

# The Answers

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Source: Valley Beth Shalom Haggadah

There are many questions. Now we begin to answer. Our history moves from slavery toward freedom. Our narration begins with degradation and rises to dignity. Our service opens with the rule of evil and advances to the kingdom of God.

1. We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the Lord freed 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.
2. We were not born free men and women; we were not born believers in one God. We came from an ancestry of slaves and idol worshippers. Tonight, we celebrate not our genesis — what we were — but what we have become. We are a choosing people, and our choice has come out of tragic encounters with pagan superstition and political enslavement. We are a choosing people and we have discovered the meaning of our choice: to live as witnesses to one God who calls upon us to mend the world, to make whole the broken vessels of this incomplete world.
3. The Torah recounts the early history of the Jewish people. It describes how God commanded Abraham to leave his country and his father's house and to go to the land of Canaan, where he would become the founder of "a great nation." Abraham and his wife, Sarah, obeyed God's command and journeyed to Canaan. There God blessed them and their family. Their son was Isaac, who married Rebecca. Their grandson was Jacob; and it was Jacob who went down to Egypt.
4. Why did Jacob journey to Egypt? Because Joseph, his son by his beloved Rachel, had become prime minister to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. When a famine broke out in Canaan, Joseph asked his father and all his family to join him there. Then Joseph granted his father and his brothers land, as Pharaoh commanded. And Israel dwelt in the land of Goshen; and they were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly.
5. Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. Now there arose a new Pharaoh over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, "Behold, the people of the children of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that if there be a war, they join themselves unto our enemies and fight against us." Therefore Pharaoh set over them taskmasters to afflict them with burdens. But the more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more the Israelites multiplied and the more they spread through the land.
7. The cruelest decree of all was the Pharaoh's order that every baby boy born to an Israelite woman be drowned in the River Nile. One couple, Amram and Yocheved, would not kill their newborn son. Instead, they hid him in their hut for three months. When his cries became too loud Yocheved placed him in a basket on the river. Their daughter Miriam watched to see what would happen.
8. Moses would have lived at the Pharaoh's palace forever, but he could not ignore the suffering of his people. Once when he saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite slave, he could not control his anger, and he killed the Egyptian. Knowing his life would be in danger once the news of this deed spread, Moses fled to the land of Midian where he became a shepherd.
9. One day, while tending sheep on Mount Horeb, Moses saw a bush that seemed to be on fire, but was not burning up. From the bush, he heard God's voice calling him. God said, "I am the God of your ancestors. I have seen the suffering of the Israelites and have heard their cries. I am ready to take them out of Egypt and bring them to a new land, a land flowing with milk and honey."

10. God told Moses to return to Egypt to bring the message of freedom to the Israelites and to warn Pharaoh that God would bring plagues on the Egyptians if he did not let the slaves go free. Moses was such a humble man that he could not imagine being God's messenger. "I will be with you," God promised Moses. With this assurance and challenge, Moses set out for Egypt.

11. When Moses asked Pharaoh to free the Israelites, he refused. It was only then that God brought ten plagues on the Egyptians. Each one frightened Pharaoh, and each time he promised to free the slaves. But when each plague ended, Pharaoh did not keep his word. It was only after the last plague, the death of the firstborn of the Egyptians, that Pharaoh agreed to let the Israelites go. And so it was that God brought us forth out of Egypt, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and with wonders.

12. And so God's promise to our ancestor Abraham was fulfilled, "Your children shall be strangers in a land not their own, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation they shall serve, and in the end, they shall go free with abundance." (Genesis 15:13-4)

13. The experience of the Exodus was transforming. It made us a free people forever. No matter how oppressed we are, deep inside we remain free. We know now that history has meaning. We know that power cannot forever vanquish freedom. We know that God has purposes in human history.