

Netzavim

You Are Standing

Decisions Which Determine Our Destinies

Note: *The Joy of Quirks:* As we come to our final service for 5775, I want to speak to two issues related to making decisions which determine our destinies and I will call these issues: correctables and quirks. One of the sad realities of leadership in our modern world is both the fear of making mistakes and the loss of prestige when they occur, even though they can be corrected.

Last week I used the Haftarah portion from this week and while it is no big deal, we can say that our Messiah may have begun His public ministry on the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah – because a great change was in the making and Rosh Hashanah is a time for positive change (renewal, repair and repentance). He read from the first part of Isaiah 61, even though the portion traditionally begins at verse 10- He started at verse one.

When we embrace the concept of correctables, we learn more about accountability and credibility than we do when we feel that mistakes undermine us instead of giving us the opportunity to learn humility and flexibility. Doing our best to not make mistakes needs to be coupled with our commitment to correct mistakes (driving in a straight line versus constantly limiting our wandering). This willingness to admit and to correct mistakes will prevent us from becoming rigid, inflexible and even mean spirited.

When I began my doctoral studies, I came up with a topic for my thesis project dissertation: ***Spirituality and the Integrity of Being***, because too often I find therapists and leaders trying to turn people into clones or copies, instead of helping them to embrace who they are, with all of the potential and the weaknesses and the foibles/quirks which we all possess. The longer you get to know someone and the closer you draw to them, the more you discover that intimacy is a two edged sword.

All of us have clay feet and all of us have quirks which are not part of the correctables and which are also not very logical. Some of them may be cultural, but most of them are personal and relate to both our temperament and our learning style and it is often these personal expressions of who we are which teachers and leaders try to suppress and change.

In the past I have said that we are born with five categories of divine empowerment which combine to make us who we are. We are all born with: **free will** (the ability to choose how we react and digest experiences), **dignity** (the ability to suffer the consequences of our own actions and those of others), **time** (our pilgrimage has a limited shelf life at all its stages), **energy** (despite self-help gurus and swim coaches, we all have a limited amount of energy which we can push, but which we cannot violate without cracking up) and **gifting** (very few people have exceptionalities, but all of us are naturally good at some things and suck at others).

We can be trained in our gifting, but we cannot train for gifting).

Accepting foibles and quirks will save us the frustration of trying to conform people to our quirks and foibles and this is especially true in marriages, families, schools and even in the business world. Learning how people tick (how they are wound) helps us build the bonds of mutual respect that will help us to learn to appreciate one another and respect each other's

integrity of being, for we are all weird and wonderful to varying degrees. This Rosh Hashanah, let us learn about true change and embrace our correctables and quirks.

Torah: Deut. 29:10-30:20

(1) **29:15: But it is with those who are here among us, present in this day before YHVH, our G-d and with those who are not among us in this day.** This is talking about you and me because it was intended to be passed on generationally.

(2) **29:29: The secret things belong to G-d, the things which He has revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may put into practice all the words of this law.** G-d far exceeds my best efforts to fully understand Him and my puny attempts to cling to His grace and to the obedience He calls us to practice, sinners though we may be. Repentance is built into the fabric of sincere, authentic biblical spirituality.

(3) **30:11: This commandment which I prescribe to you this day is certainly not beyond your strength or out of your reach.** He knows that we are but dust and as far as the East is from the West, He removes our iniquities from us, but, honestly, obedience is a viable, daily possibility to which we are called even in our stumbling and our bumbling, for there is no other way to be happy, but to trust and obey; daily and constantly, all the days of our lives.

(4) **30:19, 20: I take witness against you this day, heaven and the earth; I have placed before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose life in order that you should live, you and your posterity, to love YHVH your G-d, to obey His voice and to attach yourself to Him: for upon this depends your life and the lengthening of your days, and thus you may dwell in the land which YHVH has sworn to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.** More and more, our choices will define us more than the happenstances of our lives. The Fall Feasts are all about empowering us in our spiritual choices, both when things go our way and when we are up the creek without a paddle. When need to learn to fill our hearts and lives with things which matter eternally, while we let the grass wither and the universe grow old. It is time to renew our grasp of forever daily.

Haftarah: Is. 61:10-63:9

(5)/(6) **61:10-62:2: I will rejoice in YHVH, and my soul shall be filled with happiness in my G-d; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the cloak of deliverance, as the groom decorates himself with a diadem and the bride with her jewels. For as the earth causes the seed to germinate and the garden causes its seeds to push up, so the L-rd, YHVH will cause salvation to germinate and praise in the presence of all the nations.**

For the love of Zion, I will not be silent, for the love of Jerusalem; I will take no rest, until His salvation appears like the dawn and His deliverance like a torch which is lit. Then the nations shall see His salvation and all the kings His glory and you shall be called by a new name which YHVH shall determine. The whole point of Judaism is redemption and salvation for all the nations and generations of mankind and this was paid for (accomplished eternally) by our blessed Messiah, because it is not through human effort that this shall be accomplished, any more than the dawn – we need to let Him dawn in our hearts and lives as we draw one more year closer to the arrival of His blessed Kingdom.

Brit Chadashah: John 15:1-11

(7) ***15:5: I am the vine and you are the branches. The one who dwells in Me and in whom I dwell brings forth much fruit, for without Me, you can do nothing.*** Dwelling in Him involves a consistent spiritual intake and a steady outworking of His Word in our lives. We need to ask ourselves what is growing in our lives and what we are feeding on, because in terms of eternity, we can do nothing without Him – said another way, all that we do without Him (without a consistent spirituality based on faith and obedience) amounts to nothing. What will we amount to in 5776? What will you amount to in 5776?

(Bernie pp. 43, 45) **Ps. 81** Jewish Hero: Keturah

There is a Time for Every Purpose Under heaven: How Are Your Heavenly Purposes Doing?

I am in my third decade as a Messianic leader and each year the High Holy Days and Sukkoth both overwhelm me (discombobulate me) and also refresh me. There is so much to do and so much to say that my head spins and I initially feel that we have not said enough or done enough, and then I settle into the services and let their momentum carry me through the Fall Feasts, which this year I want to call the Big Three: Rosh Hashanah (3 services), Yom Kippur (4 services) and Sukkoth (4 services).

My title for my presentation of the Makzor (special HHD and Sukkoth prayer and service guide) is “There is a time for every purpose under Heaven: How are Your Heavenly Purposes Doing”. During the four weeks, we will have fourteen services and perform our annual fall cleaning for the New Year so that the New Year which is coming will be able to bless us fully and freely, both as we let go of the year which is passing and as we aim for the Kingdom we are drawing closer to with each passing year.

Two more comments then I will take you through the three sections of the Makzor as we bid farewell to 5775. Most synagogues are jam packed during this time of year, at least for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur because the people are trying to make up for a year where they neglected a regular spirituality and they want to pack it all in during what are called “The Days of Awe” between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. This is also the time where people pay for their annual memberships, even if they do not show up again until next year- except for the occasional Bar/Bat Mitzvah, Circumcision, Wedding or Funeral. Individual seats go for \$400-600 and family memberships can be anywhere up to \$2,000 (or more).

This is not the approach to spirituality we promote and so none of our seats are going to be for sale. We come together at this time of the Festival Year to perform a systems check so that we can embrace a dynamic, regular spirituality throughout the year.

Having said that, we also do not promote the typical sense of guilt which many communities and spiritual leaders seem to use to try and motivate people to show up regularly. Life is busy and full of chores and decisions and duties and pleasures and we want to make sure that members of our community turn their lives around their spirituality and do not push it to the periphery as we lead functionally spiritually assimilated lives.

Now on to the Makzor!

It is a 43 page document/service and prayer guide put together over more than a decade and revised regularly so that the essential components of a traditional High Holy Days and Sukkoth observance are included, both integrating a Messianic Jewish approach into the mix and avoiding the intricate and often redundant lengthy features of a rabbinic Makzor – some of which run to several hundred pages.

A rabbinic Rosh Hashanah service lasts five or six hours and Yom Kippur lasts all day, beginning with the previous evening. Sukkoth is less onerous and during the services attendance slowly drops off for another year.

Our Makzor is neatly divided into three sections: Service guides, prayer guides and special documents.

Pages 1-21 give service guides (outlines) for the three portions of the Fall Feasts. All the festivals begin on the night before and are prefaced with Erev, which in Hebrew means “the evening of”. The schedule indicates that all of our services will be held in the sanctuary; except for the three Sukkoth services which will be held in the sukkah (we need a good, portable heater for the sukkah, which is aging).

There are three Rosh Hashanah services with two special documents: Hatarat Nedarim and Tashlikh and one special prayer called Avinu Malkeinu, two shofar blowing liturgies and special round challah bread with apples and honey (and cheese).

There are four Yom Kippur services, with our only evening Yizkor (memorial service) of the year and a special chant and a special prayer called Al Hayt (which resembles Avinu Malkeinu and is a second chance to do a complete systems check). It is usual to fast from sunset to sunset, but those who are ill (and have blood sugar issues) and young children and expectant mothers are excluded from this obligation.

The ten day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is called “The Ten Days of Awe” and traditional Judaism tries to go through all the unfinished business of the year and work up a big time repentance, in order to guarantee a good year – and the New year’s blessing reads like this: Happy New Year and may you be inscribed (for a good year).

I find this to be more than a little superstitious and self-serving, so I have modified it to read: Happy New Year for we are inscribed (in the Lamb's Book of Life). Our entire year, not just ten days, needs to be given over to sincere repentance and faithful obedience because you cannot bribe G-d!

Sukkoth consists of four or six services, three in the sukkah and the final one, Simchat Torah in the shul, where we roll back the scroll and begin a new annual Torah reading cycle. Sukkoth is a time for branch waving and lemons and to pray for rain for the next harvest cycle.

There are two Onegs and one Nosh during this busy season and then a whole month (Cheshvan) where there are no festivals – nearly two months until the 25th of Kislev, when we celebrate Chanukah.

Read over the Makzor in its three sections and bring any questions you have to service and to our Yeshivas. We may follow the same annual festival cycle, but how we do what we do will

always need to be repaired and revised so that it is relevant (meaningful) to our lives AND so that our lives are relevant (meaningful) in the L-rd.

It usually takes once or twice through the festival cycle before it becomes second nature, may the L-rd bless our journey through these special days this year until our spirituality becomes dynamic and second nature and develops into the centre around which our lives revolve.

The Makzors are for sale if you want to purchase one (\$2 – to cover the cost of printing), but if you use ones from previous years, I have printed extra copies of the Hatarat Nedarim and the Tashlikh certificates which will be made available during the Rosh Hashanah services.

It is traditional to wear white for the High Holy Days and Sukkoth, but it is not obligatory.

Join us for another celebration of the High Holy days