

We Were Slaves

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Source: Telling the Story: A Passover Haggadah Explained

The Haggadah sets forth the theme that we – not just our ancestors – were slaves to Pharaoh but God delivered each of us “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.” We tell the story of the Exodus and search its meaning to better understand and appreciate its message.

We have an obligation to retell and expand upon the story of our Exodus from Egypt in order to remind ourselves that the struggle for freedom is a constant one. Over the years, Rabbis reasoned that since the Torah commands us to retell the story, this must be done creatively, in a way that is compelling to the next generation. The Torah directs us to say, “My father was a wandering Aramean,” but traditional Haggadot translate the verse as “The Aramean wanted to destroy my father.” This was done as a warning to be on guard against two types of enemies who would take away our freedom – the enemy without and the enemy within, posing as a friend and betraying us.

We are also asked to be mindful of two kinds of slavery: physical bondage and spiritual bondage. We must strive to be free in body, but also free in spirit, careful not to destroy ourselves and our people by turning from God and the faith of our ancestors. Throughout the ages, our people have been oppressed and attacked by outside forces, but there is an equal risk of destroying ourselves by abandoning our traditions and repudiating who we are.

All raise their cups of wine, but do not drink:

In every generation enemies rise up against us, seeking to destroy us, and in every generation God delivers us from their hands into freedom.

All replace their cups untasted.