

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps  
Torah Portion: *BiShallach*

*DO WE REJOICE WHEN OUR ENEMIES ARE DEFEATED?*

וַיִּטּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ עַל-הַיָּם וַיָּשָׁב הַיָּם לַפְּנוֹת בֶּקֶר לְאִיִּתּוֹ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסוּ  
לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר יְהוָה אֶת-מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם: וַיִּשְׁבּוּ הַיָּמִים וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת-הַרְּכָב  
וְאֶת-הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכַלְחִיל פְּרֹעֹה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לְאִי־נִשְׂאָר בָּהֶם עַד-אֶחָד:  
וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בַיַּבֶּשֶׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַיָּם לָהֶם חֲמָה מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם:

אִזּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה...

*Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak, the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But God hurled the Egyptians into the Sea. The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen – Pharaoh's entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites marched in the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left... Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to God...* [Exodus 14:27-29; 15:1]

Barely escaped with our lives from people who had enslaved us and then tried to kill us. Miraculously saved by God at a moment we thought that we were sure to die. Of course we are going to sing and give thanks! The defeat of our enemies is the very thing we wished for with all of our might.

And yet another voice in the tradition teaches this:

ואמר רבי יוחנן: מאי דכתיב + שמות י"ד+ ולא קרב זה אל זה כל הלילה - בקשו מלאכי השרת לומר שירה, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: מעשה ידי טובעין בים ואתם אומרים שירה?

Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of the verse And they did not approach one another all throughout the night? (Exodus 14:20) The ministering angels wanted to sing songs of praise to God, but God rebuked them, saying: "My creatures are drowning in the sea, and you want to sing?" [Bavli Megillah 10b]

Some point out that God was forbidding only the angels from singing, not the Israelites. They suggest that the Israelites had every good reason to sing about the destruction of their enemies. And yet another voice in the tradition, one aimed at Jews and not angels, teaches:

בְּנֶפֶל אוֹיְבֶיךָ אַל-תִּשְׂמַח וּבְכַשְׁלוֹ אֶל-יִגַּל לְבָבְךָ:

*If your enemy falls, do not exult; if he trips, let your heart not rejoice* [Proverbs 24:17]

**QUESTIONS:** So which is it, do we exult when our enemies are defeated or not? In the struggle for social justice, how do we view people whose policies and practices we oppose? Do we exult when they are defeated? What exactly are we celebrating? Is there an ethics of celebration that the sources cited above might help us to discern?