

**Be kind to the stranger among
you, for you were strangers in
the Land of Egypt.**

**וגר לא תונה ולא תלחצנו
כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים**

This Pesach add a little bit extra to your reading of the Haggadah by including some discussion about the people left behind in society, those who are marginalised and whose voice is often unheard. The notion of ‘the other’ – based on our own experience in Egypt – is crucial to the Pesach story, and why we’ve called this supplement, The Other Haggadah.

Each Pesach, we discuss freedom, equality, oppression, and how these ancient themes reverberate through Jewish history in every generation. As the Haggadah says, “In each and every generation, a person is obligated to regard himself as though he actually left Egypt.”

The authors of the Haggadah understood how easy it would be for us to forget that we had also been “the other”, the stranger. We’ve put together a range of stories from modern day Israel about society’s most vulnerable; relating to poverty, the periphery, religious freedom, Bedouins, and asylum seekers.

Our motivation behind this project is to share some of what we saw when we visited Israel on the annual New Israel Fund Fellowship tour. Although at times it was difficult to watch fellow Jews and Israelis being so critical, it was nonetheless inspirational to meet the leaders and changemakers of society. We hope you’ll get a deeper understanding of some of the challenges Israel is facing and what’s being done to make Israel more democratic and socially just.

So please read these stories, share them with your friends and family, bring them to your Seder table. At the start of each topic is a suggested link to the Haggadah where you may wish to introduce the topic. We hope you will discuss the questions at your seder, bringing a modern twist to ancient topics.

P.S. If you’re looking for a good haggadah to add this supplement to, here are three we recommend:

- **SISO (Save Israel, Stop the Occupation)’s 50th Year Jubilee Haggadah**, available for purchase at <http://nif.li/sisobuy> and PDF download at <http://nif.li/sisodl>
- **Stand Up’s New Australian Haggadah**, available at <http://www.haggadah.com.au/>
- **The New American Haggadah**, by Jonathan Safran Foer and Nathan Englander, available at <http://nif.li/newamericanhaggadah>

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

When we talk about maror (bitter herbs) we remember the hardship as if we were there; we were slaves and refugees. In every generation there are people experiencing such hardships. Seventy years ago it was our parents and grandparents, 50 years ago it was the Vietnamese, 40 years ago the Cambodians. At the moment the people in Darfur, Sudan and Eritrea are in the midst of genocide and dictatorship, forcing them to flee to safer countries.

Profile: Taj Haroun

Taj Haroun is a Darfuri refugee currently living in Israel. He is one of 60,000 African asylum seekers, mainly from Eritrea and Darfur, Sudan, that have entered Israel from the Sinai-Eilat border.

“I am in Israel as a guest because I can’t live at home due to the conflict.”

Taj came to Israel after hearing it was the only safe haven and democracy in the Middle East. He left Darfur in 2003 due to fears that the Arab Janjaweed militia would kidnap and enslave young men. His family fled their village and are living in an Internal Displacement Camp.



Taj Haroun

For three years Taj lived with his aunt in Khartoum, joining Darfuri students to raise international awareness about the situation in Darfur. He was arrested twice and brutally tortured before deciding to leave Khartoum to avoid further arrests.

In 2007 Taj fled to Cairo but due to the unstable situation in Egypt and fearing he would be deported back to Sudan, Taj decided to try for Israel. He was taken to the Israeli border by Bedouin smugglers and managed to make it across without getting shot, but was picked up by an Israeli army patrol.

When Taj reached south Tel Aviv he was assisted by other Darfuri refugees, before finding a low paying job. Taj became a leader in the Darfuri refugee community in Israel.

With assistance from a volunteer at the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, he managed to get into a program at Tel Aviv University and has since finished his Bachelors and Masters in Political Science and Communication. His story is very unusual for most refugees, who struggle to find any work beyond menial labour.

Although he is physically safe in Israel he continues to face many challenges, the greatest of which is his precarious status. The Israeli government has no clear policy path for asylum seekers to become recognised refugees. Currently they fall under the “Anti-Infiltration Law”, legislation from the 1950s that was originally created to keep Palestinian refugees from trying to return to Israel after the War of Independence.

“The status issue is the most difficult, and anything you can do to encourage the Israeli government to grant the refugees asylum status would be most helpful.”

Taj needs to renew his visa every 2 months and is constantly afraid of being unable to renew it or being summoned to the Holot detention centre in the Negev. While studying Taj was summoned to Holot three times and each time had to fight to continue his studies.



The Holot detention centre was built in 2013, according to the Interior Ministry, “as a deterrence to discourage more infiltrators.” It holds up to 2,000 male African asylum seekers who can be detained for up to 12 months. Detainees are allowed to wander the desert between check-ins, and they must also remain in Holot overnight. If they miss a check-in, they can be transferred to the nearby prison. While in theory a detainee at Holot could hold a day job, in practice it is a two-hour bus ride from the closest big city, Beersheva. Israel is the only democratic country which detains asylum seekers even after having spent time in the community.

The New Israel Fund, along with its grantees, including the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) and the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, have been leading the campaign through the courts to improve circumstances for asylum seekers, including limiting the time they can be forcibly detained. This resulted in the successful overturning of elements of the Anti-Infiltration Law by the High Court of Justice.

While asylum seekers wait for a permanent solution, temporary protection visas have been granted to the Sudanese and Eritreans which gives them some ability to work. The Interior Ministry considers many of the Africans to be “work migrants” rather than genuine asylum seekers.

DISCUSSION

- 1 If you were forced to flee your home country, where would you go? What two things would you take? Now partner with the person next to you and between you chose only ONE thing to take.
- 2 Does Israel have a moral responsibility, as a nation established in the aftermath of the Holocaust, to assist non-Jewish people in need?
- 3 Is it possible for Israel to balance the need to assist fleeing asylum seekers, with the need to provide infrastructure and security for its own citizens, particularly in the already run-down neighbourhoods of southern Tel Aviv?
- 4 Both Australia and Israel make it very difficult for illegal asylum seekers to claim refuge. Do you think these policies are justified?

FACTS

- 1 Most the African asylum seekers in Israel are Muslims from the Darfur region of Sudan and Orthodox Christians from Eritrea.
- 2 Asylum seekers in Israel are offered a sum of \$3,500USD to return to their country of origin, or a third country, usually Uganda or Rwanda. There is a high risk of imprisonment and death in those that have chosen to return to Africa.
- 3 The Israeli government has no clear policy regarding refugees. Currently they fall under the “Anti-Infiltration Law”, legislation from the 1950s that was originally created to keep Palestinian refugees from trying to return to Israel after the War of Independence.

Development Towns In The Negev

The exodus from Egypt involved living in the desert for 40 years, with the desert an impermanent dwelling – a means to the end. The modern state of Israel is over 50% desert. What if the best way to create a strong and vibrant Israel is to utilise this space? Here is an account of a novel thinker who is leading the way to securing a peaceful and bright future in the desert.

Meet Leah

Leah Shakdiel is an Israeli peace activist, feminist, and scholar. She initially made headlines in 1988 when she won an Israeli Supreme Court decision allowing her to become the first woman to sit on a local religious council.

Leah was brought up in a Modern Orthodox home in Jerusalem, where Judaism and Zionism played a big part in her identity. In the 1970s she spent time in the political Zionist group Gush Emumin, a messianic, right-wing activist movement committed to establishing Jewish settlements in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. With slogans like “The land of Israel won’t wait, the people of Israel will wait,” their attitude was that securing all of greater Israel was more important than social issues to do with education, housing, food and health.



Leah Shakdiel

Leah quickly began to question that idealism. It contradicted what her parents instilled in her; the idea that Zionism was “committing yourself to the welfare of other Jews...and if there are no people with full humanity, to carry the reality of Zionism in its own light then we have nothing.”

In 1975 she started the Jewish religious peace movement Oz Ve Shalom. **“The settlers would hijack religion and Torah and tell the world that the only interpretation of the Torah is that you need to actively inherit the land. Jews were misreading and misteaching what Judaism is about,”** explained Leah.

In 1978 Leah decided to move with her family to Yeruham, a small development town in the northern Negev, 15km south of Dimona. Leah believes that moving to Yeruham was the most important decision she has ever made, claiming it realised her views of living as a modern Zionist. “Building the people was very important and that’s why I came here”.

Around the world, Leah is considered a trailblazer of the pro-active Zionist humanist movement that challenges Israel to be a model state for all people – Jewish and non-Jewish. **For the past 36 years she has continued to inspire people to focus their efforts on development towns within the green line, rather than fighting a religious war over land in the West Bank. “It is possible to find religious sources and religious role models and historic precedents for religion to be an extremely important tool for making inroads for peace, for coexistence, for human rights, for social justice.”**

Development towns were major urbanisation projects in the Negev and Galilee that absorbed massive waves of immigrants after Israel's independence and filled the empty spaces in Israel. In the decade after its establishment, some 30 development towns were built in Israel. Each of them creating new foci of housing, employment, services, commerce and public administration, while also counterbalancing the polarity of the three large cities (Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem). Yeruham was established in 1951.



Watch a video with Leah Shakdiel at www.theotherhaggadah.org

Leah was one of the founders of the program Atid b'Midbar (Future in the Desert), which started in 1990 in Yeruham and aims to promote collaboration between individuals, organisations and municipalities to help fill the gaps in Jewish and Israeli culture for Negev development. The programs include communal, educational and tourism initiatives run by local people and institutions.

One of the most successful initiatives is an experiential program for visiting groups to Yeruham. During this 3-day program participants experience interactive study, creative workshops in nature, performances of local musical ensembles and ethnic meals cooked and served in the houses of local residents. With almost no tourism in the town before this program started, over 25,000 people annually now benefit from Atid b'Midbar.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Song game: divide the table into two groups. Choose a word from the list (or come up with your own) and try and think of as many songs as possible that feature the chosen word. Alternate turns between the two groups. Words to choose from: *FUTURE / LIFE / DREAM / DESERT*
- 2 Would you leave a large city (e.g. Sydney or Melbourne) to go enhance the life of a small rural town?
- 3 Around 500,000 Israelis live in settlements today. Imagine if they, like Leah, had settled with their families in development towns across Israel. How would towns like Yeruham be different?
- 4 What are the main stumbling blocks to developing desert towns like Yeruham?

FACTS

- 1 Yeruham has many immigrant groups: 40% Moroccan, 25% from the former Soviet Union, 20% Indian, 5% Iranian and 10% from other countries.
- 2 For many years Yeruham experienced negative migration. The town's population is just under 10,000 people despite over 100,000 people living there since its creation in 1951.
- 3 Atid b'Midbar has been very successful in changing people's opinion of the Negev and encouraging more people to live there.

Public Housing Shortage in Israel

Dayenu - דינו - “It would have been enough for us”: the song Dayenu retells the fortunes of the Israelites provided by God. We say that had we only been saved from bondage, it would have been enough. We recognise what it means to be fortunate, but also recognise that as long as we have the basics to survive, it would have been enough.

Today, what we need to survive is similar, but has also changed. In Israel, one can see it as a right to live in dignity, with the basic means to survive. A crucial element of this is having a roof over our heads. This, however, is not a reality for an increasingly large section of the population.

Meet Hagit

Hagit is a young Jewish mother of five from Be'er Sheva. Making ends meet is a daily struggle for Hagit. Her monthly income of 3,500 shekels (A\$1,300) needs to support a family of seven, placing her within Israel's lowest income band and under the official poverty line.

During her pregnancies she had to forgo certain medical tests that were not covered by the public health service. All her children suffer from either slow development or anaemia.

Hagit and her family should qualify for public housing. Yet for years she has been stuck in limbo, forced to pay high private market rents.



Unfortunately, Hagit's story is a common one. **In Israel, more than a third of families who rent are forced to pay over 40% of their income towards rent – a figure eclipsed only by Greece and Spain among the world's industrialised economies.** This leads to significant financial stress for families.

And she is not alone. Due to chronic underinvestment by successive Israeli governments since the 1970s, by 2014 there were approximately 2,500 families on the public housing waiting list, with a further 30,000 recent olim also meeting the eligibility criteria. **People are forced to wait up to a decade to gain access to affordable public housing.**

This problem extends beyond those living in abject poverty. An estimated 138,000 additional families who do not meet the criteria for public housing receive rental assistance as a permanent solution. However, the effectiveness of this policy is unclear, as detailed in a report conducted by the State Comptroller in 2016. All of this culminates in a desperate situation for hundreds of thousands of Israelis who do not have the assurance and stability of a roof over their heads.

The Forum for Public Housing

Hagit was helped by Shatil, the social action arm of the New Israel Fund, which established the “Forum for Public Housing”. The Forum, comprised 10 civil society organisations dedicated to equality, and attempting to address this chronic public housing shortage.

The Forum’s first step was establishing cross-party links within the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset. By bringing together representatives of “Yisrael Beitienu”, representing Russian olim, together with “Shas” and “Kulanu”, representing Sephardi and Mizrahi Israelis, the Forum succeeded in preventing the government from repealing the 1998 Public Housing Law.

This law enabled long-term public housing residents to buy their homes at subsidised rates, and should have re-invested the proceeds into additional public housing stock. However, over the years some 2.7 billion shekels from these sales have gone into general government expenses and were not re-invested into building additional public housing.

Thanks to pressure from the Forum and its Knesset allies, the government agreed to not repeal the law and instead committed to building an additional 700 public housing units.

As of January 2016, Hagit has moved into a public housing unit in Be’er Sheva and is much better placed to look after the health and nutritional needs of her family.

For others, the situation is dire. The number of state owned apartments has decreased 50% over the last decade. Despite an average rental price increase of 25% nation-wide, the rental assistance package stagnated over the same period. A continuation of this trend without intervention will only put further pressure on a suffering public housing sector.

Though Hagit’s story is undeniably a victory, there is still a long way to go to further reduce the backlog of Israelis waiting for access to public housing.

DISCUSSION

1 Did you know the average monthly rental costs in the following Israeli cities?

- Tel Aviv: ₪5,531 or AU\$1,975
- Jerusalem: ₪4,084 or AU\$1,459
- Haifa: ₪2,548 or AU\$910

Maybe it doesn't seem that high compared to Australian rental prices, but keep in mind that the average monthly Israeli wage nation-wide is ₪9872.70 is \$AUD 3526.

3 When Israel was established, it provided a strong safety net for its poorer citizens. However, as in many Western countries, this has been eroded through economic reforms. What could Israel do to ensure that the disadvantaged have better access to state resources and support?

2 What resources are essential for the average Israeli citizen to live in a dignified way? Take some time to make a list with the people around you in small groups. Come back together and share. What resources did multiple groups come up with? What unique ones? To what extent should access to these things be considered a basic right?

4 So much of Israeli politics – and conversations in Diaspora communities – revolves around the issues of peace and security. How can Israel re-focus on other important issues, such as public housing and health? What role can Jews in the Diaspora play in affecting these issues?

FACTS

1 Rental prices in Israel increased 25% (nation-wide average) between 2004-2010. Over this period, the rental assistance figure remained the same.

2 The number of state-owned apartments use for public housing has declined drastically:

- 200,000 in the 1960s
- 130,000 in the 2000s
- 66,000 in recent years.

3 House prices increased by an average of 102% (69% inflation adjusted) over the period between 2006-2015.

Israel's Bedouin Citizens

Israel went forth from Egypt – ביצאת ישראל ממצרים – and on Seder night we retell the story of the Exodus, where the Israelites were freed from bondage and left Egypt for the Holy Land. The 40 years` of wandering in the desert that followed also occupies an integral place in this story, as well as the Jewish people's collective memory.

There are parallels between the Jews wandering in the desert, living a nomadic life, and the lives of Israel's 230,000 Bedouin citizens. Some of the core values tied to this story – self-determination, respect of culture and living a life of dignity and security – are desires that still elude many in these communities.

For many, exposure to the Bedouin may only be an artificial outreach with an organised tour where one visits a tent, drinks tea, eats some food and goes on a camel ride. However, in reality, Bedouin culture is far richer and much more complex.

The oldest Bedouin community in Israel can be traced to the 11th century, long before the arrival of the Ottomans. The government of Mandatory Palestine set the population of the Negev Bedouin at 90,000. After 1948, only around 11,000 remained. Today, most Bedouin identify as Palestinians; indeed, many of their family members who left during the War of Independence now live in Gaza, Egypt, the West Bank and Jordan as Palestinian refugees.

Today, Bedouin communities are among Israel's most disadvantaged. Sultan Abu Obaid, Director of Shatil's Beer Sheva office, explains that they are "the poorest and most underprivileged population in the State of Israel". **Three of the most pressing issues facing these communities are poor education outcomes, high unemployment and a lack of recognition of Bedouin villages.**

These issues are similar, in many ways, to those that certain Australians face. Many of the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – with regard to high school completion, health outcomes, and life expectancy – are mirrored in Bedouin society.

Education: While there has been significant progress in recent years, only 1-in-5 Bedouin-Israelis graduate from high school, compared to 1-in-3 in the wider Arab community, and 1-in-2 Jewish-Israelis.

This issue is often blamed on an incompatibility of Bedouin culture and a school environment, however the roots of this problem are far more complex and related to other issues. In a survey conducted in the mid-2000s amongst Bedouin and Arabs living in unrecognised villages, nearly 60% of respondents said they dropped out of school due to financial distress or a lack of schools in the vicinity.



Hear Shatil's Be'er Sheva office director, Sultan Abu Obaid discuss the core issues facing Bedouin communities at www.theotherhaggadah.org

Economy: More than 66% of Bedouin live in poverty – in unrecognised villages the number exceeds 80% – compared with around 25% in the general population. The infant mortality rate in the Bedouin community is as high as five times that of the general population.

Any solution for the Bedouin community needs to be one that empowers them to participate in Israeli society in a way that does not force them to assimilate or leave their communities.

As Sultan Obaid puts it, “that doesn’t only mean finding jobs for people – the State is always preoccupied with ‘finding jobs’. While that is good and important, we also need economic development. We need to create an economy in which Bedouins can be entrepreneurial, start small and medium-sized businesses so that they can integrate into the Israeli economy in all areas; in agriculture, industry, trade, tourism [and] hi-tech.”

Recognition of Villages: Another major issue Bedouin face is with native title and land ownership, which remains largely unresolved, and is a constant cause of conflict with the Israeli government.

For almost 60 years, successive Israeli governments have sought to unify Bedouin life into just a few towns and villages, which they claim will allow for an easier provision of services to residents. The Bedouin believe that this is a tactic to remove them from their lands, and that the services provided in these large towns are substandard, especially when compared to Jewish towns in the area.

While some Bedouin towns and villages in the Negev operate like any other, many are not recognised by the Israeli government, and suffer deeply as a result. They are often not connected to the electricity grid or water mains, and they have no sewage or waste disposal services. Around half of the Bedouin community live in these ‘unrecognised villages’.

Bedouin residents, particularly those in unrecognised villages, face housing insecurity, with town planning mechanisms totally unable to cope with the number of residents and permits rarely issued. Sultan Obaid sums it up when he says that “the threat of demolition and lack of recognition is still a live threat for many Bedouin villages.”

All three of these areas are strongly intertwined. Sultan Obaid says that “the state must invest with a long-term plan, with clear outcomes and a clear strategy, to raise this underprivileged population. This is not a difficult task, it is achievable.”

- 1 Set up a mini-debate with a couple of people on an ‘affirmative’ team and the same on a ‘negative’ team to debate that “It is Israel’s responsibility to improve the living standards for the Bedouin communities.” The two groups have to convince the rest of the seder table to vote for their argument.
 - 2 What similarities can you see between Israel’s Bedouin citizens and Indigenous communities in Australia?
 - 3 The Australian Jewish community has a long history of activism campaigning for the rights of Indigenous Australians. Given the similarities between the two communities, what can we do to raise the profile of the Bedouin issue in our community?
-
- 1 The Bedouin population in Israel is approximately 230,000
 - 2 In the Negev, the Bedouin population is approximately 160,00. Around 45% live in unrecognised villages.
 - 3 More than 66% of residents in recognised Bedouin villages live in poverty. This figure increases to 80% in unrecognised villages.

Religious Freedom in Israel

One of the names that Pesach is known by is the Festival of Freedom. Today, we extend the idea to realms beyond slavery and physical hardship as experienced in the Exodus story. At the heart of Israel is the freedom to practice one's religion freely, a sentiment enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, that "[Israel] will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture."

However, this idealistic principle has faced many challenges. Judaism is not a single practice; different streams have expanded the religion and culture. In Israel today, there are many instances where Orthodox practices are coercively imposed, especially in public spaces, forcing people to relinquish their way of life at the expense of others.

An interesting case recently occurred in the municipality of Beit Shemesh, an increasingly religious town outside of Jerusalem. For several years, it was commonplace to see signs plastered in public that recommended women 'dress modestly', or warned them not to loiter in certain areas. Many felt that these signs were an affront to their freedoms, particularly the right to express their Judaism in their way, and not according to another's interpretation.



'Modesty sign' in Israel

Meet Nili

Four Beit Shemesh residents felt that these signs were unacceptable. Orthodox women Nili Philipp, Eve Finkelstein, Miriam Friedman Zussman and Rachely Yair Schloss decided to take legal action to remove the signs that they felt were illegal and were trying to force women and girls in their community to relinquish some of their basic rights.

Working with the Israeli Religious Action Centre (IRAC), the legal advocacy arm of the Israeli Movement for Progressive Judaism and an NIF grantee, these women mounted a successful court challenge to have the signs removed. For Nili it was a "no brainer" working with a cross-communal group in order to bring about her vision of religious freedom and justice. "I don't have to agree with everything the Reform Movement says or does in order to work together with them on issues we agree on," she said.



Nili Philipp (third from right) with fellow women protesters from Beit Shemesh

The court ruling of financial compensation and the immediate removal of the 'modesty signs' shows that different religious groups can work towards a shared vision whilst maintaining their own beliefs. As Nili summed up, the court ruling "has restored my faith in democracy and law and order in this country."

She is confident that her experience will help create further change. **"I hope it sets an important precedent in municipalities across the country, and in places like bus stations, public health clinics, banks and post offices, so that other women will not have to suffer the indignities that I did walking down the streets of Beit Shemesh."**



This issue is symptomatic of other religious institutions that impose stringent guidelines on how one must be Jewish. Increasingly these decisions are controlled by one stream of Orthodox Judaism, while not accommodating others. This includes marriage and divorce processes, ordaining and recognising Rabbis, as well as Jewish conversion. This can have widespread effects. While some of these are more contentious than others, it is clear that many citizens of Israel are not satisfied with the religious status quo.

DISCUSSION

- 1 Read out these statements, which are related to the relationship of different public institutions/spaces and religious beliefs. Participants raise their hand and indicate their response by raising a different number of fingers, as follows: 1 - *strongly disagree*, 2 - *disagree*, 3 - *neutral*, 4 - *agree*, 5 - *strongly agree*
 - It should be illegal to sell 'chametz' products in predominantly Jewish areas during Pesach
 - Public transport should run during Shabbat
 - Jewish communities can impose their own public rules within their own communities
 - Legal marriage in Israel should be run by a single religious stream
 - For legal purposes, Israel should have some sort of definition of what it means to be Jewish
 - The Western Wall should have a different prayer space for every group that desires one

- 2 The recent court ruling to create an egalitarian prayer section at a separate part of the Western Wall was hailed by some, but rejected by others. Do you think it is possible to have a public prayer space that caters to all Jews, or is segregating different streams the only way forward?

- 3 Israel was created as a democratic state for the Jewish people. What role do you think religious practice plays in public life today?

FACTS

- 1 IRAC has led the fight against religious coercion and monopolies in many areas including making gender segregation on buses illegal, advocating for state money to help fund Reform and Conservative institutions and against the Conversion bill.

- 2 75% of Israel's 8.5 million inhabitants are Jewish.

- 3 10% of the Jews in Israel are ultra-Orthodox.

