

Kol Mevasser

SHABBAT KI TETZE

9 Elul 5769

August 29, 2009

Kahal Joseph Congregation • 10505 Santa Monica Boulevard • Los Angeles, CA 90025

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Shooting For The Stars

Rabbi Yosef Benarroch

Jewish thought places a great deal of importance on compromise. In fact the Talmud Berakhot 10a goes as far as to suggest that when a judge or two people compromise they follow in the footsteps of G-d. In last week's Torah portion of "Shofetim" we read the verse, "*Justice justice shall you pursue*" (Devarim 16:20). Our Rabbis were troubled by the repetition of the word justice. Why is there a need to write it twice? They give the following explanation, "*One is to denote judgment and the other to denote compromise. This can be compared to two ships that travel on a river. If they travel side by side there is no room and they will both sink. But if one allows the other to pass first then both ships will survive*" (Talmud Sanhedrin 32b). In the eyes of the Rabbis compromise was seen as a virtue. Western civilization has adopted this idea. Much of our society is built on compromise and mediation.

But a word of warning is in place. Compromise is a good thing when applied to quarrelling individuals, business disputes, or husbands and wives who are at each other's throats. There are times where compromise is not the proper course to pursue. Let me explain.

When it comes to character building and spiritual growth our Rabbis warned that compromise could be outright destructive. Rabbi Moshe Hayim Luzzatto in his great work, "Path of the Just" explains that when it comes to serving G-d, there are far too many individuals that settle for mediocrity. They are interested in doing the bare minimum of what is expected of them. When it comes to character

PRAYER SCHEDULE

SHABBAT KI TETZE

8 Elul / Friday, August 28th

Shaharith6:30 am
Minhah & Arvith6:45 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting.....7:06 pm

9 Elul / Saturday, August 29th

Shaharith8:30 am
Minhah & Arvith6:30 pm
Motzei Shabbat8:08 pm

Weekdays

10 Elul / Sunday, August 30th

Selihoth.....6:30 am
Shaharith7:30 am

11 to 14 Elul/ August 31st to Sept. 3rd

Selihoth.....5:45 am
Shaharith6:30 am

SHABBAT KI TAVO

15 Elul / Friday, September 4th

Shaharith6:30 am
Minhah & Arvith6:45 pm
Shabbat Candlelighting.....6:56 pm

building he suggests that one should aspire to be the best person they can. He rejects the philosophy of settling for second best.

I believe that this theme is central to this week's Torah portion of "Ki Teze" and it is an ideal we should be striving to achieve during the month of "Elul" as the High Holidays approach.

Much of the Parasha deals with this theme. For example at the outset of the portion we are introduced to a very perplexing law. It has to do with a Jewish soldier who in battle is enamored with a woman of the enemy. The Torah states the following,

"And if you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire her so that you would take her for a wife" (Devarim 21:11).

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The Torah permits the Jewish soldier to take the captive woman as a wife. Is this an ideal? Is the Torah encouraging this behavior? The answer is no, the behavior of the soldier is inappropriate. When the text uses the term *"and you desire her"* it is making a very clear statement that this is not an ideal situation but rather the uncontrollable lust of a soldier. This story is talking about a man who has allowed his uncontrolled passions to get the best of him. He has, in regards to his personality, settled for second best. It is for this reason that the Torah continues by telling us that if he continues to desire her as a wife he must, *"Take her into his home, and she shall shave her hair and grow her fingernails and she will not wear the clothing of her captivity and she shall cry over her mother and father for a full month. And only then shall you lay with her and she shall be to you as a wife"* (Devarim 21:12-13).

What is the significance of this ceremony? Why is she forced to make herself so unattractive? Our Rabbis explain that in this case the Torah addresses itself to the evil inclination of the soldier. Marriage must be built on more than just physical attraction or in this case lust. It must be built on love, understanding, and a mutual desire to give to the other and grow together. Since in this case all of these factors are missing, the Torah requires her to become unattractive. To take her as a wife he must allow his lust to subside and then under more objective circumstances decide if he really wants to marry her. This story is an example of a person who wanted to settle for second best but the Torah creates a mechanism to allow him to strive only for the best. It is a story that teaches us that when it comes to marriage a husband and wife should never compromise over the quality of their marriage.

Indeed the Torah sometimes recognizes our nature and speaks to our weaknesses. It addresses the common man who wants to settle for second best. But that's not enough and so there are times that the Torah encourages us to shoot for the stars. Another such example can be seen at the end of the Parasha. In chapter 25 an example is brought of how a merchant should do business. We are told, *"You shall not have in your house two different measuring stones, one small and one large. You shall have perfect stone weights and a perfect and just scale..."*

for it is an abomination to the Lord your G-d one who does wrong". What's the problem one may ask? When a merchant comes to sell his produce why should it be such a big deal if he uses stones whose weight is not exact? So what if they are not perfect, why should a few insignificant grams matter? No says the Torah, there are times where settling for second best just doesn't cut it. When it comes to business we must not approximate but get it exactly right.

These examples are also a parable for our spiritual and moral growth. While compromise may be an ideal to achieve during quarrels, when it comes to character building we must strive to be the best we can be and not settle for second best.

This theme is especially true during the High Holiday period. There is an interesting law in the "Shulkhan Arukh" (code of Jewish Law) at the end of the Laws of Rosh Hashanah. Rabbi Yosef Karo writes, *"Even one who is not careful about the bread of a non Jew (during the rest of the year) should be careful during the ten days of repentance"* (see *Shulkhan Arukh OH 603:1*). Our Rabbis placed a prohibition on eating the bread of non-Jews even if the bread was made from strictly kosher ingredients. The Rabbis were afraid that by allowing Jews to eat the food of non-Jews it could lead to socializing and intermarriage. Since the law is Rabbinic in nature there are many individuals who throughout the year are not careful about the restriction. Nevertheless the "Shulkhan Arukh" states that during the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur one should be extra careful. One should take precautions that are not taken during the rest of the year.

It's not this specific law that is important here. What is important is the principle that seems to be at the heart of the law. What the author is saying is that during the year we often take liberties. We are not always as careful as we should be. If I could rephrase it, we settle for second best and don't follow the law as strictly as we could. During the month of Elul as we prepare for the High Holidays we must pursue a different course. This is the time of year that instead of trying to cut corners we should be striving to be the best we can be. The theme during this time of the year is to do more and not less.

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Congratulations
Nadine & Peter
on your marriage

Mazal Tov
to your parents
Julie & Robert Beller
& Yvette & Joseph Dabby
and to your families

Shabbat Kiddush
is sponsored

in honor of
the marriage of
Nadine & Peter

by Julie & Robert Beller
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Talmud Torah Starts Next Week!

First Day of Class
Sunday, September 6th at 9:30 am

Note the new starting time!!! We have
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Parasha & Haftara

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If we are all taking the High Holidays seriously and doing our utmost to make them meaningful we should all take today's message to heart. We should be identifying those areas we have settled for second best and doing our utmost to improve. It's during this time of year that we need to be pushing ourselves and shooting for the stars to be the very best that we can be. Wishing you all a Shabbat Shalom

Published courtesy of the SEC

In Memoriam

These anniversaries occur from Shabbat, the 9th of Elul (August 29, 2009) to Shabbat, the 16th of Elul (September 5, 2009). It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend services.

Shabbat / 9 Elul

Shimon ben Haskel Dabby
Habiba bat Farha
Rachel bat Miriam Mingail*

Tuesday / 12 Elul

Menasseh ben Nissim Saltoon*

Wednesday / 13 Elul

Yitzhak Faraj*
Simhah bat Khatoon

Thursday / 14 Elul

Haim ben Haim Elazar*
Haim Baruch ben Moshe Ezra*
Miriam bat Yocheved Moses

Friday / 15 Elul

Isaar Soorani*
Simha bat Rifka

Shabbat / 16 Elul

Farha bat Yochevet

**Yahrzeit names with asterisks are missing contact information for family members. To update the Kahal Joseph database, please call 310.474.0559.*

Refuah Shlemah

Yonatan ben Alizah ▪ Mazal Tov bat Sulha Mitana ▪
Jack Wickett ▪ Ayala bat Naomi ▪ Yosi ben Esther
Yaheskel ben Regina Matilda Louisa ▪ Victor ben Pauline
▪ Haim ben Mordechai ▪ Khayah Noa bat Sara ▪ Prina bat
Esther ▪ Moshe ben Naji ▪ Ramah Regina bat Farha

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