

7-25-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – *Vaetchanan* (“and I pleaded”)
Torah Portion: Deuteronomy 3:23 – 7:11
Haftarah: Isaiah 40:1-26
Suggested Acheron K’tuvim: 1 Cor 13

And the Greatest of These is Love

Central question: Are you building a genuine loving relationship with G-d, or merely offering appearances?

Today we continue in the second parasha of Devarim which is the final book of the Torah. Today’s passage is called *Vaetchanan*, which means “and I pleaded.” It takes its name from the first three words of the passage in the English, and the first word in the original Hebrew.

Deut 3:23-26

23 **"I also pleaded** with the Lord at that time, saying, 24 'O Lord God, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as Yours? 25 'Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon.'

23					
נֶאֱתַחֲנֶנּוּ	אֵל-	יְהוָה	בְּעֵת	הַהוּא	לֵאמֹר:
And I besought		the Lord	at time,	that	saying,
<u>2603</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>6256</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>559</u>
24					
אֲדֹנָי	יְהוָה	אַתָּה	הַחֲלוּתָ	לְהַרְאוֹת	אֶת-
O Lord	God,	thou	hast begun	to shew	thy servant
<u>136</u>	<u>3069</u>	<u>859</u>	<u>2490</u>	<u>7200</u>	<u>5650</u>
גְּדֻלָּתְךָ	אֶת-	עַבְדְּךָ	אֶת-	לְהַרְאוֹת	גְּדֻלָּתְךָ
thy greatness,		thy servant		to shew	thy greatness,
<u>1433</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>5650</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>7200</u>	<u>1433</u>
וְאֵת-	יָדְךָ	הַחֲזָקָה	אֲשֶׁר	מִי-	אֵל
and	thy hand:	mighty	for	what	God
<u>853</u>	<u>3027</u>	<u>2389</u>	<u>834</u>	<u>4310</u>	<u>410</u>
בְּשָׁמַיִם	וּבָאָרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר-	וְכִגְבוּרָתְךָ:		
in heaven	or in earth,		and according to thy might?		
<u>8064</u>	<u>776</u>		<u>1369</u>		
25					
אֶעְבְּרָה-	נָא	וְאֶרְאֶה	אֶת-	הָאָרֶץ	הַטּוֹבָה
let me go over,	I pray thee,	and see		land	the good
<u>5674</u>	<u>4994</u>	<u>7200</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>776</u>	<u>2896</u>
בְּעֵבֶר	יֵשׁוּעָה	כְּמַעֲשֵׂיךָ	וְכִגְבוּרָתְךָ:		
beyond	can do	according to thy works,	and according to thy might?		
<u>5676</u>	<u>6213</u>	<u>4639</u>	<u>1369</u>		
26					
הַיַּרְדֵּן	הַהָר	הַטּוֹב	הַזֶּה	וְהַלְבָּנוֹן:	
Jordan,	mountain,	goodly	that	and Lebanon.	
<u>3383</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2896</u>	<u>2088</u>	<u>3844</u>	

In this parasha, Moses begins by telling the people how much he pleaded with the L-rd that he might be able to enter into the Promised Land with them. How many times did Moses pray that the harsh decree might be lifted? Some of our Sages say 515 times.

I cannot agree with the reasoning of the Sages. I think they are overlooking the clear statement of Scripture.

Deut 3:25-28

25 'Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon.' 26 "But the Lord was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me; **and the Lord said to me, 'Enough! Speak to Me no more of this matter.** 27 'Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes to the west and north and south and east, and see it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan. 28 'But charge Joshua and encourage him and strengthen him; for he shall go across at the head of this people, and he shall give them as an inheritance the land which you will see.'

G-d spoke to Moses face-to-face, as the Scriptures say. And in this instance, G-d said, “Knock it off! The matter is already settled.” (my paraphrase). I believe Moses stopped his prayers at that time.

In the end, I guess it doesn't really matter how many times Moses prayed for relief... the real lesson for us is that the answer to fervent prayers which are outside the will of G-d (even for Moses), can be, “No.”

Moses had just had his dreams and prayers frustrated by the answer “No.” What was his attitude? It can be found in the rest of his words, recorded in Devarim.

Moses instructs us not to add to the commandments, nor to take away from them. He reminds us that our obedience to G-d is our witness to the world.

He reminds us that as we keep the Commandments, blessings flow to us. Then he gives us the words that have become the central statement of faith of our people for all time. It is the *Shema*.

Deut 6:4

4 "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!

You see that this is not a command to *obey*. It is a command to *hear*. To *listen*. Now what we do with what we have heard, that shows whether or not we have love for G-d. We see that initially expressed in the *Shema*.

Regarding the *Shema*, you recall that the *ayin*, the final letter in the Hebrew word *shema* is always written in larger script, and *dalet*, the final letter in the Hebrew word *echad*, is likewise written larger.

שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד

Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one

If you make a word from the letter *ayin* and the letter *dalet*, then you spell the Hebrew word *ed*, which means, “congregation” or “witness”.

What is our witness? Yeshua taught that our witness to the world is love.

John 13:34-35

34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

And in John's letters, he passed on that teaching to others, and showed how it should properly be applied to those to whom he was writing.

1 John 2:1-11

2 My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin¹. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation² for our sins; and not for ours only, but also

¹ We know the definition of what is sin, because of Torah's instructions.

² To provide the payment for sin, and to accomplish reconciliation as well.

for those of the whole world. **3 And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments³. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word,⁴ in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him:⁵ 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.⁶**

7 Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning;⁷ the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you,⁸ which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away,⁹ and the true light is already shining. 9 The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.¹⁰ 10 The one

³ Yeshua is the one who gave the commandments to us in the first instance – Torah. It is an error to insist that this verse refers only to the commandments He gave as He walked among us as a man.

⁴ The “word” we are to keep is Torah. “Word” is another word for Torah in Hebrew thought and speech.

⁵ This provides an easy test to determine whether someone is a true follower of G-d.

⁶ Yeshua walked-out Torah in His daily life, showing us how to live Torah properly.

⁷ “From the beginning” is a clear reference to Bereshit – the first word of Torah.

⁸ In Hebrew language, this signifies John renewing the existing commandment of loving one another.

⁹ Contrary to much Church teaching, the “darkness that is passing away” is not Torah, but rather is the spiritual death penalty associated with sin which was broken by Yeshua’s sacrifice.

¹⁰ The test of whether you are a true believer is stated again. Love for one another is the evidence.

who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Following the *shema*, called the *v'ahavtah*, we see the concept of love stated in a command form.

Deut 6:5-9

5 "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; 7 and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Before going further, I want to first discuss the translation of one of the words in the *v'ahavtah*, found at the end of the first

sentence. It speaks of the love we are to have for G-d. “...
and with all of something that pertains to us personally.

The Hebrew word translated as “might” in this version is *meodecha*. That Hebrew words means “your *meod*.” So, what is *meod*?

לִבְּךָ	בְּכָל-	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	יְהוָה	אֵת	וְאַתָּה בָּרַכְתָּ	5
thine heart,	with all	thy God	the Lord		And thou shalt love	
<u>3824</u>	<u>3605</u>	<u>430</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>157</u>	
		מְאֹדָּךְ:	וּבְכָל-	נַפְשְׁךָ	וּבְכָל-	
		thy might.	and with all	thy soul,	and with all	
		<u>3966</u>	<u>3605</u>	<u>5315</u>	<u>3605</u>	

OT:3966 מְאֹד **me`od** (meh-ode'); from the same as OT:181; properly, vehemence, i.e. (with or without preposition) vehemently; by implication, wholly, speedily, etc. (often with other words as an intensive or superlative; especially when repeated):

The word *meod* carries with it the concepts of “properly”, “with zeal”, “completely”, and “best.” It invokes the superlative expression of these traits.

The word finds various translations into English as “strength”, “might”, and even “resources”. I admit don’t like those translations. I believe them to miss the point.

I believe a better translation for *meod* is “best” Here is my reasoning:

All the other English translations suggest that if you are paralyzed and have no “might,” or are at the end of yourself, with no “strength” left to give, or are too poor to have any “resources” left, then you will be unable to fulfill this command to love G-d.

But we all know that regardless of your life situation, you *always have* your “best,” whatever that might be. The Cain and Abel story illustrates this concept.

Gen 4:3-5

3 So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought **an offering** to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. 4 And Abel, on his part also brought of **the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions**. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.

Look at the language closely. Cain brought “an offering”. Abel brought “firstlings ...and of their fat portions”. Abel’s sacrifice was clearly the “best,” as opposed to what Cain brought, which was merely “an offering”.

The point is not to simply bring offerings, whether grain or animals, to the Temple. The point has always been to obey G-d, with all your heart, all your soul, and all your best.

1 Sam 15:22

"Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

בְּעֹלֹת	לַיהוָה	הַחֶפֶץ	שְׁמוּאֵל	וַיֹּאמֶר	22
in burnt offerings	as great	the Lord	Hath delight	Samuel	And said,
<u>5930</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>2656</u>	<u>8050</u>	<u>559</u>
שָׁמַעַ	הִנֵּה	יְהוָה	בְּקוֹל	כְּשֹׁמֵעַ	וּזְבָחִים
to obey	Behold,	the Lord?	in the voice of	as obeying	and sacrifices,
<u>8085</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>6963</u>	<u>8085</u>	<u>2077</u>
אֵילִים:	מִחֶלֶב	לְהִקְשִׁיב	טוֹב	מִזְבֵּחַ	
rams.	than the fat of	to hearken	and better	is	than sacrifice,
<u>352</u>	<u>2459</u>	<u>7181</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>2896</u>	<u>9999</u>
					<u>2077</u>

This illustrates one of the fundamental rules of Hebraic hermeneutics – of Scriptural interpretation – to be applied. It is *kal v'homer* (light and heavy).¹¹

¹¹ Using the linguistic tool of *kal v'homer*, two good things are compared, but the greater concept is elevated by diminishing the lesser concept.

Hebrew scholars will note that the English translation of *shema* here is rendered as “obey” or “obeying.” I believe this translation to be a bit misleading, as it fails to make the connection that Samuel made between the *shema* and the heart. Samuel was restating what Moses had said.

What we can clearly see in the *Shema* is that it is important for us to have a close connection to G-d. But one cannot command a connection. One cannot command love. How can the loving connection to the Almighty then be achieved?

I believe that we are actually being urged to do the things that G-d has given us which bring us to the love of G-d. A deepening relationship is what causes love to grow.

Put it in human terms. You can identify someone, or hopefully many, in your life whom you love. You did not love them at your first encounter. You may well have been attracted to them in one way or another, but love? I think not. Love resides in a place that is far beyond attraction.

How did you first express the beginnings of love? You made choices which took into consideration the other person’s wants and desires. You very likely had to either abandon or to defer your own personal preferred

choices in order to prefer those of the other person. That was the beginning of love.

The deeper your love, the more you put aside your own desires and preferences, and the more you adopted the desires and preferences of the other.

In taking on this new way of life, you never lost the essence of who you were, but you grew and built upon that essence to become a different person, one who was more conformed to the one you love. If the person you love is a holy person, that person draws you to a holier life.

It is the same way with the love of G-d, and the love for G-d.

The way we change our lives because of our attraction to G-d and His ways is to simply do as He has instructed us to do. G-d used the pen of Moses to write his Instructions (Torah) to us. Those instructions were not given to be an impediment to a full life. They were given to give us the best life.

John 10:10-11

10 "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.

This verse is not limited only to the redemptive work of Yeshua, but also speaks of the abundant life that is achievable when you take into your heart and do Yeshua's instructions given in Torah. Yeshua spoke the Torah to Moses, and then Yeshua walked among us to show us the proper way to walk-out Torah.

As our attraction to G-d moves us toward a holier lifestyle, our love for G-d can increase. And as our love increases, we desire to walk-out the commandments of Torah in a more perfect way.

This cycle of love and sanctification in holiness is what draws us near to G-d, and as that happens, He will draw near to us.

James 4:7-9

Submit therefore to God.¹² Resist the devil and he will flee from you.¹³ 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to

¹² One submits to G-d by making lifestyle decisions which honor His Instructions and His ways of living.

¹³ The Devil seeks to turn you away from G-d's instructions.

you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.¹⁴

The book of Devarim (Deuteronomy) is more than a long end-of-life sermon by Moses. It is a theological discussion regarding what a true faith in G-d is all about. It combines the previous Instructions by G-d with a bit of discussion, with the view of creating a cohesive holy society that can be a shining beacon of holiness in the world.

Moses' clear intention is to urge the people to combine and balance the concepts of liberty and law to create an atmosphere suitable for the King of the Universe to reign in our midst.

This perfect society is founded upon mutual commitment, by G-d to His people and by the people to G-d. It is founded upon love.

At the center of our mutual loving commitment is one of the central tenets of our faith: "You shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your best" (Deut. 6:5).

The Torah, when viewed properly, is not a collection of laws that bind us and limit our freedom. It is a love letter in which the G-d of the

¹⁴ This is an idiom referring to getting your heart and life back into alignment with G-d's ways, and stop being a hypocrite, trying to live in the worlds of holiness and sinfulness at the same time.

universe sets out before us in words we can understand, what He likes and does not like, and what things we should do (and not do) to have the best life in His world.

The Hebrew word **אהב** "to love," appears in each of the five books of the Torah. It occurs 15 times in Genesis, but none of them speaks to the relationship between G-d and a person. These speak to feelings of husbands for wives or parents for children.

The root word **אהב** appears in the other books of Torah:

2 in Exodus

2 in Leviticus

0 in Numbers

23 in Deuteronomy

In Torah, Devarim can be called the “book of love.”

In the gospel of John, the word “love” appears 57 times. This is more than in the other gospels, combined.

In John’s letters (1,2 &3), “love” appears 105 times. John continually speaks to us of connecting with G-d, and then establishing a loving commitment with Him.

When we begin our relationship with G-d we can (and should) begin building a structure of consistent behavior consistent with Torah, which will stand the test of time.

Just as with human commitment, our relationship with G-d might have what we would describe as “ups and downs.” What will sustain us during those “down” times? The structure of discipline that we have built into our relationship with G-d that keeps us aligned with Him, even when we don’t feel it.

Our community worship is part of that structure. We start with the Torah’s instructions, and build upon that our traditions and rituals. It is much like building a brick tower. The Torah’s instructions are the bricks. Our rituals and traditions are the mortar that surrounds them, and binds us into a community of faith.

Our congregation’s structure and worship styles are not identical to every other congregation’s patterns. But we have many similarities to most other congregations in the Messianic Jewish expression. To the degree that any person folds-into our patterns, you become a more integral part of our congregation.

Rejecting the norms of our ways of walking-out Torah, or our ways and forms of worship keeps you on the fringe, and not fully integrated into our community.

This is the way it is with the Jewish Orthodox community as well. To be part of that community, you must adopt that community's practices and patterns of worship.

The same goes for the Baptist Church. I could go on.

And that grafting-in dynamic extends to the greater community of G-d. To the degree that any person adopts the Instructions of G-d and follows them with a heart of love, that person will grow closer to Him.

But G-d loves us enough to allow some to remain on the fringes of His kingdom, as well. We already know that there are several different circles of holiness in the earthly kingdom to come, and where any believer falls into any one of those circles is entirely up to that believer.

Luke 8:10-15

10 And He said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest it is in

parables, in order that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand. 11 "Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God.¹⁵ 12 "And those beside the road are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 "And those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. 14 "And the seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. **15 "And the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.**

In the previous books of Torah we find established the “how” and the “what” of G-d’s Instructions. But in the book of Devarim we begin to see much more of the “why.”

In Devarim we find the structure of holy behavior coupled with the right heart being created which can stand the test of time for all generations.

¹⁵ Specific reference to Torah

The love of G-d... and the love by G-d are developed in such a permanent structure so that as the feelings of closeness come and go, the structure is a strong tower into which we can find refuge from the storm that is this world.

Paul knew that the permanent structure built by love was sufficient to keep the nation, the congregation, and the individual believer well-connected with G-d in every season between his day and the coming of the world to come. He emphasized love as the highest expression of connection with G-d.

1 Cor 13

13 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.¹⁶ 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous;

¹⁶ An example of *kal v homer*.

love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own [satisfaction, but defers to the other in love], is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered,¹⁷ 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;¹⁸ 7 bears all [bad] things, believes [in] all [good] things, hopes all [virtuous] things, endures [and perseveres through] all [oppressive] things. 8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. 9 For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.¹⁹ 11 When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly [and with limited clarity], but then [we will see with perfect clarity as if we are] face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. 13 But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

¹⁷ Does not keep a record of wrongs, but is instant in forgiveness.

¹⁸ “Truth” is another idiom for Torah.

¹⁹ This speaks of the world to come.