

Shemot	Names
Torah:	Exod. 1:1-6:1
Haftarah:	Isaiah 27:6-28:13
Brit Chadashah:	Acts 7:17-29 (L) I Cor. 14:13-25 (F)

What will this New Year, 2005 bring to us? In French we have a saying: *Bientot ca change, bientot c'est la meme chose*. Which translated means: "Soon things will change, soon things will be just the same". Sometimes our desire to change is only temporary and we quickly return to our old burning barns.

You know that I work out at Club Fit and this time of year is quite amusing for the regular members. All of a sudden, new members show up, along with members we haven't seen all year. This crowd lasts sometimes till the end of January, when the strength of all those good resolutions collapse and the health club is left to those of us who have made it part of our regular lifestyle.

So, this year, do we really want to change? Do we really want the L-rd do be active in our lives? This week's Torah Portion spoke about His intrusiveness into Moshe's life and how He set in process a sequence of events that was going to set His people free, after one of the most amazing spiritual confrontations in history.

You see, true spiritual change involves a spiritual confrontation and a willingness to not only leave our personal Egypts behind, but also to leave our old Egyptian habits behind. All things being considered, it is the old negative survival, slavery behaviour patterns which are the hardest to break. Well the Haftarah said that with such alarming eloquence that I will not belabour it further.

I want to begin the New Year with a vision of newness, but with a difference. Not new cars, new houses, new jobs or even new boy friends and girl friends, but "newness" in the L-rd. I took my handy dandy Strong's Exhausting Concordance, and looked at all the passages which contained the word "new". I came up with seven categories of newness which I believe applies to our situation and which I would like us to begin the New Year focusing on.

The first newness is musical. David found that the L-rd caused him to sing a New Song (Ps. 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1) and Isaiah prophesied that Israel would also sing a New Song (Is. 42:10). In Revelation, John twice mentions a New Song (5:9; 14:3). What is this New Song all about? Well, generation by generation, life by life, we are all experiencing the L-rd in our lives, and the new things He does in our lives give us something to new to sing about.

We can always sing about what He did for others and we can always sing about His intervention in the lives of our forefathers, but we serve a G-d who wants to get personal. He wants to show that His activity in our lives can be just as intense, just as powerful and just as real as His intervention in the lives of all other believers, from Abel, through Noah, to Devorah through Ruth, right down to each of us. May 2005 be a spiritually musical year where both as individuals and as a community, the L-rd teaches us a New Song – where His intervention in our lives brings new songs of praise to our lips.

The second newness relates to the first: a new thing, or new things! In order to fulfill His purposes, the L-rd will act in new ways surprising and even astounding, beyond our ability to see coming or even dodge (Is. 43:19-21; 48:6-10). He is never thwarted, stumped, trumped or outmanoeuvred. In 2005 I look forward, somewhat fearfully, to the new things He will do in our midst as we continue to build a vital Messianic Jewish community in our wild and wonderful red neck city. This is why prayer is so important, because I am often out of ideas, often stumped UNTIL I spend time in prayer.

Which leads into our **third category of newness**: a new name (Is. 62:2; Rev. 2:17; 3:12), and we all get a new one, even our blessed Messiah. Why? Names in the Bible often have meaning and that meaning has power, but there is not yet a language spoken capable of adequately describing the wonder of G-d and of the Kingdom which is to come. So, one day, Babel will be forever reversed and all mankind will have new names, and speak a new language, which will be capable of expressing full wonder without burning or cutting our lips to shreds (with apologies to Gwendolyn MacEwan). One day a new name, a real name, a beautiful name. In 2005 we need to look forward to that newness, which leads me to **our fourth newness**, which is one we have been living for some time: a New Covenant.

There is so much theological speculation about the meaning of the New Covenant, or the New Testament and this conversation is usually carried out in order to distinguish it from the Old Covenant, or Old Testament – usually to the disadvantage of the Torah and of all things Jewish. Such silliness. The New Covenant is the same contract of holiness, the same contract of faith and obedience which G-d made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and later with Moses and the whole House of Jacob, generation by generation, but with a slight, extremely major difference (Jer. 31:31-34).

Instead of carving His Word onto stone tablets and having each new generation and nation of believers build Him an endless succession of new tabernacles for His presence to dwell, He fulfilled that old adage: "If you want something done right, you've got to do it yourself". He took on a tabernacle of flesh and dwelt among us and did in reality what all the symbols of the Torah described. He became the perfect sacrifice for sins and ever lives to apply its eternal benefits to the daily lives of believers in every generation until His return.

He told the prophet Jeremiah that He would write this new covenant on our hearts, and when we celebrate the L-rd's Table we are celebrating the reality of this writing and of this new dwelling place for G-d's Spirit – for G-d's Shekinah glory. Mishpocah, that's us. He writes His Law on our hearts and dwells in our hearts by His Spirit. He still has the same agenda for His people and for all peoples: Faith and Obedience. May this agenda, which He has written on all of our hearts, be our continual focus in 2005, as we continue to let His presence dwell in our midst, individually and as a congregation.

This New Covenant has three more newness features. There is the **New Jerusalem**, which is both our mother on high (Gal. 4:26) and the celestial city (Heb. 12:22) which will one day be set up on earth (Rev. 21:2) and where the One New Man shall one day forever dwell (Eph. 2:15-22). That should bring some interesting questions to our weekly Yeshiva! There is also **the New Heavens and the New Earth** (Is. 62:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1), where righteousness shall dwell with a brightness which shall never dim. And finally, there is a **New Commandment** (John 13:34, 35), and one which I want to close with.

You see, it is both a New Commandment and an Old Commandment (I John 2:7-11 and 2 John 5), because even in 2005 I must, for once, agree with Solomon – *there is really nothing new under the sun* (Eccl. 1:9, 10), *just new situations where we are called to apply and integrate G-d's eternal Word, line by line, bit by bit, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, so that our spiritual lives can grow and renew*. That's the only story in town, and one to which He will keep bringing back, until we learn to do it His way – also to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, d'or l'd'or v'l'olam va'ed (generation by generation, forever - Jer. 6:16). The old "new" commandment is to love one another, but not just in the way we would have others love us - in Messiah Yeshua, we are called to love each other in way in which G-d loves us – sacrificially and redemptively. May His newness refresh us in 2005 and cause our new songs to speak of His glorious wonders, both in the times of the fathers, in our own times and in the times which are still to come. Let's pray.