

PESACH, THE MUSICAL
A Participatory Passover Performance

SCENE 1: The Construction Site

Narrator: A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are too numerous for us.” So they made the Jewish people slaves and set them to work building cities for Pharaoh. Ruthlessly the Egyptians made life bitter for the Israelites with harsh labor at mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field.

Zebulun: Hey, Asher, look at the shape of this brick.

Asher: That’s a funny one. It’s kind of curvy. Where do you think it goes?

Zebulun: That’s what I’m trying to figure out. Maybe the Sphinx’s nose?

Asher: Could be. Could also be part of a lip, or an ear. Or maybe it’s part of that funny triangular hat the Sphinx is supposed to wear.

Zebulun: That’s not a hat. I think it’s supposed to be hair.

Asher: It’s not hair. I don’t care if it’s a lion or a man: nobody has hair like that! I say it’s a hat.

Zebulun. Whatever. I still need to figure out where to lay this brick.

Asher: Try checking the plans.

Zebulun: The plans!?! The plans stink! Remember when we built the left paw for the first time, three cubits to the right of where it was supposed to be?

Asher: THAT was a change order!

Overseer: HEY! ISRAELITES! Quit gabbing and get back to work!

Zebulun: (shouting back): Listen, you can have it done quick or you can have it done right – you don’t get both!! (To Asher) – Here he is, giving us grief while we’re legitimately trying to solve a construction-related issue. Better he should yell at Simeon – look at him, clowning around over there!

Asher: Oh, man – is Simeon walking like an Egyptian *again*?

Zebulun: Somebody should tell him that shtick just isn’t funny.

(*Levi enters.*)

Asher: Hey, Levi, what’s with the brace?

Levi: Carpal tunnel. Apparently the chisel I've been using is an ergonomic nightmare.

Asher: You know, I should get them to check out my shoulder. Ever since my stint on the winch crew last week it's been aching like nobody's business.

Zebulun: And hauling bricks has been hell on my back.

Asher, Zebulun, and Levi (together): Oy.

The Kvetching Hora

Chorus: People of the Israel nation
Living here in deprivation
Facing illness and starvation

Bass solo: And a lack of recreation

Chorus: Jews live to complain
When there's sun, we wish for rain
All we have is grief and pain
Oy, what a life!

Levi: Bending, lifting, pushing, stacking
Backs are aching, coughs are hacking
Always with the whips they're cracking
And the benefits are lacking

Asher: All day long we're schlepping, hauling
Making bricks and dry-walling
On our hands and knees we're crawling
The conditions are appalling

Zebulun: Schmutz and sand are everywhere
In our fingernails and hair
Cannot get clean underwear
Oy, what a mess!

Chorus: People of the Israel nation
Living here in deprivation
Facing illness and starvation

Bass solo: Mediocre education

Chorus: Jews live to complain
When there's sun, we wish for rain
All we have is grief and pain
Oy, what a life!

Asher: All we eat are spelt and kamut
Ancient grains, and so nutritious
Sadly, though, they're not delicious
No gefilte fish or knishes

Zebulun: Spelt cooks up all thick and gluey
Kamut's kind of hard and chewy
All the children think it's icky
And they're really not that picky

Levi : Would it kill the Big Egyptian
To diversity the kitchen?
It might even stop our bitchin' ...

All: Maybe not.

Chorus: People of the Israel nation
Living here in deprivation
Facing illness and starvation

Bass solo: Uninspired conversation

Chorus: Jews live to complain
When there's sun, we wish for rain
All we have is grief and pain
Oy, what a life!

Yai dai dai, etc...

SCENE II: Moses' Birthplace

Narrator: The more the Israelites were oppressed, the more they increased and multiplied, so that the Egyptians came to dread them. And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives and said, "When you deliver babies, if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live."

Miriam: Hey, Mom! Look who I've brought!

Yocheved: Miriam, honey, I've just given birth. I'm really not in the mood for company.

Miriam: But Mom, Shifrah and Puah are the midwives who've been saving all the Jewish baby boys. They can help us to save Moses.

Yocheved: Oh, thank God you're here! I've been worried sick over what to do with my little boy.

Shifrah: Yeah, yeah. We've been hearing a lot of THAT lately.

Puah: Lately?! This has been going on for years.

Miriam: We've heard such wonderful things about your bravery and compassion, about how you've stood up to Pharaoh's soldiers and found ways to save all these Israelite boys.

Puah: Well, sure, it's true. But I've got to tell you: it's really starting to get old.

Shifrah: You'd think after all this time that these boys would start to take some initiative, start taking ownership of their own problems.

Puah: But no! All we hear from them is "waaaah, waaah, waaaaah, this," and "waaaaah, waaaaah, waaaah, that." "Feed me." "Change me." "Hide me from Pharaoh."

Shifrah: Waiting for some woman to come and take care of them, solve all their problems for them.

Puah: I'm starting to wonder if I'm a helping professional, or just an enabler.

Yocheved: But they're just babies!

Shifrah: Men are ALL just babies. Haven't you figured that out by now?

Puah: Burnout aside, this isn't going to be easy. We've been doing this for years, and we're running out of hiding places.

Shifrah: Really, there are only so many places you can safely hide a baby. They're rather noisy, you know.

Puah: And messy.

Shifrah: We're going to have to marshal all of our collective creativity to figure this one out.

Yocheved's Lament

CHORUS: Having a baby and keeping it, too
(all women) Is pretty hard for an Egyptian Jew
How can I keep you from Pharaoh, my darling
And what is a poor Jewish mother to do?
What is a poor Jewish mother to do?

Miriam: We could try hiding him under our skirts
We could try tucking him into our shirts

Puah: We could try dressing him up like a sheep
Taking him out just to graze and to sleep
Taking him out just to graze and to sleep

CHORUS

Shifrah: We could try painting his little face green
Hide him in treetops where he won't be seen

Puah: We could try putting him in a pumpkin shell
There we could keep him very well
There we could keep him very well

CHORUS

Yocheved: Here is a basket I found in my tent
Here is a tarpaulin LL Bean sent
We could just set him afloat on the Nile
Hoping he'll charm some rich girl with his smile
Hoping he'll charm some rich girl with his smile

CHORUS

SCENE III: Moses in Midian

Narrator: Pharaoh's daughter took the child and made him her son. Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinfolk and witnessed their toil. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. He killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh to the land of Midian.

Midian Pastorale

Moses: Humming a tune on a summer afternoon
Sun is blazing
Watching my flocks as they browse among the rocks
Sheep are grazing
Thinking of Egypt, the curve of the Nile
Life in the palace, we lived it in style
But all the while
I wanted to help those Jews

I met a girl, a real Midian pearl
Named Zipporah
She was a plum, the hottest little number
In the Torah
I took Zipporah and made her my wife
We settled down to this pastoral life
But it cuts like a knife
The memory of those Jews

Climbing Mt. Horeb I'm starting to think
Grief for my people could drive me to drink
Life in this idyll is filled with delight
But somehow it doesn't seem right

What is the role, the ultimate goal
Of the shepherd?
Saving his flock from each mountain lion, panther
Or leopard
If these were people instead of just sheep
I'd save them from Pharaoh
Who's really a creep
But how can I sleep
Until I can save those Jews?

SCENE IV: The Burning Bush

Narrator: An angel of God appeared to Moses in a blazing fire of a bush. The bush was all aflame, yet it did not burn up. And God called to Moses from the bush.

God: Moses, do you feel fully challenged in your life as a shepherd here at Midian?

Moses: W-w-well, maybe it's not the most demanding life. But it's pleasant.

God: Don't you think there's more to life than sheep?

Moses: I l-l-like sheep. I have dim memories of my mother dressing me up like one when I was a baby.

God: OK, you like sheep. But what are your passions, Moses? What gets you out of the tent in the morning?

Moses: W-w-well, I do c-c-care an awful lot about my people, the Jews, and how they're stuck in bondage and misery in Egypt.

God: Egypt! Yes! Your last position was in Egypt, wasn't it? You were.....let's see.....a palace sponge, is that right?

Moses: Y-y-yes. I guess you could s-s-say that.

God: Tell me about why you left that position.

Moses: Th-th-there was this.....incident.....with an overseer. I s-s-saw him brutally beating a Jewish s-s-slave, and I just couldn't control my anger.

God: I remember. I admired your passion, but.....that was a little bit of OVERKILL, wouldn't you say? (*booming laughter from God*)

Moses is silent.

God: You're not laughing, Moses. That was a Holy Pun. Laughter is not optional.

Moses: Oh. OK. (*Laughs weakly*)

God: Think of it as: *The Divine Comedy*. (*Booming laughter from God. Moses, after a pause, gives a forced chuckle*) OK, Moses. let's do an inventory of your skills. We've already figured out that you have a passion for justice. What else?

Moses: I'm a good sh-sh-shepherd.

God: Yes, we've established that.

Moses: I-I-I was pretty good at ch-ch-chariot racing in the palace.

God: OK, Moses, enough beating around the bush. (*Booming laugh.*) Holy pun, Moses.

Moses laughs weakly.

God: (*continues*) Look, Moses, I think you've got serious leadership potential, and I mean to help you develop it. I want you to go back to Egypt and free the Jews.

Moses: B-b-but how can I do that?

God: Just go talk to Pharaoh. Tell him I said that he should let your people go.

Moses: I-I-I'm not much of a p-p-public speaker.

God: Moses, haven't you heard of "reasonable accommodation?" I will provide you with an aide. Your brother Aaron will be at your side.

Moses: O-O-OK. I-I-I suppose I don't really have any choice.

God: I think we're done here, Moses. Go forth and free your people.

Moses starts to leave

God: But one more thing: before you leave, make sure you clear away all the little sticks and brush and other flammable items. Know why?

Moses: N-n-no....

God: C'mon, guess!

Moses: I don't know!

God: Because only JEW can prevent forest fires! (*Booming laugh*) I'm on fire here, don't you think? (*Booming laugh*) Holy, Moses!

Moses laughs weakly.

God: Hey, Moses, what's the one thing you don't want to say to the Almighty when I'm on a comic tear?

Moses: I don't know.

God: YOU SLAY ME! (*Booming laugh*)

SCENE V: The Palace

Narrator: God said to Moses, "I am the Lord; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I will tell you." Moses appealed to God, saying, "See, I am of impeded speech; how then should Pharaoh heed me!" The Almighty replied to Moses, "You shall repeat all that I tell you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land."

Pharaoh: Look at you, little Moses, all grown up! Last I saw you, you were just a radical adolescent runt, running around all hot under the collar and slaying my taskmasters.

Moses: I- I- I'm sorry about that taskmaster thing. I g – g – guess that was a bit of overkill.

Aaron: (*Aside*) Moses, just be quiet and let me do the talking. (*Stiffly and formally*) Your majesty, we have come to prove to you the power of our God. Behold this staff that the Almighty has given unto Moses.....

Pharaoh: You're not going to do the one where you throw the stick on the ground and it turns into a snake, are you? My court magicians have done that one a thousand times.

Aaron: How about if I stick my hand in my robe and when I pull it out it's covered with snowy scales?

Pharaoh: Seen it. Hey, can you do the one where you saw the lady in half, and then put her back together?

Aaron: No, I can't do that one. But I can turn water into blood!

Pharaoh: Seen it, seen it, seen it. Listen, Moses, I've had enough of your sidekick over here. If you've got something to say to me, just spit it out.

Moses: O-O-OK. Here goes.

Moses (and Aaron's) Plea

Moses: I grew, I grew, I grew up as a Palace kid
Hadn't a clue, a clue of what my mother did
I never even knew that I was born a Yid
Pharaoh's daughter's pride and joy
A Jewish boy
But raised a Goy

I fled, I fled, I fled, I fled to Midian
Roughly around the thirty-ninth meridian
My soul was black, as black as obsidian
Saw my people stuck in slavery
Quite unsavory
Needed bravery

Aaron: What my brother's trying to say
In his inarticulate way
Pharaoh, Pharaoh, starting today
You've got to let our people go
Got to let our people go

Moses: I saw, I saw, I saw, I saw the burning bush
God gave me, gave me, gave me, gave me quite a push
It was a kick, a kick, a kick right in the tush
Calls to service, gotta heed 'em
Jews to freedom

Gotta lead 'em

And now I'm here, I'm here, I'm here to make my case
Free all the Jews and end up in a state of grace
Here is my contribution to the human race
Turn my stick
Into a snake
What will it take
Your will to shake?

Aaron: What my brother's trying to say
In his inarticulate way
Pharaoh, Pharaoh, starting today
You've got to let our people go
Got to let our people go

Both: What I'm/my brother's trying to say
In my/his inarticulate way
Pharaoh, Pharaoh, starting today
You've got to let our people go
Got to let our people go

SCENE VI: The Palace

Narrator: God stiffened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not consent to let the Israelite people go. So God brought plagues upon the Egyptians: blood, frogs, lice, locusts, mad cow disease, boils, hail, and darkness. And God said to Moses: "I will bring but one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that he shall let you go from here. Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians, and every first-born in the land of Egypt shall die."

The Pharaonic Blues

Pharaoh: Oh I'm the king of Egypt
I've got the Pharaonic blues (2X)
Got the Pharaonic blues
I've got nothing left to lose
But my first-born son and 600,000 Jews

These frogs have become a nuisance
Blood in the water has filled us with fear (2X)
I'm getting sick of frog's legs
And I'm running out of beer

The whole country's home from preschool
While the parents are picking lice (2X)
They taste just like baby lobsters
And they're only half the price¹

¹ Appetizing image courtesy of Stephen Ansolabehere

We've got sick and suffering cattle
Just as far as the eye can see (2X)
Japan won't buy our exports
There goes our GNP

We've got beasts and boils and darkness
The sky is filled with hail
We are overrun with locusts
And the crops are gonna fail
My whole country is a prison
And I cannot make the bail
I'm the saddest guy in the Bible
Since Jonah hit that whale

Oh I'm the king of Egypt
I've got the Pharaonic blues (2X)
Got the Pharaonic blues
I've got nothing left to lose
But my first-born son and 600,000 Jews

SCENE VII: The Desert

Narrator: And Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, "Up, depart from among my people, you and the Israelites with you!" When Pharaoh let the people go, God led them roundabout, by way of the Sea of Reeds. They set out from Succoth and encamped at Etham, at the edge of the Wilderness.

Moses: C-c-come on, people! K-k-k-keep up the pace!

Aaron: Gotta get to Etham by nightfall – we need a little motivation!

Call and Response² (to the tune of a Marine marching song – each line is sung first by Aaron, and repeated by the chorus)

I don't know but I've been told
Pharaoh's not at good as gold
Marchin' out of Egypt land
Marchin' in the desert sand
Pharaoh's army's after us
Go before we turn to dust!
If you don't like this old plan
Go back and work in Pharaoh's land

SCENE VIII: The Palace, shortly after the Jews' departure

Amenhotep: As Pharaoh's chief minister, I feel it is my responsibility to try to understand what has just happened. Obviously, this situation with the Israelites has not resulted in a

² As written by Julia Ansolabehere

favorable set of outcomes for us. I think it's time to process these events as a group, to identify "lessons learned," as it were.

Pharaoh: Yeah, like that's really going to make any difference at this point!

Amenhotep: Now, Pharaoh, I understand that you're disappointed. But you have to remember that it's OK to make mistakes, as long as you "fail forward" and don't make the same mistakes twice. So: what do all of you think went on here?

Nebtawi: I have to say: I think we really mis-handled the closing negotiations. We dug in our heels when we should have compromised. We completely missed the opportunity to create a win-win solution.

Shalam: What would you have suggested? Paying wages? Saturdays off? Giving in to those kinds of demands would not have been financially sustainable.

Nebtawi: Well, maybe not if we went the whole nine yards. But we could have met them part-way. Not real wages, for example, but performance incentive bonuses during the Feast of Ra. An annual Slave Appreciation Picnic. I think some modest investments in our workforce could have gone a long way toward building a spirit of good will here. We've always said that our people are our greatest asset. We just haven't walked the talk.

Rami: I think we should have picked the low-hanging fruit.

Nubi: I think we have to go back even further and question the wisdom of getting into the pyramid-building industry in the first place.

Amenhotep: Now, that's interesting! Tell us more.

Nubi: Look: the initial attraction of this industry was the huge barriers to entry. We were the only ones who could really get into the pyramid space in a big way: we had the land, the capital, the mortar. We were totally positioned for market dominance.

Amenhotep: So what do you think went wrong?

Nubi: We didn't think about the barriers to exit. They're enormous. Here we are with three half-built pyramids. Our capital is completely tied up in bricks and mortar that we don't have the labor to use. We've never had an exit strategy.

Rami: I think we should have created a learning organization.

Shalam: Look: the problem here is that we allowed too much power to be concentrated in the hands of our suppliers. The Israelites had a total monopoly on labor. When they walked, we lost everything.

Nebtawi: So what would you have done?

Shalam: I always said we should diversify our workforce. We could have enslaved some Midianites, some Amorites, maybe some Hittites. I tried for years to get us to enslave the Canaanites, but nobody listened.

Nubi: I would never enslave a Canaanite. They have no work ethic.

Nebtawi: Shhhh! Nubi, you can't say those things – just think of the trouble we could get in. As if we weren't in enough trouble already!

Rami: I think we need a strong leader to get our organization aligned around a forward-looking strategy.

Nubi: Enough with the jargon, Rami!

Pharaoh: If you ask me, Rami's the only one of you who's making any sense at all. Speak, Rami!

Rami: We need the Jews to finish building the pyramids. Why did we let them go in the first place? Just go get them back!

Shalam: He does have a point. We really shouldn't be trying to switch our strategy mid-stream. We should be deploying all of our assets right now to try to stay the course.

Pharaoh: I guess I could send my armies after them.....

Nubi: How fast could they be going? There are over 600,000 of them, plus their animals. And goats don't walk very fast.

Shalam: If you send your armies out now, they could corner the Israelites at the Red Sea, round them up, and bring them back. We'd have Jews again within a week.

Rami: Decisive action! Visionary leadership!

Pharaoh: I'll do it! Summon the generals! Let's go get those Jews!

SCENE IX: At the Red Sea

Zebulun: These directions must be screwy. It says here to keep going straight, but if we go straight, we'll be walking right into this large body of water.

Asher: Let me see that.....(*takes scroll*). You know, I think we made a wrong turn somewhere.

Zebulun: No, it's right here on the papyrus: those two vultures, and then the wavy line, and then the foot? That means, "turn right at the wilderness by the Sea of Reeds, and keep going straight toward Migdol."

Levi: I don't think so. I think it means, "paint my sarcophagus with Cerulean blue."

Asher: Either way, we're in a fine mess now. We can't walk straight into the sea!

Levi: And Pharaoh's army is right on our heels.

Zebulun: Let's ask the Man. Mooooooses!!! What do we do now?

Moses: (*Looking up*) G-g-god? Any suggestions?

God: Just walk across, Moses. Take your Jews and walk them straight across.

Moses: Across the Red Sea? You've gotta be kidding.

God: Listen, what choice do you have here? Either trust Me and cross the sea, or stay on shore and get slaughtered by the Egyptians. And you know what they say.....

Moses: What?

God: BETTER RED THAN DEAD!!! (*Booming laugh. Moses and the Jews are silent.*)
Holy, Moses! (*all laugh feebly*)

Moses: O-O-O.K., folks! P-p-pluck up your courage and wade on in!

Walk Across the Red Sea: THE GRAND FINALE!!

Moses: Walk across, walk across
Walk across the Red Sea
Walk across, walk across
Walk across the Red Sea

CHORUS – repeats the above

Moses: If the matzah gets wet on the way across

Chorus: (Walk across the Red Sea)

Moses: We'll make a little brei so it's not a total loss

Chorus: (Walk across the Red Sea)

The Children of Israel treat our culture with pride
We'll toast with Manischewitz when we reach the other side

CHORUS

The Jewish people know we gotta take our lumps
Our camels and our dromedaries gotta take their humps

CHORUS

Some day we will acknowledge these events with a feast
We'll eat a lot of eggs 'cause we can't have yeast

CHORUS

We gotta start this journey with a spring in our step
40 years in the desert is a mighty long schlep

CHORUS

Walking on water isn't hard for a Jew
In a couple thousand years we'll have Jesus do it too

FINAL CHORUS