

What's YOUR Exodus Story?

Sefaria Source Sheet by Rachel Buckman

In the Haggadah, Rabban Gamliel tells us that we must feel as if we, ourselves, were taken out of Egypt. How can we do this? How can we connect and be inspired to something that happened thousands of years ago?

In this lesson, we will look at three groups of people who saw the Exodus story as inspiration and hope during their own quest for freedom. At the end, you will have an opportunity to share how you connect to the Exodus story.

Pesach Haggadah, Magid, Rabban

Gamliel's Three Things 7

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he left Egypt, as it is stated (Exodus 13:8); "For the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in *my* going out of Egypt." Not only our ancestors did the Holy One, blessed be He, redeem, but rather also us [together] with them did he redeem, as it is stated (Deuteronomy 6:23); "And He took us out from there, in order to bring us in, to give us the land which He swore unto our fathers."

הגדה של פסח, מגיד, פסח מצה ומרור ז'

בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לִרְאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם, שְׁנֹאמֵר: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר, בְּעֶבְרָה זֹה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּלֶבֶד גָּאֵל הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אֲלֵא אֲף אֹתֵנוּ גָאֵל עִמָּהֶם, שְׁנֹאמֵר: וְאֹתֵנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם, לְמַעַן הֵבִיא אֹתֵנוּ, לָתֵת לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ.

Civil Rights Movement in the United States

The US civil rights movement led a campaign in the 1950s and 1960s for equal rights for African Americans. Martin Luther King Jr. was the central figure in the movement and often used biblical imagery in his speeches. The story of Moses speaking to Pharaoh to let his enslaved people be free was used by in both the civil rights movement and in the struggle a century earlier to end slavery in America.

The following verse from the book of Exodus was the inspiration for a popular song written in the 1850s by African-American slaves. The song was also sung at civil rights rallies a hundred years later.

Exodus 9:1

שמות ט':א'

Then the LORD said unto Moses: "Go in unto Pharaoh, and tell him: Thus saith the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: **Let My people go**, that they may serve Me."

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְדַבֵּרְתָּ אֵלָיו לֵאמֹר
אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי:

Links

- [Paul Robeson singing "Let My People Go"](#)
- [Hebrew version of "Let My People Go" \(Go Down Moses\)](#)

After reading the verse and listening to English and Hebrew versions of the song, answer the following questions:

- Why do you think the Exodus story resonated for African Americans?
- What emotions did you feel when you listened to Paul Robeson singing the song?
- Why do you think the song was translated into Hebrew?
- Did you like the Hebrew version?
- Some people add this song to their Pesach Seder.
- How does the song relate to Rabban Gamliel's statement?

Soviet Jewry Movement

For many years, Jews were not free to practice their Jewish tradition and culture or allowed to leave the Soviet Union and to immigrate to Israel or other countries. International efforts to put pressure on the Soviet Union to free Soviet Jews began in the 1960s and continued until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Jews in Israel and all over the world supported the Refuseniks (Soviet Jews who were refused permission to emigrate), lobbied their governments to pressurize the Soviet Union, and publicized the plight of Soviet Jewry through rallies and marches.

The story of the Exodus and the holiday of Pesach served as inspiration for Soviet Jewry movement.

"Let My People Go" was the rallying cry, and symbols were added to the Pesach Seder as a reminder that not all Jews were free.

Watch the [video](#) for background on the Soviet Jewry movement.

These are photographs from a rally in Tel Aviv in 1969. After examining the photographs, answer the questions below.

Translation of word on signs: *Freedom*



From the Dan Hadani Archive

Translation of sign:
Let My People Go



From the Dan Hadani Archives

- What are your impressions of the rally?
- Who is the woman speaker?
- Who was her role?
- What was her connection to the Jews of the Soviet Union?
- What do the signs say?
- Why do you think this message were chosen for the rally?

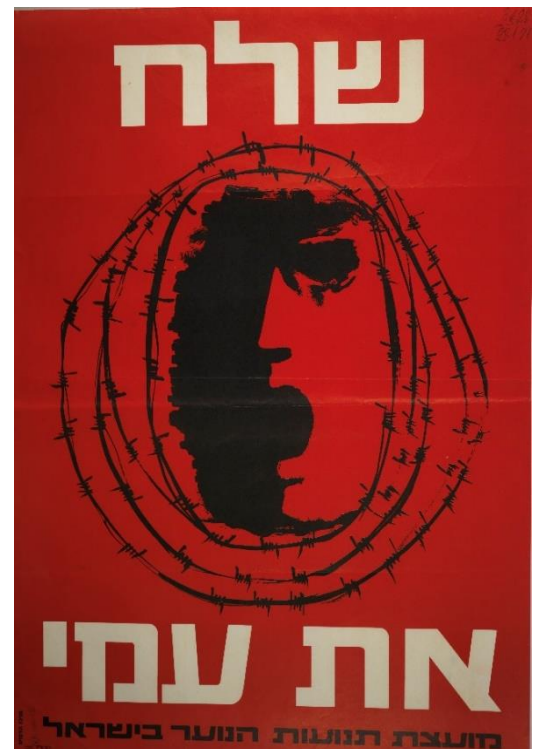
How did it go? Let us know! learning@nli.org.il

Let My People Go Poster

This is a poster published by the Council of Youth Movements in Israel on behalf of Jews living in the Soviet Union.

Examine the poster and answer the following questions:

- What is your first impression of the poster?
- What is the poster's message?
- How do the design elements (color, picture, symbols) enhance the message?
- Do you think this is an effective poster? Why?



[From the NLI Ephemera collection](#)

For the Jews of the Soviet Union, 1969

Translation:

*For the Jews of the Soviet Union
All Jews are requested to say these
words on Seder night:*

We set aside one matza, this bread of our affliction, which reminds us of the three million Jews in the Soviet Union, most of whom do not have matzot on this Seder night. How can there be a Pesach Seder without matzah, which is the tangible reminder of our exodus from slavery.

*Think of the Jews in the Soviet Union.
They cannot learn the history of their people and pass it on to their children.
They cannot teach the languages of their ancestors and bequeath it to their children.
They cannot train teachers and rabbis from among their children.*



How did it go? Let us know! learning@nli.org.il

All they can do is sit alone, silent, and invisible. We will be their voices, and our voices will be joined by many, whose conscience protests against the injustice that is being done to the Jews of the Soviet Union.

If so, the Jews there will know that they have not been forgotten, and that those sitting in the dark will yet be able to see a great light.

Therefore, we are asking you to leave an empty chair at the Passover Seder - "a throne that won't stay silent for the Jews of Russia." The Maoz society of Tel Aviv published a sign which you are requested to affix to the chair. On the sign is written: "O God, do not be silent; do not stand aloof; do not be quiet, O God!" (Psalms, 83:2).

Let My People Go!

This is an article that was published on the eve of Passover 1969, requesting Jews to remember the struggle of the Soviet Jews for freedom.

Read the selection from the Torah, the Haggadah, and the article above and answer the following questions.

Deuteronomy 16:3

You shall not eat anything leavened with it; for seven days thereafter you shall eat unleavened bread, bread of distress—for you departed from the land of Egypt hurriedly—so that you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt as long as you live.

דברים ט"ז:ג'

לֹא-תֹאכַל עֲלֶיךָ חֶמֶץ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל-עֲלֶיךָ מַצּוֹת
לֶחֶם עֲנִי כִּי בַחֲפוֹזוֹן יֵצְאתָ מִמִּצְרַיִם לְמַעַן תִּזְכֹּר
אֶת-יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרַיִם כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

Pesach Haggadah, Magid, Ha Lachma

Anya 3

This is the bread of destitution that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Anyone who is famished should come and eat, anyone who is in need should come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice. Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people.

הגדה של פסח, מגיד, הא לחמא עניא ג'

הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיא דִּי אָכְלוּ אֲבֹהֵתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל
דְּכָפִין יְיָיִל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יְיָיִל וְיִפְסָח. הַשְׁתָּא הָכָא,
לְשָׁנָה הִבָּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדִי, לְשָׁנָה
הִבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

- What is לחם עני, the bread of affliction?
- What does it represent?
- What is the connection between matza and Soviet Jewry?

- Who do you think was the designated audience for the notice?
- What is the notice asking the audience to do?
- Why was Pesach seen as a fitting time to remember Soviet Jews?
- On Pesach each person is supposed to feel as though they themselves came out of Egypt.
- How do the activities described in the notice help Seder participants do this?
- How does the notice illustrate Jewish solidarity?

Zionist Movement

The Exodus story was also seen as inspiration for Zionism, as it tells the story of the Jewish nation leaving the foreign country in which they found themselves and returning to their homeland, Israel.

This is the postcard entitled “Pesach” by the Jewish artist Ephraim Moses Lilien, which was revealed at the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901. Lilien was active in the cultural Zionist movement and was known as the “first Zionist artist.”

Examine the picture and answer the following questions:



- Which place is the picture depicting?
- How did you come to this conclusion?
- Describe the man.
 - What is he wearing?
 - What is the expression on his face?
- Who does the man represent?
- What name is written inside the sun?
- What do you think the picture's message is?
- How does the artist use the Exodus story to express his Zionist message?

Connecting

We have seen how three social movements – the civil rights movement, the Soviet Jewry movement, and the Zionist movement – found inspiration from the Exodus story, which is the basis of Pesach.

We have also studied the text in the Haggadah stating that all people should see themselves as if they personally had left Egypt.

- Does your family history include a story of attaining freedom? What is your story?
- If you don't have a personal story, is there a story that you relate to that helps you to feel as if you personally left Egypt?
- People can feel enslaved in ways other than physical slavery such as being slaves to their work, money, or social image.
- What are you enslaved by?
- How can you gain control and feel free?

Creating

Choose one of the following:

- Draw a picture in the style of Ephraim Moses Lilien, depicting a modern struggle for freedom. It can be a depiction of a modern event or a symbolic enslavement.
- Interview a family member about their participation in any of the social movements discussed above.
- Interview a family member who left their country of origin in pursuit of freedom.
- Write about another example of the use of the Exodus story to support a cause.
- Write a paragraph which can be used at your Seder describing what makes you feel as if you personally left Egypt.