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Today's Torah

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Shabbat Parashat Beshallah
January 19, 2018 - 13 Shevat 5779



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“Singing for the Future”

Torah Reading: Exodus 13:17 – 17:16

Haftarah Reading: Judges 4:4 – 5:31

How do we know what events will be remembered? What will go down in history as something extraordinary? Something life changing? Living in the present, we can never know if an event will stand the test of time. Unless, of course, that event is the splitting of the Red Sea. An event so monumental that even as it was happening, it was as if it was already recorded in the annals of history.

Rav Akiva Eiger (Early 19th Century Rabbinic leader in Hungary) noticed that when Moses sings the Song of the Sea after the people of Israel cross to freedom, the verse is written in future tense, “Az Yashir,” “And he will sing,” as opposed to “Az Shar,” “And he sang.” Rav Akiva notes that the only way a historic event is truly remembered and known in the future is if the story continues to be told in

the future, if people sing about it. Did you know there was a splitting of the sea and crossing in the book of Joshua as well? Well if you did, you are among the few, because most people only know about the sea crossing that is retold in song! “And the women dancing with their timbrels followed Miriam as she sang her song...” “Mi Chamocha Ba’Eilim Adonai?!” “Who is like you, O God?!” These are words we sing every day, and remember this moment. To sing is to publicize, to share.

Perhaps the most familiar line from the Song of the Sea is “Ozi v’zimrat Yah vayehi li li’yeshua, “God is my strength and my song, and God will be my salvation.” A Midrash (story/explanation – exegesis) goes along with these words from Shir Hashirim Rabbah (Exegesis from the Song of Songs). Shir Hashirim Rabbah is filled with parables of royalty and their relations with various people in the kingdom. In this particular Midrash, a queen has in her possession many precious jewels and stones; rubies and emeralds, diamonds and gold. The queen’s child approaches her and says, “Mother, let me have those.” In addition, the queen says, “They’re yours, they’ve always been yours, and to you I give them.” The rabbis liken this parable to the people of Israel as they stand at the shore of the Red Sea before it has been split. The Egyptians are at their backs and they are frightened. They call out to God and say, “God! Give us strength! Ozi V’zimrat Yah! Be our strength!” In addition, God replies, “It’s yours, it’s always been yours, and to you I give it.” Moreover, the rabbis do something very interesting with the word “oz” here. They say, “v’ein oz ela Torah,” “There is no strength except for Torah.”

So what does it mean for the Torah to be our strength? Moreover, what does it mean, as we say in Psalm 59, “Va’ani ashir uzecha,” “And I will sing your strength?” How can we keep the stories, events, and lessons of the Torah present in the world? We learn from Rabbi Eiger that the answer is to sing them. To sing for the future.

This Shabbat, as we rise to hear the Song of the Sea, I hope we take a moment to think about what stories we should be singing out in our own day. What is it that we need to be remembering? What is it that we need to teach and share with generations to come?

Shabbat Shalom

Josh Warshawsky is a nationally touring Jewish musician. Originally from Chicago, Josh has shared his original melodies with Jewish communities throughout the US, Canada, the UK, and Israel. He has released three albums of Jewish music. The newest album, “Chaverai Nevarech,” was released in November 2018. Josh spends his weekdays in rabbinical school at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles, and his weekends traveling to Jewish communities across the country sharing music and prayer. Josh has spent the past 18 summers at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, and the last five summers teaching and performing at Ramah camps across the country.



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