

Vayeilech                      And He Went      For the Sake of the Children of the Biblical Core

Torah:                              Deut. 31:1-30

(1) 4: ***"The L-RD shall treat these nations like He treated Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites, which He destroyed with their country."*** There are no opponents which can stand in the way of the accomplishment of the purposes of G-d. Despite all the raging of the nations since the beginning, the Kingdom of G-d shall prevail.

(2) 13: ***"And their children who do not know it, shall hear it and they shall learn to fear the L-RD your G-d all the time which you shall live in the country which you are going to take possession of after having crossed the Jordan."*** We have always been called to be a people of the Book, which is both our mandate and our bill of rights (constitution).

(3) 16: ***"The L-RD said to Moses, behold you are going to lie down with your fathers. And this people shall rise up and shall prostitute themselves to the strange gods of the country into which they shall enter. They shall abandon and violate my covenant that I have struck with them."*** Failure and backsliding have been factored into the superintending purposes of G-d and will never annul or even stall His eventual purposes.

(4) 27: ***"For I know your spirit of rebellion and the stiffness of your neck. If you have been rebellious against the L-RD during my lifetime while I am still alive in your midst, how much more shall you be after my death"***. G-d does not hesitate to bless those He knows will later abandon Him, because he is all about the preserving the children of the biblical core.

Haftarah:                      Hos. 14:2-10; Micah 7:18-20; Joel 2:15-27

(5) 14:4: ***"I will repair their infidelity, I will have a sincere love for them; my wrath has been turned away from them."*** His wrath is always redemptive, never to destroy the people, only to remove the rotten edges.

(6) 2:25: ***"I will replace for you the years that have been devoured by the locust, the hopper, the destroyer and the cutter, my great army which I sent against you."*** After the plagues which devastated Egypt and which hunted down the wicked, G-d will restore His blessing upon the children of the righteous biblical core.

Brit Chadashah:              Romans 10:1-17

(7) 10:4: ***For Messiah is the end (the objective, the point) of the Law for the justification of all those who believe."*** Messiah speaks of a choice which involves admitting guilt and surrendering to repentance, because to believe always implies an equal commitment to repentance.

Psalm 65                      Jewish Hero: Gedaliah (even if we lose, it is always better to be one of the good guys)

Today is the Sabbath of the Return, or the Sabbath of Repentance and I would like to give you a brief meditation on the dynamics of this wonderful, though often maligned, spiritual discipline: **repentance**. Repentance is not just admitting that you have done wrong and feeling sorry for what you have done. It also involved taking steps to fix and to remedy the damage you have done and to take steps to prevent further damage from occurring. But there is another feature of this wonderful spiritual discipline which is often neglected and not fully understood.

Repentance acknowledges that while sin has been dealt with in our Messiah, sinfulness will be a problem which we shall all have to deal with constantly and unless we are constantly on our guard we shall fall more from lack of being alert, than from being attacked. Gen. 4:7 (I Peter 5:8, 9; Rom. 7:18, 24, 25; 8:11).

Part of what it means to walk through this life is to possess free will and dignity – to choose between good and evil (and everything in-between) and to suffer the consequences of our choices and the choices of others. We cannot get away from this necessity to choose, whenever we encounter a choice.

Repentance acknowledges that there will always be an element of sinfulness which will always try and move from crouching at the door to ruling in the heart and the life (Gen. 4:7). Repentance also acknowledges that in every encounter with sinfulness, there is always a choice to be made (I Cor. 10:13) and that we may not always be successful in every encounter.

It is not the same as building in error into a high precision instrument, it is the same as building in function to deal with errors, so that when the machine misfires, it does not self-destruct, but can identify the problem, solve it (fixing any damage). Unless the machine can deal with misfiring and with error, then I do not want its operating systems to put the success of my mission at risk.

In all the ups and downs and complicated experiences and events that are constantly interacting and unfolding in our lives and in the life of our planet, we need to understand that there is always at least a two pronged spiritual component, which will both try and influence us into one of two directions, without this process ever being either simplistic or cut and dried (or black and white).

It is kind of like this, even the bad guys want to do a good job and function by a code of conduct and what they define as bad or evil is the breaking of this code, even if keeping it involves acts of theft, violence, murder and fornication. So honour among thieves often means defying the inner urging to do good which all of us possess.

However, even among those who are dedicated to the practice of righteousness and the pursuit of spirituality, there is also the tendency to break our code of honour, will expose us to committing acts which are in direct contradiction to our lifestyle – such as theft, deceit, gossip, violence, murder and even fornication.

In the old cartoon, Andy Capp, the main character, a drunk who cheats on his wife and loves to brawl, is having a conversation with his Anglican priest where he makes a potentially profound statement. He says that there is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us, that people do not know whether to try and draw the best out of us or to suppress the worst which is in us all.

The preacher goes away confused and Andy Capp says: "I got him". But he hadn't really, because the answer the curate should have given was this – we should try and do both, or neither as the case may be.

We should try and motivate people to seek the deep inner good which the Father has planted in each of us and teach them how to battle the evil which is always hanging around the door, whispering endless evil choices and bad decisions to us constantly.

How do we win in such a perpetual tug of war? We have to learn to use repentance which is based on our Messiah's grace. We must first acknowledge that the price has been paid and that forgiveness is available, then we must surrender our sin and take charge of our sinfulness, so that the wild horse remains under our control and does not run away with us.

This what Paul meant when he talked about the four laws of Romans chapter seven and eight. There is first the Law of G-d, which the law of my understanding rejoices in, inwardly. There is also the law of sin in my members which wants to use the Law of G-d as a weapon to convince me that the good which I wish I could do, according to my inner man, is beyond my ability to fulfill, so I might as well give in to the supposedly stronger call of my sinfulness.

The fourth Law is the law of the Spirit of Life in our Messiah which tells us that while we can never be free of the law of sinfulness, we do not have to give in to it or listen to it, even if we cannot silence it in this life. Repentance acknowledges the presence of both our inner sinfulness and the outer forces of sinfulness which are trying to come in and take possession of us. On the inside we have the flesh which wants endless satisfaction and on the outside, there is the world and the enemy which want to convince us that sinfulness is inevitable and somehow more desirable than the unreasonable requirements of the impossible righteousness which G-d requires of us.

I think I have just defined the rationale behind the carnal morality of murder, theft and sexual immorality which in our society, is trying to use the cloak of supposed political correctness to gain protection under the law for the practices of that which the law should condemn (and used to).

The Law of Spirit and of Life says that the righteousness of the Law remains both the final objective and the attainable objective if we use the power of forgiveness to remove the threat of punishment and the power of repentance to use this forgiveness to silence the voice of our sinfulness on a case by case basis in the realm where decisions must be made.

Instead of saying that we cannot avoid doing wrong, we need to say that we are protected by forgiveness, so that even if we fall and do wrong, we can get back up and walk in righteousness –and we move away from the lie that says we cannot avoid sin, to the truth that goes one step further and says that while we cannot ever be protected from the drive to do wrong which comes from our inner sinfulness,, we can be protected from the inevitability of sin by the power of the indwelling Messiah who teaches us three things.

He teaches us first that our sins are paid for so we do not have to fear punishment, which, strangely, motivates us to sin (you are going to get into trouble for doing it, so you might as well do it). Then He teaches us that this forgiveness can set us free from sin because we don't have to listen to the lies of the flesh which tells us that we will never be strong enough to resist on our own – because in our Messiah we are never alone and we can obey because He is present in us.

So we take the sword of the Word out of the hands of our sinfulness and use it to slay the sinful tendency, this time, because the third thing he teaches us is that sinfulness will never go away in this life and we can only win on a case by case basis as long as we listen to the voice of the law of the Spirit and Life which is

in us. This is the power of repentance which we are celebrating today, because it is not a single act, but it is both a habit and a lifestyle – where we acknowledge the inevitability of sinfulness as a constant drive, but not the inevitability of sinfulness as a constant stream of inevitable bad choices.

Repentance frees us to base our lives on voices and not on drives because we are forgiven and because our Messiah defeated sinfulness in His own flesh and can teach us the same strategy of victory in our own choices – in our own battle to win the war of free will and dignity.

The final victory was won by our Messiah at Calvary; the daily victory is won as we learn the difference between the inevitability of sinfulness and the inevitability of sin. The first (sinfulness) is a spiritual reality where our flesh on the inside wants the enemy and the world to come into the inside and this traitorous tendency will always be there in every choice we have to make. The second (sin) is a lie we don't have to face alone, because of three wonderful truths: first, all of our sin was paid for on the cross, second, our Messiah is with us to help us in every confrontation we have with sinfulness and third we will one day be released from the body of this death when He returns.

So with our understanding we are slaves to the Law of G-d and with our flesh we are slaves to the law of Sin. Whenever we listen to the indwelling Messiah and not to the indwelling sinfulness, we accomplish the righteousness of the law – or we keep on coming back to it, until the power of our stubborn repentance becomes more powerful than the power of our stubborn sinfulness and we keep that wild horse on a short leash and never lose sight of the righteousness objective, however long it takes us to reach it.

G-d, through His Son, will never give up on us. Sinfulness through the flesh will also never give up on us. Which one will you give in to? Shabbat Shuvah is a persistent call to give in to repentance and to learn to conquer sinfulness, for this is our own cosmic battle and one which he won for us so long ago and wants to win for us every day and in every choice we make.

May your repentance become powerful and blessed in 5773.

Let's pray.