

# The Seventieth Person

Contributed by [The Telling By Mark Gerson](#)

Source: The Telling

The Haggadah tells us that “with seventy persons, your forefathers descended to Egypt.” Except there is a problem. There are only sixty- nine people, per Genesis 46:26, who descend to Egypt.

Who is number seventy?

Each participant at the Seder. As we will see, the Haggadah instructs that we are still in the process of emerging from slavery and idolatry, and participation in this great Jewish New Year experience of contemplation and commitment, refreshment, and renewal is one of the key moments in that process. If one generation stops, the work of the hundreds of generations who came before us— including the sixty- nine— is for naught. The perpetuation of the story and the continuation of the Jewish people depend on each one of us. We are neither historians nor observers, we are neither commentators nor celebrants. We are participants.

Each of us is number seventy.

This is not a magical or mystical notion. It is within the essence of what it means to be a Jew, and in a way, that is core to the Pesach celebration. The acknowledgment of each person as number seventy ratifies the purpose of Pesach— to assimilate history into memory, to relive the Exodus, to establish every Jew as a member of a community that stretches across generations and across geographies as one.