

Exodus 2022/5782: A Reading for the Seder

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By Rabbi Tamara Cohen

Why is this Passover different from all other Passovers?

Because this Passover, Shifra and Puah, the midwives who defied Pharaoh and saved the Israelite baby boys, are mothers and grandmothers, aunts and neighbors, saving children all over Ukraine; because this year everyone who gives a home to a refugee escaping war or totalitarianism is expanding our understanding of the way liberation happens.

Behold in all my years of studying the Exodus I have never understood why God rewarded Shifra and Puah's acts of bravery with houses, as it says, "and God established for them *batim*, houses" (Exodus 1:21).

Why is a house the reward for this resistance that began the Exodus from Egypt? This Passover, I understand.

What else could a brave woman working to save her children and the children of others – so many others whose names she doesn't yet know, and babies who don't even have names, want?

Not the temporary haven of an overcrowded underground subway.

Not the cold and soon to be destroyed theatre devoid of actors but not of tragedy or everyday heroes.

What else could Shifra and Puah, or a thousand Nadyas and Iryanas huddled in Polish and Ukrainian shelters distributing food and blankets want?

Just this – for God, and for each of us – to see the work of their hands and hearts, and to establish, re-establish – for them, with them, safety, security, peace.

And houses for them and their families. Homes

After this reading, invite seder participants to pledge to give tzedakah or otherwise engage in supporting refugees fleeing from Ukraine or those on the ground in Ukraine.