

(19) Terumah Offering

Torah: Ex. 25:1-27:19

Haftarah: I Kings 5:12-6:13

Brit Chadashah: Matt. 5:33-37 (L) 2 Cor. 9:1-15 (F)

Torah Meditation:

The Gift of Cheerful Giving: Ex. 25:2-8; I Kings 6:12, 13; 2 Cor. 9:6, 7

It is the community which built both the tabernacle and the temple, according to a very precise pattern of symbolic proportions. No one was forced to give and the workers Solomon used were strangers who dwelt in the land, and who took turns working under the direction of the Hebrew and Phoenician artisans – they were not treated harshly or as slaves, like the Jews were when they did similar labour when they dwelt as strangers in Egypt – Solomon gave these workers one month on, eleven months off – not a bad benefit package. All the material was donated, either by the leaders, or by the people and it came BOTH from the spoils which they took from their enemies, and from the riches of the land, where G-d prospered their work and their financial ability.

AT BNC we all need to regularly and consistently bring our financial offerings for the construction and maintenance of our vibrant community of praise, but there are (of course) **three principles** we need to follow: (1) willingly, (2) out of our increase, (3) never the same *portion*, always the same *proportion* – a widow's mite means as much to the L-rd as all the gold that went into Solomon's temple. Cheerful giving is a gift, the gift of a generous heart for the work of ministry in our community. As we are faithful with our mites, given from a willing, cheerful heart (which is the hardest part of giving), we will always have more than enough resources to do all that we are called to, with enough left over to share with those who we might call on one day to share with us.

May the L-rd bless you as you willingly and joyfully give the same proportion, according to the changing portions of your financial solvency – every mite helps, but the blessing will always be so much greater on the giver than it ever is on the one to whom we give. As we approach our annual meeting and review our performance over the last year, I would like to express my gratitude for your faithfulness, to many of you, and to let those who have not yet learned the blessedness of these three principles of giving that I am praying for the L-rd to bless you with **both** sufficient increase to meet your needs and also with the openness of heart to learn this most basic of spiritual disciplines: Cheerful giving in proportion, whether it is a mite or a million. This is all the thundering you'll here from this pulpit about the financial needs of our congregation.

Ze ha Kol. Chemendu chweymuk

Sermon:

There are three things I want to emphasize as we examine the first of the three hurdles our spirituality has to overcome, if we want the seed of His Word in our hearts to have its way and cause the light and fragrance of His Kingdom's presence to flourish in our hearts and lives. (1) The fears and cares of life (2) the pleasures and (3) the riches of this life.

First of all, in order for us to qualify for this qualifying race, which the L-rd wishes to set before all believers, we first have to pass the first two tests: doubt and temptation. This is where too many people get disqualified (see I Cor. 9:23-27). In North America, in the ruins of what was once a spiritually vibrant Christian civilization (which had its problems), we need to understand that it is not the people of our two great nations who have rejected the Gospel for a bitter potage of evolutionary humanism and relativistic materialism – it is the Gospel which has rejected them. How? Too many have failed to pass the first two tests, and their total lack of any real or substantial spiritual rationale for so failing would even startle the Queen in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* and even amaze the foolish characters of Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Such idiotic cosmic stupidity with a straight face!

They have fallen by the wayside, trampled by heathenism and eaten by doubtful birds. When the Seed managed to take root, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life withered their eternal imperative and our society is entertaining itself to death, just like those unfortunate passengers on the Titanic who realized too late that their confidence in the "ship that not even G-d could sink" was falsely placed. Your life is either built on the Rock of His Eternal Word or as sure as there are icebergs, it will sink as tragically as any Titanic you have falsely placed your confidence in.

Sometimes, the seed has managed to dig down deep enough to foil the birds and their heathen henchmen, and some times it is even able to take root deep enough to weather the burning and the withering of temptations, but there is another level of testing, before candidates for the kingdom become acceptable disciples of our L-rd, and this week we are looking at number one: Paranoia, Pessimism and the Fox's Cave.

So, mishpocah, who have survived birds and the withering of temptations, you are ready to take the spiritual life you have accepted and allow it to grow towards the only objective it was given to you for: spiritual maturity. What does that look like? Are you spiritually illiterate, or can you describe, can you recognize that authentic kind of response to our like precious faith, which the L-rd will be judging us on, when we stand before His awesome presence when the foolishness of this fleeting life has finally sunk?

Salvation is by faith alone, based on His amazing Grace, with no buts, ands or any other conditions attached in the small print. This faith is, however, not just a feeling, not just an experience, and it is not just an inheritance, cultural or genetic, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. It is the recognition of the almighty G-d of eternity, who is both echad and Chodesh – the only true G-d – all other forms and versions of spirituality are false, wrong, mistaken, flawed and moribund (eternally bankrupt) and because He is holy, He is calling us to this same spiritual reality of holiness – which is both a separation from and a separation unto.

The maturing of this faith into holiness is what these three hurdles are which are dealing with. Spiritual maturity means we make all of our lives, all of our drives, and all of our resources turn around the realities of His Eternal Kingdom, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile – the grass withers and dies, His Word shall stand forever. So what does this spiritual maturity look like? I have already said it is based on successfully overcoming the first two stages of spiritual resistance, and not failing to qualify for this race for holiness. We may live in the smoking ruins of North American and European spirituality, but we don't have to go down with their sinking ship.

But, so I believe and so am I am learning to wrestle my flesh into submission and into moral obedience to the requirements of His Word. I still have to work and earn a living, and do you know how much trouble has happened to me and which is probably hanging around outside, waiting to pounce on me, as I try and survive in the rat race of life! My house could burn down. My car could crash. I could get sick and become paralyzed. I could get sued, robbed, raped, cheated and taken advantage of and don't get me started about all the things which could happen to my children, my extended family and to each of you. After all, isn't an optimist just an uninformed pessimist? Life is tough, life is blood sweat and tears and you can never count on people to be fair, to be kind or even really to care about anyone else except number one and protecting their own butts.

Two things and I will close so we can put our fears to rest at the foot of our Saviour's cross. First of all, rigid perfectionism and blind idealism set up so many ways for us to fail, because there is no way life is not going to suck on steroids, even in the land which flows with milk and honey. Once the music is over and the curtain falls on another encounter with the wonderful promises of His Word, the big bad world is still waiting and we have to sweat and groan and even weep, if we want to keep the light of His presence burning in our lives and not just in our services.

Bills come in, cars need maintenance, and we may even get ripped off and robbed and treated unfairly by hypocrites who just want to sell us the same bridge over and over again, until they have spent all our money and used up all of our resources. Sometimes, with great spiritual immaturity we expect our faith to equip us to somehow float above the storms of life, singing with our eyes closed – confusing walking on water with walking with the L-rd. Life will resist our spiritual growth and from here to eternity, we will encounter an endless series of challenges and battles which will continually break our hearts and crush our spirits, unless we learn the spiritual principle I want to close with.

You got it, it's in the subtitle: Whatever can go wrong has G-d's permission first. His lordship over our lives is extended over the trials and trauma He allows into our lives with alarming and surprising frequency and painful intensity again and again, l'olam va'ed – then the sun shines, the birds sing and for a while, we're even singing in the rain. You just can't rely on life to do you right. You just have to trust the L-rd and know that His hand has permitted everything which happens to happen. Take comfort, my fertile imagination could come up with much worse and much better scenarios than the ones I am called to deal with.

So what's the bottom line? We demonstrate to Him our confidence in His lordship by the way we choose to respond – to integrate, to recover, to plan and to survive – hey I've just described the History of the Jewish people as they have wandered this world in search of a home. Spiritual maturity does not rely on perfect conditions to demonstrate obedience to the principles of His Word. Spiritual maturity brings every reaction, every heart response back to His word and digests it until His peace and His rest restore our eternal perspective and we get back on track until next time.

How's your next time coming? How's your current valley doing? Are the fears and worries of life choking His Word in your heart? Are you slipping back into the spiritual ruin of our eternally bankrupt society? Or are you letting go of your rigid perfectionism and your blind idealism and learning His wisdom in the troubles which are yours to respond to? I would like a bigger salary, and I do need a vacation, and my car is making more and more funny noises. There are drug busts down the street from my house, and more and more nut cases behind the wheels of the cars I have to manoeuvre through.

And, Missionsfest is coming, with a whole new crop of weirdoes and spiritually corrupt phonies with these unbiblical personal agendas, and the Jewish community still wishes we would disappear – do I dare get started on the guys from the "other" shul who may be plotting as we speak to pull us through another episode of your local Messianic Soap Opera. You never know. Let me close with three things about my three things. (1) G-d knows – do you know G-d knows? (2) Do you know G-d – much assembly required, just like in this week's Torah Portion – Bible Study, Prayer, Worship and moral choices up the ying yang. (3) Are you learning to trust Him for those uncertainties life will always bring, and are you committed to designing solutions, short, mid and long term, which will both reflect your commitment to His Word and ensure you an abundant harvest when you stand before Him on Judgment Day, when all the stuff and nonsense is finally over?

Paranoia does not pay the bills, G-d's faithfulness and hard work does. Pessimism wouldn't work anyway, G-d's Word will always work, today, yesterday and forever. The fox's cave is a hole believers run to, instead of standing on the Word and letting the sky hit them on the head, until they realize it's just an acorn – or until it's their turn to be fed into a gas chamber or thrown to your local lions. Fear should never be the reason we do anything or do not do anything – except if it is the only kind of fear which is actually good for you – fear of the L-rd, with a heaping helping of triple common sense thrown in (i. e. your head, your heart and the Word, with some good advice on the side see Prov. 15::22).

If you don't know what I'm talking about, come to Yeshiva, come to Havdalah, come to prayer meeting or read your Bible and pray. Next Week: If It Feels Good, It Had Better Be. Let's pray.