



# Let all who are hungry come and eat!

*This is the bread of poverty and persecution that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.*

*Let all who are hungry come and eat.*

*Let all who are in need come and share the Pesach meal.*

*This year we are still here,*

*Next year, we will be in the land of Israel.*

*This year we are still slaves.*

*Next year we will be a free people.*

*(From the traditional Passover Haggadah)*

**THE BEGINNING** of the Maggid (the Telling of the Story) section of the traditional Haggadah begins with the passage quoted above. It is like an “invocation” to the seder. With these words, we welcome all those who are in need to share the Passover meal with us.

There are so many refugees in need right now from the Ukraine, Jews and non-Jews. Many of them—all over Europe and in Israel—will be welcomed at Passover seders this year with these words. Jewish hearts and hearths will welcome them into their homes and communal institutions since they have recently fled from the persecution of Putin, the modern-day Pharaoh, to various promised lands of freedom, which will allow them to live in very trying situations but without war and oppression.

When this classic passage was written in the Jewish diaspora, in Aramaic, the assumption was that life in the diaspora was somehow always going to be some kind of slavery. In the minds of the rabbis, as long as Jews lived under foreign rule they would always live in some kind of servitude. Only when they get to the land of Israel (perhaps in messianic times) would they truly be a free people. There is something to this, as we witness the situation of Russian and Ukrainian Jews right now, both of whom are suffering badly and many of whom are planning to make Aliyah (immigrating) to Israel.

But is this really true? Does living in Israel guarantee freedom? For Jews? and for others?

In a contemporary Israeli *Haggadah* published by the Hashomer Hatzair movement in 1970, the text is revised with a stark twist:



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Ukrainian refugees are guided by volunteers on March 15 to reach a train to Berlin at the main station in Krakow, Poland, after fleeing the Russian invasion.

*This year only we (in Israel) are the redeemed of Israel (the people of Israel)*

*Next year shall be all the people of Israel.*

**This year we are slaves**

**Next year we shall be free men [and women].**

The framers of this *Haggadah* negated Jewish life in the Diaspora, which was the inclination of classical Zionism for a long time, but thankfully this is no longer the case. On the other hand, they did understand deeply that just living in the land of Israel does not yet make us free.

We are still slaves to many outworn concepts and practices in Israel. First and foremost is the occupation of another people, the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza. We have not freed ourselves of this oppressive situation, and therefore we as the Jewish people cannot truly be free while we are persecuting and ruling over another people in cruel ways, which humiliate and demean them every day.

Secondly, we cannot really consider ourselves free of our responsibilities to the poor and hungry people within our own country. We have a very high level of poverty, side by side with a growing class of our own oligarchs. The gap between rich and poor is

increasing all the time.

Thirdly, we have the freedom to vote, but our democracy in Israel is under threat all the time by people seeking to undermine it, especially our former prime minister and his minions. They attack our democratic institutions all the time, and apparently would prefer that we live in an autocracy.

The list could go on and on. In short, we are not really free just by living in the state of Israel, even if we do have some basic level of freedom. True freedom comes with responsibility towards the discriminated and the oppressed with our midst. On Pesach, we are reminded that our freedom is precious, but it is never complete unless we extend it to all within our country and our region, in fairness and with justice.

We are commanded on this holiday to see ourselves as if we too went out of Egypt. This means that we need to identify and care for not only those refugees who are fleeing the “Egypt” that has now become the Ukraine under Russian attack and destruction, but we need to be mindful to be concerned about and care for all citizens within our country and region, to protect them from the scourge of violence and war. Only then will we move closer to genuine freedom. ■