



Exodus, Freedom and Responsibility

Facilitator's Guide

Instructions for Facilitator

Introduction

The Exodus narrative offers us a template for embracing social responsibility. It introduces the notions that injustice need not be perpetuated and that human beings have the capacity to transform their circumstances. This session lays the groundwork to explore how we can use the Exodus narrative as a basis for our own contemporary obligation to pursue greater justice in the world. It introduces the concept that freedom is not an end in and of itself but that it must lead to greater responsibility to pursue justice.

Essential Question

- How can the Exodus narrative serve as a model for our own pursuit of justice?

Goals

1. Explore the role of the Exodus narrative in Jewish history and tradition as well as its role as a paradigm for other liberation movements.
2. Explore the concepts of freedom and responsibility in the Exodus narrative.
3. Identify and share personal experiences of pursuing justice.

Total Time: 60 minutes

Outline

1. Part I: The Importance of the Story

Texts Referenced: Texts 1-2

Activity Duration: 10 minutes

Explore the role of the Exodus narrative in Jewish history and tradition as well as its role as a paradigm for other liberation movements. The texts in this section relate to the significance of the Exodus narrative and the commandment to retell the story. Use the questions on the source sheet to stimulate discussion about the central message of the Exodus narrative.

2. Part II: First Steps of Freedom

Texts Referenced: Texts 3-4

Activity Duration: 10 minutes

Explore the initial steps to freedom taken by the Israelites and their implications for other liberation movements. The texts in this section relate to the difficult work of the Exodus and acknowledge that the achievement of freedom is complicated, full of struggle and requires hard work. Use the questions on the source sheet to guide discussion on this topic.

3. **Part III: Freedom Equals Responsibility**

Texts Referenced: Texts 5-6

Activity Duration: 25 minutes

Investigate the connection between freedom and responsibility. The texts in this section suggest that the Exodus was merely the first step in the Israelites' journey, raising the question of what the ultimate purpose of the Israelites' liberation was. Spend about 10 minutes discussing the questions on the source sheet. Then invite participants to personalize the previously discussed texts and to connect them to responsibility and justice in their own lives. Spend about 15 minutes discussing the following questions, which do not appear on the source sheet:

- a. If the Israelites became free in order to pursue a greater goal, and we are the heirs to that tradition, what is the ultimate goal of the freedom and power that we enjoy?
- b. What kind of society are we striving to build and what actions do we need to take to get there?
- c. In pairs, share a story of a time when you either chose to take an action to pursue justice, or missed an opportunity to do so. Is your story connected in any way to your identity as an inheritor of the Passover story of slavery, liberation and the freedom to pursue justice?

4. **Part IV: Global Justice Connection**

Text Referenced: Text 7

Activity Duration: 10 minutes

Concretize the themes of this session using the example of global health, which mirrors the Exodus narrative. The state of global health shows tremendous positive change that might have been unimaginable fifty years ago. However, the health gap between rich and poor remind us that we are far from reaching the Promised Land. Use the questions on the source sheet that follow Text 7 to connect the contemporary global health situation and the Exodus story.

5. **Closing Message**

Text Referenced: Text 8

Activity Duration: 5 minutes

The Exodus narrative serves as a master story for the Jewish community and as a paradigm for other liberation movements. In addition, we can look back to it as a source of nourishment and use its lessons to inform our own contemporary social change work. Text 8 can serve as an inspiring conclusion that affirms our belief that justice and liberation can be achieved.



Exodus, Freedom and Responsibility

Source Sheet

Part I. The Importance of the Story

1 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, pp. 7-8

But the story is more important than the events, and the story has grown more and more important as it has been repeated and reflected upon, cited in arguments, elaborated in folklore. Perhaps that was the intention of the authors: certainly, they urge the repetition often enough. The Exodus belongs to a genre of religious and legal texts designed for public reading and rereading and for analogical application.

2 Passover Haggadah

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and Adonai our God took us out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm. If the Holy One, blessed be God, had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, then we, our children and our children's children would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. And even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all of us knowledgeable in the Torah, we would still be obligated to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. And anyone who discusses the Exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy.

הגדה של פסח

עבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים ויוציאנו ה' אלהינו משם ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה. ואילו לא הוציא הקדוש ברוך הוא את אבותינו ממצרים הרי אנו ובנינו ובני בנינו משועבדים היינו לפרעה במצרים. ואפילו כולנו חכמים כולנו נבונים כולנו יודעים את התורה מצוה עלינו לספר ביציאת מצרים. וכל המרבה לספר ביציאת מצרים הרי זה משובח.

Discussion Questions

1. What is so compelling about the Exodus narrative that we are commanded to retell it and that other social movements have adopted it as a model for change?
2. How would you articulate the central message of the Exodus?
3. How do you personally experience the power and relevance of the Exodus story?

Part II. First Steps of Freedom

3 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 10

The Israelites are not, after all, magically transported to the promised land; they are not carried on the "eagle's wings" of Exodus 19; they must march to get there, and the march is full of difficulties, crises, struggles, all realistically presented, as if to invite human as well as divine resolution.

4 Mechilta Parshat Bo, Section 16

Another interpretation: Israel went out of Egypt by the strength of God, as it is said, “with a mighty hand, the Lord freed us from Egypt” (Exodus 13:16).

Another interpretation: with their own strength Israel went out of Egypt, as it is said, “and you shall eat it with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand” (Exodus 12:11).

מכילתא פרשת בא פרשה טז

ד"א בזריזות יצאו ישראל ממצרים שנאמר כי בחוזק יד הוציא ה' אתכם מארץ מצרים (שמות יג:טז).

ד"א בזריזות עצמן יצאו ישראל ממצרים שנאמר וככה תאכלו אותו מתניכם הגורים וגו' (שמות יב:יא).

Discussion Questions

1. What are the different opinions about who did/does the work of the Exodus? Which opinion resonates most powerfully for you?
2. Are the Israelites freed by the strength of God or by their own strength? What are the implications of each for the narrative itself and for later liberation movements that use the Exodus as a guiding story?

Part III. Freedom Equals Responsibility

5 Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution*, p. 12

... the Exodus is a journey forward—not only in time and space. It is a march toward a goal, a moral progress, a transformation.

6 Passover Haggadah

God has bestowed so many favors upon us.

Had God brought us out of Egypt and not executed judgments against the Egyptians, it would have been enough.

Had God executed judgments against the Egyptians and not their gods, it would have been enough.

Had God executed judgments against their gods and not slain their first born, it would have been enough.

Had God slain their first born and not given us their wealth, it would have been enough.

Had God given us their wealth and not split the sea for us, it would have been enough.

Had God split the sea for us and not led us through on dry land, it would have been enough.

הגדה של פסח

כמה מעלות טובות למקום עלינו.

אלו הוציאנו ממצרים ולא עשה בהם שפטים, דיינו.

אלו עשה בהם שפטים ולא עשה באלהיהם, דיינו.

אלו עשה באלהיהם ולא הרג את בכוריהם, דיינו.

אלו הרג את בכוריהם ולא נתן לנו את ממונם, דיינו.

אלו נתן לנו את ממונם ולא קרע לנו את הים, דיינו.

אלו קרע לנו את הים ולא העבירנו בתוכו בחרבה, דיינו.

Had God led us through on dry land and not drowned our oppressors, it would have been enough.

Had God drowned our oppressors and not provided for our needs in the wilderness for 40 years, it would have been enough.

Had God provided for our needs in the wilderness for 40 years and not fed us manna, it would have been enough.

Had God fed us manna and not given us Shabbat, it would have been enough.

Had God given us Shabbat and not led us to Mount Sinai, it would have been enough.

Had God led us to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have been enough.

Had God given us the Torah and not brought us into the Land of Israel, it would have been enough.

Had God brought us into the land of Israel and not built us the Temple, it would have been enough.

אלו העבירנו בתוכו בחרבה ולא שקע צרינו בתוכו, דיינו.

אלו שקע צרינו בתוכו ולא ספק צרכנו במדבר ארבעים שנה, דיינו.

אלו ספק צרכנו במדבר ארבעים שנה ולא האכילנו את המן, דיינו.

אלו האכילנו את המן ולא נתן לנו את השבת, דיינו.

אלו נתן לנו את השבת ולא קרבנו לפני הר סיני, דיינו.

אלו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא נתן לנו את התורה, דיינו.

אלו נתן לנו את התורה ולא הכניסנו לארץ ישראל, דיינו.

אלו הכניסנו לארץ ישראל ולא בנה לנו את בית הבחירה, דיינו.

Discussion Questions

1. Walzer argues that the Exodus is a march toward a goal. What is the goal of the Exodus?
2. *Dayenu* (Text 6), suggests different potential endpoints to the Exodus narrative, and while it claims that any of those endpoints would have been sufficient, the implication is that all of them were necessary. Do you agree with this analysis that all were necessary? Why or why not?
3. According to *Dayenu*, the Exodus narrative ends with the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, implying that the Temple represents the ultimate goal of the Exodus. Where do you believe the Exodus story ends and what is the implication of reading the story that way?

Part IV. Global Justice Connection

7 **“Millions Saved: Proven Successes in Global Health,” Policy Brief, Center for Global Development, 2007**

Throughout Latin America, mothers no longer worry about their children contracting polio; vast regions of Africa are now habitable because river blindness is under control; China has made major inroads against tuberculosis; in Sri Lanka, women can give birth without fear of dying—in sharp contrast to women in most poor countries of the world. In the past 50 years, the developing world has benefited from tremendous improvements in health. Life expectancy has risen from 40 to 65 years. The chances that a child will survive to the age of five have doubled. In addition to directly improving people’s lives, this progress contributes to economic growth.

... [However,] Long-standing problems remain unsolved, such as the health gap between rich and poor. Newer ones—from the growing toll of cardiovascular disease to the AIDS pandemic—threaten future generations.

Discussion Questions

1. How does this picture of global health relate to the Exodus narrative?
2. What responsibility do we, personally and as a Jewish community, have to address global health and other global justice issues like poverty and education?

Part IV. Conclusion

8 **Michael Lerner, *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation*, p.129**

Every ruling elite of the ancient and medieval world, and many in the modern world, justified their rule by ideologies whose central message was that the world cannot be changed... Along came the Jews with a very different message: “The world can be fundamentally changed. Every system of oppression, no matter how powerful it appears to be, can be overthrown... We know it, because we did it ourselves.”

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