

A Story About Stories

Contributed by [Jewish Guy](#)

Source: Velveteen Rabbi

When the founder of Hasidism, the Baal Shem Tov, saw misfortune threatening the

Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a special fire, say a special prayer, and the trouble would be averted.

Later, when his disciple, the Rabbi Maggid of Mezritch, had occasion for the same reason to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I cannot light the fire, but I know the place and I can say the prayer."

Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save the Jewish people, would go into the forest and say: "I cannot light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place.

Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his house, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient."

And it was sufficient.

Once Were Slaves

We were slaves to a Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Eternal led us out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Had not the Holy One led our ancestors out of Egypt, we and our children and our children's children would still be enslaved. Therefore, even if all of us were wise, all-discerning, scholars, sages and learned in Torah, it would still be our duty to tell the story of the Exodus.

"Avadim hayinu; ata b'nei chorin. We were slaves, but now we are free." Though we no longer labor under Pharaoh's overseers, we may still be enslaved—now in subtler ways, harder to eradicate. Do we enslave ourselves to our jobs? To our expectations? To the expectations of others? To our fears?

Tonight we celebrate our liberation from Egypt—in Hebrew, *Mitzrayim*, literally "the narrow place." But narrow places exist in more ways than one. Let this holiday make us mindful of internal bondage, which, despite outward freedom, keeps us enslaved.