

# Our Story - On One Foot!

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Source:

The story of the Jewish people begins with Abram son of Terach, an Aramian from Mesopotamia who broke with his pagan past and pledged his belief to one almighty god. G-d rewarded Abram's belief with the promise (known as the Covenant or Brit) that he would make his descendants into a great and prosperous nation in the Land of Canaan. Abram and his wife Sarai were instructed by G-d to journey to Canaan. In the process, their names change to Abraham and Sarah as recognition for their unique belief in G-d. Abraham's and Sarah's son Isaac followed in his father's footsteps, surviving a near sacrifice by his father (that story is for Yom Kippur!) and threats from neighboring tribesman, married Rebecca, and together they had twin sons, Esav and Jacob. Jacob, with a bit of deception and at the instigation of his mother, tricked Isaac into giving the blessing of the firstborn son to him, and thus he became the heir to G-d's covenant with Abraham. Esav, in turn, became the father of the Arab nations.

Needless to say, Esav was none too pleased by Jacob's theft of his birthright. To avoid Esav's wrath, Jacob was sent by his parents back to his ancestral lands in Mesopotamia to live with his uncle Laban (Rebecca's brother). On his way to Laban's abode, Jacob dreamed of a ladder reaching all the way to the heavens with angels travelling up and down between heaven and earth. G-d appeared to Jacob and promised him that his descendants would be the heirs to G-d's covenant with Abraham. G-d further promised Jacob that he would protect him and return him to Canaan.

## *JACOB'S LADDER*

*We are climbing Jacob's ladder  
We are climbing Jacob's ladder  
We are climbing Jacob's ladder  
Yeah we're brothers, sisters, all*

*Every rung goes higher and higher  
Every rung goes higher and higher  
Every rung goes higher and higher  
We are brothers, sisters, all*

*Every new rung just, just makes us stronger  
Every new rung just, just makes us stronger  
Every new rung just, just makes us stronger  
Yeah we are brothers, and sisters, all*

Immediately upon arriving at Laban's abode, Jacob fell in love with Laban's beautiful younger daughter Rachel (his first cousin – so I'm not sure how that worked!) and Laban promised her to Jacob as a bride after he completed 7 years of work. The 7 years passed but unfortunately for Jacob, Laban was a bit of a scoundrel and placed his older daughter Leah under the wedding veil only to be revealed to Jacob once the wedding ceremony has been completed. It took Jacob 7 more years to earn Rachel's hand in marriage. After that he decided it was time to return to Canaan with his 2 wives, their 2 handmaidens, and his 11 children (Benjamin was born on the way back).

During the trip, while alone by stream, Jacob was confronted by a man (truly some supernatural representative of G-d) and wrestled with him throughout the night. At the break of day, the angel begged Jacob to release him, and Jacob demanded a blessing in return. The angel then changed Jacob's name to Israel (Yisrael) – because he 'wrestled with G-d and man and prevailed'.

Jacob and his family prospered in Canaan, but he caused jealousy amongst his sons by favoring his son Joseph (his first son with Rachel) over all the others. The jealous brothers sold Joseph into slavery and told Jacob that Joseph had perished. Joseph ended up in Egypt as a slave to Potiphar, an officer in the Pharaoh's palace guard. Jacob must have been a particularly good looking fellow as he piqued the interest of Potiphar's wife. For reasons not made clear in the Bible, Joseph rejected Potiphar's wife's attempted seduction, and landed in jail as a thank you for his moral stand!

Well, you can't keep a good man down! In jail, Joseph distinguished himself as an interpreter of dreams and he ultimately came to the attention of the Pharaoh. It seems the Pharaoh was having some disturbing dreams whose meanings were lost on his court of advisors! This is particularly perplexing since their meaning would be obvious to a 3 year old! Joseph was summoned to the court and foretold that the dreams meant Egypt would have 7 years of plentiful crops and then experience a 7 year famine. As a reward for his insights Joseph was made a senior minister of the Pharaoh's government with the charge of preparing the nation for the famine.

Back in Canaan, the famine struck hard and Joseph sent his sons to Egypt to seek food. In a dramatic turn of events Joseph recognized his brothers, revealed himself to them, and after many tears and hugs, the family, including Jacob, were ultimately reunited in Egypt, where they lived a prosperous life. Jacob's descendants flourished in Egypt, where they lived in the northern province of Goshen.

Well, there wouldn't be a Seder if the ancient Jews were able to live out their lives peacefully in Goshen. A new Pharaoh arose who felt threatened by the Jew's prosperity and growing numbers. He enslaved them, denying them their freedom, and put them to work in hard labor. As a result they built for the Pharaoh the garrison cities of Pitom (House of the god Atum) and Ram-eses (Domain of the Son of the Sun god). In their despair and agony they cried out to G-d to save them and he heard their pleas.

### ***Take us out of Egypt (to the tune of Take Me Out to the Ballgame)***

*Take us out of Egypt  
Free us from slavery  
Bake us some matzah in great haste  
Don't worry 'bout flavor  
Give no thought to taste!  
For its rush, rush rush to Red Sea  
If we don't cross it's a shame  
For its ten plagues  
Down and you're out  
At the Pesach history game!!*

G-d needed a leader to help save his people and he had just the man, for in the palace of the Pharaoh lived a prince who was in fact, a Jew! This Jew was plucked by the Pharaoh's daughter (Batya) from the edge of the river Nile where as a baby he lay in a basket. His Jewish mother had placed him there to try to save him from the edict of the Pharaoh that called for all Jewish male babies to be killed at birth! The Egyptian princess called this baby Moses (Woohoo!), and he grew up in the palace.

Moses seemed to have innate sense of justice as when, as a young adult, he confronted an Egyptian slave master who was mercilessly beating a Jewish slave. In the resulting fracas Moses called the slave master. Fearing for his own life, Moses fled Egypt and ended up in the land of Midian, where he was taken in by a local priest (Jethro) whose daughter he ultimately married (Tziporah). Moses became a shepherd (what else?) and it was during his wanderings in the fields that G-d approached him with the job proposition. In order to really impress Moses, G-d spoke to him from a burning bush.

### ***The Ballad of Mo Ben Terach***

*Come and listen to a story 'bout a man named Mo  
His people were slaves to the evil Pharaoh  
Until one day he saw a bush on fire  
And he heard the voice of G-d, as the flames went higher---  
The LORD that is  
I AM The Big G*

*Next thing you know Mo's talking to Pharaoh  
Mo says "G-d said you gotta let my people go  
But the king says "NO they will always be slaves to me!"  
So G-d sent down 10 plagues on Pharaoh's whole country---  
Blood n' frogs that is,  
Pestilence, Special Effects*

*When the first borns died Pharaoh sent the Jews away  
They ran and ate some matzah on that very happy day  
So now we have our Seder t commemorate the feat---  
We drink some wine and talk a lot, we sing and also eat!  
Matzah that is,  
Maror too  
And good food*

*Y'all come back now y'hear!*

Moses began negotiating with the Pharaoh, who, needless to say, was not anxious to see his free labor leave! Thus began a series of 10 plagues to try to bring the Pharaoh more in line with the G-d's way of thinking. These plagues ultimately prevailed, particularly when the first born males of the Egyptians, including the son of the Pharaoh himself, were killed as part of the 10th and final plague. The Jews were spared from this plague by marking their homes' doorposts with the blood of a sacrificial lamb (the first Passover sacrifice). Thus, the avenging angel would PASSOVER the Jewish homes and target only the Egyptian residences.

When the Pharaoh finally relented –