

5 Nisan, 5767 (Mar. 24, 2007) *The Repair Shop (4) Preventative Maintenance* J. M. Terrett

Vayikra                      And He Called  
 Torah:                        **Lev. 1:1-6:7**  
 Haftarah:                  **Is. 43:21-44:23**  
 Brit Chadashah:         **Heb. 10:1-18**

Before the season of Missionsfest and my foray down to Camrose, I was finishing a series on our congregational vision statement and I want to complete the last instalment before I take you through my Pesach mini-series. Next week is Shabbat HaGadol, followed by Shabbat Pesach VII (Chol HaMoed) and the Sabbath preceding Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Memorial Day). It is always an exciting time of the year where our remembrances of the Past focus our attention on the coming Kingdom and on our need to stand with integrity in dynamic tension between the two. I will speak more about this next week.

Today I want to complete my series on our Vision Statement and talk to you about how we are called to function as a Repair Shop which not only deals with damages but which also performs **preventative maintenance**. I define preventative maintenance as both dealing with the normal wear and tear which our spiritual lives encounter, and also reminding us about the limits of our personal and congregational equipment.

We regularly receive any number of requests for help from a variety of valid ministries which have nothing to do with our **community mandate (vision)** and which we would be unwise to participate in. Every year at Missionsfest, I am reminded of the scope of ministries which reach out with the Gospel in the most amazing and creative ways imaginable. My heart has always leaned towards training and education and every year when I see so many fine colleges recruiting young people, I have to remind myself that we are not called to do everything, nor are we called to be everything to everyone.

That is part of what Paul meant when he distinguished between **goodness** and **kindness** in his discussion of the fruit of the Spirit. **Goodness** is what you do, within the scope of your mandate and your resources. **Kindness** is the success you wish and prayer support you extend to those endeavours which lie outside of your mandate and beyond your resources. Some people are called to the far corners of the world, and some people are called to professions which heal, feed, service and even protect our society. Are you functioning within your calling, or outside your mandate?

I am not jealous of other people's callings and I constantly need to remind myself that my **best effort** and my **primary resources** belong to the fulfillment of my own calling. You see, I love doing marriage counselling and I love teaching in a variety of contexts, but I am called to build this Messianic community of Jews and Gentiles and help each of us and all of us to **develop** and **maintain** our full potential. If we try too hard to be all things to all people, we may end up being nothing to everyone (Prov. 25:14 wind and clouds with no rain).

We need to pray for a solid core of **committed, focused, and balanced** families at B'nai Chayim, so that whatever we are going through individually, our **corporate direction** will produce the **spiritual momentum** we need to fulfill our mandate. Because of the nature of our ministry mandate, there will always be a high degree of turnover in the congregation. Some people need our **prophetic intervention**, while others need to be trained in **effective discipleship**. Other people need to learn **freedom and focus** in worship, while others have **wounds** that need healing, and then they move on. Others find their place in our midst and send down roots.

This morning I would like to speak to our "lifers", whose call to the Messianic Movement needs some special attention in at least two areas, if not three. I have always wanted to preach a whole sermon on **Prov. 22:3** because there is always a big difference between **cowardness** and **caution** and a need does not necessarily constitute a call.

How effective are you in recognizing and protecting your limits? Some of us need regular reminders so that we stay where we belong and do not head back to the **temporary safety** of Egypt, when problems multiply and our resource base is diminished. Others of us need to leave the **security** of Ur or the **stability** of Babylon and head for the Promised Land, even if it means building from **scratch**, or rebuilding on the ruins of past failures. Five years ago, my family supported me in a decision to pioneer a Messianic Jewish Congregation with a more or less stable, growing and shrinking support base. There were many other things I could have done.

At times I have been discouraged, tired, frustrated and even angry and occasionally, if the L-rd permitted it, I would have pulled up my stakes and made Aliyah to Safed, even if I had to live on a park bench. You see, ministry does not relieve you of the need to **constantly** deal with personal issues, along with the congregational concerns of a very specialized calling. When I was teaching, and students felt overwhelmed, I told them I could not skip school and now, as a rebbe, I cannot skip shul, even if I have more on my plate than I want to handle. How about you?

**Preventative maintenance** means learning how to pace yourself and prioritize your involvements so that two extremes are avoided: **Prov. 25:16** and **Prov. 27:7**. Sometimes, even in ministry there are dry periods which make Joseph's seven famine look like a picnic and other times when so many things are happening you feel like you are crossing the sea of Reeds and climbing the holy mountain at the same time. Maintaining **balance** in our focus is one of the most important features of preventative maintenance. How is your focus and how balanced is your focus?

What is going on in your life is only **where** you are and not either **who** you are or the **destination** (direction) of your calling. As Messianic Jewish and Gentile believers, we are all called to holiness and to observing the festival cycle, from the cradle to the grave. Part of this holiness involves being a salty light which smells of redemption and which faces life's challenges with both integrity and perseverance- **where we bring our calling to the changing circumstances of our lives**, rather than trying to climb every mountain or put out every fire. It is too easy to become distracted, choked and overwhelmed on our journey to our Father's Home. How about you?

Once we are committed to **exploring** and **developing** our calling – and to protecting it from **explosion** and from **implosion**, we need to deal with the personal spiritual nitty-gritty we all bring with us when we leave Egypt, or return from Babylon. **1 Tim. 5:22** is an interesting verse which speaks of two pit falls believers can fall into and which is the second feature of my address to our "lifers". Sometimes people are placed in positions of leadership **before** they are ready to handle them, and crash and burn because they have not developed an adequate skills base, even though they have all the necessary ability or talent for the job at hand.

We need to understand the difference between ability and skill and here I will talk about the weird and wonderful world of computer technology. The first computer I saw with my own eyes was about as big as a living room couch and could only perform a limited number of functions. Against my will, I have had to learn new skills, as the technology has developed. I will only ever have a limited **ability** to handle those demons possessed, anti-Semitic bullies, but within that limitation, this old dog can learn new tricks (skills) and keep pace with what is out there.

However, many times my skill set will not be up to the challenge and I will need help and I know for an absolute certainty I am not called to a career in computers and **only want to handle new challenges within the limits of my ability**. Are you moving too fast? Do you know the difference between your **skill** set and your natural **ability**?

When we encounter a situation which is beyond our ability, we know that, as a community, G-d will always provide us with both an adequate skill set and other people whose ability can accomplish the tasks which will forever lie beyond our ability. When neither the skill set, nor the ability are there, we need to learn to wait until the L-rd provides – which is probably one of the greatest life lessons my recent study of the Patriarchs has shown me – they spent most of their lives waiting with varying degrees of patience. How's your patience doing?

The second part of the verse deals with not being sucked in to another's sins and I want to finish with this, as we prepare for our monthly celebration of the L-rd's Table. Part of getting to know one another and part of the welcoming feature we need to exercise as newcomers test the waters of our community, has to do with learning to live with **differences** and to correct **flaws**. My understanding of what it means to participate in another's sins has to do with not putting my head in the fire, just because someone else is doing it.

However, everybody sees things differently and everybody does things differently. Differences are not wrong, nor are they right. Part of what the Hebrew term *Halacha* means is the responsibility we have as believers to apply the Bible to our lives without either **slipping into legalism** or **falling into compromise**. Freedom and responsibility need to be the dual features of any contextualizing we do in the life of our community and with each other.

Sometimes people will do things which are an **open violation** of biblical spirituality and can exert considerable pressure on us to both **accept** their behaviour and **participate** in it with them. I am not thinking of anything in particular. I am thinking about a principle we need to learn to adhere to. Whatever I do and whatever you do needs to be the **product of personal conviction** based on sound biblical teaching. Sometimes this means learning to exercise a greater degree of mature freedom and sometimes it means exercising a greater degree of mature abstinence.

The application of this principle relates to such minor things as clothing style and musical preference and to such major areas as substance abuse and sexual immorality; with lying, cheating, gossiping and coveting (jealousy) appearing somewhere in between.

Three final comments and I will close. First, we are called to keep our own nose clean and our own pants buttoned – which means **we should never use anyone else's negative example as an excuse for our own disobedience to the dictates of our own conscience.**

Secondly we need to be careful about judging each other's freedom, and about elevating our personal preferences to the level of correctable standards we try and force on others. I personally think that video games are a colossal waste of time, money and energy and that Brussels sprouts and Turnips aren't really kosher. However these are personal preferences and not community or biblical standards. As long as behaviour is not a clear violation of the Ten Commandments or of community standards, then I better not condemn the innocent because they do not do things my way, to the rebbe and also to the flock, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Lastly, whatever discipline or redemptive slack we choose to exercise as we are helping people to both heal and to grow spirituality, is not a lowering or a raising of our congregational standards, but may be part of the **preventative maintenance** we need to exercise in response to our congregational vision/mandate. We all need the occasional oil change and sometimes our tires wear out and have to be replaced. Helping people through situations may require creative, temporary solutions which are designed help them come up to a level of acceptable behaviour.

Sometimes all of us will get in over our heads and sometimes all of us will encounter situations which will stretch our endurance to the limit. If we know this is part of what it means to walk with the L-rd as a community and we anticipate having to all spend "shop time", then we will be part of the solution and not part of the problem. We have a four fold vision which both defines and limits our ministry as a Messianic Jewish congregation of Jews and Gentiles. How we implement this vision will always need **constant revision** and frequently we will all need to some **periodic maintenance** so we do not wear out prematurely or break down unnecessarily. How are you doing? No, really, how are you doing?

We want to be a dynamic community of people pulling together behind our vision and our mandate, whether we are on the front lines or whether we are recovering from battle fatigue within the safety of a team which watches out for us as much as we watch out for each other. How is your **team participation** – both on the bench and on the field? Let's pray.