

Why does this Passover seem different from all other Passovers?

JNS — Every Passover, we ask the same question: Why is this night different from all other nights? This year, for the first time since Oct. 7, the answer is freedom. Real, hard-won and finally ours.

Every living hostage is home. Every murdered hostage has been given the dignity of a Jewish burial. After 738 days that felt like lifetimes, the circle has closed.

For two-and-a-half years, my heart broke on a rolling basis. Not a dramatic, one-time shattering, but a daily, quiet, relentless breaking. I know I wasn't alone. Every one of us who carried the faces of the hostages into the supermarket, into carpools, into Shabbat dinners knows what that weight felt like. We smiled at our kids while the names scrolled in our minds. We set beautiful tables while the hos-

tage families sat at empty ones.

Still, we suffered through not one but two Passovers with our people in tunnels. How do you sing "Dayenu" when your brothers and sisters are starving? How do you lean back in your chair, the ritual symbol of freedom, when freedom for your own family feels like a taunt?

Those seders were a wound. We observed them because we are Jewish, and we keep going — wounded but unbreakable. That is who we are.

Then came Oct. 13. The final



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By Jamie Geller

20 living hostages came home. I watched the footage the way you watch something you have prayed for; you're almost afraid to believe it is real.

Among them: Matan Angrest, Alon Ohel, Avinatan Or and the Cunio brothers. Sons, brothers, fathers, husbands. The exhale every Jewish mother had been holding for over two years.

Then, in January, the body of Sgt. 1st Class Ran Gvili was finally brought home. His family could say goodbye with the full dignity of Jewish burial. Grief found its proper container. The circle, at last, was complete.

Twenty men will once again sit as free people at seder tables this Passover. Their presence makes this night different from all other nights. Their freedom sweetens ev-

ery cup of wine we lift.

And yet we are not fully at rest.

I write these words to the soundtrack of freedom's price: fighter jets overhead, air-raid sirens, ambulances racing past. These are not abstract sounds of war. They are the active, costly, daily work of ensuring that the freedom our people just fought to reclaim will endure.

The lesson of these past few years is that freedom is never simply given. It is guarded.

This is what Passover has always shown us. Our sages teach that each of us must view ourselves as personally going through the process of redemption. And in each generation, our enemies rise against us.

These were not lessons learned from a text. They were lived.

You are not retelling someone

else's story this Passover. You are not a tourist in someone else's journey. You are the Exodus. That is the ancient story writing itself through you.

This year at the seder, raise that first cup knowing that freedom was not handed to us. It was fought for, prayed for and never abandoned.

Every generation is called to live that truth, not just recite it. This year, we did.

This is the story of Passover. This has always been our story.

Happy Passover. *Chag Kasher v'Sameach!*

Jamie Geller is the global spokesperson and chief communications officer for AISH. She is a bestselling cookbook author, Jewish education advocate and formerly an award-winning producer and marketing executive with HBO, CNN and Food Network.

As Passover nears, a call to support immigrants and refugees

Makom Shelanu marked HIAS' eighth annual Refugee Shabbat on March 14 with a service including curated readings, songs from the emerging Singing Resistance Movement and special guest speaker Risa Gross, director of impact for the Dallas Jewish Community Foundation.

Risa shared the story of how her maternal grandfather came to the United States from China, and her paternal great-great-grandparents fled tsarist Russia to begin a new life in America. Reflecting on her identity not only as a Jew but as a descendant of immigrants, she said, "My own narrative has been profoundly shaped by hearing stories of how my various family members came to America, and how their choices to seek better lives for themselves, or for their children, led not only to my existence, but to my existence in a democratic and prosperous country. I'm grateful for their decisions."

She then shared that her lived experience also inspired her to volunteer each week outside the Dallas ICE field office, where organizers from the group La Colectiva (The Collective) help and support immigrants, refugees and

asylum seekers who come to their required appointments with the expectation that they will be allowed to return home but are often detained.

Providing snacks, drinks, shade and crucial resources, volunteers "make sure the community members who pass under our tent feel seen, feel validated, and feel respected — especially because they are about to enter into a building and a system that does not seem to recognize their individuality or their humanity." Clergy volunteers also offer prayer or simply presence.

Risa described the tactics used to lure people to the field office, including using family members as bait, and then forcing them to remain there in overcrowded, unsafe and unsanitary conditions, sometimes for days without knowing their fate. She stressed, "these are people who are doing things exactly as they are supposed to, exactly as the system has told them to. They have made a claim for some sort of immigration status —



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most of the community members we see have a pending asylum claim — and they are reporting, as required, for their check-in appointments. The vast, vast majority have no criminal record. They are doing things by the book. And all too often, we as a country are rewarding their good-faith efforts with detention, and with deportation."

As Passover nears and we recall our journey toward freedom, we are reminded that it is incumbent upon all of us as Jews to protect and support those whose freedom and rights are being withheld. La Colectiva needs volunteers in a number of capacities — from donating food and entertaining the children of family members who have come for their appointments, to helping with the intake process or driving cars back to the homes of detainees.

For other ways to help, including calling your legislators and requesting they pass the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act, signing RAC-TX's petition to support guardrails on ICE action, and donating to funds that will directly help immigrants and refugees, feel free to reach out to me at makomshelanufw@gmail.com.

Cantor Sheri Allen is the co-founder of Makom Shelanu in Fort Worth.

POSTORIAL Home and freedom

FROM THE TJP ARCHIVES

A Passover message from the Texas Jewish Post, April 7, 1955

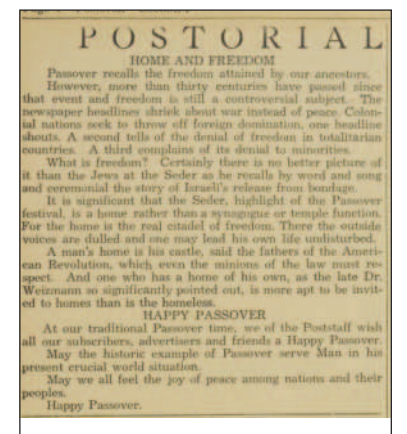
Passover recalls the freedom attained by our ancestors.

However, more than 30 centuries have passed since that event and freedom is still a controversial subject. The newspaper headlines shriek about war instead of peace. Colonial nations seek to throw off foreign domination, one headline shouts. A second tells of the denial of freedom in totalitarian countries. A third complains of its denial to minorities.

What is freedom? Certainly there is no better picture of it than the Jews at the Seder as they recall by word and song and ceremonial the story of Israel's release from bondage.

It is significant that the Seder, highlight of the Passover festival, is a home rather than a synagogue or temple function. For the home is the real citadel of freedom. There, the outside voices are dulled and one may lead his own life undisturbed.

A man's home is his castle, said the fathers of the American



Revolution, which even the minions of the law must respect. And one who has a home of his own, as the late Dr. Weizmann so significantly pointed out, is more apt to be invited to homes than is the homeless.

Happy Passover

At our traditional Passover time, we at the TJP wish all our subscribers, advertisers and friends a Happy Passover.

May the isotric example of Passover serve Man in his present crucial world situation.

May we all feel the joy of peace amon nations and their peoples.

Happy Passover.