

Story of Exodus, heart of Hebrew Bible, our companion since Pentecost. A word in praise of ancient story telling. We have so much access to contemporary perspective. We're all like water bugs skimming the surface of a vast ocean of information, scrolling thru Twitter & FB—it can be an invigorating corrective to engage a story that goes back to a time when global population was 50M (Tokyo/LA) To get in touch with our essential humanity. What hasn't changed about humans and human society since then? A lot.

This the main story we have about liberation. Exodus story is the heart of Liberation Theology, the branch of theology that most white-washed Christianity ignores. It's well worth our attention. Just like art, spirituality that is has a taproot into ancient storytelling, can offer us some emotional and creative space to deal with difficult realities we are facing today. It's like we enter a different time a different place and we get a respite the from anxiety of scrolling through social media, we relax a little, and then we meet ourselves there.

We're playing hopscotch thru early chapters of Exodus. If you're plot challenged like me, it's helpful to remember really only 5 main characters, all introduced in the first chapter.

- Egyptians
- Pharaoh
- Hebrews
- Moses
- Siphrah, Puah, Miriam

The characters in every good novel or film will always remind us of people in our lives and often voices in our heads. This Exodus story would have no legs if it didn't have to power to do that. Otherwise what's the point? But first let's dig into our portion today.

A new king arose over Egypt who knew not Joseph. And he said to his people, "Look, the people of the sons of Israel is more numerous and vaster than we. Come, let us be shrewd with them lest they multiply and then, should war occur, they will actually join

our enemies and fight against us and go up from the land.” And they set over them forced labor foremen so as to abuse them with their burdens and they built store cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Ramses. And as they abused them, so did they multiply and so did they spread, and they came to loathe the Israelites. And the Egyptians put the Israelites to work at crushing labor, and they made their lives bitter with hard work with mortar and bricks and every work in the field—all their crushing work that they performed.

So we are born with empathy. We naturally feel with and for others. But we can also, especially as we form into larger groupings, override our natural empathy and sense of connection and set up systems of oppression. This dense portion has so much insight into how that happens.

A new leader who doesn't have the same capacity for empathy comes to power. He's isolated from an entire group of people *“He knew not Joseph.”* His first move? He goes to his people and spins a fear scenario: *Look, the people of the sons of Israel is more numerous and vaster than we. Come, let us be shrewd with them lest they multiply and then, should war occur, they will actually join our enemies and fight against us and go up from the land.”* NONE OF THIS HAS ACTUALLY HAPPENED! JUST AS NO JAPANESE AMERICANS WERE WAITING TO HELP JAPAN AFTER PEARL HARBOR] It just fear mongering. But it appeals to people's collective brain stem—their alarm system always looking for threats. And that fear mongering unleashes the negative fear energy of the people onto the Hebrews.

See how the story-teller emphasizes the complicity of the Egyptians: “And they set over them forced labor foremen... And as they abused them they came to loathe the Israelites...and the Egyptians put the Israelites to work at crushing labor and they made their lives bitter.”

Even in the ancient world, with rulers who were thought to be gods, without any democratic norms or institutions, the leaders don't exercise power without a complicit population, and a kind of group think set in, and anyone who objects, feels the intimidating shushing power of the group, so they don't even voice their objections, they don't protest. That's all it takes to go from Mr. Rogers Neighborhood to the Gulag.

And you notice how as the abuse goes unchecked—no voices of dissent are raised—the oppression settles in like an infection, takes over, locks down, worsens. *“And as they abused them... they came to loathe the Israelites. And the Egyptians put the Israelites to work at crushing labor, and they made their lives bitter with hard work with mortar and bricks*

Yes, Pharaoh is an orchestrator. But it takes an orchestra—and the Egyptian people are the orchestra. They are complicit.

Midrash/Interpretation with a View toward Our Situation

All the main characters in this first chapter, resonate with our world.

- Egyptians: White-washed America
- Pharaoh: Nightmare ruler conjuring worst in us (not named so as not fuel his narcissism)
- Hebrews: Those for whom the American Dream toggles into a nightmare constantly
- Moses: Person raised with white privilege, giving it up to restore his own soul, renew his humanity, know his God
- Siphrah, Puah, Miriam: Alicia, Patrisse, Opal (founders of BLM) and all women using their voices to resist Pharaoh/effect liberation.

But today’s focus: First Midrash is white complicity with White Supremacy.

The people least surprised by the rise of our latest Pharaoh are the people who experience White Supremacy every day of their lives. Because they understand it is part of our culture; it’s like a virus that flares and recedes but doesn’t go away.

White Supremacy is a disease of the mind caught and cultivated by cultural contagion.

It is the quintessential American infection. It’s never been faced with brutal honesty, the kind of honesty that leads to deep collective repentance. We’re all affected by it, the only question is what are we doing to understand it so we can dismantle it. The

responsibility rests with all of us and we cannot shift the blame to whoever happens to ride it into the White House.

Because it's a culturally transmitted infection, as soon as we were born, we started absorbing it. Culture is conveyed by a thousand influences every minute of every day. What we need is not more liberal white guilt. We need a heightened sense of responsibility and empathy to resist it, to dismantle it. A fearlessness in facing it in ourselves. Absence of the defensive ego. Not being satisfied to be less symptomatic than someone else. And we need to see it as clearly as we can. [Facing WS in Ourselves & Our Families, hosted by me Susan Shaffer starts July 25 for 6 Sundays. Me & White Supremacy by Laylah Saad]

Exodus is confronting us with this reality: Pharaoh was the orchestrator of oppression, but the orchestrator is powerless without an orchestra.

Second bit of Midrash has to do with the forced labor foremen. Policing in American began as private slave patrols hired by plantation owners. A mirror of the "forced labor foremen" in Egypt. A big force. 600K Hebrews, men were forced labor 300K, if one foreman could supervise 20 Hebrew men, that's a force of 15,000. I never learned origin of policing. When I first heard it, asked Oceana (Criminal Justice) she oh yes! I learned about from 2 professors, both black, white professors never mentioned it. We have to face this history.

Listen to the text carefully: *And they set over them forced labor foremen so as to abuse them with their burdens.* The people set this system up, not the forced labor foremen themselves. The forced labor foremen are pawns of the system that created them. The most popular legislation in America, the one that gets bi-partisan support is what, the Crime Bill. And what does every Crime Bill call for? More police.

"More police" is as American as Apple Pie. The point is not that we have a bunch of bad police officers. The point is we have a cultural disease called White Supremacy that affects all of us, including the men and women who become police officers. 2/3 of police officers are white; 83% men... This is demographic that elected a White Supremacist to the WH. This is culture wide problem. Our policing is a symptom of our

White Supremacy disease, a disease of the mind caught and cultivated by cultural contagion.

Naming our fears is the first step