

The Exodus Story, in brief

Contributed by [Caryn Aviv](#)

Source:

Adapted from Rabbi Rachel Barenblat's *Velveteen Rabbi*.

Once upon a time, during a famine our ancestor Jacob and his family fled to Egypt where food was plentiful. His son Joseph had risen to high position in Pharaoh's court, and our people were well-respected and well-regarded, secure in the power structure of the time.

Generations passed and our people remained in Egypt. In time, a new Pharaoh came to power. He found our difference threatening, and ordered our people enslaved. In fear of rebellion, Pharaoh decreed that all Hebrew baby boys be killed. Two midwives named Shifrah and Puah defied his orders. Through their courage, a boy survived. Fearing for his safety, his family placed him in a basket and he floated down the Nile. He was found, and adopted, by Pharaoh's daughter, who named him Moses because she drew him forth from the water. Thanks to Moses' sister Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter hired their mother, Yocheved, as his wet-nurse. Thus he survived to adulthood, and was raised as Prince of Egypt.

As Moses grew, he became aware of the slaves who worked in the brickyards of his father. When he saw an overseer mistreat a slave, Moses struck the overseer and killed him. He fled into the desert. Moses encountered a burning bush in the desert, and a Voice called him to lead the Hebrew people to freedom. Moses argued with that Voice, pleading inadequacy, but the Voice disagreed and saw potential where Moses only felt fear. Sometimes our responsibilities choose us.

Moses returned to Egypt and went to Pharaoh to argue the injustice of slavery. "Let my people go!" he demanded. Pharaoh refused, and Moses warned him that his cruelty would cause great suffering. These threats were not idle; ten terrible plagues were unleashed upon the Egyptians. Only when his nation lay in ruins did Pharaoh agree to our liberation.

Fearful that Pharaoh would change his mind, our people fled, not waiting for their bread dough to rise. Our people did not leave Egypt alone; a "mixed multitude" went with them. From this we learn that liberation is not for us alone, but for all the people of the earth. Even Pharaoh's daughter came with us.

Pharaoh's army followed us to the Sea of Reeds. We plunged into the waters. Only when we had gone as far as we could did the waters part for us. We mourn, even now, that Pharaoh's army drowned: our liberation is bittersweet because people died in our pursuit. To this day we relive our liberation, that we may not become complacent, that we may always rejoice in our freedom.