

Looking Backwards and Looking Forwards: Texts for a Jewish Resistance Movement

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A. What is Resistance?

1. From www.dictionary.com

- a) the act or power of resisting, opposing, or withstanding.
- b) the opposition offered by one thing, force, etc., to another.
- c) Electricity...
- d) Psychiatry...
- e) (often initial capital letter) an underground organization composed of groups of private individuals working as an opposition force in a conquered country to overthrow the occupying power, usually by acts of sabotage, guerrilla warfare, etc.: the resistance during the German occupation in World War II.

2. <http://www.qrg.northwestern.edu/projects/vss/docs/propulsion/2-what-is-resistance.html>

“What is resistance? Resistance is anything that slow or stops movement or keeps movement from happening.”

3. Hebrew Possibilities

הַתְּנַגְּדוּת

Hitnagdut, from "neged"

To be opposite, be against, oppose

הַתְּקוּמָמוּת

Hitkomemut, from "kum"

To rise; to be raising oneself

B. Notes from Failed Resistance Movements in Judaism's Past

1. Bar Kochba, the Failed Messiah, Mishneh Torah Kings and Wars 11:3

And don't think that the King Messiah needs to do wonders and signs and create a new reality in the world or resurrect the dead, or similar things. This is not the point (of The Messianic redemptive process). For Rebbe Akiva, the wisest of the Mishnaic sages, was the "weapons bearer" of The King Ben Kuziba (aka Bar Kochba). And he said concerning him (Ben Kuziba), that he was The King Messiah. And all the sages of the generation were in agreement until he was killed due to his sins. Since he was killed they (then) knew that he was not (the Messiah). The sages did not request from him, neither a sign nor a wonder (i.e. miraculous actions). The main thing is that the Torah and its laws and statutes are everlasting forever and ever, and we do not add or subtract from them....

2. Authority of Law & Government, from Pirke Avot

Pirke Avot 1:1

מֹשֶׁה קִבַּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי, וּמִסָּרָה לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ, וִיהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים, וְזִקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים, וְנָבִיאִים מִסָּרָה לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָה. הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים, הָיוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדִין, וְהִעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה, וַעֲשׂוּ סִגָּל לַתּוֹרָה:

Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples and make a fence for the Torah.

Pirke Avot Chapter 2:3

הָיוּ זֹהֲרִין בְּרִשׁוּת, שָׂאוּ מִקְרָבֵינוּ לֹא לְאָדָם אֶלָּא לְצָרָה עִצְמוֹ. נִרְאוּ כְּאוֹהֲבֵינוּ בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּחִיתוֹ, וְאִין עוֹמְדִין לוֹ לְאָדָם בְּשַׁעַת דְּחִיקוֹ:

Be careful with the government, for they befriend a person only for their own needs. They appear to be friends when it is beneficial to them, but they do not stand by a person at the time of his distress.

3. DINA DE-MALKHUTA DINA (Aram.) דִּינָא דְּמַלְכוּתָא דִּינָא

C. PARADIGMS FOR JEWISH RESISTANCE

1. Resistance Through Affirmation of Life & Community

a. Keep Growing, Exodus 1:6-12

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל-אָחָיו וְכָל-הַדּוֹר הַהוּא: ז וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרּוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם: פ ח וַיִּקַּם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדָע אֶת-יוֹסֵף: ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-עַמּוֹ הַזֶּה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ: י הִבֵּה נְתַחֲכֶמָה לּוֹ פֶן-יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי-תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף גַּם-הוּא עַל-שְׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם-בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ: יא וַיִּשְׁימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עַנּוֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה אֶת-פִּתּוֹם וְאֶת-רַעַמְסֵס: יב וְכֹאשֶׁר יַעֲנֶה אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצוּ מִפָּנָיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

6. Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. 7. But the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them. 8. A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. 9. And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. 10. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground 11. So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Ramses. 12. But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites.

b. Identification and Freedom, Exodus 12:3-7, 13

ג דָּבְרוּ אֶל-כָּל-עַדְתֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּעֶשֶׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׂה לְבֵית-אָבֶת שֶׂה לְבֵית: ד וְאִם-יִמְעַט הַבָּיִת מִהַיּוֹת מִשֶּׁה וְלָקַח הוּא וְשִׁכְנוֹ הִקְרִיב אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ בְּמִכְסַת נִפְשׁוֹת אִישׁ לְפִי אֹכְלוֹ תִכְסּוּ עַל-הַשֶּׂה: ה שֶׂה תִמְנִים זָכָר בֶּן-שְׁנָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם מִן-הַכֹּבְשִׁים וּמִן-הָעִזִּים תִּקְחוּ: ו וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת עַד אַרְבַּעָה עֶשֶׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וְשִׁחְטוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל קַחַל עַדְתֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּין הָעַרְבִים: ז וְלָקַחוּ מִן-הַדָּם וַנִּתְּנוּ עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וְעַל-הַמַּשְׁקוּף עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר-יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם:

יג וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם לְאֹת עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם שֹׁם וְרָאִיתִי אֶת-הַדָּם וּפָסַחְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם וְלֹא-יְהִיָּה בְכֶם נֶגֶף לְמִשְׁחִית בְּהַכֹּתִי בָאָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

3. Speak unto all the congregation of Israel, saying: In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household; 4. and if the household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and his neighbor next unto his house take one according to the number of the souls; according to every man's eating ye shall make your count for the lamb. 5. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year; you shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats; 6. and you shall keep it unto the fourteenth day of the same month; and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at dusk. 7. And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it.

13. And the blood on the houses where you are staying *should be a sign for you*; when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

2. Resistance Through Direct Confrontation and Struggle

a. Righteous Midwives: the First Case of Civil Disobedience, Exodus 1:17-21

טו ויאמר בילדכן את העבריות וראיתן על האבנים אם-כן הוא והמתן אתו ואם-בת הוא וחסיה: יו ותיראן, המילדות את האלהים ולא עשו כאשר דבר אליהן מלך מצרים ותחנין את הילדים: [שני] יח ויקרא מלך מצרים למילדות ויאמר להן מדוע עשיתן הדבר הזה ותחנין את הילדים: יט ותאמרן, המילדות אל-פרעה כי לא כנשים המצריות העבריות כחיות הנה בטרם תבוא אלהן המילדות וילדו: כ וייטב אלהים למילדות וירב העם ויעצמו מאד: כא ויהי כיראו המילדות את האלהים ויעש להם בתים

17. The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt told them; they let the boys live. 18. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?” 19. The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth.” 20. And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly. 21. And because the midwives feared God, God established households for them.

b. Time to Rise Up and Defend Ourselves, The Book of Maccabees Chapter 2:39-41

[After hearing about an attack when Jews were killed on the Sabbath because they refused to fight back on Shabbat]

39. And Mattathias and his friends learned of it, and they grieved bitterly over them. 40. And one said to another, "If we all do as our brothers have done, and refuse to fight against the heathen for our lives and for what we believe is right, they will very soon destroy us from the face of the earth." 41. On that day they reached a decision: "If anyone attacks us on the Sabbath day, let us fight against him and not all die, as our brothers died in the hiding-places."

b. Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust, "About my Father," poem by Irena Klepfisz

about my father

- he became a teetotaler out of his socialist convictions; during the war he began to drink again
- he was casual; he kept his tie in his pocket till the last minute before oral exams
- he left me on the street to be picked up by the nuns from the orphanage; he watched me from a distant doorway
- once he refused to hit me; he told my mother his hand was too large
- he wrote to his aunt that he hoped the baby would be a boy
- when he was a student, Jews were not permitted to sit in the front rows of lecture halls; he made it a point to stand through the lectures; ultimately, Jews were allowed to sit
- he was a discus thrower
- according to some, he got along with everyone: Jews, Goyim, children
- he was caught a couple of times by the Germans; they thought he was a Polish smuggler
- once he was put on a train for Treblinka; he jumped, was shot at and wounded, but got back to Warsaw alive
- he believed in resistance

3. Resistance Through Active Citizenship & Engagement

a. Perspectives on Being an American, Judge Louis Brandeis

“We must make our choice. We may have democracy, or we may have wealth concentrated in the hands of a few, but we can't have both.” --quoted by *Raymond Lonergan in Justice Brandeis, Great American (1941), p. 42.*

“The greatest menace to freedom is an inert people...”

“The most important office...is that of private citizen.”

b. Abraham Joshua Heschel, Sermon on Religion and Race (January 1963)

Humanity can thrive only when challenged, when called upon to answer new demands, to reach out for new heights. Imagine how smug, complacent, vapid, and foolish we would be, if we had to subsist on prosperity alone. It is for us to understand that religion is not sentimentality, that God is not a patron. Religion is a demand, God is a challenge, speaking to us in the language of human situations. His voice is in the dimension of history.

The universe is done. The greater masterpiece still undone, still in the process of being created, is history. For accomplishing God's grand design, God needs the help of man. Man is and has the instrument of God, which he may or may not use in consonance with the grand design. Life is clay, and righteousness the mold in which God wants history to be shaped. But human beings, instead of fashioning the clay, deform the shape. God needs mercy, righteousness; God's needs cannot be satisfied in space, by sitting in pews, by visiting temples, but in history, in time. It is within the realm of history that man is charged with God's mission...

Our concern must be expressed not symbolically, but literally; not only publicly, but also privately; not only occasionally, but regularly. What we need is the involvement of every one of us as individuals. What we need is restlessness, a constant awareness of the monstrosity of injustice.