

20 Iyar, 5775 (9/05/15) **Responding to the Spirit's Guidance** J. M. Terrett

Emor Say Holiness Means Undefined and Whole

Torah: Lev. 21:1-24:23

This Torah portion is not an easy one to understand because it seems to be preventing the priests from grieving for their deceased and also excluding handicapped people from the presence of G-d. It also deals with offerings which could not have any physical flaw. It almost seems that the priests were to be an elite above everyone else, better than anyone and who could not get themselves dirty because they were so special.

The requirements they had to follow applied to their time ministering before the L-rd and dealt with making sure that nothing impure or imperfect came into the presence of G-d because He is perfect and wants to separate us from defilement and make us whole. G-d had to be their number one priority and service to Him had to take precedence over anything and everything in their lives. They had to realize how separate and flawless G-d is and they had to teach the people about this separate, pure G-d by being pure and separate themselves.

In other words they had to avoid becoming problem centred and allowing these temporary conditions to distract them from the eternal wonder of G-d. This section is followed by the second longest outlining of the festivals of the L-rd, where the people were to maintain an annual focus on G-d and on both how He promised to provide for them and making sure that they returned a portion of their increase to Him as a means of practically and regularly acknowledging His sovereignty.

The first and main festival of Judaism remains the Sabbath and all the festivals of Judaism are special Sabbaths where different aspects of G-d's redemption are highlighted on an annual basis, beginning with Passover and ending with Sukkoth. These were also geared to the annual harvest schedule, and began with a seven day remembrance of their flight from Egyptian territory and ended with a seven day remembrance that even with all the providence and protection of G-d, we are only pilgrims wandering through this life on our way home to our true home in our Father's home in glory.

The passage ends with a reminder to both keep our light burning and to remember to keep the Sabbath as a special day to celebrate G-d and His provision all year long. There is an addendum brought on by an incident with someone who belonged to the mixed multitude who also fled Egypt with the House of Jacob. The child of an Israelite woman and an Egyptian man blasphemed G-d during a dispute with an Israelite man. He is not so much being singled out as he is being used to show that there are no exclusions to the requirements and stipulations of G-d.

He was not just swearing or using vulgar language, he was cursing the name of G-d and the people of G-d, which was a pagan custom with a twist. He was reverting to his Egyptian roots and he was cursing the G-d who had cursed his Egyptian gods and was dragging G-d down to the level of the false gods.

And this was despite that fact that the presence and the provision of G-d dwelt in the midst of the camp. Let the pagans rage, but never let pagan raging take root among the people of the King.

Haftarah: Ezek. 44:15-31

The prophetic portion outlines the rights of the returning priests and reminds the people of the role of the priests in their midst and I have selected two verses which outline this mandate - 44: 23, 24: ***They shall teach my people to distinguish between that which is holy and that which is profane and they shall make them know the difference between that which is impure and that which is pure. And they shall be judges in disputes and shall judge according to My laws and my ordinances in all My festivals and they shall sanctify my sabbaths.***

The purpose of the priesthood was not to create a spiritual elite that was better than anybody else, but to create a teaching core of people versed in the Scriptures who could teach the people practical holiness and help them to both settle their disputes according to the principles of the Laws and ordinances of G-d and to keep the Sabbath and the Festivals the main focus of their spiritual lives. This is our function today; to always distinguish between the holy (the pure) and the profane (the impure) as we let our lives be regulated by the Word as we celebrate the goodness of the L-rd and rest in the wonder of His Sabbath.

We are not an elite who thinks they are better than everyone else; we are a special people who want to separate themselves from all impurity and unholy things, so that we can celebrate the goodness of G-d and rest in what He has done for us. We set high standards and hold ourselves accountable to them, not to separate ourselves from the people in the world, but to shine by our example and our teaching so that people in the world would want to leave their spiritual darkness and defilement and serve and worship the only true G-d through His unchanging Word. We teach that holiness means living free from spiritual defilement and allowing Him to bring wholeness into our lives, both as individuals and as a community.

Brit Chadashah: Luke 14:12-24

The New Testament portion speaks of our mission to reach out to the spiritually blind, the spiritually lame and the spiritually poor of this world, instead of isolating ourselves from them. Indeed, we are to let the L-rd heal us (cleanse us) from all and any spiritual disabilities in our lives. If we feel that this makes us members of an elite which wants to live separate from those who are hurting and lost in this world, the parable of the Great Feast shows us that the invitation to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is a universal call. The only special privileges we have as the people of G-d, Jew and Gentile, is both to live lives separate from the darkness of this world and to shine as a beacon so that the lost and dying in the world can join us as we serve and worship the King of Glory. How is your shining going? How is your worship doing? What is the focus of your life and your devotion?

(Jack p. 143, 145) **Ps. 42** Jewish Hero: Teresa Quarterly Mishpocah Meeting NOSH

Responding to the Spirit's Guidance as part of what it means to learn to walk with Him and listen to Him.

Scriptures: ***Do not grieve the Spirit of G-d, by whom you have been sealed for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). Do not quench the Spirit (I Thes. 5:19)***

This morning, I would like to speak to you from two short passages which speak about the resistance to the Spirit's guidance by believers who neither walk with Him nor listen to Him.

These two passages do not speak about the spiritually lost in the world among whom the Spirit is working aggressively and persistently. The passage is talking about two kinds of unwarranted spiritual resistance which believers too frequently indulge in, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Sadly the history of the House of Israel, both in the wilderness and in the land has been punctuated with a stiff necked resistance to both the Spirit of G-d and to the Word of G-d and all the problems, defeats and trials which our people have encountered over the centuries have been the result of the double resistance to the Spirit which these verses are talking about.

Basically we are talking about grieving and quenching of the Spirit by believers. Before I distinguish between these two departures from the will of G-d for us in the world as we walk with Him, let me remind you that we are not talking about resisting a force or a static set of principles which we can turn our back on.

The Spirit is a person and we are called to build a dialogue with the Spirit so that His anointing and His filling can give us joy, strength and light as we are personally guided by our spiritual trainer through the challenges of life which we will all have to face. G-d speaks to us through His Spirit and the Messiah speaks to us through this same Spirit who brings His personal presence into our hearts and lives. He wants to teach us the same level and kind of victory over sin, over the world, and over the enemy which He won and maintained while He dwelt among us in the days of His flesh.

Now, He reaches out to us from the true Mercy Seat and wants to show us that we are winners who can learn to overcome and not losers who are tossed to and fro by the winds of doctrine and the lusts and pride of life. He wants to lead beside the still waters as we learn to fight and win as overcomers which nothing can thwart as we journey through this life.

However, this kind of victory is only possible to have and to maintain as we learn to listen to the Spirit and to respond to life, both by taking His ways of escape and by setting straight paths for our wounded feet as the storms of life batter against the house which we have built upon the Rock, without being able to cause it to crumble or be ruined.

Grieving the Spirit means doing things which He does not want us to do and which He warns us against, and instead of hiding when we see trouble coming, we pass on and are punished, building golden calves, striking the rock, while we look for a pinnacle to jump off of.

Fighting, biting, arguing, lusting, and giving in to the works of the flesh are activities which cause the Spirit grief and which slow down and diminish our spiritual progress and victory, not because we encounter troubles which are too difficult for us, but because we refuse to listen to the prompting of the Spirit as we stiffen our neck and turn a deaf ear to the voice of the Saviour who was never defeated by the flesh, the world, or the enemy.

It is not true that we live in a world which is too full of techno temptations and evolutionary foolishness for us to walk with the L-rd because of the constant bombardment of the filth and

darkness of the enemy. It is true that we are living in a world where the days of Noah are returning and where our faith is under a relentless, sophisticated attack which is aimed at destroying our faith and claiming the allegiance of our souls which really belongs to G-d.

The heat is being turned up on every front and our society is growing increasingly hostile to both the Bible and to biblical morality, but that does not mean that our Messiah's Spirit is outgunned or outmanoeuvred, because it is still true that He who is in you is still greater than he who is in the world. The Spirit is able to give us strategies and help us to be more than conquerors if we listen to Him and learn not to grieve Him by doing things which we know are wrong or dubious.

It is because we are saved by His grace that it matters what we believe and how we live and the Spirit wants us to live holy lives, even if we live in a pig sty full of the filth of the world. Lot was able to remain a preacher of righteousness in the midst of Sodom and the same potential for victory and defeating assimilation still exists for us in the 21st Century if we listen to the Spirit and do not grieve Him with our foolishness and stubbornness.

There is another form of spiritual foolishness and stubbornness which we must learn to avoid if we want to respond to the Spirit's guidance and learn to overcome the world and walk in spiritual victory and not wallow in spiritual defeat, and that is quenching the Spirit. This does not mean dousing Him with a bucket of water so He falters and is in danger of being snuffed out like Tinkerbelle. His light is eternal and can never be put out or blown out, but His light in us can be quenched and put out.

This quenching is different than the grieving, because whereas He is grieved when we do things we shouldn't, He is quenched in us when we do not do things which we should. It is sad how often too many believers seem to always be on the verge of getting their lives together in the L-rd, but never seem to build any spiritual momentum. They intend to develop a life of prayer and they intend to study the Bible, but life just seems to get in the way, along with TV, the internet and all the other excuses which fall under the double category of: "yes, but I'll get there eventually" and "I cannot come to the banquet because I am too caught up with the temporary, unsatisfying things of the world to embrace the things of the world to come.

It is too easy to live spiritually distracted lives where we are too busy doing what we shouldn't be doing to do the things which we should be doing. When we fail to make G-d and the things of G-d our first priority we waste our time and energy and never get moving spiritually. The business of living is important. Relationships and family are important. Taking care of business is a valid use of our resources as long as none of the above become excuses for us to do what the House of Israel did by refusing to engage in the battle which would have given them a victorious entrance into the Promised Land.

It is more a matter of priorities and of focus than it is any one issue in our lives. There are countless examples in the Scriptures of people who refused the call of G-d and who had too many riches which were more important to them than the Kingdom. Others put family before G-d, while others did not keep their lamps full of oil and still others passed on the other side of the road rather than reach out to help the hurting and the wounded of this world.

Still others placed a higher value on comfort and security than they did on stepping out

making sure that neither Mammon nor the cares and riches of this life can stall our walk with the L-rd.

As we come to our second quarterly mishpocah meeting of 2015 and face the prospect of another busy summer and fall, may we be determined not to refuse to enter the rest which the Spirit will be calling us to as we make our spiritual lives the first priority of our lives.

This does not mean that we will not make mistakes and stumble and bumble and even at times take a detour away from the straight and narrow. Learning not to quench the light of the Spirit in our lives means that we understand that as heaven bound disciples of the Spirit and the Word, we will give our best to that which the voice of the Spirit leads us to.

We need to learn not to grieve the Spirit as the House of Israel and the Church has done too frequently over the centuries. We have a higher calling that we need to give our best to, by not doing what we know we shouldn't do - by not falling for the negative propaganda of this age. We also need to learn to not quench the Spirit by doing what the Spirit is calling us to do. Join us after the service as we learn how B'nai Chayim is neither grieving nor quenching the Spirit in how we conduct our affairs.

Having an ear to hear what the Spirit is saying is the key to overcoming the world and not losing our way because of our own spiritual folly. The world and the flesh and the enemy are pretty loud in today's world and are getting louder, but does the still small voice of the Spirit have to use fire and wind and earthquakes to get our attention.

Do you know who it is we are called to serve? Do you really know what He is like and what He wants from you? What is He saying to you? Are you listening or running away? Are you listening or are you digging in your heels and refusing to budge. What does G-d have to do to get your attention and are you aware that He is always present by His Spirit to make us more than conquerors in all and any of the fitful happenstances of life. His guidance is always relevant and His help is always wiser and stronger than any of the foolishness of the world which wants to pull our house off the rock and onto the sand.

Let's pray.