

10 Shevat, 5774

B'nai Chayim Second Winter Series: J. M. Terrett**It Is Time to Renew Our Confidence: Power In Prayer**

Beshalach When He Let Go

The Kingdom Conquers All

Torah: Exodus 13:17-17:16

(1) **14:12:** *Isn't that what we said to you in Egypt: leave us to serve the Egyptians, for it would have been better or us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert?*

Sometimes people in bondage prefer the security of survival than the risk of failure which the effort and the fear and even the pain of freedom requires, not matter how sure a thing it is. What's holding you back? Oppressed people can be seduced by the safety of their prisons.

(2) **14:24:** *During the last watch of the night, the L-RD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.* Whether through the fire or the burning bush, or the voice of an angel or the fire of the pillar, the presence of the L-rd will always be more powerful than the presence of any problem or enemy we could ever be facing. This reality is never dependant on the strength of our convictions, but only on the power of His promises.

(3) **15:11:** *Who is like you among the gods, YHVH, who is like You, magnificent in holiness, worthy of praise, performing wonders.* It was a real eye opener for the Children of Israel to see their enemies obliterated through no intervention of their own effort. Despite their fears, they obeyed and stood back and watched G-d intervening as He had promised. We need to learn to always make room for G-d's intervention, which is His job, as we learn to trust and obey, which is our job. G-d will never disappoint His people because there is no one like Him, the magnificently holy, praiseworthy performer of wonders and He is still in the same business today – let us learn to let Him drown our sorrows.

(4) **16:28:** *Then the L-RD said to Moses: How long will you refuse to observe my commandments and my laws?* In this passage we see two words in Hebrew: mitzvot (commandments) and Torot (laws) which are used in the scriptures to designate all which the L-rd teaches us, whether it be a specific set of commandments, like the Ten or any of the precepts and judgements He has given to His people over the years. The question is one of obedience and asks us whether we will do what the L-rd says or not.

Later the problem became elevating the commandments of men to the same level as those of G-d and this is the only time when the New Testament says the Law can be a curse.

Our sinful flesh may even use His Holy Word against us, but we will always be set free by it and never from it. Even at this glorious juncture of Israel's deliverance, disobedience based on doubt (and fear and all the other excuses) rears its ugly head, but G-d's deliverance and power remain intact and unaffected.

May we remain intact and unaffected by all the barriers to grace and provision in our lives as we walk according to His mitzvot and torot in our lives.

Haftarah: Isaiah 6:1-7:7

(5) **6:6:** *I heard the voice of the L-rd saying: whom will I send and who will walk for us? I answered, here I am, send me.* Our spiritual lives will always be based on at least two things – a call (from G-d) and our response. It is never just a one shot affair, but it will always be part of the personal and generational call of G-d and there are two foundations upon which this call is based: His holiness and His commandments. May we learn to know who He is and follow through with obedience to His Word.

(6) **6:13:** *If there remains but a tenth of the inhabitants, in their turn, they shall become prey for the fire. But as the terebinth and oak leave a stump when they are cut down, so shall a holy remnant remain of this people.* The history of the Jewish people is one of glorious deliverance and inglorious defeat and agony, but there has never not been a righteous core (root or stump) from which both the Word and purposes of G-d has issued.

We know the story of this generation of Israel's eventual failure, but along with Joshua and Caleb, there was an entire younger generation ready to sprout forth and flourish in the promises of the King. There are no real setbacks in purposes and power of G-d.

Brit Chadashah: Rev. 19:1-20:6

(7) **19:16:** *And upon His clothing upon His breast plate there was a name: King of kings and L-rd of lords.* G-d knows who He is and what is going to happen once all the eventualities have run their course. The glorious deliverance from Egypt and all the valleys through which believers have walked and all the mountains which believers have scaled have had as their guiding light (and final destination) the arrival of the Kingdom of G-d and the final victory of His Messiah. Let the heathen rage and the mockers deride and even let the carnal believers mess up, because come what may, He is coming and He shall reign forever. May this comforting assurance shine into our lives and deliver us from all and any detours the world, the enemy or the flesh shall try and trick us into.

Patti (p. 139) **Ps. 139** Jewish Hero: Miriam **Shabbat Shirah**

Sermon: Power in Prayer: Romans 8:26, 27:

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought to, but the Spirit Himself intercedes with groans that words cannot express. And the One who searches the hearts, knows the mind of the Spirit, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of G-d.”

The apostle Paul probably taught more on prayer than any other author in the Bible, but in this passage he makes the surprising admission that we do not know how to pray as we ought to because there are deep groanings within each of us that defy expression by the feeble skills which language has to put them into words. I can see a can of worms for mystics to come in and claim that they have the key to unlocking these inexpressible depths, but fortunately, once again the context of this declaration comes to our rescue.

After having declared that the sufferings of this world (Auschwitz, Hiroshima and all the plagues, famines and genocides imaginable) are not worthy to be compared to the glory which is to come, Paul speaks of the groaning which the pangs of childbirth draw forth from this creation which is impatient to be redeemed from the folly and futility which we are wallowing through.

Many of the natural disasters and geological phenomena which silly scientists love to speculate about, both terrestrial and celestial are merely the delightful agony of anticipation of a created order that longs for rebirth when the kingdom comes.

How and when are not the issue as much as the reality of the return, which all of creation senses more deeply as the Kingdom approaches. There is a cosmic groaning which boils up from the depth of this world that is similar to the inner groanings which boil up from the depth of our beings.

And though we feel them passionately and though we may agonize over them, as a woman agonizes over an imminent birth, we are not left alone to writhe in agony, all the while being encouraged to breath and to push – we have our own personal birthing coach who is able to take these inner eruptions and release them to G-d through our blessed redeemer and that is some powerful prayer.

Look at it like this. Here we are in agony, struggling with inner stuff we are not even sure how to relate to – deep personal themes of the kingdom which sometimes make us feel we are going to burst and then the triple power of prayer kicks in.

The Spirit takes this groaning (and all the agony) and delivers it into the arms of the Messiah, who lifts it up to G-d the Father with one big proviso, according to the will of G-d.

Does this mean He edits our prayers and that there are prayers which He ignores? No. It means He strips away those feeble attempts to make sense of our own inner nonsensical groaning and cuts right down to the deepest inner chase of our souls and lifts that up to G-d and three things occur.

First we get it off our chest (til next time), second it is laid out fully before G-d through the Saviour by the Spirit and lastly, it is healed and honed and pruned and cleaned up until it becomes worthy of its heavenly destination, despite its humble origins.

Quite the deal. In what way does the Spirit take our inner cosmic groanings when we pray? We are not told how. What is their final shape once He has proof read, rewritten and submitted the final copy? We are not told, but there is a feature of this kind of prayer which is referred to elsewhere in the Scriptures in at least two forms: praying in the Spirit and singing in the Spirit (sometimes translated singing songs of the Spirit) and boy oh boy, does the fire fly when theologians have trouble coming to terms with the actual content of the Scriptures.

Many of you know that most of my spiritual formation occurred in a Pentecostal/Charismatic context and it may surprise you to know that most Messianic Jews have also come out of this dynamic commitment to revival and to praise and worship, and it is this rich heritage which gives me a boost as I wrestle with the meaning of this passage.

In my study of the Book of Romans, a respected commentator said that the only way to understand this passage was to see that the apostle is talking about speaking in tongues under the influence of the Holy Spirit. How did he arrive at this conclusion? His main point was that there is an uttering of our groans which is vocalized by the Spirit as He intercedes for us and it is these utterings which are taken by our Messiah before our Gracious Father.

In other words, like the mute creation which is groaning and writhing with no way of expressing the deep yearning for the coming of the Kingdom, we are also subject to groanings which we do not have the power to render into utterings – which we are unable to vocalize.

Instead of earthquakes and tsunamis and volcanoes and the various exploding supernovas and other celestial trauma our telescopes are beginning to pick up, we have an amazingly efficient and reliable pressure valve in the utterings of the Holy Spirit.

Now, I am not encouraging us to have outbursts and explosions similar to earthquakes as a regular part of our services, but the giving of the Law occurred in the midst of earthquakes and as did the arrival of the Spirit. Knowing how to pray in the Spirit will have as mighty an impact on our lives as those earlier earthquakes had on the lives they impacted.

What does praying in the Spirit mean? What does it look like? What does it sound like? What does it accomplish? These are the suggestions I would like to address on this Shabbat Shirah which announces the coming of Passover as we move one more year closer to the dawning of the kingdom.

In I Cor. 14:15 Paul says he will pray and sing with his understanding and he will pray and sing by the Spirit and we need to learn the same lesson. Sometimes we will be given the exact words to say and we will be able to hit the bull's eye when we articulate our concerns before the King. Sometimes we hit a barrier where our groans are speechless and yet there is so much which is aching to be said and that is where the Spirit takes over and both needs are met – the need to speak our heart and mind before G-d and the need to have our heart and mind expressed before G-d when we are unable to come up with the words.

Nowhere in this passage does it say that these expressions by the Spirit were ecstatic and loud or accompanied by groanings and writhing and rolling around, but neither does it say these are not also appropriate, if we look at various accounts in the Scriptures. Those who say that prayer must always be quiet and dignified often clash with those who say prayers must always be wild and emotional, but both groups seem to miss the point of the Spirit praying through us.

We are frequently told to pray and to intercede and always to let our requests be made known unto G-d in every situation of our lives and to cast our concerns upon Him as our first and primary line of both defence and attack. And yet the volume or the lack of volume with which we deliver our intercession is not the core issue. When we run out of words and we still have groanings and inner turbulence, we need to learn to let the Spirit take over and bring these inexpressible utterings to G-d. That is the crux of the passage.

Does that mean that G-d cannot hear us when we pray in our heart? No. It means that when we come to the end of our rope, we need to learn to let the Spirit take over so that we are not left burdened and troubled when we run out of words to express the things which move us deeply and which we urgently need to get off our chest.

There is nothing which we are feeling and there is nothing which we are experiencing which we cannot bring to G-d in prayer and we need to learn to exercise both kinds of prayer, both with the understanding and also with the Spirit. And both kinds also apply to praise, because we should praise both with the understanding and also with the Spirit.

The process looks like this: we run out of words before we run out of needs, so the Spirit formulates requests to express these needs and the Messiah takes these Spirit expressed needs and intercedes for us by lifting them before the Father according to His will.

All too frequently, we run into a wall where we cannot adequately package our requests in words and this can be very frustrating and leave us feeling helpless and even angry. Instead of drawing back and leaving our prayer time feeling unfulfilled and unheard, we need to let the Spirit pick up the slack and pray through us, however He chooses to do so.

Once this expression is uttered by the Spirit through us, it is carried by the Spirit and He always leaves behind the peace which will keep our hearts and minds in the Messiah.

These special delivery requests arrive before the Saviour who has already been listening and they are processed, sent to the Father and are always answered according to the will of the Father who has final say in what this answer shall look like. (no, yes, wait, none of your business).

The real joy and the real strength which we derive from praying like this, has way more to do with the joy of being heard than it does with the answer we receive. Why? If you are like me, I frequently bombard G-d with requests in a kind of unorganized jumble and I regularly use prayer as a means of organizing my thoughts and putting my life into perspective.

It is the assurance which I get from Him that everything will work out in the end according to His purposes which allows me to both keep on walking with the King and to keep on asking the King until something marvellous begins to happen and I want to close with this.

My asking and the Spirit's intercession and the answers I receive, wean me away from the gimme gimmes and from wanting to have my own way; as if prayer gave me the ability to get whatever I want from the Father if I wanted it badly enough and prayed passionately about it hard enough and long enough.

Prayer helps to bring order to both our inner and our outer lives, because we learn more and more that it is the will of G-d which the Saviour takes from that which the Spirit has prayed and it is that which the Father acts upon.

I would even go as far as to say that when the Spirit puts our inner groanings and inexpressible utterings into words, He filters out the foolish, the carnal and the hurtful. He does not limit our expression, He merely puts it all into perspective and His filtering may even be to turn the foolish, the carnal and the hurtful into requests for forgiveness as He passes along the contents of our utterings and groans to the Saviour.

When this occurs, the deep, inner yearnings of our own spirit continue on their way to be answered by the Father, while forgiveness (and conviction) for all our foolishness, carnality and hurtfulness is granted by the Saviour as part of the learning process we are all subject to and which is one of the greatest benefits to earnest, frequent and fervent prayer.

Prayer should have as its major objective to bring us into the presence of G-d so that we can learn from Him what His will is for us in every situation of our lives.

Prayer should have as its next objective giving us the relief, the comfort and the conviction which comes when the contents of our hearts are revealed to us. Prayer should have as its next objective to teach us about the will of G-d as we lay all of our cards on the table.

Prayer should have as its final objective to receive the answers which we have been seeking the L-rd for, because when we do not know how to pray as we ought to, this is the time when we need the most prayer.

Letting the Spirit take over is not a scary thought and it does not turn us into prophets of Baal who yell and scream or to the loud Corinthians who competed to see who could yell the loudest or the longest.

It takes the soul which is freaking out and drains all the poison and the passion and the fear and replaces it with the peace that passes all understanding, once we have gotten it all off our chests once again.

When we get wound up, He unwinds us and He often shows us what we are really twisted out of shape about and He leads us quietly beside the still water and causes our agitated soul to lie down again in green pastures and fills us up with the joy of the L-rd, which is our real strength.

It is funny, but the more time you spend in prayer, the less concerned you are with the answers you can get or even with the renewed perspective you are granted.

The longer and the deeper you go into prayer, the more you learn to rest in His presence, like Joshua and this rest becomes a foretaste of the glory which is to come as all our agitation melts away and we make lingering in the presence one of our favourite things as we make our lives both turn around Him and around His kingdom purposes.

May there be power in our prayers as we learn to let the Spirit pray through us.

May we let Him bring the Messiah's joyful peace into our hearts and lives which can only be obtained and maintained in persistent prayer.

May we learn to wrestle with the inexplicable yearnings and groanings of our hearts until they are surrendered to Him and are replaced with the comfort and the healing which His presence always brings.

Let's pray.