

SACRED STORIES

Rabbi Dara Frimmer, Temple Isaiah

In every generation one is bound to regard oneself as though s/he personally had gone forth from Egypt, because it is said, and you shall tell your child on that day, saying: it is because of that which God did for me when I came forth out of Egypt. Therefore it is our duty to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, honor, bless, extol, and adore God who wrought all these miracles for our ancestors and ourselves; God brought us forth from bondage into freedom, from sorrow into joy, from mourning into festivity, from darkness into great light, and from servitude into redemption. Therefore let us say before God, hallelujah! *B. Talmud, Pesachim 116b*

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים שנאמר והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים לפיכך אנחנו חייבים להודות להלל לשבח לפאר לרומם להדר לברך לעלה ולקלס למי שעשה לאבותינו ולנו את כל הנסים האלו הוציאנו מעבדות לחרות מיגון לשמחה ומאבל ליום טוב ומאפלה לאור גדול ומשעבוד לגאולה ונאמר לפניו הללויה

תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף קטז/ב

אַרְמִי אֲבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגְר וְשָׁם בְּמִתֵּי מְעַט וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל עָצוּם וְרַב

“My father was a wandering Aramean, and with just a few people he went down to Mitzrayim and sojourned there. And there he became a great nation, mighty and numerous” (Deuteronomy 26:5).

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Mitzrayim. He was impelled, by force of the Divine word, as it is written, “Know for certain that your offspring shall be strangers in a strange land and they shall be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years” (Genesis 15:13).

With just a few people. As it is written, “Your ancestors went down to Mitzrayim with seventy persons in all, and now Adonai your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky” (Deuteronomy 10:22).

And sojourned there. This teaches that our father Jacob did not go down to settle permanently in Mitzrayim but rather to sojourn there, as it is written, “And Jacob’s sons said to Pharaoh, ‘We have come to sojourn in this land, since there is no pasture for your servants’ flock, for the famine in the land of Canaan is severe. Pray let your servants stay awhile in the land of Goshen’” (Genesis 47:4).

And there he became a great nation. This teaches that the Israelites became easily identifiable there. They became unique, recognized as a distinctive nation, through their observance of mitzvot. They were never suspected of unchastity or of slander; they did not change their names and they did not change their language.

Mighty and numerous. As it is written, “The Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and increased greatly, so that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7).

וַיִּרְעוּ אֲתָנּוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֶבְדָּה קָשָׁה

“The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; and they imposed hard labor upon us” (Deuteronomy 26:6).

The Egyptians dealt harshly with us. They were ungrateful, for they paid back in evil the kindness that Joseph had done for them, as it is written, “A new king arose over Mitzrayim who did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). He acted as if he did not know about Joseph.

Another interpretation: The Egyptians dealt harshly with us. They made us appear to be bad, for it is written that Pharaoh said to his people, “Behold, the Israelites are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal cunningly with them, lest they multiply, for then, in the event of war, they might join our enemies and fight against us and later leave our land” (Exodus 1:9-10).

And oppressed us. As it is written, “So they set task-masters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor; and they built store-cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses... The Egyptians ruthlessly compelled the Israelites to toil with rigor” (Exodus 1:11,13).

And they imposed hard labor upon us. They would impose a difficult task upon the weak and an easy task upon the strong, a light burden upon the young and a heavy burden upon the old. This was work without end and futile, for the Egyptians wanted not only to enslave them but also to break their spirit.¹

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

When you enter the land that Adonai your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, 2 you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that Adonai your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where Adonai your God will choose to establish His name. 3 You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, "I acknowledge this day before Adonai your God that I have entered the land that Adonai swore to our fathers to assign us." 4 The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of Adonai your God. 5 You shall then recite as follows before Adonai your God: "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. 6 The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. 7 We cried to Adonai, the God of our fathers, and Adonai heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. 8 Adonai freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. 9 He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, Adonai, have given me." You shall leave it before Adonai your God and bow low before Adonai your God. 11 And you shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that Adonai your God has bestowed upon you and your household.

Originally all who knew how to recite would recite while those unable to do so would repeat it; but when they refrained from bringing, it was decided that both those who could recite and those who could not recite should repeat the words.

Mishnah Bikkurim 3:7

¹ The following section of Maggid is taken from Passover Haggadah: The Feast of Freedom

Vayikra Rabbah 34:8

Rabbi Yitzchak bar Maryon said, “The Torah teaches a good rule of conduct, that when a person performs a good deed he should do so with a happy heart. If Reuven, for example, had known that the Holy One, blessed be God, would have it written of him, “And Reuven heard it, and delivered [Joseph] out of their hand” (Gen. 37:21), he would have carried Joseph and brought him to his father. And if Aaron had known that the Holy One, blessed be God, would have it written of him “And behold [Aaron] is coming to greet you and he will see you and be happy in his heart” (Exodus 4:14), he would have gone out to greet him with timbrels and dances. And if Boaz had known that the Holy One, blessed be God, would have it written of him that he “Reached her parched corn,” he would have given [Ruth] to eat fatted calves!

R. Kohen and R. Joshua son of R. Simon in the name of R. Levi said: In times past when a man did a good deed the prophet used to record it, but now if a man does a good deed who records it? Elijah and the King Messiah, the Holy One, blessed be God, signing beside them; in accordance with that which is written, “Then they that revered God spoke one with another; and God hearkened, and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before God concerning those who revere God and esteem God’s name” (Malachi 3:16).

ויקרא רבה פרשה לד

אמ' ר' יצחק בר מריון למדתך התורה דרך ארץ שכשאדם עושה מצוה יהא עושה אותה בלב שמחה, שאילו היה ראובן יודע שהקב"ה כותב עליו וישמע ראובן ויצילהו מידם (בראשית לז, כא), בכתפו היה טוענו ומוליכו אצל אביו. אילו היה אהרן יודע שהק' כותב עליו וגם הנה הוא יוצא לקראתך וראך ושמח בלבו (שמות ד, יד), בתופים ובמחולות היה יוצא לקראתו. אילו היה יודע בועז שהק' כותב עליו ויצבט לה קלי (רות ב, יד), עגלות פטומות היה מביא ומאכילה.

ר' כהן ר' יהושע דסיכנין בש' ר' לוי לשעבר היה אדם עושה מצוה והנביאין כותבין, עכשיו שאין נביאים מי כותב אותה, אליהו ומלך המשיח, והק' חותם על ידיהם, דכ' אז נדברו יראי י"י איש אל רעהו ויקשב י"י וישמע ויכתב ספר זכרון לפניו (מלאכי ג, טז).

- What point is the *midrash* trying to make?
- All of the people the *midrash* talks about are “**supporting characters**” in a main character’s drama (e.g. Joseph is the main character in the Reuven episode). Why do you think the *midrash* brings us supporting characters as examples instead of main characters?
- Why does the *midrash* end with a declaration that all of our good deeds are being recorded?
- How can we use this text to shape our story-telling on Passover?

Temple Isaiah Sacred Stories Hagaddah

Written by Rabbi Zoë Klein

Kiddush

Here we are, a gathering of story-makers and story-tellers. Our days are pages in an unfurling sacred scroll. May our tales deepen in sweetness and richness, as we continue along this mysterious path.

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Karpas

As a community we have planted many dreams, remembering and nourishing our roots while reaching skyward toward bright aspirations.

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

Maggid

First we recall our temple's history:

Temple Isaiah was formally incorporated as a non-profit religious corporation under the name "Temple Isaiah of Culver City" on September 12, 1947, Ever Shabbat, 27th of Elul, 2 days before Rosh Hashanah, 5708. Rabbi Albert M. Lewis came to Temple Isaiah in 1948 as its first Rabbi and served as its Senior Rabbi and Superintendent of its religious schools until 1979 when he retired.

Rabbi Robert T. Gan entered our Temple family in 1969 as Associate Rabbi and became the Senior Rabbi in 1979 until 2007 when he retired.

Cantor Robert Nadell was the cantor of Temple Isaiah from 1948 to 1988 when he retired. Cantor Evan Kent became the Cantor in the summer of 1988.

Dr. Jack Horowitz became the full-time Director of Religious Education in 1957 and retired in 1991. Ellen Goldberg became the Principal of Temple Isaiah Religious School in 1991.

Over the years our religious school has been awarded numerous honors and curriculum awards presented by the National Association of Temple Educators and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. In 1971, our religious school launched its unique Rishonim program where devoted high school post-confirmands and college students become inspiring role models of Jewish living and involvement for the younger children to emulate.

In October, 1972, Temple Isaiah opened its Preschool Center with June Marshall as the Director. In 2003 Tamar Andrews became the Director of our highly acclaimed Early Childhood Center.

Rabbi Michael White became the Associate Rabbi of Temple Isaiah in 1991. Rabbi Jan Offel became Associate rabbi in 1998. Rabbi Zoë Klein became Associate Rabbi in 2000 and

became Senior Rabbi in 2007. In 2007 we were also joined by Rabbi Dara Frimmer and Rabbi Richard Kellner.

Our congregation has maintained a formidable social action program bringing to its pulpit such notables as Mme. Indira Gandhi, Senator Robert Kennedy, Eleanor Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr., Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, Senator Eugene McCarthy, Cesar Chavez, Rabbi Albert Vorspan, Rabbi David Saperstein, and many others.

For many years Temple Isaiah and the First African Methodist Episcopal Church conducted an annual pulpit exchange. The exchange program led to other cooperative ventures between the two congregations, including a joint legal-aid clinic helping thousands of clients with free legal advice.

In 1969 Temple Isaiah established a program in preventive mental health for young people in West Los Angeles. The program began under the name “Robert J. Green Contact Center” and offered self-awareness groups for teenagers, public lectures on drug abuse, parent-child relationships and a referral service for individuals, couples and families.

Temple Isaiah was one of the first congregations to join the Jewish World Watch, a multi-denomination organization which fights egregious human atrocities around the globe.

Many of the founders of PATH, People Assisting the Homeless, are Temple Isaiah members. Temple Isaiah has also formed a strong supportive commitment to Beyond Shelter, which assists homeless families to find permanent low-income housing.

Temple Isaiah has been a strong supporter of Israel, from the early sixties helping to build a new immigrant children’s recreation center in Kiriat Gat, to more recently helping to build the Reform Congregation Mevasseret Tzion and after-school programs in the Gaza border town of S’derot.

In 1967, in the midst of Israel’s miraculous Six-Day War, Temple Isaiah presented to the community a program called “The Great Yarid,” where the Temple grounds were converted into three major settings, a café in Tel Aviv, a “Mella” in Morocco and a Shtetl in Eastern Europe. Over 5,000 people visited each setting, enjoying unique Jewish foods, music and culture. The Great Yarid established a tradition in our Temple of sponsoring major Jewish Art presentations, including an annual Festival of Jewish Artisans.

Every year Temple Isaiah members gather at camp Hess Kramer in Malibu for our Spring Retreat where we celebrate Shabbat with activities, learning, hiking and relaxing together, deepening our relationships with one another.

May we continue to be blessed with a partnership of wonderful leaders and dedicated members. *Dayeinu!*

Our story continues...

(At this point, members of the sacred story session would share a part of their own story for 3-5 minutes.)

We pour a second cup of wine:

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Shulchan Orech

We drizzle challah with honey and recite:

Blessed are You, Lord, our God, Ruler of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Berach

Blessed be each of you who have come to listen and to share and to participate in this sacred community. May our Temple continue to be a house of worship, a house of study and a house of gathering, and above all a home, where strive to deepen our relationship with God, with Israel and with each other, recognizing the spark of divinity in every living being; commit ourselves to lifelong study of Torah, from exploring our ancient tradition to discovering wisdom relevant to today; respond to the cries of injustice and in the tradition of *tikkun olam* seek to heal a broken world.

As a community we struggle, we sing, we stand up and we step forward in pursuit of our dreams. We recognize that we are constantly in process as we continually reinterpret our lives together. We do this work together: with the state of Israel and the Jewish people, with the Reform Jewish Movement, and with all our neighbors near and far.

Hallel - Nirtzah

Words of blessing to one another.

Next year in Jerusalem!