

16 Tevet, 5777 (14/1/17) **Vision Statement: A Safe Place for Healing** J. M. Terrett

Vayechi And He Lived Empowering the Next Generation

Torah:	Genesis 47:28 - 50:26
Haftarah:	I Kings 2:1 - 12
Brit Chadashah:	I Peter 1:1 - 9
Reading:	John B. p. 149 and Ps. 41.
Jewish Hero:	Sarah.

Chazak, Chazak, V'Nitchazek (Baptism tonight)

I always enjoy reading through the Book of Genesis and am always a little sad when we come to the end of it. But, in the life of any community there comes a time when one generation has to pass and another needs to take up the torch. In Today's Torah portion, we read about a double passing of the baton and in the Haftarah portion we read about David passing his on to Solomon. One of my persistent prayers for our community is that we will become generationally sustainable so that our ministry can continue to grow and flourish long after us oldsters have gone to our reward.

I am not overly fascinated by death and as I age, I look forward to many more years of annoying people and encouraging them to walk with the L-rd. However, even if I live to 101, unless we have things in place for the next generation and for succeeding generations after that, we will have missed the thrust of today's Torah portion.

I am thrilled with the two little babies we have welcomed into the world and I am excited that there is still one more to come. At the same time, I realize that at 64 I only have a limited time to continue my active ministry and I will continue to pray and to plan so that B'nai Chayim's vision attracts future generations until the arrival of that glorious kingdom whose citizens we forever are.

Will you join me in praying and planning so that there are no generational gaps in our community's life? We will still have a lot of turnover as people come and as people go, but we need to maintain a vital core of committed disciples who will keep the vision alive and embrace the generational progress of our shul family.

Jacob only lived 17 years in Egypt, but if you asked him which part of his life was his favourite, I think his vote would go for these last years of peace and security. He formally adopts Joseph's sons as his own and even though they do not get a separate final blessing, they become a blessing formula for future children: would G-d treat you like He did Ephraim and Manasseh. He reverses the blessing order so that the younger receives the blessing of the elder, which is reminiscent of what happened with his brother and him.

He uses a unique covenant formula with Joseph so that he will not be buried in Egypt and then he calls his sons and pronounces his final blessing over them. The first three reap what they have sown, but their offspring still play a role in the future life of Israel – Moses and Aaron were Levites. After Jacob blesses Dan, he makes a surprising exclamation: I wait (or hope) for your salvation (or deliverance) YHVH.

This is both an expression of Jacob's trust in the ability of the L-rd to fulfil His promises and also Jacob

realizing that there are greater issues at stake than merely the giving of a family blessing. As with the Aaronic benediction, he realizes that he and the generations of his family are merely the channel through which G-d's Kingdom purposes will be fulfilled and it is quite humbling and not a little scary. Do you trust in His Salvation and does the way you are living your life reflect this?

Related to this, he tries to give the double tribe of Joseph the biggest blessing with an awesome sevenfold calling down of G-d's favour, but even though mighty kingdom blessings will come upon the children of the children of the one who saved Israel, the blessing of the kingdom rule is given to Judah in another amazing sevenfold formula. Judah's leadership is ensured as well as Judah's royalty and it is clearly stated for all time that Messiah was to come from the House of Judah, no matter how long it took for this to happen.

In the Haftarah, David pronounces another sevenfold success formula blessing upon Solomon and his descendants because walking with YHVH according to the Torah is the only way to ensure the continuation of the blessings associated with G-d's promises. Solomon and his descendants strayed from this straight and narrow path and the blessing of Judah came through one of his brothers, Nathan, whose descendants did not follow suit and slide into the folly which Solomon and his descendants ended up wallowing in.

While I firmly believe that G-d's love and faithfulness are entirely and fully unconditional, we need to understand that our part in receiving them and passing them on is dependant upon our obedience, even if this involves some stumbling, some limping and even some starting over until we get it right. While G-d has never abandoned His people and while He never will abandon the children of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph, He remains faithful to His Word and this faithfulness to the Word needs to be the generational legacy of all those who walk with Him, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

The passage ends with Joseph's brothers bowing down before him asking for the mercy which they never showed him. He does not absolve them of responsibility but reminds them that things turned out under the sovereignty of YHVH and he submits their treatment of him into the hands of this higher court. We need to do the same as we relate to issues which we cannot resolve and to the injustices which too many innocent victims are subjected to worldwide and generationally.

While Joseph realizes that his position will require an Egyptian burial, he elicits a promise from his brother's descendants that they will not leave his bones in Egypt when G-d one day releases Israel from her time in Egypt. The eternal purposes of G-d are never in the possession of a single generation and once we see our lives as one of many generations and as we see our congregation as a three to four generational community, we can respond to the goodness and mercy which follows us by vigorously hanging onto the faith and obedience we are called to as we pass it on to all the succeeding generations who will join us in waiting for the Eternal kingdom of which we are called to be citizens.

Join me in our end of each book Torah blessing, because this is both our calling and His promise to those who refuse to loosen their grip on the Torah, because it is truly a tree of life:

Chazak Chazak v'Nitchazek
Be strong be strong and may you be strengthened.

Torah carrier: Donna

Sermon: Vision Statement: A Safe Place for Healing

When I was looking for a passage upon which to base my message, I looked at two portions of Ephesians chapter four. I have selected 4:11 - 16 and I would like to assign 4:25 - 32 for your after school reading homework. An issue which is closely related to wholeness and healing is safety and I would like to use this passage to highlight this essential element of healthy congregational life:

"He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, and others as pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints in view of the work of the ministry and the edification of the body of Messiah, up until we have all come to the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of G-d, to the state of a maturity, to the measure of the perfect stature of Messiah; thus we will no longer be children, floating and carried away by every wind of (false) doctrine, by the deception of men, by their craftiness in the means of seduction, but professing the truth in love, we grow in every respect in the one who is the chief, Messiah. It is from Him and because of the bonds of His assistance, that the whole body, well coordinated and forming a solid togetherness, takes its growth according to the strength which is due to each of its parts and edifies itself in love"

I had an interesting time translating this passage from the French, but it was insightful and while I will not be giving you an extensive commentary of every feature of this rich passage, let me zero in on several concepts it promotes: variant gifting, communal maturity, freed from being gullible, possessed of togetherness, growing in love as we speak the truth.

This is quite a relevant passage for us as we prepare for a baptismal service because unity in love and growth in maturity should be the community realities we are welcoming the candidates to share in with us.

However, this does not mean we are perfect, finely tuned elite which only accepts certain highly gifted candidates who are willing to surrender their uniqueness to our superior collectiveness. It means that we acknowledge that we are all essential pieces of a community puzzle which wants to help us flourish into the fullness of a spiritual potential which we cannot attain or maintain without each other.

It is not elusive or mysterious and it may be continually changing, but it is the enduring, nonnegotiable will of G-d and it is the only, singular objective of all of His interventions in our lives, both as individuals and as believers.

He wants us to grow and to mature and He is prepared to empower us with all the gifting we need to see this reality take root and bear fruit in our midst, no matter how long it takes and no matter how much healing and renewal is required and no matter how many times we have to come back to the drawing board and rethink how we relate to each other in Him.

I am saddened and enraged when I hear tales of bullying and backbiting that undermine the feeling of safety and welcome we all need to benefit from in order to leave the world and its carnal ways behind and learn how to do things His way and not make victims who are crushed, shushed or driven out by our aggressive, negative (bratty) behaviour. We are all limited people with a community mandate calling for unlimited acceptance and unconditional love so that our quest to grow in faith and obedience becomes a heroic community saga and not a sad dirge or a painful nightmare.

Families and communities can have their issues and can splinter and carry grudges and encourage bad temper and rotten attitudes, but this is not our calling and this is not what we will either encourage

or indulge in as we maintain a safe place for healing and spiritual blossoming into maturity and love, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. All of us are limited individuals who need to both learn how to get along with each other as we find our place in the bonded togetherness which our community promotes and also learn to accept and respect our differences in a forgiving community where judging and condemning are endangered species, swiftly on their way to complete extinction.

We are all free to make mistakes and only the L-rd is the king of the castle because we never compete against each other for the best places at our community's table – we accept responsibility for each other's welfare and do our best to be supportive, welcoming, believing in each other's worth and potential as vital team members in our midst.

Part of this growth in love and maturity means that even though we live in an increasingly sophisticated, information overloaded on-line world we are also growing to the place where we are increasingly inoculated against the winds of false doctrine that swirl all over the internet and infect the airways we are surrounded by. You also know that I do not like to perpetually attack various ministries and preachers and that I want to use this pulpit to nurture and cherish the flock of which I am a part and not use it as a weapon to confound the myriads of false teachers who are constantly on the prowl for new victims, splitting communities and callously crippling lives among the innocent and unsuspecting in our midst.

This does not mean that I accept all and every ministry which people bring to my attention and that I welcome a broad spectrum of nonsense and false teaching because I want people to think we are nice and accepting and easily taken advantage of. I am very particular about who I will listen to and which ministries I will endorse and encourage people to support, because all that glitters is not gold and I want to sail under the influence of the wind which is blown by the Spirit of G-d through the Word of G-d and not be driven by the turbulent and carnal hot air of the wolves who want to blow my house down and take me captive to their folly. There is just as much spiritual Mac junk food on line as there is in any number of unhealthy fast food franchises we would do well to avoid.

I do not want to become perpetually negative, pointing out how everybody else is wrong and that I am the only one who gets it right, but being faithful to the Bible and supportive of the Jewish people are two essential ingredients in our spiritual diet, if we want to grow in the Messiah and be healthy, joyful members of His redeemed community. Not everyone who calls themselves Messianic really is, in the biblical sense of the word, and the Bible requires us to stop listening to teaching which has departed from the Word of Truth and to accept responsibility for those we support and those we reject.

The Lausanne Committee for world Evangelism recognizes more than a thousand ministries and church denominations as holding biblically valid expressions of faith, but specialists who study cults estimate that their growing number greatly exceeds this group and they fall into two broad categories. There are doctrinal cults and pernicious cults. Doctrinal cults teach unbiblical nonsense and pernicious cults use various mind control techniques to break your will and indoctrinate you into a belief system and lifestyle you would reject if you were in your right mind.

B'nai Chayim wants you to always be in your right mind and rather than give you an exhaustive list of which groups to support and which groups to avoid, we want you to grow in grace and knowledge to the point where your spiritual radar will both alert you to dangers which are lurking in the big bad world and also guide you to the peaceful green pastures where you can rest and nourish your soul.

One of the major keys to effective spiritual growth and spiritual health is a spiritual lifestyle based on

regular shul attendance, because membership in a dynamic spiritual community takes time, effort and commitment. Let the fly by night, spiritual Mac junk food peddlers pester someone else. At B'nai Chayim we are too busy growing in Yeshua and learning to know each other according to His Word to waste our time and resources on that which does not satisfy according to His Word.

Related to the dizzying amount of false teaching that there is out there is the sad truth that religious communities are not always known for the love and harmony which they claim to promote. At B'nai Chayim we hold togetherness in high esteem because we understand that we cannot be right with Him when we are not right with each other.

I know we have had our conflicts and that there are always more ready and waiting just over the horizon, but we want to build and protect our togetherness by employing good resolution techniques and discouraging the holding of grudges or the destructive practice of judgmental gossip which the devil would encourage so that we back bite and devour each other to death.

I want everybody to feel safe in our midst, even if they only come for a little while and even if we have to gently and firmly point out flaws in their theology and help them develop better people skills and not disturb the peace of our shul family. We may all be at different places in our lives and not always be at the top of our game for shorter or longer periods of time as we deal with the ups and downs we encounter as we wander through this life.

However, we want to always be at the place where our walk with the L-rd and with each other in the L-rd is not only a key to our spiritual growth and maturity, but it is also a source of mutual support, comfort and healing. This may be a difficult reality to maintain and an elusive objective to set, but communities which claim to be Bible based can aim for nothing less if they want the blessing and the power of the L-rd to function in their midst.

One of the practical keys to building and maintaining this togetherness is both growing in love for each other and learning to speak the truth to each other in love. This is a learned skill but one which the L-rd requires us to obtain and we can not grow in Him or remain part of a loving, redemptive community without learning this spiritual way of communicating the truth.

The writer of Ecclesiastes wisely said that we should not pay attention to everything we hear – we may hear our servant curse us and we know we have cursed others in our heart. Humility and repentance are good cures for the hoof in mouth disease most of us catch from time to time. Patience and forgiveness helps when we are on the receiving end of someone else's tirade. I love my grandkids and I am helping them learn about truth and love – which means modelling for them how to tell the truth and how to handle moods and mistakes because even grandpas can have bad days.

How do you speak the truth in love? It means that if you cannot speak with love, don't speak. Now you can express disagreement and even irritation and do so lovingly. And we all need to learn how to meekly and patiently instruct those who oppose themselves because the wrath of man does not accomplish the will of G-d and He is the one we are called to serve.

It will always be a work in progress and our community will always be under construction generationally, but both our agenda and our blueprint require that at whatever stage we are in our communal walk with the L-rd, we are nurturing a safe place for everyone so that they can be healed and so that we can all continue to grow in love and maturity. If we are not growing and if we are not bearing fruit in our Messiah, then there is not point to our lives and we are just putting in time.

We are called to be Sabbath powered and Festival driven as we: shine our lighthouse, graft more branches to our tree, continually rejoice in our King and provide a safe place for healing for everyone. We are called to be a wholeness community where our mutual love and care fosters spiritual growth and maturity for everyone, from conception to the grave as we build a generationally sustainable community where togetherness and diversity join hands to walk with our King according to His Word and sing His praises.

These are not impossible goals to set for such a fractious, diverse group of people – it is the bare minimum and nothing less would be acceptable to our King. We have to ask ourselves how acceptable we want to be to our King and work and pray and grow and learn until our shul is a theologically sound, safe place for everyone and we are full of truth and love as we grow in Him together. Have you found your place in our midst? Do you make people feel safe in our midst? Do you speak the truth in love? Is your community connection strong and solid? Is your false teaching Bible based inoculation recent and up to date?

Let's pray.