

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah B'chukotai:** Leviticus 27:1-2
 Haftarah: Jeremiah 17:2-4
 B'rit Chadasha: I Peter 1:15

When a man dedicates [a person or thing] by a vow.

[Leviticus 27:2]

Today's *B'chukotai* Meditation is Psalm 71:1-6;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is 8th Petition, *Mishpat*, the Petition for Justice

Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor – i.e. And 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'erkecha nefashot l'Adonai – a man, when he vows to dedicate a soul to the Holy One Leviticus 27:1-2.

The Creator of the Heavens and the Earth has been using these precious months of 'alone time' with B'nei Yisrael to the fullest. In the shade of His Holy Mountain, while He still has our undivided attention, He has been downloading wisdom and revelation in billowing waves, unveiling layer after layer and facet after facet of His *beautiful persona*, and walking us through phase after phase and component after component of His glorious plan to bring His Kingdom to bear on the earth. 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 – and some of them have been major. But through them 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 empowered us to persevere and overcome.

We will never forget our time at Sinai. But are we getting/internalizing even half of what our Bridegroom-King is pouring out? Are we spilling more of His precious Betrothal Wine than we are drinking? Will we be able to make the '*new essential us*' that our Bridegroom-King is calling forth function under 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?

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For that matter, are we sure we even really know Who it is that has been speaking to us? Ever since the opening chapters of *Sefer B'reshit* He has been making it clear that, 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, *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 Identity and His Persona are 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 *Sefer 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*'. It can only be understood and appreciated by those who have been redeemed from a debt they could never pay and a form of bondage they could never escape, and have therefore seen the value and purpose of human life through a 'Redeemer's Eyes'.

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*. This focus of the book however ended with yesterday's aliyah. The three remaining aliyot of *Vayikra* deal with something a little different. They are not about what the Holy

² The Creator has one, unified character and persona –one '*shem*'. But the English word 'name' is not 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.***

⁴ The tetragramaton designation [i.e. YHVH] 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.***

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].

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.

The Making of 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 the Book of Bridal Calling starts with the following words: ***Ish ki yafli neder*** - *A man who consecrates by a vow* But wait! Never – nowhere in Torah - does the Holy One command us to make either a promise or a vow. Why then, do some people insist on making them? It is a good question, no?

Making Promises You Cannot 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.

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; like Yeshua our Rabbi 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 betrothe 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, Dear Reader? 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.

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’.

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

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*.

became too dark to travel any further, he stopped near *Beit-El* [KJV ‘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 Holy 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 give 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 YHVH, 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 any thing 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.*

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 set sum of money – actually, a specified quantity of silver – to be substituted for the actual performance that was promised. And under no circumstance will the money/silver necessary to discharge the debt be beyond the means of the person to pay.

Grace! Grace!

What we will hear in the rest of the passages of parsha *B'chukotai* is the essence of covenantal ‘*grace*’. Let us examine the situation. A vow has been made. It was not required by the Holy One (who does not require vows). It was not something the betrothal contract called for. But the man was stirred with passion and His dedication in a way “above and beyond” the calling of the Holy One.

Such things happen. Alas, however, when the time comes to make good on the

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

vow, the man finds he has not the means or the capacity to fulfill the vow. It is a *yafli neder* – a vow too difficult¹⁰ – like a young lover telling his betrothed “I will give you the moon and the stars”. And while the Holy One did not require that he to make the vow, to be holy as the Holy One is holy requires that he make good on his word. So what does he do?

The Holy One provides an alternative – a way of grace. He allows us to pay into the treasury of the *Mish'kan* a sum of money assigned by Torah as the “value of a soul” (i.e. the *nefesh*, which the Holy One breathed into him). What is more, if the man is too poor even for this, he just has to pay whatever amount the *kohen*, after carefully examining his situation, determines that he can afford. See **Leviticus 27:7**.

What is all this about, you may ask. *GRACE*, Beloved. Pure, unmitigated, *GRACE*. The Bridegroom-King does not want – and will not allow - us to owe Him any debt. He does not want us bound to Him by OBLIGATION. He wants us united with Him only by LOVE. He created us with all our capacities and limitations, and He knows them well.

Vayikra is therefore going to conclude with one final component of our Bridegroom-King’s plan of redemption. That is *pala* – a *yafli neder* - we are powerless to perform. That is where the Holy One comes in. He does for us what we are powerless to do. He is our covenant partner – our redeemer. He plays Boaz to our Ruth. He steps in, when we are powerless to effectuate our own redemption.

The word translated as “redeem” in this chapter is *ga'al*¹¹. It is a primitive verb meaning “kinsman's part”. It has to do with *fulfilling the obligations of a kinsman*, to “be one’s brother’s keeper” –whatever that entails. It may mean to purchase a brother who has become a slave, or to marry his widow so as to raise up children to him, or to avenge his murder, or purchase his ancestral estate. In this case, it means that *The Holy One, as our redeemer, will make up the difference with*

¹⁰ The root word is *pala* (peh, lamed, aleph, Strong’s Hebrew word #6381), meaning “difficult”, or “miraculous”. It is the same word used by Yirmayahu and by The Holy One in the haftarah for Parsha *B’har*, when Yirmayahu says “Nothing is too difficult (*pala*) for You [the Holy One]”, and the Holy One replies “Is anything too difficult (*pala*) for Me?”. See chapter 32 of Sefer *Yirmayahu* [Jeremiah], and the haftarah discussion from Tuesday’s aliyah of Parsha *B’har*. Do not be misled by the fact that the word in our text is *yafli* instead of *pala*. The yod (y) in *yafli* is a prefix, and the “f”, in Hebrew, is *peh* (in some instances pronounced ‘fey’), the same letter as which makes the “p” sound.

¹¹ *Ga'al* is *gimel, alef, vav, lamed*. It is Strong’s Hebrew word # 1350.

regard to any obligation we have to Him over and above what we are able to perform.

You cannot save yourself, Dear Reader - but your redeemer is there for you, to provide for you what you cannot effectuate for yourself.

You cannot fulfill Torah – but your redeemer is there for you, to make up the difference between that which you are capable of doing, and that which the essence of Torah entails. What you can do, do with all your heart. And leave the rest in the Holy One’s capable hands.

And if someone else in this world has made promises to you and has not kept them, or has made solemn vows to you and then broken them, perhaps now you can see that mercy and forgiveness, not judgment, is the natural and appropriate response. We are to be imitators of our Bridegroom-King.

Further Study Questions Relative to Today’s Aliyah

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 haftarah reading for today is Yirmayahu 17:2-4, which reads as follows:

*While their children remember their altars and their wooden images
by the green trees on the high hills.
O My mountain in the field,
I will give your wealth, all your treasures, as plunder,
and your high places of sin within all your borders.
And you, even yourself, will let go of your heritage which I gave you;
And I will cause you to serve your enemies in the land which you do not know;
For you have kindled a fire in My anger which will burn forever*

[A] What particular breaches of covenant does the Holy One say [as translated into English, at least] will cause His anger to burn forever?

[B] In Strong’s concordance and Gesenius’ lexicon, look up the Hebrew words our English Bibles translate as ‘anger’ and ‘burn’ in verse 4. What are those Hebrew verbs, and what is the essential meaning and word picture for each?

4. In today's assigned reading from the B'rit Chadasha Kefa tells us, as the Holy One told His Redeemed Community recently in Parsha *K'doshim*:

... as He who called you is holy, you are also to be holy in all your conduct

List at least five elements of what you think being holy as our Bridegroom-King in Heaven is holy looks like in real life.

May the people of the Holy One again begin to sh'ma His words as a bride sh'ma's the voice of her bridegroom. And may the abundant blessings of the covenant follow us, and change the atmosphere, wherever we go.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 71:1-6

*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.
Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked,
Out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.
For You are my hope, O Holy One GOD; You are my trust from my youth.
By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He
who took me out of my mother's womb.
My praise will be continually of You.*