

The Whole Hand:

Exodus 13-15 and the Crossing of the Sea

Rachel Sharansky Danziger * March 15th 2022 * Exodus: The Ins and Outs of Liberty #5

1: God's finger, God's hand:

Pesach Haggadah, Magid:

Rabbi Yose Hagelili says, "From where can you [derive] that the Egyptians were struck with ten plagues in Egypt and struck with fifty plagues at the Sea? In Egypt, what does it state? 'Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh: 'This is the *finger* of God' (Exodus 8:15). And at the Sea, what does it state? 'And Israel saw the Lord's great *hand* that he used upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord, and in Moshe, His servant' (Exodus 14:31)....

הגדה של פסח, מגיד:
 רבבי יוסף הגלילי אומר: מניין אתה אומר
 שלקו המצריים במצרים עשר מכות?
 ועל הים לקו חמישים מכות? במצרים
 מה הוא אומר? ניאמרו החרטום אל
 פרעה: אצבע אליהם הוא, ועל הים מה
 הוא אומר? נירא ישראאל את-הנץ
 בגדלה אשר עשה ה' במצרים, ניראו
 העם אחד, ניאמינו בי ובלשנה
 עבדו...

Exodus 14:30-15:1

(30) Thus the LORD delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea. (31) And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the LORD had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD; they had faith in the LORD and His servant Moses. (1) Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD. They said: I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.

שמות י"ד:ל-ט"ו:
 (ל) וַיֹּשֶׁב הַשֵּׁם בְּיוֹם הַקּוֹא אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל
 מִןֶּדֶם מִצְרָיִם נִירָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-מִצְרָיִם
 מִתְעִלְשָׁפֶת הַיּוֹם: (לא) וַיָּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֶת-הַנֵּץ גָּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' הַשֵּׁם
 בּוֹמָרִים נִירָאו הַעַם אֶת-הַשֵּׁם נִיאמְנוּ
 בְּלָשָׁנוּ וּבְלָשָׁן עֲבָדָן: (פ) (א) אָז
 יִשְׁיָרָאֵל אֶת-הַשִּׁיבָה
 כִּזְאת לְהָזָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאָמָר אֲשֶׁר
 לִיהְוָה קִידְגָּאָה גָּאָה סָוָס וּרְכָבוּ רַמָּה
 בַּיּוֹם:

Martin Luther King, "The Death of Evil upon the Seashore," 1959:

Many years ago the Negro was thrown into the Egypt of segregation... For years it looked like he would never get out of this Egypt. The closed Red Sea always stood before him with discouraging dimensions. There were always those Pharaohs with hardened hearts, who, despite the cries of many a Moses, refused to let these people go.

But one day, through a world shaking decree by the nine justices of the Supreme Court of America and an awakened moral conscience of many White persons of good will, backed up by the Providence of God, the Red Sea was opened, and the forces of justice marched through to the other side. As we look back we see segregation caught in the rushing waters of historical necessity. Evil in the form of injustice and exploitation cannot survive. There is a Red Sea in history that ultimately comes to carry the forces of goodness to victory, and that same Red Sea closes in to bring doom and destruction to the forces of evil.



2: Cracks in the story

Exodus 12:39

(39) And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

Exodus 13:17-18

(17) Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.”

(18) So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt.

Rashi on Exodus 13:18

(1) וַיַּבְאֶן means HE LED THE PEOPLE ABOUT from the direct route to a circuitous route. ...
 — The word חמשים means provided with weapons (Mekhilta d' Rabbi Yishmael
 13:19:2...Another explanation of חמשים is: only one out of five (ה) went forth from Egypt, and four parts of the people died during the three days of darkness because they were unworthy of being delivered (Mekhilta d' Rabbi Yishmael 13:19:3; cf. Rashi on 10:22).

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture:*

For what purpose are we told of the road not taken?...Rashi explains: the logic of God's thinking is about the people's desire to return to Egypt... God leads them by a crooked route, hoping that the complication will prevent their having such subversive thoughts... the Israelites, even at this moment, are ambivalent about the movement to freedom... He cannot prevent them from thinking thoughts; He can make it harder for them to act on them. (200-201)

שמות י"ב:ל"ט

(לט) נִיאָפֵי אֶת-הַבָּצָק אֲשֶׁר הָזִיאוּ
 מִמְצָרִים עַגְתָּמָאֹת כִּי לֹא חִמֵּץ כִּי
 גַּרְשֵׁו מִמְצָרִים וְלֹא יִכְלֹו לְהַתְמִיקָה
 וְגַם-צָרָה לֹא-עָשׂוּ לָהֶם:

שמות י"ג:י"י-י"ד

(יז) וַיַּהֵי בְּשַׁלֵּחַ פְּרֻעהַ אֶת-הָעָם וְלֹא-
 נִיחַם אֶלְקִים זֶרֶךְ אֶרְץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי
 קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי | אָמַר אֶלְקִים פָּרוּנִים
 הָעָם בְּרָאָתָם מַלְּחֵה וְשָׁבָו מִצְּרִים:
 (יח) וַיַּפְּלַב אֶלְקִים | אֶת-הָעָם זֶרֶךְ
 הַמִּדְבָּר יַמְּסֹוף וְתִמְשִׁים עַלְוָ בְּנֵי-
 יִשְׂרָאֵל מִאֶרְץ מִצְּרִים:

3: Radical uncertainty

Exodus 14:10-12

(10) As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD. (11) And they said to Moses, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? (12) Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness’?”

שמות י"ד: י"ב

(י) וְפָרֹעַה הַקָּרֵב וַיִּשְׁאֶל בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-עִינֵּיהֶם וְהַגֵּה מִצְרָיִם | נִסְעָ אֶחָרִים
וַיַּרְאֶוּ מֵאָד וַיַּצְאֻko בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-
הַשָּׁמֶן: (יא) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְקַח-תְּנֵן לְמֹות
אַיוֹנָקְרָבִים בְּמִצְרָיִם לְקַח-תְּנֵן לְמֹות
בְּמִקְרָבָר מֵהַזֹּאת עֲשֵׂית לְנוּ לְהֹזִיאָנוּ
מִמִּצְרָיִם: (יב) קְلָאֵזָה הַקָּרֵב אֲשֶׁר
דָּבַרְנוּ אֶלָּךְ בְּמִצְרָיִם לְאָמֶר תָּקַל מִמְּנָנוּ
גַּעֲבָרָה אֶת-מִצְרָיִם קַי טוֹב לְנוּ עַבְדָּךְ אֶת-
מִצְרָיִם מִמְּתַנְּנוּ בְּמִקְרָבָר:

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*:

They reread their story as a tragedy, a story about death: “Is it because there were no graves....?” “What is this (*Mah zoth*) that you have done to us?” is the radical question of meaning. Is this a story of redemption; or of a diabolic hatred; or even – the most unnerving possibility of all – of the personal megalomania of Moses? (202)

*

Retrospectively, the people realize the drama, strangely satisfying, of being the victims, the desired ones, in a battle between God and Paraoh. Now, released from the perverse fascination of the Egypt situation, they face a cruel death in the wilderness – the end of the story. (208)

Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*:

When you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all, but a confusion; a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood; like a house in a whirlwind....it's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you are telling it, to yourself or to someone else.

Lin Manuel Miranda, “A Farmer Refuted”, from Hamilton: the Musical:

Hear ye, hear ye my name is Samuel Seabury
And I present free thoughts on the proceedings of the continental congress
Heed not the rabble who scream revolution
They have not your interests at heart

(Oh my God tear this dude apart)

Chaos and bloodshed are not a solution
Don't let them lead you astray
This congress does not speak for me
(Let him be)

They're playing a dangerous game
I pray the king shows you his mercy
For shame, for shame...

4: Time and perspective:

Dan Bartlett, deputy communications director, White House (as quoted in *The Only Plane in the Sky*, p. 403):

The real change in the president, in my opinion, didn't actually happen until that Friday, when we traveled to New York. The situation on Tuesday, you really didn't have time to reflect. In New York, the range of emotions that he went through – standing on the rubble, the bullhorn moment – but just as important, when he sat there in that room in private and met with those people who were still trying to learn the whereabouts of their loved ones, and hugging them.

Robert Grudin, *Time and the Art of Living*:

...we cannot come to terms with the present until we learn to think of it (1) as part of the distant future (as it once was) and (2) as part of the distant past (as it will someday be). (13)

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What do I mean by “locked in time”? I mean, first of all, that we characteristically view mobile phenomena in immobile terms. We see processes like love and education as established circumstances rather than as complex temporal organisms whose lives depend on regular nourishment and renewal. Conversely, we tend to accept our own fear, weakness and ignorance as chronic disabilities rather than facing them, as we should, with the awareness that they are temporary and surmountable. Like still cameras, our minds consistently convert motion into stasis.... We are insensitive to natural and historical cycles, and hence we are always taken by surprise. We concern ourselves with superficialities, with the skin of time rather than its heart. An old tree falls, a landmark is torn down, a career takes a sudden leap or drop, a friend dies of a heart attack; and we view these events as great acts of time, rather than (more accurately) the surface results of processes which continue in all things. (17)

5: The problems with lack of initiative

George Washington's letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, 18 August 1790:

It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

John Adams to James Warren, April 1776:

..They are advancing by slow but sure steps, to that mighty Revolution, which You and I have expected for Some Time. **Forced Attempts to accellerate their Motions, would have been attended with Discontent and perhaps Convulsions....** The Royal Proclamation, and the late Act of Parliament, have convinced the doubting and confirmed the timorous and wavering...

I think it is now the precise Point of Time for our Council and House of Representatives, either to proceed to make such Alterations in our Constitution as they may judge proper, or to Send a Petition to Philadelphia for the Consent of Congress to do it. It will be considered as fresh evidence of our Spirit and Vigour, and will give Life and Activity and Energy to all the other Colonies. **Four Months ago, or indeed at any Time Since you assumed a Government, it might have been disagreeable and perhaps dangerous. But it is quite otherwise now...**

John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, 1818:

But what do we mean by the American Revolution? Do we mean the American war? The Revolution was affected before the war commenced. The Revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people; a change in their religious sentiments, of their duties and obligations... This radical change in the principles, opinions, sentiments, and affections of the people was the real American Revolution.

6: earning liberty

Exodus 14:13-14

(13) But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the LORD will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. (14) The LORD will battle for you; you hold your peace!”

Exodus 14:15-18

(15) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. (16) And you lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the Israelites may march into the sea on dry ground. (17) And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them; and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots and his horsemen. (18) Let the Egyptians know that I am LORD, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”

שמות י"ד:י"ג-י"ד

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-קָהָם אֱלֹהֵינוּ רָאָנוּ אֶת-יִשְׂעָת הַשֵּׁם אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׁעָה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתֶם אֶת-מָרְאֵת קָיוֹם לֹא תִּפְרֹפוּ לְרֹאָתֶם עוֹד עד-עוֹלָם: (יד) הַשֵּׁם יְלִקְחֶם לְכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחְזִקְנָה: (טו)

שמות י"ד:ט"ו-י"ה

(טו) וַיֹּאמֶר הַשֵּׁם אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מָה תַּצְאַק אֶלָּי זֶבַר אֶל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר: (טז) וְאַתָּה הָרָם אֶת-מִטְחָנֶת גִּנְתָּה אֶת-יִצְחָק עַל-תְּנַךְ וּבְקָעָרוֹ וַיָּבֹא בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיּוֹם בִּבְשָׁה: (יז) וְאַנְּיִ הַנְּגִי מַחְזָק אֶת-לְבָב מִצְרָיִם וַיָּבֹא אֶחָרֶיהָם וְאֶפְבָּדָה בְּפֶרַעה וּבְכָל-חַילָיו בְּרַכְבָּו וּבְפֶרְשָׁיו: (יח) וַיַּדַּעַן מִצְרָיִם פִּי-אֹנֵי הַשֵּׁם בְּהַבְּדִיל בְּפֶרַעה בְּרַכְבָּו וּבְפֶרְשָׁיו:

7: The true revolution

Exodus 15:21

(21) And Miriam chanted for them: Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.

שמות ט'ו:כ"א

(כא) ונתען לכם מרים שיר
להשם כי-גאה גאה סוס
ורכבו רמה בים:

James Madison, 1792:

In Europe, charters of liberty have been granted by power. America has set the example and France has followed it, of charters of power granted by liberty.

Lin Manuel Miranda, “The Battle of Yorktown”, from Hamilton: the Musical:

We negotiate the terms of surrender.
I see George Washington smile.
We escort their men out of Yorktown.
They stagger home single file.
Tens of thousands of people flood the streets.
There are screams and church bells ringing.
And as our fallen foes retreat
I hear the drinking song they're singing
The world turned upside down
Down, down, down, down..

Exodus 1:16-19

(16) saying, “When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.” (17) The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live. (18) So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?” (19) The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth.”

שמות א':ט"ז-י"ט

(טו) ויאמר ביזלצון את-העבריות
ORAINTO על-האכניים אמר-הו הוא
ונפקו אthon ואמדבת קיא נחיה: (יז)
ונפיראן המילדות את-האללים ולא
עשוו כאשר דבר אליהם מלך מצרים
ונתניין את-היללים: (יח) ויקרא
מלך-מצרים למילדות ניאמר לנו
מזרע עשינו כדבר מה נתניין את-
היללים: (יט) נתאמרנו המילדות אל-
פרעה כי לא כנשימים מהழית העברית
ביהדותה והילדו: