

IDENTITY

The Story of Passover

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Source:

Maggid - Storyteller

[Take turns reading. Each person is invited to read a grouped set of lines - or to pass.]

These questions are a central part of tonight's seder ceremony. Yet before we answer them, let us tell a story of Jewish hope. The tale of our people's first quest for freedom from slavery in Egypt was written so long ago that no one knows how much of it is fact and how much is fiction. Like all good stories, however, its moral lessons are valid and important.

It is written that long ago, during a time of famine, the ancient Israelites traveled to Egypt. According to this legend, the Israelites at that time were all in a single family - Jacob and his children. One of Jacob's sons was Joseph. He was so wise that the ruler of Egypt - the Pharaoh - made Joseph a leader over all the people of Egypt.

But as time passed, another Pharaoh became the ruler of Egypt. He did not remember about Joseph and his wise leadership. This new Pharaoh turned the Israelites into slaves, and burdened them with heavy work and sorrow.

Then, alerted to a prophecy that the Israelites would be led to freedom by a boy yet to be born, Pharaoh ordered all newborn Jewish boys cast into the Nile. Yocheved set her newborn son (Moses) adrift in the Nile in a basket, where he was found by Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him.

Years later, Moses came upon an Egyptian beating an Israelite. Outraged, Moses slew the Egyptian, but then fled Egypt for fear that his action would be discovered. Moses took refuge in Midian with Jethro and married Jethro's daughter, Tziporah. While shepherding Jethro's sheep, Moses came upon a burning bush which was not consumed, from which God instructed him to go back and lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Moses went to Pharaoh and demanded the release of the Israelites. Pharaoh repeatedly said no--nine times. Each time he said no, a plague struck Egypt. Finally, on the tenth time, God struck dead all the Egyptian first born. After this final tenth plague, Pharaoh finally allowed the Jews left Egypt, matzah in hand.

At our Passover Seder, we celebrate the story of Moses and the people he led out of slavery 3000 years ago. We celebrate the struggle of all people to be free. Throughout the centuries, the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt has inspired Jews and non-Jews in times of persecution and hardship.