

Politics & Mysticism in the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshat (Portion) Beshelah

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Shalom & welcome all. This week's Torah portion is called Beshelah (Exodus 13:17 – 17:16).

This Week...

- **Birth of the First TzaHaL, the Israelite Defense Forces**
- **Price of Liberty**
- **Relationship between the Natural and the Supernatural**
- **Sabbath, the Covenant of Liberty**

“And the children of Israel were armed when they went up out of Egypt” (Exodus 13:18). “This verse was written only to clarify the matter, so you should not wonder where they got weapons in the war with Amalek, and in the [later] wars with Sihon and Og and Midian, for the Israelites smote them with the point of the sword” (Rashi commentary).

Scripture is clear, the children of Israel went forth out of Egypt, not only armed, but also trained, and ready to fight. While scripture records that Israel clearly has weapons, scripture does not record how and when did they learn to use them? While it does not make much brains to swing a sword, it does take a tremendous amount of skill to be a trained soldier, capable of defending oneself successfully, and more so to be part of a greater military force and campaign. How then was the original Israelite Defense Forces born?

Israel goes forth from Egypt armed. Yet, it is not the plan of Heaven to lead them directly into harms way, into a fight, by leading them directly to the Holy Land. *“It came to pass when Pharaoh let the people go, that God did not lead them [by] way of the land of the Philistines for it was near, because God said, Lest the people reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt”* (Exodus 17:16). Remember, the Holy Land was not Israel's immediate destination! Moses made it very clear to Pharaoh, and we will assume equally clear to Israel, that they had an appointment at Sinai, God's mountain. And God's mountain was to the southeast, not the northeast. So, they were directed to where they needed to go.

Needed to go? Needed by whom? This was God's plan, not just to avoid panic in the newly freed people who maybe, or maybe not, had never known the taste of war, but more specifically, to arrange a surprise for Pharaoh's army at the shores of the Reed Sea. We all know what happens. God parts the sea, Israel goes through it on dry land. Pharaoh's army pursues. The waters come crashing down upon them, and they all drown. Now, let us pause a moment to review some points about this story that often get overlooked.

It is God who is the one that guided the people through the southern route pushing their backs up against the sea. This was not a smart move according to conventional wisdom, but since when has God even been accused of being conventional?

Pharaoh overcomes his grief over losing the nation's firstborn and wants his revenge. Nowhere does it say that his armies were sent to slaughter Israel. Rather, their orders were clear, to simply bring them back to Egypt. Yet, knowing that they went forth armed, implying that Israel would be ready for a fight, Pharaoh sent his full army, expecting armed resistance. God's plan here was for Israel to learn their first lesson of freedom. **“God will fight for you, but you shall remain silent”** (Exodus 14:14). Granted, under normal circumstances, freedom is preserved by force of arms, but in this case, freedom is bought and paid for by the miraculous Hand of a living God, acting through the most natural of ways.

“And God moved the sea with the strong east wind all night, and He made the sea into dry land and the waters split” (Exodus 14:21). Unlike in the movies, the Reed Sea did not part swiftly. Scripture clearly says here that God sent a strong wind to blow against the waters, causing them to part. God, the supernatural, clearly used the natural forces of nature, (a strong east wind, blowing for hours), to part the sea. The miracle here is not so much that the sea parted. Hurricane force winds can split a body of water. Yes, big winds can split even big bodies of water. The miracle here is not so much the parting of the sea. The miracle here is the timing.

The sea split when it was needed to split. Israel was there when they needed to be there. The sea split when it needed to split, and, the winds stopped blowing and the waters returned to normal, when they needed to do so. The actions, in and of themselves, were not the miracles. Rather, it was the timing of these actions that was the miracle.

God, Creator and Author of nature, uses the natural laws that He has made to do His bidding, at His Will. **“He makes winds (spirits) His messengers (angels)”** (Psalm 104:4). We can call this the “random element” active in natural law, but this random element acts with purpose, forethought and intent. Remember, God's Name, YHWH, means Active Being. Thus, we can say, in a language that would make sense to us, that the Name YHWH is (like) the Mind of God that acts through that which He has made (created by Elohim). Thus, scripture calls this the Hand of God. But, as we know from human example, no hand moves before the mind first thinks.

This is one Biblical example how we are taught to understand how the Creator of nature, God as Elohim, also intervenes in nature randomly, at Will, and is thus seen to be Actively Present (Being, YHWH) within nature and in control of it. Therefore, nature always follows the natural order, true, but at any moment, in accordance to the Divine Will, YHWH can intervene and make nature very conveniently flow in any way that YHWH so wishes, however unnatural such a flow might appear to us!

God's lesson to Israel is to know that when they do right by Him, God in turn does right by them. This is the first lesson of freedom. Freedom is not just an idea. Freedom is a pact and a bond with nature itself, and with nature's Creator. This is why we say that we (human beings) are endowed with inalienable human rights, endowed upon by our Creator. **“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”** (US Declaration of Independence). When we practice the freedom endowed upon us by God Himself, then even the natural world around us contributes to our efforts and sustains us in our liberty!

Although Israel left Egypt ready to fight, their first fight was fought by God. We must always remember that the greatest of all battles is the struggle against archetypal Egypt. Egypt represents slavery that enslaves first the mind, and then the body, or God freed both our minds and our bodies. When we remain faithful to Heaven, we maintain freedom of the mind. Yet, to maintain freedom for our bodies, for this, we need to fight. In order to properly fight this fight, we must be properly, militarily armed. Not only must we have the proverbial sword, spear and shield, we must also have the actual and realistic, proper military training to know how to use these tools that serve as defenders of our freedoms!

“Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to God, and they spoke, saying, I will sing to God, for very exalted is He, a horse and its rider He cast into the sea” (Exodus 15:1). Israel sang God's praise when they witnessed how Egypt was wiped out at their feet. They learned that nature itself and nature's God will use all natural forces at His disposal to bless those whom He wishes to bless and curse and kill those whom He wishes to curse and kill. ***“You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the powerful waters”*** (Exodus 15:10). Now, after this great lesson is learned, nature must march forward and take its natural course.

Israel, as a nation new to freedom, is taught many lessons about having faith in a Divine Creator, Who is also a natural/supernatural provider. Freedom as a lifestyle can never be separated from either the natural truths of life, or their supernatural origins. The nation naturally worries about their sustenance and God reminds them, and shows them, that while nature's bounty will provide, nevertheless, they should always know that nature's bounty is always portioned out by the Higher supernatural Hand. True freedom and liberty is practiced when we put our faith in Heaven to provide for us, and not cower at appearances, and thus go running to some more powerful Pharaoh, King, President, Prime Minister or government to provide for us that which comes to us from God, in the first place.

God reminds the nation about their relationship to the natural world, and reinforces the commandment of the Sabbath, the day of rest. The Sabbath is not just a day of rest for human beings, it is also a day of rest for nature itself. Our relationship with the Sabbath teaches us faith that God, as Creator of nature, is our provider. It is God who freed us from the tyrannies that seek to enslave us mind and body. Thus by observing the Sabbath, we are to remember both the act of Creation, and God its Creator, and the exodus from Egypt, with God as our savior. The Sabbath, therefore, is our covenant and our link to nature, to God, and to our personal liberties, and our personal integrity and sense of self-worth.

While freedom is given us as a gift from God, nevertheless it must be maintained by the armed struggle of free men. To teach the nation this most important lesson, on their way to Sinai, to worship God, Israel is attacked by Amalek (Exodus 17:8). Amalek attacks and God did not stop them. God did not strike Amalek down with a thunder-bolt. The ground did not open up beneath them to swallow them up. No miraculous interventions occurred. Amalek attacked and Israel was naturally required to go out and fight, and fight, they did.

There is no record that anyone complained about having to fight. Joshua leads the Israelite Defense Forces into their first military campaign of the many to come. Apparently, they knew how to fight. Israel was not only armed, they were trained and able to take on a seasoned military force like Amalek. Where Israel received all this training and military

ability, scripture does not record. Yet, as we see, with only the intervention of Moses' prayers, Israel is able to prevail over Amalek and to repel them with considerable success. Not too bad for a bunch of rag-tag former slaves. Maybe they were not so rag-tag after all.

This Weekly Torah Portion shows us a powerful blend of the natural alongside the supernatural, where miracles from the Hand of God compliment the accomplishments wrought by the hand of man! Scripture's message is clear, this is the way of the world!

God and man, and man and God, the two are a natural, normal and healthy partnership. When the two are united and work together as one, then the whole world is blessed thereby. Not only does this right and normal relationship produce the fruits of liberty for humanity, it also produces the blessings from Heaven upon the Earth.

Man and God, and God and man, this is the proper and true recipe for human liberty, and right and proper living. The strong hand of man, blessed by the strong Hand of God secures liberty, defends it and protects it, thereby bringing the blessings of liberty to all the world. This is why Israel was chosen to be a light to the world. ***"I will make you a light of nations, so that My salvation shall be until the end of the earth"*** (Isaiah 49:6).

The light of God that Israel bears is the light of liberty and freedom. This was, and still is, the universal message for all humanity.

God has set us free, and now it is our responsibility and duty, to fight all modern-day Amaleks that seek to attack those who pursue life, liberty and moral justice.

Any comments? Please send them to me at kosher Torah1@yahoo.com