

# THE JEWISH FOUNDATION *for the righteous*

"WHOEVER SAVES A SINGLE LIFE IS  
AS IF ONE SAVES THE ENTIRE WORLD."—TALMUD

## *Haggadah Supplement*

*The following should be read after singing Dayyenu.*

**READER:** Throughout the year, we commemorate examples of persecution of our ancestors. We recount tales of how despots have sought the exile and annihilation of the Jews. At Pesach, we tell of Pharaoh. At Hanukkah, of Antiochus. At Purim, of Haman. At Yom HaShoah, of Hitler. We speak of past persecutors, hoping through our civic awareness to prevent future persecutors from arising.

But we also give thanks for those in every generation who came forward to lead our people out of the darkness. We recognize the heroic rescuers in each epoch, hoping that the memory of their strength would fortify us if confronted with similar evil on a large scale.

We remember Moses, who with both vision and courage led his people from slavery to freedom. We remember the Maccabbees, whose strength and determination saved both the Temple and Jewish life in the land of Israel. We remember Esther, interceding to save fellow Jews from destruction.

**READER:** Yet, for all these tales in the distant past, we often fail to remember a number of heroes to the Jews, those who sought to save Jews from the Holocaust. As Nazi policies stripped Jews of their property, shelter, dignity and life - most were unable to resist or flee. During this dark time, there were those who had the courage to care - non-Jews who risked their lives, and often the lives of their entire families, to save Jews from imminent death. At times, the people they rescued were even strangers to them.

As part of our Seder, we would like to introduce a new tradition. As we tell of Moses leading our people to freedom, we will also tell of contemporary heroes and how they led Jews to freedom less than sixty years ago.

**READER:** Tonight we tell the story of Irena Sendler. During the Holocaust, Irena worked for *Zegota*, a unit within the Polish underground established specifically to help Jews in hiding.



*Irena Sendler*

As a health worker, she had access to the Warsaw Ghetto, and between 1942 and 1943 she led hundreds of Jewish children out of the Ghetto to safe hiding places.

Some children, after being sedated, were carried out in potato sacks, others were placed in coffins, some entered a church in the Ghetto which had two entrances. One entrance opened into the Ghetto, the other opened into the "Aryan" side of Warsaw. They entered the church as Jews and exited as Christians.

In time, the Germans became aware of Irena's activities, and on October 20, 1943 she was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo. But no one could break her spirit. She withstood torture,

refusing to betray either her associates or any of the Jewish children in hiding. Sentenced to death, Irena was saved at the last minute when *Zegota* members bribed one of the Germans to halt the execution. She escaped from prison and for the rest of the war was pursued by the Gestapo.

Irena Sendler does not think of herself as a hero. "I want the Jewish community to know that there was resistance and a spirit among the Jews in the Ghetto."

Today, Irena Sendler is in her late 80s and lives in Warsaw. Her courage enabled not only the survival of hundreds of Jewish children but also of the generations of their descendants.

**READER:** Let the stories of rescuers like Irena Sendler inspire us to do right when faced with evil.

**READER:** What is the source of this courage? How can we hope to find it when needed?

**READER:** How can we pass this spirit on to future generations?

**READER:** First let us honor these Christian rescuers by dedicating ourselves anew to the biblical injunction they so embodied: "Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbors." (Leviticus 19:16)

**READER:** Maimonides teaches us that: "... if one person sees another drowning in the sea, or being attacked by bandits, or being attacked by wild animals, and, although able to rescue him...does not rescue him...or if one knows that a violent person is going to attack another and although able to appease him on behalf of the other and make him change his mind, he does not do so; ...he transgresses in each case the injunction 'Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.'"

Let us commit ourselves tonight to honoring this biblical commandment through our own responsibility to our neighbors.

**READER:** Second, let us honor these Christian rescuers by dedicating ourselves to assisting those among them who need our help. As Jews, we must not allow such heroes to our people to remain indigent, to live with inadequate food, medicine and housing, in their later years. A modest sacrifice on our parts can make an enormous difference in their lives.

**READER:** Tonight, let us commit to learning the stories of these righteous men and women who redeemed thousands of our people from the darkness and led them to places of safety and hope. Let us also commit to making these stories a part of our Seder. As we recall those who rose up against us in every generation, let us also remember those who stood apart from the evil. On this night of Passover, we recall Shifra and Puah, the two Egyptian midwives who defied Pharaoh's edict to drown the male children of Israel in the Nile. We recall the daughter of Pharaoh who violated her father's decree to drown the infants and who reached out to save Moses. Just as we remember and praise these first rescuers of Jewish children, let us ensure that the stories of those non-Jews who rescued Jewish children and adults during the Holocaust are remembered and passed down to our children and our children's children.

And finally let us commit ourselves to join in supporting these heroes. While the numbers they saved may be fewer than the number of people Moses led from Egypt, their deeds are no less important.

For more information about the work of the Foundation or to learn about other rescuers we support like Irena Sendler, visit our website at: [www.jfr.org](http://www.jfr.org) or contact us at: