

Chaye Sarah**The Life of Sarah****Torah:****Gen. 23:1-25:18****Haftarah:****I Kings 1:1-31****Brit Chadashah:****Matt. 1:1-17**

Last week, I talked about some blind men who tried to understand the whole elephant by confusing it with the portion they were feeling. I also mentioned that a good definition of red necks describes their attempt to force their own little perspective on the bigger picture. They stubbornly cling to a tunnel vision of the world and are convinced that everybody who doesn't see things their way is either stupid or involved in some evil plot to destroy the world. I likened them to those neighbourhood sparrows who twitter and flitter from branch to branch, instead of rising up to soar above the local picture.

Mishpocah it is only in soaring that we can be renewed. In is only as we let the currents of His Spirit and His presence lifts us and wash over us that we can walk and not grow weary, and run and not faint. **Spiritual fatigue and the lack of spiritual vision will do more damage to a believer than any tribulation or oppression they might encounter.** Our shul truly needs to become a flight school so that our sparrow tendencies and our red neck perspectives are replaced with both a clear picture of G-d's bigger picture and a *continual personal inner renewal* in the spirit of our minds and our hearts. This is what needs to be the goal of our waiting on G-d.

Fluttering is not good enough. Feeling bad and wanting to do better is also not good enough. A one time massive lift off, to get it over with is also not good enough. G-d is not looking for followers whose lives are punctuated with extremes and emotional imbalances, like a perpetual roller coaster with no shock absorbers. He is looking for **Talmudim** (disciples) who want to make His way, His "**Derek**" their lifestyle – both the *inner, private lifestyle* where we wrestle with our flesh and our hopes and fears, and the *outer lifestyle* where we let His Word be the source of all the **light** and **salt** we are called to bring to the fading world we are passing through.

He is looking for a people who will adopt His agenda, **both in what they believe and in how they design a personal obedience to put these beliefs into practice.** We do not wait on G-d to get our own way, so that we can get the kind of life we really want to live. We wait on G-d to make sure He gets His own way with us and that we live the kind of life He really wants us to live. Now this is a tall order and it is one that can be misunderstood by people who do not truly understand the nature of true biblical spirituality, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

This morning I want to talk to you about **the nature of true biblical spirituality**, from a Messianic perspective, so that the biblical lifestyle we live is part of what it means for us to wait on G-d. **Obedience is not a dirty word**, it is one which brings **healing** and **renewal**, and which is the only way to move us beyond the initial stages of spiritual growth and move us into the realm of spiritual fulfillment and maturity. Always starting over again from the beginning gets so boring after a while.

He does not want us to totally withdraw from the world and hide in tight little communities with high walls and locked gates – kind of like a **maximum security prison** for the flesh. You know, building a place where we can punish it, even torture it and prevent it from breaking out and seeking all the evil pleasures and vices this carnal world has to offer. Somehow I don't think that spending all our energy avoiding the world is what Messiah meant by calling us to seek first G-d's Kingdom and His righteousness. ***You cannot learn to overcome something which you spend your time and energy running away from.*** Monasteries and ghettos are not the solution.

You cannot become a good person or a truly spiritual person by running away and hiding from the world, because all the good and all the evil that exist in the world come from the same source, **people like you and me.** We need to conquer evil in our hearts and lives and teach this kind of spiritual response to the world – even if we have to sit like Lot at the gates of Sodom and Gomorrah, or serve corrupt monarchs with integrity, like Daniel and Nehemiah.

Judaism was never taught to withdrawal from the world, as a spiritual strategy to deal with all the evil in this world. You can't be a light hiding behind a bushel, or cringing in a ghetto. Don't get me wrong, we need to form a tight knit community that is separate from the world, but not because we do not want the world to know what we are doing, nor because we want to protect ourselves from what the world has to offer. We want the world to know that we have adopted a different agenda, one which offers healing and fulfillment to a world that is confused and lost.

Before I gave my heart to the L-rd, I looked at various ideologies and religions which offered solutions to the world. I also looked at various forms of popular culture and even at some of the materialistic success strategies which are so popular with people who just want a bigger slice of the pie. None of them offered enough of a spiritual return on my investment and even the party scene gets so boring after awhile – after the supposedly "beautiful" people either grow up or grow old – will somebody please send Mick Jagger a walker before he hurts himself, tripping over his wrinkles. Hugh Hefner is really just a dirty old man, getting older and dirtier.

This old world needs to be overcome, so that we truly desire the world to come from both the depths of our hearts and from the heights of our lives. True biblical spirituality is all about habits and choices, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. It is about setting up the Promised Land in our lives, as well as in Israel. It's about redeeming our spirits as well as the Holy Land. It is not about setting up a Jewish state which excludes Gentiles as if they were defiled and somehow inferior and unworthy of our attention.

It is about showing them that **there really is only One G-d,** and one way to serve this G-d – **His way,** to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. And this way is the way of obedience, of holiness, of self control, **which is a lifestyle which revolves around spiritual choices and spiritual habits.** It is about learning to look at life, at success and at failure from a different perspective than power, money or the pursuit of great learning. We need to learn to look at the world from the burning bush and the cross of Calvary, and from the trembling mountain and the empty tomb.

As we draw close to G-d through our Messiah we develop a peaceful urgency about getting our spiritual houses in order, whether we are six or pushing sixty. We look at the world, with its exciting opportunities and dazzling possibilities, only as a means to a spiritual end, and not as the objective of a life we are trying to build. We learn to measure success not in terms of our investment portfolio, nor in terms of the size of our expense account, or the number of fancy clothes we can decorate our closets with.

We learn to measure true success in terms of **who we are,** not **what we have.** **We learn to measure success in terms of what we do with what we have, and not with how much we have.** We become more concerned with why we do the things we do than we are with the actual details of what is going on in our lives. Why? Because we know where we are going and what is going to happen to this old world. **We are kingdom dwellers sojourning here as strangers and pilgrims until Messiah returns.**

We even look at the great events of our world differently. We know that the results of the American election or the passing of Yasar Arafat are only important in terms of their impact on the progress of the Kingdom – on the righteousness, mercy and judgment which are really the foundations of this life. We look to G-d and His Word, not to CNN and FOX

We know that how we live our lives, as individuals and as a community is the reality we need to live first, before we tackle the big bad world we are part of. I find it surprising that many of the red neck activists who are trying to save the planet and help the poor around the world do not admit that their greatest challenge is that the people they are trying to help, just want to become part of the lifestyle which these same activists are blaming for the problems of the world.

The real problems of the world remain spiritual, not economic nor ecological, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Until we learn to see our lives as only one episode in a bigger story, and until we learn to see our lives from the perspective of that bigger story, we will waste our time and our resources building material or personal sand castles in the sand of this life, only to watch them dissolve when our tide comes in and it is our turn to sleep in the dust with our ancestors.

As I draw this meditation to a close, let's look at two familiar passages and accept the challenge of maintaining obedience, of maintaining a personal spirituality which is really out of this world – and which is not chained to or polluted by the things of this world. Let's look first at Matt. 7:24-27 and make a decision about the kind of spiritual Real Estate we are investing in.

It is not the storms of life which will make or break us, as believers or as a community, or even as a world. We will truly and forever be made or broken based on two things – how well we hear the words which our Messiah spoke (which means all the words which the Bible speaks) and how well we put these words into practice. I wish you all great success. There is nothing wrong with material prosperity and there is also nothing wrong with the lack of material prosperity. There is nothing wrong with the pursuit of an ambitious career, and there is nothing wrong with pushing the humblest broom. There is nothing wrong with having biceps of steel and there is nothing wrong with living with love handles. I'm not too sure about the last one – love handles are gross.

The problem is that there is nothing right with it either. Right or wrong for a Messianic believer is determined by how well he or she puts the Words of our Messiah into practice, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Now that is prime spiritual Real Estate on steroids.

But how do you put His word into practice in all the twists and turns of your life? Let's look at Isaiah 28:9-13 and understand that it is a slow, steady process, with no short cuts or compromises. Issue by issue, line by line, concept by concept, we are called to have a dynamic relationship with the Word where we create spiritual harmony in our hearts and spiritual order in our lives by our persistent obedience. Otherwise we will stumble, trip, fall and may even be broken by the same chief corner stone the nations of the world are rejecting.

I believe we are coming into a new phase at B'nai Chayim, which is really just the same old phase we have always been called to – what? You didn't expect enigmas from an English teacher? As we progress through the winter towards Pesach, our congregational life is going to be less and less about where we came from and it is going to be more and more about the soaring we are called to and to the places He will move our ministry into. How?

I would like to see our **Yeshivas** better attended. Every week, I am challenged by the questions and am deepening my grasp of the Word as we fill my spiritual tanks and renew the spirit of our minds. I would also like to see our **prayer meetings** better attended as they become times of great spiritual refreshing, where His Presence lifts us to heights of peace and rest even as we wrestle with the needs of our growing community. **Mishpocah**, provision is G-d's job, practical obedience is ours. G-d will always do His job – can He count on us to do ours?

Let's pray.