

Pesah Feast



In April, 1946, while most Jewish children were asking the four questions, hundreds of other Jewish children on board two ships in La Spezia, Italy, were asking themselves a fifth question:

“What is to become of us now?”

The two wooden cargo ships, S.S. Dov Hos and Elishu Golomb, were harbored in that Italian port on the Mediterranean Sea. The people on board had been freed from concentration camps only one year before, and were trying to go to Israel to help create a new state.

The Jewish underground army had helped thousands of Jewish refugees reach ports on the Mediterranean Sea and then tried to find boats to take them to Israel. Often the boats were old and leaky, like the two in our story, but the people on them didn't complain.

The refugees on the S.S. Dov Hos and the Elishu Golomb thought they were almost “home”. They did not know that the hardest part of the journey was still ahead.

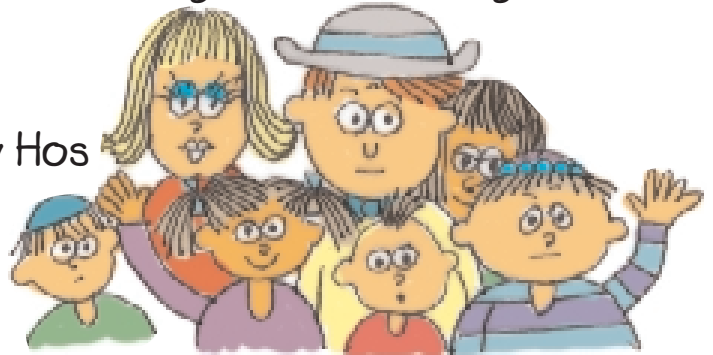
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The two ships were supposed to leave in the dark of night but something went wrong. The Italian police found out and told the British, who convinced the Italians to keep the boats from leaving the harbor. Why did they do this? Because Israel was not yet a state. Because of Arab protests, the English government had decided to allow very few Jews into Palestine.

The holocaust survivors on board these two boats were sad. They felt that no one cared about them. So they decided to stage a hunger strike, hoping to get the sympathy of the rest of the world. Perhaps people would write letters to their governments asking them to pressure England into letting these two boats go to Israel!

The Jews on board the S.S. *Dov Hos* and the *Eliahu Golomb* did not eat for 75 hours. Finally Harold Lasky,



an English official who was also Jewish, said that he would try to help his country and the passengers find a solution. The people on the boats agreed to end their hunger strike on erev Pesah. The kind people of the Italian town *La Spezia* brought food for the seder on board the ships.

Meanwhile, at another seder, in *Jerusalem*, *Golda Meir* and 14 other Zionist leaders did not eat. They fasted to show their support of the passengers of the two boats, promising not to eat until the British allowed the two boats to sail to *Haifa*.

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When the Zionist leaders announced their fast, a British official said to Golda,

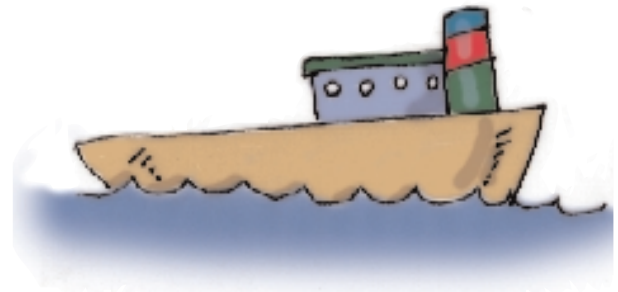
“Mrs. Meirson, do you really think that His Majesty’s government will change its policy because you are not going to eat?”

Golda answered,

“No. I know that. Surely, if the death of six million did not change the government policy, I don’t expect that my not eating will do so. But it will at least show that we are one people.”

But this time, Golda Meir was proven wrong. The world did care.

Britain was forced to allow the two ships to sail for Haifa. For those refugees, the prayer “Next Year In Jerusalem” was answered. On May 13, 1946 1,014 people arrived in Haifa harbor. Though tired, they were smiling and waving. They were no longer homeless refugees, but proud new immigrants to the land of Israel.



Pesah ~~F~~ast adapted from a story in World Over Magazine, Vol. 40, No. 11/March 23, 1979

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