

*Shiur L'Yom Shen*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayakhel:*** **Exodus 35:1-4**
 Haftarah: **I Kings 7:13-14**
 B'rit Chadasha: **II Corinthians 9:1-6**

*These are the words ... **asah** them.*

[Exodus 35:1]

Today's Meditation is Haggai 1:1-8;

This Week's Amidah prayer is Part I of the G'vurot [the Prayer of His Powers]

Eleh ha-devarim asher-tzivah Adonai la'asot otam - i.e these are the substantive things that the Holy One enjoins for you to build/make/do. **Exodus 35:1b.**

Where do we find ourselves as we approach the end of Torah's second book? What exactly has the Holy One been *doing* and saying to us through all the signs, wonders, strong East winds, sea-partings, manna-showers, and the water-pourings? What are we to make of tales about pillars of fire and cloud, of a great Sinaitic *shofar* blast, of words of betrothal spoken on the mountain, of the golden calf debacle, and of our subsequent season of 'social distancing', when each family retreated to its own dwelling? What are we who live in the Twenty-first Century to make of all the things we have seen thus far in this *ancient Book of Wonders*? What does it all *mean*? How can we put it all *in perspective*?

A Very Different Type of Resource than the Book of Beginnings

Genesis was a marvelous sweeping narrative of the encounters of individual men (and women) with the Creator. It seemed timeless - encompassing all the generations of mankind from Adam through Efrayim and Menashe. The Book of Names the world knows as "Exodus", on the other hand, is very, very time specific. Virtually all of the events that are chronicled in the Book of Names (at least since the opening lines, which recited a little history) took place in the lives of a single generation of people. In other words, even as we begin the last parsha of the Book if you were to take a quick look around the camp you would recognize almost all of the people. They are the same people we saw being traumatized by Pharaoh and his Egyptian cohorts at the beginning of *Sefer Sh'mot*.

Genesis told the tale of *twenty-four generations*; Exodus chronicles *only one*. But perhaps this is fitting. After all, the generation whose appointed time on earth is chronicled by the Book of Names was most definitely a uniquely blessed generation. The things the men, women and children of that one generation saw –

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and which we are called upon to relive by reading and meditating on the book the modern world calls “Exodus” and by celebrating *Pesach* each year - are stupendous, overwhelming, and ... well, world-changing. The Creator of the Universe spoke – and made an appearance on earth – and *everything changed*. May it be so again in our generation!

The Secret to the Holy One’s Choice Of the Generation to Which He Appeared at Sinai

The fact that the generation we read about in *Sefer Shemot* [Exodus] was *uniquely blessed* does not mean that it was by any means **perfect** – or even for that matter *particularly meritorious*. The reason the generation of Moshe, Miryam, Aharon, Hur, and Datan was chosen was most definitely not because the people of that generation were more spiritual or more worthy than previous (or subsequent) generations. Indeed our text makes it abundantly clear that the people of the generation the Holy One chose to uniquely bless and employ in His Grand Redemptive Plan were *quite ordinary folks – folks a lot like us*.

What then was there about the generation of Moshe *et al* that captured the Divine Bridegroom’s heart and caused Him to choose them? Why was *that* generation chosen by the Holy One from all the others to witness the prototypical release of signs, wonders, and miracles of deliverance? Why were those folks singled out to model what it looks like for human beings to negotiate life through miraculous provision, supernatural guidance, angelic protection, and divine instruction? Is it possible that what the generation of the Exodus had to offer was simply recognition *that they were totally powerless to effectuate their own redemption*? Is it possible that what sets them apart from most other generations is *an understanding, birthed in slavery to the richest and most powerful nation on earth, that if the Holy One did not redeem them in His power, redemption simply would not come*?

The people we read about in *Sefer Sh’mot* were *not heroes*. These were simple folk – what the world considers *rabble*. They were not *world-changers, kingdom-builders, crusaders, or demon-chasers*. They did not clamor to be acclaimed in the world as apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, or evangelists. They were on no quest to make a name – or a reputation - for themselves. These people had no program or agenda to save themselves, much less the world. They held to *no ideology*. They practiced *no talking points*. They did not have any *political opinions*. They knew no sermons, doctrines, or creeds – and they had only one song. They claimed no special anointing. They were people whose only hope was the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov. Amidst such a people the Holy One knew He could truly show Himself strong. In the midst of such a people the Holy

One would not have to share His glory with anyone. Why is that important? Why does the Holy One not want to share His Glory with powerful, charismatic men and ministries? Is the Holy One - Heaven forbid - *an egotist* who selfishly refuses to share the spotlight? Please understand this one truth if you understand nothing else from the Book of Exodus. Here it is: ***The revelation of the glory of the Holy One is an absolutely critical part of His Plan for the redemption of mankind.***

The Revelation of the Glory of the Holy One is a Critical Part of His Plan of Redemption

When the Holy One created man He programmed him to *respond to the Holy One's glory*. As a baby is programmed to respond to his mother's voice, breath sounds and heartbeat, even so mankind is programmed to respond to the revelation of the Holy One's glory. For mankind ultimate redemption is to be found only in a world where the knowledge of the glory of the Holy One covers the earth like the waters cover the sea. That is the way the Holy One created and programmed mankind. That is of course the basis of and reason for Moshe's plea to the Holy One *'Show me your Glory!'* Whether you know it or not or have ever articulated it or not, somewhere in your *neshama* Moshe's *'Show me your Glory'* plea is your most passionate plea as well. There are however factors in place on earth that tend to *cause interference with the nurturing of our souls by the glory of the Holy One*.

Much as a mother's voice, breath sounds, and heartbeat are not always audible to her baby similarly the Holy One's glory is not always clearly discernible by mankind. Competing voices such as the voice of the Serpent, of Nimrod-types, of Pharaohs, and of the political and spiritual *prima donnas* of the world like Bila'am *distract people's attention away from the Holy One's glory* to their own - or at the very least promise a competing glory to those who will listen to and follow them. By directing people's attention away from the Holy One's glory, especially when they do so subtly, in "His Name", such actors actually rob mankind of true redemption. All they can offer is a desert mirage – a sleight of hand. It's all *smoke and mirrors*. Aharon – and 3,000 men of the generation of the Exodus - learned that lesson very painfully in last week's parsha in connection with the golden calf incident.

Moshe will learn the same lesson in the Book of Numbers when he claims that it is he and Aharon instead of the Holy One who provides water from the desert's rock formations to quench the people's thirst. And alas the *prima donna's* of our generation – the spiritual "storm troopers" of all religions (including secular humanism), in our time – will hopefully soon learn this lesson as well.

Hence we have seen thus far in Exodus that the Holy One chooses a man or a woman or a generation who will not compete with Him regarding His glory. He always chooses those who know they in themselves have nothing eternal or meaningful to offer anyone, and who will not claim the credit - or demand compensation for themselves - when the Holy One works wonders and redeems men. He always chooses those who do not need or desire a *stage* - or a *spotlight* - or a *title* - or a “*ministry*” to make them feel important or fulfilled. He always chooses those who need HIM and HIM alone – those who do not clamor for “the anointing” but for the *Anoint-er*. He always chooses those who allow themselves to be overshadowed and overwhelmed by His Glory. He always chooses those who bow before His Majesty, tremble at His Word, stand amazed at His Goodness, and reverently fall on their faces to worship Him. He always chooses those who are satisfied, like the *Serafim* who surround His Heavenly Throne, to spend their lives basking in His glory, and who, when they speak, merely cry out over and over again “*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Holy One, God Almighty! The whole earth is full of His glory!*”

There is A Call Going Out!

The first parsha we study this week is the 22nd of Torah, *Vayakhel*. I call this the *parsha of shining faces*. It is not just Moshe’s face that will have a glow emanating from it. *If, as, and to the extent we surrender to and cooperate with the Holy One’s plan for community to be re-established in the Camp of the Redeemed – at the right time, in the right way, for all the right reasons - we will all find ourselves energized, synergized, synchronized, and bathed in the Light of Our Bridegroom’s Countenance. Our mission is clear: we are called to establish a beachhead for the invasion of earth by the Manifest Presence of the Holy One. We are to prepare the way for the King, and build the foundation for the earthly Throne upon which He will sit and rule. And we are to do it working together, tribe-by-tribe, side-by-side, in real time on the real surface of planet Earth. May it occur quickly, in our day!*

The sages elected the name *Vayakhel* to describe the section of Torah that follows immediately after we are told that Moshe’s face shone with the glory of the Holy One after his final descent from Sinai. The parsha begins with Moshe lifting up his voice and issuing a great call. Of what will this call of Moshe consist? What will be its prophetic import? How will it change the world? Oh Beloved – these are matters for the Holy One to conceal and for kings to search out! Let’s get started with the treasure hunt, shall we?

The name *Vayakhel* - which is actually a *verb phrase* – translates roughly into English as “*and he gathered together*” or “*and he called to assemble*” or “*and he*

summoned". The verb root of this phrase is *qahal*², meaning *to call*. The one doing the calling is Moshe. The ones being called together are all the people in the Camp of the Redeemed. The purpose of this call will become clear in time.

The verb phrase *vayakhel* is going to introduce a *major shift in the narrative* of Torah. What the Father is doing as our parsha begins is to launch Moshe into a *whole new season of avodah* [service]. What do I mean by this, you ask? Consider that Moshe has heretofore at times served as our national *statesman*, as our national *prophet*, as our national *intercessor* and as our national *judge*. Beginning with the appearance in Torah of the verb phrase *vayakhel* however the son of Yocheved is about to enter upon into a completely *new role*. From this point in Torah forward you see the primary spiritual identity of the man we chose at *Matan Ha-Torah* to act as the 'Friend of the Bridegroom' will be as *Moshe rabbeinu* [Moshe our TEACHER]. Indeed Moshe is about to enter a 40-year period of *teaching to us* the marvelous things the Holy One has shown him.

Ever since the Exodus from Egypt Moshe has been functioning primarily as a *receiver of revelation*. Now he is about to begin functioning primarily as a *transmitter*. He is about to start telling us what he has been hearing, seeing, and learning in those long face-to-Face conversations with the Creator of the Universe atop Mount Sinai³.

***The Parsha of Shining Faces,
Brimming With Mercy, Compassion, Favor, Forgiveness,
Shalom, Joy, Hope, Gentle Wisdom, and Creative Energy***

I call *Vayakhel* the *parsha of shining faces*. This represents the first message Moshe will deliver without a furrowed brow and a prophet's scowl. After receiving the '*merciful, compassionate, forgiving, faithful to covenant*' briefing in the cleft of the rock, Moshe is now all smiles – and his face is literally aglow. As a result, *if, as, and to the extent we surrender to and cooperate with the Holy One's plan for community to be re-established in the Camp of the Redeemed – at the right time, in the right way, for all the right reasons* - we will all find ourselves energized, synergized, synchronized, and bathed in the Light of Our Bridegroom's Countenance, too! Our mission is clear: we are called to *establish a beachhead for the invasion of earth by the Manifest Presence of the Holy One*. We are to *prepare the way for the King, and build the foundation for the earthly Throne upon which*

² *Qahal*, which can also be transliterated as *kahal*, is spelled *qof, hey, lamed*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #6950.

³ From time to time, we will still see Moshe as our national prophet, receiving revelation from our Divine Bridegroom on our behalf, and as our chief statesman, negotiating with the heads of other people groups. More and more, however, we will begin to see him conversing with *us* rather than with either the Holy One or the leaders of other nations.

He will sit and rule. And we are to do it working together, tribe-by-tribe, side-by-side, in real time on the real surface of planet Earth. May it occur quickly, in our day!

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The Key to Hebraic Secrets – The Hebrew Language of the Ancient Text

The language Moshe will employ to communicate this revelation to us will not be King James English, which of course did not even exist until millennia later. Nor will it be Greek, or Chaldean, or Egyptian. As apparently the Holy One communicated with Adam and Chava, and Kayin, with Noach, with Terach, with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and Ya'akov and with all of us at Mount Sinai, so the language in which Moshe chose to communicate Divine Truth to us was in the **Hebrew** tongue. Thus it behooves any serious student of Torah to understand at least a few very basic things about that particular language that are different from the languages with which most of us are more familiar.

First and foremost it is important to understand that Hebrew is a heavily *verb-focused language*. It is a language of lilting, flowing movement.

Modern languages based on Greek and Latin on the other hand [like English, among others] are *noun-based languages* – i.e. languages which focus the attention of the speaker, hearer and reader on underlying ‘concepts’, and ‘theories’, or ‘doctrines’. Hebrew is very different – it is all about the *action*. To truly understand a Hebrew-based text therefore one has to do much more than *read it* and *ponder its potential theological ramifications*⁶. Indeed, with a Hebrew text that is *a total waste of time*. Instead one has to *embrace the movement, go with the flowing river of words, and jump into the action*. Hebrew verbs are therefore the *linguistic horses* upon which our Divine Bridegroom rides - and which He desires for us to ride with Him. It is through the active imagery of the Hebrew verbs of the Sinaitic narrative through which we begin to see ‘what the Father is doing’ at Sinai and to learn how He wants us to participate with Him in the Divine Dance.

The message of Torah is therefore never about what we are supposed to think or ‘believe’. It is instead about *who we are called to become and what we are called to do*. That is a *reality inherent in all Hebrew communication*. We are called to be *doers* [i.e. *sh'ma*-ers, *sh'mar*-ers, and *asah*-ers] of the word, not *hearers only*. Now let's apply these principles to the opening line of parsha *Vayakhel*. The opening verse reads as follows: ***Vayakhel Moshe et-kol-edat b'nei-Yisra'el ...*** – i.e. *And Moshe*

⁶ The interpretation of the ancient Hebrew text with the powers of reasoning of the fallen human mind is not what the author is talking about. The fallen human mind is poisoned by the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and continually over-processes and misconstrues what the Holy One has ‘truly said’. The level of interpretation of the Hebrew text this author is talking about presumes the presence in the reader's life of the enabling influence of the Empowering Breath of the *Ruach ha-Qodesh* [Holy Spirit] - identified as the spirit the Holy One [the Compassionate One – see Exodus 34:6-7], and characterized by wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and of the reverent fear of the Holy One. See Exodus 31:3, Isaiah 11:2.

called together the entire witness-throng made up of Israel's descendants. Exodus 35:1. The verb phrase *vayakhel* implies that what is happening is the fusion of a diverse group of refugees into what is known in Hebrew as a *k'hal*. What is a *k'hal*, you ask? A *k'hal* is a kind of communal entity that is far, far beyond the refugee camp our ancestors represented up to this point in their covenant walk. Refugee camps, after all, usually disband quickly once the emergency is past and their exodus is complete. Moreover, even while the members of a refugee camp sojourn together the camp they share is not really a meaningful entity – it is just a *collection of fragmented souls* temporarily sharing space who are *bound together by common suffering and circumstances beyond their control*. A *k'hal*, by contrast, represents an eternal communal entity that takes the individuals beyond their personal identities and unites them in a new framework, elevating the fundamental bond that joins them together to a level of purpose, destiny, and common mission that will exist trans-generationally.

The opening phrase of *Vayakhel* should not therefore just be interpreted to mean that Moshe called a *meeting*. What Moshe, who was still aglow with the *Radiance of the Cloud* and filled to overflowing with revelation and prophetic empowerment from on High, lifted up his voice and called was *much, much more* than a meeting. What Moshe gave voice to was a prophetic call for a PEOPLE – the sh'ma people of the Creator broken and scattered in the aftermath of a failed effort at community done 'man's way' - to arise and reclaim both their individual callings and their communal destinies. Who will hear the call of Moshe for the healing of fractured and fragmented souls?

As our studies begin the traumatized survivors of the Egyptian redemption encamped at Sinai are a motley collection of *fragile, fractured, fragmented* souls. The throng that fled Egypt a few months ago was, after all, the ultimate *mixed-multitude gaggle* – a *jumbled hodgepodge of multi-national refugees*. They were unified only in the sense that they were all running for their lives from the maniacal Pharaoh of a nation whose economy had been reduced to shambles by the Holy One's impressive series of 'plagues'. A good number of the members of that throng, including important men like *Moshe* and *Aharon* and *Y'hoshua* and the like, unquestionably knew themselves to be physical descendants of the Hebrew patriarchs – men with Hebrew names like *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, *Ya'akov*, *Y'hudah*, *Levi*, and *Yosef*. Why did they know this? Primarily because Pharaoh had pronounced a death sentence on male babies born to women of their particular race. Their mothers had lived – and had been a part of their lives -- long enough to warn them of the risks associated with siring – or bearing, in the case of the women -- male children with particular physical characteristics that marked them as 'Hebrew'.

I would suspect however that a large number of those who fled Egypt in confusion on that fateful night *did not have a clue from what ancestors they were descended*. The vast majority of those who fled Egypt you see were *just slaves* – strong-backed workers assigned by Pharaoh’s taskmasters to whatever work crew needed manpower at a given time. And not only were they themselves slaves, but their fathers and mothers, and grandfathers and grandmothers, had been slaves.

Amongst slave populations details of *family background* are of very little consequence. Family relations are allowed slave populations only at the whim of the taskmasters, and only for purposes of replenishing the workforce. Slaves just do not have spare time – or extra energy - to hold family reunions or do genealogical research. Slaves intermix, intermingle, and intermarry with other slaves. All many of those who left Egypt on the fateful night in question could know for sure, therefore, was that somewhere back in the biological chain of their lineages some unidentified ancestor, from some foreign land, had been conquered by Pharaoh’s mighty armies or had been either forcefully or under the coercion of famine or personal tragedy assimilated into Egypt’s slave colonies. And by the time of the Exodus it did not really matter much to Pharaoh or to the Egyptians who the people who fled the royal expulsion decree with Moshe, Aharon and Miryam *were*. All that really seemed to matter, on that traumatic night when death was everywhere, was who they *weren’t*.

They *weren’t* Egyptians. And thus, they simply had no reason to stay in Egypt – or what was left of it -- anymore. Who were they? They did not know it yet, but they were *edat b’nei Yisrael* – the *witness throng* descended from Ya’akov/Yisrael.

Intermixed, intermingled, and interspersed in the loosely knit bands of refugees that left Egypt were multitudes of *zera* Avraham – the seed of Avraham. But they were *zera* [seed] in a deep state of *dormancy*.

Of Seed, Dormancy, and Divine Light

Do you know what *ends* a period of dormancy in the horticultural world? Most people think it is the warmer temperatures of spring. But that is not it. What brings a seed out of dormancy in the season we know as spring is not the warmer temperatures – it is, instead, the increase in *sunlight*. As the days get longer and longer, *increased periods of sunlight* cause dormant seeds to sprout, birthing a new season of growth and fruitfulness⁷.

⁷ This post-dormancy stage is where warming temperatures and increases in moisture factor in, providing a nurturing environment for the new sprouts to grow.

As it is in the natural so it is in the spiritual. As long hours of Spring sunlight causes dormant seeds to sprout, so the shining light of the glory of the Holy One that rests upon Moshe's face is about to cause the dormant *zera* of Avraham to come alive again. When Moshe called our ancestors to assemble before him they no doubt crawled out of their tents and gathered together trembling - not knowing quite what to expect. The trauma of the golden calf incident – where they were caught in the act of spiritual adultery - still colored their perspective and filled them with shame. Perhaps their hands and shoulders were still sore from digging graves for the 3,000 who perished. They were still not sure if they would – or could -- be forgiven by the Bridegroom-to-be whose betrothal covenant they had so quickly broken. The last they heard the Holy One was saying He would not go with them because they were a “stiff-necked” people. They therefore had no idea where they stood with the Holy One – or where they were to go from here. They had lessons to learn about *k'hal*-ing. And so do we in the 21st Century, Dear Reader!

K'hal-ing the Bridegroom's Way Involves So Much More than Scheduling a Meeting

The verb root at the base of the Hebrew phrase *vayakhel* is *k'hal*⁸. This verb can indeed mean ‘gather together’ or ‘assemble’, of course; but the focus of the action of *kahal*-ing is not on the people that assemble or gather. It is, instead, *on the intent, action, and involvement of the one who issues the call*. Picture a mother walking to the door of her house and calling her children to come in from a time of playing in the yard. Picture a father calling his family together to pray or study Torah. Picture a shepherd calling his sheep into his fold. Now picture Moshe standing before the rag-tag mixed multitude or recently-freed slaves encamped at the base of Mount Sinai and preparing to share with them the marvelous revelations he has received over the course of parshot ***T'rumah, Tetzaveh, and Ki Tisa***. To communicate these things Moshe must do much more than call an assembly. He must do something *creative, prophetic, and spiritually transforming* to the people in order to prepare them for what they are about to receive. After all, who are the people in the camp of the redeemed?

As ***Vayakhel*** begins the people in the Camp of the Redeemed are in essence just a frightened gaggle of refugees. They are a mixed multitude who joined forces to escape a life of bondage. They all ran at the same time, in the same direction, away from the same malevolent force – but they were as different and diverse as people could be. They were united only in fear, in need, and in homelessness. Such a people is too *fragile of heart, too fractured of soul, and too fragmented of spirit* to be able to receive the kind of detailed, life-changing revelation from the Holy One

⁸ Kahal is *qof, hey, lamed*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #6950.

Moshe is called to impart. Before Moshe starts his teaching therefore he has to transform them into something that they have never been before – something that is known in Hebrew as a **k’hal**. A **k’hal** [feminine *kehilah*] is an eternal communal entity which enables and empowers the individual members who make it up to go far beyond the limits of their personal identities by uniting them in a new framework, identifying, focusing upon, and elevating the FUNDAMENTAL BOND that joins them together to a point that they become cognizant of and begin to flow in SHARED PURPOSE, COLLECTIVE DESTINY and a COMMON MISSION.

The feminine form of the Hebrew word **k’hal** [i.e. *kehilah*] is often translated into the Greek language as ‘*ekklesia*’. That is right – *ekklesia*. English translators have chosen, for reasons only they know, and may have once had validity, to render this concept into English as ‘*church*’ or ‘*congregation*’. Now do I have your attention?

A Prophetic Time for Emerging From Our Own Tents

As I mentioned in the Introductory shiur this week, the fact that a phase of existence as **ish petach aholo** [every man at the entrance to his own tent] is a part of our Divine Bridegroom’s plan for the people He has redeemed does not in any way deny the reality that *those who withdraw to their own tents still share a calling, a purpose, a destiny, and a covenant with every other person and family the Holy One has redeemed*. It simply means that *as there is a season of dormancy for every kind of seed in the Holy One’s Creation* so is there a time and a season of dormancy for the shared callings, purposes, destinies and covenant of the seed of Avraham.

Intermixed, intermingled, and interspersed in the loosely knit bands of refugees that left Egypt were multitudes of **zera** Avraham – the seed of Avraham. But they were **zera** [seed] in a deep state of dormancy. As stated above, what ends a period of dormancy is an increase in *sunlight*. Increased sunlight is what causes seeds to sprout in spring birthing a new season of growth and fruitfulness⁹.

In today’s aliyah Moshe begins shining that light in large doses. First he issues a call to everyone in the camp to **k’hal**. At that call people begin cautiously emerging from their own tents. Moshe then challenge them all to become an **edat**, and the realization begins to sink in, person to person, family to family, that the shared calling of the Holy One on the lives of everyone the Holy One redeemed from Egypt is far too important and powerful to be hidden under their separate tents any longer. Moshe’s face is glowing – so bright that he has to wear a *veil*

⁹ This post-dormancy stage is where warming temperatures and increases in moisture factor in, providing a nurturing environment for the new sprouts to grow.

whenever he speaks with us. He has promised to tell us what the Holy One has said regarding where our relationship with the Holy One stands now, and where – if anywhere – it goes from here. We are eager with expectation.

***The Prioritization of our Ultimate Mission:
Enjoying Him and Being Enjoyed by Him Forever***

As *Vayakhel* opens Moshe has just returned from the Presence of the Holy One. The first thing he does is to call us out of the tents to which we have retreated to tell us collectively what the Holy One has said regarding where our relationship with the Holy One stands now, and where it goes from here. We are eager with expectation. What will the Holy One have Moshe speak to us about first? What is first on our Divine Bridegroom's priority list? What is item #1 on his heart? We have a little surprise coming. Before even "*Love the Holy One Your God with all your heart*", the first thing the Holy One has something else He wants us to focus upon as our top priority. What is it that the Holy One considers so important for the healing of our fractured and fragmented souls? The answer may surprise many of you, Beloved. It may *infuriate* some of you. But here it is. Here is *the first 'shining face' instruction we receive from Moshe*:

Sheshet yamim te'aseh melachah

Six days you are to may asah the ordinary work of human life

uvayom ha-shvi'i yihyeh lachem kodesh

but the seventh day you are to set apart

Shabat Shabaton l'Adonai

as a Sabbath of Sabbaths to the Holy One

[Exodus 35:2(a)]

Wow. There it is ... in *black and white*: first and foremost, the Holy One's great cloud of witnesses are called to be ***Sabbath commemorators***. He wants us to remember the Sabbath – and keep it holy. He wants us to stop and recall – and mull over, and celebrate - the day the Holy One stopped creating and just drank in the beauty and goodness of everything He had made. He wants us, like Him, to just stop and enjoy Him and all He has Created – even as Creation stopped and enjoyed Him back on the Seventh Day. After all, the Holy One ***blessed*** the 7th day. He ***made it holy*** – set apart – consecrated to Him – wholly separate from the other days. It is uniquely designed as *a time for us* – a time for us to enjoy our Creator, and to be enjoyed by Him, forever. You ***do*** remember, don't you? The 7th day – Friday at sundown through Saturday at sundown – is the day when we get to participate in our primary mission on earth – to enjoy Him and to be enjoyed by Him.

Though the Holy One has spoken over His people many *mitzvot*, all of which are important, there is apparently something special about the *mitzvah* of Sabbath

commemoration that forms an integral, foundational, *sine qua non* component of the *witnessing/testifying lifestyle* to which we are called by our Divine Bridegroom. And here if you will receive it is something even more shocking. What am I talking about? This Beloved: *The kind of Sabbath commemorating that makes up an essential element of the witnessing/testifying lifestyle of the Holy One's sh'ma people is not defined by what those people do on the Sabbath – i.e. meeting together, praying together, singing, dancing, teaching/learning, or, for that matter, even resting – but is to be defined instead by what they DO NOT DO – i.e. what they voluntarily abstain from doing - on the Sabbath.* Shocking indeed. But Torah says:

kol-ha'oseh vo melachah yumat

Whoever does any work on [that day] will die.

Lo-teva'aru esh b'chol moshvoteychem b'yom ha-Shabat

Do not ignite any fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath

[Exodus 35:2(b)-3]

What is the difference, you ask, between *convening an assembly or congregation for a religious meeting – on the Sabbath or some other day, on the one hand, and calling together the Holy One's great cloud of witnesses, on the other hand?* What is the difference, you ask, between holding meetings where people sing, and dance and pray and study, on the one hand, and commemorating the 7th Day of Creation by doing no ordinary work and not lighting a fire in our dwellings? Why is the latter what Torah says is important, and the former something Torah *never even once mentions*? Let's stop for a moment and consider the implications.

Wearing Our Betrothal Ring As We Enter the Season Of 'On Earth as it is in Heaven'

We must never think our “work” or our “ministry” is more important than the Holy One's words. If we begin to entertain thoughts like that we will cease to be content to merely reflect the Holy One's glory and to enjoy Him – and we will actually start to constitute *a source of toxicity* to the world. If and to the extent the things we do under the Glorious Banner of the Name of the Holy One become about us and our ministries – our egos, our reputations, our pet doctrines, our fundraising, our membership or mailing lists, our ‘ministries’, our ‘covering’, etc. – well, if that ever happens we have ceased to act as ambassadors of the Bridegroom-King and become *buyers and sellers* of religion. We are not called to become merchants of self-promotion. We are called to be vessels of Divine wisdom, power, and love. So the Holy One has a foolproof *self-importance monitoring gauge* built into the ***Covenant***. It is called the ***Shabbat*** [Sabbath].

Thus the first thing the Holy One wants us to know about the building He is calling us to do is that we are only to *build when He builds* and are to *rest – with Him and*

in Him - when He rests. Sheshet yam'im [six days] we are to build diligently according to the blueprint He has provided, causing His Words to take shape through the words of our mouths and the work of our hands – as He did in Creation Week. But just as he rested on the seventh day so are we on that day to rest from our building – and are to just *enjoy Him and be enjoyed by Him*. He did not bless the Seventh day and make it holy *for Himself* alone. He blessed it and made it holy for **US** to enjoy it with Him. What part are we to play in this beautiful Divine mystery called the **Shabbat**? What exactly does the Holy One's empowering declaration that we are to *commemorate it* and **sh'mar** its holiness mean? Here is a little secret that the buyers and sellers of religion do not want you to know – the Sabbath is not about meetings. It is not about ministering or supporting ministries. It is about resting in and deepening our relationship with Him. It is about reconnecting with our individual and collective identities and destinies. The most important thing we can do on the Shabbat therefore is to stop what we were doing in the **sheshet yamim** [six days] and just *receive the blessing* and just **sh'mar** [treasure, cherish, and carefully guard] the holiness of the beautiful island in time our Divine Bridegroom has prepared for us.

Stepping aside from organized activity in order to take time to commune with and experience a fresh encounter with our Creator is our declaration to the world that we know it is not what the little house of cards that we are building on earth that matters – but what our wonderful Covenant Partner *has done and is the process of bringing about despite the frailty of our humanity, and will bring to pass in His Time and Manner notwithstanding our hands in His Way*.

Over the next few chapters of Torah Moshe will describe for us in detail what the Holy One has shown and told him concerning the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle] – which will become the centerpiece of our camp and the focus of all our activity. Indeed Moshe will before this assembly is dismissed commission us to drop everything else and build the *Mish'kan*. But before instructing us to build our *sukkah* [the *Mish'kan*], the Holy One had Moshe tell us that we are only to work [build] *sheshet yam'im* [six days], and are to *rest* on the 7th day.

Why does the Holy One do this NOW – while we tremble before Him with our future hanging in the balances? Could it be because the *Shabbat* really is the primary and most important outward *sign of our covenant*? Could it be that like a wedding ring the *Shabbat* is that which testifies to our betrothal to the Creator of the Universe and marks us for all the world to see as uniquely His? Remember how after the golden calf incident we pulled off all our ornaments? We stripped ourselves of any ornamentation. Then we made it through 40 days without Moshe, and without any direct communication from the Holy One ... *without 'losing it' this*

time! With His help we successfully completed the *t'shuvah* process. We burned the 'golden calf bridge' behind us, so we could never go back that way again.

Isn't it wonderful that His first act as our Bridegroom after we make *t'shuvah* is to place His Ring on our finger once again. By this act the Holy One proclaimed "*You are forgiven, My Beloved!*". By this act our Bridegroom declared to us "*You are still – and will be forever - My am segulah!*" By this repetition of the central vow of the *Aseret HaDibrot* [Ten "Commandments"], the Holy One said, for all time "*Our covenant endures, My Sister, My Bride!*"

The Message of Restoration – the 'Good News' of Torah

Moshe will in this week's passages bring us into full awareness of this wonderful *good news*. Our *t'shuvah* [repentance and full return to His ways] has *touched the heart of our Betrothed Bridegroom* at a 'deep calls unto Deep' level. We are *forgiven!* Our relationship is *restored!* We have *another chance to be who He created and called us to be!* What *grace!* What *love!* What *goodness!* The Holy One be praised! "***Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty! The whole earth is full of His Glory!***"

Among the rabbis the day of the assembly we study in today's aliyah is believed to have been *the day after the first Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement). After all, according to the sages it was on *Yom Kippur* that the Divine Bridegroom accepted Israel's *t'shuvah*, announced to Moshe His forgiveness of the Redeemed Community, and gave him the new tablets of testimony to take back to renew and seal the covenant of betrothal. It was therefore most likely on the first day after *Yom Kippur* when Moshe called the assembly we have been talking about and the nation left their tents to return to and bask in our Divine Bridegroom's Presence. Perhaps now we can understand why each year after sunset on *Yom Kippur* we feel the urge to rush out to begin to build our *Sukkah* for *Moed Ha-Sukkot* [the Feast of Tabernacles]. Why do we do this? Why do we get the urge to "build", like a woman in labor gets the urge to "push"? It is the knowledge that *our sins are forgiven*. It is the knowledge that the Holy One desires to *dwell in our midst and commune with us and speak with us*. We want to give Him a place to do that.

In light of the forgiveness of sins that has already been accomplished [it happened "on the mountain" long ago] we simply must *build*. We hasten to *start over* in our relationship. We recognize our journey from Egypt is *still not over* – it is, indeed, *just beginning*. We recognize we have not "arrived" but are still in transition. We acknowledge He is our Source, our Provision, our Protection, and our Reason for Living. We return to His *sukkah shalom* [tabernacle of peace], and commit once again to *go wherever He leads us*. We stare out at the canopy of Heaven in great

anticipation. We cannot wait to once again hear His Words – the Words of Torah – the Words of Life. What does this have to do with the *Sabbath*, you ask? Ah Beloved, that is the most wonderful revelation of all. The Shabbat is both a remembrance of the intimacy man knew with his Creator in the Garden of Eden and a foretaste of the joy and blessing and shalom that will be ours in the World-to-Come. The Shabbat is the realm in which Messiah is truly Lord, because in the Shabbat *He gets all the glory*.

The Shabbat is the Holy One's 'wedding ring'. It is the sign we are to wear to declare we are His Betrothed. *May His ring never hurt your finger!*

Making A Real, World-Changing Statement

In our world *assemblies* and *congregations* of every stripe and doctrinal statement come together several times a week on a regular schedule. They come and they go, and religious meeting after religious meeting is held, and almost never does anything significant – at least in the spiritual realm – ever change. The act of assembling or congregating, as men of earth practice those concepts, you see, are just human actions, and can only generate *human results*. Such actions make a statement, it is true – but the statement they make is, well ... alas, it is *anything but world changing*. Stepping forth from the Radiant Cloud of the Holy One's Presence and calling a PEOPLE into their prophetic calling as *a throng of witnesses*, and commemorating the Seventh Day of Creation by refraining from ordinary work and the lighting of fires in our dwellings as Moshe called us to do in the opening lines of parsha *Vayakhel*, on the other hand, makes a statement that changes the world forever. Such a message has to do, you see, with *the gathering together* by the Holy One of Divinely empowered Sparks, *the building of a Holy Fire* with such Sparks, and *the employment of that Holy Fire in the Divine process of healing the fractured souls of mankind*.

What He wants us to build on the desert floor at Sinai is far more than a structure. It is far more than a tent. It is far more than curtains and furniture. Our task in life, you see, is to build *HIS WORDS*. His Words of Life are to function as the blueprint for every breath we take and every move we make. And the day-to-day activities and conversations and interactions and relationships and disciplines of our lives are to form a magnificent edifice that will bring Glory to Him, and only to Him. Are you catching it yet? Perhaps it will help if I paraphrase the text of our opening verse as follows: ***The words which the Holy One has spoken -- build them!*** Exodus 35:1 (Rabbi's son translation). The verb our English Bibles translate as "do" in verse 1 (which I have translated as "build") is *asah*¹⁰. This ancient Hebrew verb root literally means not just to "do", but to *fashion*, to *accomplish*, to *make*, to *build* – in other

¹⁰ *Asah* is Strong's Hebrew word #6213. It is pronounced *aw-saw'*.

word, to take something (i.e. some raw material) and interact with it in real time in such a way as to make/build something tangible and valuable and beautiful out of it. I will give you some Scriptural examples of the use of the word **asah** to illustrate.

And God made [asah] the firmament, and divided the waters which under the firmament from the waters which [were] above the firmament: and it was so.
[Genesis 1:7]

And God said 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding [asah] seed [and] the fruit tree yielding [asah] fruit after his kind
[Genesis 1:11]

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made [asah]; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had made [asah].
[Genesis 2:2]

And the Holy One God said, [It is] not good that the man should be alone; I will make [asah] him a help meet for him.
[Genesis 2:18]

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they [were] naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made [asah] themselves aprons.
[Genesis 3:7]

*Make [asah] for yourself an ark of gopher wood ;
Make [asah] rooms in the ark, and pitch it within and without with pitch .*
[Genesis 6:14]

Do you get the picture? When the Holy One tells us to *asah* His words, He means for us to do much more than “do” or ‘obey’ them in some mechanical, legalistic way. He doesn’t intend for us to ‘observe’ them. He certainly doesn’t intend for us to ‘fulfill’ them. What He intends for us to do with them is to *build* them. Wow. Consider what it would mean for us to actually build His Words! It is truly a *radical concept!*

A Totally Radical Building Project!

The Creator of the Universe actually intends for those of us in covenant with Him to *interact with His words and instructions for living the way a potter interacts with clay*. He intends for every single one of us to *apply our own unique level and type of creative (actually, co-creative) energy to them*. He intends for each of us to form from His Words something slightly different in *appearance and style* from that which every other one of us forms and shapes -- yet something that is, at the same time, *identical in essence*.

So how do you “build” the Holy One’s Words, you may ask? *You interact with them in such a way as to make them substantive, something tangible, valuable, useful, and beautiful out of them*. You make His Words – the instructions of His Torah – the building block of your life. By *studying, meditating upon, speaking*

forth, and walking out the *mitzvot* of Torah, by *His* genius, but by using our eyes, minds, mouths, hands, and feet, our lives become the most important “building project” of mankind’s history. And now perhaps you can understand how this ultimate “building project” of the Holy One – i.e. real human lives which cause the creative Words of our Divine Bridegroom visible and tangible and meaningful to the world in real time - was foreshadowed in the instructions for the building of the *Mish’kan*.

Questions for Today’s Study

1. After Moshe returned from Mount Sinai glowing from the glory of God’s presence and bearing the second tablets of the Testimony he assembled the people together and began to go over the Lord’s instructions once again.

[A] What subject did he cover first?

[B] Why do you think this was the first subject the Holy One chose to cover after the golden calf incident?

[C] Why do you think the Holy One declared that someone who refused to rest on Shabbat should die?

2. In the Haftarah reading for *Vayakhel* Shlomo [Solomon] is preparing to build the Temple in *Y’rushalayim* [Jerusalem].

[A] Who does Sh’lomo call to oversee the work on the Temple?

[B] Of what nationality was this person’s father?

[C] Of what tribe was this person’s mother?

[D] Our text says that this person was ‘filled’ with *wisdom*, with *understanding*, and *skill* [KJV, cunning]. In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up the Hebrew words which our English Bibles translate as wisdom, understanding and cunning in this passage. They are Strong’s Hebrew word #s 2451¹¹, 8394¹², and 1847¹³, respectively. Write each Hebrew word in Hebrew letters, with appropriate vowel markings, and search out and write the verb root of each word. Review the usages of each word, and its root, in Strong’s listing section. Then review Gesenius’ notes on both the words in question and their verb roots. Complete the

¹¹ Strong’s Hebrew word #2451 is *chokmah*, *chet*, *kaf*, *mem*, *hey*, pronounced *hok-maw’*. The first Biblical usage is Exodus 28:3. The verb root is *chakam*, *chet*, *kaf*, *mem*, Strong’s Hebrew word #2449, pronounced *khaw-kawm’*, first used in Exodus 1:10.

¹² Strong’s Hebrew word #8394 is *t’bunah*, *tav*, *beit*, *vav*, *nun*, *hey*, pronounced *teh-boo-naw’*. The first Biblical usage is in Exodus 31:3. The verb root is *biyn*, *beit*, *yod*, *nun sofit*, Strong’s Hebrew word #995, pronounced similar to the English word *bean*. The first Biblical usage of this verb root is in Genesis 41:33 [in reference to Yosef].

¹³ Strong’s Hebrew word #1847 is *da’at*, *dalet*, *ayin*, *tav*, pronounced *dah’-awt*. It’s first Biblical usage is in Genesis 2:9 – to describe what the forbidden fruit gave concerning good and evil. The verb root is *yada*, *yod*, *dalet*, *ayin*, Strong’s Hebrew word #3045, pronounced *yaw-daw’*. The first Biblical usage of this verb root is in Genesis 3:5.

exercise by describing the Hebraic word picture you see developing around each of the words.

3. Our B'rit Chadasha reading corresponding to parsha *Vayakhel* is found in Shaul's second letter to the talmidim of Messiah in the Greek city of Corinth. In II Corinthians 9:1-5 we read that *Shaul of Tarsus* [i.e. Paul] is desiring to take a gift of moneys to the believers in Y'rushalayim.

It is indeed unnecessary for me to write to you concerning the service to the holy ones, for I know your readiness, of which I boast on your behalf to them of Macedonia, that Achaia has been prepared for a year past. Your zeal has stirred up very many of them. But I have sent the brothers that our boasting on your behalf may not be in vain in this respect, that, just as I said, you may be prepared, so that I won't by any means, if there come with me any of Macedonia and find you unprepared, we (to say nothing of you) should be disappointed in this confident boasting.

I thought it necessary therefore to entreat the brothers that they would go before to you, and arrange ahead of time the generous gift that you promised before, that the same might be ready as a matter of generosity, and not of greediness.

Remember this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. He who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

[II Corinthians 9:1-6]

[A] Why do the believers in Y'rushalayim need money?

[B] What does Shaul mean by his statements about sowing and reaping in verse 6?

*May the life you **asah** become more beautiful –and more like the Divine Pattern - each day.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Haggai 1:1-8

In the second year of Daryavesh [Darius] the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, the Word of the Holy One came by Haggai, the prophet, to Zerubbavel, the son of She'alti'el, governor of Y'hudah, and to Y'hoshua, the son of Yehotzadak, the Kohen Gadol, saying,

"This is what the Holy One of Hosts says: "These people say, 'The time hasn't yet come, the time for the Holy One's house to be built.'"

Then the Word of the Holy One came by Haggai, the prophet, saying, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies waste?"

Now therefore this is what the Holy One of Hosts says:

"Consider your ways. You have sown much, and bring in little. You eat, but you don't have enough. You drink, but you aren't filled with drink. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm, and he who earns wages earns wages

to put them into a bag with holes in it."

This is what the Holy One of Hosts says: "Consider your ways.

Go up to the mountain, bring wood, and build the house.

I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified," says the Holy One.