

2 Av, 5775 (18/07/15) **Second of Affliction; Authentic Spirituality Described** J. M. Terrett

Matot/Masei

Tribes/Journeys of

Finally, the End of the Beginning

Torah:

Numb. 30:1 (30:2)-32:42/33:1-36:13

(1) 31: 8, 16: ***They also killed Balaam, son of Beor... Behold these are they who, upon the Word of Balaam, led the children of Israel into unfaithfulness towards YHVH.*** We have to be sure to remove rottenness which gives the enemy access to our weaknesses, especially that which causes us to falter. Balaam got what he deserved- we need to make sure to give unto the L-rd that which He deserves.

(2) 31:19: ***And you, camp for seven days outside of the camp; all of you who have killed someone or who have touched a cadaver, shall be purified the third and the seventh day, them and your prisoners (Red Heifer ashes).*** Closure is an important aspect of spiritual warfare – in order to avoid any spiritual PTSD, returning soldiers and their captives were given time to recover and be healed and cleansed. How is your recovery time doing?

(32 Reuben, Gad and half Manasseh; 34 journey camp sites)

(3) 33:55 ***But if you do not chase before you the inhabitants of the country, those among them whom you shall leave will be like thorns in your eyes and needles in your sides, they shall be your enemies in the country where you are going to establish yourselves.*** We live in a modern society where political correctness and inclusiveness stipulates that we accept everyone and anybody, especially those whose lifestyle choices violate the teachings of the Scriptures. While I would never advocate hatred or violence against anyone, I would draw a clear distinction between those among we live and those whom we permit to dwell among us.

Forgiving does not require either condoning or accepting and our in-house exclusions both equip us to reach out to the world with greater clarity and to exercise mercy upon those who flee from the world to find refuge in our midst.

(34 boundaries, 35 Levitical cities and cities of refuge.)

(4) 36:13: ***these are the commandments and the laws which YHVH gave by Moses to the children of Israel in the plains of Moab, near to the Jordan, across from Jericho.*** Our people were taken to a new staging area to enter the land. Just as the waters of the Sea of Reeds parted to let us out of Egypt, the flood waters of the Jordan would part to let us into the Promised Land. Most of the later teaching content of Numbers and all of the content of Deuteronomy were given on the plains of Moab – which was their second longest camping spot. G-d is never in a rush – He will always take whatever time is needed for His people to fully understand both His Word and our calling. When it is camping time, we need to learn our lessons so that it can also be the end of the beginning in our lives too.

Haftarah:

Jer. 2:4-28; 3:4;4:1

(5) 2:13: ***For my people have committed a double sin, they have abandoned Me, who is a source of living water, to go and dig cisterns, cracked cisterns which retain no water.***

Jeremiah witnessed the horror of the destruction of the temple and the cruelty of the captivity, but he proclaimed loudly and fearlessly that the people had brought it on themselves because there is no real, lasting satisfaction in anything or anyone outside the L-rd. The righteous core was much diminished in Israel, but it was preserved so that the people could learn that the L-rd accepts no competition for our heart allegiance. We need to avoid digging cracked cisterns in our lives, so that the living water can flow (nourish, heal, strengthen) in our lives, even when we live in increasing darkness and tribulations. In Him our hearts are never really captive, even when we are taken to Babylon.

(6a) 2:19: ***your wickedness shall chastise you, and your unfaithfulness shall punish you, you shall know and you shall see that it is an evil, bitter thing to abandon YHVH your G-d and to have no fear of Me, says the L-rd, YHVH of Hosts.*** As the people fought hand to hand and lost ground before the final stand before the gates of Solomon's temple, they were being made to see why they had arrived at this terrible tragedy in their lives. It was not the burning of the golden house or the loss of the holy city – it was the loss of the L-rd and their spiritual unfaithfulness. Those who repented and sought the L-rd were sustained during the captivity and formed the new righteous core of the people who returned. Are you a participating member of this righteous core in our generation?

(6b) 2:22: ***When you shall wash yourself with lye and when you use much soap, the stain of your iniquity shall stay before Me says the L-rd YHVH.*** We are going to be observing the L-rd's Table today, not so we can disguise or camouflage our sin, but so it can be identified, abandoned and washed away. This kind of surrender is a necessary spiritual discipline where we learn to deal aggressively and redemptively with our sin, so it does not constitute a barrier between us and the L-rd where we excuse wickedness. The L-rd's Table needs to remain a diagnosis where we reaffirm and strengthen ourselves in the L-rd both in our faith and in our obedience. We want to eradicate sin, and not just disguise it.

Brit Chadashah: Act 9:1-22/James 4:1-12

(Acts 9:1-22, Paul's conversion/ James, the power of sincere prayer)

(7) 4:7: ***Submit yourselves therefore unto G-d, resist the devil and he will flee far from you.*** It is truly the end of the beginning when we have this double approach to spirituality figured out. We are to submit ourselves to G-d (doctrinally and morally) and to resist the devil, so he will flee from us in G-d – and not the other way around. May we never submit to the enemy and flee from G-d. Our Messiah's victory can be ours as we learn to both submit to G-d and to resist the devil.

(Jack p. 169) **Ps. 111; 49** Jewish Hero: Abraham. L-rd's Table

Chazak, Chazak, V'Nitchazek

Sermon: Authentic Spiritual Maturity Described (Romans 12:9-21)

The Apostle Paul was a good, thorough teacher and his style was to outline doctrine and then to give a big: "therefore" at the end of his teaching. In this passage we have a 28fold "therefore" where authentic spiritual maturity is described. Spiritual maturity means both sound doctrine and also sound morality and is never a competition between the two.

There are almost endless websites, and countless books which claim to defend and proclaim spiritual maturity, but which often end up ***nitpicking*** (looking for small or unimportant errors or

faults, especially in order to criticize unnecessarily - to be excessively concerned with or critical of inconsequential details) or *riding hobbyhorses* (talking about a subject which they think is interesting and important, and which they talk about at any time they can, even if other people are not interested). These are but forms of carnality masquerading as spirituality.

The Apostle had to deal with many important theological concerns and was often critical of both false doctrine and compromised spirituality/morality, but at the end of his longest teaching he provides us with 28 descriptions of what authentic spiritual morality looks like before he deals with his final two big practical teachings (obedience to civil authorities and tolerance between believers on matters of conscience).

I like to read over this passage because it is set up bouncing back and forth between what we should do (how we should act) and what we should avoid (how we should not act). It is concentrated and pithy and we could spend a lot of time talking about each of the 28 applications, however, such an undertaking might be better suited to a Yeshiva Bible Study, but let me say one thing before I select three of the 28 to talk about authentic spiritual maturity.

Unless the brand of spirituality we are living (exploring) looks and feels like these formulations we are in danger of nitpicking and riding hobbyhorses and of becoming critical and grumpy and of turning our spirituality into a set of rigid formulas where everything is either black or white and anybody who disagrees with us or challenges us to explain ourselves is viewed as rebellious and not interested in our form of spiritual bullying. Why do so many believers feel that being contentious and grumpy is one of the fruits of the Spirit?

Core beliefs and core issues need to be our focus and I selected this passage on the second Sabbath of Affliction, where we are observing the L-rd's Table, so that our community deals with real spiritual concerns which will give us love, peace, joy, harmony and unity. Let me take you to them, but first let us read the 28 exhortations in verses 9-12.

This morning I want to concentrate on the first three, one of the middle ones and the last one.

12:9 (the first three): ***Let love be without hypocrisy. Be horrified by evil. Hold fast to that which is good.*** Love is not just a feeling, it is an appreciation of another person where we find them worthy of our affection and where we accept them for who they are and at the same time, believe in their potential to grow (heal, recover and learn).

Paul says it should be without hypocrisy and for our purposes this morning, it means three things. First we are not just pretending to love people we cannot stand – we are willing to work out the issues which separate us and not just use empty words. Next it means that we do not show affection or appreciation in order to get our own way or to get someone to do what we feel they should – and are ready to give affection when they please us and remove it when they displease us. Lastly, it means that we are not willing to make moral or spiritual compromises in order to receive or show love – love must be based on shared principles (doctrines and moral standards).

Our society is focused on being nice to all people, but in too many cases it is just an act. At the end of WW2, the German people did not all suddenly stop being Nazis and when the Iron curtain fell, Russians did not all suddenly stop being communists. You cannot effectively deal with problems by pretending that they do not exist. Prejudice and racial hatred may be

diminishing as understanding grows and as people abandon unfair and cruel stereotypes and treat people as equally valuable as they are, but just smiling and saying nice things, will not get at the root or the core issues that separate people, both within and without the Gospel.

An open dialogue where we work out these issues is the key to personal and community harmony, wherever this is set as a primary objective – when we discover why we do not like people, we can learn to appreciate them, but this comes with two qualifiers to keep us from making doctrinal or moral compromises. First we do not use affection or acceptance as a means of crowd control in order to manipulate people and get them to conform to our agenda.

It goes something like this: you are a worthy person, as long as you do what I say and do it the way I say it should be done – but until you come to your senses and stop doing things which I don't like, the way I don't like you to do them, I will not show you any appreciation or affection. Love (affection, appreciation, acceptance) should not be used as a weapon, but as a means of bonding with believers and even pre-believers because we have learned to see the image of G-d in them and want to get to know them better, instead of putting on an act and requiring others to do the same.

Lastly, there are many immoral people caught in many pernicious and negative lifestyle choices that we could never accept and should never accept. We cannot show them love and acceptance until we have dealt with our differences. Sometimes this is not possible, but instead of slipping into hatred and bitterness, we can learn forgiveness and figure out ways to express our beliefs and morality, lovingly, but without granting acceptance to those things which the Bible finds unacceptable. Politically correct, no; spiritually correct, yes!

We reject the sin and invite the sinner to find freedom in repentance because there are some issues where just having warm and fuzzy feelings will not deal with the problems of sin which people have fallen into. Love must be without hypocrisy, but we must still always be horrified by evil and not try to always be so nice to offenders, because we falsely presume that is how believers need to behave with everyone, no matter who they are or what they do. Sometimes we have to hate the sin so we can love the sinner, which brings us to the second exhortation of the first three.

We have to hate sin and be horrified when people violate the Scriptures and practice any form of criminal idolatry or immorality. This hatred of sin is a form of proactive love which shines the light so that people can escape from darkness and sin. Sin should be defined as violating the Scriptures and darkness is anything which violates or diminishes the light of the Gospel.

We have to loosen our grip on evil and tighten it on that which is good. All three actions have to do with wholesome love and about what we should be gripping and what we should be avoiding as we learn not to try and pretend our way into love. Love, hate and hold fast will make sure you are adopting the right strategy as you grow in authentic spiritual maturity, but when we encounter situations where this is not feasible how do we handle this impasse?

Let us look at the fellowship proviso -12:18: ***If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*** It also outlines three principles: (1) if it is possible (2) as much as it depends on you. (3) live at peace with all men. Sadly, there are people with whom peace is impossible because they like fights and will say and do anything to get what they want and when it is not possible we need to protect ourselves by doing all that we can (as much as it

depends on you) and then walking away from them – and not allowing them access to our hearts and lives (Churchill – if you cannot defeat your enemies, outlive them, without hating them).

Living at peace is our primary relationship objective and is one of the signal signs of authentic spiritual maturity which will have nothing to do with nit-picking or riding a hobby horse or any hypocrisy in our love. Instead of letting people determine how we should live, we will always let the Word tell us how to live.

Let's look at the last exhortation, because our faith is not a fight to the death, but is truly a fight to the life – 12:21: ***Do not allow yourself to be conquered by evil, but overcome evil with good.*** The Bible says that sin will always be crouching at our door, mature spirituality wants to keep it there and not invite it onto the couch because, truly, it is not inevitable. So instead of excuses and justifications, we want to find solutions so that how we live and how we react reflect our commitment to mature spirituality and our belief that it is both possible and desirable to overcome evil in our lives with the good which we choose to adopt into our lives.

We have to learn to love, to hate and to hold fast as we do our best to live at peace with everyone and not allow evil to overcome us in any area of our lives. As we prepare to celebrate the L-rd's Table and as we get ready for our annual picnic and as we get ready to observe the Fall Feasts, we want our lives to grow and mature and be in good spiritual shape because this is our calling and the response the L-rd wants us to adopt as we dig deeper into the Word and find new ways to apply it in every area of our lives.

May all 28 categories of faithful obedience be alive and well in our lives no matter what we encounter and no matter what life throws at us. Who we are in the L-rd and how we live in the world should be two sides of the same coin so that we are always part of the solution and are never part of the problem. Let's pray.