

16 Elul, 5766 (Sept. 9, 2996) *Sixth of Consolation: Alastair's Bar Mitzvah* J. M. Terrett

Ki Tavo                                    When You Enter In  
 Torah:                                    Deut. 26:1-29:8  
 Haftarah:                                Is. 60:1-22  
 Brit Chadashah:                        Lk. 21:1-4 (L) Lk. 24:44-53 (F)  
 Bar Mitzvah Portion:                Num. 25:10-29:40 (30:1) (*Pinchas*)

There comes a necessary time in everyone's life when they take a **spiritual stand** – when they pass from wandering, seeking and examining to deciding, maturing and building. In today's Torah Portion, Israel was instructed to perform a national ritual of transition, once they entered and subdued the land. It was time for Truth and Consequences for the generation of the House of Jacob who had grown up in the wilderness. You never learn all there is to know about G-d and you never stop growing and maturing spiritually, but there is a **big difference between a covenant relationship of personal intimacy and a tourist-like spectator approach to the things of G-d.**

We are a very distinct community of Jews and Gentiles who believe that Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth is the Messiah of promise and prophecy and this spiritual perspective equips us with some very distinct **privileges** and **responsibilities**. Alastair is making a public statement about his spiritual journey with the context of this community. He, along with us, now joins hands with Jews of all generations and proclaims that **there is only one G-d, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and that all of His promises and all of His commands in the Torah are true and binding on us.**

Gen. 12:2, 3 was a promise made to our father Abraham so that his descendents would become (and remain) a great nation and that all nations would be blessed in his seed. This seed is the **Messiah** who died on the cross for the sins of all mankind and who entrusted us with the Message of His love, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We can walk with Him as Jews and as Gentiles, in full obedience and complete faith.

As a Jew, Alastair is accepting the burden/responsibility of being one of **covenant bearers** for his generation. The covenants are **symbolic blue prints** for the intentions of G-d for all mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. If you lose the blue print, the building suffers and repairs cannot be made as effectively. I can't help wondering how different the history of the church would be if Jews had been allowed to practice Messianic Judaism as the older brother, instead of being forced to either leave Judaism, or be expelled from the Christian community.

It's a new day and we are back to rebuild a **strong spiritual, biblical community** based on **Messianic Judaism**. In honour of Yakov ben Yehoshuah, I have EIGHT points, in three groups, which I would like to drive home, both for him and for all of you, before we move on to the feast.

Here is the first group. Rituals are meaningless unless they teach us how to practice righteousness and thus enrich the reality in which we live. To put it another way, life is at best a mixed bag of: wonder, the mundane, the passionate, the boring, the unpredictable and the unreliable and unless we bring **spiritual order** to our journey from the cradle to the grave, we have **no real purpose** and there is **no real meaning** to our lives. How about you?

There are two subsets of reality which Alastair is embracing today: ritual (a commitment to a generational community with a special, distinct calling) and righteousness (not being one of those who profess one thing and live another, but whose life is guided by the principles which this ritual embodies – to be light, salt and the fragrance of the L-rd in a world which is turning into a spiritual desert of hedonism, materialism and foolishness). **Ritual describes a righteousness, which is the place where our spirituality touches the reality we live in, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.**

Here is the second set and it describes the practical side of Messianic Jewish spirituality and I will be using three Hebrew terms: Teshuvah, kavanah and tikkun olam. Teshuvah means to repent or return and to walk in obedience (**Mitzvoth**) and mercy (**tzedakah**) – It means a high degree of spiritual accountability which deals with truth, both biblical and personal.

Kavanah means intention, or what we are aspiring to – what drives the hard drive of our hearts. It means we will never just go through our rituals by rote, and will never confine our faith to religious services. It means that we focus the best and the most of our personal inner strength to the pursuit of holiness, mercy and righteousness – it means we are on side with the purposes of G-d and see our life as a vehicle of service for His Word and His Message.

Tikkun Olam means to heal or fix the world. As a Messianic Jew, Alastair is now committed to fixing and healing the spiritual and personal hurts of the world – that is to always be part of the solution, and never a source of problems. This does not mean he will not have problems, or even that he will never cause problems, it means that this will never be his intention and that he will **remain focused on G-d's solutions in every situation** (I Cor. 10:13 and Rom. 8:28; 32-39).

How about you? How is your **teshuvah quotient**? Does your **kavanah** need a tune up? Is your **tikkun olam** even in gear, or is it stalled? What rituals do you acknowledge and what righteousness does that commit you to? Does your reality line up with the spiritual truths of G-d from His Word in our blessed Messiah and Saviour, or does it suck on steroids (wallowing in greed, lust, anger, denial and selfishness)?

Let me conclude with my third group, and here I am speaking to all of us as a broader community, and to our guests, and even to our detractors. Recently many of us have encountered challenges, even attacks – physical, financial, personal and spiritual and it doesn't look like it's going to let up any time soon. What is G-d thinking? As our shepherd isn't He supposed to lead us quietly and uneventfully through green pastures to our Father's Home in glory? Yes and no. **He is also our spiritual coach who wants us to push our limits so that we do not grow stale and mediocre** – this season the Esks are discovering that they cannot expect to win without both great effort and a constant revision of strategy.

**G-d will push us to where our limits really are, not to where we have established our comfort zones.** There are in all of us, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, to the rebbe first and also to the flock, areas of **darkness, denial** and **defeat** in our lives which He refuses to let us get away with. ***Some of the disruptions and some of the attacks we are experiencing are there so that we might deal with our weaknesses as thoroughly as we do with our strengths.*** Whatever we are uncomfortable with because we would rather just not have to figure out a way to handle it, or them, will haunt us until we learn to see it and do it G-d's way from the Bible – unless we want to go round and round the wilderness and die without having made any real spiritual progress towards the Promised Land he is calling each of us to.

Lastly, I am often criticized for not giving up easily on really difficult people and for having too much patience with serial losers. I admit this weakness, but I am not going to plead insanity or even try to justify this **excessive empathy**. I am a loser beyond anyone I have yet encountered and it was people who picked me up and believed in me who have made sure that I am still here, sort of. So, I would like to continue to explain my excessive empathy and be held accountable not to exercise it with people who just want to waste my **time** and **energy**, which belongs first and foremost to my family and my flock. You can teach an old rebbe new tricks.

I draw a clear distinction between **self pity** and **mercy**, but the distinction is not always easily evident, even to the people I am trying to help. Blame, anger and all the works of the flesh are signs of **inner spiritual trauma** which will either choke any chance of healing and freedom, or with help, the twisted, perverted, pouting, selfish sinner move away from self pity and actually take some **positive redemptive action**. I will forgive 70 x 7 times a day until there is no hope of progress, then I will cut them lose, until they come around. I sometimes am taken in by a sob story and really do feel bad for all the problems of the world. I cannot guarantee that I will not be suckered in again, but I will always be accountable to my leadership so that our vision and purpose are fulfilled. How are your **limits**? Are you wallowing in **self pity** or do you really want to change and get control of what is out of control in your heart and life? Let's pray.