

tp[Exodus 22:21] Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

[Exodus 23:9] Also thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

[Leviticus 19:17] Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. / Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

[Leviticus 19: 33-34] And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. / But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

[Deuteronomy 10:17-20] For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: / He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. / Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. / Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.

[Deuteronomy 24:17-18] Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: / But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

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George Steiner, Errata: An Examined Life (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), 58-59.

The moral dictates which emanate from Sinaitic and prophetic monotheism are uncompromising. Prohibitions on murder, on adultery, on greed, on the making of images, however innocent, on commerce with house-gods, tutelary spirits, saints, are themselves symptoms of a deeper demand. They entail the mutation of common man. We are to discipline soul and flesh into perfection. We are to outgrow our own shadow. A fundamental edict of ethical self-fulfilment, of self-surpassing, underwrites the Decalogue and the plethora of ritual-pragmatic prescriptions that follows. No fibre of our native complaisance, libido, inattention, mediocrity and sensualities escapes moral and legalistic exposure. Taken à la lettre, Nietzsche's 'become what you are' is the antithesis to the Sinai-imperative. 'Cease being what you are, what biology and circumstance have made you. Become, at a [59] fearful price of abnegation, what you could be.' So ordains the God of Moses, of Amos, of Jeremiah.

George Eliot's "The Death of Moses" [1879] builds on the midrash in Devarim Rabba about Moses' death:

MOSES, who spake with God as with his friend,  
And ruled his people with the twofold power  
Of wisdom that can dare and still be meek,  
Was writing his last word, the sacred name  
Unutterable of that Eternal Will 5  
Which was and is and evermore shall be.  
Yet was his task not finished, for the flock  
Needed its shepherd and the life-taught sage  
Leaves no successor; but to chosen men,  
The rescuers and guides of Israel, 10  
A death was given called the Death of Grace,  
Which freed them from the burden of the flesh  
But left them rulers of the multitude  
And loved companions of the lonely. This  
Was God's last gift to Moses, this the hour 15  
When soul must part from self and be but soul.

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But Moses, pausing, in the air serene 60  
Heard now that mystic whisper, far yet near,  
The all-penetrating Voice, that said to him,  
"Moses, the hour is come and thou must die."  
"Lord, I obey; but thou rememberest  
How thou, Ineffable, didst take me once 65  
Within thy orb of light untouched by death."  
Then the voice answered, "Be no more afraid:  
With me shall be thy death and burial."  
So Moses waited, ready now to die.  
And the Lord came, invisible as a thought, 70  
Three angels gleaming on his secret track,  
Prince Michaël, Zagaël, Gabriel, charged to guard  
The soul-forsaken body as it fell  
And bear it to the hidden sepulchre  
Denied for ever to the search of man. 75  
And the Voice said to Moses: "Close thine eyes."  
He closed them. "Lay thine hand upon thine heart,  
And draw thy feet together." He obeyed.  
And the Lord said, "O spirit! child of mine!  
A hundred years and twenty thou hast dwelt 80  
Within this tabernacle wrought of clay.  
This is the end: come forth and flee to heaven."  
But the grieved soul with plaintive pleading cried,  
"I love this body with a clinging love:  
The courage fails me, Lord, to part from it." 85

"O child, come forth! for thou shalt dwell with me  
About the immortal throne where seraphs joy  
In growing vision and in growing love."  
Yet hesitating, fluttering, like the bird  
With young wing weak and dubious, the soul 90

Stayed. But behold! upon the death-dewed lips  
A kiss descended, pure, unspeakable—  
The bodiless Love without embracing Love  
That lingered in the body, drew it forth  
With heavenly strength and carried it to heaven. 95

But now beneath the sky the watchers all,  
Angels that keep the homes of Israel  
Or on high purpose wander o'er the world  
Leading the Gentiles, felt a dark eclipse:  
The greatest ruler among men was gone. 100  
And from the westward sea was heard a wail,  
A dirge as from the isles of Javanim,  
Crying, "Who is now left upon the earth  
Like him to teach the right and smite the wrong?"  
And from the East, far o'er the Syrian waste, 105  
Came slowlier, sadlier, the answering dirge:  
"No prophet like him lives or shall arise  
In Israel or the world for evermore."  
But Israel waited, looking toward the mount,  
Till with the deepening eve the elders came 110  
Saying, "His burial is hid with God.  
We stood far off and saw the angels lift  
His corpse aloft until they seemed a star  
That burnt itself away within the sky."

The people answered with mute orphaned gaze 115  
Looking for what had vanished evermore.  
Then through the gloom without them and within  
The spirit's shaping light, mysterious speech,  
Invisible Will wrought clear in sculptured sound  
The thought-begotten daughter of the voice, 120  
Thrilled on their listening sense: "He has no tomb.  
He dwells not with you dead, but lives as Law."