

1 Adar 2, 5768 (Mar. 8, 2008) *The Best Laid Plans of Mice and Men* J. M. Terrett
Shabbat Shekalim: Spiritual Renovation

Pekudei **Accountings**
Torah: **Ex. 38:21 -40:38** *Chazak, Chazak, v'nitchazek*
Haftarah: **2 Ki. 11:17-12:17** *Rosh Chodesh Adar 2 (L-rd's Table)*
Brit Chadashah: **Heb. 8:1-12**
Shabbat Shekalim: **Exod. 30:11-16**

Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the history of the Jewish people has been **chaotic** and often filled with great **trauma**. However, a Jewish approach to life has never reflected this disorder. No matter what else is going on in our lives, our lives need to consciously and consistently revolve around the **annual festival cycle**, from the cradle to the grave. When the Nazis began their assault on the Warsaw Ghetto, did you know that the defenders held their Passover Seder amidst the flying bullets and then went on to fight to end. How about you?

When it was no longer possible for Jewish people to gather in Jerusalem three times a year, the rabbis took both the daily and weekly temple liturgy along with the annual festival cycle and produced a **stable, orderly annual cycle of synagogue observance**. When our lives are less than ideal and when we have to make major adjustments and often have to do without and sojourn in places we do not want to be, doing things we don't want to do, **do we maintain an orderly, regular, stable cycle of community and personal devotion or constantly spin out?**

Our **spiritual devotion** needs to be the single most important feature of our daily, weekly, monthly and annual lives because it is the **only way that His will may be done on earth through us as it is done in Heaven**, where our true lives are hidden with our Messiah. This Shabbat is both the beginning of a **new lunar month** in one of the leap years which occur seven times every nineteen years, and it is also the observance of **Shabbat Shekalim**.

The rabbis wanted to make sure the festival cycle always remained aligned with the solar year so that Purim always occurs on the **last full moon** of winter and Passover always happens on the **first full moon** of spring and also so that Rosh Hashanah is always observed on the **first new moon** of the fall. It takes quite a bit of "tweaking", but they have succeeded in making sure that wherever Jews are, despite climatic variations and the ups and downs of the business of living, we are all on the same page every Shabbat, focusing on the spiritual priorities of G-d's Word.

How about you? How about us? In our busy work-a-day, shop till you drop lives, full of appointments, lessons, and those most heinous of all inventions – committee meetings, **when we come together every Shabbat, are we on the same page spiritually?** Are our lives all pointing in the same direction? Are we celebrating His grace and His goodness, continuously offering the sacrifice of our lips, or have we lost track of what time it is in the particular season of the Spirit we are wandering through? Do you know where your G-d is in your life?

And, while we do not follow all the intricate and complicated traditional observances of the various strands of orthodox rabbinic Judaism, **there is no part of our lives, or any experience of our hearts, however exalted or however painful that we do not want to bring under the regular sway of His Coming Kingdom**. I am sure you are aware that Jewish orthodoxy has designed over 20,000 laws to make sure, in a very obsessive compulsive and arbitrary way that every activity of every waking moment of every day has a regulation to follow or a ceremony to perform.

As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon for some orthodox Jews to hire a scholar to come and live in their homes so that at least someone in the home is following all the regulations and performing all the rituals – sort of being **holy by association** or serving the L-rd through **second hand spirituality**. They rely on the services of a spiritual professional to be holy and observant.

I sometimes get the impression that there are people who are convinced that this is what rabbis are for and they come to shul hoping that my spirituality is **contagious** or at least **absorbable**. It is neither. At B'nai Chayim we follow the annual cycle of festival observances according to the lunar calendar in order to maintain our **spiritual focus** in the midst of the **incidental whatever's** our lives encounter so that our consistent responses reflect both our **faith in the grace of G-d** and our **obedience to the dictates of His Word**. How are your consistent responses doing?

What is your life reflecting? Are you losing track of what G-d is doing in your life? Does your agenda reflect His agenda, or is your spiritual devotion just one of the many **penciled in appointments** you will get to if you have time? Rosh Chodesh used to be one of the major celebrations of Judaism during temple times and in the days of the tabernacle. Shabbat Shekalim used to be a time when Jews from around the world would send an annual contribution for the upkeep of the temple – sort of like an international, annual general fund offering.

In fact, today, in Israel, the orthodox community is collecting special golden temple shekels and is storing them in vaults of the synagogue of chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Israel. Some orthodox enthusiasts also perform an **annual religious prank** and sneak on to the temple mount with bricks which they place to symbolize the new temple which they soon intend to build. Should we be collecting an annual offering and be keeping it for this same new future temple?

A full answer for the rationale behind the “no, of course not” that I am now saying is something which would be more appropriately taken up during our Wednesday Yeshiva. For us, Shabbat Shekalim needs to be a reminder that **our spirituality will always need constant care and frequent repair and renovation if we do not want it to grow shabby and break down**. How much care, repair and renovation does your spirituality benefit from? Is it falling apart?

With this in mind, today, as part of what we do as Messianic Jews and Gentiles to celebrate the New Moon, we will be celebrating the L-rd's Table – **which needs to be one of the regular spiritual systems check that we do not neglect to perform**. You see, in traditional Judaism, the New Moon is a time when the coming of Messiah is the focus of the **spiritual yearning for redemption** which the festival cycle also emphasizes. What are you yearning for? Emphasizing?

Just as the moon reflects the sun's glory, rabbinic Jews believe that the coming of Messiah will finally allow them to reflect G-d's glory and each New Moon is a count down to this blessed event. Just as the moon waxes and wanes, so do our lives, but the only meaning our lives possess, and the only light the moon actually reflects come from the light of the sun – and for us, from the light of G-d's Son. **The moon would be invisible without this light and our lives would be just as lost in the spiritual darkness of this world, without the light of our blessed Messiah.**

As your spiritual life waxes and wanes, are you focusing on the light which the L-rd wants our lives to reflect, or are you allowing the spiritual darkness which surrounds us all to block the reflection of His light in your lives? Which aspects of your spiritual life are in need of renovation – or better yet, which aspects of what the Bible describes as authentic, valid spirituality are under construction in your life? Is your faith getting a little shabby? Is your obedience getting a little thin and actually breaking down in some areas of your life? Where are you at spiritually?

On this Shabbat Shekalim may we learn to accept responsibility for our own **spiritual condition** and for the condition of our **spiritual community!** As we celebrate the arrival of another new moon, may our hearts also yearn for the coming redemption which our returning Messiah will bring – when that which we see by faith and hold to in hope becomes tangible, visible and eternal!

As we celebrate the L-rd's table may we each examine our hearts and our lives and seek for whatever **forgiveness** we need and take whatever steps we need to be **reconciled** to the L-rd and to one another. Sometimes it takes time for stubborn **stains** to be removed and for stubborn **hearts** to soften and stubborn **problems** to be solved. Let us come boldly to His mercy seat to find the mercy and the grace we need to keep our lives focused and renovated, daily and constantly, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, to the rabbi first and also to the mishpocah.