

12 Tishri, 5766, Oct. 15 2005 *It's Time To Give Ear and Really Listen* J. M. Terrett

Ha'Azinu	Give Ear	His Grace is Stronger Than Life
Torah:	Deut. 31:1-52	
(1) 32:11	We fly first class	
(2) 32:12	We dine on the best	
(3) 32:43	We shall be avenged and redeemed	
(4) 31:47	We have a life – His Word	
Haftarah:	2 Sam. 22:1-51	
(5 & 6) Ps. 22:2, 3	We are never abandoned – sevenfold protection	
Brit Chadashah:	Rom. 10:14-11:12; 12:19; 15:9, 10 (L & F)	
(7) Rom. 11:12	We shall always be a blessing	

One of the tensions I experience, whenever I observe the High Holy Days is what I call: "Reality Letdown", where the wonderful idealism and the awesome majesty of a New Year, kind of fades into the noise of the daily business of living.

I get the same feeling whenever we observe the L-rd's Table, because I feel both the drive to walk with Him and be full of integrity and shine and be salty, and also that sinking feeling – sort of a practical pessimism, because I know that you can't live on the mountain top of idealism and high principles. Life happens and somehow, we have to take the wonder of His Word and the power of His presence and integrate them into our lives and actually build and maintain a redemptive community of praise.

The frame of our Sukka is up, and it is my prayer that our strong desires to walk with Him in 5766, will last longer than our sukka, and not be just our fall excursion into repentance and self examination, to be followed by rejoicing and then put back into the drawer until next year. We really don't have a brand new year in which our lives will soar more than last year and really get it right this time. We have lives full of challenges, chores and transitions.

We are not called to repeatedly rewind our lives and spend our lives starting over. We rewind the Torah to repair our focus and maintain rhythm and progress. We are called to grow and we are called to learn how to take what we have received on the mountain and what we have received in the celebration of the L-rd's Table and actually make a difference in our lives.

How do we do this? I would like to read a familiar passage and put it into context for us and hold it up as an objective for our congregational life in 5766 – I Cor. 13. As you turn to this passage, let me put it into context and then we will read this together.

I have been a believer some 34 years. I have been in ministry some 22 years. I have been teaching some 30 years and sometimes I feel old and wise and sometimes I just feel old and tired. I have seen great moments of "pith and promise", fizzle and have seen some really sincere people badly burned and some really nasty people bully their way to the top of the heap.

Patti and I have intervened to help people in some pretty dastardly dilemmas and when it has come to our own life and our own family, we have always seen a **threefold phenomenon**. We have always refused to compromise and lower our expectations and our standards, even if we admit that we ourselves are not able to fully measure up. We see our lives as repeatedly taking aim, and renewing a direction and holding onto a purpose, and it is as we do this, that the L-rd intervenes to lift us and to bless us and keep us going.

But that is only the first of the threefold of our phenomenon. ***Rigid idealism is a very naïve and dangerous form of perfectionism and legalism***, and in our lives and ministries we have always taught what James the brother of our L-rd says: "Mercy triumphs over Judgment" (James 2:13). This does not mean we lower our standards, it means we learn to make allowances for the deficiencies of life situations.

This means we do not beat people up for not being perfect, and for not being able to do things without messing up. What we do not want to mess up is the focus and the vision and what we want to learn is how to hold up the vision and lift people up to it, daily, weekly, monthly and through all the transitions of their lives and ours, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. I like to call this **redemptive pessimism**, which maintains an optimistic/idealistic focus and yet which understands that perfection is not possible, nor even desirable in our daily lives.

The third facet of the threefold is the balance, and it is one which speaks to me every time we recite the Al Hayt prayer. It is discipline based on the conviction that people can actually change, and even more that they can want to change. This means that we build friendships and provide learning situations so that people who come into our ministry and into our community are given the chance to both accept **the yoke of high ideals** (Matt. 11:28-30) and to learn how to walk so that applying this focus/yoke actually builds biblical community and the spiritual intimacy which true fellowship and friendship is all about.

So, even though I know we shall have a high degree of coming and going, and "checking" us out and even though I know that it is going to be an uphill slogging for another year as our community grows from ***carnal childhood*** to ***spiritual adulthood*** – with all the joy and pain and frustration which Moshe and David encountered. This year, again, I am prepared to continue to give ear and to learn how to take our idealistic focus and let Him show me new redemptive ways to FIRST continue to help me grow out of my own carnal childhood and then SECOND how to facilitate (teach, model, correct and mentor) ***spiritual adolescence*** as the only worthy staple of the life which we want to see take root and grow and flourish in all aspects of the life of B'nai Chayim.

Let's read the passage together and prepare to celebrate our monthly reality check, the first one after our annual reality check, and the only place where our threefold phenomenon can survive one more year and learn to thrive as we anticipate all the challenges of another year. We need a high focus. We need to make allowances for frailty and we need to provide the environment where growth and maturity can BOTH keep focused and learn the mercy which will hold us together and see us grow numerically and spiritually.

May we truly give ear and learn to really listen, both as we partake of the L-rd's Table and as we prepare for one more set of observances before the wonder of a Canadian winter sets in. Reality doesn't have to bite if we stay together and learn to cherish each other as we keep walking on our generational and congregational and personal pilgrimage. See you in the Sukka, Monday night.

Amen.