

What Happens When People Discover That We Are Not Perfect?

Torah: Exod. 19:1-20:23; Num. 28:26-31; Deut. 14:22-16:17

Haftarah: Ezek. 1:1-28; 3:12; Ruth 1:1-4:22; Hab. 2:20-3:19

Brit Chadashah: Acts 2:1-21, 37-41 (L); Jn. 1:32-44; Matt. 3:11-17 (F)

Shavuot is the second Pilgrimage Festival (Sheloshim Regalim) and is sometimes called Atzeret (conclusion) in the Talmud, because it concludes the Spring Season of festivals which began with Pesach.

All the feasts of Israel were Harvest Feasts, and they were times for the people to gather together unto the L-rd and celebrate His provision. They were to bring their tithes before the L-rd for the Levites, and once every three years, for the strangers, the widows and the orphans. The first two pilgrimage festivals occurred right after the grain harvests: Barley (Pesach) and Wheat (Shavuot). The last pilgrimage festival (Sukkot) came after the last grain harvest, and when all the other crops had ripened.

Shavuot has come to mean more than just a Harvest Festival, and, we see two major events which occurred at this season: The giving of the Law and the Spirit. In fact, while I was preparing for this message, I was able to trace seven celebrations of Shavuot in the Scripture, and they were all times of transition for the people of G-d.

Without trying to spiritualize too much, our lives in the L-rd can be marked with **three seasons of transition** which are reflected in the pilgrimage festivals. Pesach is a festival of **deliverance**, which celebrates what the L-rd did to bring us to Him, both His redemptive interventions such as the Exodus and Calvary, and also His personal interventions which drew us to Him - and which continue to draw us to Him.

Shavuot is a time of spiritual **accounting**, when we are brought to the Word and empowered with the Spirit, so that we can order our lives according to the spiritual standards which G-d wishes to hold us accountable to. At Sinai and in the Upper Room, G-d calls us to action and equips us with His agenda, so that we can become instruments He can use to accomplish His purposes in our lives and in the lives of our generation.

Sukkot is **judgment**, the end of the Harvest year, the last pilgrimage, where the full measure of what has grown in our lives ripens and is harvested. It is also the **last Harvest for all mankind**, when all the lives which have ever lived are evaluated. Our lives have a beginning and an end, and our life on earth is but a pilgrimage from the cradle to the grave.

The Harvest Festivals can be used as reminders of the spiritual transitions which G-d wishes to bring us through, so that our pilgrimage will bear the fruit He has planted in our lives. In fact, I would like to use the Harvest Festivals, and especially Shavuot, as reminders that, when we respond to the spiritual transitions which G-d brings to our lives, our lives become a story about His redemptive intervention in our lives, and as such are light and salt.

Shavuot is like a **spiritual adolescence**, where the L-rd takes what He has redeemed, and renews it, changes it and gives it focus and purpose. He delivered Israel so that the Jews would become His people, a community of worship and service, and the giving of the Law, outlines how He wants His people to serve Him. And here I clearly distinguish between the Ten Words, which are the spiritual principles which He wants all of the people He has redeemed to live by, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, and the rituals and sacrifices which allowed Israel to function as a **prophetic vehicle** to lead all mankind to our glorious Messiah.

He poured out His Spirit in the upper room, so that His people, and all peoples, could have access to all the spiritual empowering necessary to celebrate the reality of what He accomplished on the cross. The tabernacle and the temple and even the cycle of festivals which we still celebrate, are symbolic reminders of the redemptive purposes of G-d. The pouring out of the Spirit was to bring the reality of Redemption home to each of us and to all of us, generation by generation, until the final harvest.

Our hearts become a spiritual tabernacle, and our lives offer sacrifices of praise and service, as we personally apply His Word to our lives, **which is what the Spirit is all about**. The gifts and the fruit, are means by which the truth and power of His Word become realities in our lives, on our pilgrimage home. *The symbols become personal realities* as we learn righteousness, and we decorate our lives with holiness and the gifts, so that we can become living sacrifices, transformed, and accomplishing His will for our lives.

The Ten Words remain His will for our lives, and everything else that happens to us needs to become the raw materials with which we build our obedience, our house of praise that will one day be judged, and truly revealed when we all stand before Him at the Final Harvest. I am not trying to scare you and get you to run around and get your lives in shape for a sudden end of the world.

I want to take it one step further. A truly spiritual approach to the end of the world understands that one day our personal world will end, and that there is another life waiting for us when the whole world ends. So, we need to get scared, and stop running around, and start getting our life into spiritual shape, and doing whatever we have to do to keep it in shape, because this is the whole will of G-d for the people He has redeemed.

He did not save us to make us feel better, or to give us a more interesting life, full of power, riches and knowledge. He saved us to bring us to the place where we want to change, and want to be transformed so that His Word becomes our Word, where His Word becomes the set of principles upon which we build our lives. He saved us to bring us to Sinai and into the Upper Room.

He saved us so that we could move from slavery into service, so that we could build our lives into beacons of His light, to draw all mankind into His coming Kingdom. Not by preaching at them until they hide under the bed to avoid us, but by building His Word so much into our lives, that people ask us what is happening, and why we are so different, so real, so spiritual - so filled

with purpose and definitely so weird (I Peter 3:15).

He wants our lives to become expressions of His **Redemptive purposes** and there are three, each of which is reflected in one of the Pilgrim Festivals, and I will close with this. First He wants to save us from the Egypt of this world - from the false spiritual agenda of a world that does not function according to the spiritual principles He has established to cause mankind to flourish, and become so fulfilled that Maslow's self-actualization gets jealous.

Then He wants to bring us out of the confusion He found us in and teach us these principles in two groups. He wants us to understand the truth about Him and what He has done (Creation, the Flood, Babel, Exodus, Sinai, Canaan, the Captivity, the Cross, the Upper Room), and then He wants to teach about the truth He wants to accomplish in us - the Ten (His fruit and the gifts in action). He wants us to want to be holy. He wants us to willing to do whatever we have to do to be holy, through all the shadowy valleys we may have to cross on our pilgrimage to our Father's House.

Then He wants us to understand that this life is not about us, and is really not our life. He wants us to learn to live for the life that is to come. Not pie in the sky when you die, but an understanding that this life is not all there is. There is more to come, and unless we build our lives, and live our lives with this reality clearly in sight, we are **spiritually insane**, and are running headlong (minute by minute, year by year) into the greatest disaster imaginable - a final judgment (cosmic finals) for which we are not prepared, and which will determine how we will spend eternity, forever and ever amen.

For us this morning, Shavuot is the key. Pesach, our deliverance, is His doing. Sukkot, the Final Judgment will be His doing. **Our spirituality is our doing.** So is how we decide to apply the Ten Words in our lives. So is what fruit we are growing in our lives, and which gifts we are allowing to operate in our lives. The spiritual direction and purpose of our lives is our gift to Him, and is the basis upon which all mankind, including us, will be judged.

No wonder the mountain shook. No wonder the people were terrified at the voice which spoke the Ten Words. **Who we are spiritually is the only reality which matters**, because it is the only reality which will one day become permanent. I wish you success in every area of your life, but all the events and successes (and failures) we encounter along the way are not important, and have no real significance. Only our spirituality does.

How is your spirituality doing today? How is your spirituality doing at this juncture, this particular stage of your pilgrimage? What is the focus of your spiritual life? What is growing in you? What is dying in you? **What is G-d doing in you? What are you doing in G-d?** I think we need a little shaking, so that the Ten become more solid, so that the house we are building is founded on the rock, and not on the sand.

The great spiritual tragedy of our generation and of our society, is the lack of reality in what we are building and living for. We have sold our biblical heritage for a potage of materialism, and political correctness while we entertain ourselves to death, and slide over the edge into eternity,

entirely unprepared for the final judgment which waits for each and everyone one of us.

Let me summarize and challenge you, before we get ourselves ready for the Oneg.

Pilgrimage Festival One: Pesach - Redemption. Have you been redeemed? Has He become your personal saviour to come into your life and make your heart a spiritual temple where His presence can dwell?

Pilgrimage Festival Two: Shavuot - Spirituality. What are you living for? What's happening in your life, spiritually. What are you building? Are you studying for your cosmic final, or are you wasting your time, building a bonfire that G-d will light when your pilgrimage is over?

Pilgrimage Festival Three: Sukkot. You all gonna die, sooner or later. The sooner you come to terms with it, the better you can prepare your life for the one that is to come. Are you running away from eternity? Are you in **eternal denial**? Are you **spiritually insane**? Are you living for judgment day, every day, and in every issue and circumstance and valley of your life?

Deliverance, Spirituality and Judgment. Three realities we celebrate in the festival observances we follow at B'nai Chayim. Join us, not just at the Oneg, but in the realities we cherish and which express who we are, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Let's pray.