

Seder Talk: The Conversional Haggadah

הגדה של פסח • מנוח

The Seder plate and the matzot are uncovered.

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפָרֹעַ בְּמִצְרַיִם

וַיִּצְרֵאֵנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם
 בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְיָד נְטוּיָה.
 וְאֵלֵינוּ לֹא הוֹצִיא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
 אֶת אֲבוֹתֵינוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם
 הָרִי אֲנִי וּבָנֵינוּ וּבָנֵי בָנֵינוּ מִשְׁעַבְדֵי הָיִינוּ לְפָרֹעַ בְּמִצְרַיִם.
 וְאֵלֵינוּ
 פָּלְנוּ חַמְקִים, פָּלְנוּ נְבוֹנִים, פָּלְנוּ זָקִנִים
 פָּלְנוּ יוֹדְעִים אֶת הַחֲזָקָה
 מִצְרָה עֲלֵינוּ לְסִפּוּר פִּיצוּצֵי מִצְרַיִם
 וְכָל הַמְרֻבָּה לְסִפּוּר פִּיצוּצֵי מִצְרַיִם
 הָרִי זֶה מְשִׁפָּר.

WE WERE SLAVES

We open our Haggada with a quick précis of what happened and with an invitation. Tell us more. Use this as a framework rather than a script. Speak and speak more because with every articulation of this ancient freedom, our appreciation deepens.

Since the close of this passage tells us that the more we speak, the more praiseworthy we are, we turn next to sages of the Talmud who could not stop speaking about the Exodus. If you set out to tell the story of our Exodus, chances are you would not have come up with a Haggada. It does not read at all like Exodus 1-15, with its mounting tensions and ultimate relief. Instead, we have a number of passages which tell us how others read this story. Rabbi Eliezer and his colleagues were telling this story all night. They, too, could not stop speaking about the Exodus. They didn't even realize that the time for the morning recitation of the *Shema* was upon them. Many commentators believe that this

by Erica Bruhn

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עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ

WE WERE SLAVES to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD our God brought us out of there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. And if the Holy One, Blessed Be He, had not brought our fathers out of Egypt – then we, and our children, and the children of our children, would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. And even were we all wise, all intelligent, all aged and all knowledgeable in the Torah, still the command would be upon us to tell of the coming out of Egypt; and the more one tells of the coming out of Egypt, the more admirable it is.

indicates the intensity of their storytelling. They were so absorbed that they lost all track of time.

But another reading is even more likely because it is hard not to notice the transition from night to the natural light of day unless you are hiding in a dark space, perhaps a cave or an attic, when you are discussing the Exodus. These sages were likely hiding from soldiers or representatives of the Roman administration, who may have persecuted them for external expressions of their religion. The magic of this passage is not only the length of the Exodus recollections or the passionate retelling on this Passover night long ago. It is also that despite outside dangers, they kept talking. A story worth telling is told again and again. Danger only makes the story more meaningful because it offers the reason that we endure.

Think of a story that is told and retold because it continues to inspire. Name the last time you lost track of time because you were so absorbed in what you were doing. Why would the Haggada make us read about the way other people read, rather than reading the story directly?