

Eighth Day of Passover (Yizkor)

Torah: Deuteronomy 15:19- 16:17

Haftarah: Isaiah 10:32-12:6

Brit Chadashah: Rev. 15:1-4

Today's Torah portion is a departure from the regular cycle, because this is the eighth day of Passover and the last day of unleavened bread. After sunset tonight we can bring our leavening back into the house and indulge in our love of doughnuts. We have spent this week plus one, remembering how long it took our people to walk out of Egyptian held territory, so that we would not allow any Egyptian influences to take root or grow in our lives.

We remember that we are still strangers and pilgrims in this life and that we are not home yet. Our greatest battle will always be twofold – against idolatry and fornication as we seek to build both faith and obedience into every area of our lives. On March 28, 1972, I invited the L-rd into my heart and life and I have spent 47 years of my life learning to walk with the L-rd. I came to the L-rd with many areas of brokenness and it was not easy to learn to harness His help to deal with areas of darkness that still want to persist in my life.

However, the goal of every believer, is to learn to walk with the L-rd until we are out of Egyptian territory in every area of our lives. One of the most effective means at our disposal, is the festival cycle, where we let our lives revolve around the annual provision of G-d and not let temporary circumstances tell us how to live as we wander through this life.

In this week's Torah portion we remember that our first born belongs to G-d, because we are no longer slaves in Egypt and we spend a whole week remembering our ancestor's walk to freedom. The Egypt of this world will make claims on our lives, but we do not belong to this world and the festival cycle is our constant reminder that we are heaven bound and are only passing through this life on our way to our true home in glory.

The children of Israel were to gather three times a year and remember that all they had was because of the harvest goodness of G-d. This harvest cycle began with the seven days of unleavened bread, and ended with the seven days of Sukkoth. Chanukah and Purim were added so we would understand that the goodness of G-d will always impact our lives as we remember who G-d is and what He is capable of, as we make our lives revolve around Him.

The festival of unleavened bread is the first of three festivals where our people were to gather together and celebrate the goodness of G-d in their lives. This means that whatever is going on in our lives, we want them to turn around G-d and His provision. We may not be in charge of what comes into our lives or even where we will spend them as we walk through this life, but we are committed to both seeking His face and to trusting Him as we learn to live our lives based on spiritually sowing and reaping according to His Word.

You see, our spirituality is the reality we want to be living for and no matter what else is going on in the world around us, we want our lives to be turning around G-d and His Word. This is not an easy life discipline to maintain, but it is our only calling. We are to sow according to His Spirit in every area of our lives, so that we can reap the fruit of His Spirit in every area of our lives.

The Haftarah portion speaks of the arrival of the Messiah into the messed up lives of Israel in exile, because no matter where we roam, His purposes are always capable of successfully intervening to bring us back to kingdom priorities. This is because we live for the world to come, more than we do for the world we are just traveling through. We are heaven bound and the righteous judgment of G-d shall prevail, even if the mighty burden of human folly tries to drown out His voice. Disasters and man made catastrophes may dominate how we see the world, but it should always be the world to come that really catches our interest.

We do not belong to this world and its priorities may call out for our attention, but every year, we make our lives revolve around a different agenda as we patiently wait for the return of our blessed Redeemer. It is His Word which makes sense out of the noise of the world we are only walking through and it is the music of His coming Kingdom which should determine how we should live in this darkening world.

Today is the end of the festival of unleavened bread, but it should never be the end of our devotion to the L-rd through His Word. The winter is over, spring is here in full swing and summer is on the way, but it is just another year where we either walk with the L-rd or we let our lives spin out of control.

Our world wants our attention and wants to tell us how to live and what it feels is really important, but we are not going to fall for this folly because we are going to be spending our lives walking out of Egypt and never walking with Egypt. We sing a different song and are waiting for a different world, because we are called to walk differently as we pass through this world.

We have just finished another successful Passover season and we want to walk with our King through the whatever's that this life will continue to throw at us. We want our lives to revolve around His festival cycle and we want to examine what He wants to do in our lives according to His Word. He will remind us again and again what He wants our lives to look like and it is up to us to make sure that His Word is the foundation upon which we build our lives.

How is His Word doing in your life? Are you making spiritual progress as you wander through the stages of your life? Are you living free from the leavening of this life or is the noise of this life drowning out the voice of His Spirit through His Word? Which voice are you listening to? Does your life reflect His priorities according to His Word? When all is said and done, where is your life going, in terms of your spiritual destiny?

We need to be sowing and reaping according to His Spirit and His Word. This is the eighth day of Passover and we need to renew our commitment to live lives which revolve around His Word. We need to regularly leave the Egypt of this world and the Egypt of our flesh, far behind us, if we want to make progress in the things of the L-rd.

Life is too short not to live every moment for the L-rd and when we see that we have made a detour away from His Word, we are called back to the place where we make His Word our reason for living. What does your life revolve around? 47 years is not a long time to walk with the L-rd, because walking with the L-rd is what life should always be about, nothing more and certainly nothing less. He is alive, are you alive in Him?

Sermon: Counting the Omer: Generational Spirituality

Passage: *I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor their children begging for their bread.* (Psalm 37:25)

Life is always full of surprises and we can never tell what is going to happen, but G-d's Kingdom is coming, no matter what the world thinks it is doing or what it is trying to prepare for. When I look back on my life and when I look back on the life of the generations which have preceded me, life has not always made much sense. Crazy things have happened because men have sought to live by the lust of the eyes and the lust of the flesh and by the pride of life.

It would seem that in every generation, there is a battle which is being waged between that which ought to happen and that which ends up happening and we are stuck in the middle. David's life is given to us as an example of courage under fire, because neither the folly of others, nor his own folly, were able to derail how his life turned out. He walked with the L-rd through some of the most heartbreaking circumstances that any young person should have to encounter. He went from tending sheep and fighting off bears and lions, to leading a people who did not always want to be led and yet he never gave up.

I accepted the L-rd during my first year of university and I had no idea how my life would turn out. The only thing which has really been constant, is the goodness of the L-rd throughout the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. It has never been dull and it has often been quite painful and very difficult, but it has always been worth it to walk with the Messiah, first as a young person and now as an old guy who still has most of his teeth.

What we are trying to build at B'nai Chayim is a place where all the generations of life can find a place to discover the L-rd and to walk with Him, no matter where life takes them. I wish you all health and great prosperity as you stumble through this life on your way home to our Father's home in glory, but I cannot foresee all the bumps and twists and turns which life has in store for you. What I can foresee is that you will either learn to rely upon the goodness of G-d through His Word, or take your chances in a world where nothing is certain and where good people do not always finish first in a race where the odds are too often against you.

When I look at our children and when I talk with our adults, I am amazed that we have all made it this far. We live in a scary world full of scary people and where scary things keep on happening. I praise the L-rd that our country is such a safe place to live, but my heart breaks when I see all the junk that too many other countries have to put up with. I want to help and I always offer up my prayers, but the enemy of our souls is always coming up with new ways to make our journey through this life, complicated and uncertain.

Generational spirituality is a testimony to how the goodness of G-d applies at every stage of our lives, no matter what it is our privilege to live through or to do without. When I first came to the L-rd, boy did I have a lot of baggage and not too many people were willing to say that I would last very long, without falling back into the darkness I was delivered from. Many of my friends were just waiting for me to be finished with this new "spiritual" phase in my life and get back to the partying that life was supposed to be all about.

I proved them wrong, because faith in the L-rd and walking with Him according to His Word, is the only sense anyone will ever be able to make out of this unpredictable life. The pace of

change keeps on accelerating as hippies and yuppies have been replaced by both generation X and the millennials, as newer and stranger gadgets keep on impacting the quality of our lives. People may yet establish a colony on Mars and climate change may turn our world inside out before we know what hits us. I am not afraid of what our children and grandchildren may face because the same L-rd who took me by the hand is waiting for them to follow in my footsteps.

The journey of faith is a path full of dangers and more twists and turns than you can ever imagine and even if there is nothing new under the sun, no one can be certain of what will become our way tomorrow. In the last century, we survived two massive world wars and a cold war that did its best to bring us over the brink of nuclear disaster, and yet here we are. The best way we can prepare for the future is to look at the unchanging Word of G-d and let it guide us through the whatever's that are waiting to impact our lives.

As we consider that our perfect little children will morph into teenagers and come to question the truth they have been taught, we need to remember that we also faced this challenge and survived to be where we are today. I can see David writing his psalm after a life which was more than interesting and recollecting how faithful the L-rd was, no matter what challenges he had to face.

This is what I want to say to young people as our community becomes generationally sustainable. I cannot predict what will come our way as the world darkens and as the end of the age approaches, but there is one thing I am sure of. G-d will always be faithful and His Spirit and His Word will always be more than capable of guiding us, no matter what life throws at us and no matter how many valleys we have to wade through and no matter how many mountains we have to scale. The light of G-d will never be extinguished even though the darkness of this current age is once again covering the earth with its violence and sin.

The politically correct tyranny will only become more intrusive and the voice of this world will continue to shriek nonsense as more and more falsehoods are proclaimed which contradict the Word of G-d's truth. They will call us names and demand that we tow the company line, but this has always been the agenda of our enemy who is working hard to put all of his eggs into the same worldwide basket again. We need to welcome new lives as they come into our midst and show them that there is enough grace and wonder in our Messiah to see them through the stages of life which we have also survived.

I heard an inscription where someone was complaining that young people did not listen and spent their time listening to loud music as they came up with new ways to cause trouble and mischief for their elders. It was from ancient Greece and young people have not changed very much, if at all. We may be living in a unique era where the world is quickly becoming a global village that wants the good life and the best deal, but things haven't changed much at all. We are all on the same journey from conception to the grave and we say in French that soon things will change, and soon they will be the same thing.

The only worthwhile changes in this life are those spiritual changes we make as we walk with the Messiah and discover the wonder of His Word.

There will always be challenges, including snow which comes after winter is over, but our message to younger people needs to be that no matter what happens, G-d is faithful and His Word is true. Our governments may outlaw our faith and call it a violation of our human rights

to be sinners and criminals, but the truth of G-d never changes and can never be silenced.

Strange and wonderful things may yet be on the horizon, before the eventual arrival of G-d's everlasting Kingdom through His Son, our Messiah. Change is inevitable and this world will always bring forth challenges to our faith, but as we pass on our faith to the next generation, we are inviting them to engage in the same struggle which believers have always faced, no matter what generation they were born into.

The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life will always be on the prowl for more spiritual victims and the father of lies will always come up with new versions of the same garbage. Our job will continue to be to establish the truth of G-d in our lives and break down all and any fortresses which rise up against it. This may seem like a relentless battle that will never end, but the resurrection power of our Messiah is as fresh in today's world as it was when He first rose from the dead.

His Spirit is still speaking to people at the entrance to noisy places and the basic spiritual realities of life remain unchanged. It is our job to make sure that we do not remain unchanged as we discover how to sing and worship our way through the generations we find ourselves moving through.

I have seen an incredible number of changes in my life and the pace of change does not appear to be slowing down and this does not trouble me. The lies of evolution and the stupidity of our politically correct world can make noise and howl more loudly as this world darkens, but the truth of G-d through His Word will never diminish or be wiped away.

We just have to decide where we stand and which foundation we want to build our lives on. Generational spirituality means that we want to be changed by His Word and walk with His Spirit whether we twitter and bleep or whether we are stuck with older technologies. The pace of technological change may continue to accelerate and we may have to find new and creative means to express our faith in a world which is not always friendly to our message, but this has always been our challenge.

The world has drastically changed since our people were set free from Egyptian bondage and the same spiritual truths may seem to be more and more threatened in our modern world, but our journey has not changed. We are on a pilgrimage from conception to the grave and beyond and the fading glory of this darkening world is still gunning for our time and energy. As we move through another festival cycle, our calling to be salt and light has not changed, even if the world is a noisier place than the one our people first traveled through.

The truth of G-d is changeless and the call of G-d is relentless. We can either do our best to hide from it and become fascinated with the enemy, the world or the flesh, or we can allow His Spirit and His Word to help us find new and improved ways of living our faith and sharing it with the world we are only passing through. We may not be popular, but neither were the people who first shared their faith with me in 1972.

Making our lives revolve around the Word of G-d is the calling of every believer in every generation until the kingdom comes. Our faith has got something to say to every individual in every generation and at B'nai Chayim, we will face this challenge head on.

I welcome all the challenges and changes this world is generating because I am a citizen of the world to come and believe more in it than I do in this gadget ridden world we are only passing through. But I can guarantee you three things and I will close with this. First of all, despite all the advancements in human technology, there is no extraterrestrial life out there waiting to be discovered. In the 1800's people stopped believing in angels and demons and started to believe in skinny little green men with big eyes.

In order for life to exist on another planet, it would have to share about 100 characteristics which we find on our little corner of the cosmos. There is not a single planet within range of our telescopes which is in any way similar to ours. There is less chance of finding this extraterrestrial life than there is of finding Santa's workshop at the North Pole or of one day being able to fly away with Peter Pan to Never-never-land.

Next you will never find a single example of evolution actually occurring in our world. Our genetic signature is not a dynamic which is seeking for more ways to be different, it just keeps on blessing the children of father Adam and mother Eve with the same human nature we have always been stuck with. We may each be unique individuals, but we are not evolving into higher and higher forms of existence. We are all on the same journey from conception to the grave, no matter where the wild changes of life take us.

Lastly, we will never be able to conquer death and the only way to live forever is to come to faith in the Messiah from Nazareth. Medicine and medical science have made amazing progress and agriculture and other human sciences have made incredible breakthroughs to improve our quality of life, but there are no towers of Babel we can build which will reveal the secrets of life to us.

There is only one G-d and only one Mediator between G-d and men and this will never change, no matter how fancy and complicated we are able to make this life appear. Every day is indeed a new day, but there will never be anything new under the sun, just new people who will either discover the truth of G-d or spend their lives running away from it.

At B'nai Chayim, we want to be a generational community with something to say to every generation which is born and which grows up in our midst. The Word of our L-rd holds the answer to all the questions of your heart, even the ones which we need to be told are none of our business.

Unless we are walking with the L-rd, we are wasting our time as we stroll through this life. I was young and now I am old, and I have never seen the righteous abandoned, nor his seed begging their bread. I have seen and experienced persecution and my heart has been broken by all the folly of this life, both past and present (and future), but I can loudly proclaim that you can't get no satisfaction, except in the L-rd as you walk according to His Word.

Shabbat shalom and shavua tov