

21 Elul, 5765 (Sept. 24, 2005)

Dwelling in His Presence Together

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Ki Tavo**When You Enter****Torah:**

Deut. 26:1-29:9

Haftarah:

Is. 60:1-22

Brit Chadashah:

Luke 21:1-4 (L); Luke 24:44-53(F)

Welcome to a Shabbat where we are going to explore worship together. By this I do not mean that we are going to be spending all of our time worshipping, although that would be an excellent way to spend a shabbat morning! Since we began as a Messianic Jewish Community, we have never explored a **Messianic Jewish approach to worship** and we have never articulated our community's own corporate "**Mission Statement**" when it comes to worship.

So today, we would like to do things a little differently. We are going to have our teaching session, before we worship, so we know what it is we are trying to accomplish when we come together to worship. So in order to set the stage, as it were, I want to do **three things** to get us started. **First** I want to give a little teaching on the meaning of worship, then **secondly**, I want discuss our usual progression as we flow through our worship time. But even before that I want to do my **third** thing and talk about how to get the most out of any service any of us may find ourselves in – whether at B'nai Chayim, or elsewhere.

When I was at Bible School, before I went to seminary, we had daily chapel services which lasted about an hour and on Thursday, we went for two hours. Different students took turns leading worship and two or three times a week, they took turns preaching, so the quality of the music and the quality of the preaching varied wildly. We had the occasional guest speaker, but after my first semester, I found it harder and harder to focus on the L-rd and get something out meaningful of most services. Some students could have put a rioting Stanley Cup crowd to sleep in two minutes and when they lead, they gave new meaning to the words "terrified", "tone deaf" and "off key".

Unlike some students, I never felt it was right to skip chapel, even when my night jobs meant I came to school very tired. As a ministry candidate, I knew I was going to be spending the rest of my life in services and I had better get used to the idea that **worship was a discipline that I had to exercise**, if I wanted my soul to stay **fresh** and my life to remain **connected** to the L-rd. Sometimes we get the false impression that it is our personal walk with the L-rd is what we have to look after, and we give whatever is left of our time and energy to our community spirituality.

One of my favourite Bible School teachers, Miss Grace Brown, of blessed memory, was someone I was always taking my problems to and so much of what she taught me and modelled for me has become foundational in my own spiritual walk and spiritual growth. By the time I came to Bible School, she had been teaching for longer than I had been alive, so she had attended more chapel services than I would care to think about and yet she said they were all so important and meaningful to her, both as an instructor and as an individual believer. I was not easy to convince.

Sometimes, after chapel, I was so angry at what I considered to be such a waste of time that I wanted to put pressure on the faculty to do something about it. I was convinced that worship and preaching should always be **uplifting** and **dynamic**, where every word and ever song spoke to the heart of every believer – a mountain top experience where we hit the bull's eye every time. Sometimes, I felt that chapel was a **joke** and I was going to fix it! Right away and firmly! My way!

Miss Brown was very patient, and perhaps a little amused with this fire breathing young man and she said something which I disagreed with at the time, but which has since kept me from committing serial homicides over the last three decades of my ministry. She said that **G-d has always got something for everybody in every service**, even if the music sucks and the preaching is worse. It doesn't always have to be an earth shattering, life changing revelation, where we sing and dance and weep and prance, spitting fire and are energized to overflowing. Even that would get boring after a while, because **worship is not an experience, it is an encounter**. It's all about Him and all about us, together in Him.

Let me bring you to my second point, so we can move on to define worship and then worship the L-rd together. How do we set up the worship in our shul? How do we try and make it happen in our synagogue? With our worship team, I have asked that we always move our worship through **four stages**. **(1)First of all**, I want an ice breaker, an attention getter – kind of a "hey, you" song, one that also says: "yeah, I'm talking to you buddy!" – Come, let us go up to the House of the L-rd, even if your tired, sick, discouraged or so full of vim and vigour you could jump tall buildings at a single bound, and are so excited you want to burst into flame and set the whole world on fire.

You see, worship isn't about us or even about our week. ***It's a check-in time, where we climb up out of our lives, or down out of our lives, and move into His presence, together.*** It's the together part which is the hardest and which needs the most work, cause, I don't know about you, but I have the best looking **belly button** in the universe and my **thumb** does taste good. Next, I want us to **(2) celebrate the L-rd**, because He is **good**, period. Not just **good** to me, or just **good** to us, or even just **good** to Israel, like some **celestial sugar daddy**, throwing candy and \$100 bills out of His **chocolate chariot** and He blazes across the sky in the best of all possible worlds.

He is **just good**, and He has always been **just good** and forever, He will always remain **just good** and worship must always include an expression of that goodness, where we are singing to Him and **damn the torpedoes!** Once we quit belly button gazing and thumb sucking, and start our weekly check in with the Divine Presence of our Eternal L-rd and Master, ***the things of this world begin to grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and His grace*** – even if we miss the right note and don't really know the song, or even if we don't like the song, and are having trouble concentrating and "getting into in" during the worship. Does anyone really know what that "getting into it" means?

Is it like a suit of clothes? Is it a mood? Is it a frame of mind? How do we "get into" worship? Well I'm going to talk a lot about that and we are going to "get into" worship in a few minutes, but let's move on. Once we are dancing up a storm and singing some really up beat songs, then I ask the worship team to **(3) slow the music down**, so we can begin to contemplate the L-rd and let Him begin to speak to our hearts. I want to move forward and pray for each of you, and maybe do a little counselling – or at least give you a big hug.

It is so important to bring our problems and our hopes and our accomplishments to Him, as a community, surrounded by the sound of our mishpocah singing to the L-rd and celebrating His goodness. At some point, I want the worship team to **(4) bring our little journey to a halt** and get us ready to hear the Word. I want to end with a community prayer, so we re-affirm our **corporate commitment** to Him and are **NOT just in touch with Him, but are in touch with each other**. Unless we can step aside from the events of our life and reach out to Him and to each other, we are **spiritually** out of tune – a nice way of saying we are in trouble.

Now, we will not always have a **super time**, and we will not always have a **rotten time**, but we always need to have a **corporate time**, so that our community maintains its **corporate momentum** and we have all re-affirmed our **community commitment** to Him and to each other. This is a pretty **tall order** which really has **nothing** to do with the music, but which has **everything** to do with the **spiritual condition** of our lives, as **individuals** and as a **community**.

Turn with me to **Col. 3:16** and **Eph. 4:15,16** and let me honour the memory of one of the lady who continues to have an influence for good in my life, even though she has been gone for several years (and I miss her often). Worship has **three functional components** – **three pistons** which have to be all firing at once, or we will cough and sputter and stall, instead of taking flight into the Heavens. But **remember what Grace Brown said**, so that every Shabbat we come to shul committed to finding that thing which the L-rd has prepared for us and also become convinced that it is always present in every service whenever the people of the L-rd gather together, whether or not we are all firing on all pistons. Let's look at these pistons, which are the three basic components of a worship encounter.

First of all worship is all about **(1)His presence** in our midst (Matt. 18:20), which is sometimes like a burning bush and a quaking mountain, with trumpets blaring, the whole shebang – and which sometimes is just that **still small voice** which finds us in whatever personal cave we are pouting in and gently encourages us to suck it up and to grow up – that it is not our story, it is not our show – that **until we can learn to focus on Him in one accord, we will never learn to walk with Him in the same way**. Ouch gadol on steroids! Let's get a new group going at B'nai Chayim – **belly buttons anonymous** or how about **thumb suckers for Jesus**. "To pout or not to pout", that is really the question and the answer.

Even if we don't "feel" or "sense" this presence, instead of withdrawing back into our little world, remember Miss Brown was right, there is always something for everyone, if we learn to look for the honey in rock and quit criticizing the lousy job those amateurs are doing – well you know, at least they're trying. So, when you come in, you need to be ready to look for what the L-rd has for you. Sometimes it will jump out at you and hit you so hard between the eyes that you will not just fall over, you'll be knocked flat – right out of your socks. Sometimes it's hidden and you have to listen really carefully and let the worship get into your bones.

Piston one is that **presence** of G-d we come together to enter. **(2)Piston number two** is His **image** in our hearts, that personal presence, which wants to connect with that bigger presence. It is that presence of the L-rd in our hearts which wants to reach out and touch the descending presence of G-d, and kind of say "hi" to the presence which has come all the way from Heaven. **(3) Piston number three** is that **community presence** where His earthly presence in our hearts and His heavenly presence in our midst forms a **community presence** where we are linked together on earth and with all the believers who are already in Heaven, and where we experience our **corporate oneness** as a community on earth and as a generational community on earth and in Heaven..

People in the world know about this – it's called **team spirit** and sometimes it can get so intense that it's scary. They take their love for the Oilers or for the Eskimos so seriously that they almost pass out with joy when our team scores and even cry when we lose (fortunately that doesn't happen too often). The big difference is that, as believers, we have the L-rd in our hearts and when the earthly presence of the L-rd in our hearts and the Heavenly presence of the L-rd in our midst, links our hearts together in song, the furniture of our **inner lives** and our **corporate lives** begins to change. We learn to see each other differently, we are learn to love each other as true family and we are ready to learn to see each other as **essential elements** of our corporate worship experience, no matter what we sound like.

The heavenly presence of G-d which we experience as individuals is precious. The image of G-d which turns on and echoes back with the inner earthly presence is one of my favourite experiences in this life. That **team Spirit** which unites our hearts and lives into a **cohesive flock**, where both the inner earthly presence and the descending Heavenly flowing to bring us into in the **community presence** of our Shepherd, is one of the most **supernatural encounters** anyone can hope to experience in this life. You see, worship moves us from where we are and shows us where we should be, to give us a little **Heaven Break**. Worship moves us from the **theoretical** – the text, the model – and into the **reality** of contact with the King.

Worship allows our hearts to **soften**, to **heal**, to **grow**, to **release**, to **break** and to **be soothed**, if only we would take our thumbs out of our mouths and quit looking at our belly buttons – and come out of ourselves and harmonize and reach out and reach up, **whether we feel like it or not**. Sometimes it will be with gritted teeth, or a sore throat or a breaking heart. Sometimes it will be with a singing heart which floats on waves of glory. Sometimes we will just not be able to "get into it" and are singing or sitting or looking around, bored, or angry or not really present – but at least we are there.

Worship is our weekly **soul laundry**, where we discipline our hearts to move away from the pit or the rut or the pain or the joy of our lives as individuals and enter into His **corporate presence** together, so the **community momentum** can minister to our diverse **spiritual needs** while keeping us **focused** on our **King** and on our **Eternal Destiny**. Here's a formula which may help you to get a picture of worship.

The Bible is a book, a text, which we **read**, but it has no impact in our hearts and lives unless we respond, or react to what we read. Once we **respond**, we need to take this response and let it bring about changes in our lives, and feed our souls so that we can both grow spiritually and have an **impact** on the people we come into contact with, week by week. Worship is just words, a text, which will have no impact on our lives unless we react and respond. Once we react and respond, our **(1) inner image** of G-d (which is where the earthly presence of the L-rd dwells in each believer) echoes back to the **(2) descending presence** and all the activated combination of the two presences join hands and move into the **(3) corporate presence**, and the L-rd places some spiritual merchandise in our hearts, which seeps or flows out of us into our week. What **impact** are you going to let your **response** to the **singing** equip you with this coming week?

From week to week, it is never the same **experience**, emotionally or corporately, because we are all in such different spaces and are all going through such different things in our lives – and yet it is always the same **encounter** every week. Say what? Let me finish and move us into some worship. Every week, the L-rd, not Philip, Paula or Mike, prepares **something** for each of us which He works into the service at some point and if we learn the **discipline of worship**, we will have less trouble finding it, week by week. There are three staples which will always be served in each worship service, but never in the same way or in the same proportion: **(1) His descending presence** will always be here. **(2)His earthly presence** in our inner image will always want to echo back and touch base with the descending presence. And finally there is always a **(3) corporate presence**, a **musical oneness**, which will open our lives to His substantial blessing – either in our **heads**, our **hearts** our **bodies** or our **lives** – or in any combination of the four.

Lets move into worship and allow this wonderful encounter lift our hearts and our community into the Heavenlies and may you discover just how right Miss Brown was and just how good our L-rd really is to all the **belly button gazers** and **thumb suckers** who are learning not to **pout** their way through every service, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Amen. Maestro, music, if you please.