

16 Tevet (Jan. 3, 2006) *Discipleship: (4) Recycling our Renewal* J. M. Terrett

VAYECHI

AND HE LIVED

TORAH:

Gen. 47:28-50:26

HAFTARAH:

I K. 2:1-12

BRIT CHADASHAH:

I P. 1:1-9

PS. 41

Chazak, Chazak, v'Nitchazek

We live in a world where people don't want anyone or anything to "cramp" their style, and so long as they do not hurt anyone, self-fulfilment is often the same as self-indulgence. Increasingly, our society views any form of traditional or biblical spirituality as restrictive, following a regimented set of strict rules and being afraid to think for yourself or do what you really want to do. Societally acceptable religious people are **morally liberated souls** who are all into exploring every available spiritual option from every angle so they can avoid becoming part of that increasingly marginalized, narrow-minded group of fanatics called **fundamentalists** and **extremists**.

It is even getting to the point that if you were to tell people you actually believed in creation, not evolution and that you believe in the flood, and all the other miracles in the Bible, instead of being seen as good person with sincere religious convictions, both your sanity and your intelligence are questioned. In similar discussions, some people have really become exasperated with me (like that's hard to believe) and when they determine that neither my sanity nor my intelligence are seriously lacking, they figure that somehow I am brainwashed and am afraid to objectively consider the evidence. Biblical faith is increasingly seen as belief in the absence of evidence, like choosing one hockey team or one make of car over another.

Followers of biblical spirituality are increasingly seen as people trapped into a kind of restrictive religious lifestyle that has somehow survived the dark ages and from which they need to be liberated. Let me take it one step further, before I get into the meat of what it means to recycle our renewal. Many people feel that many religious leaders of biblical spirituality are either in it for the money or for the power or that they are **cynical charlatans** who are taking advantage of simple minded people, or using sophisticated mind control techniques to brain wash their people.

Well how do you answer such a **powerful indictment** of biblical spirituality? **Three ways**, and of course the third way will deal with **recycling our renewal** as a key feature of what **authentic** biblical discipleship is all about. First of all, I am also convinced that there are in fact any number **cynical charlatans** who knowingly use a variety of mind games to brain wash and control their people – the L-rd called them **false prophets** and **wolves in sheep's clothing**.

This is why I am very cautious when it comes to the sophisticated media hype that some television evangelists and super churches use – and no, I am not jealous or judgmental. I want to prove all things and hold fast to that which is true (I Thess. 5:21) and I want to search the scriptures daily to see whether what is being told to me is really there (Acts 17:11). In the end, each of us will give an account of ourselves before G-d, so what I am prepared to accept (usually because it is none of my business and after one or two exposures, I am not motivated to go any farther) I am not always prepared to approve, because I want to keep my own nose clean and mind my own business (I Tim. 5:22 and II Tim. 2:24-26).

Secondly, yes there are indeed people in churches and synagogues who may be afraid to think for themselves and would really like to let themselves go and give themselves up totally to self-indulgence, but they are either afraid of what people would think or they are afraid of going to hell. The Bible says that perfect love casts out fear and that if the sum total of our spirituality and discipleship is merely **containment**, where we channel our frustration and lack of fulfillment into loud worship, gossip or **sneaky debauchery**, then we have honestly become whited sepulchres. On the outside, we may do our best to appear clean cut and attractive, but inside, we are full of rot, decay, burning lusts, frustration and dead man's bones.

Neither **option one** (living under the mind control techniques of **cynical charlatans**), nor **option two (containment)** out of which we can only sneak for the occasional, **discrete debauchery** are really biblical options and have got nothing really to do with **recycling our renewal**, which is what sustained discipleship is really all about.

At B'nai Chayim, we aim for **total personal fulfilment** and understand that it must exist first in our **spirituality**, if it is ever to be real in the rest of our lives. We do not cramp our style; we develop our style by taking charge of one of the most fundamental principle of spirituality – our **dual nature** (Gen. 4:7, the old man and the new man, **YETZER HATOV -the drive to do good** and **YETZER HARA the drive to do evil**). We are also not afraid to consider the facts, or any evidence about the nature or meaning of reality. However, unless we have taken the time to personally prove our convictions, we are spiritual sitting ducks, waiting for either a **cynical charlatan** or a **sincere secularist** (or a member of any number of **sects and cults**) to overpower our feeble convictions and pull us away from our weak grasp of authentic biblical faith.

Let me do a quick review of the **basic biblical facts** which we need to grasp and then review how we come to terms with our **dual nature** and reach and maintain **maximum personal fulfilment through a dynamic biblical discipleship based spirituality** (that phrase is almost good enough for a slogan on a t-shirt). We do not believe that the cosmos (universe) came into being **accidentally**, nor do we believe that life is evolving in it to some **higher plane of existence** (give me a break, I've subbed in too many Junior High Schools and have seen White Avenue late at night on the weekend).

We believe that G-d created everything out of nothing, **simultaneously** – that every molecule in the universe is same age and that creation is degrading towards its eventual apocalyptic demise. We do not believe in chance (lucky thing) or in random selection as the evolutionary means whereby life developed into increasingly more complex, highly evolved beings of greater and greater intelligence and power. We believe that man is as he always was and that our planet is the unique globe upon which semi-intelligent life was created. Since there is no proof to the contrary, beyond convoluted and contradictory speculation by a silly bunch of techno-geeks whose fancy little tools and increased, limited understanding of the nature of reality makes them think that they have demolished the biblical worldview.

Yes secular humanists and material evolutionists have seriously undermined people's faith in biblical spirituality by developing **new categories of doubt** that are convincingly articulated accusations which have never been substantiated and **they are trying to gossip and discredit our faith, without actually engaging in an honest discussion about the answers they claim to reject**. They say things like: we feel, we think, we theorize, we believe that one day soon, we will begin to unravel the **mysteries of the universe – if we do not blow each other to pieces first or pollute the planet so severely that its depleted ecologically resources cause our complete extinction as a species**. All that modern technology has succeeded in doing on a spiritual level, is to bequeath to humanity a military/ecological game of technological Russian roulette in much the same way the Bible said it would happen (go figure).

Now we adhere to the biblical record as the only reasonable explanation for the nature and meaning of reality, and that brings me to how we come to terms with our dual nature and develop our **maximum personal and spiritual potential in a dark, corrupt materialistic spiritually bankrupt world** (another slogan worthy of a t-shirt, nu?). Since we believe we are part of a generational community of mankind which passes a more or less stable human nature to every generation on the planet, **we are not waiting for some evolutionary break through to help us rise above our mortal existence and become divine or at least super human**.

Instead we want to understand how to gain as much control over our spirituality as athletes gain over their bodies, so that our spiritual vitality will equip us with all the strength and energy to shine and be salty in a dark and tasteless world which is indulging and entertaining itself to death.

Morality is the self discipline side of spirituality which, rather than restricting or cramping our style, gives us a *spiritual six pack* so that we can channel all or our inner energies into producing the *fruit of the spirit* (**YETZER HATOV**) and not the *works of the flesh* (**YETZER HARA**). And biblical morality holds back no punches when it describes both the **battle for spiritual integrity** and the products of a successful or unsuccessful channelling of our basic drives and instincts.

Let me conclude with a series of verses which will describe how we can **recycle our spiritual renewal**, but in ways which you may find surprising. Matt. 18:7-9 speaks of cutting of a **hand** and a **foot**, or gouging out an **eye**, in order to prevent the whole body from being tossed into the flames of Gehenna. Yes, mishpocah, this is really rebbe Mike's formula for **recycling our renewal**, so I have brought some saws, and some medical tweezers and we will finish the service by cutting off and gouging out all of the parts of all of our bodies which are causing them to stumble. Who wants to go first? And some of you weren't sure if I was serious!

As a student of literature, I understand that the use of *figurative language* highlights a truth in a way that gets it by our defences. There is nothing wrong with any of your eyes, or feet or hands that a little bit of **self control** would not fix – you know those two dirty words **choices** and **habits**. *Discipleship establishes a set of disciplines in order to establish control and create enough energy and momentum for sustained spiritual fulfilment to occur.* My five-five-five series outlines a set of firm biblical spiritual disciplines which require an equal number of moral decisions, all based on the Ten Commandments. Our L-rd's forgiveness, which He also requires us to exercise as readily as he does, has one objective in mind – **holiness** which grows out of **healing** (cleansing) and **obedience**.

I cannot make you follow the biblical disciplines I have outlined in my system, and we cannot make you adopt a Messianic Jewish and Gentile lifestyle, which our constitution and our vision statement outline – that's your job.

On this the first shabbat of 2007, where we have dedicated the newest member of our community – and where we are preparing to welcome another bundle of joy, I want to challenge you to examine that **state of your biblical, spiritual discipleship.** Are you in danger of being assimilated into a secular lifestyle which believes in *maximum indulgence* and *evolutionary progress*? Is your head, is your heart, and is your life a reflection of your spirituality and of your morality? This is the reality or the lack of reality which we will pass on to our children's children and is the reason why a continent which still has a passively Christian majority is sinking into politically correct immorality while it marginalizes both the believes and the morals which it once held to and practiced.

We are in a **spiritual battle zone** which requires committed, trained and equipped disciples, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, if we are to continue to proclaim the truth of the Gospel to a darkening, increasingly hostile world. Are you **recycling your renewal** by the spiritual disciplines you exercise and the moral decisions you make? Or are you sinking into the sand of moral and spiritual assimilation, just because the world is loud and persistent and very **YETZER HARA** compatible?

Our heads and hearts and our homes need to be refuges where biblical truth and biblical spirituality are renewed as much, if not more than they are during our shul services. A few hours on a Shabbat cannot compensate for the other 160 odd hours you spend living the rest of your life – it can be a source of challenge and renewal which will equip you with the motivation and determination to continue to walk in the light during the new week which is to come. We want our services to be very **YETZER HATOV** compatible and very discipleship friendly.

What the L-rd meant about cutting off and gouging out really refers to **decisions** and **habits** where we cut off access to the objects and activities where our **YETZER HARA** would focus our desires, and where we establish firm links with the objects and activities where our **YETZER HATOV** knows our focus should be. **Are you going to be recycling your renewal in 2007?** Over the next few months, till Purim I am going to be highlighting the last two aspects of our congregational vision: celebration and repair. Let's pray.