

## Parashat BeShalah

### The Idealistic Woman, and Principles

“I will sing to God, for He has done proudly,  
Blasting horse and rider into the sea.” (15:21)

“‘For He has done proudly:’ It is due to Him alone, in great pride. One must attribute to Him the good that befalls one.” (Sforno)

“I say that this contains an allusion to what the Talmudic Sages stated (Mechilta, Beshalah 3): ‘A maidservant at the [Splitting of the Red] Sea saw things Yehezkel the prophet never saw.’ And this hymn was sung for this wonder. This female hymn, that is. For the females too said, ‘This is my God, and I will glorify Him.’ And this was a wondrous thing in their eyes, that ‘the female should determine the man.’

However, what connection does this have to the wakening the dead? The answer is that just as in the next world everyone will be divested of the physical, and then males and females will be equal, so too on the Sea, a maidservant as well could see the light of His glory, *yitbarach*.” (Kli Yakar)

From the Kli Yakar’s words we discern a difference between a man’s seeing and a woman’s seeing. The man discerns the quality of the Creator directly, as our Sages describe the future redemption, when “the *tzadikim* will be pointing to Him with their finger.” But about this wonder, at the moment of the Splitting of the Red Sea, the maidservant too saw the light of His glory, *yitbarach*. This is not the norm, but rather a most rare and exquisite aspect of reality reserved for the *tzadikim* alone. Therefore, when Miriam sang with the women, they did not sing, “This is my God, and I will glorify Him,” but rather “I will sing to God, for He has done proudly, blasting horse and rider into the sea.” That is, the woman sees God’s glory through His control over reality. Through His blasting of the horse and rider into the sea rather than through any direct form.

According to the Kli Yakar, woman equals the man in her innermost essence. The difference is in the body alone. True equality between man and woman will be recognized in the “World of Truth.” “Because in the next world, everyone will be divested of the physical, and then male and female will be equal.”

The difference between man and woman lies in how they see principles and ideals. A woman excels in a realistic view of principles and ideals, whereas a man clings to and identifies with an abstract ideal, and requires a woman in order to apply the ideal to existential reality. For this reason it is not clear what importance the direct view has, since it is abstract and has no power of application.

### **The Splitting of the Red Sea as a Criteria.**

This one-of-a-kind miracle in the history of the universe is viewed as proof of God's dominion over the creation. He is the strongest of all, and therefore He controls all other forces. This is viewed as the moral lesson learned from this miracle. And this is what Pharaoh was having difficulty agreeing with, because he viewed himself as the strongest of all and the ruler over all the forces of creation. And this was not the case.

Yet it does not appear that this was exactly the purpose of the miracle of the Exodus from Egypt and the Splitting of the Red Sea, because proofs of God's mighty Hand and outstretched Arm did not require that radical changes be effected in the act of creation. It would have been enough had the Creator swayed the narrow reality that obtains within the cycle of human perception. This would have sufficed to persuade man as to Who is the Controller and who is the controlled.

It seems that the moral lesson lay in presenting a criterion for quality rather than merely demonstrating power. The Splitting of the Red Sea gave man a yardstick for discerning imaginary reality from true reality by the Godly quality that could be inferred and reflected from a particular phenomena. This would be a criterion that would grant the value of truth to every situation and every phenomenon. Without this value, the world would be missing a scale of priorities. It would have no order of importance. A world without criteria is a world without law and order, something like the Generation of the Divide, which had no hierarchy, and no long-range judgment. They operated from hand to mouth, pragmatically and programatically. They were incapable of weighing or deciding anything when two interests conflicted.

From here, the next step is – no free choice. A human being without a dimension of height and without a value-oriented grasp of things, is missing his decision-making capacity. This was the world of the Egyptians, who were without free choice because they had toughened their proud hearts and denied the source of quality, refusing to accept His authority.

Here we see the importance of authority, not only as a point to relate to and belong to, in order to nullify one's ego and to accept the supreme Opinion in place of one's own opinion, but for the sake of the capacity to make decisions out of free choice, precisely for the sake of expressing freedom, and not only to express the fact of belonging to the authority.

Expressing one's freedom requires the ability to make decisions, and how can man arrive at such an ability if he lacks criteria for comparing phenomena under conditions of contradiction, when situations are opposed to one another?

Such decision-making is actually carried out in the theoretical realm, where the examination of one's guiding principles is dependent on ideals, and has not been pounded by overuse in a reality lacking a dimension of height and guided by immediate need alone. This theoretical ability was given to the man specifically, because he lacks the "additional insight" that was given to woman, who has been blessed with the cleverness of discerning the true nature of present-moment unfolding

reality. The wisdom of application, and a view of future consequences from the practical, purposeful perspective was granted to woman alone.

However, without the man's contribution, the woman is detached from the ability to judge and to assess the quality of a particular principle, and she will be controlled by necessity, which exerts the pressure of brute-force-based physical existence.

In the two contradictory tendencies of freedom and belonging, woman is the artisan of belonging, deriving her freedom from the object to which she chooses to belong. Thanks to her talent for belonging, she is blessed also with a talent for identifying, and with the flexibility needed to fit herself to the object of her belonging. This explains woman's need for a stable and secure center, from which she can receive inspiration and criteria.

In the Godly phenomenon, the women and Miriam discover the ultimate, absolute criterion. In the joy of this discovery, they burst into song and dance. Prior to this they have shown self-sacrifice and devotion to their husbands as they slaved at back-breaking labor. They brought them fish and food to strengthen them so that they would mate with them and perpetuate the nation's fertile vitality.

“In the merit of righteous women, Yisrael were redeemed.” We can speculate that the need to relate to a solid criterion is what roused them to express their wonder and admiration at the Godly criterion, which they almost certainly discovered before their husbands. For we see that with the men's hymn the phrasing is in the future tense: “Then Moshe and b'nei Yisrael will sing...” With the women and Miriam a direct response is expressed directly, revealing delight in the face of a new situation in the present moment, with no need for excessive preparation in order to make distinctions and digest and internalize the new phenomenon.

The men, as opposed to the women, needed to study the subject of how to relate to a criterion for principles and values. These qualities are not a reality in their own right. Quality in the physical world accompanies existential reality, and endows it with a dimension of height. We see from this that one does not encounter quality standing on its own, stripped of and detached from tangible reality. Therefore, the nation had to learn to endow present-moment unfolding reality with the criteria of values.

The signs of this limitation on values and their need for real-world contexts began to show on the difficult journey, as b'nei Yisrael continued to encounter existential problems. They had to struggle, and summon their strength, and free themselves from the existential distress in order to lift their eyes and discern the direction, the meaning and the value-oriented purpose that a particular lesson had come to teach them.

Only from this perspective can one view and attempt to understand the “trials by which our forefathers tested God in the desert.” For without this insight, how can one understand the fact that immediately following the greatly exalting experience of witnessing the terrible phenomenon of the

Splitting of the Red Sea, the nation's spirits sank, and they "forgot" the mighty Hand, and the clouds of glory. Is it not in God's power to see to their material needs? This very moment they have just discovered the absolute control that spiritual quality wields over material reality. Just now they have realized the absolutely inseparable unity that prevails between spirit and physical matter. And now, on meeting with existential distress, they just forgot?

It can only be that they needed to learn the issue of criteria. For criteria do not appear by themselves. A criterion is an attitude created by a human being examining and testing and investigating one reality against another. Human beings are the factor that grants reality its qualitative importance, by applying the dimension of height to present-moment unfolding reality. The dimension of height does not make its appearance except through the agency of human beings. Bestowing the dimension of height upon reality is a human being's main role in this world.

The theory is determined by the man and applied and internalized by the woman. Indeed so Devorah says to Barak: "Unfortunately, the path will not hold glory for you, because God will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." What would be so wrong with that? the reader wonders. However, when woman initiates the dimension of height in assessing a situation, the boundaries of quality can be confused, and assessment can err in the decision-making process while it is yet in its incipient theoretical/ideological stages.

Without this division of labor between man and woman, theory is left detached from the tangibility inherent in reality, and turns into dogma. It becomes doctrine, disconnected and unbound to existential reality. It exists in its own right, creating an autonomous reality that subjugates tangible reality. Upsetting the balance between the woman's role and the man's contribution in assessing a situation will turn every ideal into a doctrine, as sacred as that ideal might be.

"There is such a thing as a degenerate with the Torah's permission," the Ramban warns us in a similar spirit. The Ramban is warning us against turning a spiritual ideal into an artificial, ceremonial doctrine detached from life, that controls a fictitious reality while the flow of real life bypasses it and goes on without it, value-free and succumbing to the brute-force pressures of existence.

Thus does man tear his existence into many pieces, torn piece over torn piece, patch upon patch. Thus does he dwell in a house annexed into many wings, and he leads a different life style in every one. In every room, a different set of values prevails, opposed in quality to the atmosphere and lifestyle of the room next door. Thus does man find himself leading a different quality life style in his bedroom than in his dining room. And in the guest room, his behavior is different from his behavior in all the other rooms. His opinion there is different from his behavior with his own household, and "much degradation and wrath" results from this wildly hypocritical behavior.

**Devorah was warning against the gravity of a situation in which values are controlled by a woman. For then values turn from inspiration into dogmatic compulsion. The marginal is made into the essential and the essential is made into the marginal.**

**In the awful splendor of the events in our parasha, the shining qualities of three heroic women are most powerfully evident: Miriam, Devorah and Yael. This is to teach us that without the woman, the ideal would be left floating somewhere up there in the lofty heights, and would remain powerless to control reality. Yet without study and abstract delving into the topic of values as a criterion for reality, the woman would lack the solid hold of something to relate to and identify with.**