

Our long Canadian winter is once again upon us. This year it came suddenly and caught many people by surprise. But rather than getting grumpy and wishing it was over, we need to adjust to it because it is only going away when it is time for our glorious Canadian spring to show up. Individual believers and even spiritual communities also have seasons as we all continue our journey from conception to the grave.

I rejoice when I see people making spiritual progress as they face their own spiritual seasons and build the disciplines of G-d's Word into their lives. But this cannot really happen unless spiritual things are a reality in our lives. Personal Bible Study is the key to spiritual transformation. I have seen many young believers who gladly embrace studying the Book and they are the ones who will grow to maturity. I have seen other long term believers who do not seem to be making much progress as they make their lives revolve around the same issues or problems. They do not make spiritual progress as they remain immature believers who are strangers to the fruit of the Spirit. Things would change if they dusted off their Bibles and studied them.

Some of the people who have wandered through our shul over the years are looking for a change, but are not really prepared to make the changes G-d is calling them to. They seem to wander from place to place, repeating the same story over and over again instead of being renewed and growing in the grace of our beloved Messiah.

The other day, I made a guesstimate of the number of people who have visited and not settled in among the most amazing spiritual community in our fair city. In 25 years since I became involved with the Messianic Movement, we have seen around 800 people coming to check us out. We have never claimed to be a perfect community of Jewish and Gentile believers in the Messiah, but we have always been welcoming. People need to adjust to us and we need to adjust to our newcomers as we embark on the joyful, bumpy road to really getting to know one another.

Whatever comes my way, I want to relate to it according to His Word and not let the fickle happenstances of life determine who I am in the Messiah. I have been at it for some 52 years and I have seen the Messiah do wonderful thing in my life. I have also experienced great trials that have frequently broken my heart. If recovering is the spiritual season you are wandering through, let Him comfort you, heal you and show you what He wants us to learn from even painful experiences.

Instead of just hanging around until you get bored, once everything is no longer new and exciting and moving on greener pastures, it is time to send down roots and bloom where you are planted. It is only when you have settled down, that the Messiah can begin to establish the spiritual seasons in your life which will cause you to grow and to heal and fill your heart with gold, silver and precious jewels. Hay, wood and stubble are the issues we have refused to deal with as we wander from place to place looking for a quick spiritual fix. There are any number of devotional books which promise you success without much pain or sweat. I want to avoid this kind of spiritual junk food and make all the adjustments which I need to make in order to reach my full potential in YHVH according to His Word.

I am currently going through a long season of rebuilding my physical strength and one of my objectives during this time is for our shul to grow, both in numbers and in spiritual depth. Spiritual maturity only comes and only stays when biblical responses become second nature. Let me ask you a series of questions. What is G-d doing in your life? What does G-d want you to be doing with everything He allows to come into your life? How strong a hold do you really have on G-d' Word (It is a tree of life for those who take hold of it)? Is your life refusing to be knocked off the bumpy straight and narrow? You know it may be sad but true that the Bible doesn't read itself and you really need to study it if you want to know what it really says.

Over the years, G-d has taken me to various parts of the Bible that speak to the various things which are going on in my life. However, there are staple passages like Ps. 23 and the parables of our Messiah which can speak to us and feed us no matter what is going on in our lives and no matter how many years we have walked with the Messiah. Over and above these scriptural jewels, there are several life verses that continue to guide and direct me so that I never really lose my way.

As the snow settles in and we dig out our winter coats and winter boots and check our scrapers and our block heaters, let me share a couple of my all season passages that speak to me come rain or shine.

As a very confused and broken young man I really wanted find out what G-d wanted me to do with my life and it was kind of like saying:"G-d give me patience, but hurry". Let me share a passage which speaks to me daily, especially when I feel impatient or get panicky.

"For is G-d who is at work in you, to give you both the desire and the ability, according to His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

In the peaceful times and in the tense moments of our spiritual lives, G-d is still at work in us and His agenda is not that complicated. He wants to give us the desires we need to want to accomplish His will for our lives. He will use His Word and even the circumstances of our lives to motivate us so that we want to do His will for our lives and not get distracted by the flesh, the world or the enemy. Sometimes people want other people to tell them what G-d wants them to do. I would never want any of you to settle for secondhand spirituality.

As well, there are things I wish I could do that are not part of my skill set. Instead of getting frustrated and feeling inferior we need to develop the skills which G-d has already gifted us with. A few well meaning people have tried unsuccessfully to turn me into a handyman and I jokingly say that all machines are demon possessed and antisemitic. In my case, that is not far from the truth. I do have a tool box and a drill, but I do not go around trying to fix things. In my case I try not to break them.

I'm not an electrician or a plumber or an architect, but I am good with books and history and not bad when it comes to counselling. I also love geography, with some philosophy and sociology thrown in. I am good with languages. So G-d will motivate me to grow in my ability to operate within my skill set and I leave the other things to those gifted people who have different skill sets than me.

All that He wants us to build into our live and all the tasks and challenges He wants to handle, will be according to His good pleasure and not mine. This means He takes pleasure in me for who I am and what I am capable of. He gave the instructions for building the tabernacle and the tent to Moses so he could supervise all the gifted people who did the actual construction.

Sometimes I do not feel very worthwhile and I have struggled with depression all my life, but over and above all the amazing people in our lives who feel that we are special, there is really only one person whose opinion about us really matters. Even though I am imperfect and often flounder when I should be walking steadily, I am G-d's workmanship and He thinks that each of us are special.

Now we know that there is nothing that we could do to earn our salvation, it is the free gift of G-d when we personally place our faith in the resurrected Messiah. We are born with His image in our hearts (soul/spirits) and it becomes tarnished and even broken when sin gets control of our lives and we become miserable spiritually. When we accept the Messiah into our hearts (souls/spirits) He initiates the process of both setting us free and of keeping us free, and this free gift of salvation becomes a mighty driving force that lets us realize that we are His workmanship, created for the good works which He has prepared beforehand for us to accomplish. Lets read my second life passage.

"For we are His workmanship, having been created in Yeshua Hamashiach for the good works that G-d has prepared for us in advance that we should practice them. "Eph. 2:10)

We do not become His workmanship by any good works which we perform. We are His workmanship and are created for the good works which He has prepared for us. Our faith in the Messiah makes us special before G-d and we are gradually set free to perform the good works that we are called to. James says faith without work is dead and Paul says that the Messiah makes us come alive to perform these good works.

When nothing in our lives seems to be going right and we feel very useless, we need to stop and realize that we are always special in G-d's eye. No matter what spiritual season we are going through and no matter where we are in our walk with our Messiah through His Word, we are special to YHVH and He believes in us and in our potential, no matter how many times we have been knocked down and kicked around.

Good works and biblical obedience are parallel terms and walking according to His Word should be the number one staple of our lives. We need to let Him help us overcome discouragement and depression so that we can walk the way He wants us to. What we do should never be seen as an attempt to win His favour or impress Him. It should be seen as an expression of our gratitude that He sent His Son to die for us and wants to live through us by His Holy Spirit. We are never spiritual nobodies before our Saviour.

The enemy and the world and even the flesh will try and discourage us to the point that we want to give up and slide back into the darkness from which we have been delivered. But realizing who we are in the Messiah and what we have been created for, will help us listen to the voice of G-d and not to the voice of our detractors.

We do not try and please G-d by our good works, we need to realize that we are His workmanship, created for good works and this is really His plan for our lives. Some feel the need of a dramatic calling where we stun people by all that we can accomplish. What we need to realize is that we are already His superb workmanship and it is what He thinks about us and the good works He is calling us to perform that really matters. Now that you know how much you matter to our Messiah, let me ask you what really matters to you. He is both the only boss we have to please and sometimes He may even be the only boss who is pleased with us. Mishpocah, we need to realize how much G-d really loves us! Shabbat Shalom