

(A Lean, Mean, Living Machine)

Shemot **Names** **Do You Really Know What is Going On?**

Torah: Ex. 1:1-6:1

(1) 1:13 ***“Then the Egyptians subjected the children of Israel to a ruthless bondage of service”*** Jewish people have too frequently been subjected to the ruthless hatred of the world order, not because of any nefarious plots we are hatching to dominate the world, but because of our desire to be under the domination of the One whose rule will one day be established over all the generations and nations of this world. Who dominates over your life? Are you under the peaceful yoke of the Messiah’s stipulations or are there areas where the world is trying to crush you – They may knock us down, but in Him, we are never out.

(2) 1:17: ***“But the midwives feared G-d and did not do what the king told them to do.”*** We are always called to be law abiding citizens, but we always obey the highest law, even when that means disobeying civil authorities who themselves disobey or ignore G-d’s laws. It is my prayer that more midwives and birthing practitioners would let the babies live and not rip them out of their mother’s wombs. It is not what people feel or say is right that we have to pay attention to – it is what the Word says, whatever resistance we encounter from civil authorities who should know better. How about you? Which authority rules your life?

(3) 3:5: ***“G-d said: Do not approach here, remove your shoes from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground”*** Wherever we encounter the presence of G-d is holy ground – dangerous territory which wants to change us and show us how to walk in light through the darkness of this life. Which ground do you usually stand on?

(4) 6:1: ***“YHVH said to Moses: You shall see know what I will do to Pharaoh; a powerful hand will force him to chase them out of his country”***. No matter what our enemies think they are doing to us and no matter what kinds of ruthlessness we are subjected to, it is the activity of G-d which has final say in our lives, as long as we let His Word keep having the final say in how we relate to all that is going on in our lives. Who has the final say in your life? I would rather be chased out by the world than neglect the L-rd.

Haftarah: Is. 27:7-28:13

(5) 27:13: ***“In that day, the great trumpet shall sound and those who were exiled in Assyria or who were refugees in Egypt shall return and worship the L-RD upon the Holy Mountain at Jerusalem”*** The Bible talks both about temporal deliverance – from Egypt and from Assyria/Babylon, both to reassure us that He will never lose touch with His people, Jew and Gentile and to keep our eyes focused on the great redemption which is yet to come – how about you?

(6) 28:8: ***“All the tables are covered with vomiting and filth and there is no place (that is clean)”*** Israel has always been a nation which was known for the fullness of its measures – the fullness of our holiness and the fullness of our sinfulness. You can only be filled with one of these two opposites – holiness means a sinful emptiness and sinfulness means a holy emptiness. What is your life filling up with?

Brit Chadashah: Heb. 10:1-18

(7) 10:14 (18) “***For By One Offering, He has brought to perfection for ever those who are sanctified.***”

His sacrifice on the cross secured our eternal inheritance and this assurance gives our temporal life both meaning and passion – how about you?

Ps. 99 **Jewish Hero: The Midwives (Schiphra and Pua)**

Over the next little while, I will be browsing my way through a book by M. Scott Peck (another guy who goes by his second name), called: ***The Road Less Travelled***. It is a best seller which challenges people to come to terms with the real issues which are impacting their lives and not allow themselves to be driven by influences they are not prepared to either acknowledge or deal with. We live in a society which is increasingly promoting various forms of unintegrated and unhealthy spirituality and consequently, which is giving birth to increasingly toxic forms of morality.

While our knowledge of how our bodies work is increasing and our knowledge of the various fields of science and technology are mushrooming, both in what they are putting at our disposal to enrich our lives and in the social impact which these advances are forcing us to relate to, the only grand plan which seems to be driving this program is a double whammy which wants to unintegrate our lives and keep us off balance spiritually. The first is that everything in the realm of values needs to be seen as relative (and dynamic – which for the secular world means both open to change and undergoing constant modification) and also that no one perspective is right, and until you come to this realization, you are considered to be both narrow-minded and primitive.

In my next preaching series, which will take us up to Passover – which is only twelve Sabbaths away – I want to deal with both the nonsense which the world is trying to get us to buy into and also with the nonsense we can all too easily allow ourselves to buy into, if we do not allow the L-rd to help us work through our own personal spiritual baggage until we are consistently driven by the positive spirituality described in His Word and not by the puppy’s breakfast version which surrounds us in the world or the other personal versions which too many believers allow themselves to be trapped into.

We are called to be a lean, clean, living machine, occupied with building and maintaining an integrated, dynamic worldview, where we both shine as lights to those who are on the outside and also shine as a light, from the depths of our being and through all the various facets of our personal, social and public lives. I want to do this using some of the insights which Mr. Peck brings to his discussion of the road which is less travelled, both by those in the world who have no faith and by those in the faith, who have not let the L-rd bring order and harmony to their inner lives.

Mr. Peck points out that people with similar theological perspectives can often express their spirituality in wildly divergent manners, depending on how they actually (practically) view the world and on the strategies they adopt to express how they view the world, whether this is conscious or unconscious.

Now I am not going to go all psycho-therapeutic on you where I call each of you into my office and take notes while you pour out your guts on my couch – there isn’t one in my office in any case. What I want to do in my sermons and in our Yeshivas –and through whatever contacts we may have from now until

Passover, is to challenge each of us and all of us to honestly and thoroughly examine how we really view the world and how we are living out these perspectives on a daily, practical level.

This is because we have a unique, even jealous calling which I will repeatedly describe in two ways. We are called to build lives which are based on an integrated, dynamic worldview. Said another way, we are called to be lean, clean living machines – and not lean, mean killing machines.

Let's look at the first way I describe my second winter series. I use three words and let me describe dynamic first. In the world, dynamic means constantly changing in order to remain "relevant" to the various trends which are always cropping up – those scientific/technological, those social/moral and those political and religious. A big part of this changing is seen as the need to admit that no one position or perspective is right or wrong, but that all positions need to find enough common ground to understand that we are all basically looking for the same kinds of things, albeit in divergent ways.

This is both incredibly wrong and basically right. It is incredibly wrong because a greedy plutocrat who is seeking to endlessly expand his investment portfolio at all costs and with no regard to the ecological or social consequences is not looking for the same kinds of things as either a social activist or a subsistence farmer (or his urban cousin, the subsistence factory worker). The one is motivated by greed; the others are trying to seek for justice and fairness for all or just trying to survive in a work environment where there is little chance for them to better themselves under the crushing load of perpetual poverty.

It is basically right at the grass roots level, because what the plutocrat and the activist and the poor farmer or worker want is a good life where all their needs are met and they are able to provide the same for their children and grandchildren. However, whenever we want to meet our needs at the expense of the needs of others, we have fallen into the trap of thinking that our needs can only be met if we cheat, steal, kill and oppress those whose lives are somehow less important (or valid) than ours.

Our worldview needs to be dynamic in different ways. We need to be constantly examining the eternal principles of G-d's word and changing (renewing) how we view the world and how we live in the world so that we are meeting our needs in harmony with both the Bible and with the valid needs of our fellow travelers through this life – because we will always be our brother's keeper (our sisters too). We are not looking for newer ideas about the nature of reality or about the nature of man and we are especially not looking for newer ideas about the nature of G-d.

Dynamic for us means that we have an immutable, changeless perspective which we must constantly be careful not to be pulled away from and we must be constantly seeking for ways to articulate this life changing perspective in ways which will be meaningful and attractive to those who are trapped in the constantly changing, confusing relativism of a world which wants us to accept everybody's ideas and never impose ours on anyone – because everyone is right and no one is wrong, unless they think that only they are right and everybody else is wrong.

Indeed we believe we are right and that all other nonbiblical perspectives are flawed, lacking and eventually wrong, except at the grass roots level, where they are crying out for meaning and purpose and are unconsciously looking for a relationship with the G-d of the cosmos, who needs no help in defining Himself or in explaining Himself – especially in terms of what is right and wrong, which leads me to my second point: integrated.

Integrated means that all parts form a harmonious whole, where nothing that is needed is missing and that nothing which is superfluous is allowed to clutter up what would otherwise be an integrated whole.

We live in a world full of junk, where that which is really needed is often missing and where that which is not needed is often too prevalent. There are elements of secular culture which I find enriching and even meaningful (especially classical music and some forms of art) and there are other aspects of secular morality which I find especially heinous and totally unacceptable in terms of biblical spirituality.

It is our job to feed on that which is good and acceptable and to refuse that which is contradictory to our basic understanding of truth and how we should live in the world. This is not an easy task, nor is it a task which can be done once, but it is one which we have to constantly be coming back to as our world changes and as we change in our world. I want the eternal truths of G-d's Word to be the lens through which I view the world and I want it also to be the means whereby I both digest my experiences in the world and where I design ways for me to relate to my world.

As the pace of change quickens and as we rapidly move through the changing stages of our lives, we need to view all of our experiences and all of our perspectives as channels through which G-d wants to shine His light, first to us and then through us – for there is no other way for believers to view either the world or themselves, which brings me to my final point – worldview.

First let me say that how we view the world, does not change the world. Some thought it was flat; some still think it is billions of years old. Some think we are the main cause of global warming, others think of the world as an endless series of business opportunities. There are even those who view the world as a blank screen where they want to paint, to dance, to act and use other means to express the music of their souls, while others just want to get enough to eat and find a shelter to rest in when it rains or when the snow flies.

We are all passengers on the same planet and we are all moving at the same speed, generationally through this life, it is just that some of us have no real idea of why we were put on this planet and what it is we are supposed to want to do with our lives and with the resources we have at our disposal. Our worldview needs to understand what the nature of this world really is – including an understanding of where it came from and where it is going and what our rights and duties are.

As believers we are called to both know the Author of truth and do our best to make Him known, both to those who will listen to us and those who want to derail us, silence us, convert us and even kill us. Our worldview does not have to be hostile, but we need to understand that there is an increasingly great societal hostility to a biblical worldview. We will be called all sorts of dirty names like fundamentalist fanatics, politically incorrect hypocrites and the like.

We need to pay more attention to what we call ourselves, both among ourselves and towards the world we are trying to influence and win over to the truth that hunted us down and trapped us – and which is hunting them down and trying to trap them – which is often the sources of so much concerted, open hostility towards our worldview which embraces biblical spirituality and often expresses it through biblical morality.

There are many who would want to place both our morality and our spirituality on the endangered species list and would even like to see them become extinct – because they think that how we view the world is part of a worldview which they consider intellectually and scientifically defunct – an outmoded, disproved,

archaic view which may have served the more primitive minds of the Middle Ages, but which is no longer relevant to our sophisticated, scientific world. Liberal theologians actually call it a pre-scientific cosmology.

How do we relate to all of this?

First of all, we make sure we understand what dynamic means for us. To be changed into the image of the changeless One and to allow His immutable (changeless) word be the source for all of our perspectives, both in what we believe and how we express those beliefs.

Next we need to understand that we are called to be constantly integrating our world, both in what we pursue (and what pursues us) and in what we refuse (and which refuses us). We need to live life as a tableau which we want to paint in the colours of our Lord as we express the masterpiece He is in the process of building (that's you and me). We also must constantly fight against the puppy's breakfast the world wants to make us into, when they call us dirty names and attack our clarity as primitive and cruel.

Lastly we need to constantly be working on maintaining a biblical worldview, both practically and theoretically, so that what we believe and how we understand our duty (and rights) in this life is a clear testimony to our faith in the crucified and resurrected carpenter from Nazareth and to our obedience to His Word – which is the only valid guide for those of us, who, as believers want to build an integrated, dynamic worldview and become an authentic lean, clean, living machine.

This will be the focus of my next series as we prepare to celebrate our double deliverance – both from the Egypt of this world and from the Egypt of the Pharaohs who wanted to keep us in slavery. We should never allow ourselves to become slaves, either to any ruler or system in this world, or to the corrupt, unintegrated, dubious values and beliefs of the world which is passing away.

We live for the world to come, daily and constantly, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Let's pray.