

GET YOU TO YOUR BURDENS*

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
לְמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן
תִּפְרִיעוּ אֶת־הָעָם מִמַּעֲשֵׂיו
לְכוּ לְסִבְלַתְיִכֶם:

And the king of Egypt said to them:
Wherefore Moses and Aaron
do you cause the people to break loose from their work?
Get you to your burdens.

And the king of Egypt said to them—As with all authorities who are by their own lights unaccountable to higher authority, whether human or divine, he was indifferent to the demand of God that he had just heard through the righteous words of the prophets Moses and Aaron. Wherefore Moses and Aaron [?]—By what authority do you challenge my authority, which is unassailable? I recognize no higher power than myself, no higher purposes than my own. *[Wherefore]* . . . *do you cause the people to break loose from their work*—“Up till now the people know nothing other than they exist under the law, that hard labor is the natural lot to which they are born” (S.R. Hirsch). They are mine, my possessions, to serve me and my law; and they may have no other purpose or master. (As I have already said [5:2], your God means nothing to me.) *Get you to your burdens*—“The implication was: the people are busy with their tasks, and have made no appeals or requests. . . . You are only distracting them with your agitation” (N. Leibowitz). You too are subject to my will and must stop agitating the people to rebel against my power, must stop stirring them up with visions of a God of justice and with hopes of freedom from their burdens.

* Exodus 5:4 (in Shemot)