
THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF GREATER WASHINGTON*Imagine Israel Podcast:***Interview with Patrick Levy**

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Robbie Gringras: Welcome to the Imagine Israel Podcast, brought to you by the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. Imagine Israel is the initiative of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, connecting Washingtonians to Israel and Israelis through the lens of social change. With every Imagine Israel podcast, we get to meet innovative Israeli influencers and changemakers, people addressing social and economic challenges in Israel. We'll hear from people whose lives and whose work intersect as they address issues in Israeli society. And I'm your host, Robbie Gringras, and I'm coming to you from Makom, the Israel Education Lab of The Jewish Agency for Israel.

In this episode of Imagine Israel, we decided to take a closer look at the situation of African asylum seekers in Israel. It's actually already kind of political that I used that descriptor, "asylum seekers", because these people, who mostly arrived in Israel over the last ten years from war-torn Sudan and dictatorial Eritrea, get described in Israel with very different terms. Each of these terms contain truth and bias. Some will call them economic migrants; others call them refugees; others brand them infiltrators; and others, asylum seekers.

And however you describe them, Israel's government has recently decided that some 60,000 of these folks must now leave the country. Because they can't return to the danger of Eritrea or to Sudan, a third country, probably Rwanda, is due to receive them. Now, this move has

led to loud protests from the Jewish community around the world and 1
from certain areas of Israeli society. And one person leading these cries 2
in Israel is Patrick Levy. 3

Patrick would describe himself as a Zionist who, as we'll hear, embodies 4
his hope for Israel through nonstop unsought-for protest and activism 5
against Israeli governmental decisions. And recently the fate of the 6
African asylum seekers, in particular those living with AIDS, has 7
demanded his attention once more. I popped over to his house in the 8
Galilee to hear more about his work, his calling, and his story. 9

So, Patrick Levy. 10

Patrick Levy: Hi. Hi. 11

Robbie Gringras: Hi, there. So I popped into your Facebook page -- 12

Patrick Levy: Okay. 13

Robbie Gringras: -- and I saw that you had posted the same thing in four different 14
languages. 15

Patrick Levy: Um-hum. 16

Robbie Gringras: It was in English, it was in Hebrew, it was in Spanish, it was in 17
French. What was so important for you to note trust Facebook Translate? 18

Patrick Levy: Well, what's happening right now with migrants from Africa, asylum 19
seekers, is something that I've been involved in for the last five years. I'm 20
representing a foundation, an American foundation, which is called 21
HATD, Healing Across the Divides. It's an organization which is 22
supporting projects on community health both in Israel and in the West 23
Bank. I'm the representative here in Israel. And obviously, one of the 24
main vulnerable populations that we are supporting is asylum seekers, 25
through a project from ASSAF, which is the main organization dealing 26
with asylum seekers, and the Israeli Task Force on Prevention of HIV 27

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- but also in support of people living with HIV. 1
- Robbie Gringras: Whoa, hang on. So there's a whole conglomeration of stuff. 2
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. 3
- Robbie Gringras: So first of all, why -- I know this sounds like a dumb question; 4
why are asylum seekers vulnerable? Surely if they're asylum seekers, 5
they've applied for asylum, they've been given rights by the government, 6
they have jobs, presumably. Why on Earth would they be vulnerable? 7
- Patrick Levy: Well, the reality in Israel is slightly different. Since 2007, we have -- we 8
had among 40-, 35,000 migrants who came through Egypt to Israel. 9
- Robbie Gringras: So they left Sudan or Eritrea -- 10
- Patrick Levy: They left Sudan and Eritrea and worked. 11
- Robbie Gringras: -- and moved north, went through -- 12
- Patrick Levy: Sinai. 13
- Robbie Gringras: Wow. 14
- Patrick Levy: On the way, rape and -- 15
- Robbie Gringras: Murder. 16
- Patrick Levy: -- and violence and murders and everything. And then -- 17
- Robbie Gringras: Why didn't they stay in Egypt? 18
- Patrick Levy: They didn't stay in Egypt because they were not safe there, because the 19
Egyptian government didn't want them there and because some of them 20
actually were killed for organs and -- 21
- Robbie Gringras: Wow. 22
- Patrick Levy: -- others moved to be slaves in an African country. So the safest country 23
around was Israel, so they came here. 24
- Robbie Gringras: That's nice (ph.). 25
- Patrick Levy: They reached Tel Aviv mostly, because the government wanted them to 26
be in the south part of Tel Aviv, with a lot of -- 27

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- Robbie Gringras: Hang on a second. 1
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. 2
- Robbie Gringras: They came through Sinai -- 3
- Patrick Levy: Uh-huh. 4
- Robbie Gringras: -- into Israel. And, what, did they just keep walking? Because 5
Sinai to Tel Aviv is a -- 6
- Patrick Levy: It's a long way. 7
- Robbie Gringras: -- is, like, a five-, six-hour drive. 8
- Patrick Levy: True. 9
- Robbie Gringras: So how did they get to Tel Aviv? 10
- Patrick Levy: Well, many of them were taken by the police or by the army at the border 11
and drove them to the south of Tel Aviv and just left them there. 12
- Robbie Gringras: Was that helpful or unhelpful? Would it have been better for 13
them to leave them in the south? 14
- Patrick Levy: Well -- 15
- Robbie Gringras: Why did they drive them to Tel Aviv? 16
- Patrick Levy: Well, South Tel Aviv is one of the areas in Israel where there is a 17
concentration of very unfavorized (sic) populations: Israelis, 18
Palestinians, and foreigners. And it's much easier for the police to have 19
an eye on them when they are living together -- 20
- Robbie Gringras: Oh. 21
- Patrick Levy: -- than when they are all over the country. So, most of the migrants who 22
came from Africa were put in this place. A few years later, there were -- 23
there is a camp which was built by Israel; it's in Hulot (ph.), in the border 24
with Egypt -- 25
- Robbie Gringras: So that is down south. 26
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. -- and where they took most of the leaders, the main leaders, to 27

- this camp. It was not a closed camp, meaning they could have gone 1
outside of the camp. But they needed to be back by the evening when 2
they were checking the names of the people who were inside of the 3
camp. And because the camp is still -- 4
- Robbie Gringras: So it's a bit like, you know, a summer camp in America; it's just a 5
day camp; it's -- 6
- Patrick Levy: It's -- 7
- Robbie Gringras: -- or just a night camp, actually. 8
- Patrick Levy: It's actually a sort of -- I'm afraid -- like, it's a -- 9
- Robbie Gringras: Have you been there? 10
- Patrick Levy: I've been there, yeah. It's -- 11
- Robbie Gringras: What did it look like? 12
- Patrick Levy: It's a prison, basically. It's an open prison. It's an open prison because -- 13
it's open because it's in the middle of the desert and they can go around. 14
But they don't have anything where to go to. So they are not going out so 15
easily. And because of this checking their names in the morning and in 16
the evening, so you had to stay around. And this was -- 17
- Robbie Gringras: And are the living conditions difficult there, or -- 18
- Patrick Levy: Prison? So -- 19
- Robbie Gringras: Were they locked in -- 20
- Patrick Levy: They were not locked in, apart from the nights. 21
- Robbie Gringras: Oh, in the nights they are locked in? 22
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. But they definitely were -- they couldn't work, they couldn't earn 23
any money, they couldn't -- they had a sort of very basic medical support 24
and food. And then they were released, some of them at least, after a 25
while, after a few months, and said (sic) that they could go back 26
somewhere in Israel but not -- then there was a new decision of the 27

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- government, saying that they could not stay between Gedera and Hadera. 1
- Robbie Gringras: Uh-huh, basically avoid the center of Israel where Tel Aviv is. 2
- Patrick Levy: Where they can get work, basically. 3
- Robbie Gringras: Oh. It's interesting because whenever I've spent time in Tel Aviv, 4
in particular, let's say, on a Sunday, wandering around South Tel Aviv, it 5
doesn't look like many of these migrants have left. It feels like it's -- on a 6
Sunday, it's the most -- I mean, presumably, depending on your 7
perspective, but it's a beautiful thing to watch. Everybody's going off to 8
church; they're dressed up really nicely. It's a Little Africa -- 9
- Patrick Levy: Um-hum. 10
- Robbie Gringras: -- in Tel Aviv. 11
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. 12
- Robbie Gringras: Was the Israeli government also responding to the way in which 13
local South Tel Aviv people received or whether they liked the idea that 14
suddenly they were living in Little Africa? 15
- Patrick Levy: Well, that's the thing. I think that both the government and the 16
municipality of Tel Aviv didn't do a lot to try to help both the Israeli and 17
the ancient residents of Tel Aviv and the newcomers from Africa. So it 18
created even a bigger tension between them. You have to understand that 19
it's like a melting pot of Palestinians who are illegally in Tel Aviv, 20
elderly people who are -- who have a very low income, and Africans who 21
officially cannot work but they are doing a lot of work for a very small 22
amount of money in order to -- just to survive. 23
- Now, when I'm saying that they are -- some of them, 50,000 of them, are 24
asylum seekers, it's not completely true. 50,000 of them asked to get the 25
visa of asylum seekers in Israel and, since 27 -- 26
- Robbie Gringras: 2007? 27

Patrick Levy: -- since 2007 until now, only 11 got a visa, which -- 1

Robbie Gringras: How many applied? 2

Patrick Levy: Until now, 8,000; so, half of the illegal -- of the asylum seekers. 3

Robbie Gringras: So 8,000 applied for asylum? 4

Patrick Levy: Yeah. 5

Robbie Gringras: And again, how many received it? 6

Patrick Levy: 11. 7

Robbie Gringras: 11. 8

Patrick Levy: And all the rest are now illegal migrants, because they don't -- they 9
cannot ask again for a visa of asylum seeker. 10

Robbie Gringras: Ah, once your asylum is turned down, that's it? 11

Patrick Levy: Yeah. Let's say that the Israeli government is not exactly into receiving 12
asylum seekers. Now, when you are illegal here, it means that you don't 13
have any health coverage. You can get to the hospital only when there is 14
an emergency. But as soon as you are out of danger -- of life danger, then 15
you are on your own. No visa to work, so everything will be completely 16
illegal, obviously with no insurance; there's nothing. 17

Robbie Gringras: So no insurance -- 18

Patrick Levy: Yeah. 19

Robbie Gringras: -- little work -- 20

Patrick Levy: Yeah. 21

Robbie Gringras: -- no health coverage -- 22

Patrick Levy: No. The only one for whom it's slightly different are the children who 23
were born here in Israel. They do have the right to get in schools. 24

Robbie Gringras: Yes. I mean, I'd recommend to everybody who's listening, if you 25
haven't seen the film "Strangers No More", I'd really recommend it, 26
which is in a school called Bialik-Rogozin, which is in South Tel Aviv, 27

- where these kids of migrants are being educated. 1
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. In these schools are more than 40 different countries represented -- 2
- Robbie Gringras: It's incredible. 3
- Patrick Levy: -- in these schools. Yeah. 4
- Robbie Gringras: So what's changed? 5
- Patrick Levy: Well -- 6
- Robbie Gringras: As in -- because the situation sounds like it's been so rosy up until 7
now. 8
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. So -- yes. So the decision of -- the government decided a few 9
months ago to deport all African migrants to a third country in Africa, 10
and there was meant to be a sort of arrangement between Israel and this 11
country. 12
- Robbie Gringras: As in not to return them from where they've come, because it's 13
dangerous -- 14
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. 15
- Robbie Gringras: -- but to somewhere else? 16
- Patrick Levy: Um-hum. And -- 17
- Robbie Gringras: Which often happens, doesn't it? Like, in Europe -- many 18
migrants that arrived in Europe, and they've been sent to Turkey. 19
- Patrick Levy: Or they are stuck in Turkey, actually mostly. 20
And then it has been discovered that this third country is Rwanda, which 21
is definitely not the safest place for African non-Rwandese people. 22
- Robbie Gringras: Ah. If you're not a Rwandan -- 23
- Patrick Levy: Yeah, it's not exactly the place that you want to go to. And it has been 24
also discovered that the government is paying \$5,000 a head to the 25
Rwandese government so that Rwanda will be hosting these people. So 26
it's a sort of market. It's a sort of, actually, arrangement, contract, 27

between -- 1

Robbie Gringras: Like a foster home. 2

Patrick Levy: -- Israel and Rwanda. Yeah, like -- yeah, I'm not sure I would like to get 3
into such a home. And -- 4

Robbie Gringras: Not sure you'd like to be fostered by -- 5

Patrick Levy: Yeah. 6

Robbie Gringras: -- by Rwanda. 7

Patrick Levy: Yeah. And the issue is that people who are now -- there are now letters 8
which are sent to thousands of people, beginning with the men, and they 9
have 60 days to choose (in two brackets) between moving to Rwanda or 10
going to jail in Israel for an unlimited period of time, meaning until they 11
change their mind and they want to go to Rwanda. 12

Robbie Gringras: Wow. 13

Patrick Levy: And that's something which -- 14

Robbie Gringras: But this is only the males, right? 15

Patrick Levy: Right now -- 16

Robbie Gringras: It's not women? Not children? 17

Patrick Levy: -- it's beginning with the males. But seems that it's going to be for the 18
entire community. And within this community, the male -- the men, there 19
are subgroups for whom we know that, if they will be sent to Rwanda, 20
they will be sent to death. 21

What happened is that the foundation I'm working with, Healing Across 22
the Divides, we are supporting in general populations which are 23
unfavorized in Israel. And among them, we support the ASSAF, which is 24
the main organization dealing with asylum, and the Israeli AIDS Task 25
Force regarding asylum seeker with HIV. The fact is that it seems that 26
there are around 500 asylum seekers with HIV. 27

- When this crisis began and we knew that most of -- or all the asylum seekers are going to Rwanda, we understood that for people with HIV it's actually a sort of death sentence, because we succeeded through the Israeli Task Force and ASSAF to get them HIV cocktail, the treatments.
- Robbie Gringras: So in Israel they were getting treated?
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. It took us two years to sort of force the government, and eventually the government accepted to give treatment to up to 100 and then to 200 people living with HIV. And we know from what's happening in Rwanda that in case they will be moving to Rwanda because they are not citizens, they will not get access to any treatment. And regarding HIV, as soon as you stop to receive the treatments, it boosts the virus and eventually leads to the death of the people that the virus is -- the cocktail is stopped.
- Robbie Gringras: And this is also affecting other people with health issues who --
- Patrick Levy: Yeah, so people with chronic diseases, people with disabilities, in case they will be moving to Rwanda, they will get zero treatment and they will probably die.
- Robbie Gringras: Presumably --
- Patrick Levy: It's also the same thing --
- Robbie Gringras: Will probably die?
- Patrick Levy: They will probably die because the government of Rwanda is not accepting to give them any treatment.
- Robbie Gringras: Right.
- Patrick Levy: And because they are in need of specific services, speaking about deaf people and blind people and people in wheelchairs --
- Robbie Gringras: As general welfare --
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. And then the people with disabilities very often became disabled

when they went through Sinai and through torture or the organ market 1
when they were forced to give organs, or raped or whatever. 2
And the other population that we do fear that they will face death or at 3
least prison when they will go back to Rwanda and then from there back 4
to their home countries are the gay community, because in Africa, in 5
most of the countries, being gay is not something that is accepted. 6

Robbie Gringras: Right. Right. 7

Patrick Levy: And actually -- 8

Robbie Gringras: And moving from something like LGBT paradise in Tel Aviv -- 9

Patrick Levy: Yeah. 10

Robbie Gringras: -- and going to a place where it's illegal -- 11

Patrick Levy: Yeah, exactly. And also, very often they fled Africa because of that, 12
because in Eritrea and Sudan -- 13

Robbie Gringras: They fled Africa because of -- 14

Patrick Levy: Yeah. So, for them, going to Rwanda -- we have to understand that 15
Rwanda is only a station or back -- or to go back to their home countries, 16
or that they will be actually fleeing to Libya, and then -- 17

Robbie Gringras: Yeah, it's either a halfway house or it's a place they're going to 18
run from anyway. 19

Patrick Levy: Exactly. And if they are going to Libya *en route* to Europe, with all 20
what's happening -- 21

Robbie Gringras: Then that's wrought with danger. 22

Patrick Levy: Yeah, exactly. So -- but we do hope that, with the work that we are going 23
to do with asylum seekers with HIV, it's going to influence the 24
government to stop also sending people with high possibility that they 25
will be dying or injured when they will be back to Rwanda. So we do 26
hope that it's going to actually influence -- 27

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- Robbie Gringras: I guess it's insisting on the legitimate definition of what a refugee is, that they are in danger of their life -- 1
2
- Patrick Levy: Exactly. 3
- Robbie Gringras: -- if they leave. 4
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. 5
- Robbie Gringras: That's -- 6
- Patrick Levy: Even so -- 7
- Robbie Gringras: -- the nature of refuge. And how did you end up falling into this? 8
- Patrick Levy: Well, there is a saying maybe that, you know עניי עירך קודמים, meaning you have to take care of your own poor people. I -- as a migrant from France and my family having been -- 9
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- Robbie Gringras: Refugees themselves? 12
- Patrick Levy: -- refugees themselves -- 13
- Robbie Gringras: Like many Jews in Europe. 14
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. -- all perished in concentration camp or moving to the U.S. or moving to the south of France, I feel that, because of my history, I've got a responsibility also for these people, and also because of the fact that I'm living with HIV for the last 30 years. I've seen stigma and how stigma can kill, on myself and also on France, or at least people can injure and want to put an X on you and not deal with you and with you are, and also as a gay person. I don't -- it's just something that -- it's not an analysis. It's really something which is coming from my personal story. And also as a human being. I believe, if we -- 15
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- Robbie Gringras: Oh. 24
- Patrick Levy: -- all of us -- yes, that if all of us, we are speaking about this global village that we are living in, we cannot, you know, define it only when it pleases us. And I believe that we have a responsibility. 25
26
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- Yeah, so I will go on. And I'm not the only one. There are in Israel not
enough, but there are families, including Holocaust survivors, who
registered to hide asylum seekers in Israel so that they won't be --
- Robbie Gringras: Wow.
- Patrick Levy: -- they won't need to go back to Rwanda. And there are petitions of
physicians and lawyers and -- but it doesn't seem that the government
cares so much until now. And unfortunately, the vast majority of Jews in
Israel is in favor of letting the Africans go back to Africa.
- Robbie Gringras: But I suppose in one sense something has moved forward in that
over the last 30 years, living with AIDS or living with HIV, at least that
has now shifted to being an illness that needs to be treated and not an
evil.
- Patrick Levy: Well, it really depends where you live or where you were born. 80% of
the people living with HIV in the world are living in countries where it's
still a stigma and it's still a death sentence because they are not -- they
don't have access to drugs. And even in Israel we do have access to
drugs, not because of the government but because of the fight that we
had in order to get these drugs --
- Robbie Gringras: Tell me about the fight that we had.
- Patrick Levy: Yeah.
- Robbie Gringras: You were a fighter?
- Patrick Levy: I was --
- Robbie Gringras: Because you look like a kind of calm kind of guy.
- Patrick Levy: Most of the time. In '96 we began to hear about the cocktails, the HIV
cocktails. And it began to be distributed also here in Israel. A year later --
- Robbie Gringras: These were effectively beginning to shift the understanding that
AIDS was chronic and not fatal?

- Patrick Levy: Yeah, almost a chronic disease, that you could live with AIDS for tens of years at least.
- And a year later, the government, which was Netanyahu's first government actually, and specifically the Ministry of Health, which the head of it was a rabbi from Shas, Benizri, decided to stop to give the drugs because it was too expensive. And --
- Robbie Gringras: Yeah, I want here to point out that the health system in Israel, somewhat different from the health system in the United States -- there is, one might say, coverage for everybody in the country and that there is a basket of drugs which are decided on every year according to a particular budget, what gets provided without people having to pay for those drugs.
- Patrick Levy: Exactly. But there is a competition, if I may say, between the diseases --
- Robbie Gringras: Oy.
- Patrick Levy: -- meaning when one disease enters a basket of drugs, sometimes another disease is going out because the basket -- the money is not --
- Robbie Gringras: Is not endless.
- Patrick Levy: Yeah.
- Robbie Gringras: I can't imagine what it must be like to be on that committee.
- Patrick Levy: It's -- on the committee and also more for the people who are --
- Robbie Gringras: Waiting for the results.
- Patrick Levy: -- waiting for -- to see if their medicine will get into the basket of drugs.
- So --
- Robbie Gringras: So we had --
- Patrick Levy: So --
- Robbie Gringras: Benjamin Netanyahu, first time prime minister of Israel --
- Patrick Levy: Prime minister, yeah. And

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- Robbie Gringras: -- and a Shas -- 1
- Patrick Levy: Benizri is -- 2
- Robbie Gringras: -- rabbi in charge of -- 3
- Patrick Levy: -- Ministry of Health, who decided to stop the drugs -- the HIV drugs 4
because they were too expensive. 5
So what we saw is people who could not get access to the HIV drugs 6
anymore and began really to agonize, because the virus was boosted 7
suddenly. And -- 8
- Robbie Gringras: As in when you stop taking the cocktails, then the virus goes 9
crazy? 10
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. And -- 11
- Robbie Gringras: It's like finally the cat's out of the house and -- 12
- Patrick Levy: Exactly. Exactly. 13
We didn't have any choice but to fight, because we knew that no one will 14
do it instead of us. 15
- Robbie Gringras: You're fighting for your lives. 16
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. And it was really -- exactly. So what we -- so we began to do 17
demonstrations and petitions. I was on the debate with the Ministry of 18
Health and with Benizri, and I asked him -- 19
- Robbie Gringras: What, on TV? 20
- Patrick Levy: Yeah, on TV. And I asked him -- 21
- Robbie Gringras: You're a TV star. 22
- Patrick Levy: I was what we call the face of AIDS at one point, because there were no - 23
- 24
- Robbie Gringras: Uh-huh. Lucky you. 25
- Patrick Levy: Two years before, my -- yeah. Two years before, my partner and myself, 26
we decided to go out with the fact that we were HIV-positive, after I was 27

- treated in Ichilov Hospital, the main hospital in Tel Aviv, and with a lot
of discrimination around that. So --
- Robbie Gringras: What -- sorry. What do you mean "discrimination"?
- Patrick Levy: Well, my food was put on a table with wheels and thrown --
- Robbie Gringras: A trolley.
- Patrick Levy: Yeah, on a trolley, and thrown from the corridor to the bed, because no
one wanted to get into the room. And my IV needed to be changed, but
no one came, so it exploded; my veins exploded and my bed became red.
And "AIDS" was written on the bed. And I understood that living with
HIV is really a sort of double-death; it's a physical death but it's very
often before a social death, because people, including nurses and doctors,
will prefer to put you aside and not to deal with you. So when --
- Robbie Gringras: So the social death leads to the medical --
- Patrick Levy: Exactly. So when I went out of the hospital with my partner, we decided
to go out with the fact that we were HIV-positive, because in Israel there
was no -- we didn't speak about that. And it was important for us to pass
on the message that we are citizens of Israel and, yes, we are living with
HIV but we want to get the same treatment as anyone else, have the same
rights but also the same obligations.
I was in a school; I was a teacher. And so it made quite a lot of noise
when we went out.
- Robbie Gringras: Right. And so did you carry on as a teacher during --
- Patrick Levy: No. At the end of the school year, I was actually asked by the Ministry of
Education to step out of the school, because they didn't want to go again
through the same debate with the parents.
- Robbie Gringras: They asked you to save them hassle.
- Patrick Levy: Exactly. So I stepped out, but I became the first director of the Israeli

AIDS Task Force. And then the UN asked me to be the spokesperson for
people with HIV from developed countries, in Geneva. So --

Robbie Gringras: So at least you got a trip to Switzerland.

Patrick Levy: Yes. Many trips to Switzerland, yes. Yes. It was a very challenging
period, because there was a mass of people living with HIV in Israel.
And then when the government decided to stop the HIV --

Robbie Gringras: All of a sudden, they don't even have the drugs.

Patrick Levy: -- to give HIV drugs -- yeah. So we knew that we had to react if we
didn't want to die. And so eventually what happened is that we went into
the Court of Justice and we sued the government for not giving us the
right to live, basically.

Robbie Gringras: Jesus.

Patrick Levy: And after a couple of months, the Court of Justice decided to force the
government to give all the HIV drugs to all the citizens of Israel living
with HIV, free of charge, which was a huge victory.

Robbie Gringras: Massive. As in it's sort of outside of the bucket of drugs?

Patrick Levy: Yeah. Yeah.

Robbie Gringras: The basket.

Patrick Levy: Yeah. It was a huge victory, but it was a very sad one because we never
could imagine that we'll have to sue our government just to live, and also
because when people -- most of the people who came back to the drugs --
to the HIV drugs, the drugs didn't help anymore, because the virus was
much stronger. And that's what happened to my partner, who passed
away two years after that.
And I know -- "I know". I sense that if this decision of the Ministry of
Health would not have happened, Ricardo, my partner, would still be
living with me right now. So, for me, it's quite sure that his death is

- actually caused by the ministry and by the government. But, you know, 1
it's not going to bring him back, so -- 2
- Robbie Gringras: That's an incredibly tough thing to -- so a government decision 3
killed -- 4
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. Yeah. I'm not ashamed and not -- 5
- Robbie Gringras: Not embarrassed to say it. 6
- Patrick Levy: -- afraid to say that Ricardo was killed by the government. That's 7
definitely something that I believe happened. He was healthy before the 8
decision -- was very healthy before the decision of the Ministry of 9
Health. There is no reason why suddenly he would have been very ill 10
without the -- 11
- Robbie Gringras: When they suddenly stopped his medication. 12
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. Yeah. So -- yeah, so it's -- so, seeing people -- obviously, people 13
can be ill and can die, but seeing people that, because of a decision of 14
other people, can die is something that I cannot bear just -- so it's -- you 15
know, it's -- I will go on fighting for that -- or against it. 16
- Robbie Gringras: And especially in this country that you came to live in. 17
- Patrick Levy: Yeah, because I really thought, and I still somewhere have in mind, the 18
feeling that Israel can be a little bit different, and -- I'm a Zionist. I -- 19
maybe not the way and the definition that many will use, but -- 20
- Robbie Gringras: It may have developed for yourself over the 30 years. 21
- Patrick Levy: Yeah. I believe that there is a potential in Israel to make some very, very 22
good things, and some very, very good things are happening. But as 23
usual, you can -- you know, when you have such strength, you can use 24
them for good or for bad things. And unfortunately, during the last 25
period of time, I'm seeing a lot of darkness in this country. But then 26
around me there are good people, and I still -- I'm hopeful that something 27

can happen, hopefully. 1

Robbie Gringras: *Ha tikvah.* 2

Patrick Levy: Yeah. Yeah, that's my *tikvah*, and that's why I'm here. Yeah. 3

Robbie Gringras: Patrick Levy, thank you very much. 4

Patrick Levy: Welcome. Bye, Washington. 5

Robbie Gringras: So I leave Patrick's house with a familiar feeling of despair and 6
 hope struggling with each other. There are amazing people in this 7
 country doing amazing things in the face of amazing obstacles. Now, to 8
 face natural obstacles is one thing, but to face human institutional 9
 obstacles, institutions that one believes in and fights for most of the time, 10
 that can tear you apart sometimes. 11

And look, the whole Western world is dealing with a global refugee 12
 crisis, and there are many countries who are not yet emerging with a 13
 great deal of credit. And the expectation of a small country like Israel 14
 with limited space, limited land, limited resources, and a demographic 15
 paranoia -- the expectation for Israel to be the world's angels is perhaps 16
 too much to expect. 17

But there's a teaching I often return to about Shammai and Hillel. Two of 18
 our people's greatest rabbis and leaders were very different types. 19
 Shammai was incredibly strict, and Hillel overwhelmingly 20
 compassionate. They were both of them cultural heroes, but the question 21
 arises who should we try to emulate. And the answer that the Sages give 22
 us is that we should always try to emulate Hillel, the generous one, and 23
 not try to emulate Shammai, the strict one, apparently because it's always 24
 better to try and fail at being superhumanly compassionate like Hillel. 25
 You might not end up being wise, but at least you'll be kind. But if you 26
 try and fail to be like the stickler Shammai, you'll just end up being 27

perhaps thoughtlessly cruel. I guess none of us can hope to reach the 1
heights of Hillel, but I know I'm buoyed up by folks like Patrick Levy 2
who are -- well, they're giving it a go. 3
And thank you for listening. This podcast, part of the Imagine Israel 4
initiative, is brought to you by The Jewish Federation of Greater 5
Washington and hosted and produced by me, Robbie Gringras of 6
Makom. You can find us on shalomdc.org/imagineisraelpodcast. 7
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