

Brit Chadashah:

Luke 6:12-16

(7) **6:12. *He spent the night in prayer.*** Our L-rd knew what He was doing when he chose the twelve and even knew then who would betray Him. He uses our choices to determine how He will relate to us. All of them fled in great fear, but even the traitor could have been forgiven. He too gets us back for our own good. The traitor Judah became the leader of his people. The divided nation came back reunited. No matter who we are or what we have done, He is willing to accept us back when we admit our folly and ask for mercy – Judah did, how about you?

Psalm 48 (John pp. 101, 103) **Jewish Hero: Nelson (Madiba) Mandela**

Sometimes in our power hungry society, people interpret gentleness as a form of weakness, when really it is one of the greatest signs of harnessed strength. Usually strength is understood to be a display of power or of dominance, where the best man wins his way to the top of the heap and pushes all his competitors down. After which he gives his howl of victory and waits to defend his status and show everyone that he is the biggest and best and toughest, while he struts and flexes and basks in all the attention and the admiration.

This kind of strength is carnal and works better in ultimate fighting or in WWF wrestling, but it has no place in the flock of the L-rd or among G-d's people. Gentleness is a commitment to use your strengths for the good of the flock and not as a means to get attention or gain control of the community.

It is kind of like the difference between a sheep dog and a wolf. In a fight, the wolf would probably win if it was about who was the strongest or to establish dominance, but in defence of the sheep, the sheep dog is always the more formidable adversary.

In northern Quebec, we lived for awhile on an acreage in the bush and my neighbour raised sheep and geese. There were wolves who came through my woods to prey on the sheep. They knew better than to tackle the geese who knew the meaning of ganging up, but the wolves had very little chance with the sheep because he had a bouvier – a furry belgian sheep dog known for its size, speed and gentleness. Kids could wrestle with it and it never hurt the sheep, but it would patrol the edge of the pasture and instantly attack anything that came for the sheep.

It was never interested in a friendly brawl with the wolf to show who was tougher, it was bred to go for the feet and disable the wolf and then kill it if it did not run away.

There is also a reason why people in Spain use bulls and not cows in their barbaric fights with these powerful animals. A bull is much stronger than a cow and much faster and in Spain they are bred for aggressiveness and strength, but they are almost always defeated by puny men with swords and a red cape.

Why? They have one fatal flaw when they charge – they close their eyes, once they have sighted their target and charge in blindly. The matador blithely steps aside and plunges his sword in the bull's macho heart.

It is not so with cows. When they charge, they keep their eyes open and if they were in the arena and made to charge, as the brave matador stepped aside, they would make a small correction and skewer the annoying little man before he could use his pitiful little sword.

Mothers of most species of animals are smaller and usually less aggressive than the males, but they are always more dangerous and more gentle.

Gentleness uses its strength for good, peaceful purposes and has nothing to prove until there is a threat which it must respond to and then all the power and strength is released in a focused, no nonsense display of strength that means business.

When I began my doctorate, which I may finish one day, they asked us to come with an animal which best described how we saw ourselves in ministry and I described myself as a messianic beaver. This was not because of my build or because of my big teeth, but because of the peaceful nature of this powerful animal.

You see, a beaver is a little clumsy on land and is rarely aggressive when confronted and only comes on land to cut down trees and gather twigs for its dam and its lodge. It would rather be gliding through the water, repairing the dam and preparing its food stocks for our lovely Canadian winters.

Most dogs know not to follow this animal into the water, because in defence of its lodge, the gentleness for which it is known is suddenly set aside and it will maim and drown a dog or a lynx or even a wolf that is foolish enough to provoke it into a fight.

I am not a combative person and would rather be swimming through my books or engaging people in conversations on line, but if people want to tangle, they usually only come for one helping and then retreat to recover from the encounter.

Our Lord is the best example of meekness, followed by Moses, the apostle Paul and even David.

Children were attracted to the Messiah because they felt safe and welcome and the common people heard Him gladly because He used simple profound illustrations they could understand instead of the complicated language of the scribes who wanted to show people how smart and educated they were.

But when He was confronted by the contentious religious authorities who wanted Him to take sides in several silly contemporary controversies, the strength and power of His argumentation shot them down so well they usually did not come back for a second encounter and yet, several of them stayed to learn more. (Matt. 11:28-30).

Moses was a strong character and was given a great task to perform. More than once he intervened to save the people from the wrath of God which they richly deserved and more than once he patiently handled the all too frequent challenges to his leadership. But he did not do this out of fear or timidity, but out of a gentleness which used his great personal and spiritual strength for good and not for show.

He could have stepped aside and let the L-rd raise up a better nation from him and his family, but he stood in the gap and he also faced down his opponents without any bullying or defending his ego. His gentleness harnessed his strength for the forty years he endured the people as they did laps around the mountain and never really stopped complaining.

He was never a push over and he was never intimidated by the people, but he never threw his weight around or pushed his own interests at the expense of those of the people.

Paul also once described his affection for the Thessalonian church as that of a nurse maid for the child in her care. He did have a temper and he did engage in fiery disputes with people who pushed him into it, but his main thrust was to gently and firmly guide his disciples into walking with the L-rd according to the Word and teaching them the futility of trying to win arguments with those who love to wrangle about contentious issues (2 Tim. 2:24-26 and Deut. 29:29).

He had an incredible mind and his eloquence was not hindered either by his near blindness or his lack of a pleasing voice. He had nothing to prove and if people did not want to hear him, he moved on to those who were open to the message of G-d's love in our blessed Messiah. His gentleness sought first to reason with people and to show kindness and mercy and only used his heavy artillery when the flock was threatened or when he wanted to drive away contentious detractors or get through to stubborn believers (like Peter in Antioch).

Gentleness equals harnessed strength and makes sure that strength is never volatile or dangerous or unstable.

It is never needlessly explosive or showy and it is never destructive but always redemptive – if this were not so, this evil planet would not be allowed to continue to mess up and pollute itself with sin and error in a universe governed by the omnipotent L-rd of Glory whose gentleness and patience is holding off until the last one who wants to find salvation and truth is found and delivered from the folly of this sorry world of deception and wrath.

There is one more person I would like to talk to you about this morning whose gentleness harnessed an incredible strength – King David. He cut his teeth as a warrior defending his sheep from bears and lions and could easily have slaughtered Saul in open combat anytime he wanted to. He knew that his great power was there to deliver the people from their enemies and not to use to prove to the people that he was the best and mightiest warrior.

He saw himself as a sheep in the flock of the gentle L-rd, being guided and protected and cherished through all the valleys the violence of his life repeatedly plunged him into. His 23 Psalm is a beautifully peaceful description of the care and protection of the mightiest Shepherd in the midst of a life full of danger and snares.

These people I have spoken about today are examples of gentleness, or meekness but they are never examples of weakness. Gentleness is never a flaw, but it is the best and most useful harness for great power and strength that tames it and helps it to focus on using its power for good like a sheep dog and not for show like a wolf.

It has nothing to prove and it not easily provoked, and is never interested in rumbles and displays of testosterone to please the howling crowds, because it remains focused on caring for the sheep.

It wants to teach us to be a peaceful, powerful beaver, never ready to fight, but always prepared to defend our lodge and our flock when they need arises; but which is never prepared to make conflict a lifestyle or an objective. Gentleness handles conflict to restore peace and to protect the flock and does not create armies of conquest.

Our L-rd is the almighty G-d of the universe, but He came among us full of gentleness and that is what drew people to Him. He only used His temper to get Peter's attention and to drive off the religious bullies who only wanted to show people who was the smartest. He had nothing to prove, but a lot to accomplish.

Moses used the strength of his character to lead the people but never to crush them or dominate over them and Paul never wanted to show off his great wisdom and learning – he only wanted to get the job done as he cared gently for the young believers and scared off the wolves who only wanted to ravage and destroy.

David could have conquered the Middle East and set up a world empire because he was a greater warrior than the Assyrians, or the Babylonians. He could have defeated the army of Alexander with his eyes closed and taught the Romans how to fight. But his gentleness harnessed his great strength for a greater purpose – to shepherd the people of G-d and spend his free time composing songs of praise that are still being sung today.

How about you? Is your strength harnessed by gentleness or are you always itching for a fight? Gentleness makes you keep your eyes open when you charge and prevents you from being slaughtered in the arena of life before the mocking crowds who just want to see you eventually tricked and defeated by the flesh, the world and the enemy.

May the L-rd teach us gentleness as we allow Him to exercise His shepherding skills to guide us safely to our eternal home in glory.

Let's pray.