

# The Righteous Among the Egyptians: An Introduction for Passover 2025



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The liberation of Passover was only possible through the groundwork laid by righteous Egyptians. When Pharaoh's daughter rescued Moses from the river, she understood that empathy must not be limited to one's own people. Some Jewish commentaries indicate that the midwives who refused to kill Hebrew babies were also righteous Egyptians.

Our people honor those non-Jews who risk their lives to save Jews. We call them the "Righteous Among the Nations." If only more people acted with their principled clarity, we know that we never would have experienced tragedy in the first place. We proclaim that we should build a world with more people like them.

It is with this intention that we gather tonight.

A society's sense of its circles of moral obligation is rarely stagnant. Just how broadly we apply the idea that we are our brother's keeper shifts with cultural and historical trends. And these trajectories create feedback loops. Expansion begets expansion. Contraction begets contraction.

The collapse of society's empathy does not happen overnight. The slow erosion of norms and laws makes it possible — when the value of human dignity is systematically denied to those beyond one's closest circles.

It is clear that we have entered into a global feedback loop of contracting moral obligation. There will be people rendered disposable as a result.

As Holocaust survivor Eli Wiesel proclaimed, "Woe to our society when to be human becomes a heroic act." Notably, he did not deliver these words on Yom HaShoah, but rather in support of Central American migrants being deported by the U.S. back to the violence and persecution they fled. If he had any reservations about equating the atrocities of the Holocaust to those of events half a century later and half a world away, he did not make them known.

This Passover, we are called to embody Wiesel's admonition and the wisdom of our Mishnah when it declares, "In a place where no one's acting human, strive to be human." We must remain indignant at the notion that some people fall beyond the scope of moral concern. This moment is calling all of us to tune our moral compass to the same frequency as the Righteous Among the Nations.

May we never again lament that their numbers are too few.