

# The Electronic Wailers Discography

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## Interpretations

Through Hudade to Fasika with the Hon. Robert Nesta Marley, O.M.

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Being a series of weekly I-tations (1995) for Abye Tsome inspired by the spiritual melodies of the sweet singer unto JAH, Berhane Selassie.

Abye Tsome: The Great Fast...also called Hudade, or the Day of Duty...actually forty days of duty, or fifty-five with the "Fast of Heraclius"... the long prelude to the glory of Fasika, the Orthodox Easter.

In Ethiopia and among the Orthodox Rastafari Brethren of Jamaica, this is a season of "luminous darkness", a time to return to roots, a time to renew the spiritual struggle. "Let us set out upon the Ocean of the Fast; let us prepare for mystical combat..." So they chant.

One way to enter the spirit of the season is to listen with attention to the songs of Bob Marley, whose whole life was a sort of "Abye Tsome" culminating in his Orthodox baptism under the new name Berhane Selassie -- a personal Fasika.

Let us set out...

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### Redemption Song

I-tation by Norman H. Redington

Old pirates yes they rob I

-- And who are these pirates? In history, they were of course the European slavers, in collusion with certain traitor-princes of West Africa. In the spiritual sense, the slavers are

the Spirits of the Air, the fallen watchers mentioned in the Book of Enoch; the corrupt chieftains are we ourselves, we who...

Sold I to the merchant ships

that is, to bondage to materialism and the god and goods of this world. Bound in the hulls and hells of the slave-ships of our own bodies, we are carried away from our spiritual homeland, the true Ethiopia which means "union with God", into slavery to self-centeredness. From the Unfathomable Abyss of Love, as God is called by the Elders, we are cast into the Abyss of the devil and his angels, just as (according to the Jamaican elders asked why JAH permitted slavery), the Africans who had abandoned the true faith for obeah were punished with exile from the Black Man's home, and just as the people of Jerusalem were carried off to the Babylonian captivity for their idolatry.

But, as with the exile of the Israelites to Babylon, this exile is also in a way a necessary thing, a desperate last-resort call: Awaken! Once one recognizes that one is a slave and an exile, one has started to return, and the very power of Babylon is, as in the Hebrew days, the arm of the Lord carrying His People home:

Minutes after they took I from the bottomless pit.

Hudade begins with the call to repent, to return from exile, to return to our roots which are in JAH's own love. We can not do this alone: human strength cannot bridge the gap from Adam to God. But God himself will give us strength for the effort:

My hand it was made strong by the hand of the Almighty  
Forward in this generation triumphantly

What then is the effort for which we are strengthened, the struggle to which we are called? It is the Ascetic struggle:

Emancipate your selves from mental slavery  
None but our selves can free our mind

--our "selves" being our true selves, the Image and Likeness of the King.

Wa - have no fear for atomic energy  
Cause none of them can change the time

However strong the "powers and principalities" of this world, the rulers of the elements (as they think themselves) may seem, they are powerless. The true King of the Elements is JAH Adonai Egziabher, and it is He who has set the times and seasons...including, as an icon, the sacred time of Hudade.

How long will they kill our prophets while we stand aside and look?

Here the perspective tilts forward to the last and most difficult week of the season, the Great Week before Fasika. As they killed the prophets, they will kill the Son also-- and "they" are "we", for the very Apostles "stood aside and looked" (if indeed they were even brave enough to do that!) But that despairing hour, when the struggle seems to have been in vain, is not the end:

Some say it's just a part of it, we got to fulfil the book.  
Won't you help to sing these songs of freedom?  
All I ever had-- redemption songs, these songs of freedom.

May the compassionate Saviour of the World, through the intercessions of His All-Pure Mother Maryam, of the Ascetic Fathers Takla Haymanot the Ethiopian and Gabra Manfas Qeddus, and of all the saints, guide us through the Ocean of the Fast that we may be found worthI to behold His Third-Day Resurrection!

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The Hudade Prayer of Mar Ephraim:

Lord and Master of My Life,  
Grant Not to me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust for power, and meaningless talk  
Grant rather the Spirit of sanity, humility, patience and Love to Thy servant  
Yea O Lord and King grant that I may see my own fault  
And not judge my brother  
For Thou art Blessed unto the ages of ages.  
Selah.

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### **Real Situation - Total Destruction**

I-tation by Norman H. Redington

Check out the real situation.  
Nation war against nation.  
Where did all begin? Where will it end?

The reference is not solely to wars between countries, but to the violence and hatred which in some form or other, open or disguised, pervades all of human life. Indeed, it pervades our very selves -- the reason we are not at peace with our neighbors is that we are not at peace within ourselves. According to James 4:1 -- "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not even hence, even of the lusts that war in your members? Ye lust and have not; ye kill and desire to have and cannot obtain; ye fight and war, yet ye have not..."

Seems like total destruction the only solution.

Indeed it does. If we look within and see only a stormy ocean of random impulses, social conditioning, and egoistic desires, then the personal outlook is as bleak as the international.

It ain't no use -- nobody can stop them now.

Our divided selves inevitably bear us away from God and toward death. They cause our social systems to change inevitably from Zion the Holy into Babylon the (Self-)Destructive One; they bring us into the hands of (and worse, make us resemble) the proud evil spirits who prefer eternal destruction to eternal joy. And there is no escape - for we are prisoners of ourselves, our own thoughts and inward conversation. "The tongue can no man tame, an unruly evil full of deadly poison." [James 3:8]

Give them an inch, they take a yard.  
Give them a yard, they take a mile.

In Jamaica, a yard is where you live. Give them an inch and you're homeless.

Once a man and twice a child, and everything is just for a while.  
Seems like total destruction the only solution.

The way of the world, the onrush of sensations and impulses and passions, ceases only at death to which it unavoidably leads. King Solomon said: "That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; as one dieth, so dieth the other, yea they have all one breath: so that a man hath no pre-eminence over a beast, for all is vanity." St Paul wrote of this state: "I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity... o wretched man that I am, who will deliver me?" The apostle answered his own question: "I thank JAH through Jesus Christ my Lord." Seeing the hopeless condition of human beings, God did something so astounding that "the angels beheld and were amazed, the heavens were full of fear." The LORD Himself, the second person of the All- Holy Trinity, took on *tewahido* (oneness) with his creation. Immortal God became mortal man, subject to certain death. Yes, God Himself accepted

Total destruction.

And, paradoxically, destruction became resurrection:

The only solution.

Let us therefore rejoice: the unstoppable force has been stopped, the invincible enemy has been defeated, and the doorway to Life stands open!

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At the beginning of Hudade it is the custom to approach every member of the community and say with a prostration: "Forgive me, brother [or sister] for all that I have knowingly

or unknowingly done against you." To which the traditional reply is: "The Lord God forgives" and an embrace.

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## Get Up, Stand Up

I-tation by Norman H. Redington

In Ethiopia the pre-Easter "Lent" -- Hudade Tsome -- is observed with abstinence from certain foods, confession of faults, the performance of long church services using special music in a special mode heard only at this time of year... in short, by "religious activities". But if that is all they are, Hudade has completely failed in its purpose, which is to liberate man and woman from every idol, including "religion", and put them in touch with the Living JAH.

Thus, many Orthodox believers are particularly fond of Bob Marley's song "Stand Up for Your Rights", a song so Christian, and therefore so shockingly anti-religious, that attempts have been made by some to portray it as satanic when the very opposite is true!

Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights

The word "rights" here means not only political and economic rights (although they are included); "rights" translates the word "zedek", common (in some spelling) to Hebrew, Amharic, and Ge'ez. ["Zedekiah" = Zedek Jah = Jah's Righteousness.] It denotes perfect conformity with the Love of God: as Marley sings in another song, "They sold Marcus Garvey for rights".

Most people think great god will come from the sky

Well, are they wrong? This was, after all, proclaimed in almost exactly those words by the Ethiopian Church Council of Negus Joshua, and no Rastafari Bredren doubts that the End will come, JAH will be revealed in glory, the Black Star Liner will sail. The error is not the statement of fact GREAT GOD WILL COME FROM THE SKY but in the way MOST PEOPLE THINK.

Slaves think what their masters want; slave-masters (including the invisible non-human slave-masters who kept the plantation-owners themselves as slaves) have always promoted religion as the "opium of the people", a drug to prevent both political and spiritual awakening. What use is a mythical, non-existent god unconnected to creation?

Take away everything:

The evil one always claims that God is uninvolved with matter, interested only in the spirit. It hardly matters whether the implication is that only matter exists or that matter is an illusion; either way God is exiled to a shadowy ghost-world far from ours. The

Orthodox teaching however is that there is "tewahido", a complete oneness, in the universe: "Thou art everywhere and fillest all things." God is more real than the universe itself and he is not far away, but here; he will make all things new, not TAKE AWAY EVERYTHING.

And make everybody feel high:

Note the assumption -- which is indeed how MOST PEOPLE THINK! -- that *they* are safe from the Great Judgement. God will excuse my little transgressions, won't he? We'll all be in heaven by and by, right?

But if you know what life is worth, you will look for yours on earth:

Look for it, because it is lost. On earth, because that is where we are, and more importantly because (glory be to JAH) that is where He is too: "Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? -- that is, to bring Christ down from above -- or, Who shall descend into the deep -- that is, to bring up Christ from the dead -- but rather, the word is nigh thee."

Waking up to this reality, realizing the presence of JAH here and now, is the purpose of the various Hudade exercises:

Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights.

Sick and tired of your easing, kissing game, dying and going to heaven in Jesus' name:

The whole hypocritical charade of otherworldly religion, which bears no fruit (tafari) either in political justice or personal holiness. "Neither like Judas will I give thee a kiss, but like the Thief I cry unto thee, Egzio Iyasus Krestos, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner."

For we know and we understand almighty God is a living man:

Indeed, the only fully living Man. The rest of us live only to the extent that we live in HIM. Without HIM, we are duppies haunting the earth even before our physical deaths, but with HIM we are so alive that physical death is a minor matter. Indeed, although we will someday experience physical death and physical resurrection (for good or for ill), this is almost unimportant, because NOW is the day of duty (hudade): "Behold, THIS day have I set two roads before you, one to life and one to death. Choose life therefore, that ye may live."

Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights.

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Afrocentric Footnote: The Day of Gregorios Palamas

So now you've seen the light, stand up for your rights:

In many Orthodox countries (but not in Ethiopia, for reasons that will be obvious) the third Sunday of Hudade is observed as "the Day of Gregorios Palamas". The story of this feast-day is of some relevance.

According to a teaching of the Jamaican Rastafari elders also found in several other African traditions, human life has three stages. In the first, man is governed by the passions; in the second, he learns self-control; in the third, he begins to perceive directly the Light of the Trinity (berhane selassie), which is not an abstraction but a seeable reality.

This was a part of the original Christian gospel from the time of the Apostles and was once taught in all Christian countries. In Ethiopia and parts of the Middle East, the Way of Enlightenment has continued unbroken from earliest times until now; in Western Europe, however, it came under attack and by at the latest AD 1200 was apparently extinct or driven underground.

In the geographically intermediate lands of Eastern Europe, the ancient doctrines about the Divine Light were also attacked, and knowledge of them receded until it is said there was only one place in all of Europe where they were still taught openly, the Greek island of Athos. In the mid-fourteenth century the Elder of the Athos God-fearers, Gregorios Palamas, was accused of heresy and blasphemy by the forces of organized pie-in-the-sky churchianity at Constantinople, and the end of the Way in the North seemed at hand.

Instead, a miracle happened. Using the Bible and the writings of the ancient Egyptian church fathers, Palamas defended the Truth so eloquently that the Greek church officials not only proclaimed him innocent of heresy but eventually declared the Western teaching, which stopped human development at the second stage, to be in error. Thus the countries under the influence of Constantinople were preserved from the false and un-Orthodox teachings (although they and Ethiopia remained divided on some other points until recently, when negotiations initiated in part by Emperor Haile Selassie have brought about widespread agreement even on these points among all Orthodox.)

In Greece and the Slavic countries, the third Sunday of the Great Fast is kept as a memorial to Gregorios Palamas and the triumph of divinely inspired African wisdom over Babylonian misunderstanding. The feast is also kept by certain Marcus Garvey Movement churches in Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda.

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## [Zion Train](#)

I-tation by Norman H. Redington

The great season of Hudade is half over; Fasika, the Day of Resurrection, is less than a month away, and we can, as it were, hear the sound of its approach:

Zion train is coming our way. Zion train is coming our way. O people, get on board, thank the Lord...

The Israelites left Egypt amid signs and wonders, led by angels and invincibly strong. They were, in that day, the Holy Orthodox Church, JAH's chosen People, and today's brethren are still led by the same Power of the Trinity manifested then. Only the Power of the Trinity can bring us out of slavery; only JAH can set Man free:

I gotta gotta train gotta no other station; are you going in the same direction? Zion train is coming our way.

But though God parted the Red Sea, the Israelites still had to walk through it on their own feet. Man must co-operate with JAH; the life in Christ is a life of ascetic struggle, of works as well as faith.

Works are of various kinds. Some are obviously good: feeding the hungry, aiding the sick, freeing the downpressed, righting injustice. But there are also works of another class: works of prayer. The Bahitawis of Ethiopia and the "Nyabinghi Warriors" of Jamaica live in amazing, self-chosen austerity, vowing to live in celibacy, poverty, and obscurity so as to focus their concentration on spiritual things.

The emphasis of some Rastas on prayer and fasting has been criticized by left-wing political organizers seeking to make Rastafari merely a force for social change; what, they ask, is the good of such things, when you could be out stirring up the masses? But Rastafari is about human persons with faces, not about the masses, and the dread knows that to see your brother's face you must first see your own. The kingdom of JAH is within you, but deeply buried, and to fight evil in the world you must fight it first in yourself. While monks and certain locks-men are the "professional" experts in the inner combat, everyone is called to it to some degree: the Hudade fast ("Lent") is in fact intended to force people to do so who might not otherwise.

Which man can save his brother's soul? Oh, add it to self-control. Don't gain the world and lose your soul. Wisdom is better than silver and gold to the prince.

To the Prince, because there is in Rasta philosophy another stage to human life beyond that of the Free Man who controls his passions. This higher princely or imperial stage is nothing less than union with JAH himself, to the extent possible for a created being. St. Athanasius the Black wrote: "We are called to become the sons of God." (Is this blasphemy? No -- it's John 1:12.)

This union is not in nature but in energy -- sonship by adoption, unlike the sonship of God the Son. But it is sonship none the less, entry into the Life of the King. It is the King's free gift, but is also the reward of good works. In African philosophy there is no

contradiction between faith and works, merit and grace; Clement of Alexandria in fact coined the word "synergy" [synergeia] to describe the relationship of God's will and man's.

Where there's a will, there's always a way; soul train is coming our way.

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Two items about Abba Macarius the Egyptian:

Abba Macarius said: The great and costly royal pearl is suitable only for a king, and only a king can wear it. So unless a man is begotten by the royal Spirit of God and is made to be of the royal family of Heaven, he cannot wear the costly pearl of heaven, the image of inexpressible light which is the Lord: "As we have worn the image of the earthly, we shall also wear the image of the heavenly" [1 Cor. 15:49].

Abba Macarius used to pray in the ruins of a pagan temple. One day he found the skull of one of the ancient priests, which spoke to him and said: You are Macarius the Spirit-Bearer. Whenever you take pity on those in torment and pray for us, we feel respite. For behold, as far as the sky is from the earth, so great is the fire in which we stand, and it is not possible to see anyone face to face, but the face of one is fixed on the back of another. Yet when you pray for us, each of us can see the other's face a little, and that is our respite."

[After R.T.Meyer's translation of the Lausiac History; those who are interested can find more in the various works on the Coptic desert fathers which have been]

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### [So Much Things to Say](#)

This I-tation contributed by Karen Keck of the [St. Pachomius Project](#).

They got so much things to say right now they got so much things to say  
They got so many things, so many, so very many things to say.

But I never forget no way that they crucify Jesus Christ  
And I never forget no way that they stole Marcus garvey for rights  
And I never forget no way that they turned their backs on Paul Bogle  
So don't you forget no way  
Who you are and where you stand in the struggle.

They got so much things to say right now...

But I and I no come to fight flesh and blood  
But spiritual wickedness in I and low places

So while they fight me down stand firm  
And give Jah thanks and praises.  
Cause I and I no expect to be justified by the laws of men.  
You can find me guilty,  
But who will prove my innocency?

Oh when the rain fall, it don't fall on one man's house alone  
Remember that: when the rain fall...

They got so much to say, they got so very, very much  
They don't know what they're doing they ---

"One of the Church Fathers asks in an evening prayer that he not be shaken by the wickedness of the world, and Berhane Selassie also reminds us to stand firm and not to be shaken up or taken in by the chatter of the world.

The "They" have so much to say and would be among the first to proclaim their own righteousness -- and yet what have they done. The Pharisees, the righteous men of the world, crucified Jesus Christ, the Holy One of God. The British and American governments persecuted Marcus Garvey while he was alive, but now they portray him as a forerunner of civil rights, a figure to be praised, not to be feared as a subversive. Paul Bogle peacefully approached the government to seek Jamaican independence, but he was rebuffed and martyred, and Jamaica became a Crown Colony. The people who crucified Christ, the people who persecuted Garvey, the people who betrayed Bogle had so much to say, but it was all a form of spiritual wickedness.

The "I" who fights spiritual wickedness now is standing firm when they fight him. We must remember that we are here to fight more than flesh and blood, and we are here to fight spiritual wickedness in high and low places. We are here to praise God in spite of what is being said around us. They find us guilty as they found Christ, Garvey, and Bogle guilty, but God will prove our innocence as He has proven that of Christ, Garvey, and Bogle. We are not alone; the rain that falls, falls on all of us. We must stop listening and stand firm."

--Karen

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### **Guiltiness - Woe to the Downpressor**

I-tation by Norman H. Redington

THEY WOULD DO ANYTHING TO MAKE YOU REALIZE YOUR EVERY WISH: a curious sort of downpressor! What does this mean? Is it just sarcasm -- the downpressor claiming to be on your side, but really trying to EAT DOWN THE SMALL FISH?

There's more to it than that; a deeper meaning.

THEY -- the rulers of Babylon, the commanders of the invisible enemy lowerarchy -- would indeed DO ANYTHING TO MAKE YOU REALIZE YOUR EVERY WISH because it is your wishes, your passions and desires, which keep you in slavery. As Marley sings in another song: "Every need got an ego to feed" -- the selfish ego, as opposed to the loving I, is a pharaoh and a despot and a fighter against us.

That is why the great Hudade Fast was created by the holy elders: as a reminder that everyone is called to battle in the great uprising to turn the self from men's prisonhouse to Man's palace.

Life is a revolution, though not against merely earthly powers.

THESE ARE THE BIG FISH: In the Psalms, in Job, and (in the unabridged Orthodox Bible) in the Second Book of Ezra, we read about the Big Fish, Leviathan, in some detail. Together with his dry-land counterpart Behemoth, Leviathan symbolizes all the forces of arrogance, materialism, and pride of power. In Ethiopia, the -dabteras- or professional church singers, who unfortunately sometimes dabble in obeah on the side, often make little paintings of Leviathan and Behemoth on tiny scrolls, which are then rolled up and worn around the neck as talismans. Usually there are two scenes in these paintings, the second showing Leviathan alone with the world balanced on his tail, because they say "the sea-beast will devour the land beast". In Amharic-speaking monasteries nowadays, "Leviathan" is used by some to signify the negative side of Western civilization, just as Rastas use "Babylon"; some monks go so far as to say that "the one beast devouring the other" refers to the triumph of the capitalist monster over the communist one!

THAT ALWAYS TRY TO EAT DOWN THE SMALL FISH: As is well known, the word -ichthys- meaning "fish" is a Greek acronym for "Jesus Christ Son of God Saviour" (Iesous CHristos THEou HYios Soter). The Small Fish was the secret sign used by Christians in the Roman catacombs, and even today in North Africa a popular style of Coptic cross is designed to suggest a fish.

WELL I'M JUST A SMALL FISH: The Christian and his Lord are one in energy; it is not by chance that Christ used fish to represent people when he told his fisherman-apostles "Henceforward you will catch men."

BUT WOE TO THE DOWNPRESSOR! Jewish tradition says that at the Messianic Banquet the saved will feast on the meat of Leviathan, who had sought to devour them. You won't find it in the King James, but the Orthodox Bible (and also the Latin Vulgate Bible used by Catholics in the old days) gives Psalm 74:14 as "Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan, and give him as food to the Ethiopian people". An Amhara legend connects this verse with the Queen of Sheba's father burning the idol of the serpent-god and fertilizing the ground with the ashes.

Like the pagans of Sheba, all mankind was once under the rule of the evil serpent-god, but now he has been overthrown by the True God. Death which swallowed up all men has itself been swallowed up. We are now at the end of Hudade and in one week approach Fasika, Orthodox Easter [this year a week later than Western Easter]. This is Himmat, the week of Christ's suffering. THESE ARE THE BIG FISH THAT ALWAYS TRY TO EAT DOWN THE SMALL FISH: "The waters have gone over my head, the deeps have closed over me, save me, O my God!" Yes, God Himself will die, but on the Third Day he will rise again, raising with him all the dead:

"Jonah was caught but not held fast  
In the belly of the whale.  
He was a sign fortelling you... "

O Most Merciful Lord who have brought us through the ocean of the Fast, show us also your Third-Day Resurrection!

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{Remember, O King, Thy servant Robert Nesta Marley, in baptism Berhane Selassie, when thou comest in thy Kingdom!}

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### [Could You Be Loved?](#)

I-tation by Norman H. Redington. This I-tation is not part of the Hudade series.

In 1993, a shrine in Addis Ababa was dedicated celebrating 68 of the thousands of "victorious New Martyrs" killed under the bloody Communist dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Maryam. The New Martyrs would hardly seem "victorious": they died horribly at the will of a man who prefigured the Antichrist, a man who not only killed the Orthodox Patriarch and other spiritual leaders, but evidently had them buried under the floor of his office.

Nevertheless, they are called Victorious -- not because Mengistu is gone (Ethiopia is still a land of many sorrows), but because through their sacrifice as innocent victims or brave opponents of tyranny they have won the everlasting crown. "Greater love than this hath no man, that he lay down his life for his friends." Such is the love embodied by the Martyrs, and love, as every Rasta knows, not only conquers death but makes it irrelevant. "Rasta is not about dying; Rasta is about living."

"Could you be loved, and be love?" sang Bob Marley in one of his most astonishing philosophical songs. The question is almost a seven-word summation of the whole Coptic spiritual tradition, beginning with the fact that it is a question. Most of us in Babylonia think that God, if He existed, would be the answer to our questions; the Elders teach that it is rather JAH who asks, and we who will have to answer.

"Could you be loved?" The question can be taken in various ways. "Are you beautiful and wise, worthy of inspiring My love?" Who would dare to answer Yes to such a question from the Only Perfect One? Unbelievably, as Marley points out, it seems we all do -- nearly everyone accepts without astonishment the rather amazing (when you think about it) claim that "God loves you". In fact, in our smug self-confidence and arrogance, what we are inclined to doubt is that God loves others! But "the road of life is rocky, and you may stumble too; so while you point your fingers, someone else is judging you: could you be loved?"

But there is another sense in which the question can be taken. "Could you be loved -- if I love you, will you love Me back?" This is the tragedy of Hell: "Love would never leave us alone", but we are more than happy to leave Love alone. "Out of the darkness there must come out the light", but we all flee from the light into the darkness of our self-imprisoning thoughts. "So go to Hell if what you're thinking is not right."

By rejecting JAH we create our own Hell. We fear love and we hate love; we hate those who embody love, and seek to "fool", "school", "change", or "re-arrange" them until they are as dead as we are. This is the spiritual Babylon where we dwell in exile, estranged from our true selves by our estrangement from Love. But even here "Love would never leave us alone, out of the darkness there must come out the light." The Elders teach that the fire of Hell is nothing other than the eternal glory of JAH, the brightness and joy of the saints, clearly perceived... but rejected.

"Could you be loved, and be love?" We are always free to accept JAH and become one with his love, to say "HAILE SELASSIE I", "Power of the Trinity, I". The person who does this, who becomes Love, is like the bush of Moses which burned but was not consumed. There is a story about two Coptic elders: "Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him: I fast, I pray, I meditate, I live in peace, and as far as I can I purify my thoughts. What else can I do? Abba Joseph lifted up his hands to the heavens and his fingers became ten lamps of fire and he said: If you wish, you can become all flame."

To become "all flame" is to conquer death, to escape from slavery, to depart from Hell. It is to win the victory, but not always a victory that can be seen in this world. At Mt. Sinai, the guardians of the site of the Burning Bush also preserve the memory of one of the greatest of all African saints, the Egyptian philosopher-princess Katherine of Alexandria. One night Eiasus Kristus, Jesus Christ, appeared to her in a dream and offered her a ring. If she turned it down, she would remain who she was -- a wealthy and beautiful ruling-class intellectual. If she accepted it, she would encounter only defeat in this world, dying a martyr at the age of 18 -- but she would be love. The choice was hers. "Could you be loved, and be love? Say something. Say something."

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## **Buffalo Soldier**

I-tation by Norman H. Redington. This I-tation is not part of the Hudade series.

9 Mar 1996, Ethiopian Orthodox Lent, Week Two

Bob Marley sang:

If you know your history  
Then you would know where you coming from  
Then you wouldn't have to ask me  
Who the heck do I think I am  
I'm just a Buffalo Soldier  
In the heart of America ...

Said he was a Buffalo Soldier  
Win the war for America  
Buffalo Soldier, Dreadlock Rasta  
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival  
Driven from the mainland  
To the heart of the caribbean

Singing, woe yoe yoe, woe woe yoe yoe  
Woe yoe yoe yo, yo yo woe yo woe yo yoe

Trodding through San Juan  
In the arms of America  
Trodding through Jamaica, a Buffalo Soldier  
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival  
Buffalo Soldier, Dreadlock Rasta.

An odd version of history, some might think. The Buffalo Soldiers, of course, were the members of all-Black U.S. Army detachments stationed mainly in the West after the Civil War. Their history is well documented.

Marley saw them as warriors of myth, heroes from Africa taken fighting into slavery, fighting on for their masters but also in a way for themselves, fighting to survive and because they were born warriors, fighting in the Civil War, the Indian Wars, reaching the Caribbean in the Spanish War, migrating onwards to Jamaica: Ethiopian knights, Rasta nyabinghi warriors in dreadlocks for the Emperor.

It was a tragedy, of course; the "Indian" chorus begins "dread it, woe!" But the Buffalo Soldiers to Marley (as to their historical opponents, the tribal warriors who gave them the name) passed through the "stench" of history's corruption with their honor unscathed. They served the imperialists, it is true, but with time, in the desert, they came to see another Empire dawning in their hearts.

The true Buffalo Soldiers who gaze at us from the well known photographs, the small black men in fussy Prussian uniforms (chosen by the Department of War over the Parisian style when Bismark conquered France), loading ceremonial cannon at un-

endangered Fort Snelling south of Minneapolis -- were these the heroes of Marley's song? Were the hard riders who fought the genocidal war in Arizona, the freed slaves without a past or a future, battling the elusive guerillas, burning the rancherias, killing and dying...? What is knighthood, who is a warrior? Can good ever come out of evil?

At Fort Davis, Texas, the base of the Buffalo Soldiers for which the town is named stands at the foot of The Lion, a mountain cut from a lava flow by forgotten Miocene rivers. The profile of the royal animal is plainly visible to anyone once it is pointed out. Under The Lion's gaze the Black cavalrymen and white officers spent their decade of war and peace, Apache raids, endless drills, boredom, stockade sentences, brass bands on the gazebo, dances, deaths. Here they launched their expeditions from the relative cool of the Texas Alps into the furnace (or the deathly chill) of the Chihuahuan Desert; here if lucky they returned alive, and left at long last for the frustrations of civilian life in a country with no place for them.

What did they think about, a few of them at least, as they rode in the terrible heat? The desert like Egypt's desert, forty days in the wilderness, water scarce, an enemy maybe hiding in back of every boulder or lying flat in the sotol and creosote, rifle aimed. Where was God in the wilderness, a God for those born in slavery and freed only to fight and die in the yuccas?

From the cliff-line the Lion watched over them, the Lion of Judah, the Lion of their forgotten ancestors. As they fell beneath the Apache shotguns... as they rode mad with fury into the enemy camps, swords red with blood, the screams of children in their ears... Somewhere in the folly and the terror, the roar of the weapons and their own fear and the blood pulsing through their ears they began, a few of them, to hear another roar.

It was the Lion's roar, the voice of Him who had made the universe not for violence but for love, who reserved the sword to Himself, who ordained that the true knight battle not outward but inward foes. Across five thousand miles from the Davis Mountains to the hills of East Africa that roar sounded, shaking the rail-lines, rocking the steam-ships, unnoticed thunder above the carriage-thronged cities, the smoke-stacks and stockyards, the wharfs, the ocean, the rivers rising through the steaming green to the cool highland lakes and, beyond them, the desert once again.

In that desert the warriors of the Lion sat around charcoal fires. They did not carry guns or spears, though many once had, for Ethiopia was a land of knights and chivalry, warriors who fought and died for feudal lords or to defend the disunited Empire against invaders African and European alike. But these were the higher warriors, who had gone to the heart of the mystery and found their own rage, their own passions, to be the true enemy. They lived in the open air, ate only a small daily portion of tef mixed with water and dried plantains, They rarely slept, because the Master will return at midnight. No one could live like that, and yet some do, even today, and their faces glow with a fire not lit in this world, the fire of love.

As the hermits sat in the caves or on the dunes, mourning their sins which prevent the fulfilment of the Universe, praying for the beginning of love, gazing into the eyes of the Uncreated who became man and died that men might live, they heard the anguished cries of the Buffalo Soldiers in the New Mexico sand, of the Apaches and the Mexicans and the Anglos locked in their deadly battle, of the whole nineteenth century world fighting for life at the foot of the Lion. And hearing it, hearing the cry of the world, they wept, and their tears flowed into the crystal sea before the throne of the Lion who is also the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and overflowed again into the world, and into the cold and childish hearts of men and of warriors. The tears of the Elders, mingled with the Blood of the Lamb, flowed from the unseen fountains into the dark Caribbean, to the shores of the Isle of Fountains, Jamaica, and eventually into the soul of Berhane Selassie the bard who sang:

Buffalo Soldier, Dreadlock Rasta.  
Woe, o woe yoe a yoe.

Egzio tasahalena, Lord have mercy, preserve us from our invisible adversary as we fight the true battle of the Desert in the heart!

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Old pirates yes they rob I

-- And who are these pirates? In history, they were of course the European slavers, in collusion with certain traitor-princes of West Africa. In the spiritual sense, the slavers are the Spirits of the Air, the fallen watchers mentioned in the Book of Enoch; the corrupt chieftains are we ourselves, we who...

Sold I to the merchant ships

that is, to bondage to materialism and the god and goods of this world. Bound in the hulls and hells of the slave-ships of our own bodies, we are carried away from our spiritual homeland, the true Ethiopia which means "union with God", into slavery to self-centeredness. From the Unfathomable Abyss of Love, as God is called by the Elders, we are cast into the Abyss of the devil and his angels, just as (according to the Jamaican elders asked why JAH permitted slavery), the Africans who had abandoned the true faith for obeah were punished with exile from the Black Man's home, and just as the people of Jerusalem were carried off to the Babylonian captivity for their idolatry.

But, as with the exile of the Israelites to Babylon, this exile is also in a way a necessary thing, a desperate last-resort call: Awaken! Once one recognizes that one is a slave and an exile, one has started to return, and the very power of Babylon is, as in the Hebrew days, the arm of the Lord carrying His People home:

Minutes after they took I from the bottomless pit.

Hudade begins with the call to repent, to return from exile, to return to our roots which are in JAH's own love. We can not do this alone: human strength cannot bridge the gap from Adam to God. But God himself will give us strength for the effort:

My hand it was made strong by the hand of the Almighty  
Forward in this generation triumphantly

What then is the effort for which we are strengthened, the struggle to which we are called? It is the Ascetic struggle:

Emancipate your selves from mental slavery  
None but our selves can free our mind

--our "selves" being our true selves, the Image and Likeness of the King.

Wa - have no fear for atomic energy  
Cause none of them can change the time

However strong the "powers and principalities" of this world, the rulers of the elements (as they think themselves) may seem, they are powerless. The true King of the Elements is JAH Adonai Egziabher, and it is He who has set the times and seasons...including, as an icon, the sacred time of Hudade.

How long will they kill our prophets while we stand aside and look?

Here the perspective tilts forward to the last and most difficult week of the season, the Great Week before Fasika. As they killed the prophets, they will kill the Son also-- and "they" are "we", for the very Apostles "stood aside and looked" (if indeed they were even brave enough to do that!) But that despairing hour, when the struggle

seems to have been in vain, is not the end:

Some say it's just a part of it, we got to fulfil the book.  
Won't you help to sing these songs of freedom?  
All I ever had-- redemption songs, these songs of freedom.

May the compassionate Saviour of the World, through the intercessions of His All-Pure Mother Maryam, of the Ascetic Fathers Takla Haymanot the Ethiopian and Gabra Manfas Qeddus, and of all the saints, guide us through the Ocean of the Fast that we may be found worthI to behold His Third-Day Resurrection!

- tony, pon dis earth, United States

This was Marley's last single before his death on May 11, 1981. It sums up his life and what he stood for in his songs: freedom and redemption. Marley was a very spiritual singer who gave hope to the downtrodden in his native Jamaica, and whose message spread to the United States and around the world when he became a star.

Marley completed this album (his last) in the summer of 1980. He was suffering from the cancer that would eventually kill him at age 36, but was very productive in his later years. He refused traditional medicine because of his Rastafarian beliefs and chose to make music and perform as long as he could.

This was the last song Marley performed. He sang it from a stool at a show in Pittsburgh on September 23, 1980.

This plays over the credits for the 2007 movie *I Am Legend* starring Will Smith. It was also sung by the character Sawyer in the season finale of the first season of the show *Lost* on ABC. (thanks, Rita - South Pas., Israel, and Layla - DC, DC)

Johnny Cash and Joe Strummer both covered this song. (thanks, Bertrand - Paris, France)

The song includes lyrics inspired by a speech given by civil-rights campaigner Marcus Garvey in 1937.

Barbadian singer Rihanna covered this for the Haiti Relief Fund after the earthquake that devastated the country. Urging fans to download the track she said: "This song for me, growing up, anytime there was a difficult situation, I always listened to this song because it was so liberating. Even now I listen to it when my back is up against the wall. I feel like the people of Haiti need to hear something inspiring."

Rihanna performed an acoustic version live on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* on January 20, 2010.