

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah B'chukotai:*** **Leviticus 27:1-34**
 Haftarah: **Jeremiah 17:9-14**
 B'rit Chadasha: **John 14:19-21**

Everything that is cherem is holy of holies to the Holy One.

[Leviticus 27:30(c)]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 102:15-22;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 4, *Ga'al* [the Petition for Redemption]

Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor – Then the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying ...
Daber el-B'nei Yisra'el v'amarta aleihem – speak to B'nei Yisrael, and say to them ...
ish ki yafli neder b'erkeicha nefashot l'Adonai – a man, when he vows to dedicate a living soul to the Holy One **Leviticus 27:1-2.**

Alas, the time has come. This is the day that we conclude our study of *Sefer Vayikra* [the Book of Leviticus] – i.e. the Book that defines our *new, redeemed man and nation* lifestyle with more clarity than any other. Parting with the Book of Divine Calling is indeed a sweet sorrow. A *new sefer* of Torah awaits us, of course – but for the sake of the world let us hope that the sweet fragrance of Vayikra lingers on in our hearts. We will need the lessons of love this Book teaches us if we are to survive the challenges of the next *sefer* - *B'midbar* – without losing our tenderness toward the Holy One and our fellow men.

A few weeks ago when we first opened the third *sefer* of Torah I expressed the hope that all of you who engage in these studies will come to know and call this beautiful book by its “real” name – *Vayikra* [“and He called”] – instead of its Latin nickname, “Leviticus”. I told you at that time that the book we were about to study had very little to do with the “*laws of the Levites*”, and everything to do with the substance – the depth, breadth, height and circumference - of *our Bridegroom-King's calling* upon our lives. I told you that this Book is about *what being called unto the Bridegroom-King means* in real time. The subject matter of the Book, you see, is Kingdom Protocol – i.e. *how we are to approach our King in response to His calling* of us, and about *how that approach should change us forever*. I explained that the entire theme of the book is summed up in its very important first phrase – *and He called*. I explained that what this book is all about is the Holy One's calling for His people to approach Him – much the way Ahasuerus of Persia called Esther by extending his scepter to her. I opined at that time that the reason this *sefer* is in the

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Torah is because the Divine Author wants His people to know how to *approach and commune with Him*, how to *know Him intimately*, how to *walk with Him*, how to *love Him*, and how to *progressively mature into His Pure, Spotless, Bride*, so they can represent Him well to the people and nations of the earth. I explained that the book of Leviticus is not, in contrast to what its Latin nickname implies, a book for “Levites”, nor is it, as seminarians over the centuries have portrayed it, an outmoded book of regulations for a superseded priesthood; it is instead *the genetic blueprint of new creations of God – a part of every redeemed person’s DNA*.

A Few Final Bridal Instructions

Vayikra is an instruction manual for intimate, on-going relationship with - and service to – our King. What does the subject matter we study today – vows and the price of redemption for or relative to them – have to do with intimate relationship and service to the Holy One? What does the protocol for bringing about redemption from the making of rash vows have to do with the Divine Bridegroom’s recipe for diligently and sometimes painfully removing every spot, wrinkle and blemish from our lives, as well as everything that hinders full-out passionate Bridal love? Think about it. Whoever heard of a Bride embarking on a new life in the home of her Bridegroom without making a vow – a *vow of special dedication*? The whole book has been about preparing to be a Bride to the Creator of the Universe without spot or wrinkle. How can one become a Bride without understanding and embracing the protocol of making dedicatory vows?

The Context of the Holy One’s Instructions Concerning Vows of Separation

Please note that the Holy One’s Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover Protocol did not by any means *begin* with the Bride-candidate making vows of separation. The discussion of vows has instead been reserved for the very end of the makeover process. Vows of separation should never be made by *conflicted hearts* – hearts with *divided/fragmented loyalties* - however passionate and committed those hearts may in blissful ignorance think themselves to be. Vows of separation should only be made by *mature lovers who have counted the cost of permanent commitment* and who have notwithstanding the cost *sold out completely never to even look much less turn back* from their covenantal commitment – *even if it kills them*. Such vows are not for infatuated pleasure-seekers whose idea of love is a knight in shining armor riding to their rescue, a sugar-daddy lavishing gifts on them, and/or a playmate which whom they can play “dress-up” and “house” while servants cook, clean, entertain, and pay the bills.

The Divine Romance is, of course, dreamily wonderful. It is positively the highest level of relationship and purpose a human being can experience. But those who participate have to understand that the commitment it requires is very, very real. It

is stunningly substantive. It is totally consuming. And it is absolutely forever. So the Divine Bridegroom ordained that His Betrothed Bride first be taught Divine love, then be bathed and washed and purified in Divine love, and made to feel completely secure and at home in Divine love, before she even think of making a vow of separation. Hence the Holy One's teachings about vows of separation come at the end, not at the beginning. And they are spoken only in the context of the stunning teaching of today's aliyah – where the Holy One laid out clearly the conditions for restoration of a remnant of His people who will in the end of times make *t'shuvah* and will *acknowledge as wise and completely righteous judgments and wholeheartedly heed the corrective disciplines* which the Holy One imposes on them even as they *return to a proper relationship with His Torah*.

If one does not have a firm grasp on the truth of Leviticus 26:39-45, for instance, any vows of separation that a person – or nation - might make would mean very little. After all, in those six short verses the Holy One prophesied through Moshe of a glorious future day when the scales will fall off the eyes of vast numbers of descendants of Avraham who have strayed from the way of true intimate relationship with the Holy One and gone chasing after trends, causes, traditions, philosophies, ideologies, movements, secularism, humanism, and diverse forms of man-focused social, political, and religious structure. As Shaul of Tarsus will later proclaim concerning this very promise of the Holy One:

*I do not desire, brothers, to have you ignorant of this mystery,
so that you won't be wise in your own conceits,
that a partial hardening has happened to Yisra'el, until the fullness of the Goyim has come in,
and so all Yisra'el will be saved. Even as it is written,
"There will come out of Tziyon the Deliverer,
and he will turn away ungodliness from Ya'akov.
This is my covenant to them, when I will take away their sins."
[Romans 11:25-27]*

The beauty and sweeping nature of the prophetic announcement of the Holy One in yesterday's aliyah of ***B'chukotai*** is just as overwhelming in prophetic significance. Let's read it together. As you read it, ask yourself if these verses prophesy of *you*.

*They will confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers,
in their trespass which they trespassed against me,
and also that, because they walked contrary to me, I also walked contrary to them,
and brought them into the land of their enemies:
if then their uncircumcised heart be humbled,
and they then accept of the avon [i.e. crookedness/depravity] of their iniquity;
then will I remember my covenant with Ya'akov; and also my covenant with Yitzchak,
and also my covenant with Avraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.
The land also will be left by them, and will enjoy its Shabbatot,
while it lies desolate without them:
and they will accept of the avon [i.e. crookedness/depravity] of their iniquity;*

because, even because they rejected my ordinances, and their soul abhorred my statutes.

*Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies,
I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly,
and to break my covenant with them; for I am the Holy One their God;
but I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors,
whom I brought forth out of the land of Mitzrayim in the sight of the nations,
that I might be their God: I am the Holy One.*

[Leviticus 26:40-45]

The Creator has been using our very special time alone together at Sinai to the fullest. He is making the best of the opportunity this get together provides to bond with His Betrothed Bride-to-be. He is giving us a good head start on the pathway toward becoming *bone of His bone* and *flesh of His flesh*. Over the past ten months or so He has been patiently unveiling for us layer after layer and facet after facet of His *beautiful persona*. He has, simultaneously, been walking us through stage after stage, phase after phase, and component after component of His glorious plan for us to co-labor with Him in bringing His Kingdom to bear on the earth as it is in the Heavens. He has been downloading revelation to us in billowing wave after billowing wave. We have been enthralled by visitation after visitation, discourse after discourse, and prophetic picture after prophetic picture. There have been a few hiccups along the way, of course – and some of them have been major. But through it all, for the sake of His Covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov – and for the sake of His grand Redemptive Plan - the Bridegroom-King has remained faithful to His Covenant with our forefathers. He never left us or forsook us, even when we were at our worst. He just kept following up with us to make sure we learned the lessons of love, overcame our failures, transcended our folly, and matured in *emunah* in the process.

Will we be able to make the '*new essential us*' that our Bridegroom-King is calling forth function under higher levels of pressure? Will we even be able to make all this revelation we have been receiving 'work' in the desert, much less make it to, and then grow to maturity in, the land of larger-than-life patriarchs and more terrifying than death giants? For that matter, are we sure we even really understand Who it is that has been speaking to us, walking with us, taking responsibility for us? Though He is a perfect *echad*, He is content to go by many 'names'². He is equally at shalom being called *Elohim*³, *YHVH*⁴, *El Shaddai*⁵,

² The Creator has one, unified character and persona – i.e. one '*shem*'. But the English word 'name' is not nearly as inclusive or descriptive in scope as the Hebrew word *shem*. The English word 'name' just means a title by which someone is known. The Holy One has many such titles, and calls Himself by several, because each of these 'names' describes or highlights some essential aspect of His glorious character and persona. None of these 'names' is, however, intended to be exclusive. None can replace or displace any other.

³ *Elohim* is the first 'name' by which the Holy One is introduced in the Torah. See Genesis 1:1 in the Hebrew text: *B'reshit bara Elohim et-ha-shamayim v'et ha-aretz*.

Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh, *Elyon*⁶, and many, many more titles. Why is He not concerned about us all using one, and only one, ‘name’ for Him? Because He knows that He consists of infinitely more substance than any one name – or any ten thousand names, for that matter – can capture. His persona is more grand and glorious than any human tongue, using any human language, can even begin to describe. In the most recent downloads of Sinaitic revelation the aspect of His persona to which the Holy One has been directing our attention is the *Go’el* – i.e. kinsman-redeemer – component of Who He is. He has been teaching us, training us, and re-programming us, to look at every person and every situation in the world through the eyes of a kinsman-redeemer instead of a judge. Whatever mess a person has gotten into, He never focuses on how the person got there, on who was to blame, or on how horrible the mess is. He always stays focused on what needs to be done to effectuate *ge’ulah* – i.e. redemption. Every word of *Vayikra* that comes after the episode of the blasphemer [Leviticus 24:10-23] introduces and expounds upon this theme. I call these concluding chapters of *Vayikra* the ‘*Redemption Discourse*’.

As a result of the Great Sinaitic Download we have been marked forever as *His private garden*. He tilled the fallow soil of our Hebrew souls with the stunning miracles, signs, and wonders He performed for us as He was leading us from bondage. He imprinted the Passover story into our DNA in indelible ink. He led us to Sinai personally, in a pillar of fire by night and cloud by day. He is preparing us – individually and collectively – to live, to thrive, and to produce generation after generation of spiritual fruit in the world. He has promised to make those of us who *sh’ma* His Voice and *sh’mar* His Covenant into His *special treasure people*, His *royal ambassadors/courtiers of His kingdom*, and His *set-apart nation*. He knows what set of circumstances it will take for each of us to sprout, to form a root system, to send forth branches, to produce leaves that testify of the new species of which we are apart, to burst into fragrant bloom, and to bear fruit. He has written all our days in a Book. He knows when, and how, and why, each of us will sometimes falter, other times fail – and therefore need atonement. He has covered that need as well. He has prepared us to overcome every situation, to receive and

⁴ The tetragramaton designation [i.e. YHWH] was first introduced in Genesis 2:4: *Eleh toledot ha-shamayim v’ha-aretz b’hibare’am b’yom asot YHVH Elohim eretz v’shamayim*. This author strongly discourages arguments over, or even strong beliefs about, how the tetragramaton should be pronounced. Since there is no way to know how the Holy One Himself pronounced it when He described Himself to Moshe, all an obsession over the pronunciation will do is cause distraction, division, and pseudo-intellectual arrogance, and have no positive benefit to the Kingdom whatever.

⁵ The moniker *El Shaddai* was announced by the Holy One Himself to Avraham in Genesis 17:1: *Ani El-Shaddai hithalech lefanai v’heyeh tamim*.

⁶ The appellation ‘Elyon’ was introduced in the narrative of Avram’s interaction with Melki-Tzedek. Melki-Tzedek was identified as *kohen l’El Elyon* [i.e. a priest unto the Most High God].

dispense new mercies every morning, and to add a new chapter to His story every day.

Entering the Brave New Realm of “I Promise”, “I Pledge”, and “I Will”

The aliyah we will study today has to do with what happens when we foolishly step off into the realm of ‘I Promise’, ‘I Pledge’, or “I Will ...”, or “I Won’t ...”, and/or other declarations of what we will or will not do in the future. The future is the Holy One’s realm, not ours. It is His, and His alone, to say “I Will”. When we decide to play Divinity, and wax eloquent, we not only overstep our authority, leave our area of expertise, and outrun our supply line, we presumptuously invade His special area of providence – the realm of “I Will” and “I Won’t” - and thereby desecrate His Name.

Alas, we insist on doing it still. We say instead of do; we talk instead of act; and we promise instead of perform. We forget that we are, when we make a promise, vow, or declaration concerning the future, assuming facts not in evidence, and leaping headlong into a vast unknown realm over which we have no control - where only the Holy One Himself knows what will – and can – happen. As we take this quantum leap, we sometimes believe that we are doing the Holy One a service. Other times His Will and Plan never even enter our mind. But every time we make a promise, vow, or declaration regarding the future, what we are really doing is our own thing, for our own purposes.

We do not control the future – so why do we so often speak and act and make promises like we can? We do not know what the condition of our health, or our heart, our employment or finances, or the world, or the greater economic, political, or geo-physical situation in our nation will be even later today – much less months or years into the future. We do not know what competing demands, what limitations, what new challenges, or what more pressing priorities will be placing demands on us tomorrow. We do not even know if we will be alive another minute. So why do we promise people – or ourselves – that we will do things in the future?

Alas, however, the reality is that promises/vows/ and declarations in the “I Will”, “I Won’t”, “I Promise”, and “I Pledge” realm have become an expected aspect of personal and community life in most cultures. Do you tell your parents you will be home by 10:00? Do you tell your spouse you will pick up the dry cleaning? Do you tell your son you will take him to the ballgame? Do you tell your mother you will call her? Are you going to testify in a court of law? Do you want a friend to know you can be trusted to keep a secret? Do you want your chosen mate to promise to ‘love, cherish, and obey’ ‘til death do you part? Do you want to join an organization, institution, or a military force? Do you want to pledge allegiance to

your flag and country? For convenience in financial transactions do you ever use a credit or debit card, or write personal checks? Every time you do so you are making a promise/vow to pay. Do you want to buy or lease a dwelling or vehicle? Unless you have the purchase price in cash just lying around, you will have to take out a loan – and part of that loan will be a promise/vow to pay back what you have borrowed. It will involve papers, promises, and signatures. I could, of course, go on *ad infinitum*. Promise/vows are never required by the Holy One. But they seem to roll off the human tongue very, very easily, don't they. And since you do not control the future, in all or any of these situations, if you make a promise or vow, what you are doing is speaking presumptuously. The Holy One could make this a deal breaker – but He doesn't. He makes a way where there seems to be no way. He provides a protocol of redemption.

Getting Raw and Real

What specific kind of promises/vows is the Holy One talking about in the last chapter of *Vayikra*? Is He talking about a person making a commitment to serve at the *Mish'kan* at a particular time? Is He talking about a person making something like a Nazarite vow? Or is it something more to do with other relationships and/or ordinary affairs of life? Does what He is talking about include a vow to abstain from certain substances, activities, or behaviors? Does it include a vow of silence, or of self-denial, or of confidentiality, fiduciary responsibility, or secrecy? Does it include a pledge of allegiance, of support, or of troth? Does it include an oath of truthfulness as is made in court, a pledge of future installment payments as is made in debt transactions, or a vow of service such as is made when one joins an organization or takes a public office?

The Holy One is very vague in this regard. The scope of 'vow of dedication' is thus very, very broad. If it is about the future ... well, it is probably covered. So we can't cover all types of pledges, vows, or oaths in any detail in one study. Let us therefore focus, by way of example, on one kind of vow of dedication with which many of us may be familiar. Have you ever heard of a person vowing to follow the Torah, or Messiah, or to '*rededicate their life*' to the Holy One? It is not uncommon to hear of things like that. It sounds very spiritual when one does it. But what exactly does such a vow mean? Does the Holy One ever require – even suggest it? With regard to Torah, aren't we just supposed to *sh'ma* it – not add a step and first *vow to sh'ma, sh'mar, and asah* it? Aren't we supposed to 'just do it', rather than talk about doing it? Isn't the verbal commitment that our ancestors made at Sinai [i.e. *na'aseh v'nish'ma* commitment found in Exodus 24:7] more than enough? If you have ever dedicated or rededicated your life to the Holy One, to His Torah, or to follow Messiah, Dear One, you know what happens, don't you? It all starts with you feeling sorrow over your sins and/or guilt over your lapses in

discipline. You shed a few tears. You feel better. But then comes the next day. You have to face and deal with the same old temptations – and perhaps a few new ones. You find yourself confronted by irritations, aggravations and pet peeves. You get distracted. You get busy. You get tired. Stuff comes up. Your day goes south. You lose your peace. You lose your joy. You lose your temper. You lose your purity. And that ‘dedication/rededication’ thing? Well, perhaps one day you will repeat the whole process again

Not to worry. The Holy One wants you to take your words seriously, of course. Even your foolish, presumptuous excursions into the realm of “I Will”, “I Won’t”, “I Promise”, and “I Pledge”. He knows that serious fall-out – from the people in your social circle, and from your own guilt complex – will flow from the breaking of your vow of dedication/rededication. Fortunately, He knew exactly what kind of a folly-inclined mess He was dealing with before He ever cut covenant with you. He knew your weaknesses. He does not want you to think for a moment that this takes you beyond the point of redemption with Him. He names the price: fifty shekels if you are a man; thirty if you are a woman. And if you can’t afford that, the *kohen* will set a price you can afford. According to the Talmud, the *kohen* would do this by taking into consideration how much the person who would be paying the redemption price owned, discounted by whatever amount he would need to retain to cover his basic life necessities like a place to stay, a bed, a pillow, a chair/seat, and the tools he needs for his trade or skill. **Arachin 23b.**

With the Holy One, every situation is always about *redemption* – not about condemnation. It is always about *what we need to do to fix this* – instead of how bad a mess we managed to get ourselves in.

Where In Torah Are We Commanded – or Even Encouraged – to Make Vows?

Some things we do just because they are commanded. Our Beloved Bridegroom-King has spoken – and why would we not follow His wise instructions? Some things we do because we think that by reason of doing so they will receive a blessing. Other things we do because we are afraid that things will not go well for us if we do not. But the Holy One knows there is also a whole ‘other’ realm of motivation to which we as fallible human beings are uniquely susceptible. Animals don’t make commitments. Angels don’t either. That is a human thing – a thing that has passed down to us as a result of the ingestion of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Because of this it seems that some people in every generation wind up committing to go far beyond what the Holy One instructs us to do in Torah. Any time we commit to do things that are beyond the instructions of Torah, however, we go beyond the limits of our Bridegroom-King’s Divine Empowerment. And that is a very dangerous place for us to be. As the Master said:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

Sometimes a rash promise – a promise beyond the Torah level of Divine Empowerment – falls out of our mouths. Sometimes this happens in a moment of deep gratitude. Sometimes it falls out from a powerful sense of devotion. Sometimes it is rooted in desperation. Oft-times it is rooted in pride, a feeling of entitlement, and/or an attitude of presumption. Sometimes it is a combination of two or more of the above. But whatever the root of the motivation, it is potentially disastrous. Hence the final Divine Discourse of *Vayikra* begins with the following words:

Ish ki yafli neder

A man who consecrates by a vow ...
[Leviticus 27:2]

Never – nowhere in Torah - does the Holy One command us to make a promise or vow. Why then, do some people insist on making them? It is a good question, no?

What is a Vow, Anyway?

The Hebrew word that our English Bibles translate as ‘**vow**’ is *neder*⁷. The verb root of this Hebrew noun is **nadar**, meaning to fall out - particularly as grain falls out of a winnowing fork onto a threshing floor⁸. A *neder* is any promise – whether or not it is accompanied by an oath. A promise sometimes just ‘falls out’ of a man’s soul in the course of the winnowing processes of life and relationship. Hastily, whether out of emotion or due to pressure or subtle manipulation, a man promises to do something he cannot do, or be something he cannot be, or bring about a result he cannot bring about – at least presently, and without the future cooperation, authorization, assistance, and empowerment of the Holy One. If he could do it, he would just do it – not promise to do it. Instead, he promises to do it in the future. And he is not guaranteed so much as another breath – much less the ability to perform his ‘vow’ in the future. A *neder* is therefore just a rash promise that ‘falls out’.

Reckless Excursions into a Realm that Belongs to the Holy One Alone: Making Promises That You Have No Way of Knowing If You Will Be Able To Keep

Could the Holy One be trying to teach us something about humility, wisdom, kindness, and self-control here? Think about it. Every time you make a promise to another person several things happen.

⁷ Neder is *nun, dalet, resh*. Strong’s word # 5088, it is pronounced **neh'-der**.

⁸ See Gesenius’ Lexicon’s entry on the verb root **nadar**.

First of all, you create a whole *new set of expectations* that did not previously exist – and which you, rather than the Holy One, authored. We are ambassadors of a King. We are not supposed to be making commitments that He has not specifically authorized us to make. We are not to speak on our own authority; we are *men on a mission*. If we are going to accomplish that mission, we need to be men under our King’s authority – men who are *meek*, and who therefore speak only what our Father in Heaven has given us to say and to speak. **John 12:49**. Moreover, any set of expectations that we create with the promises of our mouths relate to and attempt to define the future. As *sh’ma*-people of the Holy One we should know very well that the future is beyond our control. Our circumstances could change dramatically in the blink of an eye. An illness could strike. We could be injured – or even killed. A weather event – or the outbreak of famine, pestilence or war - could occur that would make the fulfilling of our promise extremely difficult or even impossible. A higher priority – perhaps even a matter of life and death - could arise and demand our attention. Hence Ya’akov [i.e. the disciple the world has in the past few centuries come to know by the English name ‘James’] taught: *‘Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’. whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away, Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that”. But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.* **James 4:13-16**.

Secondly, the making of every promise puts the one who makes the promise under a form of bondage. Our first obligation of attention, devotion, and service is to our Bridegroom-King. He is our God, Who paid our price of redemption and brought us out of the house of bondage to betroth us to Himself every bit as effectively as He betrothed Himself to us. We are ‘His’ people. We are not free agents. To the extent we promise any attention, devotion, or act of service to another – at least without the Holy One’s express authorization – we compromise our calling and our mission. We create a conflict of interest. We divide our loyalties. Such a thing should never be taken lightly.

Thirdly, the making of a promise to another human being tends to create a ‘soul tie’/flesh bond between the maker and the recipient of the promise. With fallen man, a promise always implies a whole lot more than is actually promised. A promise always opens the door to *hopes and expectations of relationship above and beyond the subject matter of the actual promise*. As servants of Messiah, we need to keep in mind His ways of dealing with other people. As Yochanan [i.e. the disciple the world has come to know by the English name ‘John’] testified: *Yeshua did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men He knew what was in man.* **John 2:24-25**. And as the Master Himself said: *Just let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and*

your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. Matthew 5:37.

We are to love our neighbor as we ourselves are loved by the Holy One. **Leviticus 19:18.** We are even to love our enemies. **Matthew 5:44-45.** We do not need to make promises/vows to do that. As Shaul of Tarsus said: *Owe no one anything except to love one another.* Romans 13:8[a].

Confronting the Human Tendency to Speak Presumptively

Some things people – who mean well – commit themselves to do things beyond what the Bridegroom-King says they are to do they do simply because their flesh emotions and desire to serve – or be seen as serving – get the best of them. Have you done anything for that reason? The Book of Leviticus ends with an acknowledgement that even some of the People whom the Holy One has redeemed will from time to time fall into the trap of doing such things. At no point does the Holy One suggest that it is our duty – much less our calling - to do such things. All He is going to say about the matter is how to deal with the ‘fall-out’ when, as presumptuous speech always does, it threatens to go terribly wrong.

Yafli Neder – A Vow of Special Dedication

The final discussion in our review of our Divine Bridegroom’s protocols for the Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover have to do with vows of dedication. The aliyah begins with the Holy One telling Moshe to declare prophetically to the Covenant Community what is to happen at the prophetic *shadow box* we call the *Mish’kan* every time *Ish ki yafli neder...*[a man makes a vow of special dedication] The Holy One goes on to instruct everyone who voluntarily chooses to make a *yafli neder* – i.e. a vow of special dedication - to Him to *solemnize that vow before witnesses at the Mish’kan.* Part of the protocol the Holy One requires is the presentation by the person making the *neder* – i.e. vow or pledge - to the *kohen* of a *down payment* as it were – an earnest deposit on the vow in the form of *a recognizable medium of exchange like silver.*

The amount of silver appropriate as the earnest money varies depending upon the subject matter of the vow. If the subject of the vow of special dedication is *the life of a man between the ages of 20 and 60 years* the ‘down payment’ or earnest money for such a vow is set at 50 shekels of silver. If the subject of the vow is *a woman between 20 years of age and 60 years of age* the amount the person making the vow is to present to the priest at the *Mish’kan* is 30 shekels of silver. If the subject of a vow is *a child under age 20 or any person over age 60* the earnest money is set at different amounts depending upon the person’s gender.

With regard to a vow of special dedication one may wish to make relative to

anything other than a person – for instance a house, an animal, a vehicle, piece of personal property etc. – its monetary value is to be determined by the priest before whom the vow of special dedication is made.

There are more details given, and I will return to this subject briefly at the end of this shiur. What I want to talk about now however is why the Holy One chose to end the glorious book that I have dubbed ‘*The Protocol for the Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover*’ by setting forth a series of guidelines about the making of vows of separation/sanctification.

What is the Connection of Vows of Special Dedication to the Broader Themes of the Book?

What, you ask, does the making of vows have to do with the Divine Bridegroom’s recipe for diligently and sometimes painfully removing every spot, wrinkle and blemish from our lives, as well as everything that hinders full-out passionate Bridal love? Think about it, Beloved. I mean ... well ... whoever heard of a Bride embarking on a new life in the home of her Bridegroom without making a vow – a vow of special dedication? The whole book has been about preparing to be a Bride to the Creator of the Universe without spot or wrinkle. How can one become a Bride without understanding and embracing the protocol of making dedicatory vows?

Living in the Fall-Out Zone With Our Ancestor Ya’akov

The first Biblical usage of the Hebrew noun *neder* is found in Genesis, when the young fugitive Ya’akov was en route to Paddan-Aram. As you will recall, when it became too dark to travel any further, he stopped near *Beit-El* [*i.e.* Bethel] and lay his head down on a rock in hopes of getting some sleep. During the night he received a *paradigm-shifting* visitation from Heaven in the form of a stunning dream. In the dream in which he saw the Eternal One standing over him, speaking to him from atop a great staircase upon which angels were ascending and descending. He awoke astounded - awestruck. His worldview had just been totally changed. And do you remember what *fell out* of his mouth in those first few moments? Ya’akov blurted out a *neder*:

*If God will be with me, and keeps me in this way that I go,
and will gives me bread to eat, and raiment to put on,
so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then YHVH will be my God:
and this stone, which I have set [for] a pillar, will be God's house:
and of all that You give me I will surely give unto you a tenth.*

[Genesis 28:20-22]

Note the condition precedent of Ya’akov’s rash *neder*. He required the Creator of the Universe to do five things to activate his vow:

1. The Holy One had to *go with him* wherever he went;
2. The Holy One had to *keep him along the way*;
3. The Holy One had to *give him daily bread to eat*;
4. The Holy One had to *give him raiment to wear*;
5. The Holy One had to *bring him back to his father's house in shalom*.

Ya'akov dared to speak to the Creator of the Universe in this way? Yes – the young fellow got caught up in the moment, and ... well, it just *fell out*.

Note now what Ya'akov vowed to do if the Holy One met all five of his conditions precedent. First, the Creator of the Universe would be 'his God'. Second, the stone Ya'akov had set up as a memorial pillar at the site of the vision would 'be God's house'. And third, of all the Holy One would give Ya'akov in the place he was going, he would give the Holy One a tenth. Ya'akov thus spoke into existence *restrictions/limitations on a. his own freedom; b. the physical location at which he had experienced the dream, and 3. all the produce/property the Holy One would give into his hand in the future*. Of course, if you know our ancestor's story, you know that not one of these things worked out as he envisioned. His declarations were presumptuous. And there was no way he was able to bring to pass any of what he boldly declared.

Fortunately, none of the things that Ya'akov promised to do in this moment of great emotion was required of him by the Holy One. There had not been one single condition spoken from above the staircase. The Holy One had said: ***"I am the Holy One, God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzchak; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants will be as the dust of the earth; you will spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."*** Genesis 28:13-15. Ya'akov had been chosen – and was loved beyond measure - before he ever lay down to dream. But when he awoke, overcome with emotion and a racing mind, a bunch of other stuff *just fell out*.

The word our English Bibles translate as "singular", as an adjective modifying the noun *neder*, is form of the Hebrew word *pala*⁹. This word is from a verb root meaning *to do a miraculous work, or to perform an impossible task*. The first usage of this word in Torah is at Genesis 18:14

*Is anything too hard [pala] for the Holy One?
At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life,
and Sarah will have a son.*

⁹ Pala is *peh, lamed, alef*. Strong's Hebrew word # 6381, it is pronounced *paw-law'*.

An illustrative usage of the word is also found in Psalm 107, as follows:

*Oh that [men] would praise the Holy One [for] his goodness,
and [for] his wonderful works [**pala**] to the children of men!*

Only the Holy One can perform a *pala*. If a man promises/vows to perform a *pala*, what do you think will happen? He will fail. The *pala* will not be performed. And when the man fails, how will he be able to face the Holy One? The final discourse of Sefer Vayikra contains the Holy One's answers that question. He will allow a specified quantity of silver to be substituted for the actual performance that was promised. And under no circumstance will the silver necessary to discharge the debt be beyond the means of the person to pay.

The Numbering of Shekels

All of the verses we read today are spoken in the Divine Voice. These are not Moshe's words – they are the words of the Holy One Himself. One verse reads as follows:

*If your vow was to dedicate a male from 20 years old up to 60 years old,
then your redemption sum will be 50 shekels of silver,
according to the shekel of the sanctuary.*

If your *vow was to dedicate a female* [in that age group],
then your redemption price will be 30 shekels.

Wait a minute! Someone made a vow to dedicate a human being? Who *are* these people – and what were they thinking? Why would a man make a vow of dedication? How can a man make a vow of dedication over either himself or *another human being*? Isn't that being a bit irreverent and presumptuous?

And since we all know there is no provision for human sacrifice in the Torah, to what or for what, pray tell, is the person in question being dedicated? What on earth were we doing dedicating a human life - either our own or another's - in the first place? Alas, it is all too common. It is now considered a normal part of the human experience. Every day it seems we commit ourselves – and other people - to be at certain places. We commit ourselves, and even other people to do and/or refrain from doing specific things. We place burdens on ourselves, and sometimes on others, that are far in excess of the light yoke Torah places upon our shoulders. It may be about wanting to 'do the work of the Lord'; or it may be all about us - about our fleshly desire to be 'in control'. But it is the *ultimate form of human folly*.

In Biblical times a talent of silver represented approximately two years wages for a common laborer. There are 3000 shekels in a talent. Fifteen hundred shekels represented one year's wages for a common laborer. Fifty shekels thus represented a little less than two weeks' wages for a common laborer. That is not much in the

great scheme of things. The price of redemption is definitely right. Whether the man in question was a scholar, a tradesman, a beggar, or a slave, the price of redemption was the same. No matter what his health or wealth, the price of redemption was the same. No matter what his size or talent, work ethic or contribution to the community, the price of redemption remained the same. The Holy One is no respecter of persons, you see **Acts 10:34**. And He does not intend for us ever to be respecters of persons either. See **Deuteronomy 10:17 & 16:19; Job 34:21; and James 2:1**.

Why did the Holy One set the price of redemption of *a man of working age* from a vow of consecration he could not fulfill at fifty shekels instead of at some other number? We are not specifically told of the Bridegroom-King's reasoning, of course. But perhaps it is because the Hebrew letter that has the numerical value of fifty is the *nun*. The pictograph associated with the *nun* is that of a son or heir. The son/heir is the price. And the debt is 'paid in full'.

Thirty shekels for the redemption of *a woman* from a vow of consecration she cannot fulfill? Why thirty? Again we are not told. But perhaps it is because the Hebrew letter that has the numerical value of thirty is the *lamed*. The pictograph associated with the *lamed* is the goad or tongue – that which gives direction and instruction.

If the vow of consecration relates to *a child between the ages of 5 and 20 years*, the Holy One sets the standard price of redemption at 20 shekels for a male and 10 shekels for a female. Twenty is the number that corresponds to the Hebrew letter *kaf*. This is a pictograph of a winged creature in flight. Ten is the number that corresponds to the Hebrew letter *yod* – which pictures a hand unleashing creativity, releasing gifts, or expressing praise.

If the vow of consecration relates to *a child between the ages of one month and five years of age*, the Holy One sets the standard price of redemption at five for a male and three for a female. Five is the number that corresponds to the letter *hey* – which pictures a source of revelation and inspiration. Three is the number that corresponds to the letter *gimel* – which pictures the action of walking while bearing a burden.

If the vow of consecration relates to *a person over the age of sixty years*, the Holy One sets the price of redemption at fifteen shekels for a man, and ten shekels for a female. Fifteen is the number that corresponds to the name *Yah* [*yod, hey*] – i.e. the Holy One's most honored name. As aforesaid, ten is the number that corresponds to the letter *yod* – which pictures a hand unleashing creativity, releasing gifts, or expressing praise.

When It Comes to Redemption, the Price is Always Right

To date the Book of *Vayikra* has primarily focused upon what the Holy One calls us, as His holy nation, and kingdom of priests, to *be* and to *do*. But this focus ended with yesterday's aliyah. The remaining aliyot are not about what the Holy One *calls us* to do; they are about what happens when we make plans of our own design and speak them in the form of promises and/or vows. The Holy One wants us to deal with it when we boldly promise to do something or produce a result that seemed right to our own minds and consistent with our emotions at the moment - but which, when the rubber meets the road, we find ourselves unable to do or make happen.

M'shugah [i.e. crazy]

Yesterday as we read the wonderful array of blessings which the Holy One prophesied and released to accompany and flow forth out of Torah observance we had to think logically that the Holy One's People would just be "crazy" not to continue in His covenant and cling to the Holy One and to the wondrous ways of Torah with all their hearts, with all their souls, with all their minds, and with all their individual and collective strength. Then when we read today's aliyah and see in *Technicolor* as it were *the dire consequences of choosing our own way* and walking outside of the promised area of blessing again, and with even more conviction than before, we think to ourselves – we would have to be ***m'shugah*** [Hebrew for "crazy"].

But alas such "craziness" is a disease that has affected mankind throughout his generations to date. And I fear this disease is still very prevalent today! What is it in the human heart which rejects abundant, unspeakable, unfathomable blessings from a loving Bridegroom and insists on pursuing one's own way - even with detailed and graphic warning - and the example of generation after generation - of the natural consequences of such behavior? What is it that steals the hearts of the Holy One's People and causes them to walk away from their Divine Bridegroom's tender compassion and blessings? What is it that lures even people who think they are serving the Holy One into traps of false theologies which declare the eternal, unchanging words of the Holy One's mouth to be abrogated, fulfilled, superseded, 'old', and replaced with just a few vague suggestions which men can interpret any way they want - and which therefore quickly become meaningless? What is it that blinds people so badly that they cannot see the freight train of self-inflicted judgment coming as a consequence of abandonment of the Holy One's covenant? But Blessed be His Holy Name, the Holy One has provided a "treatment" and a "cure" for this "craziness". That is the subject of part of today's aliyah. As with any sickness, one cannot be treated or cured until he *realizes he is sick, decides he wants to be well, and seeks out the Physician who can heal*.

The Remnant Who Returns

Earlier this week the Holy One issued a prophetic declaration concerning a remnant who would return to Covenant faithfulness and the Torah lifestyle in the end of days:

*... if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt –
then I will remember My covenant with Ya'akov,
and My covenant with Yitzchak and My covenant with Avraham I will remember;*

*But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors,
whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations,
that I might be their God: I am the Holy One.”*

[Leviticus 26:41-42]

With these words the Divine Bridegroom of heaven *prophesied* of a yet future day and a yet future people – a day and a people that have been on His heart since before He created man in the first place. Peering through the millennia of history to the ‘end of days’ - which are to Him as only yesterday - He in His infinite wisdom knows *exactly how it is all going to end*. And He knows that in the end there will be upon the earth a *specially dedicated people* – a people who will love Him with all their heart and all their soul and all their strength, and who will long to *return to the garden, and eat of the tree of life*, and renounce and eschew forever the *poisonous fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.

The Divine Bridegroom of Heaven sees - and prophesies for His Bride – *a fitting and glorious end to the craziness*.

Who Is This Coming Up from the Wilderness?

One question remains however - *who will that final Bride-People at the end of history? Who will that repentant, returning, resplendent Bride-People - be?* In Psalm 102 an unnamed psalmist under the inspiration of the Holy One’s *Ruach Ha Qodesh* says:

*Let this be written for a future generation,
that a people not yet created may praise the Holy One”*

[Psalm 102:18]

Who are these ‘people not yet created’? What characteristics define them? When, and from whence, will they arise? The same inspired psalmist tells us:

*You will arise and have compassion on Tziyon,
for it is time to show favor to her;
The appointed time [Hebrew, mo’ed] has come.¹⁰*

¹⁰ Note the use of the Biblical word for a “festival”. Psalm 102, from which this quote is taken, is a prayer for *Yom Kippur*, the day of “atonement” identified in Leviticus 16 and in Leviticus 23:26-32; see also Numbers 29:7-11. The psalm was probably used in the Temple and/or in observant homes as a liturgy for

* * *

For the Holy One will rebuild Tziyon, and will appear in His Glory.

And He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;

He will not despise their plea.

[Psalm 102:13,16]

The people the Psalmist is describing are the people of *Tziyon* – i.e. those descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov who choose to *return to the Holy One and to His Torah*. They will not by any means be alone however. The psalmist tells us:

And the nations will fear the Name of the Holy One,

All the kings of the earth will revere your Glory.

* * *

So the Name of the Holy One will be declared in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem,

When the peoples and the kingdoms assemble to worship the Holy One

[Psalm 102:15, 21]

The prophet *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah] speaks further and more specifically of those who will join the remnant of Zion in the last days, the days of restoration:

*Neither let the foreigner, who has joined himself to the Holy One,
speak, saying, "The Holy One will surely separate me from his people;
neither let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."*

*For thus says the Holy One of the eunuchs who keep my Shabbatot,
and choose the things that please me, and hold fast my covenant:
To them will I give in my house and within my walls a memorial
and a name better than sons and of daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.*

*Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Holy One, to minister to him,
and to love the name of the Holy One, to be his servants,
everyone who keeps the Shabbat from profaning it, and holds fast my covenant;
even them will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer:
their olahot and their korbanot will be accepted on my altar;
for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.*

*The Holy One GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Yisra'el, says,
'Yet will I gather [others] to him, besides his own who are gathered.*

[Isaiah 56:3-7]

Our aliyah tells us who these 'people of Zion' will be. It will be those who:

[1] confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers,

*[2] confess that their **galut** [exile, dispersion, diaspora] has been a corrective discipline
from the Holy One, for rejecting His mish'patim **and** chukot;*

[3] humble themselves; and

that awesome day when the nation of Israel fasted, confessed their sins, and received atonement for its sins. Moreover it is prophetic of a future *Yom Kippur* – the *Yom Kippur* referred to in Zechariah 12:10 and 13:1. For further discussion and explanation of this concept and its prophetic implication see Monday's Study from parsha *Acharei Mot* and Thursday's Study from parsha *Emor*.

*[4] accept the Holy One's righteous discipline
[i.e. the prophetic time of 'Ya'akov's trouble'].*

When such a people arise from among the sons of Tziyon the Holy One says: *I am the Holy One their God!* Are you one of those people, Dear one?

Epilogue

The last section of *B'chukotai* – which I like to call the '*Redemption Discourse*' – lays out numerous instances in which a *kohen* of the Bridegroom-King may be called upon to address a difficult situation and assign a 'redemption price'. We are not called to be judges – we are called to be healers. We are not called to be problem-makers; we are called to be *problem solvers*. We are not called to be friction-causers; we are called to be *shalom asah*-ers [*i.e.* peace and wholeness makers/builders/shapers]. We are not called to bring wrath into every situation; we are called to bring the hope of redemption into every situation. And we are called to make redemption accessible and affordable to all. We are, you see, in the world at such a time as this to *pave a way for the Bridegroom-King's will to be done*, and to *provide a solid, safe, landing strip foundation upon which His Kingdom can come*, in this world as it is in Heaven.

See you in the wilderness, Beloved!

Questions For Today's Study

1. Does the Holy One ever command us to make vow? A promise? If your answer is 'yes', then where in the Scripture is that requirement?
2. What ramifications does the making of a promise or vow have upon one's personal freedom to imitate Yeshua by *speaking only the words we have heard from our Father*, to *seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and His/Its righteousness*, and to *'love the Holy One our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength'*?
3. The final aliyah of *B'chukotai* lays out numerous instances in which a *kohen* may be called upon to address a difficult situation and assign a 'redemption price'. List the circumstances you see in this aliyah under which one serving as a *kohen* of the Holy One might be called upon to set a price of redemption.
4. In the assigned verses from the Haftarah, Yirmayahu explores the mystery of the human "heart".

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt:
who can know it? I, the Holy One, search the mind,
I try the heart, even to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his doings.
As the partridge that sits on [eggs] that she has not laid,*

*so is he who gets riches, and not by right;
in the midst of his days they shall leave him, and at his end he will be a fool.
A glorious throne, [set] on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.
O HOLY ONE, the hope of Yisra'el,
all who forsake you shall be disappointed.
Those who depart from me shall be written in the eretz,
because they have forsaken the Holy One, the spring of living waters.
Heal me, O HOLY ONE, and I shall be healed;
save me, and I shall be saved: for you are my praise.
[Jeremiah 17:9-14]*

[A] Look up the word translated “heart”; write the Hebrew name and define it in your own words. [Hint: it’s not talking about the organ that pumps blood!]

[B] What two descriptions of the “heart” of a man does Yirmayahu give?

[C] Why does the Holy One “search” and “examine” our hearts/minds? Look up the two Hebrew words so translated; write and define them.

[D] When and how does the Holy One do this?

[E] In verses 12-14, Yirmayahu [Jeremiah] returns to prayer. Write an outline of his prayer. What is he seeking from the Holy One?

5. In today’s assigned reading from the B’rit Chadasha aliyah Messiah Yeshua is engaging with His *talmidim* for the final time prior to his atoning death. He has just told them He was leaving, but promised that He will not leave them as orphans. He has promised to ask the Father to send *Ruach HaQodesh* to be their rabbi, comforter, and empowerer. Yeshua’s last words to His *talmidim*, like the last words of *Vayikra*, were words about love, and actions which love will prove that love is real. He wants them – and us – to know what loving Him, even when He is not physically present with them/us in the flesh – consists of.

*Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more;
but you will see me. Because I live, you will live also.*

*In that day you will know that I am in my Father,
and you in me, and I in you.*

*One who has my mitzvot, and sh’mars them, that person is one who loves me.
One who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him,
and will reveal myself to him."*

[John 14:19-21]

It is now the time to move beyond merely doing things for blessing or to avoid judgment. It is time to explore the realm of *loving the Holy One* and *experiencing His love*.

[A] Yeshua speaks of a climactic redemptive event, planned by the Father from the foundation of the world, that is going to happen in “a little while”. What is He speaking about? Why is that event so important to the Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a species and the Restoration of Creation to its Edenic

potential?

[B] What does He say will be the difference between His talmidim and the world “in a little while”?

[C] What will Yeshua’s resurrection mean to His talmidim?

[D] What two things will talmidim of Yeshua know “when that day comes”?

[E] What do you think Yeshua means when He tells them that the world will ‘see Him no more’, but that His Disciples ‘will see Him’?

[F] What does Yeshua’s life ‘beyond the veil’- i.e. outside our vision – have to do with our life on earth in this age? How are the two life forces – i.e. His life and our individual lives - connected?

[G] As if to warn the talmidim how to distinguish between those who are truly His and those who merely say they are His, Yeshua identifies as those who “love” Him persons who meet two very specific and recognizable criteria. What are those two criteria?

[H] What two things will happen, according to Yeshua, to the person who truly “loves” Yeshua?

*Good Shabbos, Dear ones! **Chazak! Chazak! Venitchazeik!**
[“Be strong, be strong, and may we be strengthened”]*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 71:1-6 and Psalm 102:15-22

*In You, O Holy One, I put my trust; let me never be put to shame.
Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; Incline Your ear to me, and save me.
Be my strong refuge, to which I may resort continually;
You have given the commandment to save me,
For You are my rock and my fortress.*

*So the nations will fear the name of the Holy One; all the kings of the eretz your glory.
For the Holy One has built up Tziyon. He has appeared in his glory.
He has responded to the prayer of the destitute, and has not despised their prayer.*

*This will be written for the generation to come.
A people who will be created will praise the Holy One.
For he has looked down from the height of his sanctuary.
From heaven, the Holy One saw the eretz; to **hear the groans of the prisoner;**
To free those who are condemned to death;
That men may declare the name of the Holy One in Tziyon,
*And his praise in Y’rushalayim; when the peoples are gathered together -
the kingdoms, to serve the Holy One.**