

## What Our Lives Really Say

### Emor Say!

Torah: Lev. 21:1-24:23  
Haftarah: Ez. 44:15-31  
Brit Chadashah: I P. 2:4-10 (L); Lk.14:12-24 (F)

### Introduction:

Are you for real? Really? How real are you? What does it mean to be real? Two concepts that I want to weave throughout this series are spirituality and religion, because they are two sides of the same coin - spirituality is the drive to know G-d, the know the truth and to be honest, good and real. Religion is the set of truths that we accept as the basis for this expression, kind of like the home for our soul, in which we live and grow in our spirituality.

You can be spiritual, without being religious, and unfortunately you can be religious, without being spiritual. You have to be both, in order to walk with G-d, and in order to participate in the countdown to harvest - in order to be part of the purposes of G-d, which He is accomplishing through His Son, our glorious Messiah. My meditation today will ask you two questions and deal with three issues.

First the questions. Are you spiritual? No, really, are you spiritual? Is your life based on a search for truth, for meaning and for fulfillment, instead of lust, money and power? Really? That is what will appear on that glorious day when He appears and reveals the contents of our hearts ( I Cor. 4:5). Second question, are you religious? No, really, are you religious? I do not mean do you fill your life with rituals and with ceremonies, where you spend all your time praying and reading and preaching. I mean do you really believe that Yeshua is the way the truth and the life, and are you walking (examining, exploring) His truth, as you walk in His ways and make you life turn around your relationship with Him.

Spirituality and religion are similar to the two central concepts of the Bible: faith and obedience. Belief gives you access to G-d and to the truths of His word. Obedience allows you to integrate them into your life and to build Him a sanctuary in both your heart and your daily life. To have faith with no obedience is like having life with no health. To have obedience with no faith, is like trying make a corpse do calisthenics.

Heb. 11:6 outlines the relationship between faith and obedience. You have to believe G-d exists and that He rewards those that seek Him. Is that what your life says? Is that how you live? How is your faith (spirituality)? No, really. How is your obedience (your religion)? Are you for real?

First issue. Is your life full of excuses to explain why you do not do your own will, let alone G-d's will? Jer. 17:9, 10 says two things of interest about the difference between excuses and reasons. First, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, who can know it? Second the L-rd tests the heart and searches our inner self to render to each of us the fruit of our ways.

When I began to work out seriously last year, I was sixty pounds over weight, tired all the time and hungry. I made all kinds of excuses and could tell you why I was too busy, too broke, too far away, too shy, too old and too depressed to get my weight under control.

Now, those sixty pounds are history and I work out as part of an increasingly active lifestyle. Last week I was talking to a trainer, and we agreed that too many people make excuses to justify their own lack of good health and four Canadians die every year from being overweight (that's what heart disease really is), to every one that dies of cancer. Now there are limits to everyone's ability to be healthy and some people do have valid health handicaps.

In Sherwood Park Club Fit there was a man who worked out with a mini oxygen tank. Another man had a withered leg, another was blind, yet they still worked out. At Club Fit North there is a little old lady who must be in her eighties, all hunched over, who works out. There are also some pretty heavy people who are making an effort.

What is the difference between an excuse and a reason? An excuse tries to justify a lack of effort, and places blame, rather than accepting responsibility. A reason examines what can be done and within the limits of reason, does the best job, for this is the whole duty of man. Jer. 9:23,24 talks about the folly of boasting about natural abilities, and this could also be applied to being angry and envious about the lack of natural abilities.

I am an intellectual. I have always been a reader and a thinker. I'm not an athlete, nor am I a businessman, but behold I am in shape and I earn a living. Should I get all bent out of shape because I am not a millionaire? What good would it do? I am not making excuses when I say that I will never be rich, nor will I ever be selected for any Olympic or professional sports team. There are good reasons why I know my limits, and why I do my best physically and financially, while I really pursue my full potential intellectually, cause that's the way G-d made me.

What way did G-d make you? Are you building your life on excuses, or on reasons - on gold, silver and precious stones, or on hay, wood and stubble. The return of the Lrd is a wonderfully scary thought, because He accepts no excuses and judges us on our reasons - the ones He built into our hearts and into our lives.

Which brings me to issue number two. How is your Torah doing? The sages wanted to build a fence around the Torah - you might as well try and put a lion in a bird cage. The Ten words need to be the fence we build around our spirituality, so that G-d's presence can dwell in our hearts and in our lives. The Shema is the hard drive our our faith, and the energizer of our obedience, what needs to be shining out of our fence and out of our hearts and lives.

How is your fence? Sometimes our fences will develop holes and all fences need constant repair, if they are to do the job - to keep the unwanted out and to allow the desirable to flourish. we have a fence at home and I am glad. You can't keep out the magpies - that's what shot guns are for (just kidding), but we mow the grass, plant flowers and vegetables, and sit in our yard. The fence is the boundary of our responsibility, and sometimes it needs repair.

There are some bushes that needs some serious clipping and my deck is leaking again. So, I can either make excuses, and watch things crumble around me, or I can plan my time and resources so that my home is in as good a shape as I can make it. The same needs to apply to your faith and to your obedience - to your spirituality and to your religion. Rituals and traditions are fences. They need constant repair and sometimes have to be changed and repaired. Devotions and prayer and other aspects of what it means to walk with the L-rd are our inner fence and our inner house and garden.

How's your inner fence doing? How's your inner house doing? No, really. Are you just making excuses as your inner life crumbles around you, or are you taking the time to use your available resources to do the best job you can with what you got?

Which brings me to my last point. Religious people sometimes lose their spirituality and get snared by the devil into some amazingly negative behaviour. Romans 14 talks about opinions and Matthew 18 talks about conflicts between people. How many religious people do you know who are easily offended and use this as an excuse not to deal with people they do not like? How people do you know who walk around with grudges that they blame other people for? I have been hurt and I have been offended, but I never want to let this become the focus of my life.

I do not lose much sleep over our winter of opposition. I do not want to be trapped into hating or being permanently offended by other people's stupidity. Life is too short to get bent out of shape. Sure I like to whine. Sure I know I'm right. The big question remains - what am I going to do about it, and I want to close with this. I am not responsible for other people's reactions. I may suffer as a result of some of their decisions, but I am only responsible for my part of the equation, to do the best I can with what I've got.

There is a judgment coming. G-d is very patient and desires their repentance so much more than I do. I am having trouble with my dad again, and it hurts and makes me mad. That plays right into his hands and defiles me with his bitterness and anger. I do not want that. I want to free. I want to be happy, even when I cannot get what I want, and cannot always be in the place I want to be. I would like to go to Israel for the UMJC conference. I would like to have more money to fix up my house, buy clothes and finance my daughter's graduation and my son's wedding.

And I let G-d know about it frequently, but if I have to have what I do not have, and what I cannot have, in order to be happy, then I have fallen into the snare of the devil - resentment and offense - when feeling rotten and angry is somehow right and spiritual. Well it ain't. The joy of the Lrd is my strength. Forgiveness is not optional, if I want to be forgiven, and peace only comes when we deal with the turmoil of our inner lives and throw out the excuses and fix the fences.

People ask me how I am doing, and I answer on two levels. Inside, I'm having a party, most of the time. Outside, I'm having a party, most of the time. I have no ink for my printer, cannot afford to get my bike out of the shop and my computer crashed, and I cannot afford to get it out of the shop. I need new clothes, new tires, and I wouldn't mind saving a little bit for a vacation. If anything breaks, I cannot fix it and my teeth should be looked at.

But, unfortunately, I have eternal life and Gd will never let me down. I am sixty pounds lighter, and I have a wonderful family and a fantastic shul. I have a good reputation, nice neighbours and G-d continues to use me and bless me through all of my bad moods and mistakes. Yes, really. How are you doing?

As we countdown to harvest, it is time to look at what we are really about and to make repairs, and throw out excuses and stop being snared, cause we are only strangers and pilgrims on this earth, on our way home to eternal blessedness. If we lose sight of that, we're really lost. If we keep that in sight, and do the best we can, we are just fine. Yes, really. Next week, what our community really says. Lets pray.