

J. M. Terrett

Community: Our Corporate Spiritual Identity
Broken Fellowship: (Prov. 18:19; I Cor. 5:9-13[6:9-11]; 2 Thess. 3:6. 14, 15)

| | | |
|----------------|---|--------------------------|
| Yitro | Jethro (Abundance) | The Whole Shooting Match |
| Torah | Ex. 18:1-20:26 (18:12; 18:26; 19:8; 20:1) | |
| Haftarah | Is. 6:1-7:6; 9:6, 7 (9:6; 9:7) | |
| Brit Chadashah | Matt. 5:8-20 (17-20) | |
| Psalm 19 | Jewish Hero: Violet Eileen Pasula | |

As we examine various aspects of our corporate spiritual identity, we are going to be looking at some of the **more positive aspects** of our relationships with each other as a community and we are going to be looking at some of the **less positive aspects** of how people decide to relate together. I wish it were true that all believers grew in their faith to the point where fellowship was always sweet and where problems were always solved and where the bond that ties us together as believers was always the strongest feature of our faith.

Today we are going to look briefly at **broken fellowship** and at how we should relate to the relationships that break down and do not seem to want to get fixed. I want to examine these with you because far too often the battles between members of the same community can even be **more violent** and **painful** than the battles we unfortunately encounter with people who are outside or community. **Sometimes we fight more ferociously among ourselves than we do with those who might truly be said to be our enemies.**

Let's look first at Prov. 18:19:

“An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city
 And their quarrels are like the barred gates of a citadel.”

(Story about Jewish man marooned on an island who built two synagogues . . . the other he wouldn't be caught dead stepping foot in)

It seems that the **closer** we get to someone, the **easier** it is to offend them, hurt them and misunderstand them and even the **smallest** things can swiftly escalate into the **biggest** feuds and the longest fights – and without exaggerating I would have to admit that **families often hold the world's record for the worst fights on the planet** (why did Adam and Eve live so long in the garden – no in-laws).

Why is this the case, and what can we do about it? True intimacy is not just a case of **proximity**, one of the reasons most of us get along better with our neighbours than with certain members of our families is because **we do not know them very well and are not really involved in their lives.**

The biggest offender is the old saying: “**If you really knew them like I did ,you would see their true colours**”, It comes from the time when sailing ships would hoist false colours in order to get close enough to their enemies to catch them by surprise and blow them out of the water)

There is an element of truth in that saying, but it is only half the truth. We all have an **upside** and a **downside** and broken fellowship somehow gets stuck on the downside and is unable to see the upside. Now there are **valid reasons** for breaking off fellowship, but not returning borrowed books and forgetting birthdays and even stupid remarks do not fall into this category. Let's look at our second passage.

I Cor. 5:9-13: I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with **sexually immoral** people – not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the **greedy**, or the **robbers** or the **idolaters**, since you would then need to go out of the world. Now that which I wrote to you is not to associate with anyone who calls themselves a brother and who is sexually immoral, greedy, an idolater, a **reviler**, a **drunkard**, or a **robber**. You are not even with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge. Drive out the wicked person from among you.”

We have to be careful we are not driving someone out of our lives or out of our fellowship just because we **have not learned to get along** with them or because we have not been able to **resolve our differences** which do not fall into the category where we have to break fellowship off because of.

We have to learn **good conflict resolution strategies**. We have to learn to forgive and to be forgiven – we all make mistakes and we all have bad days where we say and do things which we regret later, but it is **only when these little unresolved conflicts flare up and get blown out of proportion that they seem to be much bigger and much more important than they are**.

We need to ask ourselves if we are breaking off fellowship for the right reasons or just because we have conflicts we have been unable or unwilling to resolve. Sometimes when a fight flares up and turns into a world war, but when we pause to catch our breath, **we have trouble remembering what started it all** – however, we have no trouble remembering how that jerk has always annoyed us and we are able to clearly remember **all** of their previous offenses and **we are really getting mad for all the things which they have ever done to us in the past and not because of the thing which they have recently done**.

We tell ourselves we have forgiven them, but when they hurt us or bother us again, we open the **Pandora's box of all the past offenses** and pour them on the fire and more often than not, the offender does the same and all of a sudden you have **two mighty long lists of previous offenses** which turn a small problem into a huge conflict and one for which we feel justified in breaking off all fellowship. We both have all the evidence and we stand in judgment, not about the little offense, but about all those other ones which we have been saving up for just a time as this.

We become the **evil version of Esther** who comes up with all the reasons why all the people we are mad at should be strung up on Haman's scaffold and if there is not enough room, we are perfectly willing to pitch in and build some more.

Instead of trying to work things out and deal with the issues behind the conflict and learning how to forgive, how to communicate better and how to not so easily set off, **we want to throw the baby out with the bath water** and **push the offender off the nearest cliff** and every contact we have with them turns into a contest to see who can prove how bad the other is and our wrestling becomes so intense, **we often wrestle each other off the cliff**.

We get up all bruised and broken, we are **even madder** at each other and use the wrestling match as further proof that they are evil and are really out to hurt us and **we are even more convinced that everything we said and did was in our own defence.**

We lock up our lives like a **fortified city** and our quarrels become like the **bars on a citadel** and we treat them like our **archenemies**. We are ready to tell anyone who will listen why we will have nothing more to do with them and why no one else in our lives should either. We make people take sides and a **conflict** between friends or between family members becomes a **battle** which draws the whole shul in. Everybody is forced to take sides and we bite and devour ourselves into oblivion AND get even madder, **using the bigger fight as further proof of how evil they are** – and so it goes on until that is all we think about and it crowds everything else out of lives. We get stuck in a **permanent mad and fight mode** and just want allies in the fight and turn people into enemies who do not take our side or listen to our list of woes.

Too sad, too common and these fights can become **generational feuds**, like those vendettas we hear about in Sicily where a careless word turns into a murder, which is avenged by another murder, until you end up **killing someone's uncle, because their nephew's grandson killed your cousin's best friend's wife's brother-in-law, because he insulted the honour of your neighbour's uncle's mother's niece and such an insult cannot go unpunished.**

Fifty people end up dying because of a careless word that should have been dealt with without coming to blows over something **which really did not matter until it got blown out of all proportion.** I think I have just described most family feuds and most conflicts in religious congregations that have turned into world wars over things which do not matter.

Yes, people can be **liars** and people can **cheat** and people can **say horrible things** and become **really cruel** and **hurtful**, **but so can we.** What the Gospel and the Torah call us to do is to do our best to **resolve**, to **forgive** and not to allow a **small leak** to cause the **whole dam** to burst or to allow a **small spark** to burn down the **whole forest.** **If the enemy can cause us to self destruct, then he does not have to worry about facing us in an open conflict which he will certainly lose.**

Well how do you handle it when you have done your best not to turn a little fight into a major conflict and the person concerned is not willing to work it out? We are not allowed to **assassinate** our enemies or our family members and we are also forbidden to **assassinate their characters** and describe them like those horrible people we are to exclude from our fellowship, **when all they have done is to hurt our feelings by doing or saying something stupid.**

If we are looking for a fight, we will find one, but we need to give 70 times 7 times a try first. We need to exhaust Matt. 18:15-18.

If none of this works, then what do we do? Let's look at our final passage- 2 Thess. 3:6, 13-15:

“We recommend to you brethren in the name of the L-rd Yeshua HaMashiach to stay away from every brother who lives in **disorder** and not according to the instructions which you have received from us. For you brothers, do not grow tired of doing good. And if someone does not obey that which we say by this letter, take note of them and have nothing further to do with them. But do not regard them as an enemy, but **warn them like a brother.**”

We need to **minimize the damage** and **set things in place for the eventual reconciliation**. When this is not possible right away, we close the door and have nothing further to do with them, not because they are so evil and so horrible that we have to paint them in the worst light possible, but **because they are not ready to make peace, even if we are**.

We are never to be drawn into **the hell of their rage, their anger** and **we are to refuse to continue the vendetta**. We close the gate to our city and to our citadel, but we do not lock it and we do not aim the big guns on them, ready to blow them out of the water, along with anyone who takes their side. We do three things.

First we put things into their proper perspective – even if it means counting to ten (or ten thousand, seven times seventy times a day), taking a walk, or doing whatever we have to do to **prevent the war from starting**.

Second we have to seek help and make sure we set the **scriptural reconciliation processes** in place, as we avoid the **character assassination** which would draw others into our fight (the yes, but you don't know how bad they are – when they do not commit an association breaking offense).

Third, we wait and **go about our business** of cultivating love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control **as we understand how silly and evil we can be ourselves** and **we pray for them and for ourselves** and continue to do our best **not to break the bond of fellowship for anything less than an association breaking offence** AND even there, we keep the door open for them to return, whether it is a **biggie** or just a **small thing** which is **trying to turn into be a biggie**.

Is the door of your life locked against any brethren?

Are your guns trained on any family members?

Is there anyone you are ready to tear to shreds?

Even with the sexually immoral idolaters and the reviling thieves, the **worst** we are to do is to break off association **until** they come to their senses – **we are to avoid losing ours**.

Vendettas and feuds are forbidden, because unless we forgive as we are forgiven, we cease to be forgiven. Ouch.

May your use of steps one to three help you and us to prevent our relationships from tearing us to shreds, even if we have to take time outs and wait for a long time for problems to be settled.

We have to keep things in **perspective** (and not let the devil stir up useless, destructive wars among us)

We have to engage reconciliation procedures according to the Scriptures (defensive, and offensive, based on a commitment to reconciliation).

We have to wait and not to be pulled into endless fights, even if it means taking time outs that sometimes may last years.

Sigh.

Let's pray.