

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat B'Shalach
January 18, 2019

פרשת בשלח
י"ג בשבט, תשע"ט

Torah Reading: *B'Shalach* (Exodus) 13:17-17:16

This week is *Shabbat Shirah*. On this Shabbat, we read *Parashat B'Shalach*, a section of the book of Exodus which contains the Song of the Sea - the song that Moses, Miriam, and the Israelites sang when they made the unlikely and miraculous transition from slavery to freedom. Soon after this Shabbat is over, the Jewish community will celebrate the holiday of *Tu B'Shvat*.

The holiday of *Tu B'Shvat* honors the trees and all that we receive from them. But look outside. The trees are bare. At this time of year, they do not provide leafy shade or the lovely sound of rustling wind. They do not currently bear sweet fruit to nourish our bodies and souls. We celebrate this holiday in the winter when, arguably, the trees are at their least beautiful, their least useful. That is why this is a holiday about looking toward the future. It is a holiday about hope. Not about what is, but about what can be.

By celebrating this holiday - what some call "Jewish Arbor Day" - in the winter, we are proclaiming that we believe that the trees will come back to life, and that we will once again benefit from their shade, from their fruit, and from their beauty – green in the spring and fiery red-orange in autumn.

The holiday of *Tu B'Shvat* is certainly about the hope we have for rebirth and renewal of the natural landscape, but it is also about the hope we have for ourselves. Who we are now is not necessarily who we need to be in the future. By believing in a more beautiful future for the trees, we also foster a belief in a more beautiful future for our world, and our role in it.

In *Parashat B'Shalach*, we see a people's hope for a better future materialize. The Israelites, a slave people who have been beaten down, escape their past and present, and march toward a more beautiful future as a free people. With joy in this newfound freedom, they sing and dance. They praise God and come together as a nation. The Torah tells us:

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶחָזֶת אֶהָרֹן אֶת־הַתֶּרֶף בְּיָדָהּ וַתִּצְאֶנּוּ כָּל־הַנְּשִׂאִים
אֶחָרֶיהָ בַּתְּפִים וּבַמַּחֲלֹת:

Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels.

One question that Rashi asks, basing his commentary on a classic *midrash*, is: where did Miriam and these women get timbrels? It seems odd that people who are traveling on a long journey would have thought to bring musical instruments. This is an unnecessary thing to add to one's luggage. His answer is that the timbrels were far from unnecessary. They symbolized the women's hope for a better future.

**בתפים ובמחלות. מבטחות היו צדקניות שבדור ששקב"ה עושה להם
נסים והוציאו תפים ממצרים.**

The righteous women in that generation were confident that God would perform miracles for them and they accordingly had brought timbrels with them from Egypt.

Tu B'Shvat and *Shabbat Shirah* show us how important it is to hope and believe in a world more whole, more beautiful than it is at present. They show us that the better future, perhaps even the messianic age, is possible, and that we must work, sing, plant, and dance in order to make it happen.

Shabbat Shalom.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What item serves as a symbol of hope for the future in your own home?
- 2) How do you plan to bring more hope into the world on this Shabbat and during Tu B'Shvat?