

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Yitro:** Exodus 19:1-8
 Haftarah: Isaiah 6:8-10
 B'rit Chadasha: I Peter 2:6

You will be to Me a Kingdom of priests, a holy nation ...
[Exodus 19:6]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 34:4-7;

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

B'chodesh ha-shlishi letzet B'nei Yisra'el me'erezt Mitzrayim – In the third moon cycle after B'nei Yisrael went out of the land of Egypt ... *ba'yom hazeh ba'u mid'bar Sinai* – on the very day, they came to the watershed of Sinai. Exodus 19:1a.

Yitro, sheik of Midyan, has ridden off into the sunset. He mounted his donkey one day and hightailed it back to the very same badlands from which he had come. We will miss his charisma, of course, but ... we have had quite enough exposure to the stranger's ways, don't you think? It is finally time to hear *the second Voice* of parsha *Yitro* – *i.e.* the Beautiful Voice of our Bridegroom King Himself! We have heard quite enough of *the opinions of man*. It is time to see beyond the practices of *sand-dune religion*. It is finally time to tune our ears to the frequency of Heaven, and listen to what our Wonderful, Ever-Faithful, All-Wise Heavenly Courtier-King has to say!

Behold ... the Chosen VENUE for the Greatest of all Betrothal Ceremonies!

The mountainous area known alternatively as 'Horeb' and as 'Sinai' – *i.e.* the venue at which our Bridegroom-King has invited us to get acquainted and renew the Avrahamic covenant with Him – is arrayed in splendor in anticipation of our arrival. It is springtime in this watershed, and that means the wildflowers are dazzling. The *mirr* shrubs that seem to be everywhere are casting forth their bright yellow blossoms. These are complemented by the fragrant yellow *rabil* flowers. The miniature Hawthorn trees that the desert-dwellers call *zahroor* dazzle the eye with bright red berries and the *nabug* trees add shade and texture with the tiny red fruit which their limbs bear this time of year. Shades of purple are splashed across the desert floor here as well, with hues emanating from *Zilla* thornbushes and *sakraan* plants. Delightful scents fill the air from the desert *rosemary*, the *wild horsemint*, the *bardagash* sage, and the menthol-scented *samwa*. Soon the Holy

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One will baptize the ridge overlooking all this splendor in roaring flames. Thick, swirling clouds flashing with lightning and rolling with thunder. All this, however, will only present an impressive down payment on His promise to one day fill the whole earth with the knowledge of His glory. It is finally time to go beyond hype, hyperbole, numbers, and form – and to ground ourselves instead upon something real, inspiring, substantive, and empowering. It is finally time to let the Voice that Created the Heavens and the Earth speak directly to, and release Its amazing prophetic energy over, our hearts, our lives, our families, and our budding nation. It is time for our nation's version of Avraham's '*Lech Lecha*' call to covenant.

Soon, very soon, we will tremble the way only the Holy One Himself can make us tremble. The glory of our King's Majesty, the fiery passion of His love, and the incredible depths of His insight into both our souls and Creation's fallen state will soon make us shake our heads, wondering how got so easily distracted by the words of a charismatic sheik from just another raging nation. Now it is time for our ears to hear a message rooted and grounded in and carrying the sweet fragrance of the Tree of Life. We are about to be transformed the way only a Creator can bring about a transformation. Welcome to *Act III of the Glorious Drama of Redemption*. These are the Sinai Chronicles! Let the revelation outpouring begin!

Welcome to the Sinai Chronicles Section of Torah

The *Sinai Chronicles* – i.e. the inspired record of what transpired at Mount Sinai in the year of the Great Exodus - provide the center-of-gravity of Torah. We will camp at Sinai for almost a year. This remote watershed will be the setting for the rest of the book of *Sh'mot*, all of the book of Leviticus, and the first ten chapters of the book of Numbers. The *Sinai Chronicles* will thus together comprise by far the largest and most inclusive section of Torah. Yes, what is going to happen here *really is that important*. By the time we leave this place we will be *totally transformed* - from a rag-tag mob of refugees fleeing slavery in Egypt into *the People – and the City - of the Living God*. But let's go back and pick up where we left off, shall we?

Appropriately Enough, the Sinai Chronicles Begin With a God Encounter

Between the sixth and seventh Sabbaths of our freedom from Egyptian bondage the Pillar of Fire and Cloud led us right to the base of the mountain where Moshe first encountered the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. This is where both Moshe's relationship with the Holy One and his mission started. This is the mountain of the thorn bush. It is now time for the entire Redeemed Community to get what Moshe got – and more.

Take a good look around; we are going to be camping at this venue for eleven

months! And oh, *the glorious* – and *ignominious* - things we are going to experience here! This will be the scene of a marvelous season of new beginnings. What happens *to* us, and *in* us, while we are here will not only change us – it will change the world. It is at this remote setting that the Grand Redemptive Plan of the Holy One for mankind and Creation will finally be set forth in *intimate detail*. It is here we will be reshaped into the *am segulah* of the Holy One, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. This is where the DNA of the Covenant people will be recombined and forever transformed by the sheer power of the Holy One’s Words. This is where we will be introduced to the Beautiful Divine GPS navigation system through which we are to lead our families, our households following, and the ‘mixed multitude strangers’ who come to us, along the Holy One’s *Transcendence Route* – the one consisting of strait gates and narrow ways.

This mountain – the first mountain to be called the mountain of the Holy One - will be the location of some of the most pivotal events in God-man relations. It is here where we will all hear for the first time the same Beautiful Voice that spoke the Heavens and the Earth into being. It is here that the Holy One will renew with B’nei Yisrael, and add definition and clarity to, the covenant He made with Avraham long ago. It is here that the Holy One will teach us what it looks like in real time and practical situations to *become a great and mighty nation, to be a source of blessings to all peoples of earth, and to keep the way of the Holy One, to do righteousness and justice, that the Holy One may bring to Avraham what He has spoken to him*. See **Genesis 12:1-3** and **Genesis 18:18-19**.

The Holy One is Ready to Push the Envelope – And Pop the Question!

The first thing Moshe did upon arrival at *Sinai* was to retrace the steps he had taken months previously in an effort to locate one of Yitro’s lost sheep. This time however he was not looking for a stray animal. This time he was passionately seeking a debriefing session with the Architect of the Universe.

I can only imagine what thoughts must have been going through Moshe’s head as he started an exhilarating ascent. Was he looking for the thorn bush out of which the Holy Fire had called him the last time he was on this mountain? Or was he just looking for a solitary place to sit and ponder and try to make some sense of the *amazing sequence of events* that had transpired since he last scaled these heights? Or perhaps was he remembering – and hoping to find out the meaning of - the prophetic declaration the Holy One had made over him the last time he was here. That is when the Holy One said to him: **... when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain**. Exodus 3:12. Was Moshe returning to the site of the thorn bush experience to acknowledge that *every single thing the Holy One had told him would transpire has indeed transpired exactly as*

He said it would? Was he climbing the mountain to lavish worship on the One Who had forgiven and redeemed him from sins that included murder, Who had called him forth out of a life of insignificance and fashioned him into a vessel of deliverance worthy of honor, Who had endued him with supernatural power for every task he had been assigned, Who had protected him from both the physical and spiritual forces of darkness that ruled Egypt, Who had delivered on every single one of the promises He made at the burning bush, and Who had now brought him safely back to this place in shalom?

Each step of ascent Moshe took that day must have brought a flood of memories, a torrent of emotions, and a multitude of questions. Whatever Moshe planned or purposed in his heart to do as he ascended the mountain, however, soon became irrelevant. While he was still in the process of ascent the Holy One pre-empted whatever he had planned. Before Moshe could reach the summit of the mountain to pour out his heart to the Holy One, however, Torah tells us: **Vayikra elav Adonai** - i.e. the Holy One called to him **min-ha-har** - from within the mountain. This time the mountain itself was the thorn bush. This time the Divine voice reverberated **min-ha-har** – i.e. from the mountain itself. The Holy One stopped Moshe in his tracks, in mid-ascent - and poured out His Heart to him.

Finally – the Voice of the Creator Instead of the Voice of Fallen Man!

The Holy One's brilliant Mind is racing. He is joyful beyond words. He cannot wait until Moshe gets to the top of the mountain. He has some 'to die for' news. What is the Holy One's 'to die for' news? He has a plan that will make the hosts of Heaven – not to mention the nations of the earth - shake their heads. He actually wants to take the people He has redeemed from the clutches of Pharaoh, and their descendants forever, as ... a BRIDE. The song of all songs is playing its way out in the Heavens and upon the earth. And it is the Holy One whose heart has been captured with one glance of His Beloved's eyes. He has come up with a *stunning betrothal proposal* He wants Moshe to present to the maiden He has been courting. He wants Moshe, as Friend of the Bridegroom, to convey that stunning proposal to His Beloved *here, on this mountain*, without further delay.

This time Moshe is not going to see a burning bush – *he is going to be a burning bush*. Here is the message the Holy One wants him to deliver:

Atem re'item asher asiti l'Mitzrayim

You have seen what I did to the Mitzrim [i.e. Egyptians],

v'esa etchem al-kanfei nesharim v'avi etchem elay

and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

V'atah im-shamoa tishme'u b'koli

Now therefore, if/when you will indeed sh'ma my voice,

Ush'martem et-briti
and *sh'mar* my covenant,
viheyitem li s'gulah mikol ha-amim
then you will be my own treasured possession from among all peoples;
ki-li kol-ha-aretz
because all the eretz is mine;
V'atem tiheyu-li mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh
And you will become for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'
[Exodus 19:3-6(a)]

Have more beautiful – and transformative - words of betrothal ever been spoken?

A Proposal of Intimate, Eternal, and Infinite Intertwining

The beautiful words the Holy One commissioned Moshe to speak on his behalf constituted His offer to enter into a renewed and much more intimate form of *b'rit* [covenant] with two groups of people - “*the house of Ya'akov, and the children of Yisra'el*”. These people were, of course, already specially favored and singled out for blessing by the Creator by reason of their connection to His Covenant partners Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. But the Holy One wanted for these people *a much deeper relationship, complete with much, much more frequent and wide-ranging give-and-take* than been the case with either the Ancients or Patriarchs. After all, the Holy One appeared to and directly conversed with Noach only three times over the course of Noach's entire lifespan. With Avraham it was eight times. With both Yitzchak and Ya'akov it was even less. Those relationships were all powerful – even world changing, of course. But the Holy One wants *more* for – and from – us. What is that ‘more’? We will talk specifically about the verb phrases that the Holy One uses to describe the ‘more’ He wants from us later in this *shiur*. For the moment, however, let us speak more generally about the three elements that a betrothal covenant always involves. A betrothal covenant at its essence consists of elements of *leaving*, elements of *cleaving*, and elements of *becoming one*.

1. The Element of Leaving

When a person commits to enter into a betrothal covenant he or she commits that all pre-Betrothal relationships, affections, affiliations, priorities, mindsets, attitudes, and behavior patterns that would be inconsistent with or counterproductive to the betrothal covenant will be ‘*left behind*’. This is what I call the ‘*disentanglement*’ commitment. We commit to be a ‘blank slate’ on which we and our partner in betrothal can write a totally new story.

2. The Element of Cleaving

In addition to the leaving element of betrothal covenants is the important element

of cleaving. This is what I call the ‘*intertwining*’ *element*. It means that from the date of betrothal forward the betrothed parties commit to increasingly cleave to one another – in every arena of life. That includes, for a start, the arenas of thought, word, affection, honor, priority, and behavior. All of these must be aimed at nurturing, strengthening, and furthering the covenant relationship – whatever the effect on the personal feelings or perceived individual needs of the respective parties.

3. *The Forging of a New Unified Identity*

As important as these two elements are, however, the ultimate goal of a betrothal covenant goes far beyond the sum of its parts. The goal of a betrothal covenant is the very ambitious undertaking to take two separate entities and, over the course of time, make them become more and more as *one*. The goal is to make the parties to the covenant merge ever increasingly into a state of *achdot* [unit, oneness] - in identity, appearance, personality, priority, purpose, mission, emotion, attitude, and destiny.

Words That Carry the Weight of His Glory

We owe it to ourselves therefore not to pass off too lightly the words with which the Creator of Heaven and Earth committed to betroth Himself to us forever. We owe it to ourselves and our children - and the future of our world - to *read these words over and over again* and *meditate upon* them. These words are, you see, both a *Divine prophetic declaration of what lies at the essential core of your spiritual identity and mine* AND an integral part of the Holy One’s plan for the redemption of mankind. And for that reason these words form the essential foundation of the “good news” Messiah called us to publish.

Please note that the language of the proposal the Holy One wants Moshe to make on His behalf is not by any means *diplomatic language*. The proposal the Holy One wants Moshe to communicate to the Redeemed Community is couched instead in *terms of endearment*, of *intimate affection* and of *deep and abiding commitments of heart, soul, mind and strength*. The proposal the Holy One wants Moshe to present to the people for Him is nothing short of a *two-shall-become-as-one* proposal - a proposal of *intimate, eternal, and infinite intertwining*. *Selah!* [Pause and spend some time meditating in wonder upon that!] What meaneth this?

This is That

May I suggest, Dear Reader, that ‘*this is that*’. A little earlier in these studies this author raised eyebrows when he suggested that at its essence the Exodus narrative is not so much a *war story* as a *love story*. I ruffled feathers when I suggested that what the Holy One was doing in the ‘plagues’ was not so much judging the perverse lifestyle of the Egyptian people as it was introducing Himself to and

showing His deep and abiding affection for - and gradually winning the heart of – *B'nei Yisrael*, the apple of His Eye. Furthermore, this author initiated a paradigm shift for some readers at that time by suggesting that the Holy One was not just interfering in Egyptian affairs in order to free a bunch of oppressed and overworked slaves from hard labor; He was stepping out of eternity into time in order to *claim for Himself a Bride*.

At that point in the narrative it may have been difficult for the reader to see that the endgame of the Holy One in connection with the plague narrative was not simply the deliverance of a bunch of slaves *from* Egypt – something which in and of itself would never have been enough to accomplish any eternal redemptive purposes – but was instead the deliverance of the eternal *soul mate* the Holy One had chosen for Himself from the foundation of the world *to* His Bridal chamber. But we are far *beyond that point now*. At this point in the narrative it should be much easier for even the most casual reader to see that when the Holy One sent a fiery-eyed prophet named Moshe to Pharaoh's palace with the mighty arsenals and weaponry of Heaven at his disposal what was most in the Holy One's mind was not so much changing Pharaoh's twisted mind and breaking his stubborn will as it was *courting* the hearts of a nation He dearly and passionately loved.²

About the time we are getting comfortable with and acclimated to the idea of Divine Courtship, however, the Holy One pushes the envelope even further. In His wisdom, He has decided that the time has come to move the relationship with His Beloved forward from the *Divine Courtship phase* to *Divine Betrothal phase*. While the Holy One is of course in His essence an *incorporeal Spirit*, and thus obviously does not *court*, or *betroth* or *marry* in the *physical, sensual sense the way humans do*, it appears He has graciously chosen, for our sakes, to employ the *intimate language* and *powerful imagery* of the familiar courtship, betrothal and marriage rituals of humanity to describe the kind of ever-deepening covenant relationship and 'becoming one' process which He desires to enjoy with His chosen People.

The Holy One's Proven Track Record as a Faithful and Altogether Worthy Life-Partner

Now that He has proven Himself to be a worthy suitor by delivering us safely to Sinai as He promised, the Holy One is ready to 'push the envelope'. He begins the

² The author's definitions for Divine "courting", in this context, include:[a] a lengthy process of proving one's *capability as a provider and protector* and *trustworthiness as a covenant partner*; [b] a methodical process of demonstrating *at arm's length over an extended period of time*, one's *honor*, one's *personal worth*, one's *firm commitment*, one's *perseverance*, and one's *patience*; and [c] a carefully scripted series of arms-length interactions and conversations conducted through a trusted emissary or emissaries whereby *the courtier convinces the object of his affection that he is 'marriage-material'*.

process with a reminder of the essence of what He has already done for us to establish not only His *good intentions*, but also His *capacity as a Redeemer*, His *reliability as a Husband/provider*, and His *trustworthiness as a guide*. The Holy One chooses to describe what He has been doing for His Beloved as follows: ***v'eisa eitchem al-kanfei nesharim*** - *I bore you on eagles' wings*, ***v'avi etchem elay*** - *and I brought you to myself*.

Ever since Exodus 3 the Holy One has been 'bearing' the object of His covenantal affection ***al-kanfei nesharim*** – *i.e.* on an *eagle's wings*. Do you understand the metaphor the Holy One wants Moshe to use in making His proposal? Because an eagle flies high above all other birds its only vulnerability is to projectiles from below. The *eagle* therefore places its offspring above its wings, interposing its own body between any potential enemy and its offspring. In a similar way the Holy One protected the Redeemed Community while in Egypt with the 'distinctions' He drew relative to the plagues, and then even more noticeably at the Sea of Reeds when He actually moved the pillar of cloud between them and Pharaoh's army in order to intercept any projectiles that may be thrown at them by the Egyptians.

The devastating power of the 10 plagues were evidence of the Holy One's *Strong Right Hand*. The 'distinctions' and 'inter-positionings' performed on behalf of the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov on the other hand were evidence of something else altogether – they were the proof of His *Outstretched Arms*. In my mind I actually envision the Holy One taking on physical form to part the Sea of Reeds for us with the Breath of his Mouth, then standing between the parted waters with *arms outstretched*, hands holding back the two walls of water as we walked through on dry ground. I picture a barrage of Egyptian arrows and javelins being launched from the shore of the Sea in our direction as we made our way through the seabed, and in my mind's eye I see those arrows and javelins striking all around the Holy One's exposed heart. I see the Holy One standing valiantly, arms outstretched holding back the walls of water, gladly receiving in His own flesh the blows our enemy intended for us. I therefore see in the Sea of Reeds narrative a beautiful preview of what Yeshua would later do at both the stake of lashes and the stake of crucifixion. He spread his arms and received in his flesh blows that should have been delivered to us. *Selah!* [Pause and spend some time meditating in wonder upon that!]

The Perfect Lover's Resume

The Holy One begins His proposal of Betrothal by pointing out that His Beloved has thus far "seen" Him perform three sets of glorious wonders to demonstrate His love for her:

[a] Set of Wonders #1: *what He did to the Egyptians*;

[b] Set of Wonders #2: *how He bore the Redeemed Community on 'eagle's*

wings³; and

[c] Set of Wonders #3: *how He brought her (by the leading of the pillar of fire and cloud) to Himself* (there, at the Mountain called Sinai).

Those are *pretty impressive items for a courtship resume*, are they not? The Holy One has *personally intervened* on behalf of His chosen ones in dramatic and powerful ways. He has indeed done wonderful things for His Beloved. There can really be no question any more of either *His motives* or *His suitability as a Husband* – i.e. as the best possible stronger partner in an intimate, life-changing covenant relationship. Shaul of Tarsus would later say: “*I beseech you therefore, brothers, by reason of the demonstrated mercies of the Holy One, that ...*” **Romans 12:1**. But the Holy One is far from finished. After reminding His Beloved of what He had shown her of Himself and had done for her thus far, He proceeds to spell out for her exactly what kind of responses He desires from her at this point in the relationship.

V'atah im-shamoa tishme'u b'koli

Now therefore, if/as/when/to the extent you will indeed sh'ma my voice,

Ush'martem et-briti

and sh'mar my covenant ...

The Hebrew verbs the Holy One instructs Moshe to use are designed to tell a wonderful story: the response which He requires/expects of the Beloved as the keys to deepening the relationship are simply for her to:

[1] *sh'ma* His voice, and to

[2] *sh'mar* His *b'rit* (covenant).

In Hebrew, we will discover, the two responses the Holy One seeks from His Beloved are not external responses of subordinating submission – they are instead *intimately personal* and *deeply internal* responses of *passionate surrender*. The Holy One obviously wants us to know that He is looking for much, much more than a nation of *obedient servants*. He intends for us to know full well from the beginning that what He wants – and deserves – is a *loving Bride*. So, we must ask, what exactly defines a *loving Bride* in the Holy One's eyes? The answer is two little Hebrew verbs. Those of you who have been studying along with the author will note immediately that the verbs the Holy One uses are very familiar – the same verbs the Holy One used when He taught us ‘survival techniques’ at *Marah*, in *Shiur L'Yom Shishi* [Friday's Study] of parsha *B'shelach*. Exodus 15:26. These two Hebrew verbs have thus now on two separate occasions been identified by the Holy One as *the essence of the lifestyle of His Bride*. In them is the substance of

³ It should be noted that in the visions of Daniel, the first beast he saw was like a lion, but it had *eagle's wings*. Daniel said of this beast: “*I beheld till the wings thereof were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made stand upon the feet as a man, and a man's heart was given to it.*” **Daniel 7:2-4**.

what it means to love the Holy One with all one's heart, soul, and strength, to serve Him, and to be His people. In the two Hebrew verbs *sh'ma* and *sh'mar* can be found the defining characteristics of those the Holy One forms into His '*am segulah*' [unique and specially treasured people]. Let us therefore look at these two verbs very closely. If we let them, they will tell us who we are as new creations in Messiah.

Bridal Lifestyle Verb #1: Sh'ma-ing the Bridegroom's Voice

The first verb that is to describe our lifestyle as the Redeemed of the Holy One is *sh'ma*. Let's look at the first key phrase in the Holy One's proposal again:

V'atah im-shamoa tish'me'u b'koli ...

Now therefore, if/when you will indeed sh'ma my voice ...

Shamoa and *tishme'u* are both forms of the verb root *sh'ma*. This word consists of the three Hebrew letters *shin*, *mem*, and *ayin*. The hieroglyphic picture these consonants, in this order, present is *tongues of fire, flowing like water, into a man's soul*. Our English Bibles sometimes translate *sh'ma* as 'listen'. Other times our English Bibles translate *sh'ma* as 'hear'. Still other times our English Bibles translate *sh'ma* as 'obey'. The English language, you see, really does not have a single word that satisfactorily translates the Hebraic action described in the word *sh'ma*. The English words *hear*, *listen*, and *obey* all describe only outward, physical responses to verbal stimuli. The Hebrew word *sh'ma*, on the other hand, addresses the effect of words listened to, heard, and/or obeyed upon the innermost being – the soul and spirit and life force – of the recipient.

The Hebrew word *sh'ma* describes the effect of spoken words on the inner man or woman. In relation to the words of the Holy One, all of which have '*Light, BE!*'-type creative and prophetic power in them, the word *sh'ma* describes the changes wrought by the Holy One's life-changing words from the inside out. To *sh'ma* thus means to *be changed internally by words*. The effect of such an internal change of a human being in response to the word of the Holy One is described beautifully in Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

As stated above, the verb *sh'ma* is sometimes translated into English as "pay attention", sometimes "*listen*", sometimes "*hear*", and sometimes "*obey*". If one keeps in mind that the Hebrew language is based upon the Holy One's perspective (outside of time), and that English (like Greek, Latin, and all other languages) is based upon man's perspective (limited by time) this makes perfect sense. The Holy One is communicating that He is and desires to be *communicative*, and that to that effect He is constantly sending His Word, His Voice, His messages and impulses usward.

From the Holy One's perspective the human actions of *paying attention, listening, hearing, and responding with appropriate attitude, demeanor, and behavior* are all one. His Words are *always flowing*, like springs of living water. His impulses are *ever firing*, like the tongues of fire seen by Moshe in the burning bush and seen by the 120 on the day of Pentecost [*Shavuot*]. The physical responses of paying attention, listening, hearing and obeying are simply *a natural progression in response to His constantly active Voice*. The Holy One views the covenant lifestyle as a *flowing dance*, not a series of separate steps. For us to *sh'ma* then means first of all *to let the progression proceed without interruption – i.e. to let the Holy One lead in the dance of life rather than trying to master a bunch of separate steps and dazzle Him (and other men) with our performance of the steps we most enjoy*.

Secondly, for us to *sh'ma* is for us to *attune our spiritual ears, eyes, and hearts to receive and process, and flow in consonant resonance with, all the stimuli He is sending our way*. For us to *sh'ma* means *to trust what the Holy One says instead of any other voice* [hence the Master's teaching, ***My sheep sh'ma My Voice; the voice of another they will not sh'ma*** – **John 10:27**], *and to only embrace and participate in what He is doing rather than whatever other men may think is right or appropriate* [hence Yeshua's teaching ***the Son can do nothing by Himself; He can only do what He sees His Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the son also does*** - **John 5:19**].

In essence, for us to *sh'ma* means for us *to adopt a Bridal orientation to life - letting the Holy One be the Bridegroom, while we respond to Him as a Bride*. This is the exact opposite of the spiritual orientation most of us embrace – which consists of us taking the lead in 'ministry' [believing, in our hearts, that the Holy One can't do anything without us], and seeing Him as someone who is supposed to respond *to us* – expecting Him to perform miracles 'on demand', to bless our ministries, and manifest Himself every time we sing a praise song, blow a *shofar*, do a little dance, or say a little prayer.

To *sh'ma* the Holy One, then, requires *a radical paradigm shift* for the Western mind. It is to totally restructure the way we look at spirituality – and to actually begin to see the Holy One as God, and us as mere mortals. And here is the 'kicker' - it requires us *to quit seeing ourselves, and our doctrines and ministries, as the center of the spiritual universe ... and to let Him climb out of our theological boxes and be God*.

Bridal Lifestyle Verb #2: Sh'mar-ing the Betrothal Covenant

The second verb used to describe the lifestyle the Holy One requires/expects us to embrace, at this stage of the relationship, is *sh'mar*. Let's look again at the second key phrase of the Holy One's proposal:

V'atah ... ush'martem et-briti ...

Now therefore, if/when you ... sh'mar my covenant ...

The verb in this phrase, *ush'martem*, is a form of the verb root *sh'mar*. This verb consists of the three Hebrew letters *shin*, *mem*, and *resh*. The hieroglyphic picture these consonants, in this order present, is *tongues of fire, flowing like water, into a man's head* – *i.e. into the nerve center that controls his thoughts, emotions, will, and actions*. The only difference is the destination of the flow of the Voice/Words/impulses of the Divine fire. *Sh'ma* is a response of the *soul* to the Holy One's tongues of fire. *Sh'mar* is a response of the *head* (*resh*) – a new way of thinking, of speaking, and of approaching life - to those same tongues of fire.

In English the word *sh'mar* is sometimes translated “observe”, sometimes “keep”, sometimes “guard”, sometimes “watch”, and sometimes “treasure”. Once again, considering that Hebrew is a language written from the Holy One's perspective, outside of time, this makes perfect sense. It literally means to *tend, as a garden*⁴.

Please take note that the work of *sh'ma* – the *soul response* – is to precede the work of *sh'mar* – the *intellectual, philosophical, and physical response*. From the Holy One's perspective, the mind of one whose soul is *sh'ma-ing* His Voice will, in a flowing progression, carefully guard, keep diligent watch over, cling to, cherish, meditate upon, speak about, tend as a garden, and make the center of one's life, His *b'rit* (covenant) - *i.e. His Torah*. In so doing he/she can make *tikkun*⁵ for the sin of Chava in the Garden – which consisted of *lo sh'ma-ing the Holy One's Voice* and *lo sh'mar-ing the Holy One's instructions for life in the garden*.

Here, in slightly different words, are some of the questions that are now on the table:

*My Beloved ... Will You Wear My Ring and Cleave Only Unto Me?
Will You Go Where I Go - and Keep Up With Whatever Pace I Set?*

Will You Lodge Where I Lodge?

*Will You Eat of Whatever Bread I Put On Your Table, Without Complaining?
Will You Drink of Whatever I Pour Into Your Cup, Without Questioning?*

*Will You Surrender Your Will to Mine, Your Ways for Mine,
and Even Your Thoughts From Mine?*

*Will You Delight in What Delights Me,
And Consider Abominable What I Consider Abominable?
Will You Talk About What I Talk About, and Say What I Say?*

⁴ See, for instance, the first usage of this Hebrew verb in Torah, at Genesis 2:15. The Holy One put Adam in Gan Eden to *sh'mar* it.

⁵ *Tikkun* is a Hebrew word meaning *repair* or *restoration*. It is not the same thing as *atonement*.

And Will You Trust Me Enough to Do Whatever I Call Upon You To Do?

These are the questions to which our Divine Bridegroom-King desires a response. Matters of identity, mission and destiny hang delicately in the balance. There can ultimately be only one answer to each of these questions, of course. But each one still calls for our careful consideration, a season of heartfelt prayer, and a whole lot of searching of the soul.

The Divine Destiny of Those Who Sh'ma and Sh'mar

Understanding the expected/required response of the Holy One's people, then, let us look into the rest of what the Holy One has to say. In the remaining words with the Holy One instructs Moshe to propose to us, we find the ultimate purpose for which we are Redeemed and Recreated:

*... you will be My **am segulah** from among all peoples; for all the eretz is mine; and you will be to me a **mamlaket Kohanim** and a **goy kadosh***

This then is the Holy One's proposal. It is breathtaking in its beauty. It is awesome in its simplicity, yet overwhelming in its brilliance. It is not beyond the grasp of even the most simple, yet it cannot be thoroughly grasped and mastered by the most gifted. It is very near to us – in our mouth and in our heart, that we may **sh'ma** it. **Deuteronomy 30:14**. It is what our 'chosen-ness' means. There are three essential elements.

Understanding and Embracing the 3 Essential Elements of our Chosen-ness

The Holy One indicates that those of us who **sh'ma** His voice and **sh'mar** His *b'rit* [covenant] are called to experience and live out a special 'chosen people' status. This chosenness consists of three essential elements.

1. ... you will be *li segulah mikol ha-amim* [i.e. My special treasure from among all peoples; *ki-li kol ha-arets* [for all the earth is/is to become Mine]

The first thing the Holy One indicates we will be to Him is an *am segulah*. This sounds wonderful, of course ... but what exactly does it *mean*? *Am*⁶ means *people*, or *nation*. *Segulah*⁷ is the feminine form of a Hebrew noun that Strong's defines as meaning 'to shut up' [i.e. to enclose, or lock up, as one lock's up a treasure in a secure place].

The Hebrew pictograph of the word *segulah* is very interesting. The Hebrew letter *samech* [which makes a sound much like the English 's' sound] is the pictograph of a *circuit* – a pre-determined course, path or track upon which consists of regularly recurring descents and ascents. The letter *gimel* [which makes a sound much like the

⁶ *Am* is *ayin, mem*. Strong's Hebrew word #5971, it is pronounced *awm*.

⁷ *Segulah* is *samech, gimel, lamed, hey*. Strong's Hebrew word #5459, it is pronounced *seg-ool-law'*.

English hard ‘g’ sound hard] is the pictograph of a man in motion – *i.e.* walking or running. The Hebrew letter *lamed* [which makes a sound much like the English ‘l’ sound] is the pictograph of a cattle prod – a device to used to cause an animal to move in a desired direction. It is associated with *teaching*. The Hebrew letter *hey* [which makes a sound much like the English ‘h’ sound] is the pictograph of the window of a tent, the portal through which a tent-dweller receives fresh air [associated with *inspiration*] and perspective on the world around him [associated with *revelation*]. The Hebraic ‘mural’ formed by combining these pictographs in this order thus consists of *a man [or group of men] traversing a predetermined course of ascents and descents in such a way as to bring others to – teach others about - a source of inspiration and revelation.*

This pictographic mural is a perfect picture of Israel and its relationship with the Holy One’s Torah, on the one hand, and with the nations of the world, on the other hand. By sometimes succeeding, and sometimes failing, to walk out the *mitzvot* of Torah [the predetermined course of ascents and descents], year after year, generation after generation, but *never ceasing to make the effort*, however unsuccessful they may have been theretofore, the people of Israel act as *guides* for the nations and peoples of the earth, directing their attention, and pointing them in the direction of, the source of all inspiration and revelation [*i.e.* the Holy One].

I should mention, of course, that being chosen as the Holy One’s *am segulah* means we live in a fishbowl, as it were. It means our every move is constantly watched, observed, and scrutinized by the world. The good part is that it means we are specially esteemed, valued, treasured, and shown off, by the Holy One. The not-so-good part means that, while we will be admired and appreciated by the Holy One and by those among the nations who truly know and love the Holy One, we will often be envied, frequently criticized, occasionally despised, and ever so often targeted for annihilation by those among the nations who do not truly know and love the Holy One. In the long run the *good part* far, far outweighs the *bad part*. But we should not begin the journey without counting the cost.

2. ... and you will be to Me a mamlaket Kohanim

The second aspect of our status as the ‘chosen people’ of the Holy One is that we are a *mamlaket kohanim*, usually translated as *a kingdom of priests*. The phrase *mamlaket kohanim* literally means a *priestly kingdom*.

The Holy One’s plan is that as we *sh’ma* His voice and *sh’mar* His covenant we will co-labor with Him in establishing a *kingdom on earth like unto His kingdom in Heaven* - and thereby function as *a witness on behalf of the Holy One to the rest of the nations and peoples of the earth*. We will, of course, have revealed to us what a

mamlaket kohanim looks like in real time bit by bit during our long sojourn at Sinai.

3. ... and you will be to Me ... a *goy kadosh*

The third element of our chosen-ness is that we are to be unto the Holy One a *goy kadosh*, usually translated as *a holy nation*. The phrase *goy kadosh* literally means *a nation set apart by being infused from On High with the pulsing energy of Heaven's Throne Room*. The same majesty that inspires, empowers, and motivates the Four Living Creatures, the Serafim, the Cherubim, the Twenty-Four Elders, and the Angelic Hosts to do everything they do in the Heavenly Throne Room is to inspire, empower, and motivate us to do everything we do on the earth. We are thus to be dramatically different from the ethnicities, cultures, nations, religions, institutions, and movements of earth, all of which draw their inspiration, empowerment, and motivation from a toxic mixture of *fleshly human emotions* – *i.e.* fear, envy, jealousy, covetousness, lust, greed, anger, outrage, pride, disdain, etc. - and *vain imagination fueled pseudo-intellectual abstraction-matrices* – *i.e.* false/self-serving ideas of morality/immorality, justice/injustice, truth/falsity, right/wrong, righteousness/wickedness, and virtue/vice. Just as all nations, cultures, societies, and ethnicities of the earth have since their inception been and continue more and more to be horribly corrupted by binging on the poison fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we are to be cleansed and compelled to love, to serve, and to model *emunah* [faith], *tikvah* [hope], wisdom, *shalom*, and *tikkun* [redemption, restoration] as we are constantly being cleansed by, infused with, and empowered to exude the pulsing, overcoming *kedusha* energy of the River and Tree of Life – as it manifests in the Heavenly Courts of our King.

A *goy kadosh* does not – cannot – either pattern itself after or assimilate into any other nation – culturally, philosophically, or otherwise. To *sh'ma* the Holy One's voice and *sh'mar* His covenant, you see, means that we have qualities of *uniqueness* and *otherness*. A *goy kadosh* just does not ever look quite right in the latest fashion. A *goy kadosh* still looks like a tourist no matter how much it tries to 'do as the Romans do' when in Rome. A *goy kadosh* sticks out like a sore thumb wherever it goes, whatever it does. But please note that under the Holy One's proposal what is to make us an *am segulah*, a *mamlaket kohanim*, and a *goy kadosh* unto the Holy One is not genetics – *i.e.* physical descent from Avraham, Yitschak and Ya'akov. Neither is it circumcision [at least, in and of itself]. Neither is it any self-imposed rule of separation. What is to make us a *goy kadosh*, under the Holy One's proposal is, plain and simple, the *sh'ma*-ing of the voice and the *sh'mar*-ing of *the covenant of the Holy One*. We will see what this looks like and consists of in real time – and what the hindrances to it are - in the course of the Books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The Ultimate Proposal Is Back on the Table

What will be the response of the chosen Bride-to-be to this proposal? Remember that this is not the first time the Holy One had made an offer of betrothal to these people. In parsha *Va'era*, prior to sending any plagues upon Pharaoh and Egypt, the Holy One had told Moshe to propose to His Beloved in the following terms:

I am the Holy One, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and you shall know that I am the Holy One your God, when I bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov; and I will give it you for a heritage: I am the Holy One.

[Exodus 6:6-8]

The response of the people at the time of the first proposal - right after Pharaoh had ordered them to find their own straw yet continue to make as many bricks as they had when he provided the straw for them, was less than enthusiastic, to say the least. Torah describes it as follows: ... ***they hearkened not unto Moshe for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.*** Exodus 6:10. At Sinai however there were no “we’re too busy and too stressed” excuses. The Holy One had *taken care of all that* - as well as every other need of the Community of the Redeemed and all its individual members. As He pointed out in the opening lines of His proposal, not only had He completely dismantled the Egyptian empire for them and thrown all its fearsome horses and chariots (and their riders) into the Sea, He had then *spread His Wings like a mother eagle*, picked up over a million slaves like they were a few fledgling chicks, placed them on His strong shoulders, and *brought them to His chosen “nest”*. By a stunning series of deeds consistent with His promises He had now earned their audience - indeed their *undivided attention* - and their careful reconsideration of His proposal of marriage. This time, therefore, when Moshe relates the Holy One’s proposal concerning us, to say the Community of the Redeemed is “attentive” is an understatement. Torah tells us: *All the people responded as one and said, **Kol asher-diber Adonai na'aseh v'yashev** – i.e. 'All that the Holy One has spoken, we will do.'* Exodus 18:8(a).

As Moshe was presenting the proposal to the council of elders for deliberation the discussion was interrupted by a tumultuous cry - a shout more like a roar - which arose from outside the meeting, from approximately 2 million individual throats simultaneously, as every person in the Redeemed Community in one voice, as one man, without hesitation responded - “*Yes! Oh, yes, yes, yes! We will do [Hebrew,*

asah]⁸ everything the Holy One our God, our Redeemer, our Beloved, says!”

How about you, Dear Reader? Will you abandon all you know of life for *the Voice* and for *the B'rit*? Think it over. Wherever you are in your walk with the Holy One and in His redemptive plan for your life, the call is the same. Beyond Egypt lays the *Yam Suf*. Beyond the *Yam Suf* lay *Marah, Elim, Refidim, and Sinai*. Beyond *Sinai* lays *Yisra'el*. Beyond *Yisra'el* lays *Har Tzion [Mount Zion]*. Beyond *Har Tzion* lays *Har Moriyah [Mount Moriah]*. Beyond *Har Moriyah* lays His Throne. And on that Throne sits the Beautiful, Wise, Bridegroom-King in all His Glory. Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Holy One! *Sh'ma Yisra'el!*

Questions For Today's Study

1. In today's aliyah the redeemed remnant that followed Moshe out of Egypt is encamped at Mt. Sinai, and is being made ready for betrothal to the Holy One.

[A] How much time had elapsed from the plague of the firstborn to the events of today's aliyah?

[B] In what month of the Hebrew calendar did the events of today's aliyah transpire?

[C] What *mo'ed* [appointed time, festival] of the Holy One takes place in that month of the Hebrew calendar?

2. The Holy One met with Moshe on the mountain a second time. This time He told Moshe to go back to the redeemed nation and speak certain things on His behalf.

[A] What connection do you see between the visit of Yitro and the events that transpired at *Sinai*?

[B] To what two classifications of people did the Holy One instruct Moshe to speak? What is the difference between the two, if any?

[C] List each of the things the Holy One told Moshe to say to these two classifications of people.

3. The verses of Exodus 19:4-8 have been described as what we might today call a *marriage proposal*. Following this analogy:

[A] Who is the groom? The bride? The “friend of the bridegroom”?

[B] What are the groom's vows?

[C] What are the bride's vows to be?

4. In today's haftarah reading *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah] is still in the midst of prophetic vision. In yesterday's reading the *serafim* brought a live coal from the altar of the

⁸ We will in later aliyot discuss in much detail the meaning and significance of the Hebrew verb *asah*, often [as here] translated into English as ‘do’, which the people, in their initial response, substituted for the verbs used by the Holy One [*sh'ma* and *sh'mar*].

Holy One, and touched it to Yeshayahu's lips. As this happened, Yeshayahu heard a Voice saying that his "sins" had been "forgiven", and his "iniquity" "taken away". Immediately after this experience Yeshayahu receives a prophetic call that will define his task for the rest of his life - to go back and seek reconciliation between the "bride" described in Exodus 19 and the Holy One. Yeshayahu is to become a friend of the Bridegroom, who will point out firmly but lovingly the ways in which the bride is erring from the *shitre eyrusin*.

I heard the Holy One's voice, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?"

Then I said, "Hineni" [Here I am]; sh'lachi [Send me]!"

He said, "Go, and tell this people, 'You hear indeed, But you don't biyn [understand];

And you see indeed, but you don't yada [know intimately through perception].'

The heart of this people make fat; their ears make heavy, and their eyes shut;

lest they ra'ah with their eyes, sh'ma with their ears,

And biyn [understand] with their heart,

and shuv [turn again], and rapha [be healed]."

[Isaiah 6:8-10]

[A] To whom was the Holy One speaking in the first part of verse 8?

[B] Yeshayahu interrupts the conversation. What does He say?

[C] What was Yeshayahu instructed to tell Israel?

[D] The Holy One speaks to Yeshayahu about three "spiritual portals" with which all human beings were created – the eyes, ears, and the "heart". Which of these controls the others? Explain.

[E] Read Matthew 13:10-17. Why did Yeshua choose to speak to Israel in parables?

[F] Read Romans 11:1-32. What is the reason Shaul of Tarsus [also called 'Paul'] gives for the [temporary] unwillingness of Israel as a nation to receive the words of the Holy One concerning reconciliation through Yeshua?

5. In today's reading from the Apostolic Scriptures *Kefa* [Peter] quotes from the scroll of Yeshayahu:

Behold, I lay in Tziyon a chief cornerstone, elect, precious:

He who believes in him will not be disappointed.

[1Peter 2:6]

[A] What passage from the scroll/book of *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah] does he quote? [Answer by stating the chapter and verse].

[B] Read the passage in Yeshayahu that Kefa quotes in its context. What is the topic or subject matter being discussed in that chapter?

[C] What do you think Yeshayahu understood the "precious cornerstone" and "sure foundation" to be? [Hint: Before answering, review Yeshayahu 8:11-18].

*May He strengthen you with raisins –
and refresh you with apples.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 34:4-7

*I sought the Holy One, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.*

Those who look to him are radiant; their faces will never be covered with shame.

*This poor man cried, and the Holy One heard him,
and saved him out of all his troubles.*

*The angel of the Holy One encamps round about those who fear him,
and He delivers them.*