

The Exodus Story

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Source: Adam Sanford

The story of our people is not one story. It could begin with any number of people in the Torah. Some people feel our story starts with Abraham, who left his father's idolatry to follow the Eternal, on the promise that he would become the father of a great nation, after many troubles and afflictions. Some feel this is the heart of our story - that we are a mighty people who have been through many trials.

Others will look back to Adam and Eve and their exit from the Garden, as they had to leave their childlike innocence where all decisions were made for them, and assume the mantle of adulthood, where they had to make their own decisions and stand or fall by the consequences. Some feel that this is the heart of our story - that we could no longer let the masters (or God) make those decisions for us, but must now assume responsibility.

Still others tell the tale of Joseph, favored son of his father, who was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. Some feel our story is that of the descent into slavery that began with Joseph's captivity by Pharaoh, and realizing we can never again take our freedom for granted, as Joseph himself had to learn.

But most of our stories on Passover begin with Moses and our exit from slavery in Egypt, because that is the story of our people - of the Eternal bringing us out of Mitzrayim. Many feel that this is the heart of our story - that we have suffered when we were strangers, so we must always reach out to the stranger and the sufferer, and welcome them in.

It is a familiar story, so why should we tell it? If we all know this story, why bother retelling it?

One reason is because we are commanded to do so. In Exodus 10:2, we are told "And in order that you should tell into the ears of your children and grandchildren, and you will all know that I am your God."

Another reason is that as Jews, we are not satisfied with only the literal words of the story. We tell midrashim - attempts to explain what is *not* said - to understand better these people who came before us and suffered through slavery to come out as free persons on the other side.

Finally, whenever we are grateful for something, it is proper to tell others why we are grateful. By retelling this story, we remind ourselves of what we have to be thankful for - our freedom and our survival, often against overwhelming odds; our community and peoplehood, which have continued for five thousand, seven hundred, and _____ years; and our lives, of which every moment is precious. It would be remiss not to tell the story of our exodus from Egypt in this time of remembrance and gratitude.

Just as the Eternal promised Abraham, his family became a great nation. And just as the Eternal promised Abraham, we were a people who were enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years. This promise was both wise and true, for in order to become adults, we had to pass through the time of having no responsibilities beyond our whims, as with Adam and Eve, or our orders, as when we and Joseph were slaves in Egypt. This promise has been fulfilled, and we now thank the Eternal for bringing the descendants of Abraham out of Egypt and making us a great nation.

Raise the glass of wine and say:

וְהִיא שְׁעֵמֶדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ

V'hi she-amda l'avoteinu v'lanu.

(This promise has sustained our ancestors and us.)

In the years we were slaves in Egypt, we grew until we became a great nation, the People Israel, even while enslaved. To stop us from growing and taking over Egypt, Pharaoh decreed that all our baby boys should be drowned, to prevent an Israelite uprising against their Egyptian masters. But the Eternal heard our cry, and brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm - not by any angel's work but by the Eternal One's intervention.