

Come tomorrow and its blood is on our door, we leave with Moses, or they will surely kill us. A slave who can kill the master's god is no longer a slave. And if we are afraid to kill the lamb, then we may not leave with Moses. We may pretend we are still one of the people of Israel, but it will only be pretending. And this then is the first part of the transformation of consciousness. One must irrevocably choose to destroy the god of the oppressor, which you have taken into your home. It cannot be done in secret or postponed for even a day. You must stake your very life upon it. "You must not go outside your door until morning" (Exod. 12:22). Now it is in the hands of the One of Being. "I shall go through Egypt and execute judgment on all the gods of Egypt" (Exod. 12:12).

This is the second stage. That the One of Being would settle the score. "I personally and not an angel."<sup>12</sup> For once the alien god is destroyed, the forces of transformation are set into motion throughout the entire land. All during the night. You must remain in your hut. While other powers do their work. Layers of consciousness both within and beyond our psyche are now also freed to continue the work. There is a legend that even the king of Egypt himself, terrified that he might die, sought out Moses on that "watch night." But now he could not enter the slave hut. And we imagine that, come the next morning, there was not an Egyptian to be found. Streets deserted of masters. Open to free people. "And the children of Israel set out . . . six hundred thousand . . . a mixed multitude" (Exod. 12:37-38). Thinking they were free, at least until they arrived at the edge of the sea and saw Pharaoh and his chariots behind them.

This is the third stage. The story teaches that part of every experience of transformation involves a second confrontation. Even more frightening than before. The coming up once again of the enemy whom we were sure we had destroyed. The return of the repressed. Three steps forward, but two back. The Midrash suggests that there were four groups there at the edge of the sea. Each group, each part of us, received an answer according to its

intention. Some of us wanted to throw ourselves into the sea but were told, "Have no fear! Stand by and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you today" (Exod. 14:13). Others chose to surrender and return to the slave pits, but were assured, "The Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again" (Exod. 14:13). Still others wanted to stand and do battle. They were calmed with the promise, "The Lord will battle for you" (Exod. 14:14). And the last group, who simply raised their voices in prayer, were silenced. "Hold your peace!" (Exod. 14:14). Only one of the six hundred thousand, Nahshon ben Aminadav, walked forward into what was to become a path through the waters, and for him alone and the rest of us by the merit of his singleness of purpose, was the sea split.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps one of the most insightful descriptions of existential panic recorded. Here, at the edge, with the enemy, who is also of us, rising up again to destroy us.

Once, in a workshop, we acted out this scene at the sea. Members of the group each being one of the story's rubrics. Someone was the sea and someone else Moses and so forth. The person who played "god" stood on a chair and watched. Pharaoh coming closer. The people's panic. The sea's refusal. Moses' bewilderment. And all of us, we who knew what was "supposed" to happen (everyone knows the story), began to feel an uneasiness as "god" refused to "split" the sea. We all agreed that "god" had but this one thing to do and felt a genuine fear that in this reenactment, this "god" might let "playing god" go to his head and remain silent! People actually said to god, "C'mon god, split the sea!" The anxiety grew greater still, until it seemed as though our dream-play would end in nightmare disaster. And then, at the last possible emotional moment, "god," in almost a whisper, said only, "It's time now." People actually cheered. The sea almost with gratitude acknowledged a power greater than its own and rolled aside. And the children of Israel went through its midst on dry ground. And it occurred to us, in retrospect, that this is perhaps all the One of

Being ever says: "It's time now." You may enter "the waters" and not be destroyed. Only transformed. The very waters that will purify you will at the same time rid you forever of (a part of you named) Pharaoh and his soldiers.

And this is the final stage. The passing through the waters. Like Jacob, our father, before us, who as the final act of return to his brother Esau, chose to be alone, by the edge of the waters of the river Jabok (which probably served as the boundary of the Land of Israel), and who wrestled there with the angel-person until the breaking of dawn and who, on account of his survival, was granted the name Israel, thus the children of Israel, and we, their grandchildren, are permitted to pass through the water and become new beings. For this reason, all acts of personal purification and conversion in traditional Judaism require immersion in the *mikveh*, the ritual bath. Completely naked, we come up out of the water new beings. Having destroyed the enemy's god. Remained inside during the watch night. Endured the return of the oppressor and at last passing through the waters. Death. Transformation. Rebirth. *Baruch ata Adonai*, Holy One of blessing, *M'chayeh Ha'Maytim*, the One who resurrects the dead.<sup>14</sup>

What drowns in the Red Sea is not Pharaoh and his armies, but an aspect of the ego. It is reabsorbed into the personality, but forever gone as a dynamic force. And so likewise this "passing through the waters" "from slavery into freedom" is a prophecy of what will in the future happen to all being. In the days of the anointed One.

### TESHUVA: THE RETURNING TO NOTHING

Before the world was created, the Holy One, blessed be He, with his Name alone existed. And He got the idea to create the world. So He began to trace the foundations of being before Him. But it would not stand. Not until He also created a way for it to return

to the Nothingness from whence it began. A means for cor back. Repentance. Dying. *Teshuva*.<sup>15</sup>

*Teshuva*, you must understand, is not so much an act of individual repentance, as customarily rendered, or apology, or even turning into the self and telling the truth. It is a movement return on a cosmic scale. It is the second half of one great universal rhythm, which those who "make *Teshuva*" enter. For when do, they find themselves therein joined with countless others are also finding their way home. "Through *Teshuva* all things reunited with God."<sup>16</sup> One who enters this hidden, pulsing returning to the source is ultimately renewed. Transformed. Reborn. the words of Rav Kook, "In the great channel in which the sustaining force flows, there is revealed the unitary source of existence, and in the hovering, life-serving spirit of *Teshuva* things are renewed to a higher level. . . ."<sup>17</sup> The creation maintenance of being require a kind of rhythmic moving out and a returning to the point of beginning. The Nothing that cedes the something of Being. To remain aware of this movement is the underlying purpose of all the rituals and rehearsals of sacred truth. It is the very breathing out and breathing in of the universe itself. Breathing out must follow breathing in even as it is prerequisite for the next breathing out.

According to the work of Russian meteorologist-mathematician Alexander Friedman, if matter in the universe is above a certain average density, then the resultant gravitational field will curve the lines of expansion back in upon themselves and the cosmos itself will return to the point from whence it began. Spiritual traditions are able to be much more daring and for centuries spoken of cosmic cycles of expansion and contraction, or *Shmetot*. God, they whisper, made and unmade other universes before this one. Now of course this can only be a part of cosmologic theory. And whether our universe will continue to expand into a frozen emptiness or return into an ever-contracting fireball is still a subject of debate among scientists.