

THE EXODUS STORY

Typically at Passover, we don't talk much about Moses because we are supposed to focus our attention on how God saved us. That said, here's a quick refresher of the Exodus story from the Torah. If you already know that story by heart, feel free to skip ahead to the 10 Plagues now.

The Exodus story begins with Joseph — an Israelite, the favorite son of the biblical patriarch Jacob, and a trusted aide of the Pharaoh. Joseph was a close friend of the Egyptians and even helped save the Egyptian people from famine, which is when people don't have enough food. But after Joseph grew old and died, the Pharaoh decided he didn't want to be nice to the Israelites anymore and made them slaves. That's pretty awful, but it gets even worse: Pharaoh didn't want there to be too many Israelites, in case they decided to fight back and demand their freedom. So he ordered all newborn Israelite boys to be tossed into the Nile River.

"No way!" said one young mother named Yocheved, who refused to drown her baby. Instead, she secretly left her newborn son in a basket at the edge of the river. Shortly after, Pharaoh's daughter discovered the boy and decided to raise him as her own child. She named him Moses. Then Yocheved, who was actually Moses' mom, became the baby's nurse.

And we cried out to the LORD, God of our parents, and the LORD heard our voice, and saw our abuse and our trouble and our oppression. (Deuteronomy 26:7)

Moses grew up to be a young man who cared about justice. So when he saw one of Pharaoh's deputies beat an Israelite slave, that

made him SO MAD! In a fit of rage, Moses killed the Egyptian taskmaster. He then ran away, because staying behind would only lead to him getting punished by Egyptians. He left Egypt to become a shepherd and married Zipporah.

One day, while tending to his sheep, Moses saw a bush on fire. Strangely, however, it wasn't turning black or to ash or anything like that. Even stranger, the bush began to speak. It was God's voice, telling Moses to free the Israelite slaves. So back to Egypt Moses went, with God's message: "Let my people go." But Pharaoh, still cruel and selfish, said, "No."

God did not like Pharaoh's answer, and responded with the 10 plagues.

First, God turned the waters of Egypt into blood. Then, God brought frogs, lice, wild beasts, cattle disease, boils, hail, locusts that destroyed crops, and darkness that lasted three whole days. This was all terrible, but God's final plague was worst of all: the death of every firstborn in the land of Egypt.



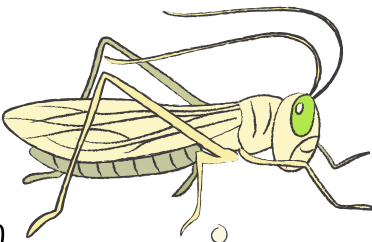
10 PLAGUES

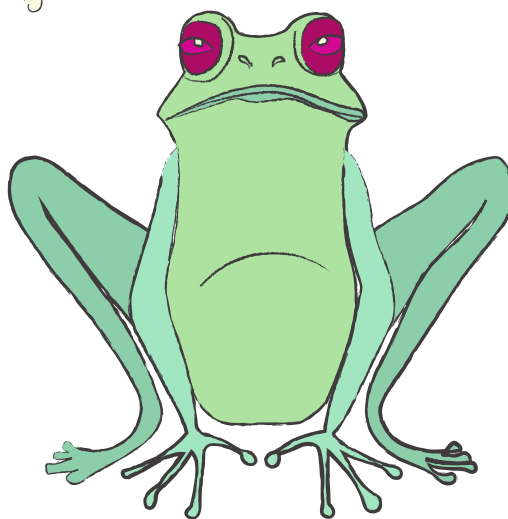
אלו עשר מכות שהביא הקדוש ברוך הוא על־המצרים במצרים, ואלו הן:

*Eilu eser makot sheheivi hakadosh baruch hu al hamitzrim
b'mitzrayim, v'eilu hein:*

These are the plagues that the Holy Blessed One, brought
upon Egypt:

It's time to recite the 10 plagues. As you say each one, dip one
finger (many use their pinkies) into your wine or grape juice
and touch it to your plate. Do not lick your fingers! By not
tasting these drops, we are saying: We take no joy when other
people suffer, even if the people suffering are our enemies.
Their pain makes our joy a little less joyful and, in this case,
our glasses a little less full.





DAM דם

The Nile River turned to blood.

TZEFARDEAH צפרדע

Frogs were literally everywhere.

KINIM כינים

People and animals got itchy lice.

AROV ערוב

Dangerous wild beasts roamed around.

DEVER דבר

Animals, such as cows, horses, and sheep, got very sick.

SH'HIN שחין

People and animals broke out in painful boils.

BARAD ברד

Hail and lightning came from the sky.

ARBEE ארבה

Locusts destroyed the crops.

HOSHEKH חושך

Darkness covered the land for three straight days.

MACAT B'KHOROT מכת בכורות

All firstborn Egyptian sons were killed.

TOP SECRET

What's the Matter With Darkness?

You might notice that the plagues go from kind of bad to really bad to deadly. Lice isn't as scary as boils, and boils aren't as scary as death. Except, there's one plague that seems out of order: darkness. The dark can be scary, but it's also something that we are pretty used to — it comes at the end of each day, after all.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains, God had two targets in mind when ordering the plagues. One was the Egyptian people. The second were the Egyptians gods. God wanted to show everyone that God was more powerful than the sun, which the Egyptians worshipped as their most important god. Egyptians even believed that Pharaoh was the son of the sun god.

"And I will cross through the land of Egypt on this night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt from man to beast, and from all the gods of Egypt I will exact retributions." (Exodus 12:12)

Living in darkness wasn't just scary and bad for growing food and keeping people healthy; it also let Egyptians know that God was in charge. More importantly, God wanted to show disapproval for the way the Egyptians treat Pharaoh like a God and let him make some people slaves.

THE EXODUS STORY: PART 2

Now, back to our story. Pharaoh, worn down by the 10 plagues, finally agreed to free the Israelites. Unfortunately, the Israelites couldn't really believe him. In the past, Pharaoh would say one thing and then do another. The Israelites had no choice but to get out of there fast, before Pharaoh could change his mind. The preparation for their journey began right away, and they didn't have much time. Rather than wait for their bread to rise and bake, they grabbed the dough and let it bake in the sun as they ran away. (That's how we got flat, crunchy matzah instead of soft, fluffy bread.) And just as the Israelites predicted, Pharaoh changed his mind about letting his slaves go free. Moses was leading the Israelites out of Egypt when Pharaoh cut off their escape route and forced them to head right up to the banks of the Red Sea.

And the LORD brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror and with signs and with portents. (*Deuteronomy 26:8*)

A dead end? Not for God! Moses raised his staff over the water, and then God parted the sea. The water split — and suddenly, briefly, there was a sandy path right in the middle. The Israelites escaped, and the Egyptian soldiers chasing them were killed. This was the beginning of the Israelites' 40-year trek through the desert. The journey will be so hard that they will miss Egypt, but they keep going. They are on their way to the Promised Land.

DAYENU

(ABRIDGED)

Now it's time for a song to thank God for everything involved in bringing us out of slavery. Here, we say that even if God had only done one or two of those things, it would have been enough. But, as it turned out, God arranged for a great many more miracles to secure our freedom, and we are so grateful for that.

(The highlights are in bold.)

If God had only
brought us out from
Egypt,

*Ilu hotzianu
mimitzrayim,*

אלו הוציאנו ממצרים

— Dayenu, it would
have been enough!

dayeinu!

דינו

If God had split the
sea for us,

*Ilu kara lanu et
hayam,*

אלו קרע לנו את הים

and had not taken us
through it on dry
land

*v'lo he'eviranu
b'tocho becharavah,*

ולא העבירנו בתוכו
בחורבה

— Dayenu, it would
have been enough!

dayeinu!

דינו

If God had supplied
our needs in the
desert for 40 years,

*Ilu sipeik tzorkeinu
bamidbar arba'im
shana,*

אלו ספק צרכנו
במדבר ארבעים שנה

and had not fed us
the manna

*v'lo he'echilanu et
haman,*

ולא האכילנו את המן

— Dayenu, it would
have been enough!

dayeinu!

דינו

If God had fed us the
manna,

*Ilu he'echilanu et
haman,*

אלו האכילנו את המן

and had not given us
the Shabbat

*v'lo natan lanu et
hashabbat,*

וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת

— Dayenu, it would
have been enough!

dayeinu!

דַּיָּנוּ

**If God had given us
the Shabbat,**

*Ilu natan lanu et
hashabbat,*

אִלּוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת

and had not brought
us before Mount
Sinai

*v'lo keirvanu lifnei
har sinai,*

וְלֹא קִרְבָּנוּ לִפְנֵי הָרַ
סִינַי

— Dayenu, it would
have been enough!

dayeinu!

דַּיָּנוּ

If God had brought
us before Mount
Sinai,

*Ilu keirvanu lifnei
har sinai,*

אִלּוּ קִרְבָּנוּ לִפְנֵי הָרַ
סִינַי

and had not given us
the Torah

*v'lo natan lanu et
hatorah,*

וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה

— Dayenu, it would
have been enough!

dayeinu!

דַּיָּנוּ

**If God had given us
the Torah,**

*Ilu natan lanu et
hatorah,*

אִלּוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת הַתּוֹרָה

and had not brought
us into the land of
Israel

*v'lo hichnisanu
l'eretz yisra'eil,*

וְלֹא הִכְנִיסָנוּ לְאֶרֶץ
יִשְׂרָאֵל

— Dayenu, it would
have been enough!

dayeinu!

דַּיָּנוּ

If God had brought
us into the land of
Israel,

*Ilu hichnisanu l'eretz
yisra'eil,*

אִלּוּ הִכְנִיסָנוּ לְאֶרֶץ
יִשְׂרָאֵל

and not built for us
the Holy Temple

*v'lo vanah lanu et
beit hamikdash,*

וְלֹא בָנָה לָנוּ אֶת בֵּית
הַמִּקְדָּשׁ

— Dayenu, it would
have been enough!

dayeinu!

דַּיָּנוּ