

On Feb. 3, which was Tu B'Shevat, (the 15th of Shevat) our friend Devorah Matkovic spoke to us about the JNF's work in restoring the forests which were damaged by the Hamas rockets and we reaffirmed our commitment to support the JNF as part of our practical involvement in our local Jewish community.

I had scheduled to speak to you about the completed sojourner and at some future date, I may expand on that aspect of our identity as the Bride, but let me just give you my key passage: Phil. 1:6. G-d knew our potential when He called us. This foreknowledge includes a practical understanding of our foibles and our failures. The commitment He makes to us is that He will complete the work which He began in us on at least two levels: in eternity we shall see Him as He is and resurrect into His perfect likeness (I John 3:2). Based on this blessed assurance, He will build as much of His kingdom's fruit (jewels) into our lives as we will let Him.

In other words we need to learn to live backwards from our eventual eternal completion by walking front wards and learning to change our spiritual wardrobe (Eph. 4:17-24). Are you letting your eventual completeness empower you to keep your spiritual wardrobe clean and shining?

This week, I want to combine my message with the Torah Portion, because this is a very special Shabbat. In the period of time from the destruction of the second temple until the sixth or seventh century (depending on whose grand mother you talk to), modern rabbinic Judaism was still in its formative stages. One of the major perceptions (concepts) the rabbis and scholars battled with was the status of the Ten Commandments. In early Judaism they were recited daily and were considered more elevated than the rest of the commandments.

However, many rabbis considered all of the commandments as equal to each other and Rambam (Maimonides) came up with what is now considered the definitive list of all the commandments in the Torah. He said there were 613 commandments (which number is an acrostic in Hebrew and spells, Moses our teacher – **Moishe rabbinu**) and even went as far as to say that the two giving's of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20 and Deut. 5) should be considered as two separate lists. So, in modern rabbinic Judaism, it is forbidden to recite the Ten Commandments daily or weekly, except as part of an overall presentation of the 613 equal commandments of the Torah.

Now, I don't have to tell you that I disagree with this departure from a Biblical understanding of the Torah, because the Ten form the basis of two aspects of our biblical faith: how we relate to G-d (1-4) and how we relate to each other (5-10). I see the presentation of the Ten Commandments, both in Exodus and Deuteronomy, as a guide to both their meaning and to how we are to integrate them into our individual and corporate lives. They are presented in three basic sections: (I) the Ten Principles (II) The moral and ethical community applications of the same (biblical jurisprudence from which we need to draw to establish and maintain our own personal and community spiritual ethics and morality) (III) The ritual symbolic practices of Tabernacle worship, which forms the pattern for our own particular cultural/generational liturgy/worship.

Here are my four verses from the Torah: **Gen. 19:5-8**

(1) 19:5 - "if" plus "if" equals "then"

(2) 19:6 - the double calling of every believer, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile (I P. 2:9, 10)

(3) 19:7 - all the words – verses 4-6 (deliverance, dedication and destiny)

(4) 19:8 – we will do all – we are ready to hear the conditions, the jurisprudence and the liturgy. Until and unless you are ready to make an unconditional commitment, you are not ready to walk with G-d and will do laps around the mountain, or go into captivity in whatever personal Babylon conquers you, or worse yet spend your life wandering in scattered pieces because you did not recognize His stubborn daily and constant desire to build and rebuild His Kingdom in your life. Is your life going around in circles? Have you been taken captive by some area of your life? Are you trying to get the pieces of your life back together wandering through the sand instead of standing on the rock?

Here are my verses from the Haftarah: **Isaiah 6:1 and 6:5**

(5) 6:1 the edge of His robe filled the temple – how much of your temple does He fill?

(6) 6:5 how effective are you at establishing your personal diagnosis, your reality spirituality? Uncleaness, both personal and cultural will not go away, even though you enter His majestic, glorious presence –it's waiting for you at the door, in the car, at home and at work. Daily and constantly we need to be cleansed and learn the difference between acceptably dirty and unacceptably filthy – between stepping in it and rolling in it. Two questions before the New Testament verse: Do you have good spiritual hygiene? Are you letting Him show you how deal with sheep dirt and how to avoid dog/wolf, pig filth?

Here is my New Testament verse: **Matt. 5:18.**

(7) 5:18 we serve an eternally focused G-d, who's Saviour will continue to rule and reign until all His enemies are subdued beneath His footstool and ALL is fulfilled, to the last jot and tittle of His will. Are you one of the enemies which His gracious and terrifying love needs to subdue? Are their portions of your life where His purposes are subdued, whether they be "biggies" or carnal jots or ridiculous tittles – unless ALL of His purposes are fulfilled in ALL the kingdoms of your heart, you will eternally suffer the loss of all and any part of your life that defies His daily and constant jurisdiction.

And now to my conclusion, and to the first instalment of my section on the repair shop function of our fourfold congregational vision: (1) The Repair Shop: Establishing a Diagnosis. I have already given you a three fold preamble. (A) In the L-rd an unconditional "if" must come before the majesty of His "then" (or His Ten). (B) Entering His glory is not the same as maintaining good spiritual hygiene. And (C) His purposes will be completed, with or without our positive participation.

Now let's deal with the four diagnostic R's of the Repair shop section of our vision.

Every thing in your life and in our lives is either

- (1) Redeemable – (Joel 2:25-27; Ps. 119:71) or
- (2) Reparable – (Heb. 12:13), or
- (3) Resistible – (I Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 12:9, 10), or
- (4) Recyclable - Is. 28:9-13.

How is your life doing?

Are there things (issues, wounds, baggage) which need to be redeemed?

Are you letting Him heal the collateral damage you have encountered before you came to faith, along with the stuff you have encountered during the time you have walked in faith, and are you prepared to admit that there is still lots of time and plenty of opportunities for you to be wounded, hurt and broken as you walk with Him in the future?

Are you learning to deal with your dark side – maintaining a firm hold on your yetzer hara (drive to do evil), so that it may serve your yetzer hatov (drive to do good), or are you living a bi-polar spiritual rollercoaster, full of **aggravated spiritual frustration** and of **quiet spiritual desperation**, instead of maximizing your **spiritual self-actualization**?

And finally are you just going in circles, around and round your **personal mulberry bush** being chased by **personal monkeys** and **personal weasels** – just putting in time and coming back to the same place again and again, no matter where you go and no matter what you do, a spiritual baby (brat) who is **forever starting over instead of learning to walk with Him** and deepen His kingdom's daily and constant grip on your life, to the Jew first and also to the Rabbi?

Let's pray.