

WORDS OF WISDOM.

Chapter Eighteen.

From the Desk of Rabbi Yochanan Hammond, Ph.D. uitam@unitedintorah.org

The most widely known prayer in Judaism is the “shortened version” of the “Shema”.

“Hear, O Israel: HASHEM is our God, HASHEM the One [and only].

Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.” **These scriptures taken from The Schottenstein Edition Siddur for the Sabbath and Festivals**

One of the challenges we Children of Israel have is our faithfulness in our relationship with HaShem. We tend to talk more than we act. HaShem acts more than He talks. We must admit the faithfulness HaShem shows to His people cannot be questioned. This is shown with absolute clarity in the death and resurrection of Yeshua HaMoshiach.

When one comes to consider this level of faithfulness, we can but ask the question! What are we prepared to die for? As this question is posed, my thoughts go back to a time when the Master Yeshua prayed the following.

“Father, He said, if it pleases thee, take away this chalice from before me; only as thy will is, not as mine is.” [KTB]

It is said that; **“if you have nothing to die for, then you having nothing to live for”**. We witness the power and truth of this statement when we consider the life and death of Yeshua HaMoshiach. Yeshua both lived and died because of His faithfulness to the Father. Yeshua has given us the footprint for us to follow.

History is full of accounts where people have died for their faithfulness to a cause. We witness in “Nature” where a mother is prepared to die for her young. Soldiers constantly face death in the hope others will be able to live.

People enjoy and engage in a variety of activities where death is a very real possibility. Yet in saying this, the vast majority would not engage in these activities if they knew death was certain.

In this day and age, it is not difficult to find a group of people who are more than willing to die for their faithfulness to a cause. A percentage of Moslems are only too willing to die for their faith. Whilst this author can understand their position, I believe it is a warped and evil position they hold. So let us move on and briefly visit this question as regards the Children of Israel.

I would suggest that we live, so we can die to self or die to self so we can live! The greatest hindrance we have in developing a consistent, devoted and trustworthy relationship with HaShem is “self interest”. May I further suggest, living a life and installing programs that help the death of self, will build and enhance our relationship with HaShem. We are given the perfect example of dying to self in Yeshua, as in the account mentioned above. This preparedness to die for our faithfulness does not always mean a physical death, it may at some stage, and sadly it does for some, but for most this will not be the case, Baruch HaShem.

I become a little amused when “believers” say they are willing to die for God, but refuse to follow His Torah. These people prefer to follow “mans” torah because changing would mean the “death” of something they hold dear. As mentioned countless times, this is shown in the preferred Sabbaths that people keep. Christians prefer to keep the 1st day of the week instead of the 7th – HaShem’s set apart day. Christians prefer to celebrate the birth of HaMoshiach Yeshua on the 25th of December instead of keeping Yom Teruah – The day that PERHAPS Yeshua was born. We know He was not born on the 25th of December. Christians prefer to keep Easter instead of Pesach and the list goes on. On the other hand Rabbinical Judaism has its own problems often following the revered teachings of men over and above “Biblical Judaism”.

Let us return to the “Shema”.

If HaShem is to be our one and only God, [absolutely this is to be the case] then the command to “love HaShem with all your heart, soul and strength” should be the foundations of our lives. Yet we find this no easy task, because for this to take place, we are required to die to self. This dying to

self requires the most intense and scrupulous examination of our very being. This examination is only the beginning of our journey, as if done biblically we will no doubt recognise our need to change. When this reality hits us, we then require the courage, strength and willingness to change. This change will necessitate a quantum shift, a shift impossible without the healing Hand of HaShem. We must come to terms with our own failings and strengths. However these must be understood through the lens of Torah. We cannot achieve this unless HaShem flows into every aspect of our lives. How do we arrange our lives in order to program ourselves for this quantum shift? Unless we make a heart decision to change those aspects of our lives that are contrary to the Torah, we will fail most miserably. In fact we must be “born anew”. Yeshua was asked an important question by one who had an interest in changing his life.

*¹⁶ A man approached Yeshua and said, “Rabbi, what good thing should I do in order to have eternal life?” He said to him, ¹⁷ “Why are you asking me about good? There is One who is good! But if you want to obtain eternal life, observe the mitzvot.” ¹⁸ The man asked him, “Which ones?” and Yeshua said, “**Don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t give false testimony** ¹⁹ **honor father and mother** and **love your neighbor as yourself.**” ²⁰ The young man said to him, “I have kept all these; where do I still fall short?” ²¹ Yeshua said to him, “If you are serious about reaching the goal, go and sell your possessions, give to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven. Then come, follow me!” ²² But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he was wealthy. Matthew 19:16-22 [CJB]*

When we read this account, it is the change of heart that Yeshua was focusing on. This individual had no problems with certain aspects of the Torah, but he was still unable to bring about a quantum shift in his attitude to self. Giving over to HaShem those “items” we hold dear is the challenge. It is prayer and Torah application that allows us to reach the point that we can achieve this very difficult task. The individual in this case was not willing to die to self so he could be “born anew”. There was no way he could fulfil the commandment of loving HaShem with all his heart, soul and strength.

We are told that HaShem is the one and only God that Israel should trust and worship. How is it then that we have the audacity to not only question

Him, but change His rules and regulations to suit our own selfish purposes? If HaShem is the only God we believe in, trust and worship, then we can follow the directive to love HaShem with all our heart, soul and might.

We Children of Israel must ask the question: "Is HaShem the one and only God we fully worship"? An easy question to ask, but the answer can be tough, requiring an honest appraisal of our living "standards". The acts that we engage in, are they acts of false gods [evil in the sight of HaShem] or are they acts manifested through application of Torah, showing our faithfulness to HaShem and Yeshua HaMoshiach, guided by the Ruach HaKodesh? The Master spoke the following words.

" Then Yeshua told his talmidim, "If anyone wants to come after me, let him say 'NO' to himself, take up his execution-stake, and keep following me. For whoever wants to save his own life will destroy it, but whoever destroys his life for my sake will find it. What good will it do someone if he gains the whole world but forfeits his life? Or, what can a person give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come in his Father's glory, with his angels; and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct." Matthew 16:24-27 [CJB]

When Yeshua was offered "the world" by satan, He rejected the offer through application of Torah. The application of Torah provides us with the foundation to guard our souls from the many enemies we face. Yet more importantly it shows that we love HaShem with all our heart, soul and strength. Let us *"Hear, O Israel: HASHEM is our God, HASHEM the One [and only]. Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever."*

May the grace, love and wisdom of HaShem and Yeshua HaMoshiach be with you!