

10 Iyar 5774 (10/5/4) **Fighting The Enemy Not Each Other** J. M. Terrett

Behar **On the Mountain** **Give it a Rest and Go With the Flow**

Torah: Lev. 25:1-26:2

(1) 25:4 (sabbath for the land)

(2) 25:6 (sevenfold provision in resting)

(3) 25:18 (Obey and practice the laws and ordinances so you may dwell securely in the land)

(4) 25:13 (land is his, we are only tenants – strangers [goy]) (pricing based on Jubilee and the freedom of Hebrew slaves once a generation – Jubilee to be declared on Yom Kippur of the 49th year – during the seventh sabbatical year.

Haftarah: Jer. 32:6-27

(5) 32:15 (the captivity was not the end of the people nor of their possession of the land)

(6) 32:24 (the punishment of G-d is quite thorough and inescapable – the sword, famine and pestilence – but never to destroy the people, only to annihilate their sin.

Brit Chadashah: Luke 4:16-21

(7) 4:19 (Yeshua is our Jubilee, He sets us free and brings us back to kingdom living in the land while we wait for the final kingdom to dawn).

(Jack p. 177) **Ps. 112 Jewish Hero:**

Sermon: Fighting the Enemy, Not Each Other.

I have often said that the worst problem which the community of faith has ever encountered is not the attacks on the truth of the Bible which our modern secular society is engaged in. It is not either the challenges to biblical morality and to the generational integrity of the family.

It is not even the rising tide of international materialism and the environmental damage it is causing globally – with polluted air, polluted water, and polluted food, as we cut down our forests and continue to pour junk into the oceans making this more and more an unsafe planet for anyone to live on.

These are concerns which we need to address if we are to fulfil our mission and reach out with the Gospel to our dying world, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

But there is a greater challenge which threatens to destroy and disable us before we confront the spiritual forces of darkness which are waiting to challenge us for the soul allegiance of our darkening world – the spiritual infighting which uses up all our ammunition on each other and leaves neither the time, the energy or the credibility to reach out effectively to the world.

To many of us as individuals and as communities seem to be perpetually engaged in a variety of spiritual civil wars where truth and reconciliation are the too most common victims and where the most vicious and the most hurtful assaults are made on brethren we are called to love and the cherish.

This does not mean that we avoid disputes and allow anyone to say or do anything in our midst, rather than risk any kind of confrontation. Rather it means that we establish strong means of conflict management and conflict resolution in our midst, so that disputes do not tear us apart before we have the opportunity to engage with our enemies in the world as we expend all of our resources and energy in biting and devouring one another, and thus are faithfully doing the enemy's job for him.

As part of what biblical preparedness means, as we count the omer towards Shavuot (Pentecost), I would like to analyze a passage with you which comes from the last piece of writing the apostle Paul left us with before he went to Rome to win his martyr's crown – Second Timothy and I want to look at 2:24-26:

“The servant of the L-rd must not be quarrelsome. Instead he must be gentle and kind towards everyone, able to teach, and gifted with patience. He must gently correct opponents in the hope that G-d will grant them repentance to arrive at the knowledge of the truth and that they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will.”

I memorized this passage early in my spiritual career because it is so easy to start a fight in the realm of spiritual truth as the terrible trinity seeks to keep us from serving the Holy Trinity. The terrible trinity is the flesh, the world and the adversary and they are constantly waiting to pounce on us, to distract us and to enslave us so that we never become effective in the cosmic battle for the souls of mankind.

There are many believers who a real difficulty entering any room, because of the size of the chip on their shoulders and when we engage them in conversation they seem permanently poised to launch into an argument, often hiding behind the “yes, but” smoke screen. As someone who has an authentic passion for the truth, I want o make sure that my life and my faith revolves around the Saviour and His Word and not around my pet peeves which elevate minor points to a position of major importance and we end up straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel!

The passage actually is divided into three three distinct sections: there are seven action imperatives for us as believers, followed by a gracious fourfold response by G-d in the face of a three pronged attack by the enemy of our souls.

Let me deal with the seven action imperatives and the first one is that believers should be in the habit of **avoiding quarrels**, rather than delighting in them. The difference between a conversation and a quarrel is not really that subtle, if you consider the intent of either participant. A quarrel wants to line up the conversation between opposing viewpoints and demolish one in favour of the other with no desire to explore common ground or discover how to reconcile the strengths and weaknesses of either position. Sharing our faith should never be allowed to degenerate into a combative exchange of ideas which is just trying to pick a fight instead of building a dialogue.

There are truths we have to stand firm on and there are false ideas which we must expose and resist, but we must establish a dialogue which lifts the conversation from the arena of dispute and places it in the realm of seeking G-d's truth rather than just defending one position over another.

I disagree with a lot of what is taught by believers, but instead of sounding the battle cry every time I encounter something which is out in left field, I want to engage with the position and reaffirm our commitment to the Word of G-d and establish a means whereby we can evaluate what is being taught from this common commitment to truth and not from a desire to solve every difficult and difference with a quarrel.

Next, we deal with the opposite of a quarrel and it may be the hardest priority for believers to maintain – being **kind** to all, whether they are the good, the bad or the ugly. Sometimes people may misinterpret our kindness and our gentleness and feel that the slack which we are giving them is some kind of agreement with their nonsense. Instead it is the attempt to establish a bond of fellowship and of mutual appreciation that is not based on solving any one particular issue, but truly desires to understand and examine the truth as brethren and not as opponents.

Next we have to be ready to **teach** and in this context it is the ability to present both new material and opposing material in a way which does not lead to argument and which is fact or information based and is not seen as either an emotional appeal or as a personal attack of any kind. It involves listening and asking questions and not just shutting down any exchange so we can get our point across.

Truth is found in both the text and context of the Bible and we need to be willing to clarify and verify as seekers for G-d's truth and not as storm troopers who are convinced that anyone who opposes what we teach needs to be smacked down and silenced.

I have often said that our faith is based on five fundamentals and if we link our discussion (our potential disagreement) to these truths, then we are measuring them against a greater truth and not against our ability to win an argument, Here they are again: (1) the Bible is the Word of G-d. (2) Yeshua (Jesus) is God's Son (G-d the Son). (3) He was born of a virgin. (4) He died on the cross for the sins of all mankind. (5) He rose from the dead, ascended into Heaven and will one day return.

Lining our discussions up with this framework helps us to see what we are really disagreeing with, which leads me to the fourth imperative: **patience**. This is the understanding that we may not be able to fix everything with one application and that it may take time and effort to resolve our differences, but that in the meantime we are going to do our best to maintain the relationship, and the dialogue and not turn every difference of opinion into a deal breaker where a wall is erected and fellowship is broken.

And even when this does happen, we learn patience and wait for an opportunity to heal and to rebuild and where we leave the unresolved things to the L-rd (I Corin. 4:5) and do not keep on fighting when there is no possibility of resolution. Patience understands that sometimes things take time and require more than we can bring to the table, so we walk away and learn to wait instead of provoking endless battles to try and force people to see it our way.

The fifth imperative has to do with **correction** which is a commitment to seeing someone reestablished in the truth and not abolished by our rhetoric. Correction is not like the loud and abrasive dressing down which the drill sergeant abuses the raw recruit with – it is the dressing up where one humble disciple of the L-rd will do anything and everything to rebuild or to repair the truth which has been compromised and damaged in some way. It is based on a positive desire to show love and care and concern and help a friend in need and not look around for a baseball bat or a rifle to knock some sense into someone.

It is tempered with the sixth imperative, which is **gentleness** and this should be seen as a love based intervention which parents use with their children so that they are corrected and not destroyed. Some dysfunctional families engage in endless factional disputes, screaming and yelling and hurting and fighting, with no commitment to each other or to peaceful communication as a means of conflict resolution – I'm sorry, have I just outlined how some believers and some believing communities deal with problem solving? Gentleness wants to solve the problem with out causing damage or inflicting pain, which brings me to the seventh imperative – **hope**.

We cannot solve every problem or successfully deal with every difficult person or even answer every difficult question right away, but part of what it means to have faith in the King of the universe is to have hope that He will be able to deal with the things which we are unable to deal with and we release them to Him, so that He can deal with them in His time and in His way, while we admit our limits and learn to live within them, peacefully and patiently.

Some try to solve problems which are not solvable until they are exhausted and even broken and put out of commission – suffering from battle fatigue because they have not learned three very successful battle strategies: halt (dig in) and retreat (to a safer position) wait for further orders.

All seven of these strategies (avoiding quarrels, kindness, teaching, patience, correction, gentleness and hope) are based on our confidence in the fourfold activity of G-d in dispute resolution and it is fourfold. First and foremost we must understand that **repentance** is a gift from G-d and we should not push people who are not ready – unripe fruit tastes awful.

We are workers in His vineyard and even among ourselves there are issues and even teachings we are not ready to deal with and we have to wait until G-d moves so that the positive force of repentance defuses the potential for defensiveness and argumentativeness.

If there is no room for dialogue, we need to release the person and the conflict into G-d's more than capable hands and leave it alone until He moves, even if it takes years (or until the day of judgment). Sometimes our well mean efforts can get in the way and make the problem worse rather than better – all and any intervention on our part needs to be based in confidence in G-d and not in fear or anger, which leads me to second activity of G-d.

I came to a knowledge of the **truth** because He brought me to it, kicking and screaming. He is both truth and the means by which truth is seen and received. If there is no potential for the truth to be shared or received, we need to back off and let Him cause the truth to overcome all opposition and finally be welcomed into the repentant heart. The truth will always eventually prevail no matter how much spiritual opposition it encounters.

Coming to the truth of G-d also involves a third divine activity, which is people **coming to their senses** and this is not going to be brought about by our eloquence or the volume of our presentation – nor the amazing clarity of our logic – it is going to be the product of a personal encounter with the L-rd of truth, where a sudden enlightening or epiphany knocks us to the ground as it did the Apostle Paul or a burning bush finally gets our attention as it did for Moses.

We live in G-d's universe and He remains in final charge and it is our confidence in this final control which will keep us from trying to make people come to their senses when they have not yet been cornered by G-d. We sometimes have to give them space so that G-d can corner them, because you can neither outrun G-d nor find any place (any ideology) where you can hid from Him forever which leads me to the fourth activity of G-d – escaping or **disengaging** from the enemy.

There is a constant warfare occurring in the spiritual realm which we can not participate in except through prayer and hope, so when we encounter potential disputes and people bent on fighting and devouring, we have to let them loose to find the strategy of G-d which will allow them to allow G-d to disengage them from the enemy and escape from His clutches.

We serve the resurrected winner in a world which is bent on wallowing in darkness and spiritual deception and we need to have confidence in G-d's fourfold ability to deal with those who are bent on pulling us into disputes which will drain all our energy (and joy and peace and love). The sevenfold strategy is a series of spiritual avoidance techniques which will remove us from the line of fire so that we do not become needless battlefield casualties. I will have even a heated conversation with anyone about anything relating to the truth of G-d's word, but when the only means of conversation slides into a quarrel, I want to use my sevenfold avoidance strategies so that His fourfold activity can take over in a disputation in which I do not belong.

Why? I want to finish with a threefold description of the enemies tactics that we need to recognize and not be pulled into. The first is **snaring** – and here it is referring to a snaring into quarrelling with another believer, even when we know we are right and they are out to lunch. If there is no possibility for discussion and resolution, we are to back-off and not feel that in order to be right we must win every argument and always silence the silly voices which the enemy sends our way to trap us into endless and needless disputations.

The next is being **submitted** to the enemy's **will** and anger and rage and conflict and argument are his favourite weapons with unsuspecting believers who confuse standing on the truth with trying to correct everyone and everything all the time. If it cannot be dealt with peacefully, patiently and without a dispute, we are not to engage endlessly to prove we are right, we are to avoid becoming submitted to a destructive strife driven series of arguments.

Now if needs be, I will exclude someone from our community and from our Yeshiva, but never for what they believe, but usually for an addiction to arguing (and for gross immorality of any kind). We want to protect our community from self destruction and from using up our resources with infighting instead of outreach.

We do not want to be snared by the enemy or be submitted to his will, since we know he is the father of lies who comes to steal, to kill and to destroy. We want to have hope in the activity of G-d who grants repentance, truth, a coming to our sense and is able to disengage us from the enemy.

As we learn how to fight the enemy and not ourselves we need to stubbornly avoid quarrels, and be relentlessly kind, as we learn the difference between arguing and teaching, and exercise considerable patience as we work towards correction, not conquest with all the gentleness which He uses towards us and armed with an aggressive hope that both He and His kingdom will prevail just fine without our assistance.

We need to learn to walk with Him and not get in the way when He is working on people and not be tricked by the devil into fruitless arguments and disputes which will destroy our peace and joy and not contribute to our patient and gentle outreach. May we truly learn to fight the enemy and not each other.

Lets pray.