

BESHALAH; Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

Tu B'Shevat: Saturday, Jan. 17

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MOSES' SONG OF THE SEA ("Shirat Hayam;" Ex. 15:1-19) envisions the settlement in the Promised Land and the building there of the Temple. This idea of Temple is expressed three times in the song: In the opening ("veanvehu;" v. 2), the verse "This is my God, and I will glorify Him" may also mean "I will enshrine Him"; "I will build a temple for His glory." In the center ("neve-kodshekha;" v. 13): "With your kindness, you led this people You redeemed; with Your strength, You guided them to the place of Your holiness." "The place of Your holiness" is a reference to the temple. In the conclusion ("mikdash;" v. 17): "You (God) will bring them (the people) and plant them in Your own mountain — the sanctuary (Temple) O Lord, which your hands established." The Song of the Sea is more than just a victory hymn celebrating the wondrous crossing of the Sea of Reeds. It projects the future; it envisions the everlasting reign of God.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

MOSES' SONG, "*Shirat-Hayam*," reaches dramatic exuberance in its ringing phrase, "*ze Eli*" (Exodus 15:2), "This is my God, and I will glorify Him; (*This is*) my father's God, and I will exalt Him!" The idea in the first line, "and I will glorify Him," is conveyed in the original Hebrew by one word, "*ve-an-ve-hu*." This verb is rich in meanings. I will adore Him; adorn Him; cling to Him; emulate Him; enshrine Him; follow His ways; build for Him a sanctuary; perform His *mitzvot* (commandments) with *hiddur* (beauty). All these nuances of a multifaceted veneration of our God are implied in one exquisite expression of religious ecstasy.

We can neither define God with our limited speech, nor enshrine Him within a confined place. True worship is a person's moral conduct; the real Temple, the human pure heart. Each one of us must build a *mikdash* internally, within one's heart.

This rich verse of "ze-Eli" can thus be rendered:

This is my God, my father's God!

I will glorify Him through my conduct,

I will enshrine Him within myself!

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MOSES' SONG reaches dramatic verve in its ringing phrase (Ex. 15:2) *Ze Eli ve-anve-hu*. The first two words exclaim: "This is my God!" The last is rich in meanings: I will *adore* Him; *adorn* Him; *cling* to Him; *follow* His ways; *build* for Him a temple. All these—glorifying, beautifying, reaching out to, emulating, enshrining God—are implied in one exquisite expression of religious ecstasy and exuberance. But how can we actually do all these? "Were our mouths full with singing as the effervescent sea, our tongues with melody as the roaring waves, our lips with praise as the spacious heavens—we would still be unable to offer fitting adoration to You . . ." (Nishmat). We can neither define God with our limited speech, nor enshrine Him within a confined place. True worship is a person's moral conduct; the supreme temple, his pure heart. The verse re-translated: "This is my God; I will worship Him through my conduct, enshrine Him within myself!"

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Jan. 20:

BESHALAH: Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

“Shabbat Shirah”

Thought of the Week.

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

SHIRA (song): Moses' song after crossing the Sea of Sooph (Reeds), and Deborah's song after defeating Sisra are both triumphant hymns. They reflect awareness, humility and gratitude to the Almighty. Song is the blooming of man's reflection and imagination. The poetic words and their symbolic associations appeal to the senses and evoke images. The ancient Hebrew poem is distinguished by a balanced blend of simplicity and vigor, motion and passion, human concern and humble marvel at the grandeur of God. The Torah as a whole is termed "Shira" (Deut. 31:19), alluding to its aesthetic qualities and to the wealth of its explicit and implicit meanings. The core of Shira is man's rediscovery of his God and his evoked desire to worship Him (Ex. 15:2): "Ze eli ve'anve'u!" -- "This is my God and I will adore and adorn Him!"

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

MOSES IN HIS SONG OF THE SEA proclaims (Exodus 15:2): "This is my God!" (*ze-Eli!*); the Hebrew word that follows, *ve-an-ve-hu*, is rich in meanings: I will adore Him; adorn Him; cling to Him; follow His ways; build for Him a Temple. All these ways of human relations to God -- glorifying, beautifying, reaching out to, emulating, enshrining God -- are implied in one exquisite expression of religious exuberance.

We can neither praise God with our limited speech, nor enshrine Him within a confined place. True worship is expressed by moral conduct; the real temple is the pure (human) heart. The song's verse can thus be rendered:

This is my God!

I will worship Him with my good deeds,
I will enshrine Him within myself!

SHABBAT SHIRA

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Feb. 2:

BESHALAH: Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

TU B'SHEVAT: Thursday, Feb. 7

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

"THIS IS MY GOD and I will glorify him!" is a vivid verse from the Song of the Sea (*shirat ha-yam*; Ex. 15:2). Its last five words are expressed in the original Hebrew by only one word "ve-anvehu." This word is rich in meaning implying at least four basic connotations: admiration, beautification, habitation and imitation. Thus, the import of this poetic outburst of fervent passion is manifold: "I will adore Him by singing His praises; I will adorn His name by refining my modes of worship; I will found in His honor an exquisite shrine to be a sanctuary for human enhancement; I will follow His ways of compassion and mercy, treating them as models for my human behavior." The combination of all of these variegated nuances of this intriguing "ve-anvehu" lead, however, to a single concept; the glorification of the Divine is achieved through the cultivation of the human in man.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“THIS IS MY GOD!” (Ex. 15:2): In prayer we turn to “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Why is the phrase “the God of” repeated with each patriarch? Because faith is a very personal and private experience; each patriarch, as an individual, found his God on his own.

In Judaism, each individual, in his own uniqueness, must find God in his own personal quest for Him, thereby clinging to the God of tradition, the God of our Fathers. Thus, first comes the phrase “This is *my* God!” (“*Eli*”); then its confirmation, that He is “My *father’s* God!” (“*Elohei avi*”).

BESHALAH: Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

"Shabbat Shirah"

Tu B'Shevat is celebrated on Monday, Jan. 27

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE MIGHTY DEEDS OF GOD, revealed in His care for the people, are given in Scripture three names: "pele," "ot," "mofet." "Pele" (wonder) means extraordinary, extremely unusual, exceptionally impressive. "Ot" (sign) means indicative, demonstratively instructive, prominently expressive. "Mofet" (manifestation) means exquisite, gloriously accomplishing, convincingly fulfilling. These three terms point to the three basic qualities of God's redemptive acts: They are dramatic (pele), educational (ot), and pragmatic (mofet). Thus, magnificent in form and scope, enlightening in content and message, and functional in goal and achievement, these Divine acts proclaim Divine glory (pele), convey Divine teachings (ot), and carry out the Divine plan (mofet). They are a tribute to God, a lesson to man and a blessing to the world. The greatest wonder, however, is man's ability to perceive the wonder: marvel at it, be moved by it, and enthusiastically acclaim it. From Moses' Song after crossing the Sea of Reeds (Ex. 15:11): "Who is like you among the mighty, O Lord? Who is like you: glorious in distinction, awesome in adoration – worker of wonders!"

BESHALAH (SHABBAT SHIRA)

Exodus 13:17 - 17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4 - 5:31

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: *The theme of the Shabbat readings is song, "shira." Both Moses' song after crossing the Sea of Sooph (Reeds) in the sidra, and Deborah's song after defeating Sisra, in the Haftarah, are triumphant hymns. They reflect human awareness, humility and gratitude to the Almighty. Song is the blooming of man's reflection and imagination. The poetic words are more than just symbols of ideas, but convey by their sound and form nuances of feeling and meaning. The poetic words and their symbolic associations appeal to the senses and evoke images. The ancient Hebrew poem is distinguished by the balanced blend of simplicity and vigour, motion and passion, human concern and humble marvel at the grandeur of God. The Torah as a whole is termed "shira" (Deut. 31:19), alluding to its aesthetic qualities and to the wealth of its explicit and implicit meanings. The core of shira is man's rediscovery of his God and his evoked desire to adore and adorn Him (Ex. 15:2).*

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

SHIRAH: HARMONY AND PLURALISM: Music is a compelling model for the idea of valid, enriching, and harmonious pluralism in Judaism, says Rabbi Yechiel Epstein (1829-1908). The many controversies among the sages from antiquity to the present, in Mishna, Talmud, and subsequent rabbinic sources -- each expressing a different opinion and a contradicting point of view -- are truly, when properly understood, "the words of the Living God." Each presents a facet of truth.

Indeed, adds Rabbi Epstein, this pluralism in rabbinic positions is "the glory of our pure and sacred Torah: For the whole Torah is called "*shirah*" (song), and the beauty and sweetness of a melody is enhanced by the harmony of its various voices and tunes."

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

TWO MOTHERS appear in Deborah's Song (Judges 5): "Mother in Israel"--Deborah herself, leader of the victorious people; and "Mother of Sisera"--mother of the slain leader of the defeated enemy. This nameless, yet real, mother of the archenemy of Israel is depicted with striking sensitivity and compassion: Weeping, she peers through the window, waiting in vain for her son: Why is he late? . . . This remarkable awareness, in a victory song, that the enemy too has a mother, loving and worried, is typically Jewish: A captive woman of the enemy is allowed to mourn her father and mother in dignity (Deut. 21:13). The "Mother in Israel" allows the bereft Mother of the Enemy to bewail her son. The tender voice of love is not vanquished by the mighty sounds of war.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE SONG OF DOBORAH (Judges ch. 5) is a heroic hymn to Jewish solidarity and volunteerism. Deborah, judge and prophetess, together with army commander Barak, led a war of liberation against the Canaanite forces of king Jabin and his commander Sisera (early 12th century B.C.E.). The decisive battle was waged at Wadi Kishon near Mt. Tabor. There, a league of Israelite tribes, inspired by Deborah and directed by Barak, won a glorious victory. In striking imagery and forceful rhythm, exemplifying the primordial power and magnificence of early Hebrew poetry, Deborah's Song lavishes praise on the tribes that rose to the call of duty and joined the struggle against oppression, and stingingly chides those which did not. Praised were Ephraim, Benjamin, Mannaseh (that part of the tribe then dwelling in northern Mt. Ephraim, mentioned as Machir), Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali (Barak's tribe). Chided for lack of cooperation were Reuben, Gad (mentioned as Gilead, including that part of Mannassah then dwelling east of the Jordan River), Dan and Asher. Not mentioned at all were Judah and Simon, the two southern tribes which merged into one, which were distant, and Levi, a priestly, non-territorial tribe. Extolling heroism, the Song of Deborah remains a powerful plea for Jewish unity.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MOTHERHOOD AND WOMANHOOD are the overriding motifs in the victory song of Deborah (Judges 5). Prophetess and poetess, she is in this song (v.7) "the arising mother in Israel." Jael, heroine from a neighborly Beduoin tribe, who with feminine charm and guile lured and slew Sisera, the archenemy of the people, is femininely praised (24): "Blessed be she of all women, Jael..., Of all women of the tents, she be blessed!" In contrast to this nomad woman ("of the tents"), a regal woman appears in the climactic finale: Mother of Sisera. Comfortably and stably sheltered, amidst courtly women, in colorful luxury and fantasy, she peers through the latticed windows, stricken with grief and alarm. In vain she waits for her son: Why is he late? This sensitive awareness that the enemy too has a mother, concerned and worried, reflects fine femininity. It is also typically Jewish: A captive woman from the enemy is allowed to mourn her parents properly (Deut. 21:13). In Deborah's Song, the "Mother in Israel" allows the Mother of the enemy to bewail her son. The tender voice of motherhood and womanhood is not vanquished by the mighty sounds of war and victory.

BESHALACH: Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION is endorsed in Judaism by the celebrated verse in Moses' Song (Exodus 15:2): "This is my God and I shall glorify Him." The Hebrew for "I shall glorify Him" ("ve-anve 'hu") is explained by our Sages to mean also: "I shall reveal His beauty" or, "I shall surround myself in beauty while adhering to His precepts." Art in Judaism is not "art for art's sake" but for the sake of Divine glorification and human enrichment. Art is a form of worship, expressing human marvel and appreciation, human devotion and concern. It is meaningless in isolation. "The artist—as Chagall once said—must penetrate into the world, feel the fate of human beings, of peoples, with real love." The artistic expression thus becomes a way of celebrating life, revealing its divine sparks and glories.

Candlelight time 5:04 Sabbath ends 5:59

Scriptural reading for Saturday, Jan. 17:

BESHALAH: Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

Shabbat Shirah

Tu B'Shevat: Tuesday, Jan. 20

— Thought of the Week —

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

FORBĒARANCE in face of antagonism is a highly praised Jewish virtue. The Sages taught, “Those who are insulted but do not insult in return; those who hear their abuse but do not respond in kind; those who do their duty with love and keep their joy in adversity — are depicted in Scripture (Judges 5:31) as follows: ‘Those who love Him are likened to the rising of the sun emerging in its full might.’” (TB Gitin 36b). Self-restraint is a noble form of strength. Forgiveness is a formidable weapon of survival. Tolerance is a potent assertion of selfhood. By his ability to overlook insulting remarks a person proves his true self-respect. A real person of “honor” does not feel threatened by verbal abuse. A person’s dignity is ascertained not by the remarks against him (or for him) but by his reaction to them. A person’s commitment is tested in critical moments, when there is no apparent reward: Does he do his duty with love? Does he keep his good cheer? Torah does not teach an attitude of apathy and weakness, but the secret of true might. The true “gibor” (hero) conquers himself rather than others; makes of his enemy a friend rather than defeats him; maintains his dignity, his vigor and his contentment with endurance: “as the rising of the sun emerging in its full might.” (Judges 5:31).

..BĒSHALAH: Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

Shabbat Shimon

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

PREPARING FOR SHABBAT, before Shabbat, is an integral element of the celebration of Shabbat. Enjoying the pleasures of the holy, Seventh Day ("Oneg-Shabbat") — the food set on the table, the lights shining from the candles—is derived from and enriched by their preparation beforehand: cooking the food, kindling the lights, when Shabbat is not yet come. This idea of preparation for Shabbat ("hachana") is rooted in the Manna experience of the Israelites soon after the Exodus (16:5): "On the Sixth Day they shall prepare from what they bring (of the Manna)" — for the Seventh Day. And (v 22): "On the Sixth Day they gleaned a double portion (of Manna), two omers (rather than one) for each person" — to provide for the needs of and show honor to the Seventh Day. The Hebrew phrase for "double portion" is "Lehem Mishneh" (namely, "Dual Bread"). This phrase serves as the biblical reference for the prevailing custom of setting two chalot on the Sabbath table; this dramatizes the idea of preparation — getting ready on Erev-Shabbat (the eve of Sabbath) for the physical as well as the spiritual delights of Shabbat: a day of sacred rest, of no baking, no cooking, no kindling, no lighting — only partaking of and savoring the joys of the day. For Shabbat to be fully and properly enjoyed, it must be anticipated, in thought and deed, during the days preceding it. By preparing things for Shabbat we also prepare ourselves for its blessings. More than just a means, preparation for Shabbat is a part of its delights.

Scriptural reading for Saturday, Feb. 10:

BESHALAH: Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

AL TIRA – FEAR NOT (Jeremiah 46:27):

As for you:

Fear not, My servant Jacob!

Do not panic, O Israel!

Behold:

I will deliver you safe from afar,

And your descendants from the land of their captivity.

Jacob will be restored

In security and peace,

And none shall alarm him.

More than a promise, “Fear not!” is a Divine

call for human alertness and determination. Indifference to real danger is more disastrous than fear itself: Reliance on the supernatural is, likewise, disastrous. Positive fearlessness means neither carelessness nor overconfidence, but rather responding to the hazards and challenges of existence with open eyes and readiness. The reassurance of Divine protection comes to instill, not replace, human responsibility and initiative. “Fear not!” – but act! Fight threats with both caution and courage. “Do not panic!” – but, with faith in God, face and confront danger with calm and prudence.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE IMPACT OF ENSLAVEMENT on the newly-redeemed Israelites can be seen in their reaction to the approaching Egyptian army pursuing them (Ex. 14:10-11): "When they saw the Egyptians marching behind them, the Israelites became terribly frightened and cried out to the Lord. And they said to Moses: "Weren't there enough graves in Egypt? Why did you have to bring us out here to die in the desert?" Fear, ingratitude, defeatism. Abraham Ibn Ezra (12th century Spanish scholar) comments: Why were the Israelites, numbering more than half a million men, so afraid of the Egyptian? Why did they lack the determination to fight back? Because, he answers, they were still imbued with a slave mentality, fearing their ex-masters, and lacking the courage and discipline of free people. The generation of redeemed slaves perished in the desert; only the generation born free in the desert reached the promised land.

Candlelight time 5:29 Sabbath ends 6:23

Scriptural reading for Saturday, Feb. 6:

BESHALAH: Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4, 5:31

Shabbat Shalom

BESHALAH (Shabbat Shirah) Exodus 13:17-17:16

HAFTARAH: Judges 4:4-5:31

TU B'Shevat will be celebrated Monday, Jan. 31

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

.. THE EXODUS EPIC encompasses two generations: these redeemed from Egypt and those born free in the desert. The redeemed retained residues of a slave-mentality, resignation and faint-heartedness. "When they saw the Egyptians pursuing them, they became very frightened (Ex. 14:10)." Petrified by the sight of their former masters, the ex-slaves were unable to fight back. The impact of "galut," submission and meekness, is not easily and at once erased. A new generation emerged. Untainted by "galut" and trained and directed by Torah, they entered and settled the Promised Land.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

TWO GENERATIONS participated in the Exodus epic: The old generation, born slaves in Egypt and freed from slavery; and the new, born free in the desert. The old generation, however, did not enter the Promised Land. This generation, although redeemed, could not, it appears, free themselves completely of their deeply ingrained slave mentality (Exodus 14:10): "Seeing the Egyptians pursuing them, they became very frightened." Petrified at the sight of their ex-masters, they could not fight back. The impact of years of oppression, submission and meekness could not easily be erased. In their panic, they protested with sarcasm: "Were not there enough graves in Egypt that you had to bring us out here to die in the desert?" Ironically, this is a portrayal of their slave environment, a vast land of huge pyramids – gigantic tombs, graves, "*kevarim*" – built by hordes of slaves. Do they really wish to return to this land of huge graves?

During the 40 years of wandering in the Sinai desert, this generation of ex-slaves perished, giving birth to a new generation of born-free conquerors and settlers. This new generation, untainted by slavery, and from youth imbued by Torah, were prepared to build a new nation in the Promised Land.

Thought of the Week

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

TWO GENERATIONS participated in the Exodus epic: The old, slaves born in Egypt, and the new, born free in the desert. The old generation did not enter the Promised Land. Although redeemed, this generation could not completely be free of their deeply ingrained slave-mentality (Exodus 14:10): "Seeing the Egyptians pursuing them, they became very fearful." Petrified at the sight of their ex-masters, they could not fight back. The impact of years of oppression, submission and meekness, could not be erased easily.

During the 40 years of wandering in the Sinai desert, this generation of ex-slaves perished, and a new generation of born-free rose up, destined and ready to be conquerers and settlers. Thus those who were enslaved never entered the Promised Land, and those who entered were never enslaved.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

JEWISH ALIENATION: The opening phrase of Exodus lists the names of the Israelites who, as commonly translated, “came” to Egypt. The Hebrew verb, however, is “who are coming” (*ha-baim*) – in the present, continuous tense. Why?

Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (13th century France) explains: This reflects the Egyptians’ cruelty toward the Israelites after Joseph’s death: After many years of living in Egypt, richly contributing to its growth and prosperity, the Israelites are still regarded as strangers and treated as unknown, unwelcome aliens -- not as residents who “came” to Egypt in the past, but as “newcomers” who presently keep “coming” – “*ha'baim*.” So is Jewish existence: Jews live and build in the Diaspora, create and take root, yet remain forever outsiders, “strangers in a land not theirs” (Gen. 15:13).

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BETWEEN THE ENEMY AND THE SEA: It was a critical moment of danger and decision. Facing the sea in front while being pursued by the Egyptians behind, the Israelites at the cross of *Yam Suf* (Sea of Reeds, or Red Sea) were divided. The Midrash, in its typical rabbinic method of typology, describes four parties: One was suicidal, saying, "Let us throw ourselves into the sea!" One was defeatist: "Let us return to Egypt!" One was belligerent: "Let us wage war against Egypt!" And one was desperate: "Let us shout against the Egyptians!" Moses displays admirable leadership as he aims to encourage the hopeless and calm the defiant: "Fear not!" to the former, and "Be composed!" to the latter (Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael on Exodus 14:13-14).

At the end, no party fully prevailed. Yet their various "solutions" taken together were realized in an expectedly glorious way: They did not "throw" themselves into the sea, but courageously "crossed" the sea. They did not return to Egypt, but instead saw the Egyptians dying at the sea. Nor did they wage war, but their enemies were defeated by their own callousness. The Israelites stopped shouting and rather marveled at the wonder of divine redemption.

A blessing over human work, practiced in Jewish tradition, is modeled after Moses' Psalm (90:17), which is related to the Mishkan dedication (Sifra, Lev. 9:23):

Moses' Blessing:

May it be God's will to reveal His Presence upon your handiwork! May the God of you ancestors increase your numbers a thousandfold, and bless you as you were promised.

People's Response:

May the sweetness of our God be upon us! Let all our handiwork prosper! Let it be firm and established! Let all the work we do succeed!

Yes, there is a blessing for everything in Judaism – especially for human work and effort, which constantly depends on and needs God's help and blessing.