

HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT

The following should be read after singing Dayyenu.

READER: Throughout the year, we remember how despots have sought the exile and annihilation of the Jewish people. At *Pesach*, we tell of Pharaoh. At *Hanukkah*, of Antiochus. At *Purim*, of Haman. At *Yom HaShoah*, of Hitler. We speak of past oppressors, hoping that through awareness we may prevent future tyrants from attaining power.

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

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

While we commemorate the heroes of the past, we also remember modern heroes who saved Jews from the Holocaust.

TOGETHER: 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 families, to save Jews from death. Just as we tell of Moses leading our people to freedom, at our *Seder* we also tell of contemporary heroes and how they led Jews to their freedom more than seventy years ago.

READER: At this Passover *Seder* we recount the story of Varian Fry, an American journalist, who in June 1940, volunteered to travel from New York to Marseilles, France, as a representative of the Emergency Rescue Committee, a newly formed relief organization.

READER: The U.S. government agreed to provide entry visas to two hundred refugees in France – prominent political leaders, scientists, artists, and writers. Fry's task was to help them get out. He arrived in Marseilles in August 1940 with a list of names and \$3,000. Varian Fry was shocked to learn that thousands of refugees were unable to leave due to bureaucratic hurdles. He felt a responsibility to help as many people as possible. He rented an office and assembled a staff of American expatriates, French relief workers, and refugees. In direct opposition to the Vichy regime and the American consulate, he and his accomplices used black-market funds to forge passports and to smuggle refugees out of France. Fry established the American Relief Center to serve as a cover for his illegal rescue work.



Varian Fry

READER: Varian Fry turned his three-week mission into a thirteen-month stay. As the rescue work expanded, however, it became harder to keep it secret. Both the French authorities and the American consulate in Vichy condemned Fry's efforts. He was detained and questioned on more than one occasion. When his passport expired, the American consulate refused to renew it. Varian Fry stayed in France nevertheless, and continued his rescue work. Among those he saved were the artists Marc Chagall and Jacques Lipshitz, the writers Lion Feuchtwanger, Heinrich Mann, and Franz Werfel, and the philosopher Hannah Arendt.

READER: On September 6, 1941, French authorities deported Fry. Upon his return to the U.S., he continued to speak out about the plight of the Jews. He began writing in *The New Republic* about the restrictive immigration policies of the United States. After he gathered information about Germany's efforts to wipe out the Jews of Europe, he wrote an

article called “The Massacre of the Jews: The Story of the Most Appalling Mass Murder in Human History.” In the piece, which appeared in *The New Republic* in December 1942, Fry called on the United States to allow the unrestricted entry of all who were suffering at the hands of the Germans. His article went largely unnoticed.

READER: Through his actions in France, Varian Fry helped more than 1,000 refugees escape to safety, including some of Europe’s leading cultural, intellectual, and political figures.

TOGETHER: Let the story of Varian Fry inspire us to do right when faced with evil.

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

READER: First, let us honor rescuers like Varian Fry by learning from their deeds and dedicating ourselves anew to fulfilling the traditional Jewish commandment to be responsible for the safety and well being of our neighbors.

READER: Second, let us also honor these rescuers by dedicating ourselves to assisting those among them who need our help. As Jews, we must ensure that these heroes live out their remaining years in dignity – with adequate food, medicine and housing. We have the ability to make an enormous difference in their lives.

READER: Tonight, let us commit to learning the stories of these righteous men and women who saved thousands of our people from death. 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.

A postscript to Varian Fry’s rescue story: Varian Fry was the first American recognized by Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust Authority, as a *Righteous Among the Nations*. He passed away in 1967. While The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR) did not support Varian Fry, we thought it appropriate to feature the story of Varian Fry this Passover – an American who saved Jews in France.

About the JFR – The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR) was established in 1986 by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis to fulfill the traditional Jewish commitment to *hakarat hatov*, the searching out and recognition of goodness. The JFR honors and supports Righteous Gentiles, non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. The Foundation provides monthly support to more than 525 aged and needy Christian rescuers in 20 countries. Through its national education program, the Foundation also preserves the legacy of the Righteous and educates teachers and students about the history of the Holocaust.

In the past nineteen years, the JFR has distributed more than \$36 million to aged and needy rescuers. We must continue to thank and support these extraordinary individuals who were the lone lights in the darkness.

In sharing the stories of the Righteous, we strive not only to honor their place in history, but also to stress the importance of their example for these times. These men and women remind us that in the midst of unspeakable evil, each human being has the capacity to act humanely and to make a difference, a lesson that is often eclipsed by the legacy of hatred, brutality, and suffering that dominates contemplation of the Holocaust.

For more information about the work of The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous or to learn more about other rescuers, like Varian Fry, please visit our website at www.jfr.org or contact us at the address listed below.

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