

THE FIFTH QUESTION

When the Israelites left Egypt they “took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders” (*Exodus* 12:34). To echo this verse, Syrian Jews at the *Seder* wrap the *Afikoman* in its specially embroidered napkin cover and throw it over the shoulder of each participant. They then ask in Arabic (the one-time vernacular of the Syrian Jewish community), “Where do you come from?” To which every person responds, “Egypt”; then “Where are you going?” to which the response is “Jerusalem!” Other Sephardic variations on the custom include marching with a walking stick and the *Afikoman* slung over one’s shoulder. Each is a symbolic re-enactment of the Exodus.

For those streaming out of the Ukraine, however, no symbolic ritual of escape from tyranny is necessary. For the 3.5 million Ukrainians who have fled Russian bombs and missiles, it is obvious who plays Pharaoh, but unclear who will take the role of Moses. Perhaps the greatest irony is that these refugees are not fleeing Egypt, but their own homeland. The nations that have opened their doors offer respite and shelter, not permanent residence or citizenship. Even if they some do, many of those displaced by Russia’s invasion want nothing more than to return home . . . but to what?

This Passover as we around a tables with loved ones (for many of us, it’ll be the first time in three years), it would be unthinkable to ignore the plight of those who are fleeing death and destruction with little more than our ancestors once did. The Torah commands us to use the Exodus story as a lens through which to view the redemption of others: “You shall love the stranger as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God” (*Leviticus* 19:34).

Below you will find a reading to include in this year’s *Seder*. More than simply read it I encourage you to discuss the ways in which we can use the *Haggadah* and the rituals of the *Seder* to highlight the relationship between our freedom and that of others. How does God’s liberation of our ancestors inform our actions today? This is the Fifth Question that we should ask each year, but this year more urgently than ever.

Hag Kasher v’Sameah,

Rabbi Jonathan Lubliner

A Special Reading for Ukrainian Refugees:

To be read after we raise the matzah the first time

This is not only the bread of our affliction, but also the *lechem oni*, the bread of those in dire need.

It's called that because of its purposeful lack of ingredients — only unleavened flour and water, nothing to make it rise, and it must be baked in haste — the food of those with nothing, those who've left everything, in desperate need of a miracle.

It is the bread we took with us when we rushed out of Egypt to pursue our destiny and our peoplehood — to pursue life.

Our Jewish family in Ukraine and all those who are fleeing the country share a single concern — life. A life of safety, of freedom, and of opportunity for better days.

As we hold them close to our hearts tonight, and remember them here at our *Seder* tables, let us do all we can to support and comfort them — in cities under bombardment and at the borders swelling with their numbers — and to build a future whose course we shape with every act of kindness.

We do this because we were once slaves in Egypt, and because in every generation we must view ourselves as personally coming forth from bondage. We are God's partners when our deeds extend the mighty hand and outstretched arm with which God has delivered our people throughout the ages.

Organizations assisting Ukrainian refugees:

Jewish Federation and Foundation of Northeast Florida Ukrainian Campaign (www.jewishjacksonville.org/campaignforukraine); Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (www.hias.org);