

## Shabbat Shalom with a Side of Torah – Beshallakh

I used to be a huge football fan. I played the game and loved watching, taking vicarious joy in the successes of those I knew who were playing or the teams I most favored. I even enjoyed second guessing the coaches. I would always cringe, though (and still do), after some big play when the player who made the big play would beat his chest and strut, as though – at that moment – he was God’s gift to mankind. Even when I was young, and still playing, we called these guys “hot doggers,” or with great sarcasm ... “superstar.” For all the things that O.J. Simpson has done to tarnish his name and ruin his life (and other’s as well), he taught me a lesson in humility and sportsmanship that will not diminish, whatever his personal story. After winning the Heisman Trophy at the University of Southern California, the Buffalo Bills snatched him up and made him the running back of their future. Over the course of his first three years, the “running back of all running backs” averaged less than four yards a carry. It was not until he was given a competent (ok, stellar) front line who would block for him that his career blossomed. Taking nothing away from his talent, I remember once remarking that the hole his line opened for him to run through was deep enough that my grandmother (may she rest in peace) could have gained five yards a carry. However good he was, it took a support crew to help him be his best. He figured this out and treated his linemen well with gifts of appreciation and open praise and thanks. I am impressed by athletes who spend time openly appreciating their teammates, coaches, and families. Too often, it is the unnamed heroes that should be appreciated as the real reason that someone else can succeed.

Bette Midler made a hit out of a song about her support system. “Wind Beneath My Wings” speaks of the appreciation a successful person has to feel for the one(s) who love(s) and support(s) her on the journey towards fulfilling goals and dreams. This song’s ultimate lesson reminds us that none of us who succeed can do it on our own. Still and all, the name of the person to whom she gives thanks is never mentioned – ok, it’s a song, but still. ...

As we turn to our Torah portion this week, there was thunder and lightning. Egypt was facing the sea on one side and Pharaoh’s raging chariots on the other. As Israel became more and more convinced that the moments of freedom they enjoyed were going to actually cost them their lives, the waters stirred and then parted. Nakhshon had stepped into the sea, and the waters parted around him. It was not Moses that brought this miracle, it was just Nakhshon. Since the moment that we met Moses, this was the first time that a miracle occurred in which he was not directly involved. Even while Aaron spoke on Moses’ behalf, Moses was still directly involved. And it is in this week’s Torah portion that we first meet Joshua and first learn the name of Moses’ sister, Miriam. These are not unimportant figures in the story line of Torah; nor are they at all insignificant in our evolving tradition. And while Moses’ name does not appear in the traditional Haggadah at a Passover Seder, many of us have a special sup in Miriam’s honor at the table. Joshua is Moses’ understudy, and we met him this week as he is responsible for keeping Moses’ arms held high so that the Israelites can see him while in the midst of battle and know that they are fighting for the superior cause. Now, mind you, I am not in support of war, but given the Bette Midler piece, this is just too coincidental to not include. The text tells us that when Moses’ arms were held high, the people’s spirits were high and they succeeded in battle. When his arms drooped, so did the outcome of the war. So, since Moses’ arms got tired, he needed help and the “wind” that held them

up was Joshua's (of course we never learn what happens when Joshua's arms got tired of holding up Moses', but that is the normal course of events – the support staff always bears the greater burden of a leader's success.

Who holds you up? As you take stock of your successes, to whom do you owe the debt of thanks? In truth, not one of us could "make it," without the help, encouragement and support of others around us. An athlete is only as good as his coaches and team allows him to be. The greatest vocalists are only at their best with a top notch supporting cast. Teachers and students need each other for classroom success, and no business flourishes just because of its CEO.

We really do need each other, and anyone of us who thinks otherwise is just fooling himself. It takes more than a community to make our individual worlds whole, and yet we take so many people for granted. From our garbage collectors to our bank tellers; our school janitor to the grocery store cashier who always smiles as you walk in. All of these people play important roles in our lives, allowing us to go about our daily business "slaying the dragons" that present obstacles to our progress. Become more intentional in greeting those with whom you interact, all of them. Moses needed Joshua and Miriam, we all need each other, and I need you, each of you. Shabbat Shalom.