

Framing

One of the essential themes and elements of the Passover experience is storytelling, and seeing ourselves as a part of the Exodus from Egypt. In fact, our entire seder revolves around a well-choreographed experience to take us from restriction to liberation. While we may be drawn to the details of the seder, this holiday and its practices can offer us insight into the emotional and spiritual benefits of encountering and exploring our own stories and relationship to others. In this session, we will take a spiritual-emotional look at the idea of seeing ourselves as though we left Egypt, opening ourselves up to the possibilities gifted to us by our tradition.

Essential Questions

In what ways does storytelling help us understand ourselves or create meaning from our struggle? How might we see ourselves as connected to a larger story of our people while taking meaning for our own unique life experiences in 2023? How might we transform the idea of "storytelling" into a conversational, relational practice? How, if at all, might we transform a detail-oriented seder into a larger, spiritual experience for ourselves?

Objectives

In this session, participants will:

- Explore the essential concept of seeing ourselves as though we took part in the Exodus
- Delve into the idea of storytelling as a means for healing
- Integrate their understanding of the purposes of Passover with individual emotional needs for healing at this time of the year.

Score

0:00 - 0:05	Grounding Question
0:05-0:10	Opening the Space

The Stories We Tell Ourselves

A spiritual-psycho-social look at Passover

Arielle Krule, LMSW

0:15-0:25	Part I: Stories Source 1: The Moth - Our Values Source 2: Excerpt from "Story" Robert Mcknee, On Being a Storyteller Source 3: Passover Haggadah Source 4: Passover Haggadah of Maimonides (1138-1204)
0:25-0:45	Part II: Being Seen In Our Journey Source 5: "Manifesto of the Brave and Broken-Hearted" by Brene Brown, PhD Source 6: Rabbi Michael Hattin, Beit Midrash Program, Pardes Center for Jewish Educators
0:45-0:50	Bonus Material Stormy First Drafts
0:50-0:55	Part IV: The Personal Download
0:55-1:00	Closing the Space & Learner Takeaways

Texts and Activities

Grounding and Centering Practice

Go around the circle:

Invite everyone to share their name, pronouns, and how they are feeling 1) physically, 2) emotionally, and 3) spiritually (one word for each, for example: "I'm Arielle, I use she/her pronouns. Physically I feel energized, emotionally I feel sentimental, and spiritually I feel curious"). You, as the facilitator, can go first in order to model this to the group.

Then, in pairs or in a group:

What is one significant storyline or plot point for you from the last year? In what ways, if any, were the events of that story transformational?

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Opening the Space

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In this session, we will explore questions such as:

In what ways does storytelling help us understand ourselves or create meaning from our struggle? How might we see ourselves as connected to a larger story of our people while taking meaning for our own unique life experiences in 2023? How might we transform the idea of "storytelling" into a conversational, relational practice? How, if at all, might we transform a detail-oriented seder into a larger, spiritual experience for ourselves?

Part I: Stories

Introduce Source 1

Since its launch in 1997, The Moth has presented thousands of stories told live and without notes. Moth shows are renowned for the great range of human experience they showcase. Each show starts with a theme, and the storytellers explore it, often in unexpected ways. Since each story is true and every voice authentic, the shows dance between documentary and theater, creating a unique, intimate, and often enlightening experience for the audience.

We're going to explore The Moth's core values for storytelling as our beginning point for this exploration and discussion.

Source 1) The Moth - Our Values

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- We believe that processing experience through narrative can provide insight and agency.
- We believe that listening to stories can widen our perspective and help us realize what we have in common.
- We believe that a community is strengthened when its members share stories with one another.

Reflection Questions:

- What are some of the key components of these values that stand out to you at this moment in your life?
- The Moth argues insight and agency are built through narrative. How does that line resonate with you?
- In what ways, if any, are these values reflected in our Passover "choreography"?

Introduce Source 2

Robert McKee (born January 30, 1941) is an author, lecturer and story consultant who is known for his "Story Seminar", which he developed when he was a professor at the University of Southern California. McKee is the author of *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*, *Dialogue: the Art of Verbal Action for Stage, Page and Screen*, *Storynomics: Story-Driven Marketing in the Post-Advertising World* and *Character: The Art of Role and Cast Design for Page, Stage, and Screen*. McKee also has the blog and online writers' resource "Storylogue".

In this source, we will reflect on the idea of story telling, and the role of the one who tells stories.

Source 2) Excerpt from "Story" Robert Mcknee, *On Being a Storyteller*

*Thank you to R Sara Rich for pointing me to this years ago!

A story teller is a life poet, an artist who transforms day to day living, inner life and outer life, dream and actuality, into a poem whose rhyme scheme is events rather than words, a... metaphor that says: life is like this!

Therefore, a story must abstract from life to discover its essences, but not become an abstraction that loses all sense of life-as-lived.

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A story must be like life, but not so verbatim that it has no depth or meaning beyond what's obvious to everyone on the street.

Reflection Questions

- Are there people you know to be good at storytelling? What makes them that way?
- What are elements you agree with here? Disagree?
- What are the emotional implications?

Introduction to Source 3

The Haggadah that we use today is in essence a collaboration and scrapbook across generations - different pieces are from different time periods and places in history. This collected nature of our primary Passover text invites us into a greater project of adding and including ourselves into our inherited story. In this next source, we'll explore the emotional implications of a central line of the Haggadah.

Note: In the next two sources, both Hebrew words come from the same three root letters ר.א.ה — *resh, aleph, hey*. *Lir'ot* is the active verb form, which lends to the translation that a person *must see him or herself as though...*; *L'har-ot* is the causative verb form, which lends to the translation that a person *must make themselves be seen as though...*.

Source 3) Passover Haggadah

"In every generation a person **must see** (*lir'ot*) herself as though she personally left Mitzrayim (Egypt). For not just our ancestors did G-d redeem, but us as well.

Reflection Questions

- What are the implications here?
- Does this feel resonant for you? What are the challenges?
- Brene Brown teaches that, "Empathy is a way to connect to the emotion another person is experiencing; it doesn't require that we have experienced the same situation they are going through." Does that feel like a realistic practice for you at the seder?

Introduction to Source 4

Source 4 is one of Maimonides' (Rambam) additions to the last line that we read. He adds a new dimension to the element of processing our stories.

Source 4) Passover Haggadah of Maimonides (1138-1204)

"In every generation a person ***must make herself be seen*** (*l'har-ot*) as though she personally left Mitzrayim (Egypt). For not just our ancestors did G-d redeem, but us as well."

Reflection Questions

- What is the new spiritual offering given here?
- How does this differ from Source 2?

Part II: Being Seen in Our Journey

Transition

So far, we have utilized the idea of storytelling and key choreography from our Seder to explore our relationship to the story of Passover. In our next sources, we'll delve into the concept of how these holiday elements actually help us in our processing of our own stories - developing what The Moth described as "insight and agency."

In these next sources, you may decide to focus on the following questions as framing:

- In what ways does engaging with your own story of struggle relate to a greater narrative of the Jewish people?
- How might being present for stories actually open us up to deeper relationship with ourselves and those we love?
- Who are the people that help you stand in the truth of your experience?

Introduction to Source 5

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Brene Brown, PhD is research professor at the University of Houston, where she holds the Huffington Foundation Endowed Chair. She has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. She is the author of six #1 New York Times bestsellers, and the host of the original podcasts *Unlocking Us* and *Dare to Lead*.

In this source, she offers a "manifesto" for the experience of engaging with difficult parts of our own story - and the unique spiritual opportunities of cultivating resilience and presence as a result.

Source 5) "Manifesto of the Brave and Broken-Hearted" by Brene Brown, PhD

There is no greater threat to the critics
and cynics and fearmongers
than those of us who are willing to fall
because we have learned how to rise.

With skinned knees and bruised hearts;
we choose owning our stories of struggle,
over hiding, over hustling, over pretending.

When we deny our stories, they define us.

When we run from struggle, we are never free.

So we turn toward truth and look it in the eye.

We will not be characters in our stories.

Not villains, not victims, not even heroes.

We are the authors of our lives.

We write our own daring endings.

We craft love from heartbreak,

compassion from shame,

grace from disappointment,

courage from failure.

Showing up is our power.

Story is our way home. Truth is our song.

We are the brave and brokenhearted.

We are rising strong.

Reflection Questions

- What does Dr. Brown offer here in terms of storytelling?

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- Are there pieces you agree with? Disagree with?
- Take a look at the lines in bold-face. How might Passover be a spiritual-emotional tool for developing presence and resilience?

Transition

Dr. Brown illuminates a particular spiritual opportunity in seeing ourselves in our own struggle and as a part of a larger story. In our final source, we will revisit the idea of seeing ourselves in our full abilities, gifts, and struggles in the context of community.

Introduction to Source 6:

Michael Hattin teaches Tanakh and Halakha at the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem and serves as the Director of the Beit Midrash for the Pardes Center for Jewish Educators. He studied for semicha at Yeshivat Har Etzion and holds a professional degree in architecture from the University of Toronto.

Source 6) Rabbi Michael Hattin, Beit Midrash Program, Pardes Center for Jewish Educators

The Rambam relates that "it is a positive command of the Torah to recount on the eve of the fifteenth of Nisan the miracles and wonders that were wrought for our ancestors in Egypt". While this mitzvah is concisely mentioned in the Torah on four occasions¹, it was only later during the Mishnaic, Talmudic and medieval periods that the exact procedures of the Seder night including the story of the Exodus were crystallized into a liturgical text: the Haggadah.

It is instructive to note that the grammatical root of the noun Haggadah (literally "the telling") and the infinitive להגיד (literally "to tell") is actually ג.ג.ד. This root is more commonly employed in its prepositional form signifying "opposite" and sometimes "in opposition" and is always used in a relational sense.

For instance, when we sit at a table opposite a friend, we are positioned נגדה (*negdah*). We may therefore more accurately translate the term Haggadah not as "the telling" but rather as "the discussion that occurs between people who are in lively conversation with each other." While a סיפור is a story that is told to a listener who listens, a הגדה is a conversation that takes place between two or more active partners.

¹ Exodus 12:26 – 27, 13:5, 13:14 – 15, Deuteronomy 6:20 – 25

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The particular pedagogic strategy that the Haggadah employs to foster this conversation involves asking probing but open-ended questions that are suitable for all ages offering general responses, which are intended as starting points for further conversation, and encouraging us to experience the evening through multiple modalities. To refer to the evening's telling as the הגדה rather than, for instance, the סיפור, is to suggest that our retelling of the Exodus story is not intended to be a detached, historical account communicated frontally to an audience of passive listeners but rather a dynamic, vigorous exchange of ideas that engages all of the participants in active dialogue.

Reflection Questions

- Rabbi Hattin transforms the idea of the haggadah from storytelling to having a conversation. What, if anything, about the two feels different?
- How might having others be in the process of *haggadah* be meaningful, or even healing, for you?
- What groundwork might encountering our stories of struggle this Passover help you lay for the rest of the year?

Bonus Material: “Stormy First Draft”

Some of us may find that the idea of reflecting on our own stories can be challenging, if not mildly traumatizing. Many folks struggle with understanding their story in a particularly harsh light - rife with the missteps instead of a full picture. (This is a natural bias). However, our tradition offers us the tools of the seder, including a multigenerational experience when possible, to integrate others in our own understanding of ourselves. Part of the practice of involving others in our story means striving toward a right-sized, clear approach of ourselves.

In the exercise below, Brene Brown offers a way to explore what she names our “Stormy First Drafts”. This year, as you continue to evaluate and explore your relationship to your own story, keep this tool in mind.

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Key concepts:

- Introducing the idea of the Stormy First Draft.
 - When something happens that triggers strong emotions, we often immediately create a story to make sense of what happened. These stories are often one-sided worst-case scenarios, and they seldom contain the full truth. We call this story the Stormy First Draft (SFD).
- Explaining that a SFD is our brain's way of making sense of something when we don't have full information. We are a meaning-making species. In the absence of data, we make up stories because having complete information is a self-protective survival skill. But these stories often magnify our fears and anxieties. When we learn how to get curious and reality check the stories we make up, we can increase our resilience and reset faster after failures, setbacks, and disappointments.
- Reality checking using the phrase "The story I'm making up" is a powerful tool for personal curiosity and reflection. When we are hooked by emotion, the brain has a hard time focusing on anything else. Being curious and checking the accuracy of a story with others can prevent the story from festering or turning into a bigger problem.
 - We recently had a group of high school juniors tell us that this phrase brought their entire friend group closer, and they've taught their parents to use it. Now these students use the acronym SMU in texts for Story Making Up.