

JANUARY 18TH 2019 / 12TH SHEVAT 5779

Poet Mary Oliver, who died yesterday, and whose poetry graces the page of our machzor, wrote one of my favorite poems, *Wild Geese*:

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

We all experience loneliness, we all have difficult journeys to take, whether personal, familial, communal or national. We all have to come out of *mitzrayim*, the narrow places, Egypt. The question is, how do we approach the journey?

In this week's Torah portion *Beshalach*, we read the "Song of the Sea" sung by the Israelites when God split the Reed Sea, delivering them from the Egyptians, and allowing them to cross to freedom. Hence this Shabbat is called *Shabbat Shirah*, "Shabbat of song." This is the journey of our people, a people who, after surviving slavery and trauma, sing and dance their way to liberation.

Yet the path forward is not always clear. We read, "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was the nearer (*ki karov hu*) ..." (Exodus 13:17) Rabbi Yael Ridberg writes, "Upon leaving Egypt, there were two possible routes to the Promised Land: through the Land of the Philistines, a nearer and perhaps easier route; and through the wilderness, the harder and farther route. It is not surprising that the text wants us to understand that the way to the Promised Land was not going to be a straight shot, without challenges or disappointments. The text is reminding us that the precious milestones and achievements we have reached on a winding path in our

lives are often the hardest won and most rewarding.” In her writing, Rabbi Ridberg connects the Torah portion to tomorrow's Women's March, a current path toward liberation.

<https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Parashat-Beshalah--The-Harder-Road-of-the-Women-s-March.html?soid=1103697757520&aid=DbbzWNgfszM>

As for the controversies surrounding the Women’s March, I am sharing the thoughts of Rabbi Jill Jacobs of "Truah, the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights", of which I am a part. You may not agree with everything or even anything she says, but she has given this piece a lot of thought, and is head of an organization representing 2,000 American rabbis and cantors.

<https://www.facebook.com/rabbijilljacobs/posts/10157024345554553>

May we all be blessed on our journeys, both on our own and in community. May we all have the courage to take the next step toward freedom.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Diana