

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: Torah Chayei Sarah:

Genesis 24:10-28

Haftarah:

I Kings 1:15-21

B'rit Chadasha:

I Corinthians 15:45-49

Blessed be the Holy One, the God of my master Avraham.

[Genesis 24:26]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 31:25-30;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition 2, *Teshuvah* [the Prayer of Return]

Vayikach ha-eved asarah gemalim migmalei adonav vayelech – i.e. And the servant took ten of his lord's camels and struck out/started walking Genesis 24:10a.

Avraham is 'all in'. He has sent a ten-camel caravan laden with all the material wealth the Holy One has blessed him with over the past four decades to find a bride for Yitzchak. Hop on a camel - and come along on the great adventure!

Whatever your culture has told you about finding and falling in love, about criteria for mate-seeking, about being 'in a relationship', about dating or courting, or about proposing, prepare to lay all that aside. The '*mashal*' (i.e. wisdom-infused rabbinic parable) that the Master Storyteller of Torah is going to tell us to introduce a new matriarch to the world will not follow the script of any of the Hallmark movies you have ever seen. Hallmark traffics in illusions – lusty notions of 'physical attraction' and 'romance' - and the clueless minions of the raging nations eat the nonsense right up; but the Holy One expects His sons and daughters to use a little discernment, understand the importance of who they are, and look for a more secure foundation upon which to enter into marriage.

Aram Nacharayim ... or Bust!

The last tidbit of news Avraham received prior to Sarah's passing was that he had a great, great niece – the great-granddaughter of his brother Nachor's lineage. See Genesis 22:20-23. After Avraham laid Sarah's body to rest he began to think about this girl a lot – imagining the trauma she must be experiencing growing up in the perverse culture in which she and her family lived. Avraham knew that culture all too well. He had spent the first 75 years of his life in it! He knew its lies, and its soul-numbing blend of 'nation-rage' and 'vain imagination obsession'. He knew what it invariably did to even the best of people. He envisioned this young girl crying in the night, longing for a kinsman redeemer – one who could see her

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suffering, be moved by her pain, see the vast, untapped reservoirs of potential that the Creator had designed into her being wasted, have compassion on her, and come to her rescue. This vision was driving him to shake off his grief over Sarah's death – and do something. He has therefore planned out, and intends to spare no expense to fund, what I like to call 'the *Kinsman Redemption Expedition*'.

Avraham had no intention of going on this expedition personally. The Holy One called him OUT of the land of the Chaldean culture, and gave him vast flocks and herds to manage - and a newly acquired field and orchard to tend and keep. Nor did he intend to involve Yitzchak in the enterprise; he was still too busy grieving. So .. who would he send? Who would go for them on this mission? Who could Avraham trust to manage the adventure? The point man on the grand expedition turned out to be a character whom the inspired text refers to simply as *ha-eved* – i.e. 'the servant'. This trustworthy agent was placed in charge a ten-camel caravan fit for a queen. The convoy, laden with all the worldly wealth the Holy One's blessing had allowed Avraham to amass over the past 50+ years, was designed to attract attention. Avraham knew it would be salivated over by every tax collector, every highwayman, every warlord, every cutthroat, every con man, every robber, every petty thief, every gold-digger, and every pack of wolves along the way. No one guaranteed its safe passage. There was no escort of soldiers to serve as a security detail; nor was there either a lookout or a strongmen riding shotgun. All the opulent wealth with which Avraham has been blessed will be watched over by one old, unarmed servant. Avraham was not worried. He trusted the Holy One completely. He has no concern that the servant would get sick, run into trouble, suffer injury, or get himself killed. Moreover, the idea that the servant, surrounded by such wealth and subject to zero human supervision, might get *greedy* along the way, and abscond with the treasure, never entered Avraham's mind. Avraham had lost fortunes and friends before. He was not worried about such as that. There was something much, much bigger and more important at stake. The 'pearl of great price' he sought – a worthy next-gen matriarch for Israel – was worth any risk. If any of us understood the value to a family – and to today's world - of a Covenant-keeping matriarch, we would be willing to risk absolutely anything to find one as well. *She is more precious than rubies. Her husband can trust her, and she will greatly enrich his life. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. Proverbs 31:10a-12.*

Besides, Avraham had a Covenant with the Creator of the Universe, and he was doing Heaven's bidding. That being the case, he knew that this caravan would be the safest place on earth to be. He knew that every step, every movement, every heartbeat, and every footfall along the way would be watched over zealously by the hosts of Heaven. He was confident that the caravan would get to its destination

- and then back again, safely – carrying even more precious cargo. So ... *Aram Nacharayim*, and a bride for Yitzchak - or Bust!

Welcome to ‘Mission: Impossible’

It might seem that the odds were a million-to-one against the expedition; in the context of the Avrahamic Covenant, however, that just means that a glorious success – and a fantastic new testimony of the Goodness and Faithfulness of the Holy One - are pretty much guaranteed.

What exactly was the servant’s assignment, you ask? It was a tall order. He was charged with finding and choosing, out of all the millions of women in Mesopotamia, the one who was to replace Sarah as matriarch of a great Kingdom Counterculture Nation of Tzadikim. What clues did he have as to this woman’s name, appearance, or identity? Very few. How was he supposed to know, if he met her – no, *when* he met her - that she was the one? He had *no idea*. But whoever this woman was, wherever he happened to run into her, whatever she looked like, and whatever other options she had on the table, he had to trust that when he found her she, like Sarah, would drop everything and go with him. He knew she would say ‘yes’ when he asked her to do the craziest thing possible – *i.e.* leave her family, her home country, and everything she knew in the world behind. He knew that, based solely on a vague, nebulous promise, she would then get on a camel, and set off with a virtual stranger on a 500-mile journey to a land she had never seen, to marry a man that she had never met. He had to chuckle to himself. Absurd! Unthinkable! What girl in her right mind would do such a thing?

This quest started in yesterday’s aliyah of Torah, when this servant and the man for whom he worked sat down to visit over tea. To the world around them this little confab must not have seemed like any big deal. But to the world the things of the Holy One never do. What the world could not see is that the man the servant worked for was not just any man - he was the Covenant Partner of the Creator of the Universe. Moreover, the servant was far from being just any servant. This servant was a man who had learned at Avraham’s feet how both to worship Avraham’s God and move the Throne of Heaven with fervent petitions of intercession. So, it should come as no surprise that the discussion these two men had was anything but just a little talk. These were dangerous men. Wherever men like these go, miraculous, atmosphere-shifting things happen. Get ready, world!

These two men did not talk about religion. They did not debate doctrine, creed, or *halakah*. They did not discuss politics, ideology, or ‘social justice’. They did not hash out or express outrage over the current events going on in the world. They planned no protest. They organized no movement. They plotted no revolution.

They contrived no war. What they talked about was much more important than any of those things will ever be. What they talked about would alter the course of history and shape the world as we know it. The men in question were speaking, you see, of a *bridegroom*, and a *bride*, and a *wedding to come*. They were speaking of a match made in Heaven - one that would open a fountain of joy from which all the nations of the earth would be invited to drink the sweet elixir of life. How the angels must have danced for joy when Avraham told the servant: *go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son* [Genesis 24:4].

Mazel Tov! Mazel Tov! There's Going To Be A New Matriarch Soon!

Avraham specifically instructed his servant not to seek a bride for his son from among the Kena'ani, but to instead conduct his bride-search several days' journey away, in *Charan* [Haran], where Avram had lived prior to receiving the *Lech Lecha* calling of the Holy One. However, Avraham also instructed the servant not to take Yitzchak with him on the journey back to Charan. Still in the throes of grief over the death of his beloved Sarah, Avraham could not bear the thought of being separated from his son. The servant understood. He knew that upon this union would hinge the future of the Covenant of redemption between God and man.

If It Does Not Seem Like An Impossible Task To Your Natural Mind It Is Not Truly Rooted in Faith

The lot of Covenant Partners of the Creator of the Universe is that most of the tasks on which they embark by the leading of the Unseen Shepherd with the Brilliant Mind and Beautiful Voice are *supposed* to seem to be impossible. That is what distinguishes a journey of faith from a life lived by creed, halakah, or 'prudence'. If all we think or do is possible in the natural realm, then what testimony is there in it of the Grandeur and Majesty and Power of the Creator? Creation was not possible to the natural mind. The Ark surviving the Flood was not possible to the natural mind. Avraham and Sarah surviving their journeys through hostile territory, prospering in times of social upheaval, and then having a child together at their advanced age after almost a century of barrenness – none of that was possible to the natural mind.

After hanging around with Avraham for decades, it was clear to everyone – especially this servant – that he, and all who befriended him, were guided, aided, and supernaturally empowered by an Unseen Shepherd. And that explains why, when the servant in charge of the great Bride-Search and his entourage of 10 camels laden with Avraham's wealth got close to the village of Nachor in Mesopotamia, he did the only thing that made any sense. He stopped what he was doing and prayed - surrendering the wildly impossible mission he had been assigned into the capable hands of the Unseen One. Let's open the scroll of Holy

Writ and look in on how Torah describes the precious moment of surrender:

V'yavrech ha-gemalim michutz la'ir

[When he arrived,] he let the camels rest on their knees outside the city,

el-be'er ha-mayim

beside the well.

l'et erev l'et tzet ha-sho'avot

It was in the evening when women go out to draw water.

V'yomar Adonai Elohei adoni Avraham

He prayed, 'O Holy One, God of my master Avraham

Ha-k'reh-na l'fanai ha-yom v'aseh chesed im adoni Avraham

Be with me today, and grant favor/mercy/covenant-faithful love to my master Abraham

V'hayah ha-na'arah asher omar eleiha hati-na chadef

If I say to a girl, 'Tip over your jug and let me have a drink,'

v'eshteh v'amerah sheteh v'gam gemaleicha

and she replies, 'Drink, and I will also water your camels,'

ashkeh otah hochachta l'avdechah l'Yitzchak

she will be the one whom You have designated for Your servant Yitzchak.

uvah eda ki-asita chesed im-adoni

And then I will know that You have been faithful to the covenant with my master.'

[Genesis 24:11-14]

The prayer the servant prayed was an *ambitious* prayer to say the least. Perhaps you could call it a *desperate* prayer. Think about it. A thirsty camel can drink up to 25 gallons of water at a sitting [and these had just completed a long journey, with a heavy load]. Multiply that times 10 and you get 250 gallons of water just for the camels. A water jug carried by a girl might hold 5 gallons, and when full of water the jar would weigh *a lot*. That means drawing and hauling water for *hours on end*. That means backbreaking work, long into the night. And it means *doing all of that for a total stranger*.

No *ordinary girl* would do this. A girl who did such a thing might break a nail – not to mention a *sweat*! A girl who did such a thing might miss a lunch date with her friends. A girl who did such a thing might be condemned as overzealous by her family and her peers. A girl who did such a thing might be laughed at behind her back – or for that matter to her face – as a fool.

For a girl of the village of Nachor to do what the servant asked the Holy One to have the Divinely-appointed bride for the promised seed of the Covenant to do would be something like having a girl who goes to the local gas station tonight just to fill up her Honda's gas tank stop what she is doing and offer voluntarily, before

going on her merry way, to fill up the tanks of - and check all the fluid levels and the air pressure in each tire on - ten eighteen wheelers lined up waiting for diesel fuel, owned by a total stranger. And believe it or not the servant was asking the Holy One for all that – *plus* a drink of water for himself that would require the girl to lift the heavy water jar to his lips. Perhaps now you can understand how absolutely flabbergasted - and totally humbled - the servant was when what he asked the Holy One for not only *actually happened* – but happened *before he could even get the words out of his mouth*. As Torah puts it:

Vayehi hu terem kilah l'daber v'hineh Rivkah yotzet asher

He had not yet finished speaking, when Rivkah [Rebecca] appeared.

yuldah l'Vetu'el ben-Milkah

She had been born to Betu'el, the son of Milcah,

eishet Nachor achi Avraham

the wife of Abraham's brother Nachor.

V'chadah al-shich'mah

Her jug was on her shoulder.

V'ha-na'arah tovat mar'eh

The girl was extremely good-looking,

me'od betulah v'ish lo yeda'ah

[and] she was a virgin untouched by any man.

V'tered ha-aynah v'temale chadah vata'al

The girl went down, filled her jug, and then came up again.

Could this really be the one? So soon? Perhaps – but the servant had been around Avraham long enough to know that nothing is confirmed except on the testimony of two or three witnesses. And so, it was time for the test about which he had prayed. He would approach the girl, and if she did not buck and run, and if she further met all the seemingly impossible criteria of confirmation he had laid out in his prayer, he would consider her further.

Torah describes what happened next as follows:

V'yarotz ha-eved likratah

The servant ran toward her.

V'yomer ha-gmi'ini na me'at-mayim mikadech

'If you would, let me sip a little water from your jug,' he said.

V'tomer sheteh adoni

Drink, Sir,' she replied.

V'temaher v'tored kadah al-yadah v'tash'keihu

She quickly lowered her jug to her hand and gave him a drink.

The first witness has now been confirmed. A later ‘woman at the well’ would demonstrate how extremely unusual it was for a girl to give a drink to a stranger. Is it possible the girl will actually now take the initiative, delay her return to her family and chores, and offer to spend hours watering all the camels in the caravan as well? No, it was not possible. But it happened. For Torah tells us of the *second witness* the young girl provided, as follows:

V'teichal l'hash'koto

When he had finished drinking,

V'tomer gam l'gemaleicha esh'av ad im-kilu lish'tot

she said, 'Let me draw water for your camels, so they can [also] drink their fill.'

V'temaher vate'ar kadah el ha-shoket

She quickly emptied her jug into the trough

v'taratz od el ha-be'er l'sh'ov

and ran to the well again to draw water.

vatish'av l'chol-gemalav

She drew water for all his camels.

v'ha-ish mishta'eh ...

And the man [just] stood there, gaping at her ...

[Genesis 24: 15-21(a)]

I particularly like the last line – the man just *stood there gaping at her*². You bet he did! Not only had she done all he had asked the Holy One for Yitzchak's *ishah* to do, but she had RUN to do it. This is getting interesting. Indeed, it is more than just interesting. This could be nothing but *the Hand of Avraham's Unseen Shepherd*. It has been *confirmed by two witnesses*. And then unknowingly the girl's own mouth provided the third witness, when she identified herself as: *the daughter of Betu'el, Milcah's son, whom she bore to Nachor*. **Genesis 24:24**. Unbeknownst to the girl, Avraham had specifically instructed the servant to 'go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son'. **Genesis 24:4**. The girl has just identified herself as the granddaughter of Avraham's brother Nachor. She was indeed a member of the family of Terach and Avraham.

Absolutely amazing!!! So what was the appropriate response for the servant – or us - to make? Here is how Torah describes it for us:

Vayikod ha-ish vayishtachu l'Adonai

*The man bowed himself and **worshiped** the Holy One.*

Vayomer baruch Adonai Elohei adoni Avraham

And he said, "Blessed be the Holy One, the God of my master Avraham,

asher lo-azav chas'do v'amito me'im adoni

² The verb root used is *sha'ah, shin, alef, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #7583.

who has not forsaken his lovingkindness and his truth toward my master.

anochi b'derech nachani Adonai
As for me, the Holy One has led me in the way

beit achei adoni
to the house of my master's relatives."
[Genesis 24:27]

Why, we may ask, does the writer of Torah see fit to include the seemingly minor detail of what the servant said to himself at the well after Rivkah gave him a drink in the narrative? This brings us unexpectedly to a *bit of a crossroads* in regard to how we are going to deal with Torah. If we are just interested in studying Torah for *historical purposes*, or merely to look for ‘types and shadows’ of things to come, we will want to slide right by what we just read in the text and move on to the fascinating bride-price negotiations between Avraham’s servant and Rivkah’s family which will be described for us in the aliyah we read tomorrow. If on the other hand we are interested in mining the deeper treasures of Torah – those precious secrets of relating to and interacting with the Holy One which are hidden by Torah in plain view in the midst of the narratives of what took place in the lives of the ancients and the patriarchs – we will upon encountering a passage like this *stop, perk up our spiritual ears, open wide our spiritual eyes, and look closely at the text searching for something much deeper than first appears.*

What I mean is that Torah is usually very concise. Words in Torah are Divinely inspired, and are for that reason generally used sparingly. Sometimes the course of events of whole generations receive only a sentence or two of Torah’s attention. Usually we are left wanting much, much more detail than we are given – and left to fill in the gaps with *midrash*. Hence when without warning, as here, Torah suddenly turns verbose and we encounter long narratives with what seems like unnecessary detail we owe it to ourselves to ask ‘*Why?*’ Could this be one of those places in the text of Torah where what looks like unnecessary detail actually contains a treasure hidden by the Master in plain view for those with eyes to see and ears to *sh’ma*?

A Secret Hidden in Plain View

Consider that in last week’s parsha, in the course of a similar detailed narrative centered on the journey Avraham took with Yitzchak up to the soil of the Moriyah we encountered without even noticing it the first Biblical usage of the verb root which is most frequently translated into English as “*worship*” [Hebrew *shachah*³]. In Genesis 22:5⁴ we were told that shortly after arriving at the Moriyah Avraham told

³ Shachah is *shin, chet, hey*. Strong’s Hebrew word #7812, it is pronounced *shaw-khaw*'.

⁴ This is the same Hebrew verb translated as ‘worship’ in such passages as Psalm 22:27 [“*All the ends of the eretz shall remember and turn to the Holy One. All the relatives of the nations shall worship before you*”].

his servants:

Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there.

V'nishtachaveh [We will worship]

V'nashuvah aleichem [and then we will return].

Since our attention was riveted upon the *akeida* [binding] of Yitzchak and the miraculous events occurring in connection with it, most of us probably just passed by this statement of Avraham without giving it so much as a thought. Who among us considered that in that seemingly superfluous little detail the Holy One might be ‘tossing in’ for those with eyes to see and ears to *sh'ma* the first Biblical reference to anyone engaging in an act of ‘worship’?

If you think about it, however, this ‘*v'nishtachaveh*’ [*i.e. we will worship*] statement of Avraham was a potentially *very significant statement*. The “*law of first reference*”, a familiar principle of interpretation of the Bible, tells us that the first mention in the Bible of or reference to a spiritual matter is very important in understanding the true, pure interpretation and meaning of that spiritual matter. In this case the spiritual matter in question is “worship”. The “*law of first reference*” means basically that in this first reference to and description of “worship” lies the secret to both the heart of what it means to “worship” and the kernel for all truth about what “worship” is. That is of crucial significance, Dear Reader, because the term “worship” has become as overused and misunderstood in modern religious circles as is the term “love”. If you don’t believe me, ask yourself what enters your mind when you think of the word ‘worship’.

What Do You Think Of When You Hear the Word ‘Worship’?

When you hear the word ‘worship’ is the first thing you think of scheduled meetings in buildings with religious symbols on and/or in them? Do you think of clergymen in robes, or matching *tallitot/yarmulke* ensembles, or fancy 3-piece suits, preaching sermons to parishioners? Do you think of stained-glass windows, steeples, and pews or rows of chairs facing a pulpit or a bema? Do you think of a platform on which musicians and singers exhibit their talents for average Joes and Jane’s who sit there wishing they could play an instrument and sing like the ones on the platform?

Now do you understand what I mean when I say that in modern religious circles the term ‘worship’ is overused and misunderstood? If we in our time are to return to the ways of the Patriarchs – the ancient path of intimate relationship with the Holy One and of lives shaped by His Precious Words – is it not essential that we

and in Psalm 29:2 [“... worship the Holy One in the beauty of holiness], and Psalm 95:6 [“***O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Holy One our maker.***”], among many others. The closest Greek verb is *proskuneo*, Strong’s #G4352, pronounced *pros-koo-neh'-o*, which is used twice in John 4:24 [“***God [is] a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship [Him] in spirit and in truth.***”].

cast aside our post-modern clichés of religious thought and practice, seek out the Patriarch’s definitions of spiritual things, and thereby learn their secrets of how a man is truly intended to live as a “friend of God”, united with Him through an eternal covenant written on the heart.

Today’s aliyah provides a wonderful opportunity to discover one of those Patriarchal secrets. But beware – the secret may be extremely harmful to your modern theology! Indeed, after you discover this Patriarchal secret you *may* never be able to look at worship the same ever again.

Have You Ever Seen A Grown Man Worship?

In the midst of the events that followed Avraham’s cryptic *v’nishtachaveh v’nashuvah aleichem* [*i.e. we will worship and then we will return*] statement in parsha *Vayera* we were given very little descriptive information to determine what Avraham’s “worship” consisted of or what it meant to him. We were not told, for instance, what part(s) of what happened on the Moriyah on that fateful day constituted “worship” and what part(s) of what transpired were something else. We were simply not told what Avraham’s worship looked like. We have, as of yet, never actually seen a grown man worship. But that is about to change. You see, Dear Reader, today’s aliyah does for us what the Moriyah narrative did not do. Today’s aliyah contains the Bible’s first fully descriptive reference to an individual – a grown man - engaging in an act that Torah itself calls “*worship*”.

Please note that the person Torah depicts as engaging in the first act of true worship that the Divine Narrative describes for us is not a king. Nor is he a priest, a musician, or for that matter a person of any particular worldly talent, title, or exalted status whatever. He is just *a servant* - just a very, very *humble man* with *a servant’s heart*. That is our first clue. The first and most important secrets of true worship are *humility* and a heart that desires *to serve* rather than *to be served*.

Now let us look at the motivation for the man’s act of worship. The motivating factors appear to have been gratitude on the one hand and awe on the other. The servant was both *thankful for what the Holy One had done on his behalf* and *stunned and blown away by the awesome way in which the Holy One had answered his prayer and miraculously intervened in the affairs of men on earth*.

Humility. A desire to serve rather than be served. A grasp of the importance – and great honor - of the mission for which he has been placed on earth for such a time as this. Gratitude. Awe. Hmmmm. I think we might just be getting somewhere. Do we dare press in a little deeper?

Consider next just *who the man whom Torah uses to introduce to us the practical components of true worship was – and who he was not*. While we are not told the man's name specifically, the implication seems to be that this man was Avraham's servant *Eliezer* from Damascus, Syria. Whether this really was Eliezer or another servant however one thing about his identity is crystal clear: he was *not a native-born Hebrew*. The only two Hebrews on earth at this time were Avraham and Yitzchak – and they were both far away in Kena'an. This man was a 'foreigner' – a *stranger to the covenant and to the promises of the Holy One*.

What are we to glean from the fact the Torah chooses this particular man – unquestionably a non-Hebrew by birth – to introduce us to the *practical aspects* of the type of worship that the Covenant-Representative Avraham introduced to us? Could it be that the Holy One is trying to tell us that in His Eyes true worship does not depend one whit upon one's pedigree, much less one's ethnicity? Could it be that 'one new man' has been the Creator's plan from the beginning of the Covenant? Could it be that we are intended to take note that in the Holy One's eyes worship is every bit as pure and precious when it comes forth from persons who have been engrafted into the covenant as when it comes from those who were naturally born to it? Could it be that we are supposed to know full well from the very beginning that Avraham the Hebrew's worship was not deemed by Heaven to be superior or more delightful in any way to that of the non-Hebrew servant - and at the same time, that the non-Hebrew servant's worship was not deemed by Heaven to be superior or more delightful in any way to that of Avraham the Hebrew? If we could just get those very simple and very clear spiritual truths down ... well, if we could do that perhaps a lot of arrogant attitudes arising out of the Jew vs. Gentile distinction – and I am talking about arrogant attitudes on *both sides* – could be laid aside forever.

All right, let us summarize what we have found out about worship from this servant thus far. We have learned thus far that the essential prerequisites of true worship are *humility, a desire to serve instead of being served, gratitude, awe, awareness of an important mission far more important than personal comfort, convenience and pleasure, and a recognition of the sense of the depth of the love the Holy One has for all human beings, whatever their race, nationality, or station in life*. Yes, Dear Reader, I think we really might just be getting somewhere indeed!

***Worship in Spirit and In Truth –
So Simple And Straightforward That Any Human Being Can Do It!***

Now, understanding the prerequisites of true worship let us proceed to take a close look at exactly what the first act of worship described in Torah consisted of. What

the servant of Avraham did by the spring/well at Charan when it became clear to him that the Holy One has just introduced him to Yitzchak's bride-to-be, you see, is according to the law of first instance what we should recognize as "worship" in its purest sense. Are you ready?

Vayikod ha-ish vayishtachu l'Adonai

And the man bowed himself and worshiped the Holy One.

Vayomer baruch Adonai Elohei adoni Avraham

And he said, "Blessed be the Holy One, the God of my master Avraham,

asher lo-azav chas'do v'amito me'im adoni

who has not forsaken his lovingkindness and his truth toward my master.

anochi b'derech nachani Adonai

As for me, the Holy One has led me in the way

beit achei adoni

to the house of my master's relatives."

[Genesis 24:27]

Since this passage contains the first *descriptive* usage of the verb worship it provides us a benchmark by which to measure any worship practice. That means that all activities and experiences called "worship" should be passed through the filter of today's aliyah to determine if such acts and experiences are – or are not – consistent with the first act of personal "worship" described in the Torah.

Of course, the first act of "worship" in a communal context that is described in the Torah would not take place until generations later, in Egypt. See **Exodus 4:31**. Look for areas of similarity between the actions of the Hebrew people in Exodus 4:31 and after the parting of the Sea and the actions of Elazar in today's aliyah. In those similarities you will find important clues as to what true Biblical "worship" is. But one thing should be clear. At its essence, worship is not *something a group of people does* – it is something an individual does. If others are present that is fine, of course; but it is not by any means necessary. And oft-times, alas, if the individual is not careful, the presence of others can actually be distracting.

The Dynamics of Pure Personal Worship

Where on earth did "the servant" of today's aliyah learn about "worship", you ask? From his dear friend and close associate Avraham, of course. It is almost certain that this "servant" was one of the servants who was with Avraham on Mount Moriyah, who observed whatever could be observed regarding what acts of "worship" occurred there. So it behooves us to look very closely at what this "servant" did in today's aliyah to see what as pure a form of personal "worship" as is anywhere mentioned in the Bible looks like. Note first what was not involved in

the purest form of personal worship. There was no scheduled meeting. No clergyman was in attendance, much less in charge of or presiding over the process. There were no musicians, nor was there any music. No sermon had been prepared, and none was delivered.

Now note what was involved. There were only two people present - a young girl come early in the evening to fetch water and a travel-weary old man come to seek a bride for his master's son. The scene was a simple spring of water beside a dusty road. The air was not filled with sweet incense - only the unpleasant odor emitted by camels under a burden. In this earthy environment, rather than in some shrine behind stained-glass windows, the Holy One chose to reveal the essence of "worship" – Hebrew *shachah* - in spirit and in truth.

Now let's really get out our spiritual microscope. Of what did the act of worship [Hebrew *shachah*] described in this defining 'first instance' passage consist? That is perhaps the most beautiful and inspiring thing of all. All that happened, you see, was that in spontaneous response to a tangible manifestation of the goodness and covenant faithfulness of the Holy One a man like any man - not particularly "spiritual" as we would ordinarily define that term today - blessed the Holy One, and thanked Him for His faithfulness and kindness.

Maybe worship in spirit and in truth is not as complicated as we have made it out to be. Torah describes the servant's simple act of worship at the well of Charan as follows:

*Then the man bowed down and worshipped Adonai, saying:
'Blessed be the Holy One, God of my master Avraham,
who has not abandoned His kindness and faithfulness to my master.
As for me, the Holy One has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives.'*

This is worship in its purest form - worship in spirit and in truth. It is simple, yet supremely profound. It is something that should repeat itself, in similar form and expression, tens if not hundreds of times each day in the lives of a people who walk in covenant relationship with the Holy One, and aspire to be His friends. Every time any little (or large) evidence of the Holy One's kindness or faithfulness is manifested - such as the provision, on one's table, of daily bread, or at the morning greeting of the sunrise, or a rainbow, or some particularly beautiful aspect of Creation, or at the first glance into the Torah, or the first sight of a child or spouse or parent, or at any answered prayer, for instance - a spontaneous eruption and expression of worship should issue forth from our hearts, without prompting, and without script. This is what worship means in its purest form. Any human being can do it. No professionals are needed. May that true type of worship characterize all of our lives, and those of all of our children, and our children's

children, forever.

***But What About All That Other Stuff We Do,
That We Have Come to Call ‘Worship’ and/or ‘Worship Services’?***

The author’s purposes in pointing this out of course are simply to stir a thirst in people for real and meaningful worship, and to call people to the deeper truth of a worship lifestyle. What I hear Torah telling us is that worship the Holy One in spirit and truth does not require, and is not about, instruments, melodies, dances, sermons or scheduled ‘worship’ services.

As we truly begin to live a *sh’ma* lifestyle we will find ourselves ‘*blessing the Holy One at all times*’. We will find that *His praise is continually within our mouths*. We will worship Him with every breath we breathe, with every move we make, with every word we speak, and even with every thought we think. We will become on earth what the *serafim* are in Heaven – awestruck servants who fall down before the Holy One and cry “***Holy, Holy, Holy is the Holy One God Almighty!***” at every movement He makes, at every word He speaks, at every deed He does – just because our hearts fairly leap within us at the sheer pleasure of being in His Presence and seeing His Glory.

So while I continue to play instruments, sing, dance, wave banners, etc., because it is the way we do things in Twenty-first Century religious circles I will, the Holy One willing, never again *settle* for just playing melodies, singing songs, raising or clapping hands, and listening to sermons. And I will never again, the Holy One willing, allow myself to mislabel such things as ‘worship’. I now know that the Hebrew word *shachah* – representing worship in spirit and in truth – is about *so much more*. It is about so much more than singing or playing instruments. It is about so much more than clapping or raising hands, or dancing, or waving banners. It is about so much more than attending scheduled services and listening to professionally delivered sermons. It is about *bending my will to His*. It is about subordinating all the hopes, plans, and dreams that have ever passed through my self-centered mind to His plan for my life and for the lives of those around me, not to mention those who will follow after me.

I now know that *shachah* – *i.e.* worship - is about *surrender*, and *humble submission*, to the Creator of the Universe in real time, in real ways, in real life. So, stunned by this knowledge, do not be surprised Dear Reader if one day I drop all my instruments on the floor and stop singing my song in mid-chorus. Do not be offended if my clapping hands fall silent and my dancing feet go limp. Do not be taken aback if you see my banners lying disheveled in piles on the floor where I recently stood. Do not think it strange if my ears lose all interest in the sermons,

the prophecies, the prayers, men around me are uttering.

I know, you see, that I am *undone*. I see clearly now that I am *a man of unclean lips* and that I dwell in the midst of *a people with unclean lips*. I realize now that I am *poor, wretched, blind, deaf, and dumb*. I am cognizant at last that I am incapable of doing anything that could possibly please Him or cause Him to ‘*rend the Heavens and come down*’. I am *broken and spilled out*. And even in my wretchedness, He *smiles at me still*, and – wonder of wonders – even *beckons that I come to Him*. And I fall down on my face and cry, “**Holy, Holy, Holy is the Holy One God Almighty. The whole earth is full of His glory.**”

Water is for *the thirsty*. And the call to worship in spirit and in truth is for those with *ears to hear*. This, if you will receive it, is a secret of Torah ... hidden in plain view.

Questions For Today's Study

1. When the faithful servant about whom we have been reading arrived in the village where Avraham's brother *Nachor* and his family had lived:

[A] What was the first place the servant went?

[B] Why did he go there?

[C] At what time of the day did he go there?

[D] Before the women from the village started coming to his location, what did the servant do?

[E] Why would the happening of that for which the servant asked the Holy One mean that the Holy One had shown “*kindness*” to Avraham?

[F] Look up the word translated as “*kindness*” [v.14] in Gesenius' Lexicon. What is the Hebrew word so translated, and what does that word mean Hebraically?

[G] What is the name of the first maiden who came to the well that day?

[H] What does this maiden's name mean?

[I] Whose daughter was this maiden, and how was she related to Avraham?

[J] What events led Elazar to “*worship*” out in the middle of nowhere?

[K] In Gesenius' Lexicon look up the word translated as “*worship*” in verse 26. What is the Hebrew word, and what Hebraic picture does it present for us?

[L] At what point do you think the girl left and ran to her mother's household? Why at that point?

2. In today's haftarah *Bat-Sheva* [known to most English speakers as “*Bathsheba*”] goes to the chambers of the aged and ill king David to secure the future and pave the way for the destiny of her son *Shlomo* [Solomon]. That future and that destiny had been placed in jeopardy by the arrogant and presumptuous actions of David's

eldest living son, *Adoniyah* [Adonijah]. The question of the day was “who will be king of Israel when David is gone?” What will happen to God’s people? As Bat-sheva walked into David’s chambers that day, the answers to these questions hung in the balance - or so it appeared to those living at the time!

*Bat-Sheva went into the king into the chamber: and the king was very old;
and Avishag the Shunamite was ministering to the king.*

Bat-Sheva bowed, and did obeisance to the king.

*The king said, **What would you?** She said to him, My lord, you swore
by the Holy One your God to your handmaid, [saying],
“Assuredly Shlomo your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit on my throne.”*

*Now, behold, Adoniyahu reigns; and you, my lord the king, don't know it:
and he has slain oxen and fatlings and sheep in abundance,
and has called all the sons of the king,
and Avyatar the Kohen, and Yo'av the captain of the host;
but he hasn't called Shlomo your servant.*

*You, my lord the king, the eyes of all Yisra'el are on you, that you should tell them
who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him.*

*Otherwise it will happen, when my lord the king shall sleep with his fathers,
that I and my son Shlomo shall be counted offenders.*

[A] What does the name “*Bat-sheva*” [Bathsheba] mean?

[B] Look back at I Samuel 12:24-25. What happened at Sh'lomo’s birth?

[C] What promise does Bat-sheva say David made to her?

[D] Is that promise recorded in Scripture?

[E] What books of the TaNaKh – and what Psalm[s] - would we probably not have if Adoniyah had been king instead of Sh'lomo?

3. In today’s reading from the first letter of Shaul of Tarsus to the followers of the Way who dwelt in the Greek city of Corinth, Shaul continued his discussion of death and resurrection. Shaul, a Pharisee, had believed in the resurrection long before he met the Master on the road to Damascus. Long before Shaul became Yeshua’s envoy to the goyim [gentiles] he and his esteemed rabbi Gamliel had unquestionably debated many times with the unbelieving Sadducees on both the fact and the details of the resurrection.

The only *additional element* the Master added to Shaul’s belief about the resurrection was His own role as the first fruits of the resurrection “harvest”. Earlier in chapter 15 Shaul had explained this new revelation:

*But Messiah has indeed been raised from the dead,
the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.

For as in Adam all die so in Messiah all will be made alive.

*But each in his own turn; Messiah the first fruits;
then, when He comes, those who belong to Him.*

Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom of God to God the Father”

[I Corinthians 15:20-24]

In today's assigned verses Shaul returns to the parallel between Adam, the first physical, or *natural*, man, and Messiah, the essence of *spiritual* man. As the natural has had its day - the Fall, and each resulting death - *the spiritual will have its day* - the Resurrection of Messiah and, subsequently, of all who "belong to Him".

*So also it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul."
The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However that which is spiritual isn't first,
but that which is natural, then that which is spiritual.
The first man is of the eretz, made of dust. The second man is the Holy One from heaven.
As is the one made of dust, such are those who are also made of dust;
and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.
As we have borne the image of those made of dust, let's also bear the image of the heavenly.*

[A] What does Shaul say the "first Adam" became?

[B] In contrast, what did the "second Adam" [Messiah] become by reason of His resurrection?

[C] Which comes first, the natural or the spiritual?

[D] In Strong's look up the words translated as "natural" and "spiritual" in verse 46. Write the Greek words and their meanings. Try to find the Hebrew words that correspond to the Greek words/meanings, and study the Hebraic word pictures underlying 'natural' and 'spiritual'.

[E] What is the source of the natural man?

[F] What is the source of the spiritual man?

[G] What do you think Shaul means when he says we will "bear the image/likeness" of the man from heaven [Yeshua]?

[H] Write an essay on the following subject - *for discussion on Shabbat morning*. When a person who *sh'ma's* the Holy One dies [a] like Sarah (in the era before Messiah's first advent); and [b] *like you or me* (in the era between Messiah's advents):

[i] What do you think happens to that person's spirit at death?

[ii] What do you think happens to that person's body at death?

[iii] When do you think that person is going to receive her or his "resurrection body", in the image/likeness of "the man from heaven"?

[iv] If that does not occur immediately upon death what kind of existence do you think the person has in the interim - the time between death and resurrection?

[v] Where do you think Sarah's spirit is right now?

[vi] What do you think Sarah is *doing* in this era between her death and the day of resurrection - the Last Trump of the last *Yom T'ruah*?

May your life be filled with and shaped by true worship. May the one He loves be crowned King in your lifetime. And may you and all your loved ones bear the likeness of Yeshua.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 31:25-30 [*the Woman of Virtue/Strength/Nobility*]

Strength and dignity are her clothing.

She laughs at the time to come.

She opens her mouth with wisdom. Faithful instruction is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household, and doesn't eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also praises her:

"Many women do noble things, but you excel them all."

Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain;

but a woman who fears the Holy One? May she be praised!