

Telling Our Story

Contributed by [Jewish Women's Archive](#)

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Our story starts in ancient times, with Abraham, the first person to have the idea that maybe all those little statues his contemporaries worshiped as gods were just statues. The idea of one God, invisible and all-powerful, inspired him to leave his family and begin a new people in Canaan, the land that would one day bear his grandson Jacob's adopted name, Israel.

God had made a promise to Abraham that his family would become a great nation, but this promise came with a frightening vision of the troubles along the way: "Your descendants will dwell for a time in a land that is not their own, and they will be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years; however, I will punish the nation that enslaved them, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth."

Raise the glass of wine and say:

וְהִיא שְׂעֵמֶדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ.

V'hi she-amda l'avoteinu v'lanu.

This promise has sustained our ancestors and us.

For not only one enemy has risen against us to annihilate us, but in every generation there are those who rise against us. But God saves us from those who seek to harm us.

The glass of wine is put down.

In the years our ancestors lived in Egypt, our numbers grew, and soon the family of Jacob became the People of Israel. Pharaoh and the leaders of Egypt grew alarmed by this great nation growing within their borders, so they enslaved us. We were forced to perform hard labor, perhaps even building pyramids. The Egyptians feared that even as slaves, the Israelites might grow strong and rebel. So Pharaoh decreed that Israelite baby boys should be drowned, to prevent the Israelites from overthrowing those who had enslaved them.

The Passover story is most often associated with the leadership of Moses, but in fact the cycle of protest that culminated in the Exodus from Egypt began with the courageous acts of two women who disobeyed Pharaoh's decree to murder all Hebrew male babies born in Egypt. These women, Shifra and Puah, practiced a bold and noteworthy profession—midwifery. It was their commitment to preserving human life and their skills as midwives that provided the safe and secret delivery of Hebrew baby boys. That the biblical text actually mentions Shifra and Puah by name suggests the ultimate importance of their role in the liberation of the Israelites.

God heard the cries of the Israelites. And God brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and outstretched arm, with great awe, miraculous signs and wonders. God brought us out not by angel or messenger, but through God's own intervention.