

### Prayer for the captives

May the one who blessed our ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah; bless, preserve and protect the captives and missing soldiers of the citizens of Israel and

the Israel Defense Forces.

May God rescue them from captivity and speedily restore them in peace, in the merit of the prayers of this holy congregation who

pray for them.

May the Holy One, Blessed Be God, show them mercy, increase their strength, remove their pain and send them a recovery of body and spirit; may God return them to the bosom of their families swiftly and soon. And let us say: Amen.

For all our family of the House of Israel, fellow Jews who face anguish and captivity, whether on sea or on land:

May the Divine have compassion upon them, and bring them from distress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption, now, speedily, soon, and let us say: Amen

Passover is our holiday of celebrating the Jewish people's transformation from individuals who were enslaved into a nation that was free. Upon writing this, we, as a nation, find ourselves enslaved once again. On October 7th, 2023, an atrocity, the likes of which we have not seen since the end of the Holocaust, befell our people. And now, our grandfathers, spouses, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters are, shockingly, still being held captive in tormented slavery.

Normally, we ask four questions at the Seder. This year we must shout a fifth: "Why are our loved ones not sitting at the table with us?" This year, more than ever in our lifetimes, when we eat the bread of affliction, taste the bitter herbs, or envision what it feels like to be enslaved, each act will take on a deeper, a more profound, intensity than we have ever experienced. This year, those experiences are real for too many of our brothers and sisters. The Seder is designed to elicit and encourage questions. Now, more than ever, all we have are questions. Where better to hash out our most weighty and painful queries than here, at the Seder table?

When thinking back to last Passover, to our last Seder, it is unfathomable to imagine that we would be where we are now; as a family, as a nation, or as a people. But Hope is Mandatory. That is what it is to be part of the Jewish nation. We are a people who will never give up. We will keep going until we are free, all of us, in body and soul.

May we merit to soon be sitting again with all our loved ones, free and healing...and singing Dayenu, together.

May the Passover aspiration of *לשנה הבאה בני חורין*, next year may we be free people, be truer than ever for all of our loved ones. Amen!

*Jonathan Polin and Rachel Goldberg, parents of Hersh Goldberg-Polin  
(taken hostage into Gaza October 7, 2023)*

## **This Year we shall Recognize Our Unity as a People as Expressed in the Hallel**

The Seder night is a night of national unification unlike any other during the year . There is no other night on the Jewish calendar, both in Israel or the diaspora, where the entire Jewish people can be found sitting around the table reciting the ancient story of the Exodus from Egypt.

When my children were still young I was often asked to conduct Seders for various groups. Whether at air force bases, with new immigrants to Israel, or a particularly emotional Seder night conducted for families of fallen soldiers, I was able to witness the vibrant fabric of the Jewish people and witness a strong desire to sit together and tell a story of events that happened three thousand years ago.

This year, maybe more so than any other year, we yearn for a unifying factor, that "thing" which helps shape our being as a united nation. It's not only to remember our exodus from the Land of Egypt, or a reminder that with every generation someone is trying to destroy us as a People, but more so, as found in the special words in the Hallel, which discusses the fact that we are all free. This is a message we must embrace.

As we assemble around the Seder table we will remember the pain embodied in the phrase " In Your Blood My Life," and the fact that the war to maintain our eternal promise "and the children shall return within their borders," is still being sought.

Just as in this generation we experienced so much sorrow, of families whose loved ones were lost, the pain of families of loved ones brutally taken and kept hostage are in essence "flesh of our flesh."

I wish upon us all to live to see the fulfilment of the saying "Next Year in Jerusalem," may we pray together for a year filled with unity, true peace, and tranquility both at home and around the world.

***Rabbi Israel Meir Lau** former Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, former Chairman of Yad Vashem & recipient of the 2005 Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement.*

## **A Prayer for This 'Different' Seder 2024**

Mah nishtanah? Why is this seder different from all other seders? Because at this seder, the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust remains a fresh, open wound which continues to bleed. The October 7 massacre in Israel, indelibly seared in our hearts and minds.

Loved ones are sorely missed yet painfully remembered as their seats at the seder table remain empty.

The hostages of diverse faiths and nationalities, men, women, and children, dead or clinging to life, linger in brutal, inhumane captivity.

The innocents, Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, are too many victims to bear.

And more, an ominous worldwide resurgence of antisemitism, instilling in Jews a vulnerability few thought they would ever experience in their lifetimes:

Vehi she'amdah: In every generation there are those who seek our destruction, but the Holy One delivers us from their hands.

Anu tefillah, we pray.

We pray for the victims of horrific terrorism and their families whose lives have been shattered.

We pray for the hostages and their loved ones, who continue to live through unending horror.

We pray for the innocents who are victim to the war, human beings created in the image of God, the dead, the injured, the hungry, and the displaced.

We pray for the soldiers in harm's way, the wounded, and the maimed. May they return safely to the warm embrace of their closest ones.

We pray for the purveyors and deliverers of humanitarian aid who endeavor to do what is right and needed.

We pray for the peacemakers. May they bring shalom to all.

We pray for the world to wake up and say: there is no place for antisemitism in our society. Confronting all forms of hate is everyone's responsibility.

Shirah chadashah: Let us sing to God a new song, a hymn that longs to extol our deliverance from despair to joy, from mourning to celebration, from darkness to light, from enslavement to redemption, from war to peace.

*Rabbi Noam Marans, American Jewish Committee (AJC) Director of Interreligious and Intergroup Relations*

**"After what we have gone through, I chose to focus on the spirit of our People"**

"Ma Nishanta Ha'lyla Haze, " (Why is this night different from all other nights? (This question is the climax of the Seder recitation.

So much has changed. Fathers and sons, sisters and brothers, men and women either brutally murdered or killed in war will be missing from the Seder table. When children ask this important question, it will be asked of people who suffered terrible loss. How will we answer the question asked by orphaned children who lost a parent?

Our answer is that despite terrible sorrow, we choose life. We continue to live and grow as a people and a society because this is our eternal story. A people who constantly rise in the face of adversity.

Our answer is that after terrible darkness comes light. Just like the ancient Israelites who left the bondage of Egypt following 400 years of slavery, we say that its possible to rise even following times of great peril, giving our children hope of a better world, because we are a resilient people. We will embrace our children and tell them that the memory of the fallen and murdered is what allows us to sit around the table this night.

I too, in my past, experienced a terrible Passover.

In 2010, my son, Major Eliraz Peretz of Blessed Memory, died in battle in Gaza two days before Passover. I remember sitting at the Seder table with his four children two days after we buried him, the eldest child six-years of age, and the youngest only 6-months old, singing the "Ma Nishanta." With horrific pain, we continued to read the Haggadah, fulfilling the commandment "I shall live and not die." At that moment we all chose life.

How is it possible to grow despite personal tragedy? Its possible because I chose to live. I chose to give meaning to my life, and to devote my days to giving onto others. Anyone who has ever experienced great loss knows that there is no greater meaning to life than the understanding that though strength has left your body, you are still able to find ways to give and live.

What I experienced then, taught me to find the positive in life. To find the light. Therefore, what we went through this year led me to the conclusion that I must celebrate our unity as a people. To celebrate our sense of unprecedented volunteerism, the fighting spirit of our reserve soldiers, and the spirit of our entire nation, that showed unbelievable strength as a people.

This year I will remember both my sons, Eliraz and Uriel, but not only them. I will remember our soldiers and civilians whose lives were taken. However, I will not let despair invade my sense of positive spirit. Even if the road taken is long, we, as a people, will find a brighter day.

On this Seder night I pray that we will remain united with all the families, with the hostages, bowing our heads in remembrance for those who fought and lost their lives for our freedom. Understanding that there are those around us who do not want us here, but recognizing all that is good in the universe, wishing upon ourselves and the entire world days of peace and tranquility, where we will be able to be free in our own land.

*Miriam Peretz Educator and Social Activist, 2018 Israel Prize Recipient for Lifetime Achievement. Mother of six. Two of her sons, Captain Uriel and Major Eliraz Peretz of Blessed Memory were both killed in action.*

**"We, The Survivors of October 7th ,Feel as if We Were Released from Slavery unto Freedom"**

On that historical Passover night, the Israelites were lifted from the darkness of bondage onto the light of redemption. I, like many other residents of the Western Negev region, from the kibbutzim and farming communities to the towns of Sderot, Ofakim and beyond, survivors of the carnage that was October 7th, know now what my ancestors in Egypt must have felt.

As we recite their ancient 3,000-year-old story, passing it down from generation to generation, I know that what we went through this year is of epic biblical proportions, becoming a story which I hope will be recited thousands of years from now. I expect that those people of the future will realize that even in modern times the Jewish people had to find the light in times of great darkness. To appreciate how we turned darkness into light, through the unimaginable bravery of our soldiers, men and women who sacrificed themselves for the future of the Jewish state. Crying out the ultimate battle cry "follow me" which embodies the essence of responsibility and comradeship. Each soldier knowing that if they don't support each other, we, and by extension they, just won't be.

As we near the holiday of Passover I wish the Jewish people find a leader like Moses able to unite his people and lead them to a new destiny. I hope that we find the way to stay united and remain so even when this war ends.

My message to the other side is simple. Though you may hold a gun in your hand, you will not beat us as our destiny as a people is in our hands and has been for generations. Our prophecy remains inspiring and full of hope and is the glue that binds us as a society.

*Haim Yelin, Former Head, Eshkol Regional Council, Kibbutz Be'eri resident and survivor*