

Exodus: The Journey of Faith

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The journey of Exodus, the journey that Israel walked, is an image of the journey made by every person who sets out to seek the Divine Presence. Israel is, as it were, humanity personified, and so what happened to Israel is what happens to everyone who sets out on the journey of faith. Christianity must recognize itself as an inclusive religion from the very beginning and honor its roots in Judaism.

In the book of Exodus, Egypt is the place of slavery and the Promised Land is the place of freedom. The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land—through the Red Sea to Sinai and across the desert—is a saga which symbolizes our own struggle towards ever greater inner freedom, empowered by “grace.” The story of Israel symbolically describes the experience of our own liberation by God—and toward a universal love.

For enslaved African Americans who knew the book of Exodus, this journey of faith became more than a symbol. It became a journey of liberation from the exploitative system of slavery. As the Black theologian James Cone described, “The record shows clearly that black slaves believed that just as God had delivered Moses and the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, he also will deliver black people from American slavery. And they expressed that theological truth in song:

Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you moan,
Oh Mary, don't you weep, don't you moan,
Pharaoh's army got drowned,
Oh Mary, don't you weep."¹

The stories of Exodus make religious sense to people only to the degree that they are themselves walking a journey of faith. If we are walking in the Spirit and listening to the Spirit, we can rather easily relate these stories to our own life and identify with the experience of Israel.

We all have to turn to God and let ourselves be led on this faith journey. We have to be willing to experience the Exodus in our own lives, to let God take us from captivity to freedom, from Egypt to Canaan, not fully knowing how to cross the huge desert between the two.



Moses takes the risk of faith. All that God has given him is a promise, and yet he acts on that promise. People of faith are the ones who expect the promises of their deepest soul to be fulfilled; life for them becomes a time between promise and fulfillment. It is never a straight line, but always three steps forward and two backward—and the backward creates much of the knowledge and impetus for the forward. (Little did I know this would become my much later book, *Falling Upward*.)

Like the Israelites, we will find that the desert is not all desert. The way to the Promised Land leads to life even in the midst of the desert. When we least expect it, there is an oasis. As the Scriptures promise, God will make the desert bloom (Isaiah 35:1).

¹ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Seabury Press: 1975), 11.