

Last week we were introduced to an ancient Jewish tradition that's called the *Aggadah*, which is still being practiced to this day. At its core it's basically telling another story to understand the main story. It's an wonderful way of getting in touch with the deeper meaning and emotional truth of a story, without having to explain too much and sounding you're like giving a lecture.

The story were heard last week was about Joseph who is reunited with his brothers, now that he is the 2nd most powerful man in all of Egypt. The question was, will he use his power to take revenge on his brothers for their betrayal - or would he be able to be open to God's Spirit and not only forgive them, but even find reconciliation?

Today we will hear another Aggadah, about Moses being found by the pharaoh's daughter, a crucial moment in the history of the people of Israel. This story is about power, abuse of that power, and grassroots resistance to that abuse.

I invite you to open your heart to the story as it unfolds, and ask yourself, "Where God is present and speaking to us in the story - and still today?"

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### **"The Pharaoh's Daughter"**

(An Aggadah based on Exodus 1:8-2:10)



*"The Pharaoh's Daughter's Catch" by Nekoda Singer*

Things were different in Egypt's royal palace. Different faces, different servants, different dignitaries. Different food is being served and different music is sounding at the banquets now. It was because of the new Pharaoh.

He had been groomed for his position ever since he was a child. He takes his new task seriously and is a hard worker: discussing new legislation, receiving foreign diplomats paying their respects, visiting military sites, designing new public buildings and pyramids. The hours are

long, there's always one more thing that needed his attention, one more detail to take care of.

His daughter loved him, but she hates his new position. She hates his entourage, the “stuffed shirts” as she calls them; they are running his life now, making him sign decrees and proclamations, and manoeuvring behind his back to win favours with him.

She and her mother hardly ever see him these days. Except the odd times when they have “family time” and eat a meal together. But then he would be doing all the talking, while she and her mother are not allowed to talk back.

Lonely, the princess wanders through the palace’s endless hallways. Somehow she winds up near the throne room, and suddenly hears muffled voices. Muffled – and agitated... Curious, she moves closer to the big doors and overhears them discussing some problem.

“Kick the whole bunch out is what we should do,” one voice says.

“No,” says another. “Who would make our bricks? Who would tend our fields? We need the Hebrews. We just need... less of them, not so many...”

“Exactly”, someone else chimes in, “What we need is some form of *population control*. Destroying each new newborn baby would take care of the problem.”

“That won’t be necessary”, a familiar voice says; it was her father's! “We don’t have to kill *all* babies. Just the male newborns will do. Make it so”.

Horrified, the princess run away from the doors to her room. She couldn't believe what she just heard.

A month or two later the Pharaoh and his family are having their “family time” meal again. But this time he doesn't say much, eating his meal in silence. Suddenly he bursts out, “Do you know how strong those Hebrew women are?”, slamming his cup down. “Why, I ordered all the midwives to destroy the male babies as soon as they are born, but they tell me those Hebrew women just take an hour off from their work, pop out the babies, and go back to work. They just pop them out, and the midwives aren't even needed. Riiight...” His voice is dripping with sarcasm; he knows what's going on but cannot do much about it.

The princess says nothing but wonders why her father would want those babies killed. Are they really such a threat to him?

A few weeks later the princess goes bathing in the river Nile, enjoying the cool, fresh water, when one of her servants points to a basket in the reeds nearby. The princess tells her to get it.

"It's a baby!" she shouts as she pushes the basket to her mistress. "It's a beautiful Hebrew baby - why, it's a baby *boy*! I heard the soldiers now throw the Hebrew baby boys into the river to drown them by order from the Pharaoh, this must be one of them."

The princess picks the baby up and holds him close to her. So this is a child my powerful father fears, she thinks. The baby cries a little. "My father will not hurt you," the princess whispers to him. Then it smiles and tries to suck her finger.

Suddenly a young girl's voice startles the group: "Would you like to keep the baby?" The sudden voice surprises the servants, one of them even falls in the water. But the princess doesn't even look up. She only has eyes for this perfect little baby in her arms. "Yes," she says almost without thinking, "yes, this child shall live".

"I know a woman who can nurse him. Shall I go get her for you?"

"Of course, get her immediately," the princess says, "Quick, the baby is hungry".

As the girl runs off to find her and the baby's mother, the princess has an inspirational idea. She will start a rumour that this baby was hers, from a Hebrew slave. That would make this baby a prince, and a prince could not be harmed, even if he's a Hebrew.

Her father's law to have these babies killed is wrong, she thinks. "Women cannot fight the law, but we can resist. And I will resist this unjust law."

To talk with her own father she has to book an audience with him first, through his secretary. It takes a few weeks before there's a spot open in the Pharaoh's busy schedule, but finally she can talk to him.

"You have five minutes. No more," says the secretary, who can't help smile at the child in the princess's arms. "Okay, make it 6 minutes."

Scared, she steps into the imposing throne room.

"Yes?" says her father in his official Pharaoh voice, ignoring the baby he saw in his daughter's arms.

"This child," she says quietly. "You may have heard that a slave is the father."

He father just stares at her with a stony face, saying nothing.

But she meets his hard stare and tells him firmly "The child is Hebrew".

Surprised, she notices real fear run across her father's face. Yes, the mighty Pharaoh is afraid. He can almost hear the scornful laughter ringing in the hallways if it were known that his own daughter has a baby by a Hebrew slave. His right eye starts to twitch as it always does when the stress gets to him. He takes a deep breath as though he's about to scream – but then just deflates and slouches back into his throne.

The princess now knows she had won; she is no longer afraid of him. "I will tell no one, father. But this is one Hebrew child that I will guard with my life. You will not harm a single hair on his head."

That seems to jolt him from his daze. "Get out of here! Get out, you and this

child!" He means it to sound hard and firm, but halfway through his voice cracks with fear.

Overjoyed, the princess hurries through the palace. She has won the confrontation with her father, the child was safe!

Glad, she enters her room and sits down with her baby. As she is rocking it, she can't help but think of the fear her father had shown, and wonders how much of a risk this child really poses to the Pharaoh... Then the bay gurgles, claiming her attention. "Only time will tell", she thinks smiling, "Only time will tell..."

Amen.