

Israel Unbound: The Legacy of Slavery

I. Deliberate Emphasis on Slavery

Deuteronomy 6:21-24 .1

- כא** וְאָמַרְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרָיִם; וַיֹּצִיאֵנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרָיִם, בְּיַד חֲזָקָה. **21** then thou shalt say unto thy son: 'We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.
- כב** וַיִּמְּן יְהוָה אוֹתוֹת וּמוֹפְתִים גְּדֹלִים וְרַעִים בְּמִצְרָיִם, בְּפַרְעֹה וּבְכָל-בֵּיתוֹ--לְעֵינֵינוּ. **22** And the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his house, before our eyes.
- כג** וְאוֹתָנוּ, הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם--לְמַעַן, הִבִּיא אֶתְנוּ, לְתֶת לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתָּנוּ. **23** And He brought us out from thence, that He might bring us in, to give us the land which He swore unto our fathers.
- כד** וַיִּצְוֵנוּ יְהוָה, לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה, לְיִרְאָה, אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ--לְטוֹב לָנוּ כָּל-הַיָּמִים, לְחַיֵּתנוּ כִּהְיוֹם הַזֶּה. **24** And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.

Mishnah Pesachim 10:5 .2

- In every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he went out from Egypt as it says, "And you shall say to your son on that day – Because of this God did for me when *I* went out from Egypt .
- בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים שנאמר (שמות יג) והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר בעבור זה עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים

II. Implications of Emphasis on Slavery

A. Empathy

Exodus 23:9.3

- ט** וְגַר, לֹא תִלְחָץ; וְאִתָּם, יִדְעֶתֶם אֶת-נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר--כִּי-גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם, בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם. **9** And a stranger shalt thou not oppress; for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 19:33-34 .4

33 And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land,
ye shall not do him wrong.

34 The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be
unto you as the home-born among you, and thou
shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the
land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 .5

17 For the LORD your God, He is God of
gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, the
mighty, and the awful, who regardeth not
persons, nor taketh reward.

18 He doth execute justice for the fatherless
and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving
him food and raiment.

19 Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were
strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 24:17-22 .6

17 Thou shalt not pervert the justice due to the
stranger, or to the fatherless; nor take the widow's
raiment to pledge.

18 But thou shalt remember that thou wast a
bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God
redeemed thee thence; therefore I command thee to
do this thing. {S}

19 When thou reapest thy harvest in thy field, and
hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go back
to fetch it; it shall be for the stranger, for the
fatherless, and for the widow; that the LORD thy
God may bless thee in all the work of thy hands. {S}

20 When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not
go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger,
for the fatherless, and for the widow.

21 When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard,
thou shalt not glean it after thee; it shall be for the
stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

כב וְזָכַרְתָּ, כִּי-עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם; 22 And thou shalt remember that thou wast a
 על-כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה, לַעֲשׂוֹת, אֶת-הַדָּבָר, הַזֶּה. bondman in the land of Egypt; therefore I command
 {ס} thee to do this thing. {S}

Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality* .7

Nothing which has been done on earth against ‘the noble’, ‘the mighty’, ‘the masters’ and ‘the rulers’ is worth mentioning compared with what the Jews have done against them: the Jews, that priestly people, which in the last resort was able to gain satisfaction from its enemies and conquerors only through a radical revaluation of their values . . . It was the Jews who, rejecting the aristocratic value equation (good = noble = powerful = beautiful = happy = blessed) ventured with awe-inspiring consistency to bring about a reversal . . . saying, ‘Only those who suffer are good, only the poor, the powerless, the lowly are good . . . whereas you rich, the noble and powerful, you are eternally wicked, cruel, lustful, insatiate, godless . . . *the slaves’ revolt in morality* begins with the Jews.

B. Slavery Frames Our Relationship with God

Exodus 20:2.8

ב אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: לֹא-יְהִיֶּה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, 2 I am the LORD thy God, who brought thee out
 על-פְּנֵי. of the land of Egypt, out of the house of
 bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before
 Me.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 .9

ז לֹא מָרַבְכֶם מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים, חֲשַׁק יְהוָה בְּכֶם--וַיִּבְחַר בְּכֶם: כִּי-אַתֶּם הַמְעַט, 7 The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor
 מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים. choose you, because ye were more in number than
 any people--for ye were the fewest of all peoples--
 ח כִּי מֵאֲהַבַת יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם, וּמִשְׁמְרוֹ 8 but because the LORD loved you, and because He
 אֶת-הַשְּׂבֻעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם, הוֹצִיא would keep the oath which He swore unto your
 יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם, בְּיַד חֲזָקָה; וַיִּפְדֶּךָ מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים, fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a
 מִיַּד פְּרַעֲהַ מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם. mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of
 bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Leviticus 25:55 .10

נה כִּי-לִי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, עֲבָדִים--עֲבָדֵי הֵם, 55 For unto Me the children of Israel are servants;
 אֲשֶׁר-הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: אֲנִי, יְהוָה they are My servants whom I brought forth out of
 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

11. Deuteronomy 8: 12-14, 17

יב פן-תאכל, וְשָׂבַעְתָּ; וּבָתִּים טָבִים 12 lest when thou hast eaten and art satisfied, and hast
תִּבְנֶנָּה, וַיֵּשְׁבָתָּ. built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;

יג וּבָקָרְךָ וְצֹאנֶךָ יִרְבּוּ, וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב 13 and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy
וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר-לְךָ, וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר-לְךָ, יִרְבּוּ. silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast
is multiplied;

יד וְרָם, לְבָבְךָ; וְשָׁכַחְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, 14 then thy heart be lifted up, and thou forget the
הַמּוֹצִיאֲךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּיַת עֲבָדִים. LORD thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land
of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;

יז וְאָמַרְתָּ, בְּלִבְבְּךָ: כַּחַי וְעַצְמִי יָדִי, עָשָׂה לִי 17 and thou say in thy heart: 'My power and the
אֶת-הַחֵיִל הַזֶּה. might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.'

Shmot Rabbah 21:5 .12

כיון שראו ישראל שהיו מוקפין מג' רוחות, And when Israel saw that they were surrounded on
הים סוגר והשונא רודף והחיות מן המדבר three sides, the sea shutting them in and the enemy
תלו עיניהם לאביהם שבשמים וצעקו להקב"ה and the wild beasts from the wilderness pursuing
שנאמר ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה' ולמה עשה them, they raised their eyes to their Heavenly Father
הקב"ה להם כך אלא שהיה הקב"ה מתאוה and cried unto God, as it says, 'And the children of
לתפלתן, אמר ריב"ל למה"ד למלך שהיה בא Israel cried unto the Lord.' God did this of set
בדרך והיתה בת מלכים צועקת לו בבקשה purpose unto them because He yearned for their
ממך הצילני מיד הלסטים שמע המלך והצילה, supplications. R. Joshua b. Levi said: It can be
לאחר ימים ביקש לישא אותה לאשה היה compared to a king who, on his journey, was
מתאוה שתדבר עמו ולא היתה רוצה, מה עשה appealed to by a princess: 'Do, I pray thee, deliver
המלך גירה בה הלסטים כדי שתצעוק וישמע me from the hands of robbers.' The king hearkened
המלך, כיון שבאו עליה הלסטים התחילה and delivered her. In the course of time, he was
צועקת למלך, אמר לה המלך לכך הייתי desirous of marrying her and was very eager that
מתאוה לשמוע קולך, כך ישראל כשהיו she should talk to him, but she declined. What did
במצרים והיו משעבדים בהם התחילו צועקים the king do? He incited robbers [to capture her], so
ותולין עיניהם להקב"ה שנאמר (שמות ב) that she might again cry and he should hear. As
ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וגו' ויצעקו, מיד וירא soon as the robbers seized her, she began to cry to
אלהים את בני ישראל התחיל הקב"ה מוציאן the king, but he said to her: 'I have been yearning
משם ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה והיה הקב"ה for this so that I may again hear thy voice.'
מבקש לשמוע את קולם פעם אחרת ולא היו Similarly, as long as Israel were enslaved in Egypt,
רוצין, מה עשה גירה לפרעה לרדוף אחריהם they cried to God and raised their eyes
שנאמר ופרעה הקריב מיד ויצעקו בני ישראל heavenwards, as it says, And it came to pass in the
אל ה', באותה שעה אמר הקב"ה לכך הייתי course of those many days... and they cried (Ex. II,
מבקש לשמוע קולכם, שנאמר (שיר 23). Immediately we read, And God saw the
/השירים/ ב) יונתי בחגוי הסלע, השמיעני קול children of Israel (ib. 25), and He began to bring
אינו אומר אלא השמיעני את קולך אותו הקול them out from there with a strong hand and
outstretched arm; but God wished to hear their

שכבר שמעתי במצרים לכך כתיב השמיעני voice once again and they were unwilling. What did
את קולך He do? He incited Pharaoh to pursue them, as it
says, ' And when Pharaoh drew nigh... and the
children of Israel cried unto the Lord ' (ib. XIV, 10).
It was then that God said: ' I wanted to hear your
voices again,' as it says, 'O my dove, that art in the
clefts of the rock' (S.S. II, 14) It does not say ' Let
me hear a voice', but 'thy voice' (ib.), namely, that
voice which I once heard in Egypt; hence ' Let me
hear thy voice '.

C. Exodus from Slavery as a Universal Narrative

Ramban on Exodus 22:20 .13

והנכון בעיני כי יאמר, לא תונה גר ולא תלחצנו And it is correct in my eyes to say 'You
ותחשבו שאין לו מציל מידך, כי אתה ידעת שהייתם should not oppress or abuse the stranger' and
גרים בארץ מצרים וראיתי את הלחץ אשר מצרים think that s/he has no champion, because you
לוחצים אתכם ועשיתי בהם נקמה, כי אני רואה know that when you were strangers in Egypt
דמעת העשוקים אשר אין להם מנחם ומיד עושקיהם and I saw how the Egyptians oppressed you
וכן האלמנה כח, ואני מציל כל אדם מיד חזק ממנו. וכן האלמנה and I took revenge on them, because I see the
והיתום לא תענו כי אשמע צעקתם, שכל אלה אינם tears of the oppressed who have no one to
בוטחים בנפשם, ועלי יבטחו. ובפסוק האחר הוסיף comfort them and who are overpowered by
טעם ואתם ידעתם את נפש הגר כי גרים הייתם בארץ their oppressors and I save all people from
מצרים (להלן כג ט). כלומר, ידעתם כי כל גר נפשו those who are stronger than them. And so too
שפלה עליו והוא נאנח וצועק ועיניו תמיד אל ה' you should not oppress the widow and the
וירחם עליו כאשר רחם עליכם, כמו שכתוב (לעיל ב orphan because I will hear their cries because
כג) ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה ויצעקו ותעל all these rely on Me. And a different verse
שועתם אל האלהים מן העבודה. כלומר לא בזכותם supplies the reason 'You know the heart of a
רק שרחם עליהם מן העבודה: strangers since you were strangers in the land
of Egypt', that is to say, you know that all
strangers are dispirited and s/he groans and
cries all day and his/her eyes are always
looking to God and God will have mercy just
as God had mercy on you, as the verse says
"The children of Israel groaned from the work
and they cried out and their cries reached God
from their work', that is to say [God did not
respond based] on their merit, but rather God
had mercy on them from their work.

**Proposed Great Seal of the United States: "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to .14
God." Drawing by Benson Lossing, for *Harper's New Monthly* July 1856**