

12 Sivan, 5775 (30/5/15) **What Has Your Attention: Spiritually Distracted** J. M. Terrett

Naso Elevate Keeping Our Eyes Focused on Him

Torah: Numbers 4:21-7:89

This Torah portion deals with the offerings of the twelve princes, but also deals with two seemingly diverse additions: jealousy and the Nazirite vow. As the Children of Israel were learning their marching orders and getting ready to transport the Ark of the Presence in their midst, they had to deal with anything and everything which could prevent them from remaining focused on both the L-rd and on the journey which they were about to undertake.

The first of these issues was jealousy between a husband and wife. If our primary relationships are in disarray, this can prevent us from giving the L-rd the first place in our hearts and lives. So a procedure was developed to deal with a husband who was jealous of his wife and suspected her of unfaithfulness. If she was guilty, she would be punished by not being able to have children, if she was innocent, her husband would not be able to shame her by putting her away.

Our primary relationship always needs to be with the L-rd, but when our primary human relationships are in disarray, we need to deal with them so that our primary focus can remain upon the L-rd and on walking with Him. The ceremony was a public way of dealing with a private concern so that the camp of Israel did not fill up with private dilemmas which would make the personal spiritual lives of Israel a catastrophe instead of a harmonious support for the greater purpose, which was and remains to be walking with the L-rd according to His Word. In today's spiritually dubious world we need to make sure our primary human relationships do not drag us away from walking with our King.

The second issue dealt with a Nazirite vow, when a person wanted to consecrate their time to the L-rd by separating themselves from the daily concerns of living. The vow began by the person shaving off all their body hair and letting it grow for the duration of the vowing time. At the end of the vow, they would shave all the hair which grew and offer it to the L-rd as a sign that they were offering themselves totally to the L-rd. This is the only time when an offering could be offered in this manner - where human material could be offered to the L-rd.

Sometimes, we need to focus on our spiritual lives over and above whatever else is going on in our lives and the vow was a way for people to take drastic measures to ensure that what was going on in their lives never prevented them from walking with the L-rd.

In the middle of getting the marching orders ready for their first departure from the holy mountain, the people were given two practical, personal means to make sure that they could remain focused on the L-rd, no matter what else was going on in their lives. We need to learn to do whatever it takes to keep our primary focus on the L-rd and make sure that our primary energy and time always belong to Him.

Haftarah: Judges 13:2-25

The prophetic portion deals with the third last judge, who was to be a lifelong Nazirite, so that Israel could be delivered from their most persistent adversary, the Philistines. The child's

parents were older and had not been able to have children and just like Sarah and Abraham, they were promised a child and were given special instructions about the way he was to be raised. Samson was to be the same kind of prophet as John the Baptist and even though his life didn't measure up to his potential, the purposes of G-d proceeded without being thwarted.

The lesson of Samson is twofold. First we need to understand that the call of G-d on our lives needs to be the thing which defines us no matter what else is going on in our lives. Second, we need to see that even when we do not fulfil this purpose in our lives, it will be fulfilled without us, because His purposes can never be thwarted permanently.

Brit Chadashah: John 12:20-36

The New Testament portion deals with the last time the Father spoke to His Son before our Messiah was offered up for the sins of the world. His chosen messengers did not yet understand what was about to happen, but He told them what they needed to hear so that when He was offered up, they were not taken completely by surprise.

We live in a world which works hard to take our focus off the L-rd and His coming kingdom and too many believers are getting snared and taken and distracted from a primary focus on the coming Kingdom. Three thoughts and then we will promenade the Torah Scroll. First of all, the purposes of G-d do not depend on us in order to be fulfilled.

They will be fulfilled either through us or in spite of us. Second of all, even with all the spiritual distraction which is escalating in our world, G-d will not become distracted from His Kingdom purposes. His Kingdom is coming and He has no other purposes to fulfil in our lives or in the life of the world.

Lastly, we have to understand that it is both possible and essential for us to remain focused on the things of G-d as a lifestyle if we do not want to become spiritually irrelevant in a temporary world which we are only passing through and to which we can never belong, if we want to serve the L-rd.

We can either make sure our lives are on board with the L-rd and His kingdom purposes, or we can watch these purposes being fulfilled without our participation.

Samson's life could have turned out very differently. Where are you keeping your eyes focused? May the L-rd make our lives make a difference as we keep our eyes focused on Him.

(Bernie, page 149) **Psalm 67** Jewish Hero: Samson's father (who wanted to be sure)

Sermon: What has your attention: Spiritually distracted.

Passage: ***"Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If someone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, does not come from the Father, but from the world. And the world is passing away as well as its lusts, but the one who does the will of the Father, will live forever."*** (I John 2:15-17)

There is so much going on in our world today and we have so many ways of being informed about it that it is too easy to become spiritually distracted. This unfortunate condition comes whenever believers become so involved in what is going on in the world or in their own lives, that they lose track of what G-d is doing in our world today.

We have to take care of all kinds of personal business if we want to get things done in our lives. We are all on a pilgrimage through this life and instead of thinking of things which come our way as distractions, we need to see them as challenges which the L-rd wants us to deal with so that we do not become spiritually distracted and lose our way spiritually.

Our passage deals with three kinds of distractions which our world is adept at bringing into our lives and into the life of our society. They masquerade as valid concerns and before we know it, we are more concerned about the things of this fading life than we are about the things of the coming Kingdom.

G-d knows that we have to eat and that we have to pay our bills and have to do any number of other practical things just to keep ourselves going as we live our lives. But actually none of the practical details of our lives are the reason we were brought into this world. We belong to the coming kingdom and we have to be about the business of the kingdom in our lives if we do not want to get left behind and waste our lives like the lost generation of Israel did who came out of Egypt, but who were unable to enter the Promised Land.

The lust of the flesh calls us to meet our physical needs as a primary focus, instead of as a secondary focus. The lust of the eyes calls us to be more concerned about what we see, then we are concerned about what we believe and have not yet seen - His kingdom which is coming whether we are ready for it or not. The pride of life wants us to be concerned with all we can do or accomplish in this life, instead of living daily for the life which is to come.

The single greatest truth in our lives needs to be the eternal life which we were given and which is on a collision course with our world, no matter how good of a job our world does of being distracted and of ignoring the inevitable arrival of the eternity which we live daily on the edge of. People seem to believe that they can create their own reality and build the kind of life they want as if we were all just given a box of parts that we are free to put together in whatever shape we want.

This is not the purpose of life and becoming spiritually distracted is one of the greatest dangers believers have to face and to overcome so that G-d has our attention.

Someone once said that some believers are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good, but I think the opposite is more of a problem in our modern world. Some believers are so earthly minded that they are of no heavenly good. As we wander through our short, wonderful Canadian summer and prepare ourselves for the fall feasts and another long, cold Canadian winter, we need to ask ourselves what has really got our attention so that we do not become spiritually distracted and forget what our lives should always be about.

I do not feel that we should isolate ourselves from the business of living and form some kind of Messianic Jewish monastery so that we do not let the world distract us from the coming kingdom. You see, the L-rd wants us to overcome the world and not to be overcome by it. Our faith comes with the power of everlasting life and when we let this power loose in our

lives, the things of the world grow strangely dim and lose their attraction for us.

I sometimes get impatient with the lack of interest most people in our world have for spiritual things and how they do their best to avoid thinking about what is really important in life. They are so busy with their lives and their problems that they seem to be too distracted to consider the coming Kingdom and this sad reality is one we need to avoid falling into.

How do you deal with being spiritually distracted? Several ways come to mind, but they all seem to be part of the category of things we should always get around to and never leave undone. How is this category doing in your life? They include the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible Study and the determination to express our faith in how we react to the things which are going on in our lives. I spent most of yesterday helping Bernie and Sheri move from the south side to the east side of the city and at one point, I told them that the next time they move, I am going to be out of town. It was hard work, but we had fun.

However, one of the trips we made during the day was to the dump where they got rid of things which were no longer useful and which they were not sorry to see go. When we moved their reclining chairs out of their house and up to the third story of their new condo, part of me seriously wished we had taken them to the dump instead. We loaded up the Uhaul truck with everything they owned and carried it all into their new home and I still ache a little.

It made me repeatedly consider how many things I have in my life which would be better taken to the dump than continuing to clutter up my life and it made me seriously consider how easy it would be to become spiritually distracted.

What gets done in our lives when other things are left undone? How much of what is in our lives would do us more good being dumped than cluttering up our lives?

Somebody once asked an interesting question, which I would also like to ask this morning. If we were taken to court and accused of being believers, would there be enough evidence to convict us or would our case be thrown out of court through a lack of evidence of any substantial spirituality? Living a spiritually distracted life is just as dangerous as being a distracted driver who does not keep his eyes on the road ahead!

The answer should lie in both what we fill our lives with and how we relate to things which come into our lives. We are truly only pilgrims passing through this life on our way home to our Father's House in Glory and the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life will gang up to do their best to make sure that we arrive home spiritually impoverished and that we continue to live spiritually distracted lives where this world has so much of our attention that we do not have the time or the energy for the coming Kingdom.

Our lawns need to be mowed. Groceries need to be bought and so many other details of modern life need to be accomplished, but if there is no kingdom focus in how we spend our time and our resources, we better rent a big truck and take all the things which are wrongly consuming our time and energy to the dump.

In a way judgment day will be a cosmic dump, because we can take nothing of this world with us into the next life, except the contents of our hearts and unless the lamps of our hearts are trimmed and kept full of oil, we will be caught off guard when the groom finally arrives, along

with too many people in our spiritually distracted world.

It is both our duty and our privilege to not be caught off guard spiritually at any time or stage of our lives and to make sure that G-d, through His Word remains that which truly and persistently has our attention. The Scriptures say to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all the other things of this life will be added unto us as well.

If our spiritual life is not in shape and if we are spiritually distracted by the things of this life to the point that the things of the coming kingdom take second place then, honestly, the love of the Father through His Son, does not dwell in our lives and we should know better.

We are all going to be taking some needed vacation time over the summer as we soak up some sunshine, but we all need to be careful that we do not lose our kingdom focus and become spiritually distracted. Indeed the whole world in all of its generations is one day going to be arrested by G-d and put on trial to determine whether they lived spiritually distracted lives, or whether they sought first His Kingdom through His Son and gave themselves over to His righteousness - because there is no other point to living.

I am not going to explore how our revenues seem to dwindle in the summer nor how our attendance goes up and down, but we all need to understand that if we become spiritually distracted (by the lust of the flesh, the lust of eyes or the pride of life), we have started to slip into the ranks of the lost souls who will weep and wail when they stand before the King of Glory and face up to how they should have lived their lives.

We have the privilege of living for the Kingdom and for the judgment which will soon overtake this world and we need to make our spirituality what our lives are functionally all about and not let spirituality be the thing we intend to get around to sorting out one of these days. Unless our allegiance to the coming Kingdom is the primary focus of our lives, we are not only spiritually distracted, we are in immortal danger when we do not have to be. Living every day for the kingdom which is to come is the whole duty of believers as we wander through this life.