

Keep going

By [Kristin M. Swenson](#)

September 8, 2008

Sometimes liberation is not enough. When the Hebrew people finally escaped Egypt, they might have shaken off their shackles, so to speak, but they still weren't done. Pharaoh and his army came barreling after them. So they had to keep going as hard and fast they could, and their faith had to keep going too.

Well, Moses stood on the Red Sea shore;
and smote the water with a two by four.
Pharaoh's army got drown-ded.
O Mary, don't you weep.

Bruce Springsteen's *Seeger Sessions* introduced me to this beautiful old spiritual. And thanks to the wonders of YouTube, you can [listen](#) to it here.

The Hebrew word for the sea has rich connotations: it can mean either the Reed Sea or the Sea of the End, the end of slavery, oppression and humiliation, and the start of something new. When the Hebrew people fled to the edge of the sea, they ran into the threshold between then and now, the end of human bondage and the beginning of a new relationship with God. And they panicked and despaired (Ex. 14:10-12). Sometimes liberation is not enough.

Moses assured them, in admirably pastoral fashion, that God would rescue them. "You only have to keep still," says Moses. But God interjects, "Why are you complaining to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward!" After liberation, keep going. As the kids in my neighborhood might say, "God don't truck with no slack-asses." (It's a rough neighborhood.) God countered Moses' advice for the people to relax and let God take care of things with a sharp "No! Pick your liberated self up and keep going." You'll notice that God leads the people. God does not carry them. God doesn't part the waters, but requires Moses to lift up his staff and reach out his hand

to divide the sea. God doesn't vaporize the army but tells Moses again to stretch out his hand so that the waters would return to drown Pharaoh's men.

How many times must you forgive? Forgive and forgive again (Matt. 18:21-25). How many times must you refrain from judging? Again and again (Rom. 14:1-12). There's a Zen saying that before enlightenment, one must chop wood and carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood and carry water. After liberation, keep going.