

# Heroic Passages in the Haggadah and Struggles of Liberation



BY MICHAEL GOLDMAN, COORDINATOR OF  
WJCS JEWISH SENIOR PROGRAMS

One of the most enduring and beloved virtues of the Passover seder is its almost limitless capacity to help us grapple with the liberation struggles we experi-

ence in our own lives. The seder and its starter-dough, the Haggadah, have an almost uncanny way of resonating with our present circumstance, both spiritually and politically, intimately and globally, giving us both a frame to help us to articulate the nature of the struggle, and a great deal of encouragement in continuing the fight. Some story or prayer which last year we mumbled through seems this year to be illuminated.

I am writing this in mid-March, as the war in Ukraine enters its third week. By the time you read this—who knows how many cities there will have been leveled, how many refugees will have fled? And worse. I know that this year, the Haggadah's more martial and heroic passages will resonate deeply with me and with others: images of G-d sweeping Pharaoh's army into the sea.

The Haggadah is written the way it is, in order to help us give voice to the righteous rage we feel at those

who wage unjust wars. We need to harness that rage to go into battle against tyrants. So, this year, let's get in touch with that rage.

But we also need to work hard not to let that rage flare out of control and turn into hatred. The Haggadah can help us here, too. Many traditional haggadot contain the following midrash (rabbinic riff on the Bible), attributed to the talmudic sage Rabbi Yochanan (Megillah 10b):

When the angels saw Pharaoh's chariots dashed into the sea, they opened their mouths to sing songs of praise to God. But God silenced them, saying, "My handiwork, my human creatures are drowning in the sea and you want to sing a song of praise?"

The story is there to remind us not to forget the humanity of the combatants sent into Ukraine.

You may have seen pictures of some of them, taken as prisoners of war. Most are boys—seventeen, eighteen—with skin pocked by acne and shrapnel, with dazed and hapless expressions. It may be a tall order for us to file these images in our minds alongside the images we have seen of Ukrainian children and grandmothers. But that is what the Haggadah is essentially asking us to do: to humanize our opponents, not to demonize them, even as we hold them accountable for injustice.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put it like this: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

WJCS offers an array of Jewish programs. To learn about them, go to: <https://www.wjcs.com/services/jewish-programs/>

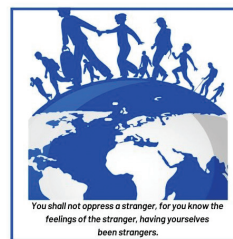
## WJCI Launches New Passover Initiative Connecting Stories from Today's Refugees with the Ancient Exodus

Westchester Jewish Coalition for Immigration (WJCI) has announced a new resource, Let the Maggid Speak: A Haggadah to Inspire the Sharing of Our Refugee Stories, in time for the Passover holiday. This Haggadah was created in partnership with Rabbi Benjamin Resnick (text) and Jack Klebanow (music) under the auspices of the Pelham Jewish Center.

Constructed around four tales, four questions, and four cups, Let the Maggid Speak encourages us to welcome the stranger to our tables to share our diverse experiences. Each section begins with an opportunity to sing aloud, either a niggun (a wordless melody) or a simple song, chosen to engage and encourage all gathered to make beautiful noise together. Let the Maggid Speak was purposefully designed to bring both current and descendants of refugees together to share their powerful and sobering stories, become better informed, and create support and empathy for refugees," said WJCI President Holly Rosen Fink.

According to UNHCR, there are over 68 million displaced people, asylum seekers, and refugees in the world today. In the last three weeks, three million Ukrainian refugees joined this incomprehensible number of people who live without a country or any place to call home. Storytelling is a way to address this growing epidemic. It is a deep and abiding human im-

**LET THE MAGGID SPEAK**  
A HAGGADAH TO INSPIRE THE SHARING OF  
OUR REFUGEE STORIES  
2022 CE/5782/1443 AH



A collaboration between WJCI & The Pelham Jewish Center

pulse, a form of reaching out beyond oneself that transcends time and place and religion, language, and culture.

Let the Maggid Speak can be used in large community settings or homes. WJCI encourages facilitators (seder leaders) to choose four Maggidim (storytellers or weavers) who will share their tales leading up to the seder. Drawing on a story-slam format, the theme, like that of the traditional Haggadah, is "the refugee experience." Maggidim can be from all faiths, and ethnic backgrounds and ideally include one or more recent refugees, preferably living

in the community. WJCI can help connect communities with newly arrived guests from Afghanistan and elsewhere. To find out more or get a free download of the Haggadah, visit [www.wjci.org](http://www.wjci.org)

WJCI is an entirely volunteer-run, non-partisan organization that envisions the United States as a place where refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants can live in safety and dignity. The organization includes Conservative, Orthodox, Reconstructionist, Reform, and non-denominational Jews from around the Westchester region and partners with institutions and individuals of all faiths who assist and act on behalf of immigrants and refugees. In 2022, WJCI officially launched its expanded mission to engage Westchester's Jewish community in social action, advocacy, and education around the issue of immigration and refugees.



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