

4 Kislev
November 29th

Growing and Maturing: 2 Pe. 1:3-11; 3:18;
(Renewed and consistent) Rom. 12:1, 2; 2 Cor. 5:16; He. 5:11-14

Toldot

Generations: The Tapestry is Still Weaving

Torah:

Gen. 25:19-28:9 (1) 25:34 (2) 26:4 (3) 26:5 (4) 27:45

Haftarah:

Mal. 1:1-2:7 (5) 1:11 (6) 2:6

Brit Chadashah:

Rom. 9:1-13 (7) 9:8

I want to talk to you first this morning about **growing**. This spiritual reality is not *the endless acquisition of new, life changing material*, which a whole to parts learner would freak at. You see, I have to see the whole picture, in order to see, to digest, and to integrate it into my heart and life. I like learning new material, once I see the whole it fits into. That's why sometimes I seem to be slow at catching things at first, because I want to draw whole pictures, and then arrange the material. If I am supposed to keep growing and perpetually absorbing new material, without being given enough time to see the whole, then this kind of growth can **disorganize** and **confuse** me, all the while causing me unbelievable stress as I am constantly trying to draw a picture which keeps shifting.

Growth in the L-rd, after 31 years and an incredible number of experiences and an amazing amount of information, does not mean always starting from scratch or having a live changing experience every Shabbat. It means that as individuals and as a community, we understand that *our life is a pilgrimage towards our Father's House, and that every situation, event and idea we encounter along the way, in some way, bears our Father's personal signature, and He wants to show us how to live, how to win, how to lose and how to turn everything that comes our way into a song of praise unto Him.*

Now a whole-to-parts, slightly obsessive control freak can handle that, because that's the whole, the point, the picture, the mega issue, the focus. **I Cor. 10:13** is a truth which should always lead us to **Heb. 12:13**, not because our lives will be punctuated with endless crises, but because *the L-rd is our Shepherd and He wants to demonstrate this at every turn*. We came into this world with a genetic agenda, that old inner clock which reminds us what stage of life we are at. The Parable of the Talents is really a lesson about the **spiritual clock** which G-d activates in each of us when we come to Him.

We always need to come to the place of saying, in every situation: "What is G-d teaching me through this?" And "How does He want me to respond to this episode in the saga of my spiritual journey home?" Not: "Why is this happening to me" nor: "What about them L-rd" (see Ps. 73).

Perpetual spiritual growth is described for us in 2 Peter 1:3-11 as the acquisition of a double imperative which leads us through a *sevenfold process*, which will both keep our spirituality fresh and on track, and our eternal focus clear and central in our lives. Let's look at this briefly this morning, and use it as a bridge to our discussion of maturity.

Peter first says that we have everything we need through our personal knowledge of Him (v. 3) and through the divine nature which we acquired when we gave our hearts to Him (v. 4). This nature is something we always possessed, for every man and woman who has ever lived is created in the image of G-d, but it is not always something we were aware of or understood.

Once we know Him, He shows us how to reflect this *inner reality* by being salt and light, and even by giving off the fragrance of His presence by the way we live our lives – **devotionally**, **socially**, and **personally**. Once we understand our duty as a holy nation of acquired people to show forth the wonders of the One who called us into His light (I P. 2:9, 10), our lives acquire an entirely new perspective and we are ready to come at things in an entirely new way, daily and constantly. Having established this, Peter launches into a **sevenfold description** of an intimate walk in the Spirit, devotionally, socially and personally.

We are called first to have **faith** (the basis of our sevenfold reaction, and which is the recognition of His providence and L-rdship over even the most sordid details of our lives and of human history), followed by **(1)virtue** (our calling requires a certain ethical/moral approach to things based firmly on the 10 Stipulations) and **(2)knowledge** (learning about the character of G-d and the divine nature which He created us in, from the fivefold witness we are heirs to, if we only have eyes to see and contemplate [cosmos, conscience, culture, circumstance and canon]).

We can't stop here, we also need **(3) self control** (being in charge of the choices we make, and the responses we formulate in our pilgrimage home), **(4) patience** (the ability to wait on G-d for the provision, the resolution and the completion, as we walk daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly homeward, sometimes plodding, sometimes running, sometimes sitting).

The **first two** speak of an inner life; the **next two** speak of our outer reactions. Now we are ready to move onto the **community reality** which the first four allow us to experience. Once our faith, strengthened by virtue and knowledge, teaches us self control and patience (see Rom. 5:3-5), we are ready to understand **(5) piety** (that series of devotional disciplines, prayer, study, fellowship, praise and witness) by which we express to G-d, to ourselves and to each other and to the world **our practical commitment to see things G-d's way and to live a life centered daily on the world to come.**

But that is not all, we need to add **(6) brotherly kindness** (the ability to see G-d's image in each other and to form a society of likeminded disciples of the Presence, even in a dark, smelly, unfriendly world, full of distractions and traps to pull us away from our calling) to our **arsenal of spiritual reality**. I love believers, and I also understand that we are the biggest hindrance to the spread of the Gospel, because neither Israel nor the church has ever encountered a problem capable of doing us serious damage. We shoot ourselves in the foot and self destruct quite nicely on our own in every generation, and also experience great spiritual awakening and wonderful deliverances at the same time (see 2 Cor. 6:3-10 for lovely contradictions we face as believers in Him).

Once we have learned to love, forgive and accept one another, we are ready for the final seal of His approval on our pilgrimage, on our spiritual journey – **(7) love**. It is not a warm fuzzy feeling, where our knees go weak and we want to hug each other. **It is an overpowering realization of the redemptive purposes of G-d in this messy, silly life, which begin with me, and which provide me with all the healing, strength and resolve to see things from His perspective and to desire the best for everyone, and to believe the best for everyone, from the personal depths of my heart, and from the social depths of our community** (see I Cor. 13).

This should be enough to keep us out of the bar most nights, because ***this kind of growth is really an integrated self perpetuating lifestyle which takes on a life momentum of its own and which ends up carrying us, both Jew and Gentile, as we wander home.*** Which wandering and renewing leads me to my discussion of maturity and to my conclusion.

Maturity in the L-rd, as individuals and as a community has got little or nothing to do with age, or even with experience. It has to do with a heart and life commitment to this kind of spirituality, stubbornly focused on the mega issues of life, from the perspective of **the life to come**. It is a threefold approach, and I want to challenge you with this as we close. It is first an attitude, which will work everything through until we are able to see it from G-d's perspective. Next it is a strategy which determines to relate to everything, so it will help our spiritual journey, and not hinder it. ***Eternal consequences will keep our house firmly building on the rock, and not slowly or suddenly sinking into the sand.***

You see **there are no real tragedies in this life which can compare to the loss of spiritual perspective.** *All the storms, the winds, the floods and the rain are what we are called to walk through from the safety of a home built on the rock.* The condition of this home and the position of this home need to be the **daily and the constant focus** of our hearts and lives, no matter what else is going on (If you can take disaster and success and treat those two impostors the same. . .). You need lots of attitude to survive in the L-rd – yo, you here what I'm saying, bro?

But that is not enough, we need vision, which I define as a **fixation** on the mega issues of this life, or said another way, ***being anally retentive about the things of the L-rd.*** Who cares who done somebody wrong, they's a kingdom comin' and all I wants is for dat chariot to swing low, and pick me up, cause it's comin' for to carry me home. If me eyes can not be *lifted up in keen anticipation of the coming kingdom, then I have become **spiritually sick, eternally impaired, kingdom challenged*** and am a pain in my own tukhus.

And we will all go through periods of spiritual sickness and weakness. That is why we need to be part of a community, so the momentum and the turning of the festival cycles can carry us, can heal us, can challenge us, till we feel better and are ready to take up the sevenfold challenge of our spiritual growth and the threefold commitment to maturity, cause there ain't no other game in town.

How are you doing? How are we doing? As we come to our first **mishpocah** meeting at LHBC, we want to seriously evaluate our strengths and weaknesses and to look how we do things, and what resources we can access together to grow and mature in our King. We will all make mistakes. We will all stumble and fall (Prov. 24:16), but we want to get up, recover and keep going, and never let the enemy of our souls distract us from our personal and community calling, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. And that calling will always be Growth and Maturity.

We will all get tired, frustrated and even angry and yet we will all eventually be so much in love with the L-rd and with each other that we can't stand not to be involved in each other's lives. That is if we are growing and maturing, not rotting and shrinking. Let's make a **renewed commitment** to **growth** and to **maturity**, for this is G-d's will in our beloved Messiah for each of us personally and for all of us socially. This is the "get real" we need and the band wagon we need to jump on and the drum rhythm we need to march together to.

Next week a sermon not to miss

Number Six in the Series:

From Rabble to Righteousness, From Chaos to Kingdom

A Messianic Jewish Approach to Community:

Volunteer (Willing)

(Mitzvoth, Tzedakah, not grudgingly Deut. 30:19, 20).

Let's pray.