

27 Iyar, 5775 (16/05/15) **Maintaining the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace** J. M. Terrett

Behar/B'chukotai

On the Mountain/In My Statutes Staying in Sync

Torah: Leviticus 25:1-26:2/26:3-27:32

Chapter 25 deals with the year of Jubilee, which was a generational recalibration of the nation so that they would stay focused on the provision of G-d and never lose their grip on putting Him first in every detail of their lives. From the cradle to the grave, generationally, the L-rd promises to provide for His people and part of that is to give the land regular rest and to cause the people to remember that they are but tenants and pilgrims in a land that forever belongs to the L-rd. Verse 25:18 ***gives the key to remaining in sync with the L-rd: Put my laws into practice, observe my ordinances and put them into practice and you shall dwell in security in the land.***

Neither the sabbatical year nor the year of Jubilee were designed to bring any hardship on the people. Walking with the L-rd will always be a source of blessing even in a world that is hostile to the light, because the earth is the L-rd's, and the fullness thereof. In fact the L-rd promised that in the forty eighth year he would give a triple harvest, enough for three years (25:21, 22) so the land would have a double Sabbatical rest.

The chapter ends with a discussion of how the land (25:23) and the people (25:55) belong to the L-rd in perpetuity, generation by generation, and that both the land and the people would be blessed in perpetuity as long as they remained in sync with the L-rd through obeying His laws, ordinances and statutes. This basic, grass roots principle of core spirituality - staying in sync with the L-rd through faith and obedience - has never changed, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

The next two chapters deal with conditions which are necessary for the blessing of the L-rd to remain a constant and also explain what will happen when we fall out of sync with the L-rd. 26:8 says that five shall pursue one hundred and one hundred shall pursue ten thousand, but if we fall out of sync, He shall render the sky like iron and the earth like brass (26:19). It goes on to say that in a fallen condition, they will eat their own children (26:29) as they as dispersed among the nations.

However, through it all: ***But when they shall be dispersed in the country of their enemies, I will not be horrified by them to the point of exterminating them to break my covenant with them, for I am the L-RD their G-d.*** (26:44).

The book ends in chapter 27 with a discussion of tithes and the redemption of land, animals, and people, because how we handle the practical aspects of our spirituality is the truest measure of how well we are staying in sync with the L-rd or how far we have wandered away from His statutes. G-d wants us to live lives which revolve around Him and His Word and this double imperative is both non-negotiable and the key to remaining in sync with Him through all the ups and downs of life as we face the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Haftarah: Jer. 32:6-27/Jer. 16:19-17:14

Jeremiah chapter 32 continues this theme of staying in sync with the L-rd as he prophesies to

those who are about to go into captivity because they violated both the sabbatical year and the Jubilee, and because they wandered in idolatry; figuring that because they were in the holy land of the L-rd, nothing really bad could happen to them because the L-rd would always protect His land.

They were both very right and very wrong. Both the people and the land belong to the L-rd. If the people in the land do not walk with the L-rd, they are taken out of the land until they learn to walk with the L-rd. Through it all, they remain the people of the L-rd and it is His land and He is capable of both returning them to the land and of turning the land into a generational source of blessing for them and their children, generationally.

The second Haftarah portion reminds the people that our L-rd can be a great source of strength and blessing when we walk with Him, even though we possess the carnal potential to self-destruct: ***The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can understand it? I the L-rd search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.*** (17:9, 10)

It is always our choice no matter what we encounter, whether or not to remain in sync with the L-rd through His Word or whether to be snared by our heart's own deceitful wickedness. He is able to help us understand how to walk with Him in the midst of our heart's deceitfulness, because successful spirituality will always depend on the choices we make and never on the circumstances which we face.

Brit Chadashah: Luke 4:16-21; Matthew 22:1-14

The first New Testament portion deals with the beginning of our L-rd's ministry when He enters into a synagogue and proclaims that the year of Jubilee is fulfilled in His ministry because He sets us free and is able to return us to the place where we need to be in the L-rd as we wait for His final, eternal kingdom to be established over all the nations and generations of mankind.

The second Haftarah portion deals with the excuses which were made by those who were invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb and who placed the secondary demands of their lives above the primary place which the L-rd alone is worthy to occupy. Staying in sync with the L-rd means maintaining Him in the first place of all that we do and this is the challenge which each generation and nation faces. It remains the principle challenge and calling of Israel, so that this maintenance of Him in sync can be the light which we shine to the nations to show them the only way to walk with the King. Don't go down the sink, stay in sync!

(Sharon p. 145) **Ps. 105** Jewish hero: Ari Joseph Zimmerman

### **Chazak, chazak, v'Nitchazek**

**Maintaining the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace: Eph. 4:1-16**

***"I exhort you therefore, me, the prisoner in the L-rd, to walk in a manner worthy of the vocation you have received, in all humility and gentleness, with patience supporting one another with love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is only one body and only one Spirit, just as you have been***

***called to only one hope by your vocation. There is only one L-rd, only one faith, only one baptism and only one G-d and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all."***

As Shavuot looms upon us and as we prepare to celebrate the double imperative of our faith - the Word and the Spirit - we need to renew our understanding of what that means for us, both as Spirit filled individuals and as a Spirit filled community.

You see the false impression is often given that Spirit filled people are always running around prophesying and praising the L-rd, casting out demons and leaping tall buildings at a single bound, like a combination of Samson and David with a dash of Elijah thrown in. The Corinthian church fell for this deficient understanding of all that it means to be Spirit filled. The Spirit creates a unity in the bond of peace which harnesses our individual personalities and our various gifting and crafts them into a corporate expression of love, patience, gentleness and humility where the greatest expenditure of energy lies in our concerted effort to maintain this unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Truly, unity and peace are the two greatest manifestations of the Spirit, over and above the gifting and the supernatural manifestations which can only be maintained as long as the unity and the bond remain intact. We have already said that the Spirit is the active agent of the Messiah's presence in our midst and that means that both His character and His power will show themselves in our midst.

Oneness is expressed in a sevenfold declaration of our faith in this morning's passage and our corporate oneness is the reaction to the oneness of G-d which the apostle is pleading for us to strive to maintain at all costs.

There is nothing wrong with strong personalities or with a great variety of temperaments and gifting in our midst. In fact, we need to see each member of our community as a source of blessing and strength for all of us, as long as each of us (and all of us) respond to the urging of the Spirit to express ourselves and our participation in the bond of peace and unity.

The Spirit does not want to call attention to any one person or ministry in our midst as much as He wants to promote our love and unity as a team which works in harmony and which resolves all of its issues. This is so that our team work will be the instrument through which He is able to keep us strong and filled with peace and joy as we bump along through this life on our way home to our Father's Home in glory.

This is a tall order and one which will continually come under attack, but it is only as long as our unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace remains intact that we can really function in the Spirit. All the fanfare is the easy part, because we serve a powerful G-d who is always able to overcome any spiritual opposition which rises up against Him and His kingdom.

We saw in the Torah portion that it was only when the people walked according to the Word that they and the land were blessed. Whenever they walked away from faithful obedience, the sky turned to iron and the soil to bronze and instead of blessing them, G-d resisted them because the way they lived and the choices they made resisted G-d. The same is true today and maintaining unity in the Spirit remains our single greatest spiritual challenge as we come to another observance of Shavuot and want to be filled with both His Word and His Spirit.

We live in a society which is increasingly focused on individual rights in opposition to the rights and obligations we all face as community members, both in our society and in our shul.

There does not have to be a tension or a competition between our individual rights and our corporate identity and it only occurs when unity and peace are threatened.

The character of our Messiah is expressed best in the way we treat one another and in the way in which we learn to work together and mold our strengths and weaknesses into a place where everyone has a place; not in a competitive pecking order, but in a flock where we have learned to appreciate and encourage one another as we all face various challenges at various stages of our pilgrimage through this life.

The power of the Spirit and the character of our Messiah function in power to bring us together as a dynamic redeemed community where we see every challenge which rises up against our harmony as a learning opportunity where we collectively seek the L-rd to see how we should respond to the challenge.

It is not easy to learn to work together, but it is an essential strategy in order to maintain the power and the presence of the L-rd in our midst. Neither Israel nor the church has yet encountered an enemy capable of doing us any real spiritual damage, as long as we stand together and maintain the presence of the Messiah in our midst through His Spirit.

We are a flock, a herd, a family, and a body. We are part of the redeemed body of witnesses who have preceded us into glory and we should be able to learn from their victories and from their mistakes as we win our own victories and learn to recover from our own mistakes. The true, authentic and powerful presence of our Messiah can only be sustained in the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. As we come to Shavuot for another year, we need to seek the L-rd so that we can design reactions and strategies which will foster the unity of the Spirit and reinforce the bond of peace for one more year.

We have passed the half way point in our annual Torah reading cycle and Shavuot brings the first part of the annual festival cycle to a close before the summer break before the High Holy Days and Sukkoth. May we grow in peaceful unity as we see what the L-rd has in store for us as a dynamic community of Spirit filled believers maintaining His presence in our midst.