

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.

Nevertheless, 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-five years ago.

READER: At this Passover *Seder*, we recount the story of the Veseli family, a Muslim family from Kruja, Albania, who gave shelter to two Jewish families. Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Authority, recognized the entire Veseli family as Righteous Gentiles.

READER: Mosa and Gabriela Mandil were professional photographers who lived in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia (now Serbia). When the Germans invaded in April 1941, Mosa, Gabriela, and their two children, Gavra and Irena, fled south to the Italian-controlled province of Kosovo. Being Jewish, they were caught and imprisoned in the city of Pristina from October 1941 until May 1942. While in prison, Mosa volunteered to take photographs of the Italian soldiers, thereby winning their favor. The Italian soldiers allowed the Mandil family to escape to Italian-occupied Albania.

Once in Albania, the Mandils settled in Kavaja. In the summer of 1943, learning of the impending German takeover of Albania, the Mandil family moved to the Albanian capital of Tirana, hoping to find safety. Mosa found work in a local photography studio. Around the same time, 25-year-old Hamid Veseli, who came from a devout Muslim family, left his mountain village of Kruja and went to Tirana to open a clothing store. Hamid's younger brother, Refik, came with him and found work as an apprentice in the photography studio, where he met Mosa Mandil. Mosa became a mentor to Refik.



Refik Veseli and Gavra Mandil

READER: When the Germans occupied Albania in September 1943, Refik asked his parents to hide the Mandil family. Refik's father, Vesel Veseli, immediately agreed and traveled to Tirana to bring the Mandil family back to their home. The trip took days, they hid during the day and traveled only at night.

READER: Also in the fall of 1943, Hamid, who was still in Tirana, began sheltering the Ben Joseph family, which included Joseph, his wife, Ruzhica, and his sister, Finica. When the situation became too dangerous for them to remain with Hamid, his 14-year-old brother, Xhemal, traveled to Tirana to bring the Ben Joseph family back to his home in Kruja.

READER: From November 1943 until liberation in October 1944, the Veseli family sheltered the Mandil and the Ben Joseph families in a small room above their barn. While the



adults had to remain hidden, seven-year-old Gavra Mandil and five-year-old Irena Mandil were dressed as Muslim villagers, allowing them to live openly in the village. Despite the many hardships, the entire Veseli family took care of the daily needs of the seven Jews they were hiding.

READER: After the war, the Mandil family returned to Novi Sad, where they reopened their photography studio. In 1946, Refik Veseli joined the Mandil family in Novi Sad to complete his training with Mosa Mandil. The Mandil family immigrated to Israel in 1948 and the Ben Joseph family moved to Brazil.

READER: Vesel Veseli and his wife died years ago. The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous provided financial support to Hamid, Refik, and Xhemal. Refik Veseli died in 2000 and Hamid Veseli died in 2009. Xhemal turned 91 in December 2020.

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

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

READER: Let us honor rescuers like the Veseli family 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: 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 each 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.

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 190 aged and needy rescuers in 17 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-nine years, the JFR has distributed more than \$42 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 about other rescuers like the Veseli family, please visit our website at www.jfr.org or contact us at the address listed below.

80 MAIN STREET, SUITE 380, WEST ORANGE, NJ 07052-5438
973.736.1800 FAX: 973.736.1119 JFR@JFR.ORG WWW.JFR.ORG WWW.JFR.ORG/BLOG