

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Yitro:*** **Exodus 19:9-25**
 Haftarah: **Isaiah 6:11-13**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Peter 2:7**

Then the Holy One descended upon Mount Sinai
 [Exodus 19:20]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 34:8-14;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 14: *Modim Anachnu* [We Give Thanks]

Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe – And the Holy One said to Moshe ... ***Hineh anochi ba eleicha ba'av ha-anan*** – Behold, I am 'coming with' to you in a thick cloud **Exodus 19:9a.**

It is the ultimate match made in Heaven. After centuries of finding 'none faithful' on the earth, the Master of the World has finally found an audience that is receptive to His glorious message of redemption and restoration. After centuries of being feared, hated, persecuted, cruelly enslaved, and targeted for genocide, we have finally found a Mentor Who sees something good in us. What is next? By live-streaming beautiful Words direct from Heaven's Courts into our midst the Holy One plans to ignite sparks of holiness that He – and only He – knows are hidden deep within us. As He ignites those sparks, He intends to turn each of us into a burning and shining lamp that radiates both His Messianic light and His inspiring Holiness into the world. He intends to revive our spirits with the Breath of His Mouth – and change mankind's paradigm of 'possible' forever. He intends to reawaken the dream of *pre-Fall Eden* and *pre-fruit of the-tree-of-knowledge level co-laboring* in us with a manifestation of His Holy Presence. He is determined to teach us to recognize and celebrate the difference between His Immaculate Wisdom, on the one hand, and profane humanistic pseudo-intellect, on the other. In the face of what the Holy One is about to say to us, voices of men like Pharaoh and Yitro will soon be completely forgotten – eclipsed in the shade of a far Greater Glory.

You see, the Creator of the Universe wants to enlist us in a Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a species and for the Restoration of Creation to its Edenic beauty, fruitfulness, and *shalom*. He has chosen us out of all the peoples and great nations of the earth to nurture, cherish, delight in, and co-labor with. He intends to personally invest Himself in our training. He intends to personally oversee our maturation. He intends to empower us to become His model

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community. He intends to implant the atmosphere-shifting energy of His Beautiful, Creative Words into our hearts, our minds, and our souls. Beginning at this Mountain He intends raise us up as a high-impact special forces team. Through the special operations He assigns to us He plans to introduce His Grand Redemptive Plan to all peoples, cultures, and ethnicities. The plan calls for sending us into the world as a counter-culture - a shining city set on a hill, in which ordinary men, women and children model His Ways of Wisdom, Joy, and Harmonious Kingdom Interaction to the world.

All that the Holy One Has Prophetically Declared, We Will Become!

It is a radical plan, no doubt. We are blown away; but captivated. We are humbled; but inspired. We are frightened; but exhilarated. It is breathtaking; but empowering. It is overwhelming; but energizing. Oh, be still my beating heart; oh, no – do not be still! Instead, relish every second of this adventure to the fullest! Lift up your voice and *sing, Tziyon!* Celebrate like children! Swoon like young, awestruck lovers! Dance for joy!

How can these things be? A mere three cycles of the moon ago we were dime-a-dozen slaves. We have no clue how to do, or what it will take to become, any of things our Divine Bridegroom plans for us to do and to become. We are just a mob of shell-shocked refugees suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. If any of what the Holy One is talking about comes to pass – if we are somehow able, for even a few moments, to transcend our fears, our faults, and our predilection for folly enough to flow in rhythm with even a small part of our King’s Grand Plan of Redemption Song – it will be Our King Who will deserve all the credit, and He alone Who must receive all the glory.

The Counsel of Man vs. the Wisdom and Revelation of God

Human beings are designed to respond to the Creator’s Voice very differently than we respond to the voices of our fellow humans. When the voice of one of our fellow men speaks, the parts of our brain that are activated are the parts that were most severely affected by the Fall – *namely* [1] our capacity for seeing and speaking into that which is or can be ‘good’ instead of obsessing over, and speaking curses over, ‘evil’; [2] our ability to think with a forward-looking orientation and a goal-oriented rather than backward-looking and judgmental mentality; [3] our ability to focus on the Passion and Plan of the Creator for the common good, rather than getting distracted by the personal and ethno-cultural special interests of the flesh and the pseudo-intellect; [4] our ability to employ common-sense logic and reasoning, and [5] our software for processing, analyzing, evaluating, prioritizing, and assigning emotion to sound bites of information. Hearing human beings speak, we tend to immediately start leapfrogging to self-serving and predisposition-perpetuating conclusions. When we hear a human speaker – take Yitro, for

example – make a statement, the parts of our brain that go to work are by far the least healthy ones we have go into overdrive, trying valiantly, but in vain, to accurately evaluate, analyze, process, organize, prioritize, assign emotion to, and form opinions. What happens, instead, is that the message of the human speaker gets hijacked and re-routed, ultimately being processed through multiple layers of room-darkening lens – lenses of self-interest, of fleshly appetite, of ethnic, cultural and ideological predisposition, of mood, of attitude, and of whatever emotion we happen to be indulging at the time. That is the *law of the carnal mind*. And do you know what that means? See Romans 8:7: ***The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.***

Ah, but the process and the result are very, very different when the Voice that speaks to us is that of our Creator. Communication from Him is pure, and cannot be corrupted – no matter what games our flesh and pseudo-intellect try to play. The instant we encounter an utterance of His Mouth, all the fallen components of our brains overload and short-circuit. The vast reservoir of pre-Fall brilliance that generally lies untapped in each of us - hidden behind the veil of the physical and temporal – comes alive. Our eternal *neshamas* begin to vibrate like a tuning fork that has been struck. Our mind, will, and emotions give way to a Greater Glory. Our hearts are set a-tremble with *yirat Adonai* – the quickening energy of the reverent fear of the Holy One. Wave after wave of wonder and delight wash over us. We become alive in a way and begin to resonate with a life force that fallen human intellect can neither access, recognize, or define. When men speak to us we are lulled to sleep; but at the first syllables spoken by our Beloved our hearts awaken with a start².

The sound of our Bridegroom-King’s Voice of causes our hearts to dance. Wisdom from Heaven causes our minds to focus again on *beautiful things*, on *Kingdom of Heaven priorities*, and on *eternal realities*. A radical transformation process begins. Our awestruck hearts come alive again. Our minds race with inspired dreams and visions. Even our physical bodies receive and infusion of energy. How does the Holy One accomplish this? He does it all by merely speaking.

The Beautiful Words of Divine Betrothal

In yesterday’s aliyah the Bridegroom-King revealed to Moshe what He is planning on doing with us. He did not redeem us from bondage just to get us out from under Pharaoh’s thumb. He did not bring us to this mountain to bemoan the state of secular government and society in the name of ‘fellowship’, memorize creeds,

² See Song 2:8: *It is the voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills*, and Song of Songs 5:2: *I was asleep, but my heart is awake; It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, “Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.*

argue theology, or play church. He intends to blow through all that flesh-arousing and pseudo-intellect stimulating fog like a summer storm, so He can cut a life-changing covenant with us. He intends to permanently engrave words of life, hope, and peace on the tablets of our hearts. He intends to make us partners in a Grand Redemptive Mission – one that involves both making *tikkun* for every bloodline that emanated from Adam and Chava, and restoring every square centimeter of physical Creation to its intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and shalom. Out of all the people in the world He is offering to us *the opportunity to become His very own **am segulah** [i.e. a unique, highly favored, and exclusively His people – like a city set on a hill], His **mamlaket kohanim** [i.e. kingdom ambassadors, diplomats, emissaries, appointed messengers, and administrators], and His **goy k'dosh** [i.e. nation that is fueled by, thrives on, exudes and brings holiness]*. He intends to make our ordinary human lives impact every sphere of influence into which He releases us - in ways we never could have imagined. See **Deuteronomy 6:1 – 8:18** for details. What a vision! What a calling! What an honor! What a challenge! But tell me again ... why did He choose ... us?

Why Is The Creator of the Universe Investing the Resources of Heaven So Extravagantly In Us?

The purpose for which the Holy One brought us to this mountain is now out of the proverbial bag. He is fulfilling a promise He made to Avraham, of course – but it is even bigger than that. He is fulfilling a blessing He spoke over mankind on the day He spoke us into existence. See **Genesis 1:26-28**. It is not primarily about any merit we possess in the flesh, for in the natural state we, like all men, women, and children of all races and all ethnicities, are a stiff-necked mess. See **Deuteronomy 9:4-7**. So why is He choosing us? It has been His plan all along. See **Genesis 12:2-3, Genesis 18:18-19, 35:10-11**. It is all about His vision for Creation. He doesn't need us to be perfect – in fact, our glaring imperfections are what makes us the perfect candidates for His ultimate extreme bridal makeover program. All He asks of us is that we do three things: a. **sh'ma** (i.e. stay tuned to, and respond to) His voice; b. **sh'mar** (cherish, treasure, and diligently watch over to keep alive and effectual) His covenant, and c. **asah** (build, form, cause to take shape according to design) His Counter-Culture Kingdom, day by day, generation by generation, *mitzvah* by *mitzvah*. *Selah!* That means He wants us to let Him be Who He Is and Do What He Does – and actually let Him use the ordinary substance of our lives and interactions with humanity and Creation to do it. He wants us to follow His lead instead of trying to tell Him what He should do – or judging and ranting about what we think the people and leaders are doing wrong. And He wants us to trust Him to work all things together for good. And as we are trusting Him for these things, to learn to listen to His Counsel about how do things His Way, on His cue, and according to His directions, instead of wallowing in, and foisting on others,

either [a] our *fleshly moods and emotions* or [b] our *pseudo-intellectual opinions about what is good/evil, fair/unfair, moral/immoral, just/unjust, possible/impossible, and wise/foolish.*

We are actually being invited to learn how to *think like He thinks*; how to *see things, situations, and people like He sees them*; how to *love like He loves*; how to *forgive like He forgives*; how to *speak like He speaks*; and how to *approach and solve problems like He approaches and solves problems*. This is the highest and best calling of mankind. It does not get any better. Our response was to jump at the opportunity. Torah reports: *All the people answered as one and said, **Kol asher-diber Adonai na'aseh** – i.e. 'All that the Holy One has spoken, we will make/build/ do.'* Exodus 18:8(a). The Covenant Partnership through which the Holy One intends to bring *tikkun* to the world is '*on*'. In three and a half more days we will all experience simultaneously the empowerment for our glorious mission – the overshadowing of the manifest glory of our Creator and Redeemer. Under His Radiant Cloud we will *become Life-Partners and Soul Mates with Him*. Under that supernal Chuppah we will *become partners with Him in a covenant comparable to nothing short of a Divine Betrothal.*

The Holy One Will Cover Us With His Garment

Today's aliyah begins Moshe heading back up Mount Sinai to tell the Holy One about our enthusiastically affirmative answer to His proposal. No need; He knows! He stops Moshe in his tracks, and declares:

Hineh anochi ba eleicha b'av he-anan ba'avur

Behold, I am coming to you in a dark cloud,

yish'ma ha-am b'dabri imach

that the people may sh'ma the words I speak with you,

v'gam-becha ya'aminu l'olam

and may also trust/put their confidence in you forever."

[Exodus 19:9(a)]

In light of the recent Yitro distraction, the Holy One wants to re-affirm in no uncertain terms that Moshe alone is His '*point man*' for releasing *sh'ma*-worthy revelation in the generation of the Exodus. There will, of course, come a time when the revelation flow begins to spread around somewhat, and include persons other than Moshe – but that time is *not now*. For that to happen will require another generation to arise – one not limited in frame-of-reference to the dark ways of Egypt. What the Holy One is pouring forth now is foundational – and in the season of foundations there is no room for multiple voices, multiple perspectives, or multiple pathways. Moshe has his faults, of course; but out of all men, his voice alone has been chosen to be the one to release the Creative Words that will define the identity, mission, and destiny features of the 'great nation' the Holy One

intends to bring forth from Avraham's seed. Moshe is the vessel the Holy One has called forth to train and mold a rag-tag refugee mob of former slaves into the high-impact special forces team that will introduce the details of His Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a Species and for the Restoration of Creation to its intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and *shalom* to all nations of the earth. Moshe will teach us what it means to eat, drink, dress, think, speak, work, do business, marry, raise children, and care for the poor, the widow, the fatherless, the foreigner, and the outcast in ways that will set us apart from all other people groups. Moshe will be the human shepherd the Holy One will use to teach us how to model His Wise and Wonderful Ways of thinking, living, loving and forgiving to every tribe, tongue, and people group on the planet.

Identifying and Calling Forth the Holy One's 'Bride People'

Several weeks ago, when we were studying the union of Adam and *Chava* [Eve], we read:

*And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh:
she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*

*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother,
and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*

[Genesis 2:23-24]

This is the foundational marriage instruction of Torah: *leave, cleave*, and become 'one flesh'. Sounds simple, doesn't it? But it isn't. Leaving is hard. Cleaving is even harder. And becoming 'one flesh' – well, think humpty-dumpty with me for a moment, okay? You know, *all the king's horses and all the king's men*

Oh, did you really think becoming 'one flesh' meant a couple spending a few moments together alone in the dark doing birds-and-bees stuff? Hardly! Becoming *one flesh* Torah style is a *lengthy process* of in-depth interaction *on multiple levels*, which brings about a union of man and woman that is *complete* and *permanent*. For humans, you see, in order for birds-and-bees type physical union to be a *healthy* rather than a *hazardous* activity it should follow a well-designed and successfully completed *leaving and cleaving process*. So, how can a couple be made ready to *leave* and *cleave*? The Holy One tells Moshe:

Lech el-ha-am

Go to the people

v'kidashtam hayom umachar

and bring holiness/consecration to them today and tomorrow

v'chibeisu simlotam

And have them immerse and tread-wash their outer garments.

Vehayu nechonim l'yom ha-sh'lishi

That they may be ready/prepared for the third day

ki b'yom ha-sh'lishi yered Adonai
For on the third day [1], the Holy One, will descend

l'eynei kol-ha-am al-har Sinai
before the eyes of all the people on Mount Sinai.
[Exodus 19:10b-11]

This is not a dream. This is not a drill. This is happening. The King of Heaven is coming to claim us as His People, much the way a Bridegroom comes to claim His Bride. How then are we – as a Bride – to go about making ourselves ready! How can we put off these filthy rags? How can we put off these selfish, sensual thoughts? How can we put off these hypersensitive, self-indulgent emotions? How can we put off these unclean words and dark sayings from our lips? How can we put off all these unhealthy attitudes, opinions, ideologies, philosophies, prejudices, and religious predispositions we grew up with– and become less like the ‘made in Egypt’ version of us, and more like the *B'nei Yisrael* version of us in which He delights?

Making Ourselves Ready

How does one respond to an invitation to meet – much less become betrothed to – the Creator of the Universe? We have been consecrating ourselves in every way we know how. Every other item on our individual and collective agendas has been put on the back burner. All our priorities have been rearranged. Making ourselves ready for our Bridegroom-King has become *Job One*. We know we *can't*; but we sense we *must*. We tremble in anticipation. Having made the conscious choice to seek first the Kingdom of Heaven, we deliberately chose to abstain from the usual fleshly distractions of life for three days. One-by-one we made our pilgrimage to the broad stream that now gushes from the Rock of Refidim. We stripped off and threw away every garment we had worn during slavery. We walked right into the living water. First the water was up to our ankles. Then we walked a few steps further and it was up to our knees. Just a few more steps and it had reached and covered our loins. And then, before we knew it, the waters were risen – waters to swim in – a river that could not be passed over. Deep called unto deep. All His waves and billows crashed over us. We became completely immersed in a *mikveh* the sweetness of which we will remember forever. We held our breath as if dead. And in that instant, dead is exactly what our former slave selves became.

As we rose from the waters our breathing reflexes kicked back in. As we drew air deep into our lungs it felt as if we had never really breathed before. It felt to us like the moment we had heard our fathers tell us stories about – back when the Holy One drew Adam close and exhaled into his nostrils His *nish'mat chayim*. We looked around us and were suddenly amazed at the beauty of Creation. Had the sky always been this blue! Had the sands of the desert always looked so much like

streets of glittering gold! Had the desert roses of springtime ever bloomed so beautifully, with such a dazzling display of brilliant colors? Then we were bombarded with the scents! Then our hearts and minds awakened to the sounds. Listen to the rushing water! No, to the birds singing! No, to the children laughing! Have you heard the sound the junipers make when the wind blows through their branches! If the Creation is this glorious – well, just think how much more wonderful the Creator of all these things must be!

We looked at our bodies and noticed to our delight that all the scabs from the wounds inflicted on us by taskmasters' whips and Amalekite swords had disappeared. They had been replaced with new, tender skin like that of a baby. It is almost as if we have re-entered our mother's womb and been born again. We felt fresh and clean, inside and out. All the layers of filth we had accumulated in Egypt's slime pits was also now totally gone as well – as was the dust we picked up from the desert trail that had brought us to this mountain. Most importantly, gone was all anger, all offense, all outrage, and all bitterness. Gone was every twinge of a feeling of victimization. Gone was all weariness. Gone was all hopelessness. Gone was all fear of man. Gone was any hatred we had ever felt toward our enemies. And also gone at last was the deep, dark, overbearing aura of sadness that had been our portion every day of our lives back in the house of bondage.

Upon emerging from the purifying waters we rushed to put on brand new, clean, white linen garments - the purest part of the trousseau we put together with the help of our Egyptian neighbors before we left Egypt. We could really feel it now - the *time to awaken love* was upon us. Selfish and soulish things had suddenly become distasteful. Physical food had become an afterthought. Sensual pleasures had ceased to interest us. We had found a far more inspiring passion. We had discovered a far more satisfying pursuit. We were ready to run hard after the superior pleasures of God - of knowing Him, of walking in His Courts, of having conversations with Him, and of co-laboring with Him in His Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan. We had become enthralled by a Greater Glory than the most pleasurable experiences and greatest comforts of this world could ever offer. Our greatest desire – and our quest - had become to discover as much as we possibly can about Who our Bridegroom-King and Redeemer really is – and who He has created, designed, and called us to be. So this is what life on earth was supposed to be like! And we have no way of knowing it now – but *the best is definitely yet to come!*

Imagine being a four-year old on Mount Sinai that day. Imagine what questions you might have asked! "Daddy, why is this whole mountain shaking?" "Mommy,

why is the top of this mountain on fire?" "Daddy, why is it lightning and thundering even when there is no rain?" "Mommy, who is Moshe talking to in the midst of that thick cloud?" "Daddy, why is that shofar blowing so loudly?" "Mommy ... Daddy ... Brothers ... Sisters ... Moshe - why are you all crying and laughing at the same time?" Ah, let's talk about that a little!

The Holy One Models For Us The Protocol of Betrothal

Because the processes of leaving, cleaving and becoming one flesh for men and women who want to be husband and wife are so important to the fulfillment of the purposes for which the Creator made the human race - and also because these processes are so *complicated* and *fraught with pitfalls for the unwary* – over the centuries the Hebrew people developed a ‘betrothal’ program or protocol to assist persons desiring to marry to prepare themselves for the great adventure of marriage that lies ahead of them. A famous example with which most people are familiar is the relationship between ‘Joseph’ and ‘Mary’ – the man and woman who provided the upbringing of Yeshua. When ‘Joseph’ [whose name was really *Yosef*] found out that ‘Mary’ [whose name was really *Miryam*] was going to have a baby, they were betrothed, but not yet married – and therefore lived separately and had no unchaperoned interactions which could even theoretically have led to the baby Mary was carrying being his biological child.

The idea that men and women, rather than enter directly into the critical stage of marriage as soon as physical attraction flares, instead might voluntarily postpone physical union in order to first *prepare themselves for successful marriage* through a carefully monitored period of *betrothal* is absolutely foreign to today's secular way of thinking. To the mind of secular man marriage is not a spiritual process of achieving a meaningful oneness; it is merely a convenient (sometimes) *social institution*. To the secular worldview marriage is a *civil state* in which people have a right to participate in order to access certain rights, privileges, economic benefits and pleasurable activities the society in which they live sanction only to persons meeting the societal definition of ‘married’. According to this Hebrew tradition however, once a man and a woman agreed to be married a ceremony was held before witnesses at which the man and woman would officially ‘*pledge their troth*’ [i.e. be *betrothed*] to each other. This *troth*-pledging ceremony came to be called ***Eyrusin*** [i.e. *betrothal*] and/or ***kiddushin*** [i.e. *sanctification*, or ‘*setting apart*’]. Even after this *troth*-pledging ceremony the couple would continue to live separately, sometimes for years, while [a] *the man, with the assistance of ‘friends of the bridegroom’, prepared a marital home* especially for his bride-to-be, and [b] *the woman with the help of ‘friends of the bride’ diligently prepared herself to become the specific kind of bride for which her bridegroom contracted*. When the preparation of both parties to the betrothal progressed to such a point that the

Bridegroom's father felt the parties were ready to 'leave' and 'cleave' in a meaningful manner, a second ceremony called *nissuin* [i.e. consummation] was held. It was only after this second ceremony that the parties finally began to live together as husband and wife.

Issues of Proper Documentation – From a Hebraic Perspective

In modern secular culture marriage is documented by the existence of a *marriage license* issued by a civil court clerk and signed by a State-approved official. But in Hebraic tradition it was not so. Hebrew people preparing to marry utilize another kind of documentation altogether – documentation lovingly drafted *by the Bridegroom-to-be* for His Beloved instead of prepared by some governmental official. In Hebrew tradition every prospective bridegroom is responsible for preparing and delivering to his beloved *two documents* – one for each of the ceremonies discussed above.

Hebrew Marriage Documents: The *Shitre Eyrusin* and the *Ketubah*

The first document a prospective bridegroom is to prepare for his beloved is a *Shitre Eyrusin*. This document is the fundamental document of commitment. It is executed and delivered to the bride-to-be at the ceremony of *etrothal*. The second document a prospective bridegroom is to prepare for his beloved is called a *Ketubah*³. Founded upon the promises and stipulations of the *shitre Eyrusin*, this document evidences the satisfaction of the bridegroom with his bride-to-be after the testing and trials of the betrothal period. The *Ketubah* constitutes a renewal and extension of the vows made initially at the time of *Eyrusin*, and is executed and delivered to the bride at the ceremony of full marriage⁴.

Since what is about to happen at *Sinai* is analogous to a Hebrew betrothal ceremony with the Holy One as the Bridegroom-to-be and Israel as His Betrothed it behooves us to explore the relationship between the document the Holy One is about to give Israel on this mountain and the *Shitre Eyrusin* of ancient Hebrew tradition.

Of What Does a Shitre Eyrusin Consist?

The covenant document given by the Bridegroom to his prospective Bride at the time of the *Eyrusin* ceremony contains two primary focuses:

1. an *outline of the specific terms of the Bridegroom's proposal of*

³ The *Ketubah* is a Hebrew word referring to a document outlining the terms of a covenant of marriage. The word *Ketubah* itself comes from the root *Kaf-Tav-Beit*, meaning writing. In traditional Jewish wedding ceremonies, patterned after the events recorded at *Sinai*, the *Ketubah* is read aloud first, then the document is signed and delivered to the Bride.

⁴ The Hebrew ceremony of full marriage is called *Nissuin*.

- marriage, and
2. a *description in specific terms the Bridegroom's expectations with regard to the Bride* and the marriage – i.e. a listing of general principles of what kind of husband he intends to be to her and what kind of wife he expects her to be to him.

The *acceptance* of this document by the bride-to-be begins the betrothal period, which can be quite lengthy. Upon the bride-to-be's acceptance of the terms of the proposal made by the Bridegroom the couple is not in traditional Hebraic thought merely 'engaged'. Engagements are mere *informal agreements to be married*. They are solely between the two fiancées. They cannot be enforced by law. They can be broken on a whim. *Eyrusin*, on the other hand, is a legally binding covenant. It cannot be broken without serious *legal* and *spiritual* consequences. After *Eyrusin* the Bride and Bridegroom are regarded as forever 'set apart' unto each other, but still do not live together, nor are they permitted to have un-chaperoned conversations or be intimate in any way, until the ceremony of *Nissuin* [wedding].

The *Eyrusin* ceremony is thus a very, very important moment in the life of the parties to the covenant. Commencing at the *Eyrusin* ceremony, and throughout the betrothal period the bride-to-be is expected to take her new status very, very seriously - and enter into a totally new lifestyle. This is the season in which the Bride-to-be 'makes herself ready'. How does this work? It starts with the Bride-to-be setting aside time to *diligently studying the shitre Eyrusin in order to fully grasp what her bridegroom-to-be expects of her*. But it goes far beyond study. She is also supposed to begin to *practice, along with the friends of the bride, doing the things the shitre Eyrusin says the Bridegroom expects of her*,

The goal of this season of study and practice is to help the bride-to-be begin to *think of herself as, act like, and truly start to become* the wife she has agreed to be. The task of a bride-to-be during this period is to train herself to think, speak, and act in manners consistent with the bride's covenantal commitments as same are written in the *shitre Eyrusin* document.

1. The Sealing of the Covenant

The first objective of the *Eyrusin* ceremony is to 'seal' the covenant before witnesses. The *sealing of the covenant* before witnesses means that the *Eyrusin cannot be broken*, but becomes a *b'rit o'lam* - an *everlasting* covenant. For this reason, Hebrew tradition maintains that a properly sealed and witnessed *Eyrusin* is just as binding as a marriage - even though neither formal wedding nor any physical act of consummation has occurred. The *Eyrusin* ceremony is therefore *the threshold for an eternal relationship that will consist of many stages*.

2. The Stipulations Regarding Permissible Contact and Chaperoned Interaction

The second purpose of the *Eyrusin* ceremony is to put in place the *stipulations regarding permissible and impermissible degrees of contact* between the prospective bride and bridegroom during the betrothal period. Such stipulations are designed to assure that the relationship between the prospective Bride and Bridegroom grows, expands, and matures *according to a schedule*, and the couple do not grow too intimate too soon or lose respect for each other by familiarity.

The stipulations declared at the *Eyrusin* ceremony are the “rules” by which the betrothed couple consents to live during the betrothal in order that the relationship will be gently nurtured, not imposed or rushed, and in order that love can *mature gracefully* – and not erupt in a consuming, disruptive flash. In the Song of Songs, the oft-repeated chorus is appropriately translated: ***Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you ... do not arouse or awaken love until the good, desirable and proper time.***

The idea is that the couple, even though betrothed, should under no circumstances be allowed to jeopardize their relationship by becoming *too close, too soon*. The kind of love which is the subject of true covenant is not to be allowed to explode in a ball of fire that will burn itself out leaving burned souls in a cloud of suffocating smoke. It is, instead, to be nurtured and tended in such a way as to become an *eternal flame*, lighting the way for all future generations. The focus of the parties during betrothal is thus not to be on receiving selfish personal pleasure from each other, but upon each party *becoming the person each of them was created and has now contracted to be*. The parties are to learn early on to approach the marriage relationship *unselfishly*.

3. The Physical Delivery of the Shitre Eyrusin

The third purpose of the *Eyrusin* ceremony is the *public delivery to the Bride-to-be of the shitre Eyrusin document* – i.e. the written instrument explaining the promises of the Bridegroom and detailing the expectations He has of her as His Bride. At the *Eyrusin* ceremony the *shitre Eyrusin* becomes the Bride-to-be’s *permanent possession*. Such a precious and life-refocusing document is not to be put in a drawer or a closet or a glass case somewhere and admired for its poetic wording or its intricate calligraphy. Instead, the bride-to-be is to use the *shitre Eyrusin* daily much like a building contractor uses a blueprint for a construction project. The *shitre Eyrusin* is to become the bride-to-be’s reference book for every activity. It is to become the constant focus of all her thoughts and actions, in order that she may by the time of the marriage become a mature full partner in the relationship.

A faithful and dedicated Bride-to-be will consult the ***shitre Eyrusin*** given to her by her Bridegroom each morning and evening. She will study it intensely,

contemplate its literal and deeper meanings, meditate upon its levels of application, cherish it as an expression of the essence of her Bridegroom, discuss its provisions and their implications with her friends, begin to practice it her daily life activities, and surrender to its gradual transformation of her life. Throughout all the years of her betrothal, the passion of her life – even while she remains in her father’s household - is to be learning and practicing the *shitre eyrusin’s* provisions.

By the time of the wedding the essence as well as its specific wording of the *shitre Eyrusin* will thereby be *written upon the bride’s heart*. It will be so “second-nature” to her by that time that she will not need anyone to teach her how to be a fitting companion to her Bridegroom.

So ... What Does All This Betrothal and Marriage Talk Have to Do With the Passage of Torah We are Studying?

Are you getting a bit of a headache from thinking about this? And are you wondering what on earth all this leaving and cleaving and oneness talk and all this betrothal and documentation discussion has to do with the passage of *Torah* we are assigned to read?

The tradition of men and women being expected to be betrothed long before they were married was, of course, never specifically mandated by Torah. It was, however, *directly patterned after the process the Holy One followed at Mount Sinai with regard to His Beloved* – the people He redeemed from Egypt to be His *am segulah* [i.e., His especially cherished and treasured people], His *mamlaket kohanim* [i.e., His kingdom of priests], and His *goy k’dosh* [holy nation]. If it was the pattern chosen for the Holy One for becoming one with His most prized people, the Hebrews rationalized, it was as good a pattern as could possibly exist for man and woman to follow in an effort to become one flesh.

We are about to read about the covenant-cutting process that the Hebrews saw as the pattern for betrothal and marriage customs. In yesterday’s aliyah, through the brokerage of Moshe the Holy One made a proposal of covenant to the Community of the Redeemed like unto an offer of *betrothal*. Likewise the Community of the Redeemed - though still just an immature ‘child’ in many ways – yesterday made a commitment to the One Who redeemed her from the house of bondage with a *mighty Hand* and an *outstretched Arm* and Who bore her to Himself on eagle’s wings *very similar to the commitment a bride-to-be when she agrees to be betrothed to a bridegroom*.

If you understand the connection between betrothal and what is going to happen at Sinai you will be in a much better position to understand the depth and beauty and

long-term significance of what we will be reading tomorrow and in the days to come. What the Holy One is about to do on Sinai is not to issue a bunch of ‘commandments’ to lay down a set of laws He wants Israel to obey. What He is going to do instead is to speak *prophetic* and *creative* and *loving declarations* over His specially treasured people which will, if she accepts them and over time studies them and practices incorporating them into her way of thinking, speaking, and living, Divinely empower her to become to Him a totally dedicated bride.

Until then please note that in preparation for the ceremony after which *Eyrusin* was patterned the Holy One instructed Moshe to tell the people they should spend three days *sanctifying themselves*. Hebraically, in the *Eyrusin* context that would mean, among other things, that they were after 3 days of prayer and meditation on the upcoming betrothal, all to do three things: [1] immerse in the *mikveh* of living water as an act of consecration, [2] put on pure, spotless wedding garments without spot or wrinkle, and [3] emerge from their home to go out and meet the Bridegroom.

What is the Father Doing?

While the bride-to-be is ‘making herself ready’ the Bridegroom is not exactly going to be twiddling His thumbs. He is also going to be preparing for the ceremony, arranging the ‘meeting hall’, the witnesses, the refreshments, etc. And so it will be that on the third day of assembly at Sinai, in the morning, the scene will be set for the most extraordinary ceremony of *Eyrusin* that ever has occurred or ever will occur. This particular *Eyrusin* ceremony will definitely be an *event to remember*. There will be special effects *to die for*. The heavens and the earth will shake with thundering and lightning. A *thick cloud* will descend upon the mountain and form a *chuppah*, or canopy - under which the ceremony will take place. The sound of an exceedingly loud shofar will pierce the air and reverberate, growing ever louder. But please do not be frightened by at all this. Just smile, and revel in the shouts of *Mazel Tov*, and understand that the Holy One’s redemptive plan for Creation is alive and well and moving into its next phase.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. In Exodus 19:9 the Holy One describes what His appearance, at the time of the shofar blast, will be like:

The Holy One said to Moshe, "Behold, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may sh'ma when I speak [English versions add the words "to you"], and may also believe you forever."

[A] In what manifestation or form does the Holy One say He will appear to Moshe in the presence of B’nei Yisrael?

[B] Look up the words used by the Holy One to describe this manifestation

in Strong's, Gesenius, and in an expository dictionary of Bible words. Write the words in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, and in transliteration, then explain what you think they mean in this context.

[C] For what purpose does the Holy One say He is going to speak [Hebrew *davar*] out of the "thick cloud"?

[D] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the word our English Bibles translate as "believe" in the above verse [Strong's Hebrew word #539, consisting of the letters *alef*, *mem*, and *nun sofit*]. Write the Hebrew word in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings, and transliterate it into English letters. Then describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing around this word.

2. Today's aliyah represents the "first instance" of a corporate manifestation or appearance of the Holy One. Previously, God had appeared to Adam and Chava, and to the Patriarchs, and to Moshe, but not to a large group of people gathered for that purpose.

[A] What preparations were the people told to make for this encounter?

[B] What was the pre-arranged signal for at which the Holy One would make His Presence manifest to all the people, from the oldest to the youngest?

[C] What preparations do you think we, as those who *sh'ma* the Voice of the Holy One and *sh'mar* the instructions of His covenant, should make today to prepare for a corporate encounter with the Holy One?

3. The initial stipulations regarding permissible and impermissible contact between Bride-to-be and Bridegroom-to-be are negotiated between Moshe and the Holy One in verses 21-24 of today's aliyah.

The Holy One said to Moshe, "Go down, charge the people, lest they break through to the Holy One to gaze, and many of them perish. Let the Kohanim also, who come near to the Holy One, sanctify themselves, lest the Holy One break forth on them."

Moshe said to the Holy One, "The people can't come up to Har Sineh, for you charged us, saying, 'Set bounds around the mountain, and sanctify it.'"

The Holy One said to him, "Go down and bring Aharon back up with you, but don't let the Kohanim and the people break through to come up to the Holy One, lest he break forth on them."

[A] What was to be the signal that the Bride could approach the Holy One?

[B] What was to happen to anyone who touched the marked-off area of the mount before this signal?

[C] Why do you think "boundaries" were established at the very beginning of the ceremony?

[D] The Holy One warned Moshe that the people were not to "break through" to gaze upon Him. What is the Hebrew word or phrase our English Bibles translate as "break through" in this verse, and what do you think this Hebrew word

or phrase means?

4. The location of this *erasing* ceremony, and the giving of the basic provisions of the Torah as a *shitre erasing* there, rather than in *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Promise) is interesting.

[A] In what nation was this site located at that time?

[B] What people group lived there at the time?

[C] Why do you think the Holy One chose such a place [not Israel] to deliver the *shitre Eyrusin*?

5. The events that took place on the mountain on the “third day” were stunning. Imagine you were one of the members of the Community of the Redeemed on the mountain that day. Think about what you would have seen, heard, felt, smelled, experienced. Write a letter to a friend who did not leave Egypt to tell him or her about the experience and the effect it had on you.

6. In Exodus 19:22 the Holy One gives specific instructions for the *kohanim* [usual English translation “priests”]. But we know that at this point the Aharonic priesthood had not yet been established, nor had the tribe of Levi been selected to serve the *kohanim*. Indeed, the *mish'kan* [tabernacle] had not yet been built – or even announced.

[A] Look up in Strong’s, Gesenius, and in an expository Bible dictionary, the Hebrew word that our English Bibles translate as “priests” in this verse. Write this word (in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, and in its English transliteration).

[B] Considering the fact that there was no Aharonic priesthood yet when these instructions were given, and the various shades of possible meaning of the Hebrew word in question, to what group of people do you think the term refers in this verse?

[C] What specific instructions did the Holy One give Moshe for these persons?

7. Today’s haftarah aliyah constitutes a continuation of the Holy One’s prophetic call to Yeshayahu. As you will recall, the Holy One has manifested His Presence to Yeshayahu “*in the year Uziyahu died*” and has informed him he is to “*make fat the hearts of the people*”, that they *lo sh'ma*. The Holy One clearly intends to blind the descendants of Ya’akov for a time in order to accomplish another aspect of His Divine Plan. Yeshayahu responds to the Holy One’s instructions by questioning “how long” Israel will be “blinded”?

And He answered:

Ad asher im-sha'u arim me'eyn - until cities lie waste without inhabitants,

*and houses without men, and the land is utterly desolate.
 Until the Holy One has sent the people far away
 and the land is **b 'kerev** – i.e. under the sword.
 And if one tenth remain in it,
 it will be consumed again;
 but like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains when it is felled,
 so the holy seed will be its stump.'*
[Yeshayahu 6:11-13]

[A] At the time this prophetic call was given Y'hudah [Judah] was still a nation, with a king (albeit a new one, since 'Uziyahu had just died). What would happen shortly to cause that nation's "cities [to be] waste without inhabitant", and its "houses without man"?

[B] The Holy One's answer to Yeshayahu's question indicates who is ultimately responsible for *Yisrael* (the Northern Kingdom, consisting of all tribes other than Y'hudah and Benyamin) being "removed far away" (i.e., going into exile, and becoming the "ten lost tribes"). Who is responsible according to the Holy One?

[C] The Holy One indicates that as a *terebinth* or oak tree that is cut down has a "stock", or stump, so shall the tree of His planting have a "stock" or stump. What is to be the stock of the tree of the Holy One's planting?

8. Turning our attention to the B'rit Chadasha reading for today Kefa [Peter] is giving a drash [teaching] on the verse in yesterday's aliyah which he quoted from Yeshayahu 28, about the "cornerstone" the Holy One laid in *Tziyon* [Zion]. First, let's quickly look back at yesterday's reading, to get our bearings:

*... it is contained in Scripture ,
 "Hineni [Behold], I lay [Hebrew, yissad] in Tziyon an eben [a stone],
 yik'rat [elect], precious: He who believes in him will not be disappointed."
 [1Peter 2:6]*

Kefa's commentary on Yeshayahu 28:16 goes like this:

*For you therefore who believe, this eben [stone]
 is yikrat [precious, worthy of honor, in your sight] (as it is written in Yeshayahu 28:16),
 but for such as lo sh'ma [do not yield their innermost man to Him],
 "The eben [stone] that the builders rejected,
 Has become the l'rosh [chief] cornerstone," (as it is written in Psalm 118:22).
 [1Peter 2:7]*

[A] What does Kefa tell us is to be our attitude toward the *eben chayav* "living stone" laid in *Tziyon*?

[B] What will be that *eben chayav* become to those who are "disobedient" [KJV] (in Hebrew, to those who *lo sh'ma*)?

[C] Who are the "builders" [Hebrew, *Ha-bon'im*] who rejected the *eben chayav*?

[D] The verse from the TaNaKh quoted in I Peter 2:7 as describing what the

eben chayav becomes to those who *lo sh'ma*, is near the end of “the **Hallel**” which we sing/chant at certain *moed'im* [festivals]. At which *moed'im* [festivals] do we traditionally recite the Hallel, and why?

*May you hear the shofar, Beloved,
and may it arouse and awaken love in you in its good, proper, and pleasing time.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 34:8-14

*Oh taste and see that the Holy One is good.
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.*

*Oh fear the Holy One, you his holy ones,
for there is no lack with those who fear him.*

*The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger,
But those who seek the Holy One shall not lack any good thing.*

*Come, you children, listen to [Hebrew, **sh'ma**] me.*

I will teach you the fear of the Holy One.

Who is someone who desires life, And loves many days, that he may see good?

*Keep [Hebrew, **sh'mar**] your tongue from evil,
and your lips from speaking lies.*

Depart from evil, and do good. Seek shalom, and pursue it.