

IN HONOR OF PASSOVER, WHICH COMMEMORATES THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF THE ISRAELITES FROM EGYPTIAN BONDAGE, THE LAS VEGAS ISRAELITE WILL PUBLISH A SERIES OF FEATURES. THIS YEAR THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL IS INAUGURATED AT SUNDOWN ON THE EVENING OF SATURDAY, APRIL 18 AND ENDS ON APRIL 26.

From Bondage to Freedom

BY FOROTHY OPAS

In Israel, and in every Jewish home around the world the eve of Passover will find us seated around a festive table, narrating once again the story of the Exodus from Egypt. We recount it each year as a moral duty to teach it to our children, so that this important lesson of history will never be forgotten.

This year it will have a special poignancy and significance, especially in Israel. Celebrating it with us will be former Prisoner of Zion, Yosef Mendelevich - a living symbol of the Jew who has come from bondage to freedom; whose unwavering faith against the tyranny of oppression is akin to the vision of Moses, seeking to lead his people from slavery to liberty.

Almost the first words we recite are: "This is the bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt." Mendelevich subsisted for more than ten years literally on "the bread of affliction." Unwilling to compromise his strict observance of 'kashruth,' he lived mainly on dry bread and water and would not eat any food that had been cooked. His prison was not in Egypt - it was in Soviet Russia, but his incarceration was as bitter as any known by our forefathers at the hand of Pharaoh.

Further on, we read: "...not one only has risen up against us, but in every generation some have arisen to annihilate us, but the Most Holy, blessed be He, hath delivered us out of their hands." Mendelevich's faith that he would be delivered never wavered during the decade of his ordeal. "Faith is a gift from heaven," he once wrote his sister, "but it is the test of faith under critical situations which counts."

"And the Egyptians ill - treated us, afflicted us and imposed heavy bondage on us" read the words of the Haggadah. The repression of Jewish ideology in Russia and the restraints placed on Jews who wanted to leave, were

the reasons that motivated Mendelevich to be part of the desperate act of stealing a Soviet plane to fly it to freedom - an act aborted

by its premature discovery.

Like the Jews whose tale we tell each Passover, Mendelevich was ill - treated and afflicted. He was sentenced to 12 years' hard labor, and it is a miracle that he survived - undernourished and overworked; severely punished for secretly teaching Hebrew to fellow-prisoners. When warders confiscated the books he used to teach Hebrew, he began a three and a half month hunger strike that ended only with his release.

Many wonderful people and organizations fought tirelessly for his release and that of other dissidents still languishing in Soviet prisons. His own Israeli sisters - Rivka Drori

and Eva Lisitin, never let up their efforts and were aided in Israel by the Public Council for Soviet Jewry. President of the World Jewish Congress, Edgar Bronfman, was apparently a key figure, as was another Jewish multi-millionaire from America's West Coast with close connections in the Soviet Union.

Mendelevich, while he must be deeply grateful for their intervention, will nevertheless offer the most praise elsewhere. With a full heart this Passover, he will be able to add a fervent "Amen!" to the words in the Haggadah:

"Therefore we are bound to thank, praise, laud, glorify, extol, honor, bless, exalt and reverence Him, who did all these miracles for our ancestors and for us; and He brought us forth from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to holydays, from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption. Therefore let us sing unto Him a new song. Hallelulah."

best wishes for a happy passover

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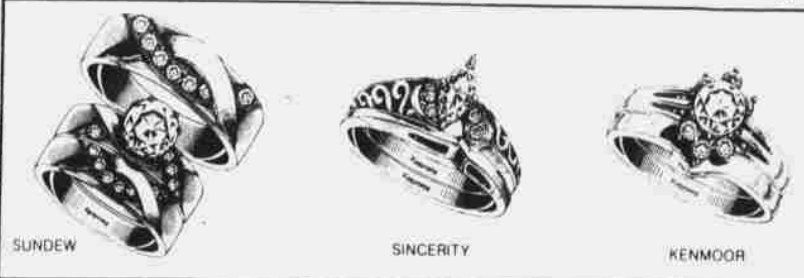
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