



Parashat Beshalach - #267

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On the Haftarah... A Woman at the Head

[Ashkenazim: Shoftim 4:4-5:31

Sefardim: Shoftim 5:1-31

Yemenite Jews: Shoftim 4:23-5:31]

When the Tanach tells us that the prophetess Devorah was our leader, it is not only to relate a unique chapter in our history, but to teach us a lesson about the future.

We know that not all prophecies were committed to writing. "Many prophets stood for Israel, double those who left Egypt, but a prophecy which was needed for all generations was written, one which was not needed for generations was not written" (Megillah 14a). The prophet is, before all else, a speaker and not a writer. According to our Rabbis, there were hundreds of thousands of prophets whose teachings were passed down orally. Contrary to the Torah, whose message is unchangeable, eternal, remains true from the beginning of time to its end and is applicable to all situations – prophecies were only stated for specific circumstances, times and places (Chulin 137a in Rashi d.h. Torah). As a general principle, the prophecies were not written, and if there are rare circumstances when they are, it is because they contain a message for future generations.

We have a woman who stood as a leader of the Nation of Israel. It is unusual for a woman to hold such a position, but the text is explicit: "Devorah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidot, judged Israel at that time. She would sit under the palm tree of Devorah, between the Ramah and Beit El in Mt. Efraim, and the Children of Israel would go up to her for judgment" (Shoftim 4:4-5). But Devorah was far from Joan of Arc riding on a horse in battle gear – though she was the leader, it was not her but Barak ben Avinoam who headed the army. And according to tradition, he was Lapidot, her husband (Yalkut Shimoni 42). Nonetheless, this prophetess was largely the head of the Nation of Israel and had a decisive influence upon it.

Her unique appointment is explained by the Tosafot in the following way: 1. She was a prophetess who received a unique prophetic ruling (Tosafot on Niddah 50a). 2. She was willingly accepted by The Nation of Israel for this reason (Tosafot on Baba Kamma 15a). In fact, an individual who is usually unqualified to be a judge can be accepted as one for a special reason if both sides of a dispute agree. In a rare case, even a family member of one of the sides, or a shepherd, who most consider unfit can serve as a judge in monetary (but not halachic) matters (Sanhedrin 24 and Chiddushei Ha-Ran on Shavuot 30a).

Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, looked favorably upon the institution of the Knesset of Israel. He held that according to Halachah it was legitimate for the Knesset to rule on economic, national and societal matters but not on halachic matters such as Shabbat and Kashrut (Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah 9, Ish Va-Isha 18).

Returning to Devroah...there are two reasons that justify her role as judge. First, the Divine Presence rested upon her, which – on account of Hashem's kindness, transformed her into a leader. Second, the consent of the community strengthened her authority. Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, mentioned that even today the Nation of Israel has given the ruling authority to a woman as the Prime Minister, and it was quite successful (ibid.): Golda Meir's relationship to Torah was better than her predecessor's, she succeeded in raising up the honor of the Nation, and made a positive impression both within the Nation and among the surrounding nations.

In the period described in the Book of Shoftim, our neighbors caused us great troubles, similar to that described in Tehillim: "All of the nations surrounded me...they surely surrounded me" (Tehillim 118:10-11). But in the merit of the Divine Presence resting on that judge, the prophetess, we received amazing results: "The Land was quiet for forty years" (Shoftim 5:31). This allowed us to renew our strength for what was coming next.

How did Devorah attain such results? It was not due to military talent, but to her being a spiritual hero: a prophetess! This central figure of the Nation of Israel reached a high level of philosophical and ethical spirituality. The spiritual greatness given to her influenced Barak ben Avinoam, the Chief of Staff, who feared going into battle. Devorah taught him to attack the enemy, even though "it had nine hundred chariots of iron, and greatly oppressed the Children of Israel for twenty years" (Shoftim 4:3). "And she sent and called Barak ben Avinoam of Kedesh Naftali and said to him: Hasn't Hashem, G-d of Israel, commanded, 'Go and gather people from Mount Tabor'" (ibid. v. 6). Barak, who feared competing with an enemy who instilled fear, responded to her: "If you go with me, I will go. But if you do not go with me, I will not go" (ibid. v. 8). Devorah said: "I will surely go with you" (ibid. v. 9). She is the one who filled the Chief of Staff with strength and courage.

We learn from Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah, that this type of prophecy still applies today, since spiritual strength is what provides the Nation with national, idealistic motivation, which in turn leads to military courage. Spiritual weakness and a lack of Torah commitment endangers us on a military and national level. We must increase our faith and connection to Hashem. The more we develop ourselves in a spiritual sense, the more we dedicate ourselves for the sake of the Nation of Israel, the more we will influence the Nation (Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah ibid.).

When we sanctify Hashem's Name before the nations, they will respond with exalted awe and respect towards us. Our weaknesses, hesitations, yielding, compromises, degradations, humbling ourselves, will have no place and will completely disappear.

The Song of Devorah points to an additional problem – one that we still have today: different factions were created within the Nation of Israel (Shoftim 15-16). This problem must be fixed forcefully, because it is essential that a spirit of peace, unity, respect and mutual understanding rests among us. Our Rabbis express this idea in a harsh manner: "Great is peace, for even if they worship idols and peace prevails, Hashem says: I am able to rule over them when there is peace between them" (Bereshit Rabbah 38:6), as it says: "Efraim is united in idol-worship, [lit. joined to idols] leave him alone" (Hosea 4:17). If the Tribe of Efraim is united, even if it is involved with idol worship, no harm will befall them.

So too, if the situation in our Land is extremely complex and problematic, but we live in peace with one another, we will merit a Divine blessing. "Hashem will give strength to His Nation, Hashem will bless His Nation with peace" (Tehilim 29:10). Hashem will send us His blessing, despite all of the international pressure which is upon us.

Rav Aviner on... Neo-Reform and Faith

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Bo 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

In every generation enemies rise up to eliminate elements that are part of the Torah, or to insert elements that are not there; to be lenient where the Torah was strict, or to be strict where it was lenient. Since the Torah is the supreme Divine Light that elevates the Jewish Nation and individual, countless attempts are made at counterfeiting the Torah. The various counterfeiters seek shelter behind our Sages' words that "there are seventy faces to the Torah." Truthfully, however, those counterfeiters constitute the seventy-first face. In other words, they are outside of the Torah. They argue: "There are arguments, and our position is legitimately within the Torah." Yet that is not so. Their position represents the destruction of the Torah.

It is true that to the simple person, this seems like a simple halachic difference of opinions, but that is not the case, because everything depends on one's approach.

Most people do not notice this, so there is an obligation to shout: Danger!

Yet those same precious people still will not understand why we are shouting. This seems like a rebuke that no one will heed, and we are advised not to give such rebuke. Yet that is not so. Our point is indeed something that people will listen to, because it fits their intellectual and moral ability. It just takes time, but it is ultimately to be heeded.

And what constitutes a counterfeit approach? Everyone agrees that the Torah is a living Torah. Yet what is a living Torah? Must the Torah be suited to life, or must life be suited to the Torah? We, the disciples of Moses, say: The Torah preceded life. It is the breath of life. It provides our lives with order. It is the light of our lives.

Put another way: Does the reality follow Halacha, or, G-d forbid, is the opposite the case, that Halacha follows reality, such that the Torah must be bent to agree with public opinion? Certainly the Torah must enlighten the entire Jewish People, and Shamai the Elder said,

“Receive every person with a pleasant countenance (Avot 1). Yet that does not mean that, G-d forbid, we must change the Torah.

As Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook put it: We are allowed to pray with the sinners on Yom Kippur, but not to take their sinful views into account (Igrot HaRe'iyah). Rav Kook provided a parable: “A physician must watch over a patient, curing him by means of his medical science.

He should pay no heed to the wishes of the patient who has ruined his health by way of his heinous life style. In just the same way, the gaze of our holy leadership must always be focused on the Torah, on the life of the Holy Temple. From there we can see very well how life has to be and, based on that, how it must be organized. If someone is further swayed by the corrupt reality of life in the outside world, it will ruin his outlook.” (Ein Aya, Shabbat 17, Chapter 1, letter 79).

The physician must act in accordance with the doctrines of medicine, and not, G-d forbid, in accordance with the wishes of the patient in order to increase his own stature.

Thus, “G-d forbid that life outside the House of Study, with its corruption, should influence the process of codifying Jewish law and providing Rabbinic guidance, a process that emerges specifically from the House of Study, a place of Torah.” (ibid.)

Certainly we must have a full acquaintance with life, so that it will be possible to cope with it, but we mustn't be influenced by life. Therefore Rav Kook explains that this is why Moshe “ascended to Mount Sinai early in the morning” to receive the Torah, and “descended from Mount Sinai early in the morning” in order to give it to us (Shabbat 86a). It is because during the course of the day our lives are intoxicating, especially regarding our interaction with society. Yet we mustn't allow the Torah to accept any impression from life and from our surroundings. There is no need for this mixing. Quite the contrary, it can only detract. Torah must be free of any external influence, and then it can be part of life (Ein Aya, Shabbat 86a, Chapter 9, Letter 16).

We are very happy that we have a Jewish State, but the Torah is not subject to that State. Rather, the Torah loves us, enlightens us and educates us.

The Torah is not a description of what exists, but rather of what has to be, as Maharal said (Netivot Olam, Netiv Ha-Torah, Chapter 14). If you wish to know what is happening in life, buy a newspaper, but if you wish to know what *should* happen in life, or what *will* happen, then learn Torah. The Torah “is not influenced by reality. Quite the contrary, it influences reality. Be cautious regarding everything you hear,” writes Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto in Mesillat Yesharim. “Examine it seven-fold, lest it was influenced by the evil impulse.” (end of Chapter 6)

“One must particularly be cautious regarding what one hears in the realm of modesty, because the evil impulse is very strong in that realm, tricking people into thinking that it is pure” (Chapter 11).

Rambam wrote that there is nothing in the entire Torah which is as difficult to withdraw from as this particular passion” (Hilchot Isurei Biah), namely, who we are forbidden to marry and what is forbidden without marriage.

This is Avraham's war, from time immemorial, against paganism, which argues that man's purpose on earth is the harmony of pleasures, within which the gods are integrated. We, by contrast, say that this world is a world of fulfilling duties, and pleasures are just a necessary aid so that we can feel good and we can do our work steadfastly.

Is the Torah the ideal of life with certain pleasures being essential, or are pleasures the ideal with Torah being essential, just in minute quantity, or less than that?

Do not say: Torah has to be rendered more friendly. Truthfully, nothing could be more friendly than the Torah. It was given to us by He “who chooses His people Israel with love,” He “who loves His Nation Israel”. We say in our prayers, “Hashem, our G-d, Your love for us is everlasting... You teach us law of life, to perform Your will whole heartedly” (from the blessings of the Shema).

The Torah is friendly. We just have to follow G-d's pathways and fulfill “Love your fellow as yourself” (Vayikra 19:18).

The antidote to Neo-Reform is to increase faith in G-d, fear of G-d and love of G-d. The entire Jewish People loves the light of G-d. "O give me the kisses of your mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine" (Shir Ha-Shirim of Songs 1:1). The Jewish People are ready and waiting for those kisses. They are waiting and longing to love G-d and attach themselves to Him. Wine is an intoxicating experience, but G-d's love is better and sweeter. (see Zohar Chadash on Shir Ha-Shirim 63b, 64a).

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Shut Rabbenu Tam Tefillin

Sofer Stam who does not Put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin

Q: Can a Sofer Stam who does not put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin write Rabbenu Tam Tefillin?

A: The basic Halachah is that there is no problem (Mikdash Meat 34:4). But some are strict to only buy Rabbenu Tam Tefillin from a Sofer Stam who puts on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin (Lishchat Ha-Sofer 26:1).

Rabbenu Tam Tefillin and Maaser Kesafim

Q: Is it permissible to buy Rabbenu Tam Tefillin with Maasar Kesafim?

A: No. Maaser Kesafim is for the poor (And this is also the ruling of Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski. Hilchot Maaser Kesafim, Chapter 14 #53).

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