

12 Tevet, 5772 (Jan. 7, 2012) *Community: Our Corporate Spiritual Identity* J. M. Terrett
The Heavenly Body of our Blessed Messiah

Vayechi And He Lived You Never Know How Things Will Turn Out

Torah: Gen. 47:28-50:26

(1) **48:22**. I give to you one portion more than I give to your brothers, of that which I took from the hands of the Amorites with my sword and my bow.

(2) **49:18**. I trust in your help, o YHVH

(3) **50:7**. Joseph went up to bury his father. All the servants of Pharaoh and the elders of his house and the elders of the country of Egypt went up with him.

(4) **50:17**. You shall speak thus to Joseph: O, forgive the crime of your brothers and their sin because they have done badly to you. Forgive now the sin of the servants of the G-d of your father.

Haftarah: I Ki. 2:1-12

(5) **2:2**. I am leaving by the way of all the earth. Strengthen yourself and be a man.

(6) **2:4**. In order that the L-RD would accomplish this word which He pronounced upon me – If your sons take head to their way, in walking in faithfulness before me, with all their heart and all their soul, you shall not lack a successor on the throne of Israel.

Brit Chadashah: I Pe. 1:1-9

(7) **1:7**. So that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold that though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and honour and glory when Yeshua HaMashiach is revealed.

Ps. 41 Chazak, Chazak, V'Nitchazek **Jewish hero: Joseph– he did not take revenge**

In this next series, I want to examine various aspects of our **corporate spiritual identity**, since, though we are saved individually, we are also saved into a corporate body, composed of every believer who has ever lived. We can never escape from the **group aspect** of our faith and I want to deal with this group aspect of our faith in at least ways: first our **current** group or community, then our **international, generational** community, then finally our **glorified, eternal community**.

All three aspects of our group identity are realities which exist **whether we realise them or not** and the **genuineness** and long term health of our spirituality depends on how well we are aware of these three aspects of our corporate identity. In other words, we need to be in a **positive relationship** to the three aspects of this group identity, no matter what else is going on in our lives or in the life of our community – or in the life of the greater national and international, generational community of believers.

When we read the Torah portion, I realise that we are examining the lives of believers who have preceded me in the faith and when I consider the history of our faith, both Jewish and Gentile, I also realise that I am examining the lives of the various kinds of believers throughout the ages who have had varying degrees of **genuineness** over the centuries and millennia. Finally, I am able to come to a full stop and rest in the realization that one day all believers will be set free from all the **limits** and **foibles** of their lives and be united in **permanent perfect harmony** with each other – so that nothing which is going on, which has already transpired or which may yet transpire is really permanent or finally real, **apart from this final state**.

So what is my job, when I come to realize the triple nature of my corporate identity? Let me work it through backwards for you on this the second Shabbat of 2012, as we come to the end of our annual examination of the book of Genesis and prepare to contemplate the majesty of the events of the Exodus – which will take us into the glory of our eventual Canadian spring!

In the final analysis, we all belong to the **heavenly body** of our **blessed Messiah** and once the glory and the folly of this life is over, we will find **rest** and **vindication** in our permanent position of perfect harmony with each other, which is the aspect of the body of our Messiah which I want to talk to you about this morning. In other words, it does not matter what happens to us during our pilgrimage, because we know **our final, peaceful, perfect destination**. Said another way, the only things which should matter to us in this life are those which would affect our place in the glorified body of our blessed Messiah.

I am not saying we should try and **earn** our place in His body, nor that we should **compete** for the best position in this heavenly reality – only that once we understand where we are heading and what is waiting for us, it puts an entirely different spin on how we **view** and **review** our lives.

In part, this is what our Messiah meant when He said that **the first shall be last and the last shall be first**. We may not get the recognition we feel we deserve as we battle through the twists and turns of this life, or we may receive all the recognition that this life has to offer as we rocket into first place ahead of the crowd. The only status or recognition we should build our lives around is the permanent one which will **endure** long after all the joys and fears of this life have disappeared.

Next we need to realize that we are part of an international, generational conspiracy to take over the world and that at various times in the history of our people, Jew and Gentile, we have seen such great **deliverances** and **victories**, along with some amazingly stupid **mistakes** and needless **defeats** and **setbacks**. When I pray for the progress of the Gospel worldwide and for the spiritual re-integration of the Jewish people back into our Messiah, I am actually taking refuge in the bigger picture, where I can see the **hand of G-d** working to bring people to faith over and above my local or even national situation.

He is active in every corner of the globe and though some of our brethren may do foolish things and suffer great setbacks, He is the L-rd who is working to make sure His will is done and that His purposes are fulfilled, which brings me to my last point – our local situation.

When we realize where we are going to end up and what is going on around the globe, then we can look at our own situation in a better perspective. We will always have a **triple corporate identity** and the one aspect of this identity over which we have the most control is the local group or body that we find ourselves in.

I remember a political quote from **To Kill a Mockingbird** which I want to use here – the objective for us in our local situation should be: **equal rights for everybody and special privileges for nobody**. I would always want to be accused of setting the highest standard and wanting my local situation to reflect my understanding of our eternal standing as much as is possible as well as our generational and international situation.

In other words, I want to set things up at B'nai Chayim so that the eternal and international, generational realities of our faith are also reflected in how we live out our local corporate identity. We were born into a family that stretches right back, twisting and winding to our **first mother and first father**. We are never alone and we should never try and isolate ourselves and ignore being an active part of a community.

Now over these next weeks, we will be looking at various aspects of this corporate spiritual identity, because things will not always be pretty and things have not always been done decently and in order over the generations, but ***the privilege and the obligation of learning to function in a local contingent of our corporate identity remains inescapably part of G-d's will for our lives*** – and the place He will keep bringing us back to until we are ***securely rooted and functioning in a local group***.

Finding our place in the body of our Messiah will always remain part of what it means to find our place in the Messiah Himself. At times, people may be even harder to get along with than we are and all too frequently the flock will both resemble the disorganized rabble that stumbled out of Egypt and then suddenly scatter to the hills at the first sign of trouble (every man for himself), but until we have settled in our hearts, minds and lives that ***we have to be in community***, our spirituality can neither be ***balanced*** or ***healthy*** in the long run.

I know people can be so hard to get along with and they will almost certainly let you down and even abuse, misuse and abandon you frequently, but they are family and we have to learn how to live with these people G-d has brought into our lives according to the ***stipulations*** of His Word. ***We remain rabble until we become a team and we turn back into rabble whenever we cease being a team.***

G-d will bless us individually in order that we can bring this blessing to the group we belong to – and He will bless the group we belong to in order that we might also be blessed. At times there will be ***fighting***, ***bickering*** and ***misunderstandings***, but instead of looking at these as if they were setbacks and distractions, we need to look at them as the ***raw material***, the ***homework*** which G-d has assigned to us so that ***our corporate spiritual identity can be in as good shape as our individual spiritual identity.***

It is going to be fun to spend the next few months looking at the various aspects of this ***tricky, elusive*** identity, so that we can really connect with ***the whole will of God for us*** – with the ***wholeness*** which G-d wishes for us both as individuals and as members of His corporate body.

We can take refuge in our membership in the eternal, glorified body of our blessed Messiah. We can even find comfort that we are part of an enterprise which is both international and generational and we can find comfort in the way the L-rd provides a local place for us to be planted in and to set down roots in amidst the toils, changes and troubles of this life.

He doesn't bring people into our lives to annoy us or for us to annoy, but so that we can take the power of our ***individuality*** and combine it with the power of His ***corporate community*** – when we blend into our corporate identity, we find ***strength*** and we find ***resources*** we never expected and we experience ***authentic growth*** and reach a level of ***spiritual genuineness*** which is not available in any other way.

Let me conclude by reading two key passages which describe features of our corporateness:

Heb. 12:18-24 (larger than this life) and Eph. 2:11-22 (indelible oneness without losing our individuality).

We are part of this glorious body. This glorious body exists both internationally and generationally. Finally it also exists in our midst. We are going to look at how we can bring all aspects of this identity into our lives in all its richness, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Let's pray.