

Jack's Story

Kehillat Yedidya, Shabbat Iyun, Parshat Beshalah

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to each one of you for taking the time to listen to me and to express your disappointment with the suffering of my people and the terrible situation in Sudan today. Your being here to hear me gives me moral support and confidence to feel safer about my current situation. I can't even express how thankful I am for this opportunity. I would like to introduce myself and talk a little about my history. My name is Ma'awiya Mohamed Adam, but you can call me by my cultural name which is Jack Tege. I am from Darfur. I would like to begin this talk by telling you a little bit about the history of the tragedy in my home, the terrible things I saw and experienced there, how I escaped to your country, and to end with a little about my life here and my hopes for the future.

The Arab population in Sudan is very small in comparison to the African population. However, the Arabs are in charge of the government. As a result, the government started an Islamization and Arabization project. In Arabic it's called Moshru Islami Arabi. This project aims to spread Muslim values and Arab hegemony in Sudan. The genocide started in 2003 but the abuse of our people started years earlier when the Arabs came to power. First they took away any chance we had of getting an education and stopped any development that had started. It was very hard to find a job and even if we did have a job farming or raising cattle they would steal from us or even kill us. It was so dangerous to have cattle that if someone offered to give us cattle we would say no because we knew that people would come and kill us for it. The government outlawed our language and stole our cattle from us and was slowly killing people one by one. They were trying to wipe out our culture and replace us with Arabs.

The Arab government early on tried to kill us but then realized that they could not kill all of the African people by themselves. Because of this, they recruited and armed some of the Arab tribes. These people are called the Janjaweed and together with some troops are being ordered

by the Arab government to massacre the Darfurian people. The Arabs have been persuaded to kill Africans because they are told that if they don't they won't have land to possess.

I'm from Darfur and I was born in Sany, which is a very small village, far from markets and shops. When I was growing up, if people went to the market they could be robbed or killed by cattle herders. Due to the immense risk, my family moved to the village Oniry where my dad tried to raise cattle. He would let them graze just outside the village. In 1997, Arab herders attacked him and tied him with rope and took him with his 400 cattle. They threatened him and forced him to be their slave. For the next 6 years he was their slave and he was taken so far from our village that he had nowhere to escape to.

Let me explain what I mean when I say herders. Most of them are Arabs who came from different countries such as sub-Saharan countries and other Arab countries. Some are of African descent who have integrated into the Arab culture and now only associate with Arabs and have estranged themselves from their African roots. They raise cattle and move from place to place. Herders always go to places with grass, sometimes even traveling into neighboring countries. The herders who abducted my father crossed the border into Chad. The Chadian people saw that my father was quite different than the herders and were able to save my father from the herders. I have not seen him, but I know that he is still safe with them today.

When my dad was kidnapped, my mom was so upset and stressed that she felt sick and was unable to take care of us. We were left without a father and with a disabled mother. A victim of the circumstances, I was forced to take care of my ailing mother and little brother. I was working in the farm during the Autumn, going to the mosque where I lived during the summer, and studied academics the rest of the time. One day in 2003, while I was studying at the mosque Dergy, I went to the market when Janjaweed attacked the mosque. They killed 47 students and burned down the mosque. The survivors ran back to their villages, some running for 3 days straight.

When I got back to my village I went to another mosque called Golal to learn. Unfortunately, I was only there for 3 months when Janjaweed surrounded us during the night and in the morning started shooting at us. The people in the nearby villages heard the gunfire and came to help us. The battle lasted 8 hours. The Janjaweed killed 27 people, 5 of them burned alive inside our grass homes. I had 2 roommates, one was killed and the other had one of his eyes shot out. The Janjawwed burned everything and destroyed the village.

Again I went back to my village, but less than one month later, Janjaweed, accompanied with troops, attacked the village. Many of the people who could not escape were disabled people and children and they were killed. Those who escaped ran into the mountains; we all went in different directions, nobody knew where his mother or son was. I was in the mountains for two weeks without food or blankets. I came on foot to Kass City, then after a few more weeks I came to Neyala, a big city. The main problem was that I didn't know Arabic language to talk with people. I was sleeping in the street, sometimes going without food all day. After 3 months I came to Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. Here I was able to support myself and I became a student at the YMCA institute.

In 2007 the resistance attacked Omderman city which is right next to Khartoum. The government beat the resistance in the battle and started killing and arresting Darfurian people in Khartoum. They would throw people into the sea during the night. I left the school because I was afraid that the police would come and find me. I hid myself in the rural area called Mayo. Police were there too and started kidnapping Darfurian people in the night when they were in their homes.

In an attempt not to get captured, I was sleeping in different homes every night. Finally, I escaped to Egypt, I wasn't thinking about where I was going, I was just trying to save myself from the people trying to kill me. I thought Egypt would be safer for me. Ironically, as soon as I arrived to Egypt, I found all the Sudanese trying to escape from Egypt too. Right before I had

arrived, 40 Darfurian people had been murdered by the Egyptian police. We asked ourselves, what is going to happen to us if we stay here?

I became, jobless, homeless and helpless. I was filled with disappointment and despair. I had tried so hard to get an education and to make a life for myself and a family and yet, here I was, in Egypt, far from home yet still not safe. I heard that like Egypt, other Arab countries were not treating us well and some were even killing and deporting us. I thought, maybe Israel would be different. I came to Israel with help from a Bedouin tribe. They took us to the border of Israel. Crossing the border was a moment of life or death. To my back were pursuing enemies and to my front was the Israeli border, filled with promise. We went on foot for three hours until we saw a fence when suddenly Egyptian police started shooting at us. They killed two of us and injured one. We ran on until we were safely in Israel.

During the course of my trek I didn't think I would survive. I thought of myself as a dead body, desperately trying to find a life. Everyday I had to convince myself to keep struggling to find safety. When I arrived in Israel I finally truly believed I was going to survive. I was brought to a camp in Israel, filled with Darfurian refugees. After one month I was released from the camp and given a visa. I was free in Israel.

I felt safe for the first time in a long time. I tried to relax and to be happy, but my heart was sick and it was hard each day when I heard about the children and disabled dying in Darfur due to shortages of food, bad health and murders. I remember 4 classmates who had been publicly hung with 8 other Darfurian youth and then their corpses thrown in the streets of Mayo. I felt so much regret and sadness because they did not escape to Israel. If I had not escaped I too would be one of the dead.

Being in Israel was not easy at first but I am so glad that I was able and that I chose to stay in Israel. Over the first year in Israel I felt pretty safe and felt that I had a chance to build a

stable life. Here I have made friends and am able to focus on other things than just survival. I have been able to find work and live in an apartment. I am so thankful to be here.

Recently, over the past few months, I often heard about possible plans of the Israeli government to deport me and other refugees to Africa or Europe. It reminds me and frightens me of how many places I have been and why I left them. I want to be able to stay in one place and build a life until I can go back to my home. I also hear about plans for me and other refugees to be moved to a camp, which is a place of uncertainty and confusion. Many people go crazy in these camps. People don't know when or if they will go out and are haunted by the memories of what happened to them and what continues to happen in Darfur. I am afraid to go back to them and am afraid of going insane while in a camp. When I think about this I choke and all the times I have had to flee flash across my eyes. I ask myself, am I still struggling for a safe and good life.

I think about my family. I wonder where in the mountains is my mother hiding and did my sister get raped by Janjaweed and what kind of life are they living today. I thought that that part of my life was behind me, that I had found a place to live and learn until I could go back to Darfur. However, recently I have realized that like my family, I might be once again on the run and struggling for a good life. I am really scared in my daily life that immigration police will come to my house and if I or one of my friends doesn't have a visa then he will be taken to prison.

I never know when immigration will come; sometimes they come to my apartment in the morning and sometimes in the middle of the night. I am worried that tomorrow or the next day could be my last day here. The legislation in Israel is constantly changing and I am worried that the next time I go to renew my visa I won't be able to. I'm really stressed because I don't know what is in store for me in the future. I have also heard refugees referred to as infiltrators. Why does it seem that the Israeli government has abandoned me? Is it because of the flooding of so many financial immigrants who come to Israel for work? If this is so, let's focus on the issue of

financial immigrants and not on Refugees living peacefully in Israel. Through interrogation, we can find out who is truly a refugee and who is not. Furthermore, the statistics of how many financial immigrants are coming into the country are misleading. This is because the government is letting in some refugees but calling them financial immigrants.

Another issue I have read about is refugees committing crimes. Recently I read an article that makes it sound like many refugees are committing crimes in Israel. Yes, some individual refugees committed crimes. However, it is important to understand that this is a very small proportion of the refugees in Israel. This happens in every society, it is not some big conspiracy by refugees. These refugees who are committing crimes are abnormal, many of whom have lost control over themselves due to brain fatigue and desperation.

I am so sorry that the media portrays the refugees as diseased, vulnerable criminals. It seems that some people want to smear our reputation with such miserable and embarrassing words. Hearing these words hurts my feelings. We are here to try to create a logical, ethical life style, where every human life is valuable, spared from extermination. I want my relationships that I have made in Israel to stay friendly and to last until I leave Israel and go back to a peaceful Darfur, whether it be next year or in the years after. And then I want to invite all of my Israeli friends to my farewell party and to be in touch with them in the future.

Us refugees coming here was an accident, but its impact has had results that nobody could imagine. A few years ago a seemingly impossible meeting of the two nations, Jews and Darfurians, was made possible by the extremist Sudanese regime, which tragically forced us to abandon our homeland. When the Israeli government let us in, sheltering us from being slaughtered, we were able to overcome enormous barriers and adjust to a new life. I have found that every single citizen in Israel treats every other human being as created in the image of God. Israel has a structured democracy and is full of awareness. People here are faithful in their relationships and these relationships that I have had have turned into friendships, not based on

need, but because of genuine friendliness. Even religion has not been a cause for strife. I am Muslim, but I have found the Jewish people a very accepting and caring people. We have come to the holy land and been protected by holy people. I hope this lasts until there is peace in Darfur, when I will go back to my home. I feel like I am family with many Israelis. But, inside I am still Sudanese and I will go back to Sudan when peace comes.

Many refugees live in Israel in harsh conditions. Some don't have work visas, some don't have houses and sleep in the garden, sometimes without food all day long, some who are working have no insurance and those who want to study in school are unable to because they need to support themselves. For those who give up their ambition and want to stay, they still face difficulties renting houses.

We are here as refugees and come from an undeveloped country. We need to expand our understanding and awareness about Israeli society. While in Israel I met some Darfurian people who escaped to Israel but found themselves in the streets without help, in a society they didn't understand. Some even decided to go back to Darfur to live in the forest because they felt so displaced in Israel. I heard most of them were captured, and I don't know if they will be released or killed. We need tools to improve ourselves to be able to deal with this community. I do believe that both sides will benefit from each other now and in the future.

It is inspiring to have such a great relationship with so many Israelis, one that won't be torn apart by politics. The Jewish and Darfurian nations will forever have a meaningful relationship and as a result of your devotion, the world will reflect smiles of gratitude. God bless you, and may consideration and love continue to spread across the world.