



# The secular nano-Hagaddah

**Rafael Izbicki**

The tale of our people's first quest for freedom from slavery in Egypt was written so long ago that we might never know how much of it is based on fact and how much on fiction. However, we tell this story because it is interesting and inspiring. It reminds us that in our darkest moments, we can still have hope and that freedom is not always a given.

According to tale, long ago during a time of famine, the ancient Israelites (also known as Hebrews) travelled to Egypt. They were all from a single family, headed by Jacob and his children. One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, was so wise that the ruler of Egypt, the Pharaoh, made him a leader over all the people of Egypt.

Generations passed, and a new Pharaoh rose to power who was cruel to the Hebrews and enslaved them. According to legend, he feared that the Hebrews would rise up against him.

**Maror** (מִרּוֹר; bitter herbs). We eat maror to remind us of the bitterness of our slavery and the gift of our freedom, which we too often take for granted.

**Karpas** (כַּרְפָּס; parsley or celery dipped in salt water). We eat karpas to remind us of the tears of the slaves.

**Charoset** (חֲרוֹסֶת; sweet, dark-coloured paste made of fruits and nuts eaten). We eat charoset to remind us of our bondage in Egypt when we mixed clay to make mortar and bricks for Pharaoh. It also reminds us that even in the face of oppression, the people still had hope (haroset is sweet).

After the Israelites had been in Egypt for over 400 years, a man arose among them named Moses. He demanded that Pharaoh let his people go, but Pharaoh refused. Many times Moses risked his life to insist on the freedom of his people.

Many terrible things started to happen in Egypt. The Pharaoh began to suspect that perhaps they were related to the suffering he was causing the Hebrews.

The ten plagues of Egypt were:

1. Water turned into blood (מַיִם): The Nile River and all other sources of water turned into blood, making it undrinkable.
2. Frogs (עֲלֹנֶה): Frogs infested Egypt, coming out of the Nile and invading homes, beds, and even ovens.
3. Lice (כַּנְגִים): Lice appeared on all people and animals in Egypt, causing itching and irritation.
4. Flies (עֲשָׂרָב): Swarms of flies invaded Egypt, harming agriculture and bothering people.
5. Pestilence on livestock (צְבָתָה): A disease affected all of Egypt's livestock, killing many animals.

6. Boils (נִקְבָּה): The Egyptians suffered from painful boils.
7. Hail (בָּרֶד): Large hailstones fell from the sky, damaging crops and properties.
8. Locusts (אַרְבָּה): Swarms of locusts devastated Egypt's crops.
9. Darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ): Darkness covered Egypt for three days, preventing people from seeing each other or performing their usual activities.
10. Death of the firstborn (מֵתֶת בְּכֹרֹות): All firstborn males in Egypt died, including Pharaoh's son.

Today, we also face plagues as a consequence of the actions of selfish leaders and individuals: hunger, war, injustice, poverty, indifference to suffering, and many others.

After these plagues, Moses finally succeeded in freeing his people with the help of his brother, but they had little time to escape.

**Matza** (מצה; unleavened flatbread). We eat matza to remind us that when our people fled Egypt, they had no time to bake their bread. They couldn't wait for the yeast to rise. When there is something important to be done, the rest is just a detail!

**Beitza** (בִּיצָה; boiled egg). The egg becomes harder and tougher when heat is applied. It reminds us that even under pressure, we can endure. It also reminds us that life takes turns; when we are down, we must remember that we will rise up, and vice versa.

# Figures



Joseph Interprets Pharaoh's Dream, James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1836-1902)



Israel in Egypt, Edward Poynter (1867)



Moses with the Tables of ten commandments of God, Guido Reni (1575-1642)



Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh, Benjamin West (1738-1820)



The Fifth Plague of Egypt, J. M. W. Turner (1808)



The Plague of Flies, James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1896-1902)



Moses and Aaron Speak to the People, James Jacques Joseph Tissot (1896-1902)