

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Ki Tisa:** Exodus 33:1 - 34:3
 Haftarah: I Kings 18:25-29
 B'rit Chadasha: I Corinthians 8:10-11

I will show mercy and kindness

[Exodus 33:19(b)]

Today's *Ki Tisa* Meditation is Psalm 119:161-168;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Avot*, the Prayer of the Fathers

Lech aleh mizeh – Go, go up from here ... *atah v'ha-am asher he'elita me'ereetz Mitzrayim* - you and the people who came with you out of Egypt ... *el-ha-aretz asher nishbai l'Avraham l'Yitzchak ul'Ya'akov l'emor l'zar'acha etneinah* - to the land concerning which I spoke an oath to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov and to their seed, to entrust to them. Exodus 33:1b.

Have you ever had a day so bad that you are embarrassed to even talk about it? Have you ever had a day when you got so far up in your fleshly appetites, lusts, emotions, and/or pseudo-intellectual vain imaginations that you said or did something stupid, vile, hurtful – something so out of character for you that it threatened to destroy an important relationship? Well, it happens to everyone. And it just happened to the entire nation of B'nei Yisrael. We lost focus. We started overthinking and over-emoting everything. We got swept up in a frenzy of folly. Boredom and restlessness kissed. A crowd gathered. Group dynamic kicked in. And soon everything the Holy One had done for us and taught us about our mission flew right out the window. Somebody called for a party – and the allure of a dalliance with idolatry seasoned with a heaping side dish of debauchery proved just too much for us to resist. Nobody wanted to miss out on a minute of the action. Fatted calves were killed. Faces were stuffed. Wine flowed like water. Orators spoke whatever was on their minds – and we bought into it hook, line, and sinker. A series of showy, emotionally evocative sacraments were performed for the sake of pretentious piety. Before we knew it drummers were pounding drums – and people started moving provocatively – even profanely - with the beat. In short, all the elements of classic paganism were on full display. And one after another, tribe by tribe, clan by clan, household by household, and person by person we followed the madding crowd, ate, drank, swayed to the music, joined in the dance, participated in the sacraments, shouted our agreement with whatever the orators said, and sold our calling for a few bites of red, red Esavian stew. Thinking

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ourselves wise, we drank the cup of uncleanness to the dregs! We followed the crowd. We listened with itching ears to the serpentine spiel. We sallied forth from our tents to go looking for a high or thrill. We forgot who – much less whose – we are. We blew off our covenant with our Creator like it was ‘yesterday’s news’. Partying like there is no tomorrow? Everybody who is anybody is doing it, right? A god of man’s design that we can make serve our interests and feed our lusts instead of us serving its interests and tending its garden? Where do we sign up?

You Are Not to Follow a Crowd to Do Evil

What were we thinking? Who bewitched us? Where did this mass-hysteria come from? Oh well, there is nothing to be gained by pointing fingers. When it comes right down to it we all blew it. We all chose to ignore the very, very clear directions of our Redeemer and walk away from the Presence, the Will, and the Way of One our God. We have no one to blame but ourselves. **Exodus 20:18-19**. So where do we – can we – go from here? What will happen to us – and to our children and children’s children - now? What will become of our ‘*Great Name*’, ‘*Great Nation*’, and ‘*Blessing to Every Family on Earth*’ callings?

This past spring, while in the throes of Divine Romance, we all vowed passionately to *asah* and *sh’ma* all the Holy One’s instructions [**Exodus 19:8 and 24:7**]. But then summer came. Moshe disappeared for 40 long days. Our sense of mission started to flag. We quit pressing into the ways He taught us. We reverted to the old, familiar ways of the flesh and pseudo-intellect that we had learned from the raging nations. We lost our sense of purpose. With that our enthusiasm for life. We lost our sense of awe and wonder. We lost our shalom. We left our first love. We abandoned our post. We walked off our watch. We deserted our King. We aborted our destiny. We traded the part He called us to play in His Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as Species, Bloodline by Bloodline, and for the Restoration of Creation to its intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and shalom for a dirty dalliance with a deaf, dumb, calf-shaped demon. Moshe did not fare much better. He did not dance in the dark with the calf-god, of course – but he was anything but calm under pressure. He defaulted to his pre-call pattern of vigilante behavior. He ranted and raged. He broke the precious love-gift the Holy One had commissioned him to deliver to us in a thousand pieces. He then ordered the Levi’im to take up swords and massacre of every man in the camp – and actually declared that to be the will of God. **Exodus 32:27**.

But was it? Was the holocaust Moshe unleashed in the throes of anger *really* the product of a Divine Decree? Did the order for slaughter really come from the Throne of Heaven – or did it emanate from the same dark, self-righteous side of Moshe that forty years ago spawned the cold-blooded murder of the taskmaster in

Egypt? Let's replay the narrative. Before Moshe ever left the top of the mountain, didn't Torah make it clear that the Holy One had already 'relented' [Hebrew *nacham*, been comforted, put at ease]. See **Exodus 32:14**: "*Thus the Holy One relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.*". Torah also tells us clearly what instigated the slaughter. **Exodus 32:38**: *the sons of Levi did according to the word of ... not the Holy One, but ... Moshe.* There was no Divine Decree of mass murder. In a fit of human rage Moshe once again took on himself the role of judge, jury, and executioner. It was he – not the Holy One - who ordered the men of his tribe to grab short-knives and go *back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp*. It was he who devised a genocidal plan and shouted: *v'hir'gu ish-et-achiv - every man kill his brother, v'ish et-re'ehu - and [every man kill] his companion, v'ish et-krovo - and [every man kill] his neighbor!*

It went downhill fast. The Levi'im drew their knives and ran back and forth, looking for hapless victims to behead and/or disembowel. Who did they target first? What criteria did Moshe have them use to determine who they were to maim and kill? That is perhaps the most stunning part of all. Moshe did not tell the vigilantes to seek out those responsible for the golden calf. Fault in connection with the calf-debacle had nothing to do with it. If fault had been the issue, surely the killing would have started with Aharon - the most culpable one of all. But not a hair on Aharon's head or a cell of his body was touched. Instead, at Moshe's command, each Levite turned his sword upon the three groups of people most closely connected to him - his *brothers*, his *companions*, and his *neighbors*. It was just slaughter for the sake of slaughter, bloodshed for the sake of bloodshed. The three thousand that the bloodthirsty crusaders massacred were no more guilty than the hundreds of thousands who escaped harmed. I can almost imagine a haunting voice from the past calling out in the middle of the slaughter: *Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?* **Exodus 2:14.**

Fortunately, for reasons we are not told, the Levi'im only partially obeyed Moshe's orders. They stopped far, far short of literal fulfillment of his command. 3,000 men died at their hand – but not the full 600,000 contingent the enraged prophet ordered them to put to the sword. But still – those thousand human beings the Levi'im did hack to pieces in front of our eyes at Moshe's command were by no means nameless, faceless strangers – they were husbands, fathers, brothers, cousins, co-workers, neighbors, and cohorts. On the night the death angel passed through Egypt they, like us, had painted blood on their doorposts and partaken of the covenant meal of roasted lamb and bitter herbs. They, like us, had celebrated that wonderful first meal of freedom at Sukkot. They had walked by our side through the dry bed of the Sea of Reeds. Their voices had blended with ours in singing the Song of the Sea. They had led their children and families in following the Pillar of

fire and cloud through the desert. They had gathered manna beside us morning after morning. They had taken up arms and fought off the Amaleki hordes alongside us. They had been part of the procession that ascended Mount Sinai on that climactic day in the third month after our Exodus. They had trembled at the sound of the great shofar at the same time, in the same way, we did. Now, in an instant, their bodies are bloody and lifeless, their voices are silent, their wives are widows, and their children are fatherless. They are gone; so why are we still here?

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”, the wisest of all rabbis will one day declare. At this moment, however, our mourning population feels far from *blessed* and anything but *comforted*. Those things will come one day; but today is not that day. Today we can feel nothing but grief. Today we can only bow our heads in shame. Today it is all we can do to wring our hands and ask questions like ‘*how did this happen*’, ‘*why did the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov allow this*’, and ‘*how can we go on?*’ The sense of delicious amazement we felt during our *magical mystery tour* of our Bridegroom-King’s Throne-Room and Courts has given way to a state of *post-traumatic shock*. Oh, for a *seraf* to come to us! Oh, that any one of the beautiful creatures from the Beauty Realm would *pluck a coal from the fire on the eternal altar*, fly to earth ... and *cleanse the unclean lips in our Camp!*

Once Innocence is Lost, Can it – Can We - Be Restored?

We miss our fallen friends and family members terribly, of course, but what we are mourning most of all is *innocence lost*. We now understand how deeply the innate propensity toward folly is ingrained in our fallen human flesh. We now know how easily even the Redeemed of the Holy One, we whom He has call His *am segulah*, and betrothed to Himself, can succumb to boredom, distraction, pride, and what I call “A.B.A.W.” – *i.e.* *Anything Bt Adonai’s Way*. And we are seeing that fallen man’s ‘*meeting fixation*’ – *i.e.* the ‘*gathering/joining together*’ impulse about which the Holy One warned us recently in Exodus 23:1 [***You are not to follow a crowd to do evil***] - can not only be ugly but downright deadly. As we begin the fourth aliyah of *Ki Tisa*, therefore, a reign of terror – instituted by an outraged Moshe gone postal - has just come to a merciful halt. The swords of vigilantes convinced that ‘*the Holy One is on our side*’ no longer slice and rip at human flesh. But after what just happened, how can we trust Moshe anymore? How can we trust the Levi’im who conducted this slaughter? How can we even trust the Holy One, when Moshe insists it was He Who ordered this indiscriminate bloodletting?

Somehow – Even Yet - Mercy Triumphs Over Judgment!

For reasons the text of Torah does not describe, the senseless massacre stopped long before Moshe’s order could be carried out to its logical conclusion – which would have been the complete annihilation of all but the ‘*last man standing*’.

Someone or something – we are not told who or what – brought the slaughter Moshe had ordered to a mercifully premature halt after only 3,000 of the 600,000 plus men in the camp [about ½ of 1%] lay dead on the desert floor. So as we take a look around us on the morning after, we realize that what the Pharaoh's army died trying to do to us at the Red Sea we almost did to ourselves in a fleshly fit of human rage. What the Amalekites could not do to us despite their worst intentions and best efforts, Moshe actually ordered us to do to ourselves.

Innocence: *Lost!* Our post-redemption flesh has proven to still be every bit as nasty, uncontrollable, and dangerous as it had been pre-redemption. We are never going to be able to *fix our flesh* by adding in a little bit of religion – or even a heaping dose of religion; we are going to have to let our flesh die daily by submitting it to the guidance of the Holy One's Torah. And then we are going to have to meet our Bridegroom-King in the *mitzvot*, so He can cover us with His tallit as one covers a corpse with a burial shroud. Only in connection with the death of our flesh can we be raised up to new life through the *Ruach-HaKodesh*.

Where Do We Go From Here?

We are going to have to come to grips with a totally *new reality*. We cannot blame the Egyptians, the Amaleki, or the Kena'ani for this debacle – it was of our own making! This is ON US! The blood of 3,000 of our countrymen whose throats had once cried *na aseh v nish'ma* in unity with ours ... is ON US! And what is worse, in the midst of all of the trauma we are experiencing, in light of what we have done, we are *not at all sure where we stand with the Holy One our God*. Have we through our disgusting dalliance with Aharon's calf-god worship system *forfeited the grace that the Creator of Heaven and Earth had promised forever to our forefather Avraham?* Have we *sinned too grievously to be forgiven?* Have we *strayed too far to be retrieved?* Are we now *a marred vessel, unfit for the Divine Mission to which we were so wonderfully called?* Have we *done too much evil to ever again know the wondrous Voice – much less the tender embrace – of the One to Whom we pledged our troth?* Are we now to be *'put away privately'* by our *Divine Bridegroom, forever to wear the scarlet letter of a harlot?* Are we now *LO-AMMI [i.e. not My people]* in the eyes of our Bridegroom-King? The last word we heard concerning our future was not exactly re-assuring. The Holy One said:

V'shalachti l'faneicha mal'ach

I will send an angel ahead of you,

V'gerashti et ha-Kna'ani ha-Emori v'ha-Chiti v'ha-Prizi ha-Chivi v'ha-Y'vusi

and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizites, Hivites, and Y'vusites.

El-eretz zavat chalav ud'vash

[You will thus go to] a land flowing with milk and honey.

ki lo e'eleh b'kirbeicha ki am-k'sheh-oref

However, I will not go with you, since you are an unbending people,

atah pen-acheilcha b'darech

and I may kalah² you along the way.'

Atei am-k'sheh-oref

'You are an unbending people.

rega echad e'eleh v'kirbecha v'chiliticha

I walk before you in integrity calling you up; and I will draw you close, and I will kalah you.

v'atah hored edyecha me'alecha v'ed'ah mah e'eseh lach

Now take off your jewelry and I will testify what I will build/make out of you.

[Exodus 33:2-5]

This is our moment of truth. With freedom comes responsibility. With redemption from bondage comes accountability to – and dependence upon the continued mercy and covenant faithfulness of - the One Who paid the price for our redemption.

***This Is The Appointed Time For A Great Revelation
Concerning the Covenant-Discipline of Teshuvah
and Exploring the Unfailing Mercy of Our Partner in Covenant***

It is time for us to *get real*. What we participated in when the shofar of Heaven blew and the Voice of the Bridegroom thundered was not a 21st Century-style engagement with an opt-out-at-will clause – it was a *betrothal covenant*. We were accepted ‘*as is, with all faults*’. Covenant protocols of discipline, reparation, restoration and reconciliation were placed in force. Leaving a “*Sorry, but I just don't love you anymore*” post-it note on the bathroom mirror was simply not an option - for us or for the Holy One. It is time to take a little responsibility. It is time to employ the covenant's restoration protocols.

What covenant protocols am I talking about? I am talking about the pattern of covenant-renewal modeled for us by our patriarch Ya'akov and his family at *Beit-El* back in Genesis 35. I am talking about the covenant protocols of *teshuvah* [*i.e. the turning of the face, the heart, the soul, and the strength back to the Covenant Partner and the Covenant enterprises*], *discipline*, and *restoration*. The time has come – the time to *stop making excuses, stop blaming anyone else, stop acting like a shrew*, and kick the process off by following Ya'akov's lead and *making teshuvah*.

Introducing the Teshuvah Protocols We Are To Model To the World

Teshuvah protocols are an absolutely *essential* part of every covenant. *Teshuvah* is

² As explained in Wednesday's Study from *Ki Tisa* the Hebrew verb *kalah* does not mean ‘destroy’ or ‘consume’ as the traditional English Bibles translate it. It means to *bring a state of viability, functionality, and completion; to take to the next phase of responsibility; to finish out a season or protocol of preparations and make ready for activation*. In noun form, *kalah* means ‘bride’.

a Hebrew concept that is often translated into English as “repentance”. That is unfortunate. *Teshuvah* involves a much, much more significant series of attitudes, words, and actions than the English word repentance – at least as it is used in Christian circles today – can possibly convey. *Teshuvah* is the required response of any party to a covenant who has breached a term of that covenant but who still desires for the covenant to continue in effect.

Teshuvah is a noun derived from the Hebrew verb *shuv*³, meaning ‘to turn’. To convert the verb *shuv* to the noun *teshuvah*, one adds the Hebrew prefix *tav* [‘t’ sound] and the Hebrew suffix *hey* [‘h’ sound]. What is the significance of these added letters? The first letter, *tav*, is a Hebrew pictograph of a *covenant seal* – signifying that *teshuvah* is a *covenant deed* – a way of turning back to the covenant. The second letter, *hey*, is a Hebrew pictograph of the window, or open flap, of a tent, through which one both sees outside the tent, receives light in one’s tent, and receives fresh air. The Hebrew suffix *hey* is the sign of the feminine gender – marking *teshuvah* as *the expected covenantal action of the weaker partner in the covenant relationship, returning to the revelation, illumination, and inspiration offered to her by the stronger covenant partner* [in this case, the Holy One].

Teshuvah thus involves a total turning of the heart, mind, soul, spirit, and body back to the Holy One, in accordance with the words of Torah. From a Hebraic standpoint there can be no *teshuvah* without a return to commitment to *sh’ma*, *sh’mar*, and *asah* Torah – i.e. to make Torah and all that it entails the center of gravity of one’s life once again – and to thereby restore intimacy with the Holy One.

Teshuvah vs. Repentance

Teshuvah is not merely *feeling sorry* for one’s misdeeds. Nor is it simply *confessing* them, *apologizing for them*, or *asking forgiveness* for them. That combination of emotional outbursts, attitude modification, and speeches is mere *repentance* - as practiced in modern, humanistic, self-obsessed cultures in which true covenants, with their focus on cross-generational goals that require dying to self, are extremely rare.

The modern western-world concept of repentance – consisting of responding to getting caught in bad behavior, feeling embarrassed and/or guilty about it, confessing the obvious, apologizing, and asking forgiveness, is nothing more than a form of interpersonal witchcraft. It is just *a manipulative technique engaged in by self-absorbed people*. A little of such shallow, self-indulgent repentance - along with a *good cry* and a few *pats on the back* from friends, family, and/or a minister

³ *Shin, vav, veit*, Strong’s Hebrew word #7725.

– tends to make the person engaging in it *feel better*. But almost never does that kind of repentance really change anything. It is just a *temporary coping mechanism*. Embarrassment is transitory. Guilt is relative. Confession is rationalized. Apologies are subject to self-serving provisos and conditions. And all that really results from such superficial things is that a *Band-Aid* is put on a gangrenous lesion.

Repentance protocols, you see, are not about the Holy One. They have nothing to do with the Creator’s Grand Redemptive Plan for mankind. They are aimed *solely at making the person who is performing those protocols feel better by relieving his or her feelings of guilt*. Repentance is not therefore ever a sufficient response for a party who is desirous of resurrecting a *covenant* that he himself has materially breached. What is required for that is *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* goes much *deeper than* repentance. *Teshuvah* is an unconditional surrender to the Holy One and His Ways. *Teshuvah* requires [a] turning away from every course of thought, priority, emotion and action that led to the breach of covenant, [b] re-submitting every aspect of one’s life – even one’s very breath – to the Holy One, and [c] re-affirming a commitment to walk out His Torah as the Bride-to-be He deserves. *Teshuvah* requires walking back *with the Holy One* to the very place where temptation caused the person to leave the path of Torah, then tearing down the ‘exit ramp’ one used to deviate from the path – *i.e. burning the bridge behind you* – so the person can never go there again. *Teshuvah* is only complete when the very temptation which led to the sin is faced once again, head on, and overcome - not in one’s own power, but by walking in unity with the Holy One, leaning on Him as the stronger partner in the covenant relationship. *Teshuvah* is about *complete relationship restoration*, not *forgiveness or even sin absolution*. An essential final step of *Teshuvah* therefore is actually *facing the exact same temptation to which you yielded before* and this time making a *different decision* – the covenant-consistent decision. *Teshuvah* is therefore not something accomplished in five minutes – or five hours – at an altar or in a prayer closet. *Teshuvah* is a *process* which can take days, even weeks, to walk through. And at each stage of the *Teshuvah* process one must realize that *His life is in God’s hands* and is no longer His own. *Teshuvah* is not a matter of asserting some ‘right’ under the covenant – it is, instead, a matter of acknowledging the covenant has been *completely shattered* by his or her own actions, that it therefore provides him or her *no rights whatever* – and then totally throwing oneself on the mercy of his or her former covenant partner, and doing whatever the former partner requires to rebuild the trust that was lost.

It All Starts With Stripping Oneself of ‘Ornaments’

Torah tells us that the traumatized people, who knew their fate hung in the balance, stripped off their “ornaments”. The Hebrew word that our English Bibles translate

as “ornament” is *adiy*⁴. It is from the verb root *adah*⁵, which means to “pass over”, or “pass by”. The picture is very important for an understanding of the covenant concept of *Teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is about not about getting forgiveness and getting accepted again as if nothing had happened – it is about transcending. *Teshuvah* is not about escaping the consequences of one’s breaches of covenant; it is about receiving and dealing with them – and moving on. Unlike repentance, you see, *teshuvah*, is not about the past; nor even about the present. It is about *the future*.

Embracing the Hunger For Transcendence

As you will recall, the night before we left Egypt – the night of the plague of the firstborn –we took the blood of the Pesach lamb and sprinkled it on the doorposts and lentils of our dwellings. This blood became our “ornament”. And when the Holy One saw it He “passed over” – *i.e.* caused the Angel of Death to “pass by” our dwellings - such that His awesome judgment did not fall upon them. This was the protocol of *transcendence*. Transcendence means there *can be no going back*. Transcendence means *the bridges are burned*. Transcendence means *we are not focusing on the past anymore – we are forging a new and better future*.

What does this have to do with today’s aliyah? By stripping ourselves of the golden rings and jewelry Aharon had so recently used to make unto us a golden calf the remnant of the Redeemed Community *returned precisely the place where we had sinned* – in stripping off our gold in order to make a “god”. We returned to the very night when we received the gold – the night on which the Egyptians showered us with gold, silver, and garments (ornaments). We returned to the time when, and to the mindset, and to the spiritual place where, we had no ornament whatever but the blood of the *Pesach* lamb. We returned to the time when we trembled inside our dwellings waiting to see if the Holy One would indeed “pass over” us - or if we would be judged. We returned to the point where all we had to rely upon was our Covenant Partner’s Word – His promise. We returned to the point where we were able to say in the future tense, with no distractions or reservations, “we will *asah*, and we will *sh’ma*” the Holy One’s instructions. And that was *the critical first step* we took, in the aftermath of the calf sin, in forging a new and improved relationship with the Bridegroom.

A Fresh Start – And a New Phase For The Covenant Relationship

Things in the camp could not, however, be allowed to revert to the way they were before the debacle. We could not pretend that we had not sinned grievously against our Bridegroom. We could not act like nothing had happened. A fresh start was required – and a new phase for the Covenant Relationship had to be inaugurated.

⁴ *Adiy* is *ayin, dalet, yod*. Strong’s Hebrew word #5716, it is pronounced *awd-ee’*.

⁵ *Adah* is *ayin, dalet, hey*. Strong’s Hebrew word #5710, it is pronounced *awd-aw’*.

This new phase of relationship will culminate – several chapters of Torah from now - with the Holy One moving His Manifest Presence from the top of the Mountain into the center of our Camp. But it starts with a movement in the opposite direction. It starts with Moshe moving his tent from the center of the Camp to the outskirts of its fringes. Torah describes this first installment on re-arranging the camp in the aftermath of the golden calf incident as follows:

*Moshe took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp and he called it the **Ohel Moed** [i.e. ‘tent of appointment/meeting’].*

[Exodus 33:7 (a)]

And there in that simple tent, outside the camp but *clearly visible to every man, woman, child, and foreigner among us*, something absolutely wonderful and amazing began to happen. Here is how Torah describes it:

When Moshe went into the tent the pillar of cloud would descend and he would stand at the tent's entrance, and [the Holy One] would speak to Moshe.

And the Holy One would speak to Moshe Face-to-face just as a person speaks to a close friend.

[Exodus 33:9, 11]

Up until *chet-ha-egel* the Holy One had met with Moshe totally *out of the view of the people in the camp*, deep inside the glory cloud atop Mount Sinai. Then in Moshe’s absence the people started to focus upon [i.e. over-emphasize] ‘community’ and ‘**form**’. In Moshe’s absence some of the people in the camp began to get restless. They decided that what they wanted/needed was *a visible religious leader to put on a pedestal* [hence, Aaron’s ordination as ‘man-of-the-hour’]. To get the average person on board they had to promote themselves as doing something exciting and important – so they planned a *communal project in which they could get the bored people in the camp to participate* [hence, the gold earring offering to kick off the big showy, entertaining image-building ‘service’]. And in his absence they designed in their own minds a *form of religious activity that allowed them to schedule and conduct their own events/meetings at which they could expend/release spiritual energy and show off their singing, dancing, speaking and culinary talents in ways that brought them physical pleasure instead of surrender* [hence, the ‘festival’ at which they ‘worshipped’ the calf-god]. As a result thousands of the souls the Holy One had redeemed from Egypt with His Strong Right Hand wound up as rotting corpses that polluted the camp.

The Holy One wanted to give the people a ‘down payment’ – a little taste – of what it would be like for Him to meet with a human being at ground level. But the people were not ready for this to take place in the Camp. So Moshe moved his tent. This would allow the people to watch and become comfortable with the kind of God-man interaction the Holy One wanted for them *from a safe distance*.

The Holy One appeared to Moshe, at his tent outside the Camp, and declared that He still intended to take the people in the Camp to the land He had promised to their forefathers. He did, however, attach a significant proviso. He declared – for the time being at least – that He would not Himself go in the midst of them because they were ‘a stiff-necked people’. **Exodus 33:1-3**. His Holy Presence in the midst of such a people - at least without some ‘buffer’ zone – was simply *too dangerous for them*.

The buffer zone was initially provided by the distance between the Camp and Moshe’s tent. It would eventually be provided by the curtains and courtyards of the *Mish’kan*. But the people did not understand all that yet. Upon hearing the news that the Holy One would not go in the midst of them to lead them to the land of promise the people were therefore *dismayed*. That was a good sign. The news had exactly the effect on them the Holy One desired – indeed knew His announcement would have. What was that effect, you ask? The people now realized that they wanted – needed - *more than just freedom from bondage* [which they already had] and *more than just a land flowing with milk and honey in which to live* [which the Holy One promised to give them anyway]. They realized that they wanted – needed - more than just a *visible religious leader to put on a pedestal*. They realized their souls cried out for more than just a *communal project with religious overtones in which to participate* at their own convenience. They realized they wanted - needed - more than just a *form of religion involving scheduling their own events/meetings at which they could expend/release spiritual energy and show off their singing, dancing, speaking, culinary talents and superficial forms of piety for each other in the name of God*.

The reason the people were dismayed is because they finally realized that they desperately *wanted* – needed – more than any of those things. They suddenly realized that what they desperately wanted – and needed – was exactly *the kind of increasingly intimate, ever-growing personal and communal relationship with the Holy One which He had offered them and prophetically declared over them just a few weeks prior to chet-ha-egel*. As Joni Mitchell once intoned: “Don’t it always seem to go – that you don’t know what you’ve got till its gone!”⁶

We took off their ornaments. We got real. We entered into a time of heartfelt communal mourning as well as sincere individual repentance. **Exodus 33:4**. We were still not ready for anything close to Exodus 20-type intimacy, of course. The idea of the Holy One appearing in majestic splendor, looking into our souls, and speaking directly to us with His Beautiful, world-changing, voice, still scared the

⁶ This line is from the popular 1970 Joni Mitchell song entitled ‘Big Yellow Taxi’.

liver out of us. We did not know if we could trust Him – or ourselves – to faithfully steward that kind of relationship. We still wanted Moshe to be our intermediary. But something was happening to us. We have become far too smitten with love for the Divine Bridegroom Who has captured our imaginations and our hearts with signs, wonders, and words of love to ever be satisfied without more and more of Him. And so it was that first one-by-one, then two-by-two, the lovesick ones among us started to break free of the religious bondage and guilt-motivated behavior patterns we had accepted as ‘normal’, and *come out of the camp*. A few at a time, we began seeing more value in the Bridegroom-King than our little ‘community’, its ‘meetings’ and its ‘forms of religion’. A growing group of forerunners began to truly seek the Holy One in reverent awe, in humility, and in all-out self-surrender. Moshe stood in his tent daily and interceded for such as these. **Exodus 33:12-18**. The over-riding issue that Moshe’s outside-the-camp-tent intercession concerned was simply this – *what kind of – i.e. how intimate – a relationship would/could/should the covenant people of God have with their Divine Covenant Partner? How close was ‘too close’? How distant was ‘too distant’?*

The Season of Ish Petach Oholo

[Each Man at the Threshold of His Own Tent]

In those awesome days when our covenant – and indeed our lives - hung in the balance, we watched from the threshold of our tents as Moshe met with the Holy One face-to-Face in the temporary “tent of meeting” he pitched outside the camp. Close your eyes and *picture the scene*. Get the prophetic image *clearly in your minds*: each man, with his family gathered around him – worshipping the Holy One right there in his own tent. Each man standing as an intercessor and Torah-teacher at the entrance of *his own dwelling*. Let Torah reinforce the picture for you:

And whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent,

*They all stood and worshipped - **ish petach aholo***

[each man at the entrance to his tent].

[Exodus 33:10]

The question hanging in the air was – would the Holy One forever send us away in shame and dishonor? Would the Holy One, the Divine Bridegroom, ‘*put us away quietly*’ and find another more worthy Bride? Would we be left without even the hope of intimate communion with the covenant partner for Whom our hearts now longed? Privileged as we are to sit on this side of the continuum of time, we know the answer to that question. We have after all had the opportunity to read *the end of the Book*. We therefore know that *the Holy One will never, never, never abandon any aspect of His covenant with the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov* – no matter how adulterous their descendants act. We know that He loves us enough to discipline us as harshly as necessary to get our attention, *as a father disciplines his children*. We know that He works all things together for good for

those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. *We* know that after He disciplines us if we will make *Teshuvah* and seek Him with all our heart He will always *restore us*, will always lovingly *wash the stains of our adultery from our souls as well as our minds and bodies*, and will always *bind up our wounds and heal us*. *We* know that with the Holy One there is *no shadow of turning*, and no possibility whatever of His finding ‘another Bride’.

We *DO* know those things, don’t we? But the generation of the Exodus – the generation of *chet ha-egel* – did not know those things. The very real men, women, and children living in tents on Mount Sinai, simply could not have known. Like the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 7:53 – 8:11, they *waited for the stones to fly* - and braced themselves for the impact.

Please note in this connection a curious parallel. Did you know that the ‘woman caught in adultery’ passage in John’s ‘gospel’ is not found in several of the ancient texts? Did you know that when this passage is not found in an ancient text, the text skips from what we know as John 7:52 to what we know as John 8:12? Did you know therefore that the ‘woman caught in adultery’ passage thus actually does not begin with John 8:1, but begins instead with what we know as John 7:53? Do you know what the last clause of that verse is? I will tell you. It says: *‘And each person went to his own dwelling.’*

The clear parallel between this passage and the *‘ish petach ohelo’* [each man at the entrance to his own tent] statement in Exodus 33:10 is not, of course, coincidental. Do you realize now that it the intention of the writer of the ‘gospel’ of John to stir in Hebrew minds as they read about the *woman caught in the act of adultery* in the days of Yeshua the remembrance of *chet ha-egel* and its aftermath?

Enough talking. It is time for the matter to be settled. The Master’s finger is even now writing the decree in the sand.

Moshe’s Plea on Behalf of Every Man, Woman and Child in the Camp

Moshe’s intercession is in full swing. As he speaks understand that he is not acting on his own accord – he is driven by the Spirit of God the Holy One has deposited within him. Acting as our representative what he is doing is merely responding to Divine prompting by uttering words straight from the heart of God that we think of as prayer.

“If You still see any beauty in me ...” he began with quivering lips.

“Teach me Your ways!” he heard himself crying out passionately to the Holy One.

“If You do not go with us ...” he heard his mouth utter “... do not send us up from here.”

Then from somewhere deep inside his soul he heard a final groan burst forth toward Heaven: “And Please ... Show me Your Glory!”

The words Moshe spoke were not for himself alone. Moshe was *our representative*. His words expressed the cry of all of our broken hearts. With stammering lips he cried out to the Holy One on behalf of us all. And thus his three-fold intercessory declaration became the model for all hearts who will ever find themselves in the midst of the process of *teshuvah*:

“If you still see any beauty in me,
hodi'eni na et-deracheicha [teach me your ways]
so that I may have ***yada*** [intimacy] with you and learn how to bring you pleasure.”
[Exodus 33:12]

“If ***paneicha*** [Your Face - or the light of Your Countenance]
does not go with us, do not send us up from here.
How will anyone know that you take pleasure in me- with your people - unless you go with us?”
[Exodus 33:15-16]

Now – [in my life, before we go any further] –
har'eni na et-k'vodeicha [Show me Your Glory!]
[Hebrew ***k'vodeicha***, meaning that with which
You adorn Yourself, which expresses Your Essence].
[Exodus 33:18].

Selah. May these be your prayers today Dear Reader! I assure you they are mine.

The Holy One's Promise to Reveal His Glory

The Holy One responded to Moshe's plea immediately. He was the One Who prompted Moshe to pray such things in the first place – why would He not respond to the very prayers He had prompted his prophet to pray? Our Divine Bridegroom is a *good Husband*. He is communicative, and re-assuring, even in the midst of crisis. He assures us that there will be no divorce. To the contrary, He promises to make our relationship with Him closer, more intimate, and more fulfilling, than ever. He promises to cause something wonderful to rise out of this horrible incident. He promises to show us a revelation of Himself different than any we have, despite all that has happened so far, ever seen. He promises that He will overwhelm us and will change us forever. He promises that Moshe will – on behalf of us all – see ‘all His goodness’ pass by. As that happens Moshe will hear the Holy One proclaim and reveal His unfathomable grace usward.

V'yomer Ani a'avir kol-tuvi al-paneicha
[The Holy One] replied, 'I will make all My goodness pass before you,

V'karati v'shem YHVH lef'neicha

and reveal my Divine Name/Character in your presence

v'chanoti et-asher achon v'richamti et-asher arachem

And I will have mercy and show kindness to those I love.'

V'yomer Lo tuchal lir'ot et-panai ki lo-yir'ani ha-adam v'chai

*and He then explained, 'You cannot have a vision of My Face
for no man can look upon Me and live.'*

[Exodus 33:19-20]

Avraham had experienced a vision of the Holy One and lived. **Genesis 17:1-2; Genesis 18:1**. Similarly, Yitzchak had experienced a visual revelation of the Holy One and survived. **Genesis 26:2**. Ya'akov as well saw YHVH and suffered no ill effects. **Genesis 28:12-13** and **35:9-13**. Just a few weeks ago Moshe, Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and the 70 elders of Israel 'saw God', and even ate and drank in His Presence, and were none the worse for the experience. **Exodus 24:9-11**. So why, at this stage in the narrative, were we being told that a man cannot *look upon the Holy One and live*? What happened between Exodus 24:11 and '***ki loy yir'ani ha-adam*** – i.e. *no man can look upon Me ...*'? Ah – now we remember - *the sin of the golden calf* happened. Now the Holy One could with complete justification consider the covenant *over and done*, and *null and void*, and just walk away. Or He could do the truly remarkable and *make a way where there was no way*. He opts for the latter.

V'yomer Adonai

And the Holy One then said,

Hineh makom iti v'nitzavta al ha-tzur

Behold - a place where you will stand on THE ROCK.

V'hayah ba'avor kvodi

And My glory will pass by

v'samticha b'nikrat ha-tzur

and I will place you in a broken place in THE ROCK

v'sakoti chapi aleicha ad-ovri

And I will protect you with My power while I pass by.

v'hasiroti et-kapi

I will then remove My protective covering,

v'ra'ita et-achorai

and you will gaze upon THAT WHICH COMES AFTER⁷

⁷ What the Holy One promises to show Moshe – i.e. *acharei* – is enigmatic. The phrase *acharei* literally means *after* or *following*. The King James edition's translators chose to translate this phrase as '*My Back*'. Hebrew translators have varied in their interpretations. The most literal is '*what follows from My Existence*', or '*in My Wake*'. More esoteric interpretations include *a glimmer of My essence* [***Emmunot VeDeyot 2:12***]; or *a partial realization of My uniqueness*. **Yad, Yesodei HaTorah 1:10**. It could also refer to *a significant future event* – i.e. an event that will follow or come after.

uf'nai lo yera'u

My Face itself, however, will not be seen.

[Exodus 33:21-23]

Oh Dear Reader, please stop what you are doing for a little while today. Please stop analyzing and theorizing and theologizing and doctrinalizing just for a moment or two. Please, for a little while, try to focus all your energies on *becoming like a little child* again, and just . . . well, just *beholding*.

After all, what the Holy One told Moshe to do was “**Hineh**” – *behold!* Behold *what*, you ask? The Holy One said “Behold ... **a place**. Where is this place, you ask? A place where you stand upon **THE ROCK**. A place where you are hidden by the Holy One in a **broken place in THE ROCK**. What is THE ROCK? Shaul of Tarsus tells us **THE ROCK** was ... *Messiah*. **I Corinthians 10:4**. How can we ‘stand upon THE ROCK?’ Yeshua taught us ... by *sh'ma*-ing and *asah*-ing the Torah He taught us. **Matthew 7:24-24**.

But wait, you say. How can **THE ROCK** we now know to be *Messiah* have a **broken place** – *in which the Holy One will hide us?* That is truly the most miraculous thing we can behold, isn't it, Beloved? If we look closely, we can see that there are actually a number of ‘broken places’ in THE ROCK in which the Holy One can hide us. He can hide us in the places where *the cat-of-nine-tails ripped the flesh from His Back*. He can hide us in the places where *the crown of thorns* pierced His head. He can hide us in the places where *the nails* pierced His Hands. He can hide us in the places where *the spike* pierced His feet. He can hide us in the place where *the spear* pierced His side.

Do you now see why He had to be so cruelly *wounded?* *Behold ...* it was so all of us would have *a broken place in Him to hide*.

Questions for Today's Study

1. In today's aliyah the Holy One gives Moshe the instruction to leave Sinai. The idea of leaving this mountain must have created mixed feelings in Moshe and in the people.

[A] What good thing had the people experienced at Sinai?

[B] What horrible things had the people experienced at Sinai?

[C] Who lost family members at Sinai?

[D] In what two ways were people from among the community slain at Sinai?

[E] Where does the Holy One say B'nei Yisrael is to go after leaving *Sinai*?

[F] What descriptions does the Holy One give of B'nei Yisrael's ultimate destination?

2. Despite the awesome promises made by the Holy One in Exodus 33:1-2 concerning the Redeemed Community's trip to their ultimate destination, the Redeemed Community *mourned* rather than rejoiced.

[A] What specific promises did the Holy One make concerning B'nei Yisrael's journey?

[B] Why did B'nei Yisrael mourn despite these promises?

3. After the golden calf incident but before the *Mish'kan* was built:

[A] Where did the Holy One meet with Moshe?

[B] Where was this meeting place in relation to the camp of the Redeemed Community?

[C] What did the men/fathers of the Redeemed Community do when Moshe met with the Holy One?

[D] Where did they do this?

[E] Look up the Hebrew word translated "worshipped" in verse 10. Write this word in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, define the concept, and describe the picture you see as you research the Biblical usages of this word.

[F] Write a definition for "worship" based upon Scripture.

4. Beginning in verse 12 Moshe models for all Israel and for all people everywhere the passion for the Holy One and the intimacy with the Holy One desires for all of His Created ones to enjoy. As you read these verses and marvel at Moshe's level of communion with the Almighty, ask your Abba to bring you into that level of intimacy as well. Remember also that Moshe's cries for intimacy with the Holy One were not for himself alone – he was acting as a "friend of the Bride", seeking such intimacy on behalf of all of the Redeemed Community.

[A] List each of the requests Moshe makes of the Holy One in this chapter of Exodus and give the reference to the verse in which that request is made. You should find at least 6 specific requests if you look carefully.

[B] Memorize the first such request for recitation and discussion at your family's home Shabbat celebration this week.

[C] What promises does the Holy One make in response to Moshe's prayers?

[D] Go back and re-read Exodus 3:1 - 4:17 [Moshe's first encounter with the Holy One]. How has Moshe's relationship with the Holy One progressed since the burning bush incident?

[E] List what you believe are at least 3 key reasons why Moshe's relationship with the Holy One deepened so dramatically in the relatively short period between Exodus 3 and Exodus 33.

[F] Read Esther 5:1-3. List all similarities you see between that passage and Exodus 33.

[G] What was Moshe told to do to prepare himself for the Holy One to meet with him and respond to his requests? List the preparations one by one.

5. In I Kings 18:25-29 *Eliyahu* [Elijah] is challenging the prophets/priests of Ba'al.

*Eliyahu said to the prophets of Ba'al,
Choose you one bull for yourselves, and dress it first; for you are many;
and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under.*

*They took the bull that was given them, and they dressed it,
and called on the name of Ba'al from morning even until noon, saying, "Ba'al, hear us".
But there was no voice, nor any who answered.
They leaped about the altar that was made.*

*It happened at noon, that Eliyahu mocked them,
and said, "Cry aloud; for he is a god: either he is musing,
or he is gone aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleeps and must be awakened".*

*They cried aloud, and cut themselves
after their manner with knives and lances until the blood gushed out on them.*

*It was so, when mid-day was past,
that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the [evening] offering;
but there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any who regarded.*

[I Kings 18:25-29]

[A] List the things the prophets/priests of Ba'al did to try to get their "god" to consume the slaughtered bull with fire?

[B] Was what the prophets/priests of Ba'al were doing "worship"? What exactly would you call what they were doing?

6. In this week's reading from the Apostolic Scriptures Shaul of Tarsus has been applying the Torah to the situation present in Corinth, where food (meat, grain, fruits/vegetables) bought in the public markets came from crops the first fruits, at least, of which, had been sacrificed to idols at the pagan temples of the empire. In I Cor. 8:10-11 Shaul paints a strange "picture" - not unlike the picture in I Kings 18:25-29. Shaul says:

*For if a man sees you who have knowledge sitting in an idol's temple,
won't his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols?
And through your knowledge, he who is weak perishes,
the brother for whose sake Messiah died.*

[A] What "picture" does it paint?

[B] What does Shaul say is "wrong with this picture"?

[C] What do you think is "wrong with this picture"?

[D] Our English Bibles appear to describe a man with a conscience as 'weak'. To the Roman way of thinking, this was so. To a Roman, conscience was

“weakness”. But it is not so in either Hebraic or Christian thought – and it is certainly not so in the Holy One’s eyes. Hence, this statement of Shaul needs to be searched out linguistically. In Strong’s, look up the Greek word our English Bibles translate as “weak” [it is Strong’s Greek word #772, *asthenes*]. Greek translations of the gospels put this word in Yeshua’s mouth in Matthew 25:39, 43, and 44, Matthew 26:41, and Luke 10:9, among other places. Look up those references.

- i. Considering the usages of *asthenes* in the Greek text of the Gospels, what do you think that Greek word really means in the context of I Corinthians 8?
- ii. What Hebrew word do you think would have been what Shaul (whose first language was Hebrew, not Greek) was thinking (instead of the Greek *asthenes*) when he penned this passage? [good possibilities include Strong’s Hebrew word #s 2470 – *chalah*, 3510- *ka’ab*, 7390 – *rak*, and 7504 - *rafah*]
- iii. How does the Hebrew word you believe was in Shaul’s mind differ in meaning from the Greek word *asthenes* and the English word “weak”?

[E] What does Shaul mean when he says “he who is weak *perishes*” [Strong’s Greek word #622, *apollumi*]? This Greek word is the same used to describe what happened to the male children of Judea under age 2 when Herod the Great was trying to kill the infant who some believed was the Messiah. Why and can one who has a conscience be said by Shaul to “perish” as the result of someone in the Redeemed Community participating in/sponsoring idol worship by purchasing food which has been sacrificed to idols (and thus financially supporting idol worship)?

[F] Give some examples of how believers today could do the same thing as the ‘believer’ in Shaul’s “picture”.

*May the Holy One bring you into His Presence, teach you His ways, and show you His glory -
and may you learn to worship Him at the entrance to your tent,
without any ornament but the blood of the Lamb.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 119:161-167 [SHIN]

*Princes have persecuted me without a cause,
but my heart stands in awe of your words.
I rejoice at your word, as one who finds great spoil.
I hate and abhor falsehood. I love your Torah.
Seven times a day I praise you because of your righteous ordinances.*

*Those who love your Torah have great shalom. Nothing causes them to stumble.
I have hoped for your yeshu`ah, Holy One.
I have done your mitzvot. I love them exceedingly.*