



**DAYENU**  
A Jewish Call to Climate Action

## THREE STORIES OF OUR TIME

Dr. Joanna Macy is an environmental activist, author, and scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology. Her renowned framework for activism is called *The Work That Reconnects*. In *The Work*, Macy describes Three Stories of Our Time. She writes, “Each of these stories reveals a profoundly different lens through which people understand the world we all live in.” Each is happening simultaneously, and at any moment, we can choose which story we put our energy behind.

The following excerpts explore how the Three Stories of Our Time live in Jewish sacred myth, and in our lives as Jewish climate activists.

### STORY #1 BUSINESS AS USUAL

*“Business As Usual is the story of the Industrial Growth Society, and the European-based colonial empires from which it emerged. It is the dominant enforcing mechanism of a predatory capitalist, imperialist economic system (in other words, the corporate financial military industrial complex) that perpetuates patriarchy and white supremacy for the profit and power of a few. The defining premise, which we hear from politicians, corporations, corporate-controlled media, and the military, is that there is little need to change the way we in the industrialized world live.”*

[workthatreconnects.org/spiral/the-great-turning/the-global-context](https://workthatreconnects.org/spiral/the-great-turning/the-global-context)

As you read the following text, keep in mind that Ancient Egypt was a great industrial empire of its time, with massive organized systems of labor, agriculture, and concentrated power.



**Exodus 5:1-6**

(1) Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness." (2) But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should heed God and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go." (3) They answered, "The God of the Hebrews has manifested to us. Let us go, we pray, a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest God strike us with pestilence or sword."

(4) But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you distract the people from their tasks? Get to your labors!" (5) And Pharaoh continued, "The people of the land are already so numerous, and you would have them cease from their labors!"

(6) That same day Pharaoh charged the taskmasters and foremen of the people, saying, (7) "You shall no longer provide the people with straw for making bricks as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves."

(א) וְאַחֲרַיִם בָּאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כֹּה־אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיְחַגּוּ לִי בַמִּדְבָּר: (ב) וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה מִי ה' אֲנֹכִי אֲשַׁמַּע בְּקוֹלוֹ לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־ה' וְגַם אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֲשַׁלַּח: (ג) וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהִי הָעִבְרִים נִקְרָא עַלְּינוּ גִלְכָּה זֶה דְרֹדִי שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְנִזְבַּחַהּ לַה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ פֶּן־יִפְגְּעֵנוּ בַדָּבָר אוֹ בַחֶרֶב:

(ד) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לָמָּה מַטְוִי מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן תַּפְרִיעוּ אֶת־הָעָם מִמַּעֲשֵׂיו לָכוּ לִסְבֹּלְתִיכֶם: (ה) וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה הַדְרֹבִים עִתָּה עַם הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁבַּתֶם אֹתָם מִסְבֹּלְתָם:

(ו) וַיִּצַו פַּרְעֹה בַיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־הַנְּגִשִׁים בָּעָם וְאֶת־שֹׁטְרֵיו לֵאמֹר: (ז) לֹא תֹאסְפוּן לָתֵת תַּבֵּן לָעָם לְלֶכֶן הַלְּבָנִים כַּתְּמוּל שְׁלֵשָׁם הֵם יִלְכוּ וְקִשְׁוּ לָהֶם תַּבֵּן:

Who in this text represents the Business As Usual mindset?

What is at stake for Moses and Aaron and the Israelites?

How does Pharaoh respond to Moses and Aaron?

Do you see corollaries between these characters and groups of people today?

How does Pharaoh increase oppression on the Israelites?

Do you see corollaries today?

Have you ever stood up to people in power who were championing Business As Usual? How did you feel? What was their response?

In what ways do you put your energy behind the story of Business As Usual?



## STORY #2 THE GREAT UNRAVELING

*The Great Unraveling is the story told by scientists, journalists, and activists who have not been bought off or intimidated by the forces of the Industrial Growth Society. Drawing attention to the disasters caused by Business As Usual, their accounts give evidence of the on-going derangement and collapse of biological, ecological, economic, and social systems.*

[workthatreconnects.org/spiral/the-great-turning/the-global-context](http://workthatreconnects.org/spiral/the-great-turning/the-global-context)

Some understand the plagues in the Exodus story as an allegory for the natural consequences that afflict a society built on oppression and shortsightedness. The plagues are thus terrible and awesome wake-up calls that signal the Great Unraveling of the Egyptian system of slavery. Moses and Aaron are the initial prophets who warn Pharaoh, but eventually, even his own magicians name what's happening:

### Exodus 8:13

Aaron held out his arm with the rod and struck the dust of the earth, and vermin came upon man and beast; all the dust of the earth turned to lice throughout the land of Egypt. (14) The magicians did the same with their spells to produce lice, but they could not. The vermin remained upon man and beast; (15) **and the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!”** But Pharaoh’s heart stiffened and he would not heed them, as the LORD had spoken.

(יג) וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן וַיִּטְּ אַהֲרֹן אֶת-יָדוֹ בְּמִטְהוֹ וַיִּדְּ  
אֶת-עֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ וַתְּהִי הַכֶּזֶם בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה  
כָּל-עֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ הָיָה כְּנִים בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: (יד)  
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן הַחֹרְטָמִים בְּלִטְיָתָם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת-הַכֶּזֶם  
וְלֹא יָכְלוּ וַתְּהִי הַכֶּזֶם בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: (טו)  
וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֹרְטָמִים אֶל-פְּרֹעֹה אֲצַבֵּעַ אֱלֹקִים הוּא  
וַיַּחֲזֹק לִב-פְּרֹעֹה וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה':  
{ס}



After the plagues of blood, frogs, lice, beasts, cattle disease, boils, and hail, there has been terrible devastation in Egypt. Many crops, livestock, and people have perished. At this juncture, Pharaoh's courtiers themselves speak up:

**Exodus 10:7**

Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, "How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship the LORD their God! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?"

(ז) וַיֹּאמְרוּ עֲבָדֵי פַרְעֹה אֵלָיו עַד־מַתִּי יִהְיֶה זֶה לָנוּ  
לְמוֹקֵשׁ שְׁלַח אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֵיהֶם  
הֲטָרָם תִּדַע כִּי אֲבָדָה מִצְרָיִם:

What elements of Egyptian society are at risk from the plagues?

What if any corollaries do you see to modern climate change?

Who are the contemporary spokespeople for the Great Unraveling?

Medieval rabbinic commentator Ibn Ezra translates Exodus 10:7 as "Do you want to first be *certain* that Egypt is lost before you let the people go? Are you going to wait until then?!" How does this translation change the verse's meaning?

Do you see modern day connections?

How do you put your energy behind the Story of the Great Unraveling?



## STORY #3 THE GREAT TURNING

We hear the story of a Great Turning from some who see the Great Unraveling and don't want it to have the last word. This is the story of the transition from an Industrial Growth Society to a Life Sustaining Society. Attitudes shift from exploitation to respect, from extraction to regeneration, from competition to cooperation. More and more people come to see how interwoven we are as peoples, and recognize that solidarity with one another is a way through these crises. So we join together to act for the sake of life on Earth.

[workthatreconnects.org/spiral/the-great-turning/the-global-context](http://workthatreconnects.org/spiral/the-great-turning/the-global-context)

After the Death of the First Born, Pharaoh finally lets the Israelites go, acting for the sake of the survivors in Egypt.

### Exodus 12:30

And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians—because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead. (31) He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, “Up, depart from among my people, you and the Israelites with you! Go, worship the LORD as you said! (32) Take also your flocks and your herds, as you said, and begone! And may you bring a blessing upon me also!”

(ל) וַיָּקָם פַּרְעֹה לַיְלָה הַזֶּה וְכָל-עַבְדָּיו  
וְכָל-מִצְרַיִם וַתְּהִי צַעֲקָה גְדֹלָה בְּמִצְרַיִם כִּי-אֵין  
בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר אֵין-שָׁם מֵת: (לא) וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה  
וּלְאַהֲרֹן לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צֵאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי  
גַם-אַתֶּם גַּם-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְכוּ עַבְדוּ אֶת-ה'  
כְּדֹבְרְכֶם: (לב) גַּם-צֹאנְכֶם גַּם-בָּקָרְכֶם קְחוּ  
כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּם וּלְכוּ וַיְבָרְכֶתֶם גַּם-אֹתִי:

What do you make of Pharaoh's remarkable request at the end of this excerpt:  
“May you bring a blessing upon me also!”?

What does the text suggest about the relationship between the  
Great Unraveling and the Great Turning?

Finally, the Israelites cross the sea:

### Exodus 14:29

But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for

(כט) וַיַּבֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵלְכוּ בַיַּבֵּשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַמַּיִם



them on their right and on their left. (30) Thus the LORD delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea.

לָהֶם חֲמָה מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם: (ל) וַיּוֹשַׁע ה' בַּיּוֹם  
הַהוּא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל  
אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מֵת עַל־שְׂפַת הַיָּם:

This is how Exodus 14:30 is usually translated, but the Hebrew uses the singular noun for the nation of Egypt. Literally, “The Israelites saw Egypt dead on the shore of the sea,” as in the national economic, social, and military systems of Egypt were dead.

When we think about the Great Turning today, there is clearly no one moment where destructive systems end and life affirming ones begin. Instead, we are in a massive global moment of transition where all three stories exist at once.

In what moments of your life do you put your energy/money/actions into supporting Business As Usual?

How are you calling attention to the Great Unraveling?

Where do you see or experience that the Great Turning is already here?

What more do you dream of doing to support the transformation?

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