

Formative Accompaniment in Exodus

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Abstract

The story of the Israelite Exodus from the land of Egypt, though ancient, has ever new applications and implications opening our heart to new vistas and horizons. The exodus is the central event in the Old Testament. The liberative experience of Israel from the bondage of Egypt and its establishment as the people of God was a decisive and definitive event of God's self-disclosure. Here in this study we are going to undertake a search for the valuable treasures hidden in the Book of Exodus concerning accompanied formative journey. The study is centered on two parties: God the guide and companion who accompanied Israel and Moses his faithful servant who journeyed along with people of Israel sharing their fate. Whatever took place during their Exodus was part and parcel of their formative schedule and contributed substantially to their all-round development and faith formation.

Introduction

Spiritual life is a journey towards the perfection of the Father in heaven (Mt 5:48). To reach this perfection one has to embark on a long and tedious journey which is a time of formation. During this formative journey one needs the presence and support of others to make it smooth and pleasant. Psychological studies bring to light the effects and merits of the presence and companionship of another person and consider it as an essential part of growth and development. Though being accompanied by someone is mandatory at the initial stages of growth it is helpful and advisable throughout the developmental stages. The formative process starts from the maternal

womb and ends only at the tomb. The natural development is deeply in association with the spiritual formative journey. From the very beginning of the humanity God began this accompaniment (Gen 3: 8). The history of the patriarchs as well as Israel presents before us a God who was accompanying them all through their life's journey. The entire Old Testament is the story of an accompanying God. The presence and the accompaniment of God and human mediations can enrich and form the life of an individual or a group. This principle is supported and proved in the Book of Exodus.

Exodus as a Formative Journey

Exodus is a Latin word borrowed from Greek. The title *Exodus* was given to the book by those who translated it into Greek. The word means 'exit' or 'departure' (Kenneth 1985). *Exodus* lays a foundational theology in which God accompanies a group of people in their formative journey to become God's own people who were very distinct and unique from all other nations of their time. It was a formative journey in which God reveals his name, his characteristics, his redemptive power, his law and how he is to be worshipped. It gives a progressive report on the appointment and purpose of the first covenant, the appointment of the accompanier Moses, describes the initiation of the priesthood, defines the role of the prophet and explains the covenant relationship between God and his people that came to effect at Sinai.

Profound insights into the nature of God are found in chapters 3, 6, 33 and 34. The focus of these texts is on the fact and importance of his presence in the formative journey. But emphasis is also placed on his attributes, justice, truthfulness, mercy, faithfulness and holiness. Thus to know God's "name" is to know him and to know his character. It is reassuring to know that God remembers and is concerned about his people (2:24). What he had promised earlier to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is now coming into fruition as Israel is freed from Egyptian bondage and is on their way to take possession of their promised land. The covenant at Sinai is but another step in God's fulfillment of his promise to the patriarchs. As we go through the Book of *Exodus*, the accompaniment and presence of God among Israel is very evident and striking. The Book of *Exodus* presents it in a human language.

The Notion of Accompaniment

The word accompaniment has its origin from the Medieval Latin word *cum-panio*, which means "the one who has the bread in common"

(Cencini 1997). To accompany means to share something vital like the bread of the journey. Keeping this idea in mind if we read the Book of Exodus we experience the presence and accompaniment of God as a vital experience for Israelites during their long journey towards Promised Land. The accompanying experience of God inspired Moses to become a good companion of the Israel during their journey towards the land of promise. Both Moses and Israelites experienced a God who enters into the history of the individual and who walks along with the people sharing their daily bread of life.

God the Accompanier

All the way through the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob we notice a repeated emphasis on theophany, the appearance of God to the patriarchs in one way or another and ensuring His accompaniment along with them. "I am El, God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I shall go down to Egypt with you and I myself shall bring you back again" (Gen 46: 3-4). This assurance of God came into fruition during the Exodus of people from Egypt accompanied by God.

The Formative Accompaniment of God in Exodus

The verses 2:24-25 forms the background for God's relationship to the humanity. Here we find God referring to Israel twice as "my people". God's relationship with them had already been rooted in the relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The initial chapters of Genesis present a clear vision about the God-human relationship. God takes him for a walk and often gives him casual visits. Once the relationship was broken we see the absence of divine presence and the downward spiraling of humanity. However, seeing their misery God finally decides to get reconnected with humanity. As we go through 2:23 to 3:3 we experience a God who is in touch with human heart, a God who walks along with the people. Up to the above-mentioned passage in exodus God was remaining hidden. "The Hebrew text repetitively insists that God is subject of four verbs: 'God heard...God remembered...God saw...God knew'. God listened and responded to the outcry of the people" (Binz 1993. Here is a God who is in touch with his people. He is no more presented as a power that exists far beyond human intellect and heart. God descends to communicate with his children personally.

"I shall be with you" (3:12). The context of this verse is that as God revealed his plan to appoint Moses as the accompanier of Israelites to enter into the land of freedom. He refused to accept it. The reason for

his reluctance was, “Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of the Egypt?” (3:11) In answer to his query God committed himself saying, “I shall be with you” (3:12). Here “Moses’ lack of authority and ability is supplemented by the divine presence in the midst of the struggle” (Binz 1993). The prophetic sign of God’s presence is that what Moses has experienced at Sinai will one day be the experience of all the formative companions who journey along with the young generation. The following Biblical passages present before us a God who educates, accompanies and forms the people of Israel during their faith journey to land of promise. 3:14, 16-20, 4:1-9, 21, 6:1, 6:5, 6:10, 7:1, 7:8, 7:14, 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 9:1, 12:1, 12:23, 12:29-36, 12:42, 12:51, 13:17, 13:19, 13:21-22, 14:2-4, 14:14, 14:14-19, 15:25-26, 16:4, 9, 19:4, 20, 20:1, 23:20, 27, 24:12, 28:1, 40-41, 29:1, 42-45, 30:6, 11, 31:1,13, 18, 33:1, 9, 12-13, 16-17,19, 34:10-17, 32, 35:30-35, 36:1, 40:34.

The common features we can see in all these parts are:

- God educates, accompanies and forms the human person
- Makes use of the human resources
- God respects and accepts the human dignity
- God reveals and explains all the plans to the Moses
- God encourages, strengthens, supports and helps his messenger at all times and at all places.
- God is present along with the people in their journey in the form of cloud, pillar and other natural manifestations.

In chapter five there is an episode of utter frustration and hopelessness exhibited by the Moses. According to Moses the plan of God has failed and the conditions of the people become worse. However, the angry protest of Moses was accepted with understanding and new assurance from God. From chapters 6 to 14 we notice that each of them opens with the line “Yahweh said to Moses” or “Yahweh spoke to Moses”. These chapters reveal mainly the picture of God as an educator and formator. God instructs Moses and Aaron what to tell Pharaoh, Egyptians and Israelites, how to plan different phases of liberation, how to perform different signs before them. “Now go, I shall help you to speak and instruct you what to say” (4:12) is a clear evidence of accompanying presence of God with Moses and the Israelites.

Chapters 16 and 17 present a picture of God accompanying his people meeting their physical and spiritual needs. Basic needs of thirst, hunger and security are met by giving water from rock (17:1-7), raining bread from heaven (16:4), and providing quails (16:13). We see God's wrath destroying Amalekites, who dared to "lay hold of Yahweh's banner (17:16). The grumbling of Israelites is mentioned six times in chapter 16 verses 7-12. Remarkably, God does not respond with severity, but the complaints of Israel become the springboard for God's display of grace. In the following chapter Moses is completely engaged in accompanying the people in their various spiritual as well as physical needs by listening to them. Here God sent Jethro to make him aware about the physical and mental strain he is taking upon himself unnecessarily. Jethro advised him of appointing judges according to the needs of the people (18:13-27).

It is necessary to fulfill the basic needs first, for achieving the higher goals in the life. As the formative journey continues Moses and Israelites are entering into a new phase at Mount Sinai (19:1-). The glory of God on the mountain was visible in the descending cloud and the consuming fire seen by the people on the mountain top. This appearance of God in cloud and fire was characterized by God's presence in the dwelling at the end of Exodus (40:38). The divine experience that happened on Mount Sinai is continued in his dwelling place as well.

Israel's foundational story is a formative journey that started with the people's bondage to a rigid system and to the oppressive presence of Pharaoh, now concludes with Israel in the service of the God who journeys along with them. God demands from his people the courage to face the challenges to acquire their freedom. God, who is the source and sustainer of life and of all vocations, now plays twofold roles: supporting his people on one hand by giving them abundance of grace on their journey and on the other hand directing his representative to lead them on the right track. As the story is retold and re-experienced in our own vocational journey we are entering into a covenantal relationship with God who is accompanying in our vocational journey. This can be more personally experienced by reflecting on Moses the outstanding model of companions in vocational journey.

Moses the Accompanier

God entered into the life of Moses and began journeying with him directing his steps to provide him the experiences he required to

undertake his new mission. Moses who encountered God in the burning bush was a changed person. The God experience he had enabled him to be an accompanier to the Israelites who were in bondage. To liberate and accompany somebody it is essential that the liberator must be liberated from all bondages. A blind person cannot lead other blind people. If we want to save a person who has fallen into a pit, first of all we should be out of the pit. Then we will be able to plan and execute our saving plan for the one who needs assistance. The same thing is applicable in every situation. The liberator must be liberated from his physical, psychological, social, political and spiritual bondages.

Formative Journey of Moses

The role of Moses as an accompanier in the history of Israel was a consequence of the God-experience he had in his life. During his formative journey along with God, he managed to realize his flaws and limitations. The humbled Moses left his dreams behind and chose the life of a shepherd grazing sheep in the wilderness. God made use of this opportunity and prepared him for a theophany on the Mount Horeb. Moses thus experienced the presence of a personal God who accompanied him from his birth. This personal experience helped him to be good accompanier to the Israelites. The formative process of Moses underwent three phases during his long journey with God: 1. Coming out 2. Wandering in wilderness and 3. Entering into a covenant.

“Coming out” in the Life of Moses

The opening chapter of the Exodus describes the cruel measures of the Pharaoh to contain the increasing strength and number of the Israelites. The midwives who were given strict mandate to kill the Hebrew infants reported to the Pharaoh that “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women, they are hardy and give birth before the midwife get to them” (1:19). So Pharaoh ordered to throw all the new born to the river Nile. As we see in chapter two (2:3), after the birth of Moses his mother hides him for three months. When she found it impossible to hide him anymore, the future liberator was thrown into the river with a protective basket. The hands of the daughter of the oppressor itself drew out the liberator. God of the liberator prepares for him a table under the eyes of the enemies (Ps 23:5).

Etymology of the Hebrew name Moses is “to draw” (Mickenzie 1984). According to Ex 2:10 explanation, the origin of the name is from a passive root of “I drew him out”, although the form of the name is

more properly the active participle 'one who draws out'. The name Moses is probably of Egyptian origin, a short form of a name which typically combined a deity's name with a particle meaning 'child of' or 'born of'. Even if the meaning given in verse 10 is inaccurate by contemporary etymological standards, still it provides an opportunity for the writer to introduce another point of contradiction in this story. The Hebrew text recognizes a foreshadowing here. They knew that the child whom Pharaoh's daughter "drew out" is more properly regarded as the "one who draws out" (Burns 1983). As the name signifies Moses the liberator miraculously came out of the water. The event of drawing out from water is a sign of liberation from the existential bondages as a human being. The existential bondages deprive a person from growing as a fully human being. The one who grew up to become deliverer of the Hebrews himself first had to be delivered.

He (Moses) went out (Ex 2:11, 13)

Here we observe a continuing pattern, an attitude adopted by Moses in his adult life, that although Moses had been brought up in Pharaoh's palace he allied himself with the oppressed Hebrews. "In saying that Moses 'went out' (both in verses 11 and 13) the biblical writer uses the same Hebrew verb which later is used of the exodus itself. One interpreter thus observes that "Moses 'going out' to his people was the first stage of his own exodus" (Burns 1983). As Moses was growing up he saw the real situations of his own kinsmen. Here he made an active choice of faith. "Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh, choosing rather to share the ill-treatment with the people of God. The element of choice is emphasized by setting up the alternatives: ill treatment with the people of God instead of the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Childs 1974). Verses 11-12 relate an incident which ultimately led Moses' flight from Egypt. Moses' departure from loyalty to Egyptian ways prepares his ways to the wilderness.

In this context we can see a real experience of renunciation of position, which could have led him to be the successor of the Pharaoh, wealth, fame, relationships with royal members of the palace and all the securities of the future. Here he came out from all securities the royal life offered him and abandoned himself into the hands of God in the midst of uncertainties and insecurities ahead. Once we surrender before God as a beloved child, then God's favour will rest upon us (Mt 3:17). When a person is free from his own securities the Spirit will lead him to the desert (Mt 4:1) where the person is prepared for the theophany to enter into a covenantal relationship.

He Went into Midianite Territory (Ex 2:15)

The wilderness of Midian was an important place, very much related to the formation of Moses as an accompanier of Israel. There he encountered a real God who remembered the promise to the Patriarchs and came down to the people of God. The moment that Moses realized that his Hebrew brothers are not ready to accept him as their leader and his life is under threat due to Pharaoh's anger (Ex 2:15), he came out from his own 'royal slavery' and went out to Median. It is said that he spent forty years there (Act 7: 30). The one who is called to deliver the slaves from Egypt became the slave of fear and ran to desert. But his days were not ended with fear along with white sand of Median desert at the end of Sahara (Prado Flores 1992).

Wilderness is the place of solitude, where one is able to encounter oneself and discover the simplicity of life. The nakedness of the desert helps one to concentrate on essential things, the aridity of life leads one to penetrate into the invisible ones, irreversible intimacy of being leads one to transcendence. Presenting Moses resting at the well in verse 2:16, the writer gives us the bare minimum of background information regarding him, which is needed to understand the event that ensues. The setting at the well is a "traditional setting for human encounter in the semi-desert areas of the Near East" (Childs 1974). "She gave birth to child, whom he named Gershom because, he said, I am alien in a foreign land" (Ex 3:22). The name given to the son "indicates that he is a sojourner in a foreign land. He belongs to another people in another land" (Childs 1974). Indifference and lack of meaning to life is expressed here. The loneliness is a common experience of wilderness, which helps one to fill the emptiness of life with thirst and hunger for God. The thought as a foreigner in this world leads us to search for an eternal land where there is no feeling of alienation or loneliness. Through the alien experience along the wilderness of desert forced Moses to leave himself to be formed by the divine guidance. This formation is expressed in the naming of the second son Eliazer (Ex 18:4) means God is my help.

The coming out and the hardships of wilderness life turned Moses into a hero of faith in the salvation history. According the author of Hebrews:

He considered that the humiliations offered to the Anointed were something more precious than all the treasures of Egypt, because he had his eyes fixed on the reward. It was by faith that he left

Egypt without fear of the king's anger, he held to his purpose like someone who could see the Invisible (Heb 11: 26-27).

This journey of faith kept him forty years in Median. He was drawn into the desert near Mount Sinai (Act 7:30). Through the various experiences and process in wilderness Moses was prepared to encounter God. This encounter in the midst of burning bush opens new horizons to his and his kinsmen's future.

Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy Ground (Ex 3:5)

"The presence of God demanded a holistic preparation of the one who would aspire to enter his presence. Therefore to teach Moses this lesson God set up boundaries – "Come, no nearer", and commanded that he should remove his sandals" (Kaiser 1969). The close access of the presence of God leads us to penetrate into the awareness of the holiness and transcendence of God. To enter into a good relationship with him one must remove the sandals of the personality. To walk along with the footsteps of God the man must have to make his feet according to the path of God. J.H. Prado Flores comments that, by requesting to remove the sandals, God asked Moses to leave all his existential plans about the future. The God of Horeb will accept a narrow plan of our on schemes. He is asking us to integrate our plans with the plan of God to have universal salvation (Prado Flores 1992).

In front of God our dignity and importance is not the achievements of our life, but our being. The shoes of our limits, shortcomings, spiritual blocks, psychological hurts and everything must be given into the hands of God in faith. To comprehend the mystery of our life as well as that of others we must recognize the distinction of the different grades of our life in front of God (Excell 1975). When God asks to remove the sandals and stand barefoot on the land where he was, it is imaginable how it would be with naked feet on the desert ground where the heat is augmented by the burning bush. It is essential to have a purification of life after coming out from the bondages and before entering into a new vocation. In the life of Moses now it is forty years that he was in the desert. The desert is not a place so pleasing. He underwent a lot of bitter experience as a foreigner. In other words he was in exile for forty years. Now he has to come out from his own slaveries of life experiences, before consecrating himself for the mission as an accompanier. He has to reconcile with his past. Again the aridity of desert is no more an enemy. But it is only a bridge leading to the Promised Land.

Vocation of Moses - A Journey of Becoming an Accompanier

The whole life of Moses was purified by the presence of God and he was able to enter into a dialogue with God. It was in an atmosphere of intimacy and freedom. When Moses was released from his own bondages of life he was able to enter into the mystery of God who sets free. As we read in Bible, Moses was awed by the living presence of God in the burning bush. But he was also fascinated and he eagerly went to see the strange event (Ex 3:3). "He responds to the mystery. He is a seeker, a discoverer" (Coert Rylaarsdam 1987).

God's call is always dialogical in nature. In the presence of God, the recognition of holiness (3:6) did not lead Moses into passivity. Disagreement, argument and even challenge play an important role. God invites Moses into a genuine conversation. "God does not demand a self-effacing Moses but draws him out and works with him, warts and all" (Fretheim 1991). Indeed, it is Moses' persistence that occasions a greater fullness in the divine revelation. Human questions and doubts find an openness in God and lead to fuller knowledge about the forthcoming events. God thus reveals himself, not simply at the divine initiative, but in interaction with a questioning person. Simple deference or passivity in the presence of God would close down the revelatory possibilities in our discernment of the divine will in our life (Fretheim 1991). When God called Moses by name, Moses expressed his readiness and openness to God's word by his response: "Here I am" (Ex 3:4). Moses responds in faith and proceeds with a practical question. How shall he convince the Israelites that God has really spoken to him? In the Bible a name, whether of man, angel, or deity, sets forth the character of its bearer.

A Call to Become an Accompanier

The encounter between God and Moses throws light into the nature of the God and to the mission. God calls and reveals his plans. The call and mission are nothing other than becoming an accompanier. It shows that God who speaks with Moses is not a God who is far away from his people, but he is a God who is in touch with and who wants to walk along with his people participating in their joys and sorrows. "God treats the dialogue with Moses integrity and honors his insights as important ingredients for the shaping of the task. God has so entered into relationship with him that God is not the only one who has something important to say. God will move with Moses, even

adapting original divine plans in view of Moses considerations” (Fretheim 1991). God’s ways in the life of a person is thus not identified solely by the divine word and will. God places the divine word and plans into the hands of another for him to do with what he wills. God respect the freedom of the human person to choose His will. In any call narration we can find that God works through the frailties as well as strengths of the called one.

Therefore vocation to accompany somebody is totally the action of God, but in a real way it is also the action of individual people: the work and penetration of God into the heart of human liberty, but also the effort and struggle of men and women free to welcome the gift. “The liberty of God meets the liberty of man in a mysterious and fascinating dialogue, made up of words and silence, of messages and actions, of looks and gestures, a liberty that is perfect – God’s – and one that is imperfect – man’s” (Pontifical Work for Ecclesiastical Vocations, 1997). When the called one feels he is fully a liberated person in front of God, then without any veil he is able to enter into a covenantal relationship. Chapter 3 of Exodus present before us, the long dialogue section between God and Moses finally reaching the point, in which Moses is appointed as the accompanier of Israelites on their journey towards the Promised Land (Ex 3:7-12). God, in calling men to his service, acts in sovereign freedom, but with respect for the freedom of the person he chooses. In every instance there are two free wills at work. Having drawn the person of his choice, called him by name and empowered him with the capacity to respond, he awaits that response with regard for the uniqueness of each one, with his fears, his doubts and hesitations; he engages in dialogue, provides reassurance, with the familiar phrase, ‘Do not fear, I am with you’ (Ex 3:12, 20)

The life of Moses till the theophany at mount Horeb brings before us a long formative journey, which starts from his birth onwards. The accompaniment of God in the life of Moses had enlightened him to accompany Israel on their formative journey. The Israel also had passed all the three phases that Moses had passed. So he was able to accompany them successfully on their journey.

Formative Journey of Israel

We have seen that Moses was called to accompany Israel in their formative journey. The long formative journey of Israel was inaugurated on the day of Passover. They also passed through three phases of formation as in the life of Moses.

Coming Out of Egypt

The special call and mission on Mount Horeb helped Moses to move along the path of God to accompany Israel to come out from their slavery. Through a long period of formation and purification Moses was well prepared to bring out Israel from the house of bondage to a land of freedom. Chapters three and four of Exodus brings out the immediate preparation and God experience of the deliverer. Chapters 5:1 to 13:16 prepare the background to facilitate the coming out of Israelites.

The ten plagues that followed one after the other over Egyptians had a telling effect on their peace and well being. The plagues can be viewed as the effects of Pharaoh's genocidal policies. We see a series of events occurring related to plagues to break the stubbornness of the king of Egypt. Here God acts for the sake of the entire creation. The Lord brought the Israel out of Egypt through a series of events. The saving power of God experienced by the Israelites is made available to each Passover participant. "The Israelites are facilitated to leave Egypt 'dressed out' in Egyptian valuables, sign of their new status as free persons, no longer slaves" (Fretheim 1996).

The Israelites' journey out of Egypt, though carefully planned by God (13:17-22), is interrupted by an Egyptian change of mind (14:5). The Egyptian pursuit endangers Israelite freedom and necessitates further divine action. Liberation from Egypt can truly be confessed only when the threat from the Pharaoh has been fully eliminated. At the same time, God's stated purpose moves beyond Israel's liberation (14:4, 17-18); it has centrally to do with God's relationship to the Egyptians, that is, to bring them to the point of knowing that God is the Lord of all earth. "The immediate effect of God's salvation is rescue the Israel from the Egyptians, yet it describes more comprehensively the deliverance from oppression experienced by a free people. They are challenged to begin their vision of life according to their experience of freedom rather than the bondage they so painfully remember" (Binz 1993).

The victory which God accomplished for Israel at the sea is the primary event of salvation for Israel. Israel's passing through the waters to freedom and new life is not just a narrative account of what happened that particular night. It represents what God did for Israel throughout the whole event of Exodus and what God continues to do. For Israel, the sea symbolizes the forces of destruction, chaos and death. The passage through which God led Israel out of the waters, form the

Israel through all the powers that rebel against the freedom and life which Yahweh wills for this newborn people (Binz 1993). After long years of slavery people of Israel came out from Egypt.

From the start of Exodus, it becomes clear that Yahweh has orchestrated the entire sequence. He has so guided Israel to avoid the inevitable but certainly lesser resistance of the coastal road (Durham 1987). Once people of Israel came out from their slavery of Egypt they were led to the wilderness of Succoth and then to Shur, where they were formed as a people, distinct from all other nations of their time.

Wilderness and Wandering of Israel

“Between Israel’s ‘coming out’ of Egypt and her ‘coming into’ the Promised Land was a long journey through the wilderness. Part of this wilderness tradition is found Israel’s journey from the Sea to Mount Sinai (15-18) and part is found on the journey from Mount Sinai to the borders of the Promised Land (Num:10-36). Throughout this journey on the desert the Israel was experiencing the process of being formed into a people. This foundational period of Israel’s newborn life was a time marked with testing, failure and above all, learning to trust in God’s constancy in precarious environment” (Binz 1993). The desert experience provided new experiences for their formative journey.

Towards a New Life Style

In the desert, the foundations of Israel’s future life take shape. The Israelites’ self-identity begins to change as they realize the provider for their life is no longer Pharaoh with his slave wages, but their generous and faithful God. They learn how to exist in freedom, discovering that it requires a sense of responsibility and a whole new attitude towards life. Israel learns what a life of partnership with God implies, what covenanted life requires, the need for solidarity, and the legal and organizational institutions necessitated by the bond. They also realized and experienced that the purity of heart and loyalty towards commandments are inevitable in the life of Israel. It was during this period that Israel received her distinct faith and become a people that can scarcely be doubted (Bright 1971).

The first test of Israel in the wilderness parallels the first plague in Egypt: “they could not drink the water” (7:24;15:23). We have seen in the plague narratives how disorder and destruction occurs when life is distorted by bondage. When living under the God of life, Israel

discovers the abundant potential within life. Human ingenuity and imagination are able to discover the capacity that God has given to life when it is free to flourish. When Pharaoh hardened his heart, the Egyptians experienced affliction. When Israel opens its heart to listen to God's voice, the people experienced healing and abundant life. Israel is liberated from Pharaoh so that she may have the freedom to serve Yahweh. Obedience to God's commandments and precepts becomes Israel's way of demonstrating her trust in God in the specific situations of life.

Providential Accompaniment of God

In the seventh plague God rained down hail upon Egypt, destroying the source of food. In the desert God rain down bread from heaven to remove the hunger of God's people. In the eighth plague the arrival of the locusts which came and covered the land is described in the same ways as the arrival of the quail which covered the camp and provided food. When Israel abides in freedom with God and relies on divine providence, the necessities of life abound. The Israel experienced and they realized that the miraculous food in the desert as a sign of the divine care for the people on its search for a new life (Pixely 1987).

Desert a Place of Blessings

In the desert they came to realize that God bestows numerous blessings in the context of their daily lives. God's presence is not to be sought after in the extraordinary, in strange and inexplicable events. Rather, divine generosity is discovered in all that contributes to Israel's life. Yahweh is intimately involved in the daily needs of this new community of God's people. Yahweh gives Israel the necessities of life. Manna sustains the people with the gift of nourishment; the Sabbath favors Israel with necessary rest and renewal. Yet, with God's gifts, also comes responsibility. Thus, God tests the Israelites so that God's generosity becomes the occasion for Israel to develop a responsible life style (Binz 1993).

In the desert land where life is so precarious and death is always threatening, God works through Moses and his staff to provide water for the people. Moses' striking the rock to bring water for the people to drink is the life-giving counterpart to Moses striking the Nile to make the water unfit to drink in the bondage. The tradition of Israel saw much more significance in these events than satisfying the physical needs. During the crucial moment, after crossing the river Jordan to take possession of the Promised Land Moses exhorts the

Israel to remember the blessings and Lord's saving acts in the Exodus and the wilderness and to hold firm to their covenant pledge during the days to come. "Yahweh tested, disciplined, and humbled Israel to burn into her heart the secret of her election. He tested her so that she might find out what was in her heart" (Stock 1969).

Tests and Self-Recognition

"The purpose of the test is Israel's self-recognition which consists in humility. Humility, and not pride, is the proper response to Yahweh's election" (Stock 1969). Israel is not chosen because she is bigger (Deut 7:7) or better than other people (Deut 9:4). More than that, self-recognition of sinfulness (Deut 9:7) and turning way from the sins are essential to enter into the covenantal relationship. Through Deuteronomy 8:14-16 Moses is bringing out the sum total of the wilderness experience. Here we can see the meaning of various events and experiences that take place in our life as the part of the formation:

Do not become proud of heart. Do not then forget Yahweh your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the place of slave-labour, who guided you through this vast and dreadful desert, a land of fiery snakes, scorpions, thirst; who in this waterless place brought water out of the flinty rock; who in this desert fed with manna unknown to your ancestors, to humble you and test you and so make your future happier. (Deut 8:14-16)

Even in the wilderness God the accompanier is responsive to the needs of the complaining people. God provides what the context cannot. The protests are answered; the cries are heard, quite undeservedly. Deliverance comes, but not in being removed from the wilderness. A table is spread in the very presence of the enemy (Ps 23: 5). There is a gift of food where the resources are only ephemeral. There is a gift of water where only rocks abound. There is a gift of healing where the pain never ends. The movement from death to life occurs within the every experience of God forsakenness. Death is transformed into life from within a death-filled context. A sanctuary is provided, but in the wilderness. In the midst of light and shadows Israel experienced invisible hands of God who accompanies and to whom they can give trustfully. This experience of life led them to enter into a covenantal relationship with God.

The formative journey will be always an experience of wilderness both for the formee and the accompanier. All the way of wilderness God bore Israel on eagle's wing, and that is the way he bears us today. He leads us by grace and we walk with by faith (Mcgee 1984). During

this journey the visible things will only be transient and temporary. The transcended values and the dreams of our commitment will be always in shadows. This time the accompanier must lead them to the everlasting light and life in their journey. Through various processes they must be helped to experience the healing of the divine healer in their wounded experiences of life. They must be convinced that there would be total liberation and freedom in the life not by removing the wilderness from life but by facing the wilderness with courage and wisdom. Thus they will be able to enter into a covenantal relationship with a God experience; they had in their wilderness of life.

The Covenantal Experience of Israel

The journey that started from Egypt has entered into a new phase in the formation of the people of God. Exodus chapter 19-24 are the descriptions of the covenant at Mount Sinai. As the people reach Mount Sinai, the narrative returns to its source. Anticipated since Moses' experience of Yahweh at the burning bush, the movement of Exodus has been to bring Israel to this place of encounter with God. Here God will come to meet Israel and reveal the divine nature more fully, just as God met Jacob and said, "I am God of your father. Do not be afraid of going down to Egypt for I will make you into a great nation there. I shall go down to Egypt with you and I myself shall bring you back again" (Gen 46: 3-4) has come to meet Moses to reveal the divine name. Finally He revealed himself to the people of Israel to fulfill the promise He had given to Patriarchs.

Chapter 19: 3-8 verses serve us to have a style and structure of understanding of covenant. The opening ceremony is with a proclamation of God's mighty deeds (19:4); in the second part, the conditions of the covenant are set forth (19: 5-6) and finally, the people give their free response of commitment (19: 7-8). This is the pattern, which dominated all of Israel's subsequent ceremonies of covenant renewal (Jos 24: 1-28).

The invitation to covenant is based on God's deeds in the past. God is here described as an eagle bearing its young to the mountain. Further is developed in Deuteronomy 32:10-11, the image is one of its nature and protection, in which the parent eagle tenderly cares for its young and hovers over them. It is also an image of testing and maturation, in which the eagle helps the young to fly themselves by catching them as they fall from the nest and bearing them on its outstretched wings. The image is one of gentle encouragement, preferring to elicit a free

response from people rather than imposing submission by force (Binz 1993).

The Core of the Covenant

Exodus chapters 19 and 24 narrate the preparation, actual covenant and its ratification. The people of Israel go through the ordeal of preparation for the theophany and they recognize the terrible sovereignty of the transcendent God who appears on the mountain in the thunder, fire and lightning. Here they reach the phase of maturity to declare; “all that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient” (Ex 24:7) (Mulloor 2002).

The conditions for the relationship with God call for Israel to listen to God’s voice and keep God’s covenant. It is a personal invitation to experience life more fully, based on the faithfulness that God of Israel would be described by three separate but interrelated images. As God’s “special possession” among all other people, Israel would be like the crown Jewel of a king’s treasure. As a kingdom of priests, Israel would have special access to Yahweh and would serve as mediators between God and other kingdoms. As a “holy nation”, Israel would be set apart from others for the worship and service of God. Israel’s response, “Everything the Lord has said, we will do”, indicates the people’s enthusiastic acceptance of this relationship with God. It is a pledge to a God to whom they are already closely related. The remaining events at Sinai will unfold the implications of their commitment and reveal more fully the nature of this life-giving God of the covenant.

In the following part Moses and the Israel are preparing for the theophany to come. As a preparation washing of clothes and refrain from sexual relationships are the indications that to have a separation from what is normal and good in daily existence is essential, to prepare for an extra ordinary encounter with the divine (Durham 1987). The commandments are an integral part of the Sinai narrative. They flow out of the action of God’s self-revelation and God’s instructions for the life of the community are centered in the self-identification of the living and freeing God. God’s commandment, which could have been understood as another form of bondage for Israel, are understood as the gracious instruction of the God who leads them through obedience to greater freedom and fuller life.

Since the Sinai narrative is all about the unique interpersonal relationship with God established with Israel, the law is understood to be a gift of God’s generosity and an opportunity for Israel to

personally, respond to what God has done on her behalf. For every generation, responding to God's commandments, just as worshipping God in Liturgy, would be a way of sharing in the redeeming actions of the Exodus and living in the covenant (Binz 1993).

The Ten Commandments are the testimony of the Sinai covenant. The law expresses Israel's commitment, to be faithful to the Exodus experience.

These principles embrace the whole order of life in its God-ward and man-ward relationships, and comprise in summary from the whole law of God. The preponderantly negative forms of the commands is protest against sin in the midst of His redeemed people, but is also a pointer to the triumph of grace in that this protest becomes the rule of life and the instrument of death (Hywel 1986).

The foundational covenant had been based on Yahweh's wondrous deliverance of Israel from slavery into freedom; the renewed covenant is grounded in an experience just as marvelous. Yahweh delivered Israel from the self-imposed bondage of deadly sin and, through divine forgiveness, brought her back to the freedom and life that God's presence provides. God promises to work awe-inspiring 'marvel' among the people of Israel. On her part, Israel must maintain exclusive loyalty in her worship of Yahweh. The marvels that God will work concern the events associated with Israel's inheritance of the Promised Land (Binz 1993).

Conclusion

The wondrous deliverance and covenantal relationships are not limited by the experiences of the history of Israel. It is continuing till the end of the world among the pilgrims of the Church. Those who are journeying towards the covenantal relationship through religious vows must be helped by the accompaniers to recognize the continuing process of Exodus in their daily life. When the formative journey in religious life arrives at a special point the pilgrims to religious life are allowed to enter into a covenantal relationship. This relationship is always based on the personal experience of continuous presence of God who walks along with us. The living presence of God enforces us to give our life as a thanksgiving offering to God. During this journey towards the self-giving offering there will be various movements of crisis, at which presence of an accompanier is inevitable.

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