

# Pesach – A Time for Stories

Pesach is the time to remember when we as a Jewish nation left Egypt. We gather together for the Pesach Seder, eating matza, maror, and charoses, drinking four cups of wine and leaning while doing so. We tell the story of what took place, starting from the times of Avraham and going up until Moshe acted as Hashem's messenger to take the Jews out of Egypt.

But is this the entire point of Pesach and the Seder night? Are we just supposed to tell a story that happened thousands of years ago? Why do we even bother telling this story? In Jewish law, we're commanded to act: to keep Shabbos, to blow Shofar, to wear Tzitzis, etc. Since when did telling a story become a mitzvah? What is it supposed to do?

Rambam, Laws of Pesach, Chapter 6

6. In each generation, one is obligated to show himself as if he was freed from the bondage of Egypt **right now**, as it says, "And You took us out from there, etc." Concerning this matter, Hashem commanded us in the Torah, "And you should remember that you were a slave", as if to say that you yourself were a slave and you went to freedom and were redeemed.

7. **Therefore**, when a person eats on this night, he needs to eat and drink while leaning in the manner of free people.

וְכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לְהִרְאוֹת אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּאִילוֹ הוּא בְעַצְמוֹ יֵצֵא עִתָּהּ מִשְׁעַבּוֹד מִצְרַיִם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים ו-כג) "וְאֹתָנוּ הוֹצֵיא מִמִּצְרַיִם" וְגוֹ'. וְעַל דָּבָר זֶה צִוָּה הַקָּב"ה בַּתּוֹרָה "וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עַבְדְּ הָיִיתָ" כְּלוּמָר כְּאִילוֹ אַתָּה בְעַצְמְךָ הָיִיתָ עַבְדֵּי וְיֵצֵאתָ לְחֵירוֹת וּנְפִידִית:

וְלִפְיֶיךָ כִּשְׁמוּעַד אָדָם בְּלֵילָה הַזֶּה צָרִיךְ לֵאכּוֹל וּלְשַׁתּוֹת וְהוּא מֵיִסָּב דְּרַךְ חֵירוֹת

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes that there is no biblical Hebrew word for "history". Whenever the Torah wants to refer to something that happened in the past, it uses the word "zeicher – remembrance", which amazingly appears 269 times in the Torah. What is the difference between history and a remembrance? History is just that; **his story**, something that happened a long time ago to someone else that you have very little interest in. History is something they teach in classes where all the kids are checking their Facebook statuses. However, a remembrance is **my story**, myself remembering my own memories.

We're not just telling a story that happened a long time ago; we're telling our own story! We are obligated to feel as if this happened to us, but how could we possibly do that if it happened so long ago? We use all these different symbols and actions on the Seder night in order to help us feel that we are free, eating the bitter maror and the cement-like charoses to taste the bitterness of the slavery in Egypt, and wearing nice clothes, drinking wine, and leaning so that we feel like royalty.

But it's not enough to just do that. Leaving Egypt wasn't a one-time event. There are miracles that have taken place throughout our history, stories in each generation that tell the amazing story of how the Jewish nation survived against all odds. Let's look at a very clear and powerful story that took place during the lifetime of our parents or grandparents: **the founding of the State of Israel**.

For the State of Israel to be founded in 1948, the following incredible things had to happen:

1. Tens of thousands of Jews, many of whom had just lost their entire families and had been brutally tortured during the Holocaust, had to somehow sneak their way into Palestine when the British weren't letting anyone in.
2. President Harry Truman voted in the UN to support the Jewish state and helped swing the vote in their favor, even though most of the government, including Truman's secretary of state, the war hero General George Marshall, one of the most politically influential men in the world, were strongly opposed to the founding of Israel. Truman voted for Israel because it was an election year and thought that he needed the Jewish vote. Had the vote for Israel taken place a year later, Israel likely would have lost.
3. Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union, a tremendous anti-Semite who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews, incorrectly thought that a good way to weaken the British Empire was to help the fledgling Jewish state get weapons to fight off their enemies at a time when no country would even consider selling them weapons. That August, he realized he made a terrible mistake and stopped the sale, but by that time, the Israelis had won.
4. After the declaration of the state, the Haganah, Israel's defense force, had 21,000 basically untrained men (many of whom just survived the Holocaust), fighting against a professional Arab invading army of 10,000 Egyptians, 4,500 in Jordan's Arab Legion, 7,000 Syrians, 3,000 Iraqis, and 3,000 Lebanese – plus the Arab Liberation Army of Palestinians, yet they still miraculously won.

These are some highlights, but the list goes on and on. But Pesach isn't just a time to tell the story of the Jews leaving Egypt or forming the State of Israel. It is supposed to help us come to a greater level of belief in God, to help us see His hand in our daily lives.

For that, we can't just tell stories that have happened to the Jewish people throughout the generations. For that, you have to get nice and personal. You and your family have to tell **your own stories**, times when it has been so clear to you that God is running the world. This is how we see ourselves as if we're leaving from Egypt right now, by recognizing the miracles in our and our family's lives. The night of the seder isn't designed for us to just ask cute questions about Dayeinu or Ha Lachma Anya. It is a night when we gather together with our families, when your parents or grandparents can tell you what it took to get you where you are today. If they don't tell you, ask! It's important to take time to think about your life, but more importantly, you have to proclaim it to the world. You have to tell your story.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov - "Most of the world says that telling stories puts people to sleep, I say that telling stories can wake people up from their slumber!"

So give it a try today, take a practice run before Pesach. What has happened in your life that has helped you see the hand of God? What was your Yetzias Mitzrayim (Redemption from Egypt)? Let story time begin!