

**Shabbat Parasha:** Bo (Enter), Beshalach (when he let go), Yitro (Jethro), Mishpatim (Judgments)

**Exodus 10:1-13:16; 13:17-17:16; 18:1-20:33; 21:1-24:18**

There are four stages in this final transition from slavery to discipleship:

- (1) Deliverance: all bridges had to be burned with Egypt – all allegiances, affinity (functional closure).
- (2) Childhood: personally and corporately develop/experience trust in Divine provision.
- (3) Adolescence: personally and corporately own Divine imperatives/accountability.
- (4) Assimilation: application of practical/ritual spirituality to daily living.

**(1) Deliverance.** Egypt had to hold no fascination for them. They had to see the bountiful, mighty land where they had lived for generations, brought to ruin and they had to cut all ties with it. Their treatment in Egypt had been severe, but they had prospered and become a mighty nation, with considerable wealth – so much so that they posed a threat to the current regime.

They had to acknowledge that it was not only G-d's hand which had brought them to this hostile refuge, but that it was also G-d's hand which could overcome the impossible circumstances of their oppression and bring them out, not as slaves, but as free as they were when they went in. The regime which had welcomed them under Joseph may have been overthrown, but the security which they had known in Egypt had accomplished its purpose- they were as numerous as the sands of the seas and as the stars of the heavens.

For us, it important for us to really see that the hand of the L-rd has been active from the moment of our conception, through all the series of unfortunate events through which we stumbled or were dragged through until we cried out unto the L-rd and He set in motion the circumstance of our deliverance. He is not some extra-terrestrial force which suddenly appears in our lives and whisks us away to a distant planet. He is the one who has been protecting us from annihilation and limiting the negative impact of whatever Egyptian oppression we have to live through until His "full meal deal" deliverance is ready to be set in motion.

It is not just the intensity of our crying out or the level of pain and anguish we suffer which leads to our salvation, it is also AND principally the hand of the L-rd who decides when ALL the circumstances are right for us to be delivered. True spirituality has no room for the quick fix, instant coffee, convenience store deliverance, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile – and all the people said: "oh great, that really sucks".

**(2) Childhood.** A lot of people who come to the L-rd are not convinced He is able to meet their needs, and so they moon light in Egypt. Now, I am not talking about holding down more than one job, making a sensible budget and investing in a pension plan. It is not what you are doing to make a living, it is why and how you are doing it. The people needed protection from the sun, they needed water and they needed food. They also needed to learn how to defend themselves, because those mean old Egyptians were not there to keep them safe from the scum of the universe.

In fact, Egypt's tactical ability had become a real wash out, and so all the other bullies in the neighbourhood could kick as much sand in Israel's face as they wanted (and we're talking about the Sinai, where sand grows). But first the Jews had to sit still for three days and get rid of all the parasites of Egypt – it gives a totally new meaning to getting your crap together. They were to leave all of the spiritual residue of Egypt behind and develop a new diet, and learn new sources of sustenance and satisfaction.

How convinced are you that He is able to provide for all of your needs, and for the needs of your children and your grandchildren? Are you afraid He used up all His grace and power dealing with you and your little Egypt? Are you hedging your bets, just in case He doesn't come through? Spiritual defeat is not part of the agenda G-d wants to implement in our lives. Trials and troubles, with lots of Amalekites may be lurking in the wilderness were are called to wander through, but until we realize that He is in control, even when we

are not, our confusion will keep us wandering around in circles, instead of forging ahead towards the mountain and spiritual maturity.

**(3) Adolescence.** When the House of Jacob arrived for a year of in house training, they really had no idea what they were in for. They had lots of ideas about the role of religion in the lives of ordinary people. They had seen how the Egyptians had used it and they were ready to serve the G-d who crushed the Egyptian deities. They knew they had to set up a system of sacrifices and worship and they figured that they could live with Shabbat observance. In fact they were sitting around the mountain "talking among themselves" and trying to get an appointment with Moshe, when the in-laws showed up and told them to get organized.

It was Jethro who established that leadership had to be based, not on the strength of personality, but on a fourfold portfolio: capable, G-d fearing, with integrity and free of greed. A truly biblical class system never oppresses, but guides the whole community into peaceful prosperity, where resolution and redemption rule the day, not corruption and muscle. Until this organizational imperative was set in place, the people were not ready to hear from G-d and move onto the next stage, which is spiritual maturity.

They understood in principle and gave their allegiance to G-d and agreed to abide by all the words of the laws He would teach them. They were to become more than a religious people, they were to become a holy people, where religion was not part of their life, but was indeed their life, from the cradle to the grave and in every circumstance of their lives. When Moshe went up the mountain and they heard the voice of G-d, they understood that their camp, their nation and their lives were to be extensions, expressions of the Presence which was to take up residence in their midst.

Their G-d was not going to live in a temple in a valley, or on top of a hill, accessible but not really the central focus of their lives. He was going to dwell right in their midst and their lives were going to be lived as a nation of priests, with no other agenda than serving Him according to the specifications of His Torah.

B'nai Chayim is an organized community which began as a group of slightly more than ten, and is growing towards our first fifty. Leadership in our community will always be based on the principles which Jethro articulated and which are echoed throughout Scripture. We will play no favourites and we will never divide into the "in crowd" and "the outsiders". There will be no bullying, and the Baptists would get really upset if we kicked around a lot of sand. Few communities in our generation move beyond this point and unfortunately, most church and synagogue politics sends even the Russian mafia running for cover.

Unless we run our communities according to the bottom line of Scriptural principles, we are not ready to become His holy people, ready and equipped to do His will. Unless we live according to the Kingdom in this life, then we will lose all the little kingdoms of hay, wood and stubble we have wasted our time building, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Both corporate and personal spirituality have to function according to the principles of His Word, or we become carnal rabble, building golden calves and entertaining Moabite whores. And if that is not enough we sacrificing our next generation to the multimedia high-tech Moloch who leads the powers of spiritual darkness we are called to wrestle with, not get into bed with.

How we conduct our business and the kind of lifestyle we both live and promote say more about us than our huge buildings and the music and literature we generate – a sophisticated fake is still a fake, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Repentance is not measured by the tears we shed and the regrets we formulate, but by the changes we make in our lives and the grace we exercise in all of our dealings with everyone in our lives – and all the people said: "oh crap, you mean if it sucks, I better not do it?"

**(4) Assimilation.** The next portion takes the Ten Commandments and applies them in great detail in a broad spectrum of possible personal and community scenarios. You see, if the Presence is going to walk in our midst, we cannot allow any physical or spiritual defilement to

take root in our midst. Our obedience must be intentional and the habits we build must not be partial, accidental or convenient applications of some of the divine imperatives.

Walking with **Adonai Tse Va-ot** is an all or nothing proposition and He has endless wildernesses and countless captivities, for those of His people who don't get it right. Everything we do or don't do, needs to be an expression of our obedience to the commandments – that is what Matt. 5:17-20 means. Do we have to wear special clothing and avoid technology and spend all day praying and studying? Definitely not, that would be too easy. We are called to be salt and light in the world, not to withdraw from it into monasteries or ghettos.

You can be holy in Hollywood and on Wall Street and in the gym, whether the tent you are sojourning in is rented, or worth a couple of hundred "g's". Sometime look at this collection of commands and correlate them with the Ten, then look at the commandments you have set up in your life (and the commandments we have set up at B'nai Chayim) and see if they correlate.

You know me well enough to know that it is not really a matter of no smoking, no bars, no movies and blowing up Rock music videos. Let me close with a philosophical distinction which we all need to make, if we are to serve the L-rd in 2006 as we seek daily His Kingdom and pray earnestly for His return. We need to build our spiritual lives on both sound morality and consistent ethics.

This means that we need to know the moral principles which are to define our lives, according to both what is required and what is forbidden, and also according to what doesn't really matter. Living according to clear moral principles gives us true moral freedom, breaking these principles turns us into slaves living in spiritual captivity as we watch the devil's Turkish delight turn to dirty straw in every area of our disobedience.

Ethics means that we constantly design and revise the rules we fill our lives with, so that we uphold the highest moral standards and possess spotless integrity in all of our ethical decisions. This may sound like rigid legalism, where if we step to the right or to the left, divine wrath will rain down on our heads. Biblical morality and ethics are better than that, because we need to build in repentance and honesty and all understand that we are not to be flawlessly perfect, but entirely trustworthy.

We need to fix what we break, clean up our own messes and not bully each other into living according to our personal rules, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. There are forbidden activities and we need to build in consequences for those who insist on adopting immorality in any of its forms. But, we will never wish that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance and we will pressure our government both to reflect our understanding of morality and ethics, if we are in the majority and to respect this same understanding when we are in the minority.

So what have got in this month's Torah portions?

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Where are you on this continuum? Where are we on this continuum?