

Ki Tavo	When You Enter In	You Win or Lose By the Way You Choose
Torah:	Deuteronomy 26:1-29:9 (8)	
Haftarah:	Isaiah 60: 1-22	Torah Carrier Ifeanyi
Brit Chadashah:	Luke 24:44-53. Reading: Betty pp. 101,103 & Ps. 51. Jewish hero Joseph	

This is the second last regular Torah portion of the 5778 Weekly Reading Cycle and it deals mainly with reminding the Children of Israel that two main options are going to present themselves to them when they enter the Land: the Way of Blessing and the Way of Cursing. Moses doesn't talk much about the actual battles which lie ahead, since they have already defeated the two strongest bullies in the Promised Land – and the L-rd will fight for them and the actual combat is the least of their worries.

When my kids were young, I purchased a devotional cassette called Antshillvania. It used a lot of ant-puns with stories and adventures centered around the theme which I have chosen for my meditation: You Win or Lose By the way You Choose. You see, while you cannot always choose what the L-rd is going to put on your plate, He wants us to grow and mature spiritually to the point where we are in full control of how we respond to these often unwanted hitchhikers who are trying to taken up residence in our hearts and lives.

Since the destruction of the second temple, Jewish people have never had an easy time of it as we have wandered among the nations in our generations. We have been persecuted, massacred, slandered so severely that there is not another group in history that has had to put up with such focused mistreatment. However, instead of weeping and wailing about our fate, we have understood that as long as we walk with the L-rd, we will eventually walk out of all the troubles life throws at us. This is because it does not really matter how good or how bad you have it in this life, during your pilgrimage from the womb to the grave. What really matters is how you respond to it and what attitudes and habits you allow your heart and life to fill up with.

In the Torah portion Moses is setting before the wilderness generation, two potential outcomes. The Holy Land will either be for them a paradise on Earth where they will be protected from famine, disease and the sword, living with abundant harvests and massive flocks or they will live in a bleak desert where nothing will grow and where even the little which grows will be stolen by their enemies as they lose their flocks and see their children killed or taken captive while they are struck with the most heinous plagues, beyond even that which the Egyptians suffered.

In fact, their first act upon entering and subduing the Promised Land was to camp in between two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim. Six tribes were to stand upon Ebal and recite the curses while the other six tribes were to stand on Gerizim and recite the blessings. They were to erect a stone monument in the valley between the mountains, engraved with the Ten Words of this Law. What follows is a lengthy description of what the blessings will look like, followed by an even longer one, outlining what the curses would do to them, to the point of desperation where they would eat their own children (Deut.28:53). They would dwindle from their current large number and become a small number.

The portion ends with a reminder of their victories over the Egyptians and over Sihon and Og and also a reminder of how well the L-rd took care of them during their 40 years of wandering through the wilderness. Their feet did not swell, their clothes did not wear out and they were

fed manna from heaven. If G-d could take care of them and bless them as they wandered through an arid wilderness, they were being told how much more He could do for them in a land which flowed with milk and honey.

The passage ends with a pithy exhortation: "**You shall observe the words of this covenant and you shall put them into practice in order to succeed in all that you shall do**" (Deut. 29:9) It is never the circumstances of our lives which have the potential to make our lives a success or a failure, it is how we respond to them which will determine whether our lives can weather the storms of life or be overcome by them because: You win or lose by the way you choose.

The 6th Haftarah of consolation speaks of a complete reversal of fortunes for those who shall return from the Babylonian captivity. They will be so blessed and so healed that the memory of their suffering will be like a rainy dream when you awake on a sunny morning. The future glory of Jerusalem is really a picture of the New Jerusalem and the shoot which the L-rd has planted is really a picture of our Messiah growing up in the midst of Israel, because when we walk with the King, the mists of our troubles will fade in the light and peace which shall be ours in this life and in the life which is to come.

The New Testament portion deals with the final exhortation of our Messiah before His ascension and no matter what is going on in the world, He reminds them that ALL that was written of Him shall be fulfilled and He opened up their minds so that they could understand what the Scriptures teach concerning Him. He was not starting a new religion which grew out of Judaism and left it behind, He was fulfilling all the promises which were given to our people and allowing the Gentiles to partake of them in a new redeemed community.

It does not matter how long you have walked with the L-rd, sometimes all of us will be slow to understand and to believe what the Scriptures teach, both about our blessed Messiah and how we need to live together as brothers and sisters. Coming back to the Scriptures and spending time in prayer and supplication will melt even the most stubborn believer's heart and allow us to once again walk the narrow path and pass through the narrow gate.

We will not have the Word eaten by the birds of the enemy and our faith will not be withered by the heat of temptation and our faith will not be choked by the cares, the riches and the pleasures of this life. And even if we have to do a little wilderness wandering and even go into any number of personal captivities, when we seek His face and walk in His ways, we will win and not lose by the way we choose.

How about you? How about us? We are on the verge of another new year in the L-rd and we really should look at our hearts as living suitcases we are either packing with gold, silver and precious jewels, of clogging them with hay, wood and stubble. We will either walk effectively unscathed through whatever valleys of shadow which open up before us, or we will be ensnared by the enemy, the world and the flesh and bite and devour until we consume one another. Because: you win or lose by the way you chose. Chose life stubbornly, mishpocah.

Sermon: A Year of Intense Spiritual Warfare Lies Ahead of Us in 5779

Romans 8:18; Acts 14:22; I Corin. 10:13; 2 Corin 10:4,5; Eph. 6:11-13; Rev. 12:11.

We have had an eventful spring and summer at B'nai Chayim and I get a sense that we ain't

seen nothing yet. We have an adversary who is gunning for us and wants to defeat us and scatter us and especially who wants to discourage us and cause us to fail in times when we face great adversity. I wish no one troubles, because they will come, whether we want them or not. Great men and women of G-d were not exempt from heart breaking trials, they blazed a mighty trail through these unwanted valleys and I encourage you to study the believers hall of fame in Hebrews 11.

I want to speak to you this morning, not to scare you and make you want to run and hide, but I want you to gird up the loins of your mind and your soul, because there is not sustained victory without an intense combat and at B'nai Chayim, we have seen our fair share of them.

I weep for our sister shul which has closed its doors and my heart goes out to both Andrew and June and all the former members who may be scattering to the wind. We may see some of them seek refuge in our midst and they would be most welcome because we know who we are and how we are called to live and there is always more room in the sheepfold under the mighty sheltering wings of the Almighty.

Now I prepared this before I knew if we would have any visitors coming to test the temperature of our pond and I want to say a few things. First, visitors and newcomers are never a source of intense warfare as long as they make the effort to learn about how we like things done and do not try and impose some of their unfinished business on us. When people talk to me about their former congregations and their former leaders, I often wonder what they say about me when my back is turned.

B'nai Chayim enforces a complete gossip free zone where we do not allow biting and devouring where we end up destroying one another. We preach and require resolution and not endless striving which cause the works of the flesh to prosper and choke out the fruit of the Spirit. Paul encountered toxic believers and toxic communities and he recoiled in horror when some of the congregations he established turned against his teachings and even went gunning for him.

B'nai Chayim fights hard to be a safe place to grow the fruit of the Spirit and see the flesh crucified and wounds healed and conflicts resolved. We will always be welcoming and my approach is both firm and gentle, preaching both a seven times seventy daily forgiveness and a firm, disciplined discipleship where the teaching of the Scriptures are taken seriously and applied into every area of our lives.

When I came to faith, nearly 47 years ago, I had enough personal and spiritual baggage to fill several oversized Uhauls and my wild and wooly hippy friends who were disgusted at my profession of faith did not think I would last long, because I was a pretty committed party animal. Over the years I have done a lot of unpacking and repacking and I have always wanted the Lord to be my focus and not the brokenness and baggage I brought with me.

From the very beginning of our shul, in 2002, we put together a redemptive constitution, so we would know exactly what it is we want to accomplish and also HOW we wanted this accomplished. Our statement of faith explains what we are about as we build and maintain authentic Jewish space in the service of the Messiah from Nazareth, the second person of this plural singularity, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

After a pretty bumpy beginning where I had to work up to 8 separate part-time jobs, we matured to the place where we were ready to articulate our vision statement and move ahead and

overcome any obstacles which try to rise up against us. This was at a time when my health began to collapse and I had over 1700 asthma attacks in a row. I did not feel released from the shul, so I just wanted to lead it until the L-rd took me home and it was a close thing.

When I began my environmental medical treatment for my multiple chemical sensitivity, things began to look up and mishpocah, you are stuck with me for many more years to come. Let me review our Vision Statement so you can see where you fit in in our full meal deal ministry.

We are first a **light house**, shinning forth into a dark world where the fires of both Christianity and Judaism are fading and growing dimmer with each passing year and giving ground ever more quickly before the onslaught of the politically correct evolutionism. We want to sanctify the L-rd in our hearts and with meekness give an answer to all who would ask us a reason of the hope which is in us.

We proclaim fearlessly that Yeshua is the way, the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father except through Him. We are not anti other religions, we are just pro the only true religion and hold forth that the final truth about the meaning and purpose of life is found solely in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, from Genesis to the Revelation. Many darkness dwellers will flee far from our light, but no amount of carnal smoke will be allowed to dim the bright shinning light we are called to be.

We are next a **tree**, where people, Jew and Gentile are grafted in and start growing up into the L-rd in all things, dropping their negative baggage and repacking their hearts according to His Word. We are all called to find our place in the body and put our gifting to the service of the community. We will all have a down side which will have a diminishing impact as we become a team which has each other's back. All of us are a pain in the rear (tuches in Yiddish) and all of us need the L-rd to prune some of our personal deadwood away, as He polishes our rough edges and causes His image to become more prominent in our lives.

He doesn't so much want to change us into someone we are not, He wants us to recognize the potential we were born with and grow in the new inner man of our souls. Sometimes pruning ain't pretty and sometimes weeds try to grow back as we are removing deadwood and some old carnal stumps may take time to be uprooted, so that we can make room for growth in the L-rd. But it is always G-d who works in us to give us the desire and the ability according to His good pleasure, for we can face up to all things through Him who strengthens us.

In Him and together in our community, we have the potential to be more than conquerors. We also have the potential to crash and burn and scatter the sheep in the service of the wolf. There will always be more mean people in shuls and churches than you will find in the world.

But migratory spiritual trouble makers who slip in through our doors will be given a chance to stop messing around and shooting themselves in the foot before they are encouraged to move on and cause trouble elsewhere. We are looking for lifers who are serious about change and becoming one new man in fact and in truth and not just in theory, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

We will also encounter the winds of doctrine that want to blow deceitfully through our midst and introduce all kinds of unbiblical nonsense that we want no part of. We are firmly rooted in the G-d of the Bible and in His Son our Messiah and Saviour. False teaching and strange teaching will not be tolerated. We do not have any room in our midst for either gnosticism or kabbalah,

be it modern or ancient. We will examine all things and hold fast to that which is true and wholesome and biblical. Sometimes we will become people's enemies because we tell them the truth. We want to discover and explore the L-rd's Agenda from a Messianic Jewish perspective and we want to pray for worldwide missions and especially for those who reach out to Jewish people.

We are not the only authentic shul around, we just want to make sure that we remain authentic and grow in the tree into which we have been grafted. We do not want our leaf to wither and we want to continuously bear fruit in our season, because we are planted by the rivers of living Waters.

Thirdly we are a **bride** who is deeply in love with our Saviour and Messiah and as part of expressing that love by walking with Him, we want to also enthusiastically worship Him as we make a joyful noise unto our King and Saviour. Worship and prayer are the life blood of our shul, right alongside Bible Study and fellowship. I do not know what is lining up against us in 5779 to try and leap out at us and tear us to ribbons, but as long as we are in the Word and make regular time for prayer and worship, no weapon forged against us shall prosper and nothing and no one shall be able to separate us from the love of our blessed Redeemer.

Walking with the L-rd is not for the faint of heart and we need both the Mary's and the Martha's in our midst. When the going gets rough, those who remain planted in the L-rd will walk on the water, even when the boat sinks. David was both one of the most troubled people in the Bible and one of the most peaceful, joyful worshippers in the Scriptures. He praised in the midst of the storm and turned both his heart ache and turmoil into songs of praise and we want to learn this discipline at B'nai Chayim and keep on expressing praise as a life discipline from which we will never deviate.

Lastly we are a **repair shop**, where spiritual healing can occur and all the wounds of this world can be bandaged, anointed and restored to full spiritual health. Now, I am aware that having said that, we will always have people whose wounding and who handicaps will not go away because they will function as thorns in the flesh which the L-rd will give them victory over, without delivering them from these unwanted conditions.

I have a long term Christian friend who suffers from bipolar disorder. I know another who is battling with schizophrenia. I know others who have fought a long hard battle with depression and others struggle with PTSD and such debilitating conditions as fibromyalgia. I am struggling with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity and my daughter is struggling with Ehlers-Danlos which is one step further than fibromyalgia. Others battle with blood sugar issues and heart and liver conditions.

I believe in healing and have seen people healed and delivered from any variety of diseases and conditions, but I have also seen sincere, beautiful believers who have not been given release from their conditions in this life. The biggest release we want to strive for in this life is to be released from the pain and stain of sin. I know of a support group for people who struggle with unwanted SSA (same sex attractions) and while many are released, all of them can be given victory in the L-rd. It is this victory which we strive for in all which happens to us in this life.

Sometimes we will encourage people to seek expert medical attention and will bless whatever

meds and supplements they are prescribed. Some medical attention can be toxic and we will encourage people to use wisdom to avoid the charlatans. Many of you know that when I started to recover from my MCS, I went and got tested at Alberta Hospital to see if I had sustained any brain damage.

Well, it is now of record that I have a brain and I tested as a high functioning, backwards thinking old man. But when I get perfumed, I become certifiably psychotic. So the psychiatrist wanted to put me on a high powered (debilitating) mood stabilizer as a prophylactic. I declined saying I prefer practising safe sex. I wear a mask and take the time to recover whenever I am perfumed and I am getting stronger. I may never be free of this annoying condition, but I always want to put straight paths before my feet so that which is wounded is made better and not worse. I want to be wise and not foolish.

This is who we are at B'nai Chayim and we take our spiritual health very seriously and do not welcome any carnality which might try and take root in our midst. We are a **lighthouse** and we will shine bright. We are a **tree**, firmly rooted in His Word and growing up into Him in all things and we will continue to purge any weeds and dead wood which gets in our way. We are a **bride**, deeply in love with the Saviour and given over to much fervent prayer and joyful worship. We are a **repair shop** where people are encouraged to seek healing and release from all and any spiritual oppression and find all the healing and restoration they need to walk firmly and boldly through this life on our way to our Father's Home in Glory.

5779 look out, because B'nai Chayim is going to stomp over all and anything which rises up against us in the coming year and we are going to be more than overcomers, because greater is He who is in us than the one who is in the world.

We are not afraid of that which may be coming our way. We welcome all that the L-rd may place on our plate, because we know He will always teach us to be more than conquerors and whenever the whatevers show up, roaring in our face, we will keep looking for the ways of escape our King will always provide for us so that we can endure and overcome.

Life is not always pretty, but it is always worthwhile to walk through these messes, rooted firmly in His Word and rejoicing in His faithfulness. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua tov.