

# EXODUS STORY

Contributed by [Maggid ben Yoseif](#)

Source:

We were slaves in Egypt and the Lord redeemed us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Had not the holy one liberated our people from Egypt, then we, our children and our children's children would still be enslaved.

## The Sages tell the Story

It once happened that Rabbis Eliezer, Joshua, Elazar ben Azaryah, Akiva and Tarfon were reclining at the seder table in Bnei Brak. They spent the whole night discussing the Exodus until their students came and said to them: "Rabbis, it is time for us to recite the Shema

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah said: "I am like a seventy-year old man and I have not succeeded in understanding why the Exodus from Egypt should be mentioned at night, until Ben Zoma explained it by quoting: "In order that you may remember the day you left Egypt all the days of your life." The Torah adds the word all to the phrase the days of your life to indicate that the nights are meant as well. The sages declare that "the days of your life" means the present world and "all " includes the messianic era.

## The Story

One might think that the Haggadah should be recited on the first day of the month of Nisan, but the Torah says: "You shall tell your son on that day" [the first day of Passover]. One might think that the phrase on that day means that the story of the Exodus should be recited in the daytime; therefore, the Torah says: "This is on account of what the Lord did for me." The word this refers to the time when this matzo and this marror are placed before you - on Passover night when you are obliged to eat them.

At first our forefathers worshiped idols, but then the Omnipresent brought us near to divine service, as it is written: "Joshua said to all the people: so says the Lord God of Israel—your fathers have always lived beyond the Euphrates River, Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor; they worshipped other gods. I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river and led him through all the land of Canaan. I multiplied his family and gave him Isaac. To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau; to Esau I gave Mount Seir to inherit, however Jacob

Praised be He who keeps His promise to Israel; praised be He. The holy one, blessed be he, predetermined the time for our final deliverance in order to fulfill what He had pledged to our father Abraham in a covenant, as it is written: "He said to Abram, your descendants will surely sojourn in a land that is not their own, and they will be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years; however, I will punish the nation that enslaved them, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth."

## V'hee She-amdah (The constant covenant)

Lift (but do not drink) the Cup of Redemption and cover the matzah, as we recite the following and recall God's promise to Abraham, emphasizing eternal divine watchfulness.

*V'hi she-am'dah la-avoteinu v'lanu. Shelo echad bilvad, amad aleinu l'chaloteinu. Ela sheb'chol dor vador, om'dim aleinu l'chaloteinu, v'hakadosh Baruch hu matzileinu mi-yadam.*

This covenant that remained constant for our ancestors and for us has saved us against any who arose to destroy us in every generation, and throughout history when any stood against us to annihilate us, the Kadosh Barukh Hu kept saving us from them.

We put down the Cup of Redemption and continue with the recitation of the Passover Exodus story as recorded in the Torah, beginning first with the threat to Israel from Lavan and then the threat from Pharaoh.

Go out and learn what Lavan the Aramean sought to do to Jacob our father! Pharaoh the evil only decreed against the males, but Lavan sought to uproot everything, as it is written "A wandering Aramean was my father" [while this makes little sense in English, the free word order of Hebrew and ambiguity of the verb "oved" can be stretched somewhat to mean that an Aramean Lavan tried to cause the loss of Jacob] "and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there" (Deuteronomy 26,5). This teaches that he did not descend to live there permanently, but rather temporarily, "And they said unto Pharaoh: 'To sojourn in the land are we come; for there is no pasture for thy servants' flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan. Now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen'" (Genesis 47,4).

Few in number--as it is written "Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude" (Deuteronomy 10,22).

And he became there a nation--this teaches that Israel were distinguishable from others there. Great, powerful--"And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1,7).

And populous--as it is written "I cause thee to increase, even as the growth of the field. And thou didst increase and grow up, and thou camest to excellent beauty: thy breasts were fashioned, and thy hair was grown; yet thou wast naked and bare" (Ezekiel 16,7).

And the Egyptians dealt ill with us--as it is written "come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there befalleth us any war, they also join themselves unto our enemies, and fight against us, and get them up out of the land" (Exodus 1,10).

And afflicted us--as it is written "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Raamses" (Exodus 1,11)

And laid upon us hard bondage--as it is written "And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour" (Exodus 1,13).

"We cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers; the Lord heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression." (Dt. 26:6)

We cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers – as it is written: "It happened in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died; the children of Israel sighed because of their labor and cried; their cry of servitude reached God."

The Lord heard our cry – as it is written: "God heard their groaning; God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob."

And saw our affliction – that is, the conjugal separation of husband and wife, as it is written: "God saw the children of Israel and God knew."

Our toil – refers to the drowning of the sons, as it is written: "Every son that is born you shall cast into the river, but you shall let every daughter live."

Our oppression – means the pressure used upon them, as it is written: "I have also seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them."

"The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, with great awe, miraculous signs and wonders." (Dt. 26:8)

The Lord brought us out of Egypt – not by an angel, not by a seraph, not by a messenger, but by the holy one, blessed be He, Himself, as it is written: "I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night; I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt from man unto beast; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments; I am the

Lord.”

“I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night” – myself and not an angel; “I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt” – myself and not a seraph; “on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments” – myself and not a messenger; “I am the Lord” – I and none other.

Mighty hand – refers to the disease among the cattle, as it is written: “Behold the hand of the Lord strikes your cattle which are in the field, the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks--a very severe pestilence.”

Outstretched arm – means the sword, as it is written: “His drawn sword in his hand, outstretched over Jerusalem.”

Great awe – alludes to the divine revelation, as it is written: “Has God ever attempted to take unto Himself, a nation from the midst of another nation by trials, miraculous signs and wonders, by war and with a mighty hand and outstretched arm and by awesome revelations, just as you saw the Lord your God do for you in Egypt, before your eyes?”

Miraculous signs – refers to the miracles performed with the staff of Moses, as it is written: “Take this staff in your hand, that you may perform the miraculous signs with it.”