

**Shelach Lecha      Send for Yourself      Failure to Launch**

**Torah:**                      Numbers 13:1-15:41

**Haftarah:**                Joshua 2:1-24

**Brit Chadashah:**      Hebrews 3:7-4:11

Reading: Denysia pp. 105, 107 Ps. 64. Jewish hero: Aaron. Torah carrier: Tom **YIZKOR**

The Torah portion deals with the sending of the twelve spies, who give a yes, but report up their return. In response to their description of a country well fortified and full of tall, well armed foes, the people panic and refuse to enter the land, and express a double death wish. They said they would have preferred to die in Egypt on the wilderness, rather than face the what they felt was an imminent defeat and the loss of their women and children.

They determine to elect a new leader and return to Egypt and threaten to stone the two spies who gave a good report. Even today when people do not like what they hear, they want to kill the messenger. The glory of the L-rd, which hovered over the camp as a cloud, suddenly appeared over the tent of meeting and once again Moses intercedes for the people to prevent their annihilation because of their disobedience.

Instead of annihilation, the people face exile and are told to wander in the wilderness until all the men, twenty years and older who spoke against entering the land were dead. The L-rd strikes down the ten spies with a plague and the people decide that they would rather face their enemies than spend a generation wandering through the wilderness. A journey of a few weeks was suddenly turned into a forty year exile. The people had asked to die in the wilderness and because of their failure to launch, that is what the L-rd said they were going to do.

Foolishly, the people decide to try and enter without the blessing of the L-rd and the men who did not really want to go in, are hewn to pieces. It may have been their equivalent of "death by cop" to avoid the slow death in the wilderness, but it did not work. They knew that the only way to protect their families was to turn around and wander through the wilderness.

The only other option was certain annihilation, because without the blessing of the L-rd, they were totally defenceless with enemies ready to pounce if they tried to leave the security of the wilderness.

The passage goes on to describe rules of sacrifice that would apply once they reached the promised land. The question arise as to what they did as they wandered in the wilderness and a hint is given in 15:32-36, where a man is stoned for violating the Sabbath.

The people were already organized into their marching and camping order and the L-rd would never let the camp disintegrate back into the motley crew that came out of Egypt.

There were still some rebellions to come before the camp fully accepted its fate and headed back into the safety of the wilderness. The lost generation which had failed to launch would spend the 40 years keeping the Sabbath and following the Festival Cycle, still being fed by manna and quail, with a covering by day and a light at night.

Their feet did not swell and their clothes did not wear out and nobody harmed them as they truly prepared to live through their children who were undoubtedly raised with the sad story of

their failure to launch. It was not a fate worse than death, it was a punishment they had earned which they eventually accepted because wandering in the wilderness with the L-rd was better than being cut to pieces by the wolves who were prowling around the camp, ready to devour any of the sheep who were foolishness enough to leave the safety of the sheepfold.

The Haftarah portion is the story of Joshua sending two unnamed spies into the land, but who really do not have to go any farther than Jericho to see that the people of the land were terrified and ready to be conquered. While the lost generation failed to launch, the story of their folly and of the eventual entrance of the new generation into the land was well known to the inhabitants of Canaan.

Even the inhabitants of its strongest fortress were shaking in their boots. Nothing had really changed in the land and if generation who had experienced the Exodus had not experienced a failure to launch, their entrance into the land would have been just as glorious as their victorious departure from the slavery of Egypt.

The New Testament portion takes the example of the lost generation's failure to launch and applies it to modern believers who need to avoid the same kind of rebellious disobedience. We are told to exhort each other daily so that we also do not become hardened by the seduction of sin. The Holy Land is called the L-rd's rest and the writer is actually using it as a figurative reference to the New Heavens and the New Earth which will be established for all those whose faith translates into obedience.

G-d will never abandon His people, we just have to decide whether we want to spend our lives wandering through a wilderness of our making, or whether we are going to put our trust in the L-rd and allow nothing which comes our way to prevent us from walking with Him by faith, according to the Scriptures.

The older you get in the L-rd, the more the decisions you make, have a greater impact on your life than the situations which you encounter along the way. His kingdom is coming and we have a clear mandate to be light and salt to this dying, fading world. How full of light and salt is your life – is the life of our community. We will still have lots who will come and who will go, but the core of our community needs to remain committed to the vision the L-rd has given us, so that through all the ups and downs we encounter, we do not follow the negative example of the lost generation and experience a failure to launch. Daily, weekly, monthly, and annually, our lives need to turn around our faith in His Word which we integrate into every area of our lives, doggedly and persistently.

Over the summer, as we make time to rest and take a break, there are two things from which we should never take a break, because they are the only way for us not experience a failure to launch. We need to remain Sabbath powered and Festival driven. Make sure to make Sabbath observance part of your vacation plans so that your spiritual life does not run out of fuel and dry up. Remember the Sabbath and don' leave home without it!

I know that some of you will not be able to attend our annual picnic, which is always a high point of our family's summer, but the Fall Festivals are coming. However, you spend your summer, be rested and renewed and ready to kick off the fall as we bid farewell to 5777 and prepare to welcome 5778 and avoid experiencing a failure to launch in our lives.

**Sermon: Taming the Heart, Search Me oh L-rd**

**Passage: *Sound me out, Oh G-d and know my heart. Put me to the test, and know my***

***thoughts. Look and see if I am embarked on the path of wickedness and lead me in the way everlasting!*** (Psalm 139:23,24)

Over the summer, I want to embark on a closer look at the goals and objectives which our services are designed to fulfil and also take a look at the principles upon which our Sabbath services are based. Over the years and indeed over the centuries, both the synagogues and the churches had designed worship and liturgy to inspire, to nourish and to admonish believers so that we would never lose our way as we wander through the generational darkness of this fading world.

Worship and liturgy can become something meaningless, which we do without thinking if we do not embrace what they are intended to help us experience and at B'nai Chayim, everything we do and even the changes we make, are designed to maximize our experience of the L-rd's Presence. They are also designed to equip us to face the challenges which each new week brings. Nothing we do is meaningless, as we endeavour to maintain authentic Jewish space, which is our biblical calling as a dynamic community of Jews and Gentiles.

So over the summer, I will examining and explaining various elements of our liturgy and worship, both that which we celebrate in Hebrew and that which we celebrate in English. It is important to know, both why we do what we do and why we do it the way that we do it. I want those of us who have an extensive Jewish background and those who have just joined our ranks to get the most out of every element of our services, because learning how to behave in the presence of the L-rd is one of the most important features of what it means to walk with Him daily and constantly, on our brief pilgrimage through this world.

Today, I want to briefly examine the final verses of the 139th Psalm, which come at the end of one of his most reflective, introspective meditations. The Psalm is divided into four sections of six verses each and deal with various aspects of how G-d superintends our lives, even in the midst of all the changes and the turmoil we may experience on our homeward journey to our Father's Home in glory.

He begins by exploring the utterly complete personal knowledge which G-d has of how each of us conducts our lives. G-d always has our surrounded. He moves on to describe the futility of trying to escape from the omnipresence of G-d who is everywhere simultaneously. Next David describes the wonder and the mystery of how each of us is put together and he concludes with a description of the holy hatred he has towards the wicked who hate G-d and profane His Holy Name.

The end of this expression of disgust, is a prayer which is the passage we will be examining this morning. David wants to make sure that nothing wicked is infecting his heart and he realizes that only G-d can do a thorough enough job to protect us from being drawn into evil, as we are guided back onto the way everlasting.

This level and kind of scrutiny is not something we should ask for lightly but it is one which the L-rd is more than willing and able to subject us to. This is because the L-rd knows what we are up to and there is nowhere we can hide from His presence, since He has known us even when we were being formed in our mother's womb. The criminal folly of the wicked is also not hidden from His scrutiny and he wants us to have the same level of horror and disdain for wickedness that He has.

In to achieve this, David is asking the L-rd to embark on a fourfold diagnostic examination of

his life and this same level of scrutiny is available for us, but we might not always like what He brings to the surface for us to dispose of.

Now, please let's get a firm grip on what He wants to do and fully understand how He is going to do it. We are all born with the image of G-d and the principles of His Law are already written on our hearts, when we make our entrance into this weird and wonderful world. He does not want to change our G-d given temperaments, nor who we are at the core of our being. He does not want to change us into someone other than who we really are, nor does He want to impose a false identity on us, so that we have to pretend to be someone other than who we really are.

The makeover we are asking the L-rd to engage in is a complete systems diagnosis which will set us free from all the Trojan viruses and glitches which are keeping us from living the way He wants us to – and the way we were designed to live. Sure He wants to teach us new strategies so that we can completely divest ourselves of the old man who has been twisted and corrupted by the world, the flesh and the enemy.

This same old man and his henchmen are holding our true inner selves captive so that we end up doing the bad which we do not want to do and become unable to do the good which our better selves would rather do. We are in fact chained and snared and G-d wants to set us free, so that His image which our inner man possesses and the principles of His Word which are written on our inner heart, can join hands with His Spirit through our beloved Messiah and lead us out of the darkness into His glorious light. His intervention in our lives will settle for nothing less.

This is a lifelong process which we need to regularly engage in during our pilgrimage through this life, because, our flesh, the world and the adversary will never leave us alone and will set endless snares for us and clone endless new ways to attack and undermine us. We need to have an active spiritual immune system which will both protect us from carnal infections and also set us free from those which we have allowed to get a foothold in our hearts and lives.

With this in mind, let us examine the fourfold diagnostic examination which David outlines and, which will help us escape from any and all forms of spiritual bondage and show us how to tame our hearts. The diagnostic process involves being completely transparent and not excluding G-d from even the darkest, most painful corners of our hearts and lives.

The word which is most often translated into English as search, is the first process we will examine. The word resembles the readings or soundings which a sea going vessel takes to sound out how far the boat is from the bottom of the sea and from any shoals and sand bars it has to avoid. Our hearts all have hidden depths which we do not often visit, but which must be sounded out by the L-rd so that how we live and how we look at the world will not shipwreck our lives. Hidden pain and hidden drives and desires often lurk below the surface of the nice public face we like to put on as we pretend that everything is OK.

Suddenly, what is below the surface may be triggered to rise up and seize control of our hearts and lives, because we have not given these depths to the L-rd. This does not mean that He will erase all of our painful memories or even cause our sinful tendencies to completely disappear. What David is asking for is that the L-rd would help him to really know what was in his heart, below the pain and anger and lust so that we are not suddenly bushwhacked because we have just suppressed our inner turmoil instead of surrendering it to G-d and dealing with it.

Each time we experience major events or transitions in our lives, there is a period where we need to digest them and tame them and relate to them from the L-rd's perspective in His Word.

Do you know your heart? Have you let the L-rd sound out its depths so that no hidden sand bars or rocks of reefs suddenly spring up and shipwreck your life? If there is anything which you do not want to bring before the L-rd or if there is any part of your life which you want to exempt from the scrutiny of His Word, you are just chopping holes in your boat as you head for your inevitable shipwreck.

He is already aware of everything which is lurking in your hearts, so we are just fooling ourselves by trying to keep them from Him. He does not want us to live lives which merely contain or suppress evil, He wants us to wrestle it out of our hearts and lives, so that it is only knocking at the door and not lounging on our couch or creating havoc throughout our hearts and lives.

He wants to show what is really there beneath the layers of denial so that we can get control of our hearts and make our choices according to His image and His Word in our inner man and not according to the flesh, the world and the enemy.

He wants to take His diagnostic process to the next level and deal with our thoughts and attitudes and habits, because He is really concerned with what we actually think. There is an old expression which says: "a man persuaded against his will, is of the same opinion still". Some people have not gotten the propaganda of the Egypt of this world out of their minds and spend their lives secretly wallowing in carnal delusions such as evolution and the immoral relativism of our secular society.

I am a persuaded creationist and I react strongly against the increasing moral depravity of our society which says that if it feels good do, which is equivalent to the stupidity of the ancient Greeks who said: "eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die". What do you think? Do you avoid things which the Bible forbids because you are convinced that they are wrong, or just because you are afraid of getting caught? The Ten Commandments were never given to cramp our style, but to give us real, wholesome style so that we can get real, lasting satisfaction, which the pursuit of carnal pleasure can never give to us.

What about some of the major moral issues of our day: abortion, homosexuality, state controlled education and the violation of parental rights, racism, political corruption, materialism, pollution and third world hunger? Do you know your own thoughts or do you think one way in shul and another way for the rest of the week. Many in the media feel that believers obey their leaders and give them lip service on the L-rd's Day, while they live and support a completed different set of values during the week.

Some once asked what does it matter what I think and my answer remains that what you think determines how firm a grip you have on the beliefs and values of eternity and how much of your life will survive the scrutiny we will all face when we stand before Him on the awesome day. The things which you think about are not really important, what really matters is that you think about things which are really important and they are found in G-d's Word.

David then ask the L-rd to show him where he really stands spiritually and morally so that path we are walking on does not cause us to self destruct in any area of our lives. Our world is composed of two core groups. We have first the G-d seeking righteous core and the spiritually hostile unrighteous core and each tries to pull each generation in two different directions. What we think and where we stand can either be a window we look out at the world through and really see it as it is, or it is the door through which the filth and corruption of the world comes in to sink us and chain us to the evil which is slowly strangling our world.

Where do you stand? Are there any wicked ways in you? Are your heart and mind filled with His Word or has the negative propaganda of this evil age got a grip on you, that is leading you down the wrong path towards your ultimate destruction? Have you let the L-rd show you where you are in this world and where you need to be, both in His Word and in this world?

David ends his introspective meditation by requesting to be led on the way everlasting.

Now many people falsely suppose that Judaism is not an otherworldly religion and is only concerned with living a good life in this world. Nothing could be further from the truth because all that we think and do is to prepare us for the Kingdom which is coming and to keep us walking in the way Everlasting.

The Bible clearly teaches that the patriarch did not die, but merely fell asleep and that part of what it means for Israel to be a blessing to all nations is to crush the head of the serpent and to open the way back to the Garden for all the nations and generations of mankind.

The way everlasting is the same way as the straight and narrow we are called to walk, on as we journey through this life towards our final home in Glory. The heathen may rage and our society may turn its back on the Bible and deny the existence of a supernatural god. And many high sounding and profound, alternate explanations may be given about the origin and purpose of the universe.

The Way everlasting cuts a path for us through this nonsense and leads us to both take a stand on His Word and walk according to its teachings. This is done by allowing G-d to repeatedly engage in diagnostic examinations of our hearts and minds, so that no darkness or wickedness is allowed to lurk in any corner of our hearts and lives. Last week, Marvin Kramer quoted C. S. Lewis who said that whatever is not eternal, is eternally out of date.

The wisdom of the wise will perish, along with the strength of the mighty and the wealth of the rich who are all building sand castles on the shore of life which the tide of G-d's coming kingdom will wash away without a trace. The grass withers and the flower fades and all the glory of this passing world will vanish like the morning mist before the rising of the sun.

Even though David gathered all the gold, the silver, the precious stones and all the metals which were to go into building the temple which Solomon built, He knew that it was only a golden box to remind the people of real McCoy which is now in Heaven and which will one day descend.

He did not want anything in his heart to detract from this ultimate reality. He did not want anything lurking in his mind which would block out the glory of this coming kingdom. He did not want to stand anywhere which would open him up to darkness and not to the light of G-d's Word. He wanted to be firmly and doggedly walking in the way everlasting, so that his life was not lived in vain. He did not want to see his life suffer the same fate as that of the wicked, when they are consumed in the fire of G-d's final judgment.

As we progress through the summer months and take a breather and rest up, let us never take a break from the things of G-d because those who are spiritually undernourished will fall by the wayside and stumble back into the darkness out of which they were first delivered. May this sad state never be our individual or our corporate destiny as members of B'nai Chayim who are letting the L-rd search us and show us how to tame our hearts. Shabbat Shalom.