

25 Adar 1, 5765 (March 5, 2005) *Against All Odds: Harvesting the Stubborn Spirit* J. M. Terrett
(7) *Listening To Polonius, Even If He Doesn't. It Really is All About You, For Now.*

Vayakhel **And He Assembled** **Meditation: Welcoming the Presence**

Torah:

Exodus 35:1-38:30 Four Verses:

(Folk art: all made from Egyptian loot, plus every day items)
35:21 willingly, moved, able – only way to welcome Presence
35:21 G-d's Spirit inspires us & gives us wisdom in practical tasks
36:31 the tabernacle formed a composite unity: "ECHAD"
37:7 two golden cherubim facing the kaperot (Mercy Seat)

Haftarah:

I King 7:13-26 (S) 40-50 (A) Two verses:

7:21 (*Jakin* [he shall make firm] and *Boaz* [in him the strength]) (S)
7:49 menorot, 5 to the right (*jamina*), 5 to the left (*smola*) = 70

Brit Chadashah:

Heb. 9:1-11 (L & F) One Verse:

9:11 High Priest of good things to come, bigger/more perfect

We are being built into an habitation of this same Presence by: the gold of His Word, the Silver of His Spirit and the precious jewels of the fruit and the gifts of the Spirit – along with all of our natural giftings, talents and natural, folk art, abilities. How are you welcoming the Presence into your life this Shabbat? Let us become like the Wise Men who brought gifts to the baby Messiah, so that our lives can be built into a suitable dwelling place for His presence – so that He is not exchanging on stable for another.

Sermon: As we come to the end of the second Winter Series, I wanted to challenge us with one of the most spiritual statements Shakespeare ever made. In Hamlet, one of the King's counsellors, Polonius, is giving his son some advice, which Hamlet overhears: "And this above all else, to thine own self be true". In our Parable there are four kinds of soil, but only one kind which is being spiritually true to itself and which the L-rd calls: "Good Soil". He says that this soil represents those who, when they hear the Word, keep (observe) it and with a good and honest heart, bring forth fruit with perseverance.

How does Shakespeare relate to this Parable? *Unless you are true to yourself, you cannot be true to G-d or to anyone else.* But what does it mean to be true to yourself? Well, first of all, it means not to be untrue to yourself. That is, not to tell yourself lies and not to fill your understanding of who you are and of what you can do with anything less than the truth. Well, let me pretend that I am Roman for a minute, and with Pilate, ask the obvious, what is truth? Well, the answer is not as complicated as it first seems, at least not in the words of our L-rd, who calls us to persevere in having a good and honest heart. The truth is in the responses of this heart.

But doesn't the prophet Jeremiah warn us that the heart is evil above all else and desperately wicked, and a curse to all who trust in it (Jer. 17:9)? Yes and no, because you have to finish the passage, which says that the L-rd tries and knows the hearts of everyone, in order to render to each one according to their deeds. Yeshua echoes these words, because He is coming to render to each according to their deeds. Which deeds? **The heart responses and life choices we make.** Solomon wades into the debate by saying that we should cherish our heart above all things, because from it proceed the sources of life (Prov. 4:23). Can we say that our heart only becomes a curse when it is neither good, nor honest and when it lacks perseverance to make good choices?

Like Hamlet, we all have great challenges to face as we move through the valley of this life towards our Father's Forever Home. From the Parable of the Sower, we learn that there are four kinds of reactions to the Word of our L-rd. Some doubt, some succumb to temptation and some are choked (sidetracked) by the fears, the pleasures and the riches of this life. Some persevere in honesty and are spiritually fruitful. Where are you in your reaction to G-d's Word? This morning, I want to talk to you about being true to yourself, without becoming evil and desperately wicked, so that your heart can be a source of life, by being good and honest, and that takes perseverance.

I have always had trouble with the doctrine of original sin, because, too often it has been used by believers to both justify their own sinful behaviour and to condemn the innocent behaviour of people in the world. We are born to choose, not to loose and we have His image in our hearts from birth. We either spend our lives trying to discover the meaning of life – which is the spiritual homing device, His image in our hearts, or we think that our desires, our pleasures are the true purpose of life. Many people in the world are struggling to find this meaning of life.

Like them, we may listen to the deepest longings of our heart and launch out on the quest for personal meaning and purpose, which will draw us to the light of His Word and to the reality of His Kingdom. We may also spend our lives wasting our inner energy on the million and one rabbit trials which our heart, our world and the adversary of our souls would continually place before us, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We need to eat, we need to breathe, and we need clothing, but just how extensive are we going to make the list? Prov. 27:20 says that hell and destruction are never full, so the eyes of man are never satisfied – what will it take to make you satisfied? What are you being true to?

We are only given so much time and so much energy, before our lives are over and we have to give an accounting of our deeds to the Lord and Master of the entire universe. Now this does not mean that we should try and turn our lives into neat little packages of sugar sweet success, where, since we live in the best of all possible worlds, we will never know failure, defeat or even captivity. Success in G-d's Kingdom is measured on a different scale (that which is exalted among men is an abomination before G-d, Luke 16:15) and **it is often how we function through adversity which determines the spiritual success of our lives, not how many toys we finish with.**

I do not like to get too mystical when it comes to understanding our spirituality. In my short life, I have found a tendency among some believers to assign spiritual significance to things which are insignificant (the static and natural resistance of life - sometimes a flat tire is just a flat tire) and to miss the really important issues (Matt 23:23). Having said that, let me try and deal with one of the greatest mysteries of life, the one which I believe Shakespeare and Jeremiah and also our L-rd deal with, and I want to do this backwards, just before I dismiss you so you can continue your spiritual renewal for another Shabbat. How do you find the meaning of your life and be true to it?

We all have to face doubts and temptations, personal times of wilderness temptations where we face down our adversary and learn to get a grip on our deceitful and desperately wicked heart – our very own perpetual spin doctor. **Whatever happens to us in this life only has meaning when we rise above the cares and the riches and the pleasures of this life and consider the kingdom meaning and the kingdom obedience G-d has equipped each and every event of our lives with.** You see, we all need a degree of the anal retentive, because our own personal world has to revolve around us and our needs, because we cannot do everything and we cannot go everywhere.

But, we will all be judged on our deeds, on our personal responses, **and not on the events of our lives which we have responded to.** **What we chose to do and how we chose to respond is the most important reality of our lives and the only one which matters to the King before whose presence we will one day have to appear.** So, my messianic Hamlets, how true are we being to "thine own selves"? Is this being true above all else in our lives, or just when we get around to it?

Are you choked, full of doubt, driven by desires which prevent you from sending down roots into His Word? *Are you being deceived and allowing your heart to turn your life into a desperately wicked spiritual soap opera of sin, excuses and compromises?* In my understanding of Hamlet, the jury is still out on whether he did the right thing, but at least he tried and he made his life about a mission. I don't think we ought to join him in personal quests of vengeance, like so many Corlioni dons, and assassinate all the wicked people in our lives. It is a nice thought, though.

We are not of that spirit, and yet we are called to stand up for righteousness and justice and not to become like Hamlet's mother who is so lacking in discernment that she marries her husband's murderer. But here is the difference, and I want to emphasize this. *Instead of listening to the ghost of a murdered king, and get all bent out of shape, we need to listen to the Spirit of the resurrected King, who has very distinct priorities and precise objectives for our lives.* When we consider the *simple majesty* of the Ten Commandments, and the *awesome power* of the Shema and the *incredible challenge* of the Beatitudes we don't have time to set lesser goals for our lives.

There is no magic formula for us to follow in order to find G-d's individual will for our lives, because, in His scheme of things, we are actors, and He is the writer, but with a major difference. The great Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen, composed a play about women who finds out that her husband has been unfaithful, and she must decide whether to forgive him or to leave the illusions of her shattered life and start over somewhere else. Before the final act, he would come out on stage and engage the audience in a dialogue and find out how they felt the play should end. If he was satisfied with their input, the actors would alter the play accordingly and sometimes she would put her shattered family back together, and sometimes she would launch out into a new life, free from the shackles of a life which was nothing more than lies and deception. How's yours?

However, I am not just talking here about the kind of interactive drama which you sometimes find at dinner theatres, because *frequently our spiritual responses will have no visible effect on the outcome of our lives in this life.* That would be too easy. The fruit which the good, honest heart is able to bring forth with perseverance has to do with the Kingdom of Heaven and the life which is to come, where neither thief, nor moth nor even rust can wreck our spiritual treasure. Being true to ourselves is to understand the calling of the Gospel, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. *We are ambassadors and witnesses and planters and harvesters, all at the same time.*

G-d does respond to our responses, but He is more concerned with eternal dividends than with any temporary gain this fleeting life has to offer. How about you? Are you following the deep desires of your heart – those spiritual passions and inner drives with which the L-rd wants to turn our personal cranks? Or are you floundering in the carnal passions and regrets of this world, trying to get all you can, so you can "can" all you get and sit on the lid? Polonius did not listen to his own advice and joined the dark side, plotting against the rightful heir and using intrigue, even his own daughter to accomplish a warped agenda. His intervention made things worse, not better.

What is on your agenda? As we continue the countdown to our annual observance of Purim and of Pesach, we need to understand what kind of harvest it is that G-d is seeking to reap from our hearts and from our lives. We are either building up an eternal weight of glory, to which the meagre sufferings of our life are not worthy to compare, or we are storing up a treasure of wrath, where we will really get burned, forever. I don't want you to go away in fear and trembling that you might lose the salvation of your soul, unless you have never worked out this contract with our Heavenly Father through His Son. I want you to go away convinced that your heart is indeed a storehouse for spiritual treasure, which you can reap perpetually, as long as with perseverance, you truly and honestly walk with the L-rd through all the valleys and over all the mountains of your life, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Nothing more, nothing less. Let's pray.