

EZEKIEL RADIO PROGRAM
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Shalom. I have often wondered why the Prophet Ezekiel is written in the style in which it is written. Ezekiel is one of the simplest prophets to understand. His prophecies are written in the simplest language. If one picks up the Prophet Ezekiel in Hebrew you can read it very easily, not like some of the other prophets who use poetic imagery and who use all sorts of literary conceits which make it extremely hard to understand their words but not Ezekiel. Ezekiel, one of the last prophets, writes in a terse, plain, simple, lucid style. His prophecies are very easy to understand and to read. The Prophet Ezekiel lived at the end of the first Temple. He saw the destruction of the first Temple, and then he comforted the people who were in exile, and told them that they would return and that the land would be built up anew. According to tradition, he was exiled during the first exile. Before the Temple was destroyed the Babylonian king had come and exiled part of the people and allowed the Temple to continue, but when the people rebelled a second time he sent another horde to besiege Jerusalem and the Temple was then destroyed. Ezekiel was taken away during the first captivity, and his prophecies were actually made in Babylonia. There he prophesied that the Temple, itself, would be destroyed.

One of the keynotes of his prophecy is found in the opening chapter when he describes a huge chariot, a chariot which was in the sky and which was composed of various images of a four-sided creature with one face a man, one face an ox, one face a lion, and one was an eagle. He saw this chariot moving away through the sky. He interpreted this to mean that G-d's presence was leaving Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. He did predict the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed because the people had not dealt fairly one with another.

His prophecies, though, in the rest of the book are clear and lucid, unlike the other prophets. I have also wondered why the Hebrew word for "life - Chayim" is double. Why is this word found in the plural? The word should be "Chai", which in the singular means also "life", but always in Hebrew when we refer to life we refer to it in the plural, to Chayim. It seems to me that really these two questions can be answered with one answer. All of us really live two lives. All of us have an inner life and an outer life. All of us have a life which we express through outward symbols and deeds, through the clothes we wear, the expressions we use, the homes we live in, the occupations we pursue. This is just the outer shell of us, but each of us has an inner life within us which is very hard to express which is ours alone and which most people do not even know or can glimpse. Many of the modern authors today are trying to give a picture of this inner life through such devices as a stream of consciousness and other literary conceits and fictions which allow a person to go into another person's mind and really feel his inner life and really feel what he feels. Sometimes outward appearances are deceiving and we are not what we outwardly appear to be. The inner life is the real us, the conglomeration of memories, of experiences, of feelings, of drives, of ambitions, of emotions. This is really us.

Ezekiel of all the prophets is the one upon which Jews and Judaism has based their whole mystical experience. This description of the chariot moving away from the Temple is the basis of all Jewish mysticism, and later the Kaballah and many other mystical experiences which went really into the heart of the western culture and western religion. In fact, much of Christian mysticism, too, is based on Ezekiel. Ezekiel is the simplest of all the prophets. How do we account for this, that Ezekiel, the one who has the most to tell us about mystical experiences, the one who spawned the whole treasury and library

of works on mysticism is the one written in the simplest and most terse style? I think what the rabbis and Bible is trying to tell us is in this Book of Ezekiel is that to each of us there is an inner life and an outer life, and we must be very careful how we balance these two lives. The mystical experience, this urge to life, this feeling of uniqueness, this feeling of appreciation for life and with life, is found within all of us, and we all need it. However, we also exist in an outward form as well. We also exist vis a vis other people, and vis a vis the nature that G-d has created. In past generations there has been an tendency, especially in this country, to pooh pooh the inner life, to say that it has no meaning and to stress just outward externals, things which will impress others. If a person had a good job, a fancy car, nice clothes, a big house, then he was a successful man regardless of how he felt inside. The inside feelings were considered unimportant, because everyone knows that everyone wanted these other things and if they had them, that was what was important. As long as your neighbors thought you a success, then you were a success. This, of course, we all know is a false notion. Many times a person can have a big house, a fancy car, a good job and feel empty inside. A person also has to develop his inner resources, his inner feeling, his inner emotion if he is to have a meaningful life. The members of this present generation realized it. They looked at their parents, many of whom struggled all their lives to have these outward manifestations of success, who were inwardly miserable, and these people of the young generation looked at their parents and said, "This is not for me. I don't care how I look. I don't care what I appear to other people. I want an inner feeling, something that will let me live, something that will give me the feeling of being alive. I want this mystical inner self to be developed." They went to the other extreme and threw off many of the laws of hygiene and manner and the basic rules of conduct, because they were not concerned about these things.

These things, it seemed, could not provide this inner mystical spirit which we all need.

We all lead two lives, though, the rabbis say. We all lead Chayim. We have to have both an inner and outer life. Unfortunately, both generations failed to realize this. This is where the message of Ezekiel is clear. If you want to lead a full life you must have an inner life. You must have a mystical experience but you must clothe it in simplicity and lucidity and you must make it conform to the rules of human behavior. Otherwise it will become self-destructive.

In another place in the Bible we learn how "Nodov and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his sensor and put fire therein and laid incense thereon and offered strange fire before the Lord which He had not commanded them, and there came forth fire from before the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." There is a great danger in developing mystical experiences, in developing the inner self without any regard for outward constraints, because you will produce a fire which will devour you, a fire which will destroy you. The rabbis were very, very careful when they dealt with mystical experiences and the inner life. You had to be very, very careful how you dealt with it because it was a fire. A fire is a wonderful and an important thing. It is necessary for life. Without fire we could have no warmth, no light, but we all know fire is a very dangerous thing that has to be handled very carefully within set rules and in proper ways. If it is not it will burst out and destroy the people who are using it. This is the same with the inner life, with our inner fire which all of us have and must develop, but we must develop it properly. If we do not it will burn and break out and destroy us.

This, unfortunately, is what many of our young people have discovered. They thought they could develop their inner life through all sorts of shortcuts; perhaps some thought through drugs, through immorality, through disregarding all sorts of basic rules which govern disease and things of this nature. But they were quickly consumed. They may have had a momentary experience, but they were quickly consumed and destroyed. This does not mean, however, that we are not to have an inner life. Without an inner life our outer life is meaningless. It means that we are just to clothe our inner life in proper and simple forms. We must not think that we can arrive at this inner life through exotic means, because if we try to do this we will destroy ourselves.

This is the lesson of Ezekiel, and this is the meaning of the word "Chayim". In order for us to really live we must have both an inner life and an outer life, but we must learn to garb and clothe our inner life and develop it, but clothe and garb it in simplicity and lucidity and do it in such a way as we will not be consumed by it.