

Dynamic Spiritual Martial Arts

The Breastplate of Righteousness

Devarim **Words** **Can You Handle the Truth?**

Torah: Deut. 1:1-3:22

(1) 1:11. Moses' prayer that G-d would increase Israel a thousand times more

(2) 1:22. Sending in the spies was the people's idea

(3) 1:45. After they were defeated when they had initially refused to go in, He did not give ear to their weeping, because they only wanted to avoid the wandering (obedience was their second, default choice),

(4) 2:1. They did laps around Mount Seir and spend 38 years before they came back to Kadesh Barnea, in order to go around Edom, and Moab/Ammon. – They went round and round the mulberry bush (2:14 – 38 years, two more years till the plains of Moab and the crossing – took them two years to conquer the kingdoms of Sihon and Og and for the 2 and ½ tribes to get settled in.)

Haftarah: Is. 1:1-27

(5) 1:25 – spiritual detoxification through self imposed (inflicted) tribulation – He will remove the lead from their gold.

(6) 1:26 – the objective of divine punitiveness is restoration, to wean us away from rebelliousness.

Brit Chadashah: Acts 7:51-8:4

(7) 1:58. The witnesses left their coats with Saul and murdered Stephen, but he did not say anything but the truth – and the vision he had was kosher and biblical. Saul was a leader among the early opponents of the Gospel and his repentance is a model for those of who are too thick to initially get the message.

Black Sabbath: (Erev Tisha B'Av) Psalm: 137. Jewish Hero: Prophets

After the final siege was set (9th of Tevet) and the walls were breached (18th of Tammuz), it was only a matter of time before the temple fell and we weep, because it happened twice. We do not weep because of divine retribution, we weep because of the degree of destruction which our own folly causes us in our own lives and in the lives of all the nations and generations of mankind. We live in a fallen world, but we do not have to live fallen lives since sin only has a three or four generation shelf life, but His mercy lasts to a thousand shelf life.

We cannot blame G-d for any of the violence and destruction which we have heaped upon each other since Cain slew Abel, we can only weep because we do not learn our lesson and keep on self destructing. Once our lives are ruined and as the survivors gather by the rivers of Babylon, we need to remember why it is we reached the low point and begin the process of repentance and healing.

We do this, not only so that we are restored, but also so that we do not have to see this kind of punitive tragedy re-occur again and again – because it will, generation by generation until His purposes are fulfilled and He has gathered the righteous core of the last generation and His kingdom finally comes. Today, let us weep for the surging international tide of iniquity, which is undermining our world and once again filling it with violence and paganism – and for the divine retribution which is on its way for one last time. Now it is time for my sermon.

Gen. 4:7 says sin is crouching at our door and the illustration of a breastplate of righteousness indicates that just as we have a personal relationship with G-d by faith through His Word, so we also have a personal relationship with our sinful flesh, that we either **succeed** in winning control over, or that succeeds in winning control over us through the two means by which we live – through our **attitudes** and our **habits**.

Any area of our lives, any attitudes or habits of our lives, which are not under the control of His Word, so that we **slam the door in the face of sin**, instead of welcoming it into our hearts and lives, is a **breach of our breastplate** and a **weak spot** through which the enemy can infiltrate and defeat us repeatedly, until (and unless), we **plug the hole** and **regain control** over the **attitude(s)** and **habit(s)** that allow sin to be victorious in our personal lives.

There are three things I would like to discuss with you briefly this morning, as we prepare to observe Tisha B'Av and they relate to the reason why this disaster was allowed to happen. It relates to **sowing** and to **reaping**. Both temples were destroyed because of the **rebelliousness** of G-d's people and never because they ever encountered an adversary capable of conquering them and enslaving them – and this is still true today. G-d will always love Israel and this love will determine how He relates to His people.

When we walk with Him, He will bless us. When we **cease** to walk with Him, He will **rebuke** us and even allow our enemies to dominate over us, until we **repent** and **return** to the place where He once again rules over all the **kingdoms of all of our hearts**, or until our children do, or until our children's children do.

This will happen for however long it takes to bring both individual people and the entire nation of Israel back to a place of acknowledging His **sovereignty** and **growing back out of the damage and loss until we once again are a well watered garden, pruned and weeded, bearing fruit unto an hundredfold**. Am Yisrael Chai!

Let us examine these three things. **First, what does it mean to have a sinful nature? Second, how do we gain control over areas where sinfulness rules?** And finally, **third, what do we do in the interim, until control is regained?**

The call of G-d has always been: **If you will hear my voice and choose this day whom you will serve**. We are **born to choose** and we all possess a **double spiritual nature** in the same physical temple of our bodies. There is first **the inner man of our understanding**, where G-d has written His **law** and where the **image of our Creator** has been **stamped**.

It is this part of us which is **renewed** and becomes **born again** when we accept the L-rd into our hearts so that He can both **repair** the **image** of our Creator and also **return** His **Law** to its rightful place of being the **central motivation** which drives the choices of our lives (the **attitudes** and **habits** we live by).

The other spiritual nature has been called the **flesh**, even though it is **not physical**, because our physical bodies are **neutral** and **there is no part of our bodies and no member of our bodies which is evil in and of itself.** Our fleshly nature is more like a bundle of **drives** and **desires** which want satisfaction and do not factor in any form of **morality** or **control** in either the **stimulation** of the **satisfaction** of these drives.

In the animal kingdom, these drives are **controlled by instinct** and are frequently regulated by the seasons which animals live in harmony with. It is this part of our inner man which we are called to **crucify** so that our drives are kept under the control of **attitudes** and **habits** which reflect our voluntary obedience to the teachings of His Word through His Law – the spiritual instinct we are called to build and to live in harmony with.

Rather than go through a list of **specific** attitudes and habits which these two competing natures will clash to gain control over, let me guide you to **Gal. 5:17-22** and **I Cor. 9:24-27** (this last one in honour of the Olympics which have just begun). **Anything, any choice or any habit or attitude which allows the works of the flesh to displace the fruit of the spirit, is the work of the fallen, sinful nature, which is carving holes in our personal breastplate and allowing some of all of our lives to fall under the power of the evil one.**

We were born to choose and we will always have a choice between at least **two directions** – towards His **Law** (His grace and His Word) or towards the **gratification of drives and urges** that ceaselessly cry out for **the satisfaction they can never provide us with** (Pr. 27:7 and I John 2:15, 16). What direction are you choosing in all and any of the attitudes and habits of your life?

My second point relates to **regaining control** over those areas of our lives where sinfulness has gained a foothold and for this, I take you to a passage from today's Haftarah portion: **Is. 1:16-20**. Verses 16 and 17 outlines **eight action verbs** (wash, remove, cease, learn, seek, protect, do, defend) which summarize both defensive and offensive spirituality.

These are followed by a call to plead and reason with the L-rd, followed by **five if's** in verses 18-20 (if you sins are scarlet or purple, they shall be white; if you are docile and willing you shall eat the best products of the land and if you resist, you shall be consumed by the sword).

This passage teaches us that we must **first** reason with the L-rd, then we **stop** doing what we should not be doing and we **start** doing what we ought to be doing and through it all, we **repair** the damage of sin and rebuild both our **attitudes** and our **habits**, so that **the personal righteousness of the choices we make** represents the bulk of the **heart baggage** we carry with us through this life, on our way through the valleys and over the mountains, on our way from the cradle to the grave and beyond this life to our Father's home in glory, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Finally, what do we do in the interim, while parts of our lives may still either be under the influence of sinfulness, or have been so **damaged** and **stained** by sinfulness that they are out of commission? Heb. 12:13 and Heb. 4:16 and I Cor. 9:23-27 – **we go into training** and **serve the L-rd through the areas where His Law is in control, while we struggle and wrestle with areas that are out of His control**, making sure that we are walking **towards** Him and placing ourselves **in His ways** and not moving away from Him.

We do this so that the **walls of our personal city** are being **rebuilt** and not **demolished** or **repeatedly breached** – and so that the enemy of our souls is given **less and less access to our hearts**, as we **recover** and learn the **control** which the L-rd wants to teach us – **so that we crucify our flesh and we are not crucified by our flesh.**

Are there any areas of your life which are out of His control?

Are there any holes in your breastplate, where wrath, lust, lies, hatred, fear and unforgiveness are ravaging your inner life and creating disturbances in your outer life?

We need to **identify them**, learn how to **regain lost territory** and then we need to learn how to **repair** and **rebuild**, so that we can become **successful soldiers** and **medal winners** in this life as we prepare for the next life.

How are you dealing with your **sinful nature** (your drives and urges)?

How are you relating to your **inner man** (where His Law and His image reside)?

Are there **breaches** in your personal choosing which need to be recaptured and crucified?

As the process of **healing** and **re-conquest** occur, are you still serving Him in the areas of your life which are not damaged, so that His control **increases** and your control does not decrease?

Tisha B'Av and **Black Sabbath** are **sad reality checks** for us to learn from so that our lives are not destroyed or so that if they are destroyed, we allow Him to **spiritually detoxify** us from the habits and attitudes which caused our walls to be breached and our lives to be ravaged. We first **plead** with Him and be cleansed and washed, then we need to allow Him to **rebuild** (or to build) the attitudes and habits of His Law and His image, so that they become the **driving force of our rebuilding**, whether we need a little work or a major renovation.

This facility was nearly destroyed by a minor flaw which created a major problem. Be careful that untreated attitudes and habits do not cause major damage in your life – but even if they do, take the time and make the effort to rebuild and renovate to both repair the damage and to make sure it does not keep happening again and again.

Let's pray