**Peulat Shabbat Matot/Masi – Cities of Refuge**

Goals:

* Want to talk about the part of the parsha that discusses the city of refugee
* Have a productive conversation about social responsibility and refugees
* Have an in-depth discussion
* Be engaging

Materials:

* Refugee stories
  + <http://www.choices.edu/resources/twtn/documents/choices-twtn-refugees-refugee-stories.pdf>
* list of jewish social action organizations
  + <http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/social-action/>
* response to ban
  + <http://jewishsocialjustice.org/blog/jewish-social-justice-organizations-respond-executive-order-refugees>

Ideas:

* have them answer a few different questions before introducing the topic

Peulat Shabbat Machon 7/22

Goals:

* Think about empathy and injustices
* Learn skills of effective conversation
* Think more deeply about some of the issues surrounding the refugee crisis

Procedure:

* Break into groups
* Read “The Other Side Is Not Dumb”
* Play the ‘unpopular opinion game’

Rules:

1. You must say a controversial opinion you have
2. Other group members cannot respond, but can only ask questions
3. Try not to discuss that topic because we want to value people’s opinions

Examples:

‘I don’t believe trump is wrong about fake news’

‘Mexican lasagna is my favorite meal in camp’

‘I thought pitch perfect 2 was better than pitch perfect 1’

* Read parsha verses
* Read the refugee article
  + Questions:

1. How are you feeling after reading that article?
2. How do you think the game we played is connected to the article and to the Torah portion? AKA why did we play and read these things?
3. Do you feel like this is something important to talk about at camp? Why?
   * Social responsibility
     1. What do you today’s activities teach you about social responsibility?
     2. Did it make you feel differently about things?
   * Empathy
     1. How does empathy play a role in Judaism? Camp? Everyday life? International relations?
     2. How can we take these lessons about social responsibility and empathy and apply them to our lives at camp?

For Mohammed, an Iraqi civil engineer, the cruelest experience of his life was not when his father tortured him for being gay, or when Islamic State extremists took over the 26-year-old’s hometown in northern [Iraq](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iraq/index.html?inline=nyt-geo), forcing him to flee to [Turkey](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/turkey/index.html?inline=nyt-geo). Nor was it in January, when the US Governmetn first tried — unsuccessfully — to bar refugees from entering America.

As Mohammed tells it, the cruelest blow instead came this past week, when the [United States Supreme Court](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/s/supreme_court/index.html?inline=nyt-org) [agreed to reinstate](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/26/us/politics/supreme-court-trump-travel-ban-case.html) the 120-day freeze on refugee resettlement.

Mohammad’s application to enter the United States has been accepted for months, and he was simply waiting for the American government to give him an arrival date.

He is, ironically, fleeing much of the very extremism that the United States seeks to end. Mohammed left Iraq soon after Islamic State militants seized control of his city, when his sister warned him that their father had told the extremist group that he had a gay son.

But Mohammed’s persecution had started much earlier. In 2009, when he was 18, his father, a former officer in the army of Saddam Hussein, found out he was gay, which began half a decade of torture and abuse.

He was effectively beaten and kept under house arrest, allowed out only to complete his engineering degree, and later to work at a local engineering firm. If he was late arriving home, his father would increase the intensity of the beatings.

“Torture,” Mohamed said, “was a constant thing.”

With the Islamic State, also known as [ISIS](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/a/al_qaeda_in_mesopotamia/index.html?inline=nyt-org), closing in, Mohammed finally decided to escape, taking a bus to Turkey, where he applied for asylum, beginning a long process during which he was screened by the United Nations refugee agency, the International Catholic Migration Commission, and at least three American government agencies; the world’s most rigorous refugee-screening systems. In the meantime, Mohammed’s life has been neither safe nor stable.

Unlike in Western nations, refugees in Turkey are not given the same rights as the indigenous population. The vast majority do not have the right to work, and many resort to exploitative conditions on the black market.

Mohammed found odd factory jobs, but was never paid right. His employment was also easily terminated.

That left him almost destitute, with no income to pay for the tiny room he shared with four strangers whom he does not trust. To keep afloat, Mohammed began to sell his clothes, then his camera, then his watch.

In January, after he was finally approved for resettlement in the United States, but instead, a new president was inaugurated and refugee resettlement was suspended.

Now Mohammed is down to his last 20 Turkish lira, less than $6.

With no family to call on for help, he feels afraid and abandoned, and ostracized because of his sexuality. While homosexuality is legal in Turkey, gay people face frequent abuse and discrimination. Istanbul’s pride events have been banned for the past three years, and people trying to march have been tear-gassed and arrested. He recalls being spat on for being gay, and was nearly raped at knife point last year before managing to call for help.

When he reported the episode to the police the next morning, “they started laughing at me,” Mohammed recalled. “They said: ‘You’re not a girl so you can’t be raped.’”

Jobless and friendless, Mohammed, who is represented by the International Refugee Assistance Project, a New York-based refugee rights group providing him with pro bono legal assistance, now feels “on the edge between life and death.”

“I’ve been wronged all my life — by my father, by my family, by Iraqi society, by Turkish society,” he said in an interview.

“And now,” Mohammed added, “by the U.S. resettlement system.”