

**Shemot****Names**

Torah:	Exod. 1:1-6:1
Haftarah:	Is. 27:6-28:13; 29:22-23
Brit Chadashah:	I Cor. 14:13-25 (F); Acts 7:17-19 (L)

In today's Torah portion we see a man whose spiritual credibility was based on some very hard lessons. When he came to understand his Jewish roots, and tried to help his people, he committed an act of murder and ran away to save his skin. He spent a very long time wandering in the same wilderness he was to lead the people through, and when he had an experience with G-d, he balked at job he was called to do. He tried to chicken out and stay wandering in the wilderness with his sheep.

In the midst of an amazing encounter with G-d, a mini Sinai, he refused an offer to be healed from a speech impediment, and asked for someone else to be sent instead of him. The L-rd had to bring big brother to hold his hand. He even lost the priesthood for himself and his children.

On the way into the Egypt, he was nearly killed by G-d, because he did not bother circumcising his sons and his wife had to do it for him. In many ways, he was a brave man, but in many other ways he was not an ideal candidate to lead the people. Why? *He had some significant personality flaws*. In our modern world we have strange ideas about what it means to be a good leader, and I am not sure we would have found his resume to be quite what we were looking for.

When G-d calls us to Himself, He does not call perfect people, and sometimes, like Moshe, we may bring considerable baggage with us. When we are called to share our faith, and speak of the hope that is within us, we need to be careful not to just tell half the story. **Spiritual credibility must not be confused with either spiritual maturity or being a flawless example.** The L-rd can use our flaws as much as He can use our finer qualities. He can also use all the baggage we bring with us into the Gospel (Rom. 8:28; Ps. 110:71). Spiritual credibility is not a game.

Sometimes I feel like damaged goods, and sometimes I am. Sometimes I feel that all the trauma and pain I have encountered stops me from functioning effectively as a leader, and sometimes this is also true. You see, one of the biggest barriers to spiritual effectiveness and maturity in the L-rd has nothing to do with who we are or where have been, or even with the woundings we bring with us into the Gospel. *It has to do with the masks we wear and the people we pretend to be.*

**Spiritual credibility and spiritual effectiveness has more to do with how well and how true we are in our walk with the L-rd, than it does with how well we measure up to other people's expectations.** In the first module of my doctoral studies, we looked at different models of leadership, and were surprised to see how different each of us was both in temperament and in our approach to leadership. Yet all of us felt pressure to be the kind of leader our community and our colleagues expected us to be. We all felt so inadequate, so critically scrutinized constantly.

**This pressure to measure up to other people's expectations is the first thing that has to become a casualty or else we cannot grow as leaders or even as disciples.** What do you expect from your leader? What does your leader expect from you? What do we expect from each other? There are three things we should expect from each other and all of them have to do with the spiritual credibility we need, in order to be faithful witnesses of the light we are called to share as believers in Yeshua our Messiah.

Let's look at my theme verse for this meditation: I Peter 3:15 "But in your hearts sanctify Messiah as L-rd. Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you a reason for the

hope that is with in you". Many English versions stop the verse here, but my French version continues, "Do this with gentleness and reverence (meekness and respect)".

Our faith is all about Him, and His activity in our lives, and how we are learning to sanctify Him in our hearts and lives. **This is the first thing people need to see, if we are to have any spiritual credibility.** Are you sanctifying Him in your hearts? What does that mean? It means maintaining **a lifestyle of spiritual choices**, where we distinguish between light and dark, and deal with any darkness which tries to creep into our hearts and lives.

After a very bumpy start, Moshe learned to deal with his personal darkness and the best way he learned to do this was to dwell in the light of G-d' presence. Under the shelter of His wings. He still stumbled, and never really quit whining to G-d, but, like Jacob, he wrestled with his inner demons until he was ready to walk with the L-rd and lead the people. Unless we learn to walk with the L-rd, we cannot walk with each other, either as leaders or as those who are lead.

We all have a dark side and we all have to come to terms with our limitations, or we cannot walk with the King or lead people to the King. David found this out when he tried to hide his transgression with Bath Sheba: "You desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart"(Ps. 51:6). This is the second part of sanctifying the L-rd, and part of the answer we need to give concerning the hope which is within us. **The other side of sanctifying is dealing with the dark side, inside and outside.**

We are not called to adopt artificial personas, like actors adopting a role in a play. Yeshua talked about whited sepulchres (polished graves), where the outside is clean and the inside is full of death and all kinds of filth. We are called to let the L-rd deal with the inside, so that the outside we portray is a reflection of this inner redemptive activity. However, unfortunately, part of what it means when we come together as a community hinders this process, initially at least.

I call it the *battle of the expectations, mind games* we play to get people to feel that they are obliged to meet with our expectations, in order to get our respect and our admiration. Look at the way we treat politicians and actors – the applause cuts both ways. We are saying two things. First, you have done a good job, and second, you have done the job we wanted you to. In Messiah Yeshua, we need to be careful about our applause and how we respond to other people's applause. "Well done!" often means, now you're doing it my way! Now you're under my control.

As we welcome new people into our midst and as we reach out, both as individuals and as a community, **we need to be clear about what we expect from each other**, and it cuts both ways. We tell people we want them to get real, and yet is that what we are really saying? The reason for the hope that is within me is my love of the light and me constantly bringing my darkness to the cross. It is making my walk with the L-rd the source of my leadership, and this is the example we set for each other and for the world we are trying to reach. How about you? How's your light?

I have a confession to make – I am an abstract random thinker, who battles daily with violent mood swings and who struggles to stay focused emotionally. I have a twisted sense of humour and I will probably struggle with emotional stability for the rest of my life. The reason I have hope in my heart, is because the L-rd knows who I am and what I am capable of and He is prepared to walk with me, and to teach me to walk with Him. I am not the clay to be moulded by you, or by our society into the kind of leader, the kind of person we may want at the helm of our community. Superheroes only exist in comic books and in the animated games they have spawned. Don't get trapped in a virtual spiritual world that is just a game and is not real.

Sometimes, when we tell people how we accepted the L-rd and the changes which have occurred in our lives, we give the wrong impression and we damage and often lose our spiritual credibility. II Cor. 5:17 (all things have become new) is preceded by II Cor. 5:16 (know no man according to the flesh). It has to do with the nature of the transformation which occurs when we come to the L-rd, and which we are calling other people to experience. Spiritual reality on the inside.

Instead of trying to dress to impress, and present the most amazing image to the world – you know, perfect smile, perfect suit, perfect speech, even the perfect smell – like a used car salesman, or those annoying infomercials. Salesmanship tries to put the best foot forward, but has a hidden agenda. Spirituality cares little about external appearances and deals in reality, and not in illusion.

Now I am not saying that you should not shower and brush your teeth before you come to shule. Nor am I saying that it is spiritual to tell people off when you are having a bad day, and it is not wrong to try and make a good impression on people by being friendly and helpful. Keeping your home clean is not the same as "putting on the dog". Spirituality looks beyond that all important "**first impression**" and wants to come to terms with life themes and that inner truth underneath.

That's how I became a believer and that's why I am still a believer, and that's the kind of believer I am calling other people to consider becoming. Matt. 11:28-30 talks about peace and rest, not about pretence and deception. Good manners, hygiene and doing your best are not **victims** who suffer from this kind of approach to spirituality. They are the **winners**, because we have been set free on the inside to be all that we can be and to quit pretending to be someone we are not.

Which leads me to my last point about spiritual credibility, **isn't about time we quit playing games and started growing, instead of pretending?** How do we do this? Meekness and respect are qualities we need to avoid trying to mould people into images of our own idolatry. Let me give you an example from the jungle of adolescence. As a teacher I always tried to get to know my students before I corrected them or tried to influence them.

I knew I had a certain amount of material to cover in the curriculum, and that I had to enforce certain behaviours both in the classroom and around the school, but that is only a small part of what education is really all about. People's learning styles are connected to their personalities and are already moulded by the baggage they bring with them in to the classroom. I always tried to figure out how to help people to learn, and to believe in them – not indulge them or suck up to them –or to live for their approval or applause, **but to help them to quit pretending.**

I had some students who didn't like me and my answer was that I didn't want bad people to like me or to approve of me. **Spiritual credibility means being true to who you are and showing people that in the Gospel, Yeshua teaches us this most difficult of truths – being real on the inside and on the outside.** We hold to high standards – the Ten Commandments and the New Commandment to love one another redemptively are the highest performance standards this world will ever know – and *they are the only performance standards we are called to hold each other to*. They are also the only true measure of our spiritual credibility. How's yours doing?

Getting people to listen to a simple presentation of the Gospel is not the main challenge of our faith. Letting them see our spiritual credibility in the Gospel is the biggest challenge we will face as individuals and as a community. Let us pray that we may truly learn to sanctify the L-rd in our hearts and lives, ***according to the highest performance standards of spiritual credibility.*** As your leader, I want to know who you are, and to let you know who I am. I also want to know who you are not, and, mishpocah there are many things I am not, and which you are not. This reality needs to be the foundation upon which we build the spirituality we want to share with our world.

Let's pray. Next week: Intrusive Proselytization, a terrible form of spiritual abuse.