

Voices

Leaving Egypt

Merle Feld

Exodus 13:17-22

The night is so dark
and I am afraid.
I see nothing, smell nothing,
the only reality—
I am holding my mother's hand.

And as we walk
I hear the sounds
of a multitude in motion—
in front, behind,
all around,
a multitude in motion.

I have no thought of tomorrow,
now, in the darkness,
there is only motion
and my mother's hand.

Miriam: The Red Sea

Muriel Rukeyser

Exodus 14:26-15:21

High above shores and times,
I on the shore
forever and ever.
Moses my brother
has crossed over
to milk, honey,
that holy land.
Building Jerusalem.
I sing forever
on the seashore.
I do remember
horseman and horses,
waves of passage
poured into war,
all poured into journey.
My unseen brothers
have gone over,
chariots
deep seas under.
I alone stand here
ankle-deep
and I sing, I sing,
until the lands
sing to each other.

The Other Shore

Shira Rubenstein

Exodus 14:26-15:21

The guilt begins on the other shore of the Reed Sea,
with us, drained from terror and excitement,
with the sun beating down,
seagulls swooping overhead,
waves lapping against the bodies on the sand,
so gently, now.
Children laugh or cry,
but the world is quiet,
afterwards.

Who is like you, O God?
We know about fear
and doubt,
resentment and guilt.
We thought we'd be leaving it behind.
How heavy a load can be carried out of Egypt?
How many in that army were blameless?

How many innocents will die for this freedom?
We don't know whether these questions are for God or us.
We try to drown them out with drums,
hoarse, harsh song,
the pounding of tired feet in a desperate dance.
We think of the cracks of the whip,
the insults,
every murdered child
—all the times we wished
something like this would occur.
We tell ourselves we have a right to rejoice.

It would be easier to believe
if the horses
hadn't had time
to
scream.

The Song of Miriam

Ruth Sohn

I, Miriam, stand at the sea
and turn
to face the desert
stretching endless and
still.

My eyes are dazzled
The sky brilliant blue
Sunburnt sands unyielding white.
My hands turn to dove wings.
My arms
reach

for the sky
and I want to sing
the song rising inside me.
My mouth open
I stop.

Where are the words?
Where the melody?
In a moment of panic
My eyes go blind.
Can I take a step
Without knowing a
Destination?
Will I falter
Will I fall
Will the ground sink away from under me?

The song still unformed—
How can I sing?

To take the first step—
To sing a new song—
Is to close one's eyes
and dive
into unknown waters.
For a moment knowing nothing risking all—
But then to discover
The waters are friendly
The ground is firm.

And the song—
the song rises again.
Out of my mouth
come words lifting the wind.
And I hear
for the first
the song
that has been in my heart
silent
unknown
even to me.

Thirst IV

Kadya Molodowsky (transl. Kathryn Hellerstein)

Exodus 15:22-25

My pitcher lies, dry and thirsty,
And I walk through all the streets
Seeking out a drop of water,
And I am spent
Near my pitcher.
I lay my lips
To the roots of the trees,
I stretch with eyes and mouth
To the sky's rains.
And my tongue is bitter from roots of the trees,
My mouth is thirsty,
And my eyes are tired from looking at the sky.
I seek my pitcher,
And it is dry.