

*Shiur L'Yom Sheni*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Beshelach:*** **Exodus 13:17-14:4**
 Haftarah: **Judges 3:31-4:5**
 B'rit Chadasha: **John 6:22-30**

He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night.

[Exodus 13:22]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 78:1-4;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #13, *Retzeh - The Petition for Intimate Relationship*

Vayehi beshalach Par'oh et-ha-am – And it came to pass in connection with Pharaoh expelling the people ... *Vayasev Elohim et-ha-am derech ha-midbar yam-Suf* – that the Holy One led the people in a circuitous route to the desert around the Sea of Reeds ... Exodus 13:17a., 18a.

The Beautiful Voice that spoke to our ancestors is being heard again. The Mighty Hand that moved on their behalf has moved powerfully once more. The Outstretched Arm that created the cosmos has brought the most arrogant and cruel of earth's raging nations to its knees. The slave camps of Mitzrayim are empty. The slime pits are abandoned. The brick factories are closed. The store cities stand unfinished, the haunt of jackals. The taskmaster whips fly no more. We are finally free from all that. Our long season of Egyptian oppression is finally at an end. Our long-awaited mass *aliyah* journey – the approximately 500-mile trek by foot, through a series of deserts and foreboding badlands, that our return to the sacred pastures, fertile fields, and fruitful orchards of our forefathers in *eretz ha-kadosh* requires - is underway. *Selah!*

To our surprise, we are not embarking on this odyssey alone. A vast harvest of souls - descendants of Avraham and a great multitude of peoples hailing from every ethnicity and nation - have decided to cast their lot with us. So far the only things the various peoples traveling together have in common is that they have all had more than enough of Egypt, its toxic materialism, its sensual and sexual perversions, its toxic materialism, its pseudo-intellectual snobbery, its political skullduggery, its occult manipulation, and its maniacal obsession with ethnicity – but, at least for now, that is enough. Last week we all collectively experienced the thrill of breaking free from Pharaoh's impressive house of occult horrors. As this week begins our great migrant horde stands poised to leave the continent of Africa. In *B'shelach* we will face our first challenges as free men – and we find

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out that this ‘freedom’ gig can be a nightmare as well as a dream. We will learn what it feels like to have no social structure, no job, no income, no police force, no army, and no food bank. We will get a taste of what it looks and feels like in real time to have to rely upon the Holy One for everything - to forsake our compasses, maps, and established roadways - and just follow the Holy One wherever He leads.

***The Raging River of Deliverance Has Poured Us Out
Onto the Narrow Road to Destiny***

A few weeks ago, in our introductory study on parsha Sh’mot, this author characterized the season we were entering as ‘*the GREAT ADVENTURE*’. I also explained in that study that the narrative of the Great Adventure would read somewhat like a play, and would consist of three major ‘acts’. I explained that *Act I* of the saga would be set primarily in the land of pyramids and Pharaohs, sphinxes and sarcophagi, that *Act II* would be set amidst the shifting sands of the desert in the area between the Egypt’s Eastern border and Mt. Sinai, and that the *third and final act* of the epic story would be set at the mysterious ‘mountain of God’ the Bible calls *Horev*.

The curtain has now closed on Act I. Places everyone! It is time for *Act II of the Glorious Drama of Redemption ... and Phase II of our Heavenly Bridegroom’s Divine Courtship Protocol*.

***Act II, Phase II – What Be Our Heading, Captain?
Which Way Leads to the Strait Gate ...
and Wherewith Lies the Narrow Road?***

When the sun rose upon our encampment on the day after the Exodus we realized that for the first day in our entire lives there would be *no Egyptian telling us what to do*. There would be no taskmaster lurking in the shadows with a whip. There would be no decrees issued by a Pharaoh telling us where we could and could not go, what we could or could not do, when we could and could not rest, what God we could and could not worship, when we could and could not speak, what we were supposed to think, or when and how we could or could not die. From this point on it will not be either a Pharaoh or a taskmaster who determines either our identities or our life spans. Okay, we are free. *What happens now?* Could it be that the *dark controlling spirit of Egyptian bondage* has really released its death grip upon our hearts, our souls, and our bodies? Not so fast, Dear Reader. This is going to be a *process* – and it cannot be rushed. There are many, many challenges to be met and obstacles overcome.

***Learning To Trust the Bridegroom –
and to Follow Him Wherever He Leads***

From now on our destinies rest 100% in the capable hands of the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov. He Who redeemed us from bondage in Egypt is worthy, willing, and fully able to lead us as a Shepherd through all the obstacle course challenges this wilderness can throw at us. He has a wise and detailed plan to break every fragment of the residue of enslavement off of us. He intends to set us free of the *old-as-the-Pyramids Western Culture mentality* of obsession over material things – and all the greed, envy, paranoia, xenophobia, lust, cynicism, victimization, helplessness, hopelessness, and worry that go with such an obsession - in order that we can actually begin to function according to the vast potential, purpose and world-changing destiny for which He designed, created, and redeemed us.

It is by the Holy One, and Him alone, that we will be *led though the wilderness*. It is by Him that we will be *fed*. And soon, very soon, it is by Him that we will be *wed*. The *feeding* will begin place later this week. The *wedding* [or at least the betrothal] will take place next week, after we make yet another transition, from Act II of the great Exodus story to the third and final act. But the Divine *leading* has already begun.

Three times in the opening verses of parsha *Beshelach* our English Bibles use a form of the verb 'to lead' to describe what the Holy One is doing in relation to His newly redeemed people. In Exodus 13:17 the Holy One is described as leading His People *away from the way of the land of the Philistines*. In 13:18 the Holy One is described as leading His People in the way of the wilderness of the Sea of Reeds. And in 13:19 the manifestation by which the Holy One accomplished all this leading is described as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

A critical part of becoming the people of God is learning to follow Him wherever He leads. If you understand and enjoy the child's game of 'follow the leader', it seems, you might be halfway home!

The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as 'lead' in this context is *nachah*². Gesenius' Lexicon³ identifies this verb as meaning to lead not merely in the sense of guiding along a particular path, but in a much broader

² *Nachah* is *nun, chet, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #5148.

³ All references in these studies to Gesenius refer to the Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon originally authored in 1806-7 by German lexicographer Heinrich Freidrich Wilhelm [a/k/a 'William'] Gesenius. This detailed lexicon subsequently updated by other scholars, including Francis Brown, Samuel Driver, and Charles Briggs, hence what is commonly known as the Brown, Driver, and Briggs [a/k/a 'BDB'] edition of *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*.

administration of Divine oversight and government. The perfect illustration of the action described by the Hebrew verb *nachah* is the image of a Great Shepherd Whose leading of His sheep beside still waters, through green pastures, into and out of valleys of dark shadows, and in paths of righteousness is all part of a much larger plan of nurturing, training, development, maturation, bonding, and love.

The Holy One is not content to be looked upon as our Deliverer. He now wants us to get to know Him afresh as the Good and Faithful Shepherd of our souls.

Lessons From the Name of the Parsha

The name of this parsha - *Beshelach* – is derived from the second word of the Hebrew text. The root of this word is the primitive verb *shelach*. It means to *cast out*, or *send out*, *expel*, or *put away*. The common English translation of *shelach* in this verse is “*let go*”. But that is far, far too mild and passive a term to describe what took place. Pharaoh did not ‘let go’ of the Hebrews – he ordered them out in rage. In the last aliyah of *Bo* we saw exactly what Pharaoh’s decree provided.

*He called for Moshe and Aharon by night, and said,
kumu tzei’u ... lechu [Rise up, **get out** ... and **GO!**]*

*Take both your flocks and your herds ... v’lei chu [and **be gone**]”
[Exodus 12:31-32]*

Look at the verbs Pharaoh used – **Get out! Go! Be gone!** This was not *permission* – it was a classic expulsion. Pharaoh did not just sit back and give a green light for the Hebrews to leave – he cast Moshe and all who would follow him out by executive order. Like Pharaoh’s ancestor before him, who cast out Avraham and Sarah [Genesis 12:20] and like Avimelech of Philistia who cast out Yitzchak and Rivkah [Genesis 26:16], Pharaoh actively, aggressively, and on penalty of death, *expelled* Moshe and his followers. Similar orders have occurred throughout history wherever Hebrews have lived.

Perhaps the choice of translators to use the passive term ‘let go’ in the opening phrase of parsha *Beshelach* is a desire to put the emphasis of the story on what *the Holy One* did (in changing Pharaoh’s mind) instead of on what *Pharaoh* did once his mind was finally changed. But if we believe that history equals prophecy – that is, that what happened to our forefathers in Torah will repeatedly happen to us and to our descendants until the end of this age – we miss, by seeing Pharaoh’s decree as passive and benign, an opportunity to learn to always live as sojourners, not citizens.

The Message To Us All At Such A Time as This

The truth is that we who live in America - or Europe - or anywhere else other than Israel - are *always subject to an expulsion order at any time*. Though we may consider ourselves patriotic citizens and productive members of the society of whatever republic or sheikdom in which we may live, we are never *home* – and never *safe* - outside of Israel. We thought we were home – and safe - in *Egypt* ... before Yosef died. We thought we were home – and safe - in *England*⁴ ... before 1290 CE. We thought we were home – and safe - in *Spain* ... before 1492⁵. We thought we were home – and safe - in *Germany*⁶ and *Poland*⁷ ... before 1938. We thought we were home – and safe - in *Russia* ... before Joseph Stalin came to power.

We *think* we are home – and safe - in places like America in the current age. But we *must learn from history*. Some time, from somewhere, there will arise in whatever comfortable little country of exile in which we settle a Pharaoh, or king, or *fuehrer*, or prime minister, or ayatollah, or president, or pope who *knew not our ancestor Yosef*. And the decree the new leader issues will not be any more passive than was Pharaoh's. And we will have to run for our lives once again. As Messiah said:

***Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.
For then there will be great distress***

[Matthew 24:20-21]

Yeshua wanted us to know that there will indeed come another time of flight. He wanted us to know that ‘great distress’ awaits us. Build this into your world-concept. Teach it to your children. It is a part of your mission as disciples of the Master to teach ALL His teachings - not just the ones that draw ‘amens’ from the Sunday-Pharisee crowd.

Devise a ‘Pharaoh-escape plan’ now, and teach its details to your family members just as you would a fire escape plan at your home. Make sure your

⁴ While there had been small settlements of Jewish folk in England for centuries, after the Norman invasion in 1066 CE, large numbers of Jews flocked there at the encouragement of William the Conqueror. While they were never particularly well liked by the locals, they managed to prosper economically. Ultimately, however, on July 18, 1290, King Edward I expelled all persons of Jewish descent by a royal edict. Most Jews in England at that time fled across the English channel to France, Spain and Germany. Sixteen years later a similar expulsion decree was issued by King, Philip of France and two centuries later a similar expulsion decree was issued by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain.

⁵ In spring 1492, shortly after the Moors were driven out of Granada, Ferdinand and expelled all Jews from Spain. This put an immediate end to the largest Jewish settlement in Europe.

⁶ Before Hitler came to power there were approximately half a million Jews in Germany. By the time the Allies were able to crush the Nazi regime only approximately 15,000 were left alive.

⁷ In the 14th century [c. 1335 CE] King Kazimierz of Poland invited Jews who had been expelled from Germany and other countries to settle in his country.

family members all understand where you will all try to meet up in case you get separated in the chaos. At least make some basic arrangements, so that you have some agreed place to go, and at least give some thought to how will you live, and will continue to press on in Torah study, prayer, and mitzvot if you ever have to go there. Trust the Holy One to prepare you, help you and guide you; but be sober and alert. Perhaps there will be a pillar of fire and cloud to follow next time as well - but if it were so, surely Messiah would have told us

What I am suggesting is not ‘caving to paranoia’, ‘looking for trouble’, or adopting a ‘victim mentality’. It is just plain common sense. Messiah has warned us in Matthew 24 that another episode of forced flight will occur. Shouldn’t we get our hearts and minds prepared in case we – or our children – are the generation Messiah was speaking about?⁸

Which Way Do We Go?

The encampment at *Sukkot* where we enjoyed our first meal of freedom was only a temporary stopover. Located just a few hundred yards from the Egyptian border and still fully visible to Egyptian border patrols, Sukkot was most definitely not a place we could feel comfortable hanging around for very long at all. Soon therefore we *took to the march* again – all two million or so of us!

Pharaoh’s vast kingdom - and several lifetimes of slavery – began to get smaller and smaller in our collective rear-view mirror. And then we came to a *crossroads*. The well-worn pathway to our left was the road leading to the Mediterranean Sea. To our right was a much less-traveled pathway that led into the deepest part of the desert. A *critical decision* loomed before us. The way of the Mediterranean, leading through Philistia, was much shorter was *much more clearly marked* and held the promise of *many more sources of fresh water, food, and interaction* with civilization. The way of the desert, on the other hand, was extremely long, was *unbearably hot, dry and tedious*, was *poorly marked*, and promised to be *very, very lonely*.

It seemed like a no-brainer – who in their *right mind* would not choose the way of the Mediterranean and Philistia? Well ... the answer to that question is **US!!!!** The Holy One has called us to meet with and worship Him in the desert, so *to the desert we will go!* True freedom, you see, means being free to do the will of

⁸ It is the duty of every teacher to inform those who study with him that the current tribulations and agonies going on in the world, particularly as they involve Israel, are *the birth pangs of Mashiach* (Messiah). That is my purpose in mentioning these things here. Please be aware that the Holy One is calling all of His People to return to Torah and *mitzvot*, in order that we be ready for the imminent coming of Moshiach. Observe *mitzvot b'hidur* [*with beauty* – meaning beyond minimal requirements] – as a bride-to-be does everything she can to prepare herself for life with her bridegroom.

the Holy One even when both human counsel and human reason tell you do go a totally different direction.

The Road Not Chosen

Torah tells us very plainly why the Holy One wanted us to go the way of the desert instead of going the way of the Mediterranean and Philistia:

The Holy One didn't lead them by the way of the land of the Philishtim, although that was near; for the Holy One said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and they return to Mitzrayim ..." but the Holy One led the people around by the way of the wilderness by the Sea of Suf

[Exodus 13:17(b) – 18]

The *path not chosen* for us was the well-marked path along the coast of Mediterranean that had been trod by armies and caravans for centuries. Following that path, the land of our ancestors was a *straight shot* - a mere 11-day trip. On that path, as noted, both food and well-watered oases were plenteous.

The Holy One however chose for us the ‘long way home’ – the ultimate ‘road less traveled’. The path our Courtier-King wisely chose for us a *zigzag* path through the worst part of the desert, where oases were few and far between, where water nor food were scarce to non-existent, and where we would be almost totally isolated from interaction with other human beings. Why? The Holy One *knew us too well*, and *loved us too much*, you see, to take us the way the rest of the world traveled. And here is an immutable truth with which we all need to come to grips, sooner or later, Beloved: In the Holy One’s kingdom, *reaching one’s destination is of secondary importance; the most important thing is that we learn the lessons the Holy One wants to teach us in the course of the journey.*

Conversations in the Heavens Revealed

I don’t know about you, Beloved, but it thrills me to the bone when Torah undertakes to let us eavesdrop upon the actual conversations of the Heavens! Torah tells us not only *what* the Holy One *did*, but *why* He did not, as one would have suspected, lead His people in triumphant procession and with great pageantry along the well-worn Mediterranean Coastline road [the ancient “*Way of Philistia*”], where food was plentiful. Torah actually tells us the *thought-process* behind why the Holy One instead led His People on a zigzag path through the hottest and driest part of the Sinai desert, where the trail was not marked, and food and water were scarce if not non-existent.

What was the Holy One’s decision-making process in this regard? Torah tells us

that the Holy One intuitively sensed that if we *encountered hostility from other human beings* – from highway robbers, Arab raiding parties, etc. — on the main road, we would lose heart and would ... *return to Egypt!*

Return to Egypt?

Does that strike you the way it strikes me? I want to say – “*No way, Holy One!*” The one thing they [er ... uh ... I mean *we*] would NOT do – never, ever, no way, not in this lifetime, I don’t *think so* - is return to *Egypt*. Why, after all, would we *ever* want to return to that *raging madman* who abused us, enslaved us, and then expelled us under penalty of death? Why would we fear petty little things like highway robbers and raiding parties more than we fear the most powerful army in the earth in the hands of a despot who hates us?

With the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night - *i.e.* with the Almighty One Who had just freed us from Egypt with a mighty Hand and an Outstretched Arm as our frontal shield and our rear guard - why would we fear a lesser force than the one our God had just overcome? Ah, upon closer examination we see it. The issue the Holy One was concerned about was not the hostility we might encounter *on the road* (after all, look what hostility we are about to encounter in the desert, by the Red Sea – and then, a few days later, from the Amaleki!). The real issue with which we need to deal is *the affection we still had (have) in our hearts for Egypt*.

Oh how we *loved Egypt*. Oh how *we still do*. I do not mean the land alongside the Nile – I mean *the essence* of Egypt. How we love leeks and onions, and secular culture and entertainment. How we love being part of a booming economy and looking, walking, talking, dressing, and thinking like those we idolize. How we love that which *steals from us, kills us, and destroys us* – by separating us from the Holy One’s covenant.

The Holy One knows that in our hearts we did not really believe Pharaoh wanted us to leave. Surely that ‘*get out/go/be gone*’ decree was just one of those ‘heat of the moment’ kind of things. We did not yet really believe he was our enemy – much less that he really wanted to annihilate us. Surely it was just a big misunderstanding. We did not really believe what the Holy One had in store for us was better than what we had been able to obtain for ourselves by working for Pharaoh. After all, we had no frame of reference other than life in Pharaoh’s world; and while the Holy One had made a lot of promises, all we had really seen Him do so far was *destroy things*.

Our *feet* were marching toward Kana’an, but it seems we’d left some pretty large

chunks of our *hearts* in Memphis ... and Thebes ... and London ... and Madrid ... and Berlin ... and Krakow ... and Paris. Or maybe, just maybe, it was San Francisco.

All We Like Sheep

When we as the Holy One's redeemed remnant left Egypt the Holy One did a very strange thing. He led us back and forth along the border of Egypt, right in front of Pharaoh – much like a *muleta* is waved in front of an angry, wounded bull. What on earth did the Holy One have 'up His sleeve'?

Here is how Torah describes the strange zigzag route on which the Holy One led His people in the six days between the Exodus and the miracle at the Sea.

*Hence the Holy One led the people around
by the way of the wilderness to the Yam Suf [Sea of Reeds];
and the sons of Israel [went up] **chamashim** [we'll translate that later!]
from the land of Egypt.*

***Tell the sons of Israel to TURN BACK and CAMP before Pi ha-Chirot,
between Migdol and the sea; you are to camp in front of Ba'al-Tzafon,
opposite it, by the sea.***

The Holy One *chose the route*. He could, of course, had translated Israel to Sinai – or, for that matter, to Kena'an – had that been His intent. In the blink of an eye, they could have all been 'home', safe and sound. But the Holy One had other plans. He did not merely want to take Israel out of Egypt; He wanted to *take Egypt out of Israel* as well. He wanted to 'burn the bridges' we would have to cross in order to go back to Egypt. He didn't want His people looking back over our shoulder, either in *fear* or in *hope*, that Pharaoh was coming after us to take us back home.

Left Behind?

In verse 18 of chapter 13, our English Bibles tell us varying things about how the sons of Israel "*went up*" out of Egypt. Here is a representative English translation: *and the sons of Israel [went up] **chamush'im** from the land of Egypt*. The adjective used in the Hebrew text of Torah, used to describe the departure is *chamush'im*. My NIV and my Stone *Chumash* both translate *chamushim* as "*armed*" - as in "carrying weapons". "Armed" is not at all, however, what the word *chamush'im* [related to the Hebrew word '*chamesh*', or "five"] means literally. And we must ask ourselves, is "*armed*" even a remotely credible mistranslation⁹? Where would these slave peoples have gotten swords, bows, etc.? We are told what the Egyptians gave them - gold, silver, and garments. There is no mention whatever of weapons. I seriously doubt Pharaoh allowed

⁹ A similar translation is traditionally presented in Joshua 1:14 and 4:12, as well as in Judges 7:11.

our ancestors to arm themselves, don't you? There was no Second Amendment 'right to bear arms'¹⁰ in effect in the slave camps, I can assure you. And the prevailing paranoia of Egypt for centuries had been that the Hebrews were potential enemies of the State. [See Exodus 1:10: "... *if war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against us, and escape.*"] You do not arm those you see as your potential enemies. And if they are your slaves, you do not let them arm themselves.

Moreover, Israel being armed would seem to at least partially defeat the purpose of the Exodus story - to show clearly to everyone that the Holy One was the One who wrought Israel's deliverance, without any human participation [other than prophetic words]. Furthermore, were we not told expressly in last week's parsha:

*The people took their dough before it was leavened,
their kneading-troughs being bound up in their clothes on their shoulders.*
[Exodus 12:34]

It would seem more likely to me therefore that what the people were carrying as they left Egypt was not *weapons* – but *kneading troughs* and large quantities of *matzah* dough wrapped up in robes. Some other versions therefore do not translate *chamashim* as 'armed'. They say instead that Israel went out with "*uplifted hand*". This is, of course, closer to the "five" concept of the original word (since a hand has five fingers), but seems nonsensical - if not arrogant and uncaring. The "*uplifted hand*" translation makes the journey out of Egypt sound like a modern-day end-zone celebration – a forerunner of today's "high five" – designed to rub the sting of defeat in the face of the vanquished foe. But this was no football game. Every firstborn in Egypt was DEAD. Every household in Egypt was mourning.

Almost all commentaries admit these renderings of *chamush'im* as 'armed' or 'with uplifted hand' are questionable, and highly debatable. I personally don't 'buy' any of them. There is, of course, another interpretation – one advanced long ago by Jewish sages. The other interpretation is that the word *chamush'im*, in this context, means 'one-fifth'. In other words, under this interpretation, of all the Hebrews in Egypt at the time of the Exodus, *only one-fifth left* with Moshe. The other four-fifths – 80% of the heirs of the covenant between Avraham and the Creator of the Universe – simply could not bring themselves to leave Egypt. Freedom? Purpose? Destiny? Or leeks, onions, shopping malls, movie theatres, Super Bowl/World Cup parties, MTV, CNN, TBN, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, TicToc, and so on and so forth *ad nauseum*?

A Sobering Thought

¹⁰ This is a provision of 'Bill of Rights' portion of the United States Constitution.

Well, stranger things have happened. When Cyrus gave the decree that the millions of Jews in captivity in Babylon could go home, and even funded the rebuilding of Jerusalem, do you know how many of the million or so Jews then alive made aliyah? A measly 55,000. The rest hung around Babylon and Susa, soaking up the culture and the creature comforts. The vast majority chose *the beaten path of the dominant culture*. Why do you think *the events of the Book of Esther* happened in Susa? And when all Jews were expelled from Spain by the decree of Queen Isabella in 1492 do you know what a multitude of Jews did? They faked a conversion to the then-prevailing form of Catholicism so they could stay in Spain¹¹. They, as well, took the beaten path, and forsook the road less traveled. Why do you think the *Spanish Inquisition* claimed so many Jewish lives -*years* after Spanish Queen Isabella had issued a decree ordering all Jews to leave the country?

Perhaps the Holy One was very, very wise to lead our ancestors along the road less traveled so long ago. And perhaps the road less traveled is the road to which we would be well served to follow today.

Way Station #2: A Place Called Etam – i.e. ‘With Us’

The second place our ancestors encamped after exiting Egypt is often referred to in English Bibles as *Etham*. Torah tells us:

Vayis'u miSukot vayachanu
[The Israelites] moved on from Sukkot

v'Etam biktzeh ha-midbar
and they camped in Etam, at the edge of the desert.
[Exodus 13:20]

All the text of Torah tells us about this place, other than giving us its name, was that it was *‘biktzeh ha-midbar’* – i.e. *at the outer edge of the desert*. If you have ever traveled across a large desert by automobile, you can imagine what kind of this place this was. For those who like us were getting ready to head off into the desert this place meant *‘last chance’ to stock up on water and to prepare one’s heart, mind, and soul for the grueling ordeal ahead*.

There is something about seeing a vast, dry, hot, sprawling desert looming before you that un-nerves even the saltiest traveler. The desert is, after all, an

¹¹ This is not in any way to suggest that the writer, or any one living today, would have been more spiritual, and made a different or better decision. In times of crisis, people do whatever they have to do to cope. At least the *marranos*, as the Spanish *pseudo-Christians* came to be called [because they often were required to hang a smoked hog – which the Holy One calls an abomination in the Torah - in their homes to prove they had abandoned the Torah] continued the study of Torah, and some elements of Torah observance, in secret. Many of the persecuted Jews in Poland, Germany, and Russia, on the other hand, would later surrender any and all forms of Torah observance under much less pressure.

extremely hostile, potentially deadly environment for human beings. Extremely high temperatures during the day can lead to *heatstroke*. Plunging temperatures at night *can chill to the bone*. Arid conditions can lead to *dehydration*. Sandstorms so severe that the unprotected suffocate on sand come up without warning and can last for hours or even for days. Even if the heat or a sandstorm doesn't kill you, it can so disorient you to the point that you lose your sense of direction, wander in circles, and begin to see things that are not there.

Few recognizable landmarks exist, and what do exist are often obscured by the shifting of sand dunes. And did I mention that deserts are inhabited by *venomous snakes* and *scorpions*? Okay, you get the picture. Perhaps, however, there was something about the place Torah calls *Etam* that took the 'edge' off the prospect of heading off into the desert. Consider that in Hebrew the name *Etam* is spelled *alef, tav, mem sofit*.

Alef – Tav. Does that mean anything to you? If I translated it into Greek, it would be *alpha omega*. Does that help? The letter *Alef* – the first letter of the Hebrew *alef-beit* - is a Hebraic pictograph representing *He Who came before* – i.e. the Holy One Himself. The letter *Tav* - the last letter of the Hebrew *alef-beit* - is the Hebraic pictograph of a covenant sign – the mark that promises fulfillment of all covenant undertakings. The letter *Mem* in *sofit* form is a Hebraic pictograph representing the ultimate water-source, namely the *River of Life* of Revelation 22. Put all those images together, and the word *Etam* forms a mural of the *Holy One* showing forth a *covenant sign* involving an *endless supply of living water* flowing from His Throne.

Get that image etched permanently into your spirit, Dear Reader. That image is what the Holy One intends to sustain you no matter what troubles you may encounter in the days ahead.

Questions for Today's Study

1. Let's begin our study of *Beshelach* with a few basic questions.

[A] If the mixed remnant of former slaves who left with Moshe had traveled straight from Rameses eastward across the Sinai peninsula by the most direct route [along the coast of the Mediterranean, through Gaza, on the ancient "*Way of the land of the Philistines*"], they would, if unaccosted, have reached *Eretz Yisrael* in as little as eleven days. Why does Torah say the Holy One did not take them into the Land by that route?

[B] Look back at Genesis 21:22-34, and Genesis 26:26-31. Would it have been right for the descendants of Avraham and Yitschak to have invaded the land of the *Ph'lishtim* [Philistines]? Why or why not?

[C] Look ahead to Exodus 23:23. Did the Holy One promise to give His people victory over the *Ph'lishtim*, or to make the land of the *Ph'lishtim* a part of the original “deal”?

[D] Look up the Hebrew word translated as “armed” in the NIV. Try to find that word in other locations, and consider the variations of meaning. Then write a paragraph telling what you think it means, and why you think so.

2. From Pharaoh’s perspective the route taken by the Hebrew slaves under Moshe and the mixed multitude who left Egypt with them must have made it look like they were lost and helpless.

[A] In your Bible Atlas, look up the route the mixed remnant of the redeemed followed. Write the names of the first five places the Bible says they encamped.

[B] Look up these five names in the Bible Dictionary or in Strong’s Concordance. After reviewing Gesenius’ notes, write your interpretation of the meanings of the five names of the Hebrew encampments.

3. The redeemed remnant carried - of all things - a *coffin* with them when they left Egypt.

[A] Whose remains were in the coffin?

[B] Why did the people carry this person’s remains with them?

[C] What eventually was done with these remains?

4. In today’s aliyah we are introduced to the pillar of fire and of cloud, as the manifest presence of the Holy One amongst His people. What purpose did this manifestation of the Holy One’s presence serve?

5. Torah says that the Holy One told Moshe to have the people turn from the Southeasterly heading with which they began, and head instead back almost due North, to *Pi Ha-Chirot*. This meant that they were to go back the same way they had come - within easy reach of Pharaoh and his army!

[A] Why does Torah say the Holy One wanted His redeemed remnant to do this?

[B] What redemptive purpose does the Torah say the Holy One had in mind?

6. In today’s haftarah from the book of Judges, we see an early instance of the Holy One’s people *in their own land* being *subjected to foreign rule*. Here is how the writer of *Sefer Shoftim* [the Book of Judges] introduces us to the season of foreign dominance and oppression that existed when this week’s haftarah was written:

*Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Holy One after Ehud died.
And the Holy One sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan,
who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera,
who lived in Haroshet-ha-goyim.*

*The sons of Israel cried to the Holy One; for he had nine hundred iron chariots,
and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.*

*Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidot,
was judging Israel at that time.*

*She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel
in the hill country of Ephraim;
and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.*

[A] What was the spiritual condition of the redeemed remnant at the time of the events recorded in Judges 3:31 - 4:5?

[B] What were the names of the two men the Holy One allowed to rise up and oppress the redeemed?

[C] What do those men's names mean?

[D] Who did the Holy One establish as a "judge" to deliver His redeemed from the two oppressors?

[E] Look up the name of this "judge" in your Bible Dictionary, your Strong's, and your Gesenius, and write the Hebraic meaning of the judge's name.

7. In today's B'rit Chadasha aliyah we are provided background material for the focal passage of the week. Let us "climb into" the text so we can experience the truth Messiah is going to teach us as His redeemed remnant.

*On the next day the multitude that stood on the other side of the sea
saw that there was no other boat there, except the one in which his talmidim had embarked,
and that Yeshua hadn't entered with his talmidim into the boat,
but his talmidim had gone away alone. However boats from Tiberias came near
to the place where they ate the bread after the Master had given thanks.*

*When the multitude therefore saw that Yeshua wasn't there, nor his talmidim,
they themselves got into the boats, and came to Kafar-Nachum, seeking Yeshua.*

*When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him,
"Rabbi, when did you come here?"*

*Yeshua answered them, "Most assuredly I tell you,
you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves, and were filled.
Don't work for the food that perishes,
but for the food which remains to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you.
For the Holy One, the Father, has sealed him."*

*They said therefore to him, "What must we do,
that we may work the works of the Holy One?"*

*Yeshua answered them, "This is the work of the Holy One,
that you trust in him whom he has sent."*

*They said therefore to him, "What then do you do for a sign,
that we may see, and believe you? What work do you do?"*

[Yochanan 6:22-30]

[A] Our passage starts with “on the NEXT day”. What event transpired the preceding day?

[B] In today’s aliyah, the people ask Yeshua three separate questions. What three questions was Yeshua asked?

[C] How did the Master answer the first question? What do you think His answer means?

[D] How did the Master answer the second question? What do you think His answer means?

[E] The key to understanding what Messiah and these Jews were talking about lies in the word our English Bibles translate as “work”. The English concept of “assigned task” (conjuring up images of legalism) is not what either Messiah or these Jews were talking about. In Strong’s, look up the Hebrew words which the KJV from time-to-time translates as “work” or “works”. Search out each of those words, and their verb roots, in your Strong’s and your Gesenius. Write each such word and its verb root, and describe the Hebraic word picture each such word reveals.

[F] Which of the Hebrew words, if any, do you think Messiah and these Jews were talking about when they had this discussion? [Explain your reasoning for this answer!].

*May we learn to let the Holy One lead, and may He strengthen us that we may follow.
And may Messiah break for us the Bread of Life.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 78:1-4

Hear My Torah [i.e. teaching, instruction], *My people.*

Turn your ears to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable [mashal].

I will utter dark sayings [hiy’ot (riddles)] *of old,*
Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

We will not hide them from their children,
Telling to the generation to come the praises [t’hila’im] *of the Holy One,*
His strength, and his wondrous works [pala’ot (marvels, wonders)]
that He has done.