

Jewish Hero: Isaiah: he could see the big picture

Shoftim: Judges What Have You Got in Your Life?
Torah: Deut. 16:18-21:9
(1)17:3 no horoscope (spiritual shortcuts)
(2) 17:19 read your Bible, pray every day
(3) 18:13 serve G-d, don't play games
(4)20:4 He walks with us
Haftarah: Is. 51:12-52:12
(5)51:16 His plan is unfolding as it should – are you?
(6) 52:12 Settle down and take it easy
Brit Chadashah: Acts 3:22, 23 (L) John 1:19-27 (F)
(7) 1:26 Messiah walked in our midst, He still wants to

What Have You Got In Your Mouth?

In the Torah Portion judges were to be established to make sure that the people understood G-d's Law and applied it to every aspect of their daily lives. We are coming to the end of the annual cycles of harvest festivals, where the people were to gather together one last time and consider both the goodness of G-d, and the spiritual harvest which the year had produced.

As we come into the High Holy Days, we need to prepare ourselves to consider the Spiritual Harvest we will be offering back to G-d this year. Our Messiah has fulfilled all the sacrificial requirements for our forgiveness, and our cleansing, and we are no longer called to perform the levitical sacrifices, with the burnt offerings, meat offerings, grain offerings, wine offerings, spice offerings and all the rest.

They are still part of our ritual heritage, as symbols both of G-d's goodness, and of our need to respond with obedience and holiness. Unless we have His truth on the inside, unless we are feeding on His truth and expressing it in our lives, all the rituals and ceremonies in the world will not draw us close to Him. We need to develop our own rituals of obedience in our daily lives, as people, as families and as a community of believers. We are coming up to a major event in this process on Sept. 13th and I am looking forward to this milestone in the life of our congregation.

But as I was preparing for today, I had two sets of images, weaving in my heart. On the one hand, the sacrifices, which need to be echoed in our lives, and the words of our mouths, where what is in the inside comes out. I want to combine these two themes into one: the sacrifice of our mouths (Heb. 13:15).

How do you prepare an acceptable sacrifice with our mouths? In Deut. 18:18, G-d says He will put His words in the mouth of His Messiah. In Is. 51:16, He will put His words into the mouths of His servants. How do we get G-d to put His words in our mouths?

There are really three stages:

(1) To take in (read, hear) What are you putting into the inside? What are you feeding on? Building up? Rom. 12:1, 2 talks about renewal which is not automatic, but which is based on choices. What choices are you making, so that the fruit of your lips can reflect a healthy spiritual diet?

In our society we are surrounded by noise, but we are only truly affected by what we listen to. The Shema we chant calls us to hear. Hearing takes listening. As we come to the High Holy Days, let's agree to listen until we hear, not the noise, the static or the interference, but the Word – daily, weekly and yearly. Are you running on empty?

(2) To understand and to retain (think, to agree). As I ride around in the truck, I have a lot of time to think and to consider life from an angle I have not seen it from for quite a while. I go into schools, offices, community centres, and even into churches. I am very sensitive to moods and atmospheres, and I understand that we are to be influences, and not be influenced, when we walk in this world.

It ain't easy to be holy in a warehouse, or when you drop a tailgate on your shin during a delivery. But, as believers, we need to let His word, swirl in our hearts and we walk through our week, so that what comes out reflects what's on the inside, and not what's going on around us – unless we let that drown out His word.

It's not wrong to be angry. It's not wrong to cry and feel sad. It's not wrong to shoot the breeze. As long as we let the Word we have taken in show us how to express itself through the activities and reactions of our lives as we walk through the week. Even when we make mistakes and are bad – sometimes on purpose, if the truth be told. There is a reaction from His word for every condition of the human experience, to allow what comes out of our mouths to reflect His truth in action, bringing us to obedience and to praise.

Which brings me to my third point.

(3) To speak (what you say and how you live). We need to get His word into our hearts and lives and let it flow out of our mouths. Sometimes this will not be easy, nor frequent. Sometimes we will rage, and sometimes we will sin. Sometimes we will not know what to say, nor how to react. But if we are reading and listening to His word, and letting it swirl through our lives, like a fountain, it will spring up and refresh our lives, and cleanse our lives – even heal our lives.

I am not talking about magic behaviour where we speak good things to make bad things go away. I am speaking about letting His truth become the understanding we bring our lives to, and the basis upon which we design our responses to life. What do you talk about during the week? How do you talk during the week? When you have to deal with things in the week, does His Word come out of your mouth? Not spouting verses at your

coworkers, but speaking the truth in love, so that you win a hearing for those verses which people need to hear.

Sharing our faith is not a complicated venture. Winning a hearing can be very complicated, unless we take His word into our hearts, and let it swirl around, and come back out in the responses we make to the events of our lives.

As we come to the High Holy Days, let's agree to get His Word inside, and let's agree to let it come out of our mouths, but not the way it came in. It has to do its work – 2 Tim. 3:16, 17. What is its work? To become our word, to become the inner drive or truth and love, from which we respond, first on the inside, then in what comes out.

What have you got in your mouth?

Let's pray.