

# Follow the Guide

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As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Jim Crow laws presented Afro American people with a set of rules that boiled down to separate *and* unequal rights. Wherever there was white privilege to be experienced, there was, at the very same moment, black oppression. Many folks just accepted these inequities by saying to themselves, 'Well, rules are rules. You can't change 'em. Just accept 'em.' But Martin Luther King, Jr., who is credited as a monumentous leader in the struggle for Civil Rights, was a rule-changer—a person that refused to accept the rules as they appeared in his time. He notably was responsible for, or helped to propel, the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955, the co-founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957, the joining in the Albany Movement of the early 1960's—King helped to foster the Birmingham, Augustine, and Selma campaigns, and probably one of the things that he is most known for is the 1963 March on Washington. While this is a very short list of some of his accomplishments, Dr. King gears up to fight a tyranny that seems impossible to topple. He becomes an acclaimed champion from out of obscurity. Where have we heard this before? If you are familiar with the story of Moses, you understand that it is Moses' task to topple tyranny--and free an abused and vexed people from under the hand of a selfish and terrible tyrant--Pharaoh. He was commissioned, charged, and challenged by God to return to a place that represented pain for him—Egypt—and free the oppressed children of Israel. Martin's genius--Moses' genius--in manipulating the systems in power to bring liberation--were certainly not their own. There is a common thread that runs between the two leaders--and it doesn't take much work for us to deduce who is the true genius behind Social Justice in *any* age--*any* time--no matter how many *thousands* of years the oppressed groups are separated. The Original Social Justice Advocate is none other than the Lord, Our God! Who else is/was present? It has often been said that humans are inherently selfish creatures. Certainly we cannot believe that our wish to redeem the plight of others originated from our own thought. Not so! Our burning passion and desire comes from the very Being who, with care and deliberate diligence, formed a man and woman at the beginning of time--receptors for his love--beings of his doting--creatures of His protection. And this same Creator would *not* stand for the subversion of his creation--even by itself. So what does he do? He intervenes and puts social justice in the hearts of selected men and women. It is clearly recorded for us in the pages and annals of history. And if we choose to take a page out of *his* book--to relish in *his* guidance, there is *no* telling how commonplace freedom for *all* will one day become!

Our text outlines the familiar story of Moses' interaction with God via the burning bush experience. On the surface, we see a series of events that ultimately lead to God's giving Moses instructions to return to Egypt to free the Israelites. But upon deeper inspection, this text outlines a guide to social justice: I want to spend a little time on some of the things that this guide teaches us about waging a war against injustice. We can outline, in this sequence of events between Moses and God, a guide that will assure success in waging the war against social injustice--continuing the Legacy of freedom fighters across the globe. The guide begins by telling us that Moses was watching Jethro's flock and look! The angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a fire's flame from inside the bush. The Lord does not come (in this case) with trumpets, pomp, and circumstance. No! He appears out of something commonplace; mundane;

everyday. He makes himself known through an object very familiar: Fire. God infuses himself in the 'everyday-ness' of the fire. Why? Well, the Lord positions Himself within something so mundane as fire, because, when the natural or ordinary thing is juxtaposed against the Lord's power and deity, the stark contrast between the two further emphasizes his real power! The tension that *natural occurrence* creates when it meets *Divine Intervention* magnifies the Divine! How much more is the Lord's Might proven when he is revealed through ordinary things vs. His being announced through Divine flashing light and trumpet sounds? What is the guide to social justice saying to us here? As we prepare to wage this battle against social injustice, we must first find God in the mundane. It is NOT in the places of flashiness that he is found. *No!* The guide says that he reveals himself through the commonplace. Kevin! In our efforts to attain social justice, you mean to tell me that I can fight injustice by something as small as empowering a child to read? Are you telling me that something so commonplace as reading builds a self-worth and confidence within a child that will allow them to say *no* to gangs, drugs, sex, and improper living--diverting them from prison cells?! How can something so mundane as reading change a person's future? Who would've *ever* guessed that the Lord would transform something so ordinary into a tool that could change the world! Is God really in the mundane??? *This* revelation makes things like *Freedom Schools all the more necessary!* In handing a child a book—fostering a love for learning, you provide keys to a better life! You can't tell me that the finger prints of the Lord aren't apparent, when the cells that were built based on children's test scores are *not* occupied, due to programs like FS intercepting these children—removing them from the cradle to prison pipeline—placing books in their hands. The Lord is right *there*—in the mundane. And what is mundane to us becomes a *miracle* for them!

The guide goes on. Moses sees the fire. He notices that the fire is not consuming the bush. Moses says, why is this bush not burning? Let me see! Fire, as we know, has *many* qualities and characteristics. It can purify, give light, provide heat, and destroy, among other things. But it is not the purifying nature of fire that we witness here, or its ability to give light and heat. Fire sometimes also symbolized the Presence of God, and though he *was* in the flame within the bush, during the account, the text speaks from Moses' *perception of the spectacle*—not what we are informed of prior. The text uplifts, *from Moses' viewpoint*, the destructive quality of the fire: When Moses *saw* that the fire did not do what it had the natural propensity to do, which was to destroy that bush, he was surprised. The bush did not burn because the Lord had joined himself to the relationship between fire and bush. As a result, the fire's natural propensity/proclivity to destroy the bush was defied. It would seem that the guide would suggest that when The Lord finds his way into relationships that appear, at first glance, to be inevitably destructive, a wonder is produced: Moses witnesses, and is consequently baffled, that the relationship between the fire and the bush did not take its natural course, because the Lord intended it. It was *not* the fire's consuming power that fixated Moses' attention, but the *ability* of God to preserve the bush--under fire. As we read the guide, we must pause and ask ourselves, how often have *we* been preserved *under fire*? We must further admit, that things that had the *propensity* to destroy us did *not*--frankly *could* not, because the Lord had intervened in the mundane: Thousands of years ago, a Pharaoh got nervous when he saw the people of Israel waxing great in his land. What does he do? He taxes them greatly; oppresses them. He kills a great number of them. What happens to the children of Israel? Do they become extinct? Do they languish? No! They do the opposite. They wax even greater!! In the 1950s and 60s, Jim Crow unrest grows to a head, leading to murders, oppression, and persecution. Does this kill the African-Americans off? Does this end protesting? No! They wax greater. They unite. People from all walks of life and backgrounds have been fighting for rights for *centuries*--under fire, but not consumed. Why? What does the guide tell us? The Presence of the Lord *defies* destruction--even when ALL evidence would suggest that the bush should've been utterly destroyed. As we fight under fire, we must pray for God's presence--that we may defy the odds--and survive *beyond* probability; beyond statistical data; beyond natural propensities.

Next, the text says that the Lord saw that Moses turned aside to see, and *then*, he called his name, "Moshe. Moshe." It was only after Moses was fully invested in the spectre that his name was called. When God saw that he had Moses' attention--that Moses was fully invested, that's when he called his name. What is the guide suggesting? We must ask ourselves the question, what are *we* doing to get the full attention of people that we wish to enlist in the fight against injustices? The Lord was *very* deliberate in his actions of drawing Moses to see what it was that he was doing--he enacted a series of events that were *sure* to attract Moses' attention.

We cannot call people into this fight haphazardly--folks who don't feel connected in some way or form. Do you *really* think I am gonna care about Civil Rights, Freedom School Rights, or human rights in general, if I haven't been exposed or witnessed the burning (or lack thereof) for myself? How can you make the burning experience tangible for those you wish to enlist? What *will* I do to ensure that I get your attention?

Let's also notice for a moment that in this ordeal, Moses met the Lord *in action* before he ever knew his name. If we take the Lord's lead in constructing a social justice movement, our actions often precede the revealing of our names! Now is not the time to expect notoriety. We must not keep lifting our heads from the work, expecting recognition, or the work will never get done! The chance for folks to learn our names will come. For now, keep working! Follow the Lord's guide and your name will be made known. Follow the Lord's guide, and speak truth to power. Follow the Lord's guide, and learn your true self. Most importantly, follow the Lord's guide, and help someone to gain their freedom!

Finally, what does Moses do in response to his name being called? He responds. I'm here. Let's leave the guide for a moment and turn the lens on ourselves. We have *seen* how the fire has not consumed in our own lives, due to the help of the Lord--in our own worlds--how the Lord has sustained. Does he have *your* attention? He is calling your name (Moshe, Moshe). Will you answer (Moshe, Moshe)? Will you divert responsibility?? Will you wait for others to do it? Will you make excuses? I want you to follow the guide for the last time, in our conversation and when you are next called--which is right *now*, I want you to say, *Here I am*.