

A TALE OF TWO FREEDOMS

A Storytelling Challenge



While the Haggadah tells us to “grow” the Exodus story (see the framing on pp. 1-2), it leaves the details of how to do this up to the imagination. This activity invites Seder participants to craft their own versions of the Exodus story in small groups. Through playful storytelling, they will connect with the text of the Haggadah and with each other. This activity is designed to be used with older elementary school kids and above. Try this activity after the Four Questions as an introduction to Maggid, or as a preparatory pre-Seder activity earlier in the evening.

INTRODUCTION

Mishnah Pesachim says that, when we tell the story of the Exodus on Seder night, we should “מְתַחִיל בְּגִנּוּת וּמַסִּיִּים” - start with something negative or shameful, and end with something positive or praiseworthy.” But this instruction is vague, even cryptic. What is the negative moment we should start with? What kind of success do we celebrate? How do we tell that story?

Two rabbis in the Talmud, Rav and Shmuel,¹ had very different answers to this question. Shmuel’s answer is the one we might expect. He says to start with our history as slaves and progress toward our freedom. Rav, on the other hand, tells us to start with the idea that our ancestors were idolaters, who only over time came to serve God.

These answers present two different ways of telling the story of the Exodus. Shmuel focuses on overcoming physical slavery, while Rav highlights overcoming spiritual slavery. The Haggadah likes both answers and incorporates both of them into our Seder. Tonight, we will bring these interpretations to life, using them to tell our own versions of the Exodus story. What we create together could not exist with a different group of people or at a different Seder!

MATERIALS

- » Copies of the prep sheet (opposite) for all participants
- » Somewhere for each group to gather

FLOW

- » Read the introduction and goal aloud
- » Divide the Seder participants into Rav and Shmuel teams of 2-4 people. Give each person the instruction sheet and send them to their location. (You may have more than one Rav team and more than one Shmuel team)
- » Groups spend 10-15 minutes preparing their stories
- » Groups present their stories. After each presentation, encourage participants to appreciate something they noticed about how the group told their story

GOAL

Using your instruction sheet as a guide, create a 2-4 minute retelling of your team’s Exodus story.

Your retelling should...

- » start with the words corresponding to your team
- » end with something positive (either the Haggadah’s words or your own)
- » Optional: include one object from the Seder table as a prop
- » include a role for each person on your team

¹ In our printed editions of the Talmud, this opinion is attributed to Shmuel, who was Rav’s contemporary (mid-3rd century CE). But in fact, earlier texts of the Talmud in medieval manuscripts show that the proper attribution should be Rava (a mid-4th century CE Sage). Still, the opinion is referred to as Shmuel’s throughout for the sake of simplicity.

1 GREET

Greet your teammates.

2 READ AND DISCUSS

Read your story out loud. Take turns noticing words or details that jump out at you and sharing any insights you have.

TEAM RAV

"Our Ancestors Were Idol Worshippers"

מִתְחִלָּה עֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, וְעַכְשֵׁיו קָרְבָנוּ
הַמָּקוֹם לַעֲבֹדָתוֹ.

At first, our ancestors were idol worshippers (literally: worshipers of strange/foreign worship), and now Ha-Makom (a name for God, literally: The Place) has drawn us close to God's worship.²

TEAM SHMUEL

"We Were Slaves"

עֲבָדִים הָיינוּ לַפַּרְעֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם, וַיּוֹצִיאֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם
בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְרֹעַ נְטוּיָה.

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the Lord our God took us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.³

3 RETELL

This story is very short! It's time to embellish it, adding details and drama.

- » **At first, our ancestors were idol worshippers...** What is foreign worship or idolatry? What did our ancestor Israelites do as idolaters? Why might Rav think that idol worship was negative (lit. shameful)?
- » **Then...** Fill in the missing **middle**: How did Avraham come to believe in God? Why did God decide to take Avraham out of the house of idol worship where he grew up?
- » **And now Ha-Makom has drawn us close to God's worship...** What details can you add to the idea that "Ha-Makom has drawn us close to God's worship?" How does it feel or look to be close to God? Why is this a positive or praiseworthy end to the story? (Feel free to speak about this symbolically—what does spiritual slavery or freedom look like?)

- » **We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt...** What did it feel like to be a slave? What did the Israelites do as slaves? What was so negative about being a slave?
- » **God took us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm...** How did the Israelites go from being slaves to being freed? How did one thing lead to the other? What happened?
- » **Then...** Fill in the missing **now**. What was the result of God's outstretched arm? What might it have felt like to be freed from physical slavery?

4 CHECK-IN

Invite anyone who hasn't spoken much to add their thoughts. Is anything from the text missing from your telling?

5 PRESENT

Plan your presentation. Don't forget to give each team member a role and to include your object if you like!

2 This is the Haggadah's embellishment of Rav's story. Originally, Rav probably intended to refer to the telling of the story in the last chapter of the Book of Joshua (24:2), his speech beginning, "Across the river..." For this, and also the attribution of Rava vs. Shmuel, see the discussion in Josh Kulp, *The Schechter Haggadah* (Jerusalem: Shoken, 2009), pp. 201-203.

3 This is the Haggadah's embellishment of Shmuel's story, based on Deuteronomy 6:21.