

11 – Beshalach Outline

Pasha Summary

Beshalach

1. We need to be able to read these chapters in Exodus on two levels: both as a story of birth and as encouragements to the mature
2. “beshalach” means “in sending”
 - a. we are in a phase of the year where the light and truth we have previously internalized is now being sent out into the darkness
 - b. Israel is being sent out of the darkness into the light
 - i. Pharaoh is God’s tool for this sending; God controls Him
 1. It is God Who opens the womb
 - c. a mature community of Believers will send out emissaries
 - i. it’s a greatly unifying project, both unifying internally and externally as people around the world are connected together

A Time to Pray, A Time to Move

1. The LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.” (Exodus 14:15)
 - a. R’Trugman from Rashi: What is Moses supposed to do here? Aren’t we taught to go to God in such moments? (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nfvfjfgB6rQ&list=PLYztuC2svll6_ZNFX4aJBGf9MFba3wEEA&index=10 6min)
 - b. sages say: Moses prayed too long. This was a time to move, not pray for a long time.
 - c. as we mature, we need to be able to discern when it is time to pause and get direction from the Lord, and when it is time to make a decision and move

Leap of Faith

1. the people of Israel take a remarkable leap of faith, even if they were pushed
 - a. mature Believers take these leaps with less pushing from God

The Power He Gives Us

1. God entrusts great power to us
 - a. “And may the God of our Master Yeshua the Messiah, the Father of glory, give us a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened, so that we will know what is the hope to which He has called us, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Messiah, when he raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies. And may He grant us, according to the riches of His glory,

to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Messiah may dwell in our hearts through faith..."

2. Where do we see this power in Bashalach?
 - a. The staff of God entrusted to Moses is God's arm
 - i. "Then He remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, **Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses**, Who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name, Who led them through the depths?" (Isaiah 63:11-13)
 - ii. it contains a snake within it to say that it is God Who brings death and restores to life; only He can do this
 - iii. Let's be encouraged that God entrusts His arm to a man, Moses

A Powerful Foe?

1. the Egyptian army is represented as the most powerful force mankind can produce
 - a. curious repetition of horses, chariots, and horsemen – extreme repetition from Pharaoh, God, and Israel
 - i. the combo of horse, chariot, and rider is the ancient world's version of a cyborg soldier
 1. mankind pooling its resources to create technology for evil, enhancing the inner beast's ability to claw for territory and wealth
 2. this is what men do to become powerful in defiance of God
 - b. the Egyptian army evokes the Tower of Babel
 - i. also men working together for evil
 - ii. also based on a technological advancement – the crafting of human-made stones (bricks)
 - iii. God admits that mankind can do much working together; He confuses their language and disperses them on the earth
2. God shows His great power by drowning the Egyptian army in the Reed Sea
 - a. the reed is used in Scripture as a symbol of that which is fragile, easily broken
 - i. God uses a sea of reeds and a little water to annihilate the best man has to offer
3. We are living now in times of great scientific progress
 - a. mankind's pride grows by the day
 - b. these are dangerous times; man will either begin annihilating each other or God will step in to end this epoch of earth
 - c. we are truly living in the end times

Shabbat Shirah

1. We read the Song of the Sea this week and, in the haftarah, the Song of Deborah and Barak
2. This Sabbath is known as "Shabbat Shirah," the "Sabbath of Song"
 - a. one of only a few specially named Sabbaths in the year

3. Song is associated with the conclusion of salvation
 - a. people break out in song when they have come through the test and salvation is revealed
 - b. it is an expression of unity
 - c. we are nearing the end of the calendar, and here we have an emphasis on song
 - d. this Sabbath and Tu BiSh'vat are marking the end of winter; they've come through the test of winter
 - e. another example: Rev. 15:
 - i. Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb..." (Revelation 15:1-3)
 - ii. not only a special song at the end, but the uniting of two songs – the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb
 - f. Shabbat is the end of the week, and we sing together
4. the unity in song and prayer on Shabbat is miraculous
 - a. busy lives all coming together on Shabbat
 - b. thinking the same thoughts, speaking and singing the same words in unison, even breathing in unison to do this
 - c. it's the crafting together of something ephemeral and beautiful both in thought and sound
 - d. it is nothing other than the Living God working through His Living Son and His Living Torah that guides this miracle of unity into happening
5. Song is a very unique expression, and uniqueness of expression is also associated with maturity
6. one perspective: God is the Giver, the male, and the Bride is the receiver, female
 - a. the Song of the Sea begins with the men and includes the response led by Miriam
 - b. the Bride provides a unique vessel for the Light

Yeshua – Mara and Mary

1. Question: why do so many Mary's surround Yeshua?
 - a. Yeshua's mother, Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary the mother of John Mark, and another Mary mentioned in Romans
 - i. not just mothers and wives but disciples, important members of this phase of the kahal
 - b. Mary means "bitter" or even "rebellion"
 - c. the question of bitterness is dealt with here, in Beshalach
 - i. Yeshua is the Tree of Life
 - ii. God throws Yeshua into the "waters below," the physical realm

1. His body is shaped as an unborn baby in the waters of the womb of “Mary,” “bitterness/rebellion”
- iii. In Yeshua is healing of the rebellion and bitterness
 1. when He most resembles a tree, when He is hung on a tree, is when the most healing comes
 - a. and while there, He makes provision for His mother, Mary

Tu BiSh’vat

1. 15th of Sh’vat – full moon of Sh’vat
2. the New Year for Trees – trees all gain one year’s age on this day
3. it is said the sap begins to ascend in the trees on this day
4. it’s about renewal
 - a. goes well with these portions where Israel is being reborn, the exodus
 - b. these portions and this special day give us a boost
 - i. the cold is deep now – we must fight apathy, our bodies are exhausted from sickness, individually and corporately we are being tested and pruned (disheartening to see what’s going on inside of us that needs to be pruned away)
 - ii. we are being encouraged: rebirth and renewal is coming soon

11 – Beshalach Transcript (not exact)

Welcome to Beth Tikkun and this series called Spiritual Seasons, where we are studying the Torah portions in the light of the yearly pattern of development God has created for us. Today we are in portion Beshalach. As we get started, let me remind you that I’ve been including links to outlines with these teachings below the video. If you prefer to follow along with a written outline, you can download it or open it in a new browser tab.

Before we get to the parsha summary, let me explain why I decided to do a teaching this week. We normally don’t do teachings on weeks that our whole fellowship gets together for the Sabbath. But as I began studying parsha Beshalach this week, the Lord was pouring out so many ideas that I knew I would struggle to do two portions next week. And too, we are coming up to a couple of special days in the calendar, one of which is this Sabbath, and it’s better to explore these days before rather than after they pass. So, here we go.

Parsha Summary

Last week in parsha Bo, the children of Israel were finally released from Egypt, but they had not yet exited the territory controlled by Egypt. They were on the way. In parsha Beshalach, we have the dramatic confrontation at the Reed Sea. God splits the waters and the children of Israel cross on dry land while Pharaoh’s chariots and army are drowned. Having come through and seeing the Egyptian army dead and washing up on the shore, Israel sings the Song of the Sea. They then turn their backs on Egypt and march into the wilderness. After three days

without finding drinkable water, they start to grumble. God shows Moses a tree to throw into the bitter waters at Mara, making the waters sweet and drinkable. At a later stop, the wilderness of "Seen," the people begin to murmur about food. God sends quail in the evening and the manna begins the next morning. God begins training the nation to follow His leading with early commandments regarding collecting manna and the Sabbath. They are learning that they must follow God's instructions or things won't go well for them. At Rephidim, they again lack water and ask, "Is God with us or not?" God has Moses strike the rock in the presence of the elders, and water begins to pour from the rock. Amalek attacks while they are still at Rephidim. This first battle as free people is the unusual one where Moses is on top of the mountain while Joshua leads the battle below, and as long as Moses keeps the staff of God raised, Israel wins the battle below. In the end, Moses gets some help from Aaron and Hur, and the battle is won. God has Moses record in a book that He will completely destroy the memory of Amalek from under heaven.

Beshalach

One gets the sense while reading a portion like Beshalach that Israel is, indeed, like a newborn. The birth imagery is very strong here. Once through the Reed Sea, they cry a bit regarding water and food, seemingly not yet quite knowing much about the God they are following. And who can blame them, really? Hundreds of thousands of people have followed God into the wilderness, and there's no water. Then there's no food. It seems very natural that they would wonder where the water and food are going to come from for all these people!

The point I want to make here, though, is that particularly with these earlier chapters of Exodus, we have to be able to read on two levels, both as a birth story and as encouragements to the mature. In the cycle of months, we are nearing the end. We're nearing the middle of the 11th month already. This means we are reaching a point of MATURITY in the yearly cycle. On the other hand, we're reading about the birth and infancy of a nation. And when we review this story in Nissan at Passover, our focus at that time is on rebirth and the emptying out of Unleavened Bread so that we can be filled with new life. So we have to be able to see in this text both early and late stages of maturity. It's a bit of a paradox. So just keep that in mind as we are moving forward.

The word "beshalach" means "in sending," and it's part of a phrase that usually gets translated in English as, "When Pharaoh let the people go" or "sent the people out." "Shalach" is about sending out. As we have been emphasizing lately with this portion of the calendar, we are in a phase of the year where the light and truth we have previously internalized is now being sent out into the darkness. We are shining, reflecting His light like the moon. And this is what is happening in this Torah portion with Israel being sent out of the darkness of Egypt into the light. The name of the portion refers to Pharaoh pushing the people out, implying they didn't have much choice here, and there is truth to that, though we always have some choice. Even the baby has to signal to the mother that it is ready to be born. But Pharaoh is not the one pushing Israel out. Make no mistake, Pharaoh is the tool in God's hand from the beginning to the ending of this story. It is God Who makes the pathway open for us to reflect His light, and it is God Who makes the pathway out of Egypt. Pharaoh is a mere tool here. The sages emphasize

that there are several actions God takes a special interest in making happen personally in this world, not using intermediaries, and one of those is opening the womb to bring forth a child. And we find this idea mentioned in the last chapter of Isaiah.

Looking now to the application to the mature Believer, one sign of the maturity of a group of Believers is that they will, eventually, send out sh'liachs, missionaries, emissaries, workers of good either near or far. In doing so, the fellowship acts like God, because God sends emissaries, beginning with His own Son. The Apostolic Scriptures are largely the records of missionaries. When a group sends out a missionary, they are really having to put their money where their mouth is. And there's a high level of unity that such a project requires. The body must receive the call or vision, step up to pledge their money and resources for it, pray over it, send out those charged with implementing it, and keep tabs on it, overseeing the effort. This whole effort can be a great unifier for the body, unity in self-sacrificial service.

But the unity doesn't stop there. As a former missionary and one who often found himself as the newsletter writer or editor, I came to understand that God really desires for missionaries to connect together people from very different life circumstances and cultures and geographic locations; He loves this. At one point I was part of a work in China where the head missionary just hated being pulled away from the work to go reporting and raising money in the States. Yet I came to see it pleased God very much to have this humble woman from Eastern Kentucky travel the country and over and over again be brought to tears as she showed pictures of the children we were serving on faraway Hainan Island in the South China Sea. She was drawing the hearts of the people in Kansas and Oklahoma and Ohio to the hearts of those very far away who had experienced a very different life. A connection was being formed between very different-seeming people on opposite sides of the world. And this is a very wonderful thing that God loves. We can nurture in our children the desire to serve in this way, in whatever role, whether a supporting role or as one who is sent. There's always some risk involved in sending a missionary, but what do you get in life without risking something.

A Time for Prayer, A Time to Move

I'd like to draw out a second point here related to maturity as we practice seeing the text on multiple levels. We read a curious verse in chapter 14 when Israel finds itself pinned between the sea and the Egyptian army, and the people are panicking a bit. Moses answers them,

"Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." (Exodus 14:13-14)

Sounds great. But then the very next verse is this: The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward." (Exodus 14:15)

The text doesn't even show us Moses crying out to God, though clearly he must have. R'Trugman explains that Rashi asks, "What else is Moses to do?" Aren't we taught to cry out to God in moments like this? Isn't that what the people of God do? The answer from the sages is

that perhaps Moses actually prayed a bit too long. A long prayer was not what was needed at this moment. Rather than Moses pouring out the heart of the people to God and pleading for mercy, what was needed at that moment was movement. "Why do you cry to me?" God says. "Tell the people of Israel to GO FORWARD." There is a time for long prayers, and there is a time to get moving. And as we mature, we need to be able to recognize what kind of a moment we are in. Are we in a moment to stop and get direction from the Lord, or are we in a moment to make a choice and move?

Leap of Faith

And so the people move, and, importantly, God makes the way forward clear for them ONLY AFTER THEY START MOVING. And they come to the other side. It's really a momentous thing all of these people did, our spiritual ancestors. They knew the dangers of the wilderness. They knew the scarcity of that place, the lack of water, the predatory animals, the blasting sun. In Egypt, all they had to do was leave the Nile valley to experience the wilderness. And though we can see that there's a kind of immaturity here that requires God to really push them out, we can also see that this kind of faith step, this putting faith into practice when we are risking everything, is what the mature Believer is called to do, only with a bit of a lighter touch from God. We're talking about that overused but still very useful phrase "leap of faith." A child is pulled from the womb. An adult uses his or her free will to jump into the darkness. Let's let Israel's plunge into the wilderness be an example to us now.

I love that scene in one of the Indiana Jones movies where Jones comes through a narrow rock tunnel to the edge of a massive chasm that slips away below into total darkness. It is a test. It's been years since I've seen the movie, so I'm a bit foggy on the overall plot, but I found a couple minutes of the movie on YouTube. At a certain point, his father is dying, and his quest to find the Holy Grail takes on a great sense of immediacy because his father doesn't have long to live, and it is believed that the grail has healing powers. He knows from the book of clues he has that the chasm in front of him is a test of faith designed by religious people trying to protect the grail, and that what is required is a leap of faith. Yet there is his foot on the stone wall with his toes sticking out into the abyss. It looks impossible. After some hesitation, he places his hand over his heart, closes his eyes, lets out a big breath, opens his eyes again, and just takes a huge step out into the air. He falls about a foot before he lands on an invisible bridge, a narrow rock bridge that is cleverly designed and perfectly cut so as to blend in with the far wall of the chasm, making it invisible. It was there all along. This is what the people of Israel were, in some ways, a bit forced to do during the exodus, and it is what we are called to do willingly over and over again as we grow up in the Lord. And it's a blast! It's one adventure after the next.

The Power He Gives Us

And God empowers us to make such leaps. I want to make a point now about the great power He entrusts us with because we see a clear picture of it here. He gives us unimaginable power if we have the eyes to see it. And I'm afraid I often don't. I'm speaking to myself here first. In the small daily prayers book that Grant made for Beth Tikkun, we read this combined prayer from Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 3 that speaks to the great power God makes available to us:

“And may the God of our Master Yeshua the Messiah, the Father of glory, give us a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened, so that we will know what is the hope to which He has called us, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe, in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Messiah, when he raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenlies. And may He grant us, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Messiah may dwell in our hearts through faith...” And it goes on.

So where do we see this great power in Beshalach? I would like to suggest that we should read the staff of God in Moses’ hand as the arm of God, Himself. Moses is wielding in his hand the arm of God. I had this thought this week when God led me to read a chapter of Isaiah, Isaiah 63. There it says, speaking of God, “Then He remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit, Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, Who divided the waters before them to make for Himself an everlasting name, Who led them through the depths?” (Isaiah 63:11-13)

The phrase that stuck out to me there was, “Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses.” We can read this to be saying that the staff of God in Moses’ hand is God’s own arm. And this becomes important later at the battle with Amalek, when Moses raises up the staff on the hilltop. This is the same staff that has the snake within it. It is a staff that reveals God’s power to both bring death and restore to life. It is only God Who can do this.

Let it be an encouragement to us today that God entrusts His arm to a man, Moses. And likewise, He makes available to each of us vast power beyond what we can imagine.

A Powerful Foe?

It struck me in this portion that God is showing His power over mankind in a special way in how the Egyptian army is being represented here. God sets up for destruction the most powerful army mankind can produce. As I have read this passage over the years, it kept sticking out at me how strange it was that the passage keeps mentioning the horse, the chariots, and the riders. Both God and the people keep listing these elements of the army, almost like a formula. We start seeing this in chapter 14 verse 6, when Pharaoh regrets letting the people go and decides to chase after them. It says, “So he made ready his CHARIOT and took his army with him, and took six hundred chosen CHARIOTS and all the other CHARIOTS of Egypt with officers over all of them.” (Exodus 14:6-7)

Ok, got it, there are chariots involved here, and chariot drivers. A bit later, we read God saying this, “...I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”” (Exodus 14:17-18)

And on it goes. When the army descends into the sea, it says Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen go in. And when we see the people of Israel sing, they sing that God has thrown into the sea the horse and his rider.

What's going on here? What is this emphasis? I think what the combination of the horse, the chariot, and the chariot driver is is this: in a nutshell, it is the power of men pooling their creativity for evil. It is mankind working together to develop technological means of better harnessing the power of the inner beast for war. The combination of the horse, the chariot, and the rider is the ancient world's equivalent of a cyborg soldier. It is the personification of what fallen humanity can do through technology to enhance the power of the inner beast to fight for resources, to claw for territory and wealth. This is what men do to become powerful in defiance of God.

It's very evocative of the Tower of Babel, where we first see what mankind can do WORKING TOGETHER to build with evil ends in mind. The Tower of Babel was a technological achievement – the crafting of baked bricks held together with a tar-like mortar. This is mankind MAKING HIS OWN STONES, stones that are of uniform size that can be fitted together easily, stones that can be made by the millions using the simple raw material of the earth that is everywhere around them. It's quite a technological feat! And God admits that man go do vast things working together in unity like this, both good and evil. And so He confuses man's language and disperses them across the face of the earth.

Of course man's most clever machinations are like nothing to the Infinite God. By drowning this army of cyborgs in the Reed Sea, God is saying, "It is an easy thing for Me to destroy this that man raises up against Me and my chosen people." In an instant all of that craftiness is gone. And the point is made stronger by the name "Reed Sea." The reed is used in Scripture as a symbol of that which is fragile. It is easily broken. And here a sea of reeds is used to utterly demolish mankind's army of cyborgs, this combination of beast and technology and warrior, in a brief instant of time. Gone. It's quite a picture! God is saying, "Mankind, take note that when you pool together your intelligence for evil, when you bring against God and His people the best and most powerful and the greatest advancement you can muster, I can use the humble reed and a bit of water to demolish it in mere moments."

One reason I mention this here is that we are now living in times of great scientific progress. The world is "speeding up," as they say. Scientific breakthroughs are coming fast and furious; it's an exponential advancement we're experiencing. And mankind's arrogance grows by the day. These are DANGEROUS times. We can only advance so far before we either begin to utterly annihilate ourselves or God steps in to put an end to the current epoch of the world. Truly we are living at the end of days.

Shabbat Shirah

Let's move on now to the concept of song. We read the Song of the Sea this week, and the haftarah is the song of Deborah and Barak; because of this, this Shabbat has a special name, the

Sabbath of Song, Shabbat Shirah. There are only a few Sabbaths in the year with special titles, and this is one.

Song is associated with the conclusion of salvation. In Scripture, we see people break out into song when they have come through a test, when they have come to the other side of a great struggle, when they can look back and see the difficult beginning, and they can also now see the good result, salvation. The result is unity in song. And so we can say that breaking out in song is an end-times element. It's not that we can't always be singing or that music and song aren't a part of every phase of life, but we see a special EMPHASIS on song at these moments when salvation becomes fully revealed, especially people singing together. It is the same with the calendar. We are nearing the end of the calendar, and here we have Shabbat Shirah, the Sabbath of Song. And this Sabbath, in a way, is marking the end of winter in Israel.

Another example of this phenomenon is found in Revelation, Revelation obviously being the last book of the Bible and the one that most describes the end of days. In Revelation 15 it says:

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb..." (Revelation 15:1-3)

Here as the end draws near, we not only have a special song, but it is the drawing together of two songs, the uniting of two songs, the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb.

Let's think a bit about song being an expression of the end of the salvation process. At the end, we are achieving a transcendent unity in this place of separation as the spiritual is merged with the physical. Everything about wholesome song is an expression of this unity.

The structure of music, itself, shows this unity of above and below. Grant has taught us about this before. The melody is like the simple essence of the song; it's like the spiritual life of the song. On the other side, the rhythm is like the physical grounding of the music. And in between is the bridge of the soul, the harmony, which is a kind of place of knitting together. There is an intellectual element to the harmony and a deeply emotional aspect to it too, like the brain and the heart together. When done in unison, the three make something that far transcends the individual pieces.

And when people sing TOGETHER, there are even more layers of unity. The Sabbath is a kind of end point given to us, the end to the week. And we sing together. When I think of the miracle of a group of Believers gathered together singing on the Sabbath, a certain image sometimes comes into my mind. Maybe I've described this before, but it's good to come back to it. I imagine a map, like a map of Northeast Ohio where Tim and I are now recording this. And I picture each member and each family of Beth Tikkun as a separate dot on the map, all over the place. And as the week progresses, each of those dots moves here and there on the map as

they go about work and school, the dots, themselves, splitting into smaller dots and rejoining back at home. But then Shabbat comes, and all of those dots start to move toward a single place on the map, and they combine together to make one dot. And that's miraculous! And the unity is so deep at times as we sing and pray together that in unison we are thinking the same thoughts and feeling similar emotions related to those thoughts and speaking the same words together. And to do that speaking or singing in unison, we even have to BREATHE together. And we're crafting something together, something ephemeral and beautiful both in thought and sound, something that can't really be captured but must be experienced in the moment. It's spectacular. It's a miracle of unity in our often hectic, separate lives.

How does that unity happen? A person who didn't have faith would be mystified by what brings us together like this. "Is it an ancient book that brings you together?" they might ask. "Is it the story of a spiritual leader that lived 2,000 years ago in the Near East that brings you together like this?" Well, yes, the truth of the Book and the truth of Yeshua bring us together, certainly. But these are more than an ancient book and a Near-Eastern spiritual leader. They are both ALIVE, this book and this Leader, and they are active in our lives, shaping us and guiding us into unity. It is the Living God working through His Son and His Torah that brings us together. And it's a wonder. It is supernatural.

Song is a very intimate outpouring from us; it's very revealing of what is happening inside of us, and it is very individual, unique to us – no one else sings like you sing. And this UNIQUENESS OF EXPRESSION is also what we find with maturity.

Maybe one way we can think of how we translate the light and truth given to us is through song. God pours out His light, and we respond in song. God is in the male role, the giver. And we are in the female role, returning the gift. And in a sense, we can see this reflected in the actual structure of the Song of the Sea, which appears to be in two parts. The men sing the first part, and the women, led by Miriam, sing and dance and play the tambourine in response. The initial song is male, and the response is female. God pours out His Spirit on us at Shavuot in the spring, and we, the bride, are now in a season of pouring out that light in the winter as we are uniquely empowered to craft vessels for that light, and one expression of that pouring out of the Bride is song. This week, we recognize the Bride's song with the special Shabbat Shirah, the Sabbath of Song.

Music is a powerful part of our lives. The Lord has been telling me recently that I can be bringing more holiness into my music choices. Last week we talked about just this idea of the month of Sh'vat being a time when God provides a special ability to extend holiness into the mundane areas of our lives. I tend to prefer music without words. I'm careful to listen for the spirit in the music, to sense whether the atmosphere and the inner message of the music is mostly positive or negative, and I avoid music that brings the wrong spirit with it. But music can also powerfully carry meaning with words, good words, words that glorify and lift up Adonai. And we have so much music available to us. Today it's simply a matter of searching and maybe asking each other what music they are listening to.

Yeshua - Mara and Mary

Let's move now to bringing Yeshua into the discussion. The connection I'd like to make this week to Yeshua will be a bit different, as it comes not so much from the calendar discussion as it does a specific incident in this portion.

A question has nagged me for some years – why are there so many Mary's surrounding Yeshua. Some count as many as seven Mary's in the Apostolic Scriptures. These include Yeshua's mother, Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary the mother of John Mark, and another Mary mentioned in Romans. These were not just mothers or wives; they were disciples. Of these listed, it is most striking that Yeshua's own MOTHER is named "Mary."

One reason this question has intrigued me is that the meaning of Mary is "bitter" or even "rebellion." Why are there so many surrounding Yeshua named "bitter," including His mother? Well, the question is answered here in our Torah portion. This is maybe the clearest place in Scripture where the question of bitterness is addressed – the bitter waters are turned sweet by the tree which God directs Moses to cast into the waters. After this physical picture of God turning the bitterness into sweetness, God talks about how He will keep diseases from Israel, the diseases of Egypt, and He says, "for I, the Lord, am your healer."

How does He heal? He heals through the tree cast into the bitter waters. These Mary's surrounding Yeshua are the bitter waters. Yeshua is like the Tree of Life cast into the middle of the waters below, the fallen physical realm, and so He is surrounded by bitterness. It's like God took Yeshua, Who we can think of as the Tree of Life, and He threw Him into the physical realm, the waters below. And so it is that in His Incarnation, in His appearance among us, that God brings healing to the whole planet and humanity for his rebellion and the resulting bitterness. Every aspect of the Tree of Life walking among us is healing for humanity. But it is especially when He is most made to resemble the tree, when He is hung on a tree, the cross made of wood, that the greatest healing comes. Literally He is hanging on the tree and He makes provision for the care of His mother, whose name is "Mary," arranging for Mary to be taken into the home of John.

Tu BiSh'vat

Speaking of trees, let me just add one final point here today by mentioning that this Torah portion of Beshalach is always read near to the 15th of Sh'vat, a special day in the calendar called Tu BiSh'vat. It's the new year for trees. This year the 15th of Sh'vat, which is the full moon of the month, occurs next week in parsha Yitro, but we'll talk about it here. The new year for trees is the calendar marker for calculating tithes for trees and determining the age of trees. Fruit trees have to reach a certain age before we can eat the fruit, and the 15th of Sh'vat is the yearly birthday for the trees. It is said that on this day, the sap begins ascending in the trees, which have been dormant in the cold of winter. This is what the trees in Israel are doing, and it won't be long until the sap begins to rise in our trees in Ohio, too.

Tu BiSh'vat is about renewal, so it goes well with these portions where Israel is being reborn, the exodus from Egypt. These portions are exciting and help give us a bit of a boost. We always have cause to rejoice and be passionate in our walk with the Lord, but this is a particularly difficult time in the calendar, this time of deep of winter. And this rebirth of the trees that reflects the rebirth of Israel in the Torah portions is a physical reflection of renewal that reinforces what we read in the Torah. The renewal of the trees encourages us like the exodus does, when we need it most. The cold is strong, and that's indicating a battle against apathy and lack of passion. Our bodies are laboring under sickness that wears us down. Both individually and corporately, we are being tested and pruned so that we can bear more fruit eventually, and this pruning can be disheartening because it involves seeing what is really going on inside of us that is not of God and must be changed or removed. And here in the midst of this heaviness, we have the lightness of the Song of the Sea; we have this fantastic story of the exodus, and this rebirth of the trees. Both the story and the trees are telling us, "Be encouraged; the spring is coming. Your own rebirth and renewal is coming soon. Hang in there." God is gracious to provide such encouragements. As we say in the prayers, "Blessed are You, O Lord, Who restores souls to dead bodies.

We'll have to end it there today. Thanks again for listening. May God strengthen us to be senders of the light, like He is. May He put a song of salvation in all of our hearts. Through His Son, may He bring healing to the bitterness we sometimes experience in life. And may He make us into the people He wants us to be. Shalom.