



The excitement of Pesach is upon us! Many families are preparing for their seder, planning menus, arranging place settings, and studying texts that will help unlock new understandings of: *הרי זה משובח* כל המרבה בסיפור יציאת מצרים, הרי זה משובח the traditional tale. Guided by the Haggadah, we are told: anyone who expands the telling of the exodus from Egypt is praiseworthy

Many scholars have pointed out that the magid section actually contains four separate stories of yetziat mitzrayim – the Exodus from Egypt. During the Seder, we put these stories together so that we all participate in one unified narrative.

As such, here are four stories of infertility, thematically linked to four of the items on the seder plate: maror, charoset, karpas, and zeroa.

Maror – the bitter story

As with any difficulty in life, this journey carried with it bitter moments that overwhelmed the other aspects of life, often creating a sense of despair.

It began when the doctor explained that our situation was “not optimal.” After discovering that IVF was our only real hope for conceiving, we were extremely optimistic going into our first transfer. Then it failed. Then the second transfer failed. And the third. We felt a deep sense of loss, even though we hadn’t technically lost anything.

Were this the full story, it would have been bitter enough. But throughout the entire ordeal, we also overcame painful social interactions that presented themselves:

I endured the “playful” comments from community members when they observed me holding a friend’s child and would remark “that looks good on you.” Exercising restraint, I’d politely smile back, and think to myself, “It’s a baby, not a sweater!”

In fact, the deepest hurt existed at others’ celebrations. I can still remember the sting of people wishing me “soon by you” at every bris and baby naming. In my best attempt at empathy, I would reply “today is about their family”, so that I wouldn’t have to think of (the incompleteness of) mine.

Charoset – the bricks and mortar

The charoset reminds us of the mortar used by the Israelites in building Pharaoh’s cities. For our story, the charoset represents the tasks that simply had to get done.

I was challenged by how difficult this chapter was for my wife – her desire to be a mother was at the core of her identity. As such, I became the “logistics manager” in order to enable her to address her emotions in a more focused way, unencumbered by the extracurricular demands.



I appreciated the responsibility of scheduling doctors' appointments. I found meaning in mixing the medicines for her nightly injections – it was my contribution to the process. Most notably, I felt like a partner in sharing my wife's burden. By taking care of the details, I allowed her to free up the necessary headspace to deal with her emotions.

Karpas – the story of hope

On Pesach, many people have the custom of using a green vegetable, symbolizing spring, as their Karpas.

Fittingly, it seemed as though every time we found another glimmer of hope, (e.g. another embryo transfer) it felt that our parsley would be doused in salt water. The hope had been engulfed in sorrow. It was tricky to maintain my optimism, but I recognized how essential it was. I quickly learned that humor (albeit wry at times) would be my default coping mechanism.

At key moments, we clung to hope. Other times, I found it more helpful to seek respite. Sometimes the best feeling came from playing in my weekly frisbee game. For those 2 hours, I was able to escape my doubts and fears. For a brief time, I could release myself from the pressures of the home and remember the larger scenery of life – joking with friends, enjoying the outdoors, and appreciating all that I was physically capable of.

By providing a break, these moments of respite allowed me to return to my situation with a renewed sense of hope.

Zeroa – the story of strength

In the Bible, Israel is led out of Egypt with an outstretched arm. Consequently, the shank bone is associated with strength, or in this case, support.

We found ourselves continually reframing our situation to express gratitude for what we had. We were fortunate to have family and friends who supported us with outstretched arms. Though I occasionally reached out to friends to unload my burden, the most important idea for me during this time was to stay close to my wife.

We prioritized time for each other and found strength in three phrases, which became our mantra: “1) I love you. 2) We'll get through this together. 3) This will eventually be resolved.” Now, I didn't know what “resolved” would look like, or how long things would take before they were resolved, but as long as #1 and #2 stayed strong, it gave us hope for #3.

Each person's Passover seder connection revolves around a different aspect of the day – songs, rituals, community, and in many cases, the food. Regardless of the personal association, our seder reflects a mixture of experiences. This is how we remember the slavery while simultaneously celebrating freedom.



It's important to recognize when to immerse ourselves in one perspective of the story. By the same token, if we fail to engage in the other narratives, our story is not authentic. Similarly, my personal “yetziat mitzrayim” taught me to embrace all of the stories and flow between them.

We spend so much time and effort trying to create the world as it should be; this experience has taught me the importance of living in the world as it is.

Although my story may not be unique, its events and details make it mine. During this holiday season, may we all find the courage and conviction to tell our stories, and may we also demonstrate the kindness and sensitivity to empower others to share their stories with us. Chag Sameach.