

27 AV 5767 (Aug 11, 2007) *True Spirituality: Extremism and Stability* J. M. Terrett

Re'eh	See!	Make up Your Mind
Torah:	Deut. 11:26-16:17.	[11:26] [12:32] [14:2] [16:16,16:17]
Haftarah:	Is. 54:11-55: (5)13.	[54:17] [54:7]
Brit Chadashah:	John 7:37-52.	[7:38]

Only four more Shabbats to go until the High Holy Days (Two Festivals and a Fast)! How many of the special services will you be able to attend?

Today is the third Sabbath of consolation and I want to briefly discuss two spiritual principles with you, but I cannot decide if they are oxymoronic (the juxtaposition of apparent opposites) or just paradoxical (the presentation of an apparent contradiction): extremism and stability.

Turn with me to Luke 9:23: "**Then He said to all, if anyone desires to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up His cross daily and follow Me**". I see four spiritual principles here, two of them relating to extremism and two of them relating to stability.

**Spiritual Principle Number One:** "If anyone desires to follow me" Did you know it is possible to want two or three contradictory things at once, especially in today's technological wonderland of gadgets and endless consumer goods? It is hard not to love the world because there are so many things in it to trigger the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and even though the things of this life are always wearing out and fading, their presence in our hearts can leave no room for the Love of the Father.

You will notice that I said in our hearts and not in our lives. I am so grateful for the gadgets and the consumer goods, the medications and the increased means of mass communication, but they are only means to an end and should never be considered an end in themselves. In fact everything in our lives should be seen as a means to express our faith in the Lord and our commitment to His immanent Eternal Kingdom.

Unfortunately too many of us allow our faith to become choked by the cares, the pleasures and the riches of this temporary life. You hear so many equivalents of: "Get all you can, can all you get and sit on the lid" and of: "The one who wins is the one who dies with the most toys". It is simply not true, because there is no profit in gaining the whole world, if you lose your eternal soul in the process (Luke 9:25).

Where is your heart today? Which of its desires are you following, the deep spiritual longings of your spirit, or the carnal drives of your flesh (see Jer. 17:9, 10 and 2 Cor. 7:1)? We live our lives in a minefield of possibilities where all the distractions are always causing our spirit to argue with our flesh, day by day, in every way from the cradle to the grave and to the Jew first and also to the Gentile – also to the Rabbi first and also to the flock. This inner tension of extremism is probably the biggest spiritual battle any of us will ever have to fight and let me tell you why.

**Spiritual Principle Number Two:** "Let him (or her) deny himself (or herself). Sometimes it feels good to do bad and sometimes it feels rotten to do good and sometimes we don't feel anything at all and we still have to make a spiritual decision, a choice that could affect the whole direction of our spiritual lives – and this often occurs daily. Buddhists are right when they say desire is the source of all suffering, but they are wrong when they say the path to spiritual liberty is to remove all desire – you do not control the flame, the furnace, the engine or the heart by extinguishing it, but only by exercising constant caution and firm control. Denying yourself means listening to your spirit and not to your flesh, no matter how many tantrums it throws or how loud and persistently it whines at you.

Both of these two principles are constantly trying to pull us in opposite directions with persistent unpredictability, like a wild donkey which is always trying to buck us off and drag us into

submission. There is not way to make either of them go away and if we hope that one day our flesh will stop trying to lust after the world, we are right – it will happen the moment you die, with two, exceptions. When you are in a great deal of pain or in a great deal of danger, your flesh is too busy to bug you, but no worries, once things settle down, the whining and the tantrums will start again. How do you deal with this miserable mess – cut off all the offending parts of your body or sign up for a partial frontal lobotomy? Maybe, but let me suggest two other principles and then I will close.

**Principle Number Three:** "Take up his (or her) cross daily". Every time you get into your car, you put your life at risk and every time your furnace kicks in it could burn your house down, but so far at 54 years of age, my various cars have never killed me and none of my houses have burned down – but there's still time. What can I do to prevent these morbid eventualities from ending my earthly existence? You need to use regular maintenance and defensive driving.

Every day, when you wake up you could have a spiritual crash and burn your spiritual house down, unless you use regular spiritual maintenance and exercise defensive spiritual driving. Success or failure in life is not dependant on the absence of danger, but on learning to take only calculated risks (see Heb. 13:5 and I Cor. 10:13 and Heb. 12:13 and Pr. 22:3). Take up your cross daily and win the inner battles first, then if the outer ones end your life or cause you to acquire great fame, wealth, you win, today, tomorrow and forever –which leads me to the fourth principle and my conclusion.

**Principle Number Four:** "Follow Me". I have the world's best, real live invisible friend, who not only walks with me and talks with me, but who also indwells me – you got it, our blessed Messiah. But, hey, He also comes with a whole heavenly host of angels, the ability to answer prayers, perform miracles and my favourite, and the inexhaustible potential to forgive sin and repeatedly cleanse my filthy soul. He warns me, He comforts me, He picks me up and no amount of trouble, noise or any other creature on earth, or in the heavens above will ever be able to separate me from His love or rob me out of the palm of His hand (or from under the shelter of His wings).

So mishpocah, in the midst of constant, daily inner turmoil on the roller coaster of life, learn to be both an unmoveable dweller and a constant sprinter. Learn to dwell in the shelter, the safe place of the L-rd by the good decisions you make, daily and, L-rd help me, to run for your life back into His arms when you blow it or when your spiritual life alarms sound. I am not afraid of the red alerts which sound sometimes all day long and I am not afraid of that which what is left of my life will bring me. I am only terrified that I may let both my evil desires and my stupid decisions pull me away from the only real reason that life is worth living – a personal relationship with the resurrected Carpenter.

How is you extreme stability doing? Are you trying to get rid of the extremes – it'll never happen. Are you trying to build a permanent spiritual stability which functions on cruise control – it'll never happen.

Let me close with my verse: Luke 9:23: "***Then He said to all, if anyone desires to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up His cross daily and follow Me***".

Shabbat shalom, ye wild donkeys and mischievous monkeys – let Him show you daily and constantly how get a life and keep it. Amen.