The Syrian Civil war has been going on for more than 4 years. Its the greatest humanitarian refugee crisis since World War Two. Over 10 million people have fled from chaos… into chaos. There are 360,000 refugee children under the age of 11 in Turkey alone. The United Nations even has a counter for refugees who somehow get to a UN station and sign up for aid. The registered refugee reading a few days ago was 4,087,139. I am sure it's more now.

Two hundred thousand people have died in the fighting, or while running or swimming for their lives. Millions of children are suffering from trauma and ill health. A quarter of Syria's schools have been damaged, destroyed or taken over for shelter. More than half of Syria's hospitals are destroyed.

Jonathan Sacks, Britain's former chief rabbi, wrote in the Guardian on September 5: "I used to think that the most important line in the Bible was 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Then I realized that it is easy to love your neighbour because he or she is usually quite like yourself. What is hard is to love the stranger, one whose color, culture or creed is different from yours. That is why the command 'Love the

stranger because you were once strangers' resonates so often throughout the Bible. It is summoning us now."

We would all save the child, because children -- no matter their country, culture or religion -- are all innocent. Sacks suggests a modern day kindertransport – like was organized to save Jewish children on the eve of the Shoah, perhaps the humanitarian refugee crisis most similar to this one. [There have been other "great" humanitarian refugee crises – Vietnamese/Cambodian "boat people", Rwanda, Somalia, etc.]

But "Save the Children" is not, "loving the stranger". To love the stranger you have to take the parents too.

To love the stranger you have to love the Syrians who were taught to fear and hate Israel, to fear and hate….Jews.

No, "love the stranger" does not mean you have to open wide the borders to Islamists, fundamentalists or terrorists. But in these numbers the world is dealing with, too many innocents will die while we carefully screen for the next Bin Laden.

B'Makom she'ain anashim, hishtadel lihyoth ish Pikei Avot extolls us, “In a place where people are acting inhuman, be a human being!”

I know you’re concerned, I know your friends, local and of the Facebook variety are expressing caution.

“Think before acting.” They say

“It’s a Muslim problem, let those countries come to their aide. They hate us anyway.’

“Allowing millions of Syrians and others from the Muslim Middle East into Europe will end up as a catastrophe for Europe, and therefore for the West.”

Federation should worry about he Jews that need help, that’s our mandate, our first priority.

I hear those statements and my mind can’t help swapping the word Muslim for Jew. Re-read them that way and they are indistinguishable from the same statements that were issued

when it was our people, the Jewish people trying desperately to get out of Europe ahead of the Nazi menace.

Sacks reminds us -- like we could ever forget, we will Never Forget, Never Again -- that one of the darkest moments in human history, not just Jewish history but HUMAN HISTORY occurred in July 1938, when representatives of 32 countries gathered in the French spa town of Evian to discuss the humanitarian disaster that everyone knew was about to overtake the Jews of Europe wherever Hitler's Germany held sway. Jews were desperate to leave. . . . Yet country after country shut its doors. Nation after nation in effect said it wasn't their problem. Or more precisely said they didn't want it to be their problem.

We know the infamous response of an unidentified Canadian immigration agent who in early 1945 was asked how many Jews would be allowed in Canada after the war. He replied, "None is too many."

This is not the Shoah, thank God, what's happening in Europe is a humanitarian crisis of the first order. But it's not genocide. It shouldn't need to be said that the Holocaust was the

determined effort by one of the world's leading industrialized powers to murder all the world's Jews in the course of a nearly successful effort to conquer the globe.

Raising images of the Holocaust may help draw attention to the crisis. But it also shuts down reasoned discourse, and thus drowns out urgent questions that need airing.

"If the borders are opened wide, how many millions will want to flee the world's no-longer-livable regions for the safe haven of a continent that works?"

Prime Minister Netanyahu, rightfully, reminds us that Israel is a small country that lacks geographic and demographic depth – it cannot take in masses of Syrian refugees.

Yet Israel is not standing idly by. Quietly so as not to endanger those it is helping, Israel is treating hundreds of Syrian wounded on its Northern Border. IsrAid, and the IDF who's director of emergency field hospitals was here in Vancouver, Federation made that visit possible a few weeks ago - Israel is providing life saving care in a true embodiment of the imperative to not stand by the blood of your neighbour.

Because for Israel – these are not strangers, these are neighbours who one day God willing we will peacefully share a border with.

“But in an atmosphere where every dinghy is the St. Louis, where refrigerator trucks smuggling migrants into Austria become boxcars transporting Jews to the gas chambers, where numbers thoughtlessly scrawled on refugees’ forearms in felt-tip pen by Czech police frantically trying to keep track of the human tidal wave are transformed into numbers tattooed on death-camp inmates — in such an atmosphere, there’s nothing left to discuss.”

We are called by the same biblical imperative to not stand idly by, we must do something, and maybe its harder for us because they are so far away, so foreign, we must “love the stranger, because we were once strangers in the land.”

Is Canada the best place for millions of Syrian refugees – no, it would be better to keep them near their homeland that way, when troubles are over, they are in position to return to rebuild. Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan have taken in two million;

the rest of the oil-rich Gulf states have refused, they need to do their part.

But as Irwin Cotler reminded us at FEDtalks the other night, quoting Rabbi Tarfon from the Mishnah: "It is not our responsibility to finish the work [of repairing the world], but we are not free to desist from it either" (2:16).

Last Thursday afternoon between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – five Vancouver synagogues, their rabbis and lay leaders met here at the Jewish Federation, JFSA and CIJA were present along with and our interfaith partners in the Episcopalian Arch Diocese. Together we are developing a plan and a program for each synagogue to sponsor a refugee family, for our community to not stand idly by and tonight you will consider what Federation will do, whether as a community we will “love the stranger”.

This will not be a small project, someone in our working group compared it to becoming a foster family. We will be responsible not only for raising enough money to show the Canadian government that we can support a family for a year; we will also be responsible for everything from meeting them

at the airport to finding them a place to live, from helping them learn English to helping them find work and schools.

We will be responsible long after their images and stories have disappeared from the headlines of our news. But if we do this we will not do it alone, we will stand together with other synagogues, churches and communities across this country who are living their values, our Jewish values and stepping forward to do what they can. If this isn't the essence of Tikkun Olam, what is? If this is not the essence of what it means to be a Jew, a Jewish community then what is? Yes we love our neighbor, that is not really that hard, love the stranger – that is what is needed now.