

לדרוש בשבת

Parashat Beshalach 5781

January 29 - 30 2021

"The goal of the Book of Exodus is to create holy spaces."

- Rabbi David Silber, *Thresholds in Time*

Source: Shemot 15:1-21

Parashat Beshalach contains Shirat HaYam, the Song of the Sea. This song, along with other Biblical songs, is written differently than the rest of the Torah, as it comprises both words and spaces. The function of songs in the Bible is to serve as a moment of break. They mark a threshold in time, an important moment.

Shirat HaYam is the moment when it can be said that the Israelites have finally been freed of the Egyptian yoke. As Moshe says to Bnei Yisrael, "כִּי אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם אֶת־מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסִּפוּ לִרְאֹתָם עוֹד עַד־עוֹלָם" *for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again* (Shemot 14:13). The song marks the end of the Egypt experience — of the bondage, suffering and being a stranger — and begins the experience of wandering in the desert. To make this point, to highlight the transition, the Torah marks it with song.

Source: Bamidbar 21:17-20

Later in the Torah, in Sefer Bamidbar, we have Shira HaBe'er, the Song of the Well. Although a shorter song, it is parallel to Shirat HaYam, most prominently in their opening lines.

The differences are interesting, but what they share in common is that this little song appears just before the Battle of Sichon, King of Emori, which is the beginning of the conquest of the land. The Battle of Sichon (and then of Og) is a threshold in time. When we move to a new stage of development, the Torah marks it with song.

Source: Shemot 15:17

Shirat HaYam in particular is interesting because of its ending. The bulk of the *shira* focuses on God and His miraculous deliverance, but it ends with God bringing His people to His temple, that He will build with His own hands. This threshold in time, the end of Exodus part 1, bears a striking similarity to the end of the Book of Exodus part 2.

Source: Shemot 40

The Book of Exodus also ends with the temple — with the *mishkan* — but that temple isn't build by God's hands. The temple in the second half of the book, in the conclusion of Exodus, is the temple that the people build. The men, the women, the architects - together, bring their gifts, and are able to construct a space in which God can be present, and a place in which God accompanies them throughout the desert.

What this points to is that the goal of the Book of Exodus and the goal of Shirat HaYam are the same: the goal is Mikdash Hashem — God's holy habitation — whether it's built by God in the first part of the book, or it's built by the people following God's instruction in the second part of the book. The goal of the book is to create holy spaces. That's the end point of the journey.

The holy spaces in each case involve either song, as represented by the song in the first part, or by people bringing various gifts, their artistic talents, their whole selves, into the project. That's our goal. But as we know, when we begin the journey in the second half of Exodus, we begin with the bitter waters of *marah* — there will be many trials and tribulations along the way, among them the golden calf.

This week's parasha reminds us that we have to celebrate what we've accomplished up to this point, but also begins the next stage of the Torah — the difficult journey, the trials of the desert. We have much to look ahead towards in the Book of Exodus, until we arrive at the culmination of the book: the temple that our hands have wrought — the *mishkan*. "ועשו לי מקדש" *you shall make the temple* - that's our responsibility, and God's response is "ושכנתי בתוכם" *I will dwell amongst them*, amongst the people that built the temple.

שבת שלום!