

The Passover Story

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Source: CSJO: Congress of Secular Jewish Organization

The story of the Exodus has been told to us by our parents, just as their parents told them. We now repeat the story in hopes that this will pass on to the next generation.

The ancient Hebrews came to Egypt from their land to get provisions during a famine. They became a favored group in Egypt and prospered and multiplied there. Legend tells us that our ancestor Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, became valuable to Pharaoh for his foresight and wisdom. Because of this, his people were welcomed. When new rulers came to power, the Hebrews fell out of favor and were enslaved. Despite their hardships, the Hebrew people survived and grew in numbers. The new Pharaoh became concerned that they would unite with Egypt's enemies.

At one point the Pharaoh ordered that all newborn male babies be killed. The parents of one boy were determined to save their child and they made a basket so the baby would float in the water.

The baby's sister, Miriam, took the basket to the river. While she hid nearby, she floated the basket downstream so that her brother would be discovered by the Pharaoh's daughter who bathed there every day.

When the Pharaoh's daughter saw the baby in the water she decided to save him and raise him as her own son. While wondering who would be his wet nurse, Miriam appeared and suggested Yocheved, the baby's mother. The Pharaoh's daughter agreed and decided that she would call him Moses, because the name means "I brought him from the river's water."

Many years passed and this man named Moses, who had been brought up as an Egyptian prince, saw an overseer brutally whipping an enslaved Hebrew. This so enraged him, that he struck the overseer and killed him. Moses fled to nearby Midian where he became a shepherd and married Zipporah.

His was a tranquil life, but the thought of the persecuted Hebrews in Egypt would not let Moses rest. The legend tells us that an angel appeared to Moses in a miraculously burning bush and commanded him to return to Egypt and help his people regain their freedom.

After much indecision, Moses finally went back to Egypt and he and his brother Aaron began to talk to the Hebrews in order to arouse a spirit of rebellion in them. Many were, at first, hesitant and afraid, but soon they became convinced of the justice of their cause and agreed to follow Moses's plan of liberation. Moses pleaded with the Pharaoh to let his people go. The Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrews go free. Tradition tells us that ten plagues then struck the land of Egypt.