

8 Iyar, 2006 (May 6, 2006) *Speaking What the Spirit Says* J. M. Terrett

**Parasha Acharei Mot/Kedoshim**      **After the Death/Holy Ones**

**Torah:**                                      Lev. 16:1-18:30; 19:1-20:27

**Haftarah:**                                Amos 9:7-15; Ez. 20:2-20

**Brit Chadashah:**                      Matt. 5:43-48

One of the central pillars of our faith is the belief that G-d speaks and one of our greatest privileges as believers is to both learn to hear Him when He speaks and to be able to share, when He gives us a message, whether it is to a particular individual, or to the community as a whole. Let me do a bit of review about how G-d speaks and then move on to learning to share what He says.

The Scriptures are full of examples of G-d speaking to specific individuals, beginning with our first ancestors, Adam and Eve and then to our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Probably the most direct and detailed account of His speaking is during the time when Israel was camped around the mountain for a whole year. However, there appears to be differences between how He speaks to individuals and how He speaks to the community of believers, but first some review on how He speaks in general.

In past I have spoken about the five "C's", to identify the means by which the L-rd communicates with humanity. First of these is through the "**cosmos**" (Ps. 19:1 – the heavens declare His glory and the firmament shows His handiwork) where the wonder and the complex harmony of the universe indicates a superintending intelligence who both designed and controls the whole thing. Some people want G-d to make an appointment, and send a resume, so that they can review His credentials and decide if He really exists, because they see a difference between the physical universe and what the Bible says about G-d. Heb. 11:6 talks about the necessity of faith, but not because G-d has an inferiority complex and, like Tinkerbell, needs people to clap their hands so He can exist.

Faith opens us up to the **underlying spiritual realities** of the universe, which are as permanent and necessary as the laws of physics which govern the universe which G-d created. Once we begin to look for meaning and purpose, we open ourselves up for G-d to begin to speak to us, because there is another level of communication He has established to get our attention: "**conscience**". Even those silly people, who try to manipulate their lives through magic and "luck", understand that everyone, even the vilest of criminals, is driven by an inner set of values which divides our personal world into some kind of moral order where certain actions are "**right**" and others are "**wrong**". It's almost as if G-d gave mankind a highly developed **sense of conscience**, instead of a highly developed **sense of instinct**. Morality is a kind of moral instinct.

And just because there are other people in the world, He also speaks through changing set of **generational stories**, whose general themes remain constant: "**culture**". I find it amazing that not only are each of us incredibly unique individuals, but we all share so many common characteristics that there is a "group" or "family" identity which G-d wants us to develop. G-d speaks to us as individuals and G-d also speaks to us as communities, and it is this aspect of His speaking which we are building towards as we continue to countdown towards Shavuot/Pentecost- two of the most amazing "group epiphanies" in the Bible.

However, there is another way in which G-d gets our attention, and it is both perhaps the most personal and the most controversial: "**circumstances**". I can trace the hand of G-d in my life, which lead up to my surrender, my capitulation to the **celestial stalker** who had been after me for years. Now, not every event in our lives is a message from G-d. Sometimes a flat tire is just a flat tire, and it is obvious and logical that someone must win the lottery, so I am careful about saying that G-d either directly selects who is going to lose and who is going to win that ludicrous amount of money.

His intervention is not that sloppy, and has to do with more important things than money or power – He wants to teach us **eternal values** which will cause us to store up treasures in heaven which will neither wither, nor be stolen. He wants to engage us in a **lifelong conversation** where we both learn to walk with Him and learn to see things His way, or we spend it running away from Him. Unfortunately many of us, generation by generation, waste our lives building our pitiful little personal sandcastles on the edge of eternity and don't get it until the tide of our lives comes in and washes them away, again and again.

He wants to turn every circumstance of our lives into an expression of His love for us and wants us to turn our response to these events into an expression of our love for Him. Mishpocah, probably the greatest spiritual lesson we need to learn is that **it is all about choices**, the ones we make – not the ones which are made for us. G-d both causes and allows things to come into our lives, both as individuals and as a corporate, generational human family of smaller and smaller sub groups. **Sometimes these things are message from Him and sometimes He wants our responses to them to be message from us to Him.**

How do we learn to do that? This brings me to the fifth item of our review: the "**Canon**" of Scripture, or the great **source book for practical spirituality**, which we need to learn to access, if we want to understand what G-d is saying to us and how we need to respond to Him, both as individuals and as a community – sort of a **corporate response** as well as an **individual response** which we need to make, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year and generation by generation – to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

I put the Five "C's" together as a way for me to understand spirituality and so that as a community we can get the **whole picture** and not miss out on anything which G-d may be saying to us, both as individuals and as a corporate entity. Well, how do we respond to the messages which the **celestial stalker** may be sending our way? For us as believers, **the key will always be the Scriptures**, so we can both see how G-d has spoken to people over the ages and so we can make sure the message we are getting comes from Him and not from some other source.

You see, we live in a world full of a variety of **spiritual influences**, and some of them are deceitful, some of them are evil and many of them will try and corrupt our ability to hear from the true G-d, the G-d of the Bible and the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the Father of our blessed, resurrected Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth. As we come closer to Shavuot/Pentecost I want us to learn both how to avoid being **distracted** and **deceived** and also how to be dutiful hearers of the messages which G-d is sending our way – be they personal messages for specific individuals, or corporate messages for us as a family of believers.

Now this may surprise you, but I want to conclude with a little teaching on how we need to discern and share messages which G-d is sending our way and there are maybe four principles involved. (1) All of the messages He sends our way will be **biblical** (which is also a source book of **generational jurisprudence** in the things of G-d). (2) All the messages He sends our way will be **confirmed** by the first four of the five "C's", both in our lives as individuals and in our life as a shul. (3) All of the messages will be **received**, that is acknowledged and evaluated, to make sure they are **accurately given** and **fully understood**. And finally, they will be **orderly**, which actually means **three** things.

**First of all** orderly means they will not be given in a manner which Paul had to correct when he addressed the **problem of disorder** in the Corinthian congregation (I Corinthians chapters 11-14) and which Elijah encountered at the foot of Mount Carmel. You see, in the Ancient Middle East, and in many other spiritual traditions, people who received messages from G-d or from the spirits, went into some kind of trance and then gave the message in a loud, unnatural voice, while they quaked, rolled around on the ground and even sometimes foamed at the mouth. I don't think the Baptists would be impressed if we started doing this during our services. They are received, nor given in a manner which resembles a seizure, or some kind of psychotic episode. Excitement is not something we are afraid of, unless it is a total loss of control.

**Secondly**, orderly means that they are given as part of everything which is occurring in our services, from the **first prayers**, right up through the **final blessings**. We need to view every part of our service as a communication with the L-rd and as a possible vehicle for messages to come through to us from the L-rd. There will never be a time at B'nai Chayim where will have to stop the service, in order to hear from the L-rd – there will always be a time when our whole service is functions as a vehicle to hear from the L-rd. Sometimes, different elements of the service will be used of G-d in different ways to speak to us, both as individuals and as a mishpocah. That is the primary reason we gather together as believers.

**Finally**, orderly means that what we do and how we do what we do, in order to hear from G-d will be open to what I like to call **prepared** or **anticipated spontaneity**. In other words, our services are not like a catered meal, where we only serve what we have cooked up beforehand. Sometimes, we will do some cooking on site, during the service. Sometimes, I will receive a word which may cause me to change or to add to (delete from) what I have prepared. Sometimes during prayer and worship, someone will get an insight from G-d and will want to share this during the service. Sometimes someone will come to service with a message, or an insight which they have received during the week and which they may want to share during the service. I will be speaking more about this kind of **service protocol** next week.

Orderly means that we will set up our services for **maximum spiritual impact**, for **maximum spiritual contact**, for **maximum spiritual encounter** with G-d and with His presence. Sometimes that will mean a little excitement. Sometimes that will mean changing how we do our services. Sometimes that will mean making changes in a particular service, as we learn to respond to the messages which the Spirit may be giving to us during our services. I come to service to hear from G-d and to confirm what He has been doing in my life during the week and indeed at every major juncture in my life from the cradle to that eventual grave. How about you? Are you a five "C's" believer? Do you want to hear what the Spirit is saying to you and to us, day by day, week by week, and month by month and for the rest of our lives? What has the Spirit said to you during this service? Have you been listening? What does He have to do to get your attention? What does He have to do in order to get our attention? Let's pray.