

11 Shevat (4/2/12) *Community: Our Corporate Spiritual Identity* J. M. Terrett
Hot Air Fellowship: (I John 3:17, 18; Matt. 21:29-32; Prov. 25:14)

Beshalach

When He Let Go

The Road to Freedom

Torah:

Ex. 13:17-17:16

(1) **14:12:** *"Is this not what we said to you when we were in Egypt – leave us to serve the Egyptians, for we would prefer to serve the Egyptians than do die in the wilderness?"* Sometimes we have to fight against our own fear of moving out of our own toxic comfort zone.

(2) **15:11:** *"Who is like You among the gods o L-RD? Who is like You, magnificent in holiness, worthy of praises, doing wonders?"* A lot of people believe a lot of things and provide various explanations for the meaning of existence and purpose of life, but only the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob actually intervenes to direct and control the affairs of His people and of all mankind.

(3) **15:26:** *"He said: If you listen attentively to the voice of the L-RD your G-d, if you do that which is right kin His eyes, if you give ear to His commandments and if you observe all His laws, I will not strike you with any of the diseases with which I struck Egypt; for I am the L-RD who heals you."* He sets us free to walk with Him so that we remove all sources of toxic infection from our lives. If we don't then the infections from which He has delivered us will return and drag us back to the bondage it is our inheritance to escape from.

(4) **16:1:** *"All the assembly of the children of Israel left Elim and arrived in the wilderness of Shin, which is between Elim and Sinai, the fifteenth day of the second month."* What did they live on for the month it took them to get this far? We are expected to use our resources to their fullest and then He provides His over and above.

Haftarah:

Judges 4:4-5:31

(5) **4:8:** *"Barak said, if you come with me, I will go, but if you do not come with me, I will not go."* He was not afraid; he just knew that the deliverance had to come from the L-rd, if it was going to happen. He knew that without G-d it was impossible, but also knew that it was impossible not to confront the enemy which was coming against him – there was no running away (cornered by His aggressive, persistent grace)

(6) **5:31:** *"Would you all enemies perish thus, o L-RD! Let those who love You be like the sun which appears in its strength. The country had rest for 40 years."* In the great spiritual conflicts of this life, generation, by generation, the L-rd has intervened and we will continue to be like the sun and after we see His intervention, on a case by case basis, we shall have rest in our lives, after every victory He brings our way.

Brit Chadashah:

Rev. 19:1-20:6

(7) **20:6** *"Blessed and holy are those who participate in the first resurrection! The second death will have no power over them, but they shall be priests of G-d and of the messiah and they shall rule with Him for 1,000 years."* When we cling to a biblical vision of the final things, we will never be overpowered by the events of our own life or our own generation and we will not falter like those who saw Pharaoh gaining on them and we will not have to have someone hold out hand, like Barak. We will be those who allow the final picture be the focus of our lives as we walk according to His word in obedience and in faith. Why? Because we understand that obedience and faith are the road to Victory in times of peace and in times of distress. We will exercise obedience to how He calls us to walk and we will cling to faith in His eventual, final victory and not be terrified or distracted by the Egyptians, the Amalekites or the Canaanites who come against us to destroy what cannot be destroyed.

As we examine our corporate spiritual identity and look at what kind of fellowship which the Scriptures call us to experience and to avoid, I want to speak to you this morning about a kind of fellowship which sounds so nice and ends up being so disappointing. I call it the hot air fellowship because there are those who make promises under pressure that they have no intention of fulfilling and will not make the effort to carry through and meet the needs of those who are in difficulty.

Now I am not talking about the promises we make that we are unable to fulfill, despite our best efforts, when things get in the way, because that happens to all of us and it is not the same thing. I am talking about the tendency I have noticed to offer help that we have no intention of giving and instead of being honest and saying we will do our best, but can make no promises, we proceed and somehow fall short and confuse good intentions with good deeds.

Let's look at three passages of Scripture as we broach this topic.

Prov. 25:14: "As wind and clouds with no rain, so is a man who boasts of a gift never given."

Matt. 21:28-32: "What do you resemble? A certain man had two sons and speaking to the first one he said: my child, go and work today in my vineyard. He answered, I do not want to, but later he repented and went. He spoke to the other in the same manner and this son said I will go, but he did not go. Which one did the will of the Father? They answered the first one. And Yeshua said to them: I tell you truly that publicans and prostitutes shall precede you into the Kingdom of G-d. For John came to you and you have not believed in him, but the publicans and the prostitutes have believed in him; and even after you who have seen this, you have not repented to believe in him."

John 3:17, 18: "If someone possess the goods of this world, and seeing his brother in need and shuts up the bowels of his compassion from him, how does the love of G-d dwell in him? My little children let us not love with words and the tongue, but in action and in truth."

I do not want to make people feel guilty this morning and get all of you to increase your giving. I want to challenge you to see that ***we have to avoid the trap of sounding good when we do not have the intention of doing good.*** Hot air fellowship is similar to toxic fellowship, but instead of doing that which is wrong and hurtful, it does not do that which is good and necessary.

This is what the Scriptures mean when they say that our yes should be yes and our no should be no – and what it means when we say that we will do it if it if the L-RD is willing. We have not fulfilled our obligation to G-d or to each other by making well intentioned promises.

I have already said that we must not feel bad when we have tried our best to do what we said we would try to do and have been unable to come through, due to circumstances beyond our control. I am talking about the tendency of making promises that we are not committed to fulfilling and in order to avoid this we need to do three things.

First of all, we need to learn ***not to make unwise commitments***, even if we feel strongly and really want to do something, because we cannot talk things into existence by the strength of our wishes or our good intentions. We need to express our desires to help and to do good things as a first step, without immediately jumping to making promises we are not yet in a position to make.

In today's Torah portion, the people twice expressed their fear and their desire to return to the relative safety of Egypt – it was not that they really missed Egypt or that they really wanted to go back to slavery, it was just that they were in trouble and wanted to get out the trouble they were in and they were venting. Barak was not venting when he wanted Deborah to come with him, not because he did not intend to proceed, but because he wanted to be in a position to be able to proceed.

We need to express ourselves without jumping steps and moving to promises, when we are not sure we have the resources, the time or even really the drive to follow through. When I was in ministry in Quebec (and I still miss my French Canadian friends), I often heard people say that they were 99% sure that something would happen or that they were 99% sure of being able to do something. I quickly learned that this was a cultural way of saying that they had no intention of doing it or of it really happening and that they just wanted to say whatever they needed to, in order to make a quick exit and get people off their back.

Was it lying? Sometimes, but more often it was just silliness where they felt that if they felt strongly enough about something they could will it into existence, like saving Tinkerbell by clapping your hands. We need to say that we feel strongly about something and really want to see it happen, without unwisely promising to be involved in bringing it to pass when we have neither the intention nor the resources.

Secondly, we need to learn *not to pressure people into things* and also to back them off when they pressure themselves into things. The finances of this shul need help as does our attendance and our outreach, but none of this will be helped by pressure tactics and people making promises beyond their ability to help.

I want us to learn to trust the L-rd and to learn patience and kindness and to learn the difference between goodness and kindness when it comes to the fruit of the Spirit. ***Goodness is what you do when you can and kindness is what you wish when you can't.*** It is not hypocrisy to wish someone well when you are unable to help just as it is not hypocrisy to say that you would love to help, but you are unable to help AND that you will trust the L-rd. There are so many good things which could happen and so many bad things which could also happen, but ***we need to distinguish between what is possible and what is probable, especially in the faith.***

Being certain in times of uncertainty is not always a step of faith, as much as it is wishful thinking and when we encounter it in our own lives or in the lives of those around us. Kids are great at this tactic, both in applying pressure and in responding to it by making promises they have no intention or ability to follow through on. We need to learn the repentance and wisdom of the first son in the parable and also to avoid the folly of the second son.

When we make plans and express our desires, we need to look at the practicalities of the situation and limit ourselves to saying one of three things. First, if we know we can and have thought through and concluded it is something we should do, we need to learn to simply say **yes** and then do it. Second we need to learn to say **no**, we wish we could but we cannot and are not able to make any promises. Third we need to learn to say that we cannot **unless the L-rd's provision opens a door** and we will only respond once that door is opened (but that we cannot be counted on to follow through, and the person and the situation needs to rely upon the L-rd, who also may say no way).

Remember my teaching on the four answers to prayer (no, yes, not yet and none of your business)? Hot air fellowship violates the wisdom of learning how to relate to situations from within our ability to respond. Now if we can respond, and we know we should, we should, but we should not respond to pressure apply pressure, just wisdom and firmness and faith.

The last thing we need to learn is to **balance our ability to respond both practically and spiritually**. I want to trust the L-rd for great things and I want to see great things happen and yet I know it depends on Him and not on me or on either the strength of my desires or the power of my words. It took more than 400 years for the Children of Israel to be liberated from Egypt, because it had to happen in the L-rd's time and by His help.

So, we need to learn to rely upon the L-rd's timing in our own lives and upon His help. He helped Israel as much during the 400 years as He did during the exodus. **He is with us in trials and in troubles and in need as much as He is when he supernaturally intervenes**. We need to learn to live under His lordship, not as a way to pressure Him into giving us what we want or to deliver us from things we do not want, but as a commitment to the bigger picture which will always function according to both His timing and according to His intervention.

I want to trust Him for great things for our community and I believe that great things are coming – because we serve a great G-d. However, I have as much faith in His timing as I do in His provision – which means that I trust Him as much as we are waiting to fill up the building and as we are waiting for those Jewish people to come whom He is calling, as I do when He reaches down and parts all the reed seas of my life.

He is not a celestial action figure who arrives in the nick of time to head off the villains at the pass and save the farm. He is the One who is working through His people Israel and through His people among the nations to bring His final purposes to pass in all the lives of all the generations of all the peoples who have ever dwelt on our planet.

I want to plan for and expect His intervention in my life and in the life of our community, but I do not want to say that what will happen will happen either according to the strength of my desires (and promises), or according to some timetable which I want to impose on Him.

Hot air fellowship needs to ease up on the wind and clouds and not say yes while we do no – it also needs to understand that our ability to intervene and help must always be according to our present resources, as we wait for the L-rd to move.

We need to help when we can and not just say bless you and not help when we can. We also need to liberate people from false promises and teach them to trust in the L-rd – because the manna will come along with the quail and the water, all in His good time.

His good time is the only safe place for us to dwell and to wait in this life. Toxic fellowship hurts people by doing what should not be done. Hot air fellowship also hurts people by not doing what should be done and by making promises we are unable to follow through on.

May we learn not to make unwise commitments. May we learn not to pressure people into things. May we learn to balance our ability to respond both practically and spiritually as we trust in Him and not imagine we are in control.

Let's pray.