

Parasha Shemini Eighth

Torah: Lev. 9:1-11:47

Haftarah: Ez. 36:16-38

Brit Chadashah: Heb. 7:1-19

(4) Shabbat Parah (Num. 19:1-22) (the Red Heifer, Bart Simpson's Shabbat)

How is your spring cleaning going? Last week I talked to about looking at your life as a piece of spiritual Real Estate, where G-d is going to take all the rubble and the rabble of our lives and, by His grace and by our habits of obedience, build each of us (and all of us) into a magnificent dwelling place for His Son, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. How is this going? Remember, it cannot be the product of a single decision, nor can it be accomplished on a single Shabbat. It is the fruit which comes from both adequate sowing and from conscientious spiritual gardening – or to put it another way – by the maintenance of good spiritual hygiene, where our souls are groomed and kept in shape, no matter what else is going on in our lives. How's it going?

Now this is really a tall order. No, it is even more than a tall order; Solomon said it is the **whole duty of man** (and of course of woman – Eccl. 12:13, 14). You see, our spiritual condition is the most important thing about our lives and is really the only thing that matters to G-d, eternally speaking that is. He may number our hairs and take better care of us than He does of the sparrows and the lilies of the field, but He has a bigger agenda, and a greater purpose for us and it is this calling and destiny which He wants us to build our lives around – and even more important yet, to aim our lives towards. How is your whole duty doing?

We only have so much time and so much energy, before the chapter of our lives, of our generation, is over. But before we too take our place sleeping with our fathers and mothers we need to ask ourselves three questions, so we can plan for a good nap before our final exam. **(1) First of all, what are you doing with the Son?** Are you just going around and around the mountain, and wandering in the wilderness of unresolved issues, bitter disappointments and frustrated ambitions, just waiting for your turn to die so that the next generation can move on to get the job done which you couldn't do? Are you wasting your time spiritually going in circles?

In a sense, I am there. Why? I did not come to the L-rd with any generational spiritual momentum – I was not raised in a home with any faith of any kind. Returning to my Jewish roots was something I did with a little help from my friends, not from my family. So, whatever else happens to my children, they are at least 20 or 40 years ahead of me, when I started on my pilgrimage to our Father's glorious house. There is "to the third and fourth generation" baggage in my life which I will probably be dealing with till I am able to throw off this mortal suitcase of my flesh and get some sleep before the glorious day of His appearing. What about you?

Instead of crying about our lot in life, like so many cowardly spiritual Hamlets and blaming our parents, our friends, and the great bad luck which has deprived us of all that we really deserve and actually feel we need to be happy and fulfilled, may I make an alternate suggestion? ***Even if we knew why some people seem to get more breaks than us, it would not help us to fulfill the calling we have before G-d for our own lives.*** It is really a form of subtle and pernicious coveting, which will fill us with bitter regrets and an angry dissatisfaction both with G-d and with our lives, and which may cause us to become spiritually foolish and build futile personal golden calves and other toxic idols that will only diminish our eternal reward – which is really the only which really matters, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Let me move on to my second question. (2) **What are you recycling through the hard drive of your heart, as you come to terms with your own mortality and your own flawed humanity?** (Lam. 3:19-23). I want to say something which is both painful and which you might find somewhat shocking – your rebbe is not perfect. I know it is hard to believe, but it gets worse – sometimes I am such a *putzo that I am the only real cause of the lack of spiritual growth and spiritual momentum in my life*. At nineteen, I had such plans and there was so much I wanted to do, and there is so much I still want to do. And if the truth be known, *the only thing which can stop any of us from fulfilling the entire purposes of G-d for our lives is ourselves*. Why? Because there is no adversary, no set back, and no set of personal inabilities which the L-rd would allow into our lives to prevent us from succeeding in His Kingdom (I Cor. 10:13 and Romans 8:37-39). Amen and ouch gadol.

And this and this alone which is the biggest thing which sucks in my life. **Coming to terms with who I am and who I am not and what I can do and what I must admit I can never do, is the biggest cross which believers have to bear.** G-d is most concerned with how we handle life's little disappointments and great tragedies, and how we rise up against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Walking with G-d in the sunshine of His love, through a garden of ease and good fortune, is what Heaven is going to be all about. **Trusting G-d really means accepting the challenges and the defeats of life as part of His will for our lives, and not expecting to be fast tracked or delivered out of trials because we belong to Him.** And everybody said "ouch".

Now this is a tall order and a very difficult spiritual objective to reach and an even harder spiritual discipline to maintain, because this life will always only ever going to be an untrustworthy minefield of possibilities – like a ship that is always springing leaks when we are trying to take a nap, or whose engines break down and whose weapons go off line when we need them the most. Now this would suck and we would be destroyed, if we did not belong to the greatest life coach in the universe, who has promised never to leave us, nor to forsake us (Heb. 13:5, cf. Jos. 1:5), and who never abandons ship and who will always provide us with a way to endure and to succeed spiritually.

In the final analysis it is these spiritual victories and these spiritual defeats of life which should concern us the most – and which should give us the most satisfaction and which should also give us the greatest grief (II Cor. 7:11). Do you understand, in the midst of all the deceptive glory and splendour of this world which is passing away as we speak, that it don't make no never mind what's going on in your life, *it's only what's going on in your heart which has any eternal benefit, or conversely, which has any eternal deficit?*

Your answer to this question brings me to my third point as we slide home towards my conclusion. (3) **How are you talking to yourself in the quiet depths of your heart, where no one else can see and when no one else can hear?** Our topic this week deals with instructing each other in all wisdom and here, I am not referring to an endless series of seminars where you are always being transformed and re-energized by the *perpetual shifting of the paradigms of your heart*. For me, this is a trap which is really a good description of what hell must be like – always being told that you have not got it right and need to spend eternity as a perpetual loser, starting over and again, knowing you will never get it right. Why? Because, really this *power of personal development spirituality* is just a subtle judgment or damnation which forever casts us into the role of serial spiritual losers, never good enough, and certainly never smart enough. Do I hear any "amen's"?

Instructing one another mutually is not forever taking each other apart and pointing out all the flaws and mistakes we make as we flounder along on our way to our Father's home. That's the devil's job and he does it quite well – you know, he tempts us, then he condemns us and when we try and get back on track, he confuses us *He wants us to feel like a piece of rotting spiritual driftwood, sinking as we are washed away towards eternity through a world which makes absolutely no sense*. Let me encourage you. **Poor baby, is it time to take a valium?** This is not how G-d works and this is not how G-d speaks to us and this is definitely not how He wants us to speak to each other, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

How are we supposed to talk to each other, as we let the word of Messiah dwell richly in the emerging spiritual palaces of our hearts? We will be reviewing this speaking all the way through this series, but this week, I want to close with a little illustration, and it has to do with cars. You see, we have to be careful about the pictures we are building in our hearts, which is the way we come to terms with the events of our lives. I am talking hear about our personal dreams, and the personal understandings we all build as we go through life. **This personal imagery, this inner metaphor will eventually take over our entire lives, and either turn us into joyful, contented believers, resting peacefully in His constant provision, or into bitter, angry trouble makers, full of the venom of blame and hatred, frustrated with our failed lives, because none of our silly carnal dreams came true, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.**

To help to prevent this inner tragedy, let's move onto my picture of the car and you all know how much cars hate me, and how much the feeling is of course mutual. There are three ways you can help a car to get to where it needs to go. **First** of all you can maintain it adequately, so that it is not always breaking down. How is your personal maintenance doing with the car you are stuck with in your personal journey to our Father's House? **Next**, you can help the driver learn how to drive and to successfully manoeuvre through all the twists and turns and adverse weather conditions and traffic jams which this old life lying in wait with, ready to spring out at us with, perpetually and constantly. What can I say, that's Alberta for you.

How is your spiritual driving doing, how is your heart driving doing? Are you spending too much quality time in the ditches of this life? Do you go from one smash up to the next, because you won't learn how slow down, how to swerve or even how to stop and take a break? Do you keep picking up hitchhikers who distract you, who rob you, or who oblige you to give them rides which really take you completely out of the way which G-d has called you to? Are stuck in an endless sensual rush hour, which is really all that the carnal pleasures of this life have to offer us?

Finally, you can help the driver learn to read the map – and of course, to read it three ways. First where are you on G-d's road? Second where are you going and third, where have you been? Have you picked up some junk that needs to be dumped out of the car of your heart along with a few hitchhikers? Have you missed some of the help which G-d has been trying to put in your car, because you are such a control freak that you only let things into your car that you feel comfortable with – you know the junk food of your life which messes up the way you drive? Have you taken some wrong turns, because you have trouble reading the signs G-d places along your path?

Sometimes all of us bse our way. Sometimes all of us need some time in G-d's garage. Sometimes all of us need to clean some of the junk out of the cars of our lives and stock up on helpful things which really matter. Sometimes we need to stop and learn to read the map. It is only the spiritual breakdowns which matter to the L-rd who has placed the triple calling on our lives. We are called to **be the cars** which He has purchased and that He is repairing – I would rather spend my life learning how to live as G-d's Volkswagen then spend my life trying to pretend I'm the devil's Cadillac. He has also called us to **learn to drive** through the traffic of life according to the rules of His road. And finally, He has called us to **follow His map** and keep our focus on His destination, on His House of Glory, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

How's your driving? How's your vehicle? Are you following the map, or just driving around in circles until you run out of gas? Let's learn to ***mutually instruct*** each other so that our journey together as a redemptive community of praise is a triumphant march to His eternal Promised Land, though Amalekites bushwhack us, Midianites curse us – Gibeonites deceive us and even though Philistines beat the life out of us repeatedly. We are pilgrims on the same journey, so let's learn to stay together and to become the camp of the L-rd, under His cloud and illuminated by His light – feeding on His manna and His quail – He'll take care of our feet and of our clothing and shelter.

I've given you bt's of illustrations and images today. Hey, isn't that the best way for us to instruct each other in all wisdom? Think them over. Bring your questions to Havdallah and Yeshiva. Let's pray.