

4 Elul, 5773 (10/8/13) *Victory Means Winning More than You Lose* J. M. Terrett

Shoftim Judges Fighting For the Big Picture

Torah: Deut. 16:18-21:9

(1) **16:19.** *You shall not strike down any right, you shall not consider the appearance of any person and you shall not receive any bribe, for bribes blind the eyes of the wise and corrupt the words of the righteous.* Spirituality and morality are one and the same function – you cannot have the one without the other – bringing moral order into our lives needs to coincide with upholding moral behaviour – separate the two, you kill both.

(2) **18:9.** *When you shall have entered the land which the L-RD your G-d gives to you, you shall not learn to imitate these nations.* Syncretism means integrating the values and practices of paganism, which is forbidden. Accommodation means expressing our beliefs and values in ways that are meaningful to those we are endeavouring to reach. Do you know the difference? Do you live the difference?

(3) **18:14.** *For these nations whom you shall chase out, practice astrology and divination (discovering insight from organizing random facts to direct and predict the future). The L-RD your G-d does not permit you to do this.* Spirituality helps you figure out both the meaning of life and our place in G-d's great scheme of things. Astrology and divination promise us the best deal in life, as if getting an edge for money and success was the point of spirituality – we need to learn to see and integrate spirituality into our lives and not falsely assume that spirituality exists to serve our carnal purposes

(4) **20:4.** *For the L-rd your G-d shall walk with you to fight your enemies and to save you.* We are in a spiritual combat and we have to both see who our true enemies are and learn to fight them – one of the biggest and most enduring features of this victory is learning to walk with the L-RD – it is the cornerstone of proactive, victorious spirituality – how is your walk doing? Who do you walk with and how do you walk? Are you defeating your enemies or are they defeating you?

Haftarah: 51:12-52:12

(5) **51:16.** *I put My words in your mouth and I cover you with the shadow of my hand in order to stretch out a new heavens and found a new earth and to say to Zion: you are my people.* This verse presents some interpretation challenges and I even went on line to look at different versions, after I looked it up in Hebrew – most of your translations will not say a new heavens and a new earth, but unless we take this verse to mean that somehow Israel was there when G-d first stretched out the heavens and founded the earth, then it must be talking about the new creation.

It might be possible to say this is talking about our Messiah, in whose mouth the Word was put, but He was not hidden under G-d's hand – He is G-d's right hand and He is the active agent who performed creation. Therefore it talks about His hand which covers us and which will cover us as He eventually and finally ushers in the new creation. What is in your mouth and whose hand is covering you?

(6) **52:10.** *The L-RD uncovers the arm of His holiness in the eyes of all the nations and all the extremities of the earth shall see the salvation of our G-d.* Speaking of hands and arms, Yeshua is

called the right hand of G-d and here He is called the arm of G-d which shall be uncovered (His sleeves are being rolled up so that He can get to work), so that He may accomplish His salvation purposes before all the nations.

Israel has always had an international, multigenerational mandate and it has always been to bless all nations through the salvation of both our own people and indeed of all people. How is your salvation mandate doing – both personal (knowing that you are saved) and corporate (is the salvation of others your principle motive in how you relate to others?).

Brit Chadashah: Mat. 3:1-17

(7) **3:8. Produce therefore works worthy of repentance.**

Salvation is like conception – it brings us life that has a drive to grow and give us an ever strengthening, growing spiritual life as we wander through this life. Repentance is a double function which both seeks for health and for nutrition so that a vigorous spiritual health fosters the spiritual growth for which we came to faith. Are your works worthy of your repentance? Is your repentance worthy of your faith – have you got a firm grasp of the bigger picture? Are you fighting for it or against it?

Psalm 17 (Bernie) Jewish Hero: Israel Pavilion at Heritage Days L-rd's Table

Sermon: Victory Means Winning More Than We Are Losing

As we wander through the Sabbaths of Consolation towards Rosh Hashanah, which is only three weeks away, I want to talk to you about the dubious, but dynamic spirituality which Israel has struggled with over the ages – and it has never been without both its ups and downs – both personally and generationally.

There is no major character in the Scriptures who did not experience major setbacks in their struggles to walk with the L-rd and to accomplish the purposes which G-d assigned to them. Now there are many levels of setbacks – including both those we cause and those we encounter, but, as we shall see this morning, as long as we continue to walk with the L-rd and learn to stubbornly bring forth works worthy of repentance, the L-rd will help us to eventually and regularly overcome even these.

I want to look briefly at two passages of Scripture, even three, so we can understand that victory is not a onetime thing which determines our ultimate victory each time we win or each time we lose, but victory and defeat are battle results in a greater war, and our ultimate and our current victory means winning more than we are losing, rather than coming apart at the seams every time we lose, or thinking the war is won, each time we win.

We need to see our lives in the L-rd as a series of battlefields through which we wander until the end of our personal war – and one day until the end of the cosmic war of the ages – of which our lives and our struggles are just a small episode.

Let's look at these verses:

Proverbs 24:16: A righteous man falls seven times and rises up again, but the wicked are overthrown by calamity.

I Cor. 10:13. There has no temptation which has overtaken you except that which is common to man, but G-d, who is faithful, will never let you be tempted beyond your ability to resist, but will, with each temptation, always provide you with a way of escape so that you can stand up under it.

Hebrew 12:13. Set straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be made worse, but rather strengthened.

You guessed it – I have three principles or truths to teach you and remind you about this morning. Years ago, one of my Profs at university talked about how he learned to ski later in life.

He said many of the people he was learning to ski with, spent all day trying to avoid falling, but never really learned to ski.

After his first day, he was covered in snow from lots of tumbles, but he learned to ski.

I am not saying that we should consciously put ourselves in situations which could cause us to fall, all I am saying is that is the nature of life and we have to learn to ski, instead of spending our lives running away from the challenges which may cause us to fall, but which we are called to confront and to overcome, so that we have victory and not protective isolation, totally withdrawn and unable to handle life.

David's life was a series of serial setbacks which he all too frequently encountered and most of which he eventually came out on top of – and he even learned from his setbacks and learned the most important spiritual lesson in this life – when you walk with the L-rd and when you learn to recover from your mistakes (which is a nifty definition of authentic repentance), you are no longer either afraid of what may come your way or of any failure which you may temporarily encounter along the way.

Kipling said that if you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters the same, you will not be ruined by either of them, and because both of them are part of the pilgrimage we are on. Learning to win (to get back up seven times) more than you lose is one of the reasons Jewish people are still here and still eventually succeed, no matter how much pain and opposition we encounter.

Spirituality which promises you automatic victory which will guarantee that you never encounter defeat is the worst spiritual Ponzi scheme the enemy has ruined more lives with and is one of the spiritual infections/temptations we have to learn to avoid. A righteous man or woman or child or senior will always fall seven times, but since seven is the number of G-d, it should tell us that this is not a literal reference, but a symbolic reference which means that even our falling is under His protection as long as we keep getting up and returning to Him.

We will all fall in various manners – not all in the same way, but if you want to learn to ski, hit the slopes and figure out how to ski and then your falls will fall off as you make progress. If we bring our defeats to Him, He will help us to get up and not to be overthrown by calamity. Neither the first and second destruction of the temple, nor the relentless persecution of our people which culminated in the Holocaust have been able to overcome our people with calamity, because each time we have gotten up and rebuilt. How about you?

I wish no one calamities, instead I wish them a successful series of getting back up so that our righteousness and our repentance define us and the direction of our lives, more than any disasters which may come our way and try to overcome us.

Let's move on to the second principle – G-d is as mightily present in the worst and darkest of temptations as much as He is in the midst of the most glorious praise and joy – why – hello – omnipresent.

He will not allow any temptation to come your way without building in a way of escape – not so that we can avoid it, but so that we can beat it, even if we have to put up with it a long time (even a life time). Victory in our blessed Messiah is inevitable more than temptation. So what do we do when we fall or are tempted?

Three things. First admit and recognize that omnipresence of G-d and we call out to Him. Secondly, we look around for the way of escape. Third we learn to take it and endure, rather than ignore it and be crushed, ensnared and driven off.

In every possible circumstance, be it an intellectual conundrum, a personal tragedy, a financial meltdown or a health crisis, we need to admit a truth which does not depend on us being aware of it. G-d's presence is never like tinker bell, where we have to believe and clap our hands to keep Him from dying, His presence screams out from the cosmos and from every subatomic participle in this pain soaked cosmos.

Learning to see it is one of the most satisfying spiritual challenges we will ever face, followed by learning to see and to take the ways of escape which He always builds into every temptation.

This does not mean we will always escape the flames of Auschwitz, or the painful afflictions we have to learn to live with, it means that He will do whatever it takes to help us to be able to endure and survive. The whole time I was sinking lower into the morass of scent symptoms which kept on worsening – at every stage He met me and helped me not give up as I fought a continuous rear guard action – learning the true meaning of a strategic retreat rather than a final massive defeat.

I lost a lot of friends along the way and I lost a lot of income and precious time as I lay coughing on my basement floor in constant pain and struggling with a growing mental haze which I wish my memory loss would remove, but that is not how it works – and which brings us to my last point and to our conclusion.

People often ask me how I deal with such a debilitating condition and I often surprise them by saying that I have to own it and be in charge of it. In other words I have to make straight paths for my crippled feet (bronchioles), so that how I respond and how I choose, makes me stronger and not weaker or worse.

We have already talked about learning to get up when we fall and learning to see and to take the way of escape, but there is another aspect of learning to win more than you lose and that is dealing with some of the inevitable woundedness which we will all encounter at various times in our lives.

Our bodies come equipped with both an immunal system and various systems which help us to heal and to repair damage we encounter in our lives – and this also exists in the realm of proactive, positive spirituality.

I have encountered considerable emotional and spiritual damage in my short life and it ain't over yet, sigh. But learning to recover and owning our pain and the damage is the best way to recover – vengeance,

bitterness and regret are just infections which will cause our lives to fester and sicken, instead of healing and rebuilding.

Setting straight paths for our feet means doing whatever we can do deal with our situation – like wearing a mask and surrendering my licence for three years. As we do our part – as we seek redemptive means of responding to negative pain, we have begun the process of healing and we have moved out from under the influence of defeat and have begun to climb back up to victory. Do you need to set straight paths? Are your woundings getting better or worse? Getting a cane is better than falling repeatedly and riding a bike in 40 below weather is better than being housebound all the time.

Looking for solutions and handling defeat successfully means that, like Tito, you will survive long enough to win and not be cornered into defeat. Be like David and like Jeremiah and like John the baptiser and Paul the apostle. They fell seven times and rose up again and were never overcome by calamity. They learned to look for both G-d's non negotiable presence and His guaranteed way of escape.

How about you?

He is there, get over it. His way of escape is too – take it (run, duck, punch, jump, lie down, go for a walk, eat, sleep, cry, laugh, to name a few).

It is up to us to own our own spiritual health and our own spiritual recovery.

Are you setting straight paths for you feet?

Sin will clone itself endlessly in our lives, but G-d in His faithfulness will always give us new and better ways of escape – His technology is never outdate and is always cutting edge - is yours?

May you learn to rise up again seven times as a lifestyle.

May you learn to take His ways of escape and endure instead of succumbing when you are tempted.

May you learn to set straight paths for your feet and get better and not worse.

Let's pray.