

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 Martha and Waitstill Sharp, Americans who in February 1939 volunteered to travel to Prague as representatives of the Unitarian church in the United States.

READER: After the signing of the Munich Pact at the end of September 1938, Unitarians in the United States, who had close ties to churches in Czechoslovakia, were alarmed by the increasing number of Jews, political dissidents, and other refugees seeking help from the Unitarian church in Prague (now the Czech Republic). Shortly thereafter, the American Unitarian Association (AUA) allocated more than \$40,000 to support the newly formed Commission for Service in Czechoslovakia.

READER: The AUA selected Reverend Waitstill Sharp, a young minister from the Wellesley Hills Unitarian Church in Massachusetts, and his wife, Martha, an experienced social worker, to oversee the program. The Sharps accepted the mission and left their two young children in the care of close friends. On February 4, 1939, they set sail for Europe. Throughout their six years of rescue work, the Sharps engaged in both direct relief and emigration assistance, often focusing on individual cases, many of whom were Jews.

READER: On the night of March 14-15, 1939, just before the Germans entered Prague, the Sharps burned the notes they had compiled. The Gestapo closed down their office at the end of July, 1939. Waitstill and Martha returned to the United States shortly thereafter.

READER: In May 1940, the Sharps returned to Europe and opened the first Unitarian Service Committee office in Portugal, a neutral country. They opened a second office in Marseilles, which was in Vichy France. The Sharps also worked closely with Varian Fry, an American who was a representative of the newly formed Emergency Rescue Committee.



Martha and Waitstill Sharp

READER: The Sharps helped the German Jewish novelist Lion Feuchtwanger escape from Vichy France to Portugal. Waitstill sailed with Feuchtwanger and his wife, Marta, to New York; Martha Sharp gave up her ticket to Marta to ensure that the Feuchtwangers could leave Europe. On one occasion, Martha Sharp battled numerous bureaucracies to secure



exit visas, transit permits, and identity papers for twenty-nine children and ten adults to leave Vichy France. She managed to get the children across the French border to Spain and then into Portugal. One of the Jewish children was fourteen-year-old Eva Feigl, who still remembers arriving at the port of New York on December 23, 1940, and seeing Martha Sharp there at the dock to meet them.

TOGETHER: Let the story of Martha and Waitstill 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 Martha and Waitstill Sharp 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 Jews 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 Martha and Waitstill Sharp's rescue story: Martha and Waitstill Sharp were the second and third Americans recognized by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Authority, as Righteous Among the Nations. Waitstill passed away in 1984 and Martha in 1999. While The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR) did not support the Sharps, the JFR was instrumental in having them recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Gentiles, we thought it appropriate to feature the story of Martha and Waitstill Sharp this Passover – Americans 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, Christians and Muslims, who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. The Foundation provides monthly support to more than 450 aged and needy 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 twenty years, the JFR has distributed more than \$37 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 Martha and Waitstill Sharp please visit our website at www.jfr.org or contact us at the address listed below.