

## Gefilte Fish-A Mythical Midrash (Revised)

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**Source:** Original

According to Ashkenazic Jewish custom, we eat a lot of Gefilte fish on Passover. The question arose as to why Gefilte fish is so closely associated with Passover, and why it seems to appear on so many Seder tables.

Here is one answer:

God prepared every aspect of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt in exquisite and loving detail. It was expected to be completed without a glitch. But God failed to foresee that Pharaoh would pursue the Israelites so soon after their departure intending to re-enslave them or kill them. God knew that the Egyptian embalming and mourning period lasts for 110 days, more than enough time for the Israelites to get back to Eretz Yisrael, (Genesis 40:3) but God didn't count on Pharaoh's hardheartedness, preferring chasing down the Israelites to properly mourning his own firstborn son.

So here's what happened.

The Israelites found themselves trapped between the Sea of Reeds (sometimes mistakenly called the Red Sea) and the pursuing Egyptian chariots. They cried to Moses, Moses cried to God and God said: "Why are you crying to me? I mean, is it My fault Pharaoh is such a *yutz*? Tell the Israelites to get going!"

"Get going??? To where?", asked Moses, incredulously. "They're trapped with their backs to the Sea and the Pharaoh's chariots are bearing down on them. Just where do You suggest they go?"

Hmmm, mused God, this is a situation I didn't anticipate. Wait, let me think...

A *ha* !

[A *ha* : You see, God never creates the wound before the healing. In a quirky moment during the evolutionary process, God created an odd kind of sea creature. It was awkward looking and lumpy, with no fins, no scales, (although a Takkanat Tannaim - unknown until the discovery by Solomon Shechter, of blessed memory, of a medieval manuscript in the Cairo Geniza - declared it "kosher" anyway). Its actual kashrut was not confirmed until the middle of the 20th Century C.E., when Rabbi Isaac Klein of Buffalo, also of blessed memory, consulted a fish scientist who confirmed that at one stage of its life, before it, er... "matured," it did, in fact, have BOTH fins AND scales, although not necessarily at the same time, prompting Rabbi Klein to affirm that it was, in fact, kosher WITHOUT the need for the original Takkanat Tannaim, and therefore, certainly permissible to eat, even on Passover, as long as it was not mixed, cooked or served with any Chametz. But I digress, so where were we? Oh, yes...no eyes, no tail...and very, very pale. *Yuch!* So God stuck this evolutionary error in an out of the way place where it could live out its life-cycle in peace, undisturbed, undisturbing and unobserved. God put the wild Gefilte fish species in only one body of water on Earth -- somewhat off the beaten path -- in the Sea of Reeds (sometimes mistakenly called the Red Sea) -- where the species lived

and multiplied in obscurity for ages. Suddenly, God, who has a really long memory, remembered the wild Gefilte fish and the unique capability they developed, namely, the ability to suck in and hold 40 times (400 times, according to Rabbi Akiva) their weight in water.]

Now, God nodded knowingly and summoned the wild Gefilte to fulfill ( *ahem* ) their intended destiny by playing a crucial role in saving the people of Israel from the pursuing Egyptians.

And God spoke to the wild Gefilte, numbering in the tens of thousands, saying, "OK, fellas, at the count of three, SUCK IN!" (Some versions read: " *Oseh, fella, ...* " and so on) "One, two, THREE!" All at once, tens of thousands of wild Gefilte fish made a whooshing, sucking sound, as they simultaneously sucked in so much water that the middle of the Sea of Reeds (sometimes mistakenly called the Red Sea) dried up and a path opened up for the Israelites, enabling them to cross to the other side. But when the Egyptian chariots tried to follow them across the dry sea bed, the wild Gefilte fish, unable to HOLD 40 times their weight in water (400 times, according to Rabbi Akiva) any longer, let go, and the ensuing tsunami swept the Egyptian chariots away.

Israel was saved, and with tambourines and song, they praised God for God's foresight in creating the now heroic and celebrated, ugly but ultimately useful, wild Gefilte fish.

So, from that day to this, in gratitude for the part they played in rescuing Israel at the Sea (remember, the Sea of Reeds, NOT the Red Sea) and saving them from the pursuing Egyptians, the wild Gefilte fish were domesticated, bred (OMG! No *bread* on Passover!) (OK then, *matzah-mealed* ) and granted a place of honor on the Seder table and menu (at least in Ashkenazic practice; Sephardim don't believe in *bubba meisehs* ).

Now, how's THAT for a fish story?