

In a few days, we will gather once again around the table for the Pesach Seder. The occasion invites us to reflect on one of the most profound messages of our tradition: crossing from slavery to freedom. This topic is not only central in Pesach but appears constantly in the Jewish liturgy, for instance in the Shabbat *kidush* “*zecher l’itziat Mitzrayim*” (to remind us of our departure from Egypt). Freedom is not only a historical value; it is an essential and eternal principle of Judaism.



The *Haggadah* requests us to reflect about four children with different characteristics: the wise, the evil, the innocent and the one who does not know how to ask. This year I would like to propose something special: to add a fifth son/daughter to the Haggadah. Several decades ago, the Lubavitch Rebbe suggested that the fifth child would represent those who, either by disconnection or indifference, do not take part in a Seder. This Pesach, however, I propose that the fifth child be he/she who cannot sit with us because their freedom has been taken from them: the hostages still being held in Gaza. They are our brothers and sisters who have lost their independence and their capacity to choose.

In our tradition, *pidion shevuyim* (freeing captives) is one of the highest values. Freedom is essential for human existence; when a person is deprived of his/her freedom, part of their humanity is refuted as well. That's why, this Pesach, when we sit around our tables, let us leave an empty seat for the fifth child. The empty place will remind us of those who cannot be with us, and it will express our collective commitment to their release.

Let us not abandon them. Let us continue fighting together, according to our abilities, for them to have their own Pesach and recover their freedom. As long as they are captive, our celebration will not be complete.

We pray from the bottom of our hearts for the hostages to return safe and sound to their homes and live a full and free life.

Chag Pesach Sameach,

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