

WORKING WITHOUT TOOLS

A Devotional Meditation on Bo (Go)

Exodus 10:1-13:16; Jeremiah 46:13-28

Proverbs 9:10; Matthew 5:13-16, 7:24-27; Luke 6:31; Romans 2:13-16

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January 28, 2023

The leaders I admire most are those who try to help the people under them grow in their skills, experience, and ability to handle the trials of life. One of those accomplished leaders was commander of an Army Reserve unit in which I served. In civilian life, this man was a deputy sheriff. He had lived through a number of life-threatening and heart-wrenching situations that had given him a very good understanding of what is truly important. That's why he was such a steady, even-handed leader, with a wry sense of humor.



Photo from Inga Korolkovaite, "[Why Women Live Longer Than Men In 81 Pics.](#)" Boredpanda, 2018.

His sense of humor may be what I appreciated most. He was not one to fly into rage when subordinates made mistakes or failed to follow orders. Instead, he would craft a powerful corrective rebuke delivered in the form of a subtle play on words. My favorite was his catch phrase, "There you go thinking again, working without tools."

That casual comment was a joke, of course, made at the expense of the soldier being corrected, but those who took it only as a joke failed to grasp the depths of meaning packed within it. On one level, it was a rebuke for not following instructions. On another, it was an admonishment for failing to use the right tools – such as good judgment to temper overzealous ambition. At still another level, our commander's nuanced rebuke encouraged initiative and critical thinking. He expected soldiers to exhibit those traits, but in ways that enhanced our mission, not in ways that harmed the unit. Thus, "working without tools" also meant, "not using the brains God gave you."

So, then, is thinking a good thing, or a dangerous thing? The answer depends on whether our thinking is grounded in the objective truth of our Creator, or in our fleshly nature that seeks to dominate our environment and turn whatever we can to our own advantage. Both types of thinking make use of knowledge and experience, but only one puts knowledge and experience in a context that brings life. Smart people who know our Creator's framework for His creation can operate in a way that reflects His priorities of righteousness, justice, mercy, life, and peace. Those who do not know or who reject the Creator's established order are at best using their tools to improvise their own framework for life. That's what our Messiah meant in the closing lines of His Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came,

and the winds blew and beat against that house; and yet it did not fall, for its foundation had been built on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.

Matthew 7:24-27 TLV

Since Yeshua's teaching upheld everything that His heavenly Father had taught through Moses and the prophets, we can see in His sermon illustration a reflection of what Solomon taught:

The fear of *ADONAI* is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

Proverbs 9:10 TLV

In contrast, we see in Pharaoh's opposition to Moses the result of rejecting the Creator's ways and using the tools of knowledge and understanding to prop up a rival system. That's what brought about the destruction of Egypt. God will have His way in the end, even if He must allow judgment to continue on to the inevitable destruction of those who refuse to turn toward the Creator and away from their own shortsighted ways.

But then, Egypt's destruction wasn't entirely Pharaoh's fault. He presided over a system that excluded the counsel of the Almighty God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As long as Joseph, the righteous Hebrew, and his family had places of influence in Egypt's government and society, the fear of the LORD and knowledge of the Holy One was injected into the policies and values of the ancient world's most powerful nation. The native Egyptians may not have embraced completely the God of the Hebrews, but they did honor His people and accommodate their values. We might say that the ancient Hebrews were salt and light for Egypt, curbing the excesses of Egypt's pagan culture, and pointing the way toward the One True God and the redemption He offered to a fallen, rebellious world. It helped that even the pagan Egyptians had a moral code of their own with standards of righteousness, justice, mercy, life, and peace. Their standards, like those of every other society, derived from the Creator's eternal, universal standard, as Paul explains:

For it is not the hearers of *Torah* [law, direction, instruction of God] who are righteous before God; rather, it is the doers of *Torah* who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the *Torah*, do by nature the things of the *Torah*, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the *Torah*. They show that the work of the *Torah* is written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts switching between accusing or defending them on the day when God judges the secrets of men according to my Good News through Messiah *Yeshua*.

Romans 2:13-16 TLV

We might say that people in their right minds will live according to their culture's interpretation of "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). As long as there is a segment of the population willing to live that way, the Redeemer is able to work with them, using the salt and light He has sown into the fabric of each culture to bring them closer to His heart. When a society has lost the will to live by such standards, then crazy things start to happen. The standards of righteousness and justice become tools in

the hands of wicked people who have no moral compass and no inhibition against using those tools for evil purposes. They make a mockery of the Creator and His ways, and of those who still try to honor His ways. That's the kind of society in which the salt has lost its flavor, and is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled under foot. There is no reasoning with a person or a society that has reached that point, just as there was no reasoning with Pharaoh after he had rejected the witness of the Almighty through His messengers, His signs, and His acts of merciful judgment.

Israel's exodus from Egypt happened in the context of a nation and a culture devoid of understanding. They still had the tools of knowledge and experience, but they had thrown out the context by which those tools could be applied to bring life. Their knowledge and experience became tools of their self-imposed insanity, digging for themselves deeper and wider pits that became the graves of their overzealous ambitions. Professing themselves to be wise, they became foolish, just like anyone at any point in history who chooses not to listen to the witness of creation and follow it in the direction of the Creator's heart.

This is an uncomfortable feature of the human condition. Even those who do listen to the Creator have to be vigilant so that their wisdom remains grounded in His truth, and not in their own selfish and shortsighted desires. That's why we need one another so that we can help each other remain on the narrow path of righteousness. If we don't, then all our amazing qualities and accomplishments mean nothing, and we might as well be working without tools.