



Parshat B'shallah
Judges 4:4-5:31
January 31, 2015 / 11 Shevat 5775

Most sociologists and people who study gender agree in general that the person in a relationship who most likely will determine the nature of a family's religious affiliation and participation will be the woman. It doesn't matter if she is Jewish or practices another religion, if she decides the children will be Jewish, they will be Jewish and most likely will choose to marry or partner with someone who is Jewish. A mother's influence is extremely powerful.

A father's influence is equally important but in general different. Men and women often make specific types of decisions decades after their father has died because they feel their father would have wanted them to do so. Children hear their fathers' voices in many instances long after conversations have occurred. Think of it this way: the emotions that resonate behind their fathers' voices continue to echo through time and continue to influence the decisions that we make.

A classic example of this resonating behind the words and the echo which travels forward in time is this relationship between the Torah and haftarot in b'shallah. Poetry represents some of the oldest portions of the Tannach. While today we might not understand its rhythm and its cadence, these poems, of which there are many, were sung or recited for generations and after a long period of time were inserted into our texts.

I suspect the rabbis living in Talmudic times, at least six hundred years after the Torah and Haftarot were more or less finalized, connected them because they perceived their parallelism. But I wonder if they were able to hear the messages that resonated behind the text. Could they hear the message that God continued to work wonders, albeit in different ways, in different generations? Did they consider that Deborah was a strategist and Moses did what he was told? Did they understand that songs were written to commemorate victory but also to instill guidance to the listeners of how they could hear the voice of God?

Could it be that one of the messages of the songs that were written, the songs we sing, were to teach a people of words how to more effectively listen?

This week's Haftarah commentary was written by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of numerous books, including "Understanding the Haftarat. An Everyperson's Guide" and "The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership", both of which are available online at the FJMC store.