

## Am I My Brother's Keeper? Jewish Texts on the Refugee Crisis



<b><i>Tefillat Hederech</i> (Traveler's Prayer)</b>	<b>תפילת הדרך</b>
<p>May it be your will YHVH, our God, God of our ancestors, that you lead us for peace and direct our steps for peace and support us for peace and guide us for peace and bring us to our destination for life, happiness, and peace. Save us from the hand of every enemy, ambush, robbers, and wild beasts on the way and from every kind of punishment that rages to come to the world. Send blessing upon every work of your hands and give us grace, kindness, and mercy in your eyes and in the eyes of all who see us. Hear the voice of our requests because you, God, hear prayer and request. Blessed are You, YHVH, who hears prayer.</p>	<p>יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ שֶׁתּוֹלִיכֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וְתַצְעִידֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וְתַסְמְכֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וְתַדְרִיכֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וְתַגִּיעֵנוּ לְמַחֲזֵז חַפְצֵנוּ לְחַיִּים וְלִשְׂמֻחָה וְלִשְׁלוֹם וְתַצִּילֵנוּ מִכָּף כָּל אוֹיֵב וְאוֹרֵב וְלִסְטִים וְחַיּוֹת רָעוֹת בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּמִכָּל מִינֵי פְרָעָנִיּוֹת הַמְתַּרְגְּשׁוֹת לָבוֹא לְעוֹלָם וְתִשְׁלַח בְּרָכָה בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂה יָדֵינוּ וְתַתִּיבֵנוּ לַחֵן וְלַחֲסֵד וְלִרְחֻמִּים בְּעֵינֶיךָ וּבְעֵינֵי כָל רוֹאֵינוּ וְתִשְׁמַע קוֹל תַּחֲנוּנֵינוּ כִּי אֵל שׁוֹמֵעַ תַּפִּלָּה וְתַתִּיבֵנוּ אֶתָּה : בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' שׁוֹמֵעַ תַּפִּלָּה</p>

- According to this prayer, what do we wish for ourselves when we travel?
- Do you think that we should wish these things for non-Jews as well? Why do you feel that way?



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<b>Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:33-34</b>	<b>ויקרא יט:לג-לד</b>
<sup>33</sup> When a stranger resides with you in your land, do not deceive him. <sup>34</sup> The stranger among you shall be like one of you. You shall love him like yourself because you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am YHVH your God.	<p>לג וְכִי־יָגוּר אִתְּךָ גֵר בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנוּ אֹתוֹ :</p> <p>לד כְּאַזְרַח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵר הַגֵר אֶתְכֶם וְאַהֲבַתְּ לוֹ כְּמוֹךָ כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאַרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם :</p>

- How are refugees similar to strangers who live among us?
- How are they different? Based on this text, what is our obligation to refugees?

<b>Rashi on Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:34</b>	<b>רש"י על ויקרא יט, לד</b>
<b>I am YHVH your God:</b> I am your God and his God.	<b>אני ה' אלהיכם</b> אלהיך ואלהיו אני

- According to Rashi, why should we love the stranger?
- What happens if the stranger does not agree that we have the same God?

<b>Haamek Davar on Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:34</b>	<b>העמק דבר על ויקרא יט, לד</b>
<b>You shall love him like yourself:</b> That is to say the individual that is attached with you...	<b>ואהבת לו כמוך</b> היינו היחיד שהוא מדובק עמו

- How does the *Haamek Davar* change your understanding of the text from *Vayikra*?
- This text emphasizes the individual. What is our responsibility to large groups of people?



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<b><i>Bereshit</i> (Genesis) 1:27</b>	<b>בראשית א:כו</b>
God created the person in God's image. In God's image God created him; male and female God created them.	כֹּז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצֶלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם :

- According to *Bereshit*, what do we know about people in general?
- According to this text, why are we obligated to help refugees?

### **Living in the Image of God: Conversations with Rabbi Irving Greenberg**

Being in the image of God means that each human being is born with three intrinsic dignities -- infinite value, equality, and uniqueness. These dignities are mine, and yours, and everybody's. They are independent of any other factor, such as heritage, status, wealth, health. The implication of the human's infinite value is that it would be proper to spend a fortune to keep one human being alive -- even for one day. That is why if you save one life it is as if you have saved a whole world. Since every human being is an image of God, there is no preferred image -- God is neither white nor black, male nor female, Jew nor non-Jew. Then all people should be treated as if they are equal.

- According to Rabbi Greenberg, what is our responsibility to the refugees? Why?
- What might be a case where we would say that Rabbi Greenberg's definition of *Tzelem Elohim* (being created in the image of God) would not apply? When would it definitely apply?



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<b>Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:5</b>	<b>וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה:</b>
Protect my laws and statutes that a person shall do them and live through them. I am YHVH.	ה' וְשִׁמְרֵתֶם אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת־מִשְׁפָּטַי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֲתֶם הָאָדָם וְחַי בָּהֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה:
<b>Tractate Avodah Zarah 27b</b>	<b>עבודה זרה כז:</b>
Live through them and not die through them.	<b>וְחַי בָּהֶם וְלֹא שִׁמּוֹת בָּהֶם</b>

- The rabbis interpret the *pasuk* (verse) from *Vayikra* to mean that we should follow the laws and statutes in a way that enables us to live. How does this text inform your view of the obligation to refugees?
- How might the obligation change if taking in refugees could be seen as harmful or dangerous?

### **Letter of Bernard Horwich to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, June 24th, 1939**

In May of 1939, the MS St. Louis set sail for the United States by way of Cuba carrying 907 German-Jewish refugees. Due to quotas and general political upheaval, the refugees were not welcomed by either the US or Cuba. After the ship spent weeks at sea, arrangements were made for them to go back to Europe where they were welcomed by Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. 532 of these refugees were trapped when Germany invaded Western Europe. Of these, 254 died. The following from is a letter from Bernard Horwich congratulating the Joint Distribution Committee on the accomplishment of finding a place for the refugees.

“Not only did you save the 907 unfortunate, homeless, wandering souls from despair and probable death, but you brought great mental relief to millions upon millions of other people who were filled with anguish and hopelessness concerning this cargo of wretched human beings.”

## **Am I My Brother's Keeper?** **Jewish Texts on the Refugee Crisis**

- If we cannot accommodate the refugees ourselves, what is our responsibility to find other arrangements?
- How does the knowledge that more than a quarter of the refugees died change your opinion about responsibility toward refugees?

### Summary

- What is the difference between doing what is good and doing what is right?
- Based on the sources that we have discussed, what are the policies that should direct how we treat refugees?
- Which sources most influence your opinion?

