

Introduction to Parsha #34: B'midbar¹

READINGS: ***Torah B'midbar:*** **Numbers 1:1 – 4:20**
 Haftarah: **Hosea 1:10 – 2:23**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Cor. 12:7 – 13:3**



Then the Holy One spoke to Moshe b'midbar [i.e. in the desert] of Sinai.
[Numbers 1:1]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 5, *Rofei* - the Petition for Healing

Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe – *And the Holy One spoke to Moshe ...* ***b'midbar Sinai*** – *in the wilderness of Sinai ...* ***b'Ohel Mo'ed*** – *at the tent of witness ...* **Numbers 1:1a.**

Welcome to the season of the year in which we draw instruction and inspiration from the fourth book of Torah – *Sefer B'midbar*. In the course of this Book our Creator will allure us away from the sweet shade of Sinai into the dry, barren wilderness that separates His Holy Mountain of revelation from His Holy Land of strategic activation. Unbeknownst to us, while we were busy basking in His Manifest Presence at Sinai the Holy One has had His hosts out in the wilderness preparing an obstacle course for us to traverse – an obstacle course designed to train us in the disciplines of stewarding Kingdom Kedusha on the one hand, and in the practical application of the problem-solving methodologies He has been teaching us, on the other hand. Gird up your loins, Beloved! it is time to *put* up ... or *shut* up. This obstacle course the Hosts of Heaven have created will either make us ... or it will break us.

The adventures that await us in the wilderness East of Sinai will challenge us to the core. The terrain will be treacherous. The heat we encounter in the daylight hours will be intense. The nights will chill us to the bone. Dust storms will wear us out. *Shalom* will be hard to find; a joyful countenance will be a challenge to maintain;

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and hope for the future and trust in the Holy One's Plan will prove difficult to hold onto. We will start hearing strange voices whispering to us on each breeze – and often inside our own heads. Oases will be few and far between. Predatory beasts, jackals, serpents, and spirits will congregate at those oases – and vultures will circle them. The ominous howling of hyenas will be our portion at night; the screeching of birds of prey and the cackling of spirits of uncleanness will bombard our ears by day. Some of the human cultures we meet along the way will gnash their teeth at us; some will try to cast occult spells over us; others will charge at us headlong with drawn swords. Of these things, however, we are confident: our King is good; He knows what He is doing; He knows what we are – and are not – capable of; He knows exactly what it will take to get us to the place that He has prepared for us; and He will never, ever, under any circumstances, leave, forsake, abuse, neglect, or abandon us along the way.

Yeshua endured 40 long days of testing in the Wilderness at the hands of ha-Satan; for us the Wilderness-testing season will last forty long *years*. Over the course of those four decades the Holy One will test us to the core - to prove who will – and who will not – stick with Him, His Will, His Plan, and His Ways when the gild drops off the lily and mountaintop of beauty-realm revelation gives way to real life, real pain, real fear, and real sandal-meets-the-sand loyalty-challenges. Here are some critical words for the season we are entering are: *Transition. Movement. Metamorphosis. Maturity. Focus. Fruitfulness. Harmony. Humility. Loyalty. Purpose. Process. Progress. And Perseverance.*

So ... Are You And Your Household 'Wilderness Ready'?

It is time for sons and daughters of the Covenant to *awaken to destiny*. It is time for the *am segulah* of the Holy One to show its true beauty. It is time for the Kingdom of Priests to *arise to the mission challenge*. It is time for the Holy Nation to break free of the attitudinal, ideological, behavioral, and relational hindrances. It is time for the witness throng of B'nei Yisrael to testify to the world - by actions as well as words - of the Goodness, the Wisdom, the Mercy, and the Awesome Power of *Elohei Avraham, Elohei Yitzchak, v'Elohei Ya'akov*². It is time for the people of the Great King to *stop with the excuses*. It is time to *lose the thin skin, shake off offense, and move forward*. No more acceptance of mediocrity. No more victim mentality. No more blaming other people, groups, governments, or leaders - or either ours or anyone else's ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, political position, etc. – for any 'glass ceiling' we face, real or imagined. No more ivory tower ideology. No more manipulation by oratory or sentimentality. It is time for Comfort and Familiarity to yield to the higher calling of mission and destiny. It is time for *settling for the first thing that brings a little pleasure* to yield the floor to

² For the origin of this particular 'name' of the Holy One, see Exodus 4:5.

an unquenchable quest for the best the Holy One has laid up for us –i.e. for that which no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, and the mind of man has not even been able to conceive.

See you along the road to Jerusalem, Dear ones! May we be as those who dream. May our mouths be filled with laughter, and our tongues with singing. And may they say among the nations: “*The Holy One has done great things for them.*”

From Sinai to Nebo: The Long and Winding Road

Sefer Bamidbar will constitute Moshe’s chronicle the approximately 38 1/2 years of B’nei Yisrael’s wilderness wanderings. The epic journey this book records began at *Mount Sinai*, early in the year immediately following the Exodus. The trek took B’nei Yisrael through the hot, dusty desert all the way to *Mount Nebo* in the land of the descendants of Moab.

As a result of the infusion/infilling/empowerment we have received at Sinai, the spirit is now willing – but we will find out soon enough, and in every way possible, that that the flesh is still very, very weak. The desert of Sinai will empty into to the desert of Paran. The desert of Paran will yield to the desert of Tzin. The desert of Tzin will yield to the wildernesses of Kedimot, Edom, and Moav. Over the course of the journey our newfound commitment to the Bridegroom-King will be tested severely. We will find a new trial, a new distraction, a new discouragement, and/or a new seduction in every dried-up watershed of the Middle East. So gird up your loins, Dear Reader! We - and the world - are about to find out exactly what we who have been sitting around in peace and comfort engaging in 'God-talk' for the past few months are made of. It will not always be pretty. Indeed, what will come out of us will sometimes be so horrendously ugly that we will want to divert our eyes, tuck our tails between our legs and run as fast as we can back to Sinai – or even ... dare we say it ... *return to bondage in Egypt.*

Many of our present number will not complete the journey. Alas, even for those who make it the pathway we trod to get there will prove to be a very, very long and winding road. But rest assured of this, Dear Reader - it will all be *worth it*. Every step. Every wound. Every scar. Every hard lesson of the wilderness. It will be worth it a thousand times over! A generation from now, when our descendants stand upon the plains of Moav and stare across the Jordan River at the beautiful Bridal Chamber our Bridegroom has prepared for us ... *Selah!* Yes, it will indeed be worth it all.

Eye Has Not Seen, and Ear Has Not Heard ...

Every event chronicled in the last half of Exodus or in the book of Leviticus occurred at one place – the glorious Cloud-enveloped mountain of revelation that

Torah calls *Sinai*. The events we are going to read about in the first nine plus chapters of *Sefer B'midbar* will occur at this mountain as well.

The Holy One has spread His Tabernacle of Peace over us and He is using this precious time to impart to our souls volume after volume of *life-changing, nation-shaping revelation*. To further this the Creator has *established in* our midst, has *visited in power*, and has *taken up residence in* a Heavenly embassy patterned after His Throne Room in Heaven. On the desert floor beneath the crest of Sinai, in the tent-within-a-tent structure we have learned to call the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle], He has *met with us regularly* and *spoken to us passionately*. And oh the *glorious things* He has spoken! He has *released unbelievable blessings* over us. He has *prophesied marvelous things* concerning us. He has *imparted stupendous empowerments* into us. He has pulled back the curtains of Heaven and has actually revealed to us the *way He sees us* – the way He desires and envisions His Beloved, His Betrothed, His Bride, *thinking*, and *seeing*, and *feeling*, and *speaking*, and *acting* and *approaching* virtually every aspect of life on earth.

We have been stunned by the realization that despite our checkered history and slavish worldview He sees us – individually and collectively – as potentially *holy, wise* and *good* ambassadors of His Kingdom to the nations and households and peoples of the earth. He actually sees in us world-changing quantities of *salt* and *light*. He has shown us our *destiny*, our *mission*, and our *purpose for being on earth*. He has laid out a glorious protocol for the Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover - the Divine process of leaving and cleaving through which He intends to remove from His Betrothed Bride every spot, wrinkle and blemish that hinders her from total abandonment to His Will, His Ways, and the Manifold Wisdom of His Plan to both redeem mankind and restore to Creation the purity of Eden. It is *far too wonderful for us to comprehend*. And as you will discover as we study this book, I mean that last statement *very, very literally*.

Who is This Coming up from the Wilderness?

Several months of *daily God-encounters* have passed since the Angel of Death struck all the firstborn of Egypt causing Pharaoh to order us out of Egypt. As you will recall, the first two months were spent in transit, as the *Pillar of Fire and Cloud* led the people from the border of Egypt to sit with Him in ‘heavenly places’, as it were, at Mount Sinai. For the last 11 months³ the Redeemed Community has been camped at *Sinai* resting under the Holy One’s ‘*anan* [Cloud] and receiving the

³ Exodus 19:1 tells us that it was in ‘*the third month after B'nei Yisrael left Egypt*’ that they came to Sinai and made camp – *i.e.* in the month of *Sivan*. Numbers 1:1 tells us the Holy One spoke to Moshe concerning the rearrangement of the camp [in preparation for leaving Sinai] on *the first day of the second month* [i.e. the month of *Iyar*] in the next year. The interval is approximately 11 months.

Torah as a *shitre eyrusin* [betrothal covenant].⁴ Have we truly had ears to *sh'ma* what the Bridegroom has been saying to and regarding us? Do we truly have a clue yet *who we are called to be*? Or *what it will cost* to become whatever that is? Have we even *caught our Divine Bridegroom's vision* - much less truly *bonded with the Bridegroom Himself*?

The fourth book of Torah will be the book in which the things the Holy One has been speaking over and imparting into us at Sinai will be put to their first sandal-meets-the-sand and rubber-meets-the-road tests. I will warn you in advance, the result of the test will look to us a whole lot like what an untrained human eye would consider a series of *colossal failures*. And truly if our relationship with the Holy One and our standing in His Divine Plan for Creation were based upon our ancestors' *performance* – *i.e.* their 'fulfilling of the law' - we could expect that He would respond to what is going to happen in the book of Numbers with absolute disgust, revulsion and wrath. If what our Divine Bridegroom sought from us was really just 'obedience to commands' - as many have taught - we could expect Him to turn His Back on this '*am segulah*', '*mamlechah kohanim, v'goy kadosh*' experiment very, very quickly. But our Covenant Partner will *not see it that way at all*. He is not nearly as legalistic and judgmental as fallen human beings are. Eating a steady diet of fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has, alas, turned the default nature of the human species into that of *angry cynics* and *harsh judges* and *self-righteous hypocrites* and *drama queens* and *preening prima donnas* and *obsessive-compulsive control freaks*.

The Holy One does not however share any of those traits with fallen Creation. While He will be deeply moved with emotion by seeing us in our worst moments, even so with our Divine Bridegroom in Heaven there is *no shadow of turning*. He will therefore not consider what is about to happen in the wilderness between Sinai and Kena'an as a 'failure'. He will instead consider it to be a necessary – though unpleasant - part of His Bride-to-be's *learning curve*. With Him there is no *revulsion*. With Him there is no *rejection*. He will *never give up* on us. He will never *abandon* us. He will never leave or *forsake* us. He is an absolutely *Relentless Lover*. He will therefore constantly work and rework the sickening things that are about to happen, and the ugliness that is about to show up in us, as He works all things – *i.e. together for good to those who love Him* and who are called according to His purpose. He will take the unfaithful and bloody Bride-to-be that we are about to be proven to be into His *Creative Hands* and *transform her*. Like a master potter dealing with a marred and misshapen vessel which He loves too much to discard, He will tenderly break her down to her essence, then lovingly and

⁴ For an explanation of the *shitre eyrusin*, and of the Hebraic concept of betrothal in general and as it applies to the Redeemed Community in particular, see Monday's Study relative to parsha *Yitro*.

masterfully remold and reshape her into the treasure of beauty and usefulness He envisioned all along.

He will take the horrible things that befall us, as well as the pettiness and evil that manifest themselves in us, and will work all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His Purpose. He will do it, and do it, and keep doing it. He will do it as many times as it takes. He will never give up on His plans for us or for the world. He will never waver in His passionate love for either. Oh what a Bridegroom! Oh what a King!

Adventures in the Wilderness Kiln – The Lions’ Den and Fiery Furnace Rolled into One

Up to this point in Torah, of all the millions of people in the camp of the Redeemed, we have only been formally introduced to a very few. We know *Moshe*. We know his brother *Aharon*. We have briefly met *Y’hoshua*, son of Nun the descendant of Efrayim. We have met Aharon’s sons. We have been introduced to *Chur*. We have met the divinely inspired craftsmen *Betzalel* and *Oholiav*. And of course the person we have known the longest is Moshe’s sister *Miryam*. The rest of the vast multitudes who followed the pillar of Fire and Cloud to Mount Sinai are however thus far for the most part a *faceless, nameless generation*. Meanwhile up to this point all the enemies we have met have been *external* – the Egyptians, the Amaleki, and the Midyani. In *Sefer B’midbar* however all that is about to change. We are going to be given a lot of names to go with the numbers. We are going to meet some *real characters*. And we are going to see what can happen when the Divine Bridegroom’s glorious callings for His People and His beautiful instructions for living come face to face with human *arrogance*, with human *ambition*, with human *reasoning*, with human *selfishness*, with human *fear*, with human *lust*, and with human *stubbornness*.

Something about the desert just seems to bring out the worst – and the best - in people. Which will it be for you, Dear Reader? The best? Or the worst? Beautiful desert rose? Or blustering tumbleweed? How will you handle the heat? How will you respond to the ugliness of the flesh of both redeemed and unredeemed humanity? Are you ready to find out?

The Opening Lines of Sefer B’midbar

B’midbar is a Hebrew phrase usually translated into the English language as ‘*in/of the desert*’ or ‘*in/of the wilderness*’. Hence it is entirely fitting that the fourth scroll of the Holy One’s wonderful Torah should begin by telling us about things that happened *b’midbar Sinai* [in the Sinai Desert, in the Meeting Tent]. **Numbers 1:1(b)**.

The first words the Holy One is going to utter in this book will follow shortly after

this brief introduction. The opening phrase of Divine Speech will be: ***Se'u et-rosh kol-adat*** – literally meaning *lift up the heads of the whole witness-throng*. That phrase sets the theme of this book right up front. This book is going to be about *lifting our heads* and getting *a full-on Bridal perspective* concerning the world around us – and why we are here in it at such a time as this.

Our extended stay at *Sinai* – especially after that nasty golden calf incident – has been truly wonderful. Our Divine Bridegroom-to-be has for eleven months or so now been speaking over us creatively and prophetically, day-by-day, in order to *establish us as new creations*, to *equip us to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*, and to *prepare us to shine His Divine Light upon the world*. The Holy One's creative and prophetic words have *pierced our collective souls* and begun the process of *reshaping our spiritual identity* and *rearranging our ways of approaching the Holy One*, of *relating to each other and to our enemies*, and of *interacting with Creation*.

Behold ... A New Thing On the Earth!

The Holy One has *reconstituted us*. The changes He has wrought on the *outside* of us – from Egyptian bondage to freedom – are nothing compared to the changes He has wrought *inside* of us. He has through the transforming power of His Creative, Prophetic Words *radically upgraded our DNA*. He has declared us to be a people the likes of which the world has not seen.

We number 2 million or so counting women and children. And we are a 'new thing' on the earth. As the Holy One set apart and sanctified Noah – then Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov – He has now set apart and sanctified ... well ... us. He has redefined both our identities and our destinies by *the sheer power of His Words*. He has spoken forth prophetically over us *what He wills us to become*. As the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle] was designed to function as *an antechamber or embassy of Heaven* on the earth, *so are we*. He has released over us a prophetic empowerment to *become on earth what He has designed us to be in Heaven*. And the *neshamah* within each one of us [*i.e.* the breath we received from the Divine Bridegroom much as Adam received breath from the Holy One at Creation] has finally begun to respond to those words, and is *reshaping our nefesh* [soul], is *renewing our mind*, and is *gradually conforming our behavior* accordingly. The process is in motion.

We now have a new, radically different *calendar* by which to structure our lives. We now have a new and radically different *menu* defining what is and is not "food", so that we can remain holy to the One Who redeemed us from Egypt and betrothed us to Him at Sinai. We now have a new and radically different *way of approaching and interacting with the Creator of the Universe*. We now have a new and radically different way of seeing and dealing with virtually every aspect of life

on earth. We now are, by virtue of what has been happening at *Sinai*, by no means the same rag-tag mob of refugees who came out of Egypt thirteen months ago.

By virtue of what He has done for us and in us we are now absolutely *overflowing with potential to change the world*. But alas we know nothing yet of life.

Sinai has been an incubator. It is the place the Holy One has used to keep us warm and safe, and nourished with “mother’s milk”, for our first year of redemptive life. But mother’s milk is only the beginning of life. It is now time for us to be weaned. And that weaning process is what *Sefer B’midbar* is all about.

The Challenge of Zeman B’midbar [The Season in the Wilderness]

The challenge of *sefer B’midbar* will be to keep the obstacles we face in life and our newly discovered spiritual identities, missions, and destinies in proper perspective. *Sefer Vayikra* can tend to seem somewhat surreal to most of us. In the exotic desert mountain of Sinai, underneath our Divine Bridegroom’s Glorious *chuppah*, Divine revelation has flowed usward day after day like the endless supply of water from the rock of Horeb⁵. But we cannot live on this mountain – or even wander around it – forever. We have places to go, and people to see. We have a story to tell – and a Kingdom to build. So, could our time at Sinai be drawing to a close? And, if so, how should we feel about that?

For the most part life has been very, very sweet at Sinai. Heaven has felt very, very near. Have you noticed that since the Golden Calf debacle there has been *complete harmony in the camp*? Have you noticed that not a single enemy has attacked us while we have been here? Have you noticed that, since Yitro left at least, there have been zero outside influences around to entice us? Have you noticed that, at least since Moshe came down the mountain with his face aglow, and the second set of tablets in his hands, all 2 million or so of us have been like hungry, wide-eyed little children, delighting in the shade of our Divine Bridegroom, soaking up the blessing and the holiness of His Sabbaths, and enthusiastically embracing His Vision for us, for the Nations, and for Creation? Nice, huh? But alas, the purpose and destiny for which the Holy One redeemed us from Egypt and brought us to Himself at Sinai will soon call for us to *leave this surreal mountain retreat and go back into the ‘real world’*. There comes a time when every young eagle – or family of young eagles – simply must *take a leap of faith and leave the comfort of the nest behind*. We know that of course. But still we cannot help but wonder, once we leave, *can we maintain the level of spirituality we have experienced here?* Can we really be, in the real world, *who the Holy One has, at Sinai, prophesied over us that we are?* Can we really do, in the desert and

⁵ See Exodus 17:1-7 for the narrative relating to the rock of Horeb.

beyond when it really matters, *all the things that the Holy One has at Sinai prophesied over us that we will do?*

The secret we are about to learn is that however spiritual we think we are, *we simply cannot make any of the things the Holy One has prophesied happen in our own strength*. For each and every force we can muster, we will learn, there will be an equal and opposite force. And we will learn quickly that the ‘equal and opposite force’ not only always *catches up with us in our weakest moments* – but always *aims directly for, and always hits us squarely in, our most vulnerable parts*.

Oh my! This is not going to be easy. No, not at all. We cannot, we will discover, navigate any of life’s really significant challenges by *following our hearts*; hearts are so deceptive and conflicted that they will wind up leading us astray every time. We also cannot - we will find out the hard way - rely upon our intellects. We will never be able to *reason* our way through life’s really tough trials; our capacities of *logic* and *intellect* are *nowhere near sufficient for the challenges of the real world*. We also cannot, we will learn, *force* our way through the obstacles real life throws our way with weapons made by our own hands, with the strength of our own wills, or with the power of our own individual or collective might. It just does not work that way. It is not even supposed to work that way. If it did work that way, how would any victory won that way bring glory and honor to the Holy One?

So how can we possibly make it in the ‘real world’? Do not despair - the Holy One our Bridegroom has a radical plan for us not just to *survive* the ‘real world’, but to *overcome it* – and, in the overcoming of it, to actually bring *shalom* and *simchah* to it!

The Bridegroom’s Radical Survival Plan

The Holy One has a very *simple plan*. We can access and draw all the energy and inspiration we need from the Holy things He has given us – the 7th day Sabbath, His Abiding Presence/*With-ness*, His Empowering Breath, His Torah instructions/guidance, His daily showers of Manna, His River-of-Living-Water-Flowing-from-a-Rock, and His Tabernacle-model modalities of healing, restoration, and maturation. All of these portals of kedusha energy are important, but the most accessible portal is the Torah itself. All we have to do is *sh’ma* the Voice of the Divine Bridegroom, *sh’mar* His covenant, and *asah* His words. All we have to do is receive His words and directions, internalize them in our innermost beings, and let the sheer wisdom and creative power of those words abide in, and grow and work in us and through us.

The Holy One’s plan is that we surrender to the redemptive and creative power of

His Words – and yield *our hearts to His Heart, our wills to His Will, our perspective to His perspective, our sense of justice to His sense of justice, our wisdom to His Wisdom, and our strength to His Strength.* It doesn't take a rocket scientist. It is like the child's game of '*Simon Says*' – we just do what He tells us to do ... and nothing else. Oh, did you not know that the name 'Simon' is merely an English derivative of the Hebrew '*Sh'mon*', meaning '*sh'ma-ing one*'?

The stunning secret we are about to learn through our studies in *Sefer B'midbar*, you see, is that *only when and to the extent we allow the words the Holy One spoke over us at Sinai to work in us and mold our thought processes can we even view the world in its true perspective, much less deal with it in an effective and God-Honoring manner.*

The Torah is not just *a training manual* - it is a *lifestyle manual*. What He has provided us at Sinai is not just another competing database of information which He expects us to crowd into our frame of reference alongside secular philosophies and worldviews, cultural norms, social customs, learned coping mechanisms, folk-wisdom, superstition, etc. Torah is THE LENS through which we are to look at the world. Torah is THE FILTER through which we are to approach every situation, deal with every fleshly appetite, and purify every emotion. Torah is the PULSE GENERATOR out of which and the PACEMAKER by the rhythm of which our lives are to flow.

The Covenant lifestyle requires us to start over with Torah – absolutely divesting ourselves of all previously held ideas, beliefs, opinions, habits, moral judgments *and* behaviors. Who did Yeshua call blessed? Not the wise man, the rich man, or the powerful man. Not the priest, the rabbi, the prophet or the evangelist. Yeshua declared blessed the *pure in heart, the humble, the poor in spirit, the one who mourns over the sinful condition of himself and his people, and the one who exudes and brings shalom.* The people that Yeshua called blessed are those who subjugate their most precious possessions, their hearts, their minds, their wills, and their worldview to the truths of the Torah – people to whom life is Torah, and to whom Torah is life.

To the extent we insist on looking at the world through our own eyes – or through a mixed lens of our own eyes and the eyes of the culture around us - you see, we thereby automatically subject ourselves to base material desires and to the distorting effects of human passion and bias. That is our *Achilles heel*. The prototypical example of this approach is Chava, who though she had received the words of life from the Holy One, after hearing the Serpent speak of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, actually allowed herself to look at the

forbidden fruit from the unenlightened perspective [which she borrowed from the Serpent in this case] that it was good for food, and pleasing in appearance, and valuable for making one wise. Do you see her failure? She followed her heart. Then she followed her logic and reason. And then she followed her will.

Only a mind conditioned to thinking from God's point of view - as revealed in the Torah - can view the world without such fatal distortion. Only if one is prepared to *let the Torah possess him and guide him totally* will its secrets – and its secret power - be revealed. "*All are blind until God opens their eyes*" [Midrash – B'reshit Rabba 53].

Torah is neither an *academic subject to master* nor a *creed to embrace*. Torah is a *medium of encounter with the Divine*. We do not fulfill Torah - *it fulfills us*.

The Weaning Process Begins

The Holy One's process of "weaning" His people – His young 'new creation' - off the 'mother's milk' of constantly flowing revelation they have been experiencing at Sinai – will start this week. Are you *up for it*? Are you ready to transition from theory and doctrine and talking and soaking up revelation to RADICAL ACTION? Are you ready for the kingdom of the Holy One to forcefully advance – in YOUR WORLD? Will this be the generation that functions as a burning and shining light for the Holy One? Or should we wait for another generation?

It is best to face the facts right now. Many – indeed most - of your generation will not be up for the task. Some of your closest friends – and most trusted associates - will fall in the desert. But what does that have to do with *you*? Does not there beat in your chest *the heart of a Y'hoshua*? Does not there pulse within your veins *the passion of a Kalev*?

Do not look at what others around you are doing. Just *keep your eyes on your Divine Bridegroom*; just *follow Him wherever He leads*, and just *do what you see Him doing*. Do not let your heart listen to *the grumbling of those in whose company you find yourself*. Shut out the *l'shon ha ra* and the negativity and the victim mentality and the sensuality – and just *sh'ma, sh'mar, and asah* the beautiful, empowering Words your Divine Bridegroom's has spoken over you. Do not *get distracted* by what distracts *the people around you*. Do not be ensnared by what enamors them. Do not be caught up in their failure.

Do not be frightened. Do not over-analyze it. Our King has already completed the feasibility study. So be bold. Be strong. Some may trust in horses, some may trust in chariots – but we have a much greater basis for confidence. The Lord of Hosts is with us! The God of Ya'akov is our refuge.

A Quick Look at this Week's Haftarah: The Relentless Lover

Hoshea 1:10 – 2:23

The Haftarah this week is taken from the book of Hoshea. This passage presents a beautiful portrait of the Holy One's relentless love for His Betrothed. It is all about a prophet named Hoshea and his promiscuous wife Gomer. Hoshea's service as a prophet came at a time when a large part of the covenant nation [specifically, the 'Northern Kingdom' called '*Israel*'] was badly backslidden. The events about which we will read all took place during the reign of Jeroboam II the son of Joash [c. 793-753 BCE]. At a time when the kings and people of Israel had completely forsaken the Torah and had become as pagans, worshipping the idols of their neighbors, the Holy One appeared to Hoshea and told him to do an unthinkable thing as a prophetic act – to *take a woman of deeply-ingrained sexual immorality as his wife*.

Hoshea did as instructed. He found Gomer, a woman for whom sensuality was the sole focus of life. He let his heart delight in her as if she were a chaste virgin. He courted and wooed her in purity. And he eventually convinced her to join him under the *chuppah* that to him meant eternal covenant. He pledged his troth to her forever.

Sheer madness, you say? It certainly looked that way for the first few years. Gomer bore three children. Were they of Hoshea's seed – or of the seed one or more of her endless stream of secret lovers? Who could be certain? A willing slave to sensuality, she rebelled against the constraints and responsibilities of motherhood. She abandoned Hoshea and the children she had borne for a succession of illicit lovers. Hoshea was left bereft, inconsolable.

Hoshea's personal tragedy was intended to serve as a vivid prophetic image. Hoshea – the faithful husband - was of course symbolic of the Holy One. Gomer – the faithless wife and mother willingly enslaved by sensuality - was symbolic of Israel. The 'other lovers' to whom Gomer kept running for pleasure and entertainment were symbolic of the other cultures, religions, worldviews, value-systems, and economic systems to which Israel sold herself.

The essence of the prophet's message was to call to make *teshuvah*, to break off her identity and destiny distorting relationships with all of her illicit 'lovers', and to return in humility to her husband, to her legitimate children, and to the Torah way of life for which she was created and where true joy, blessing, and meaning in life would be found.

The highlight of the haftarah will be when the Holy One, speaking through Hoshea, says of Israel:

... Behold, I will **allure her, and take her to the wilderness,**
and speak tenderly to her.
 I will **give her vineyards from there,**
and the valley of Achor [i.e. troubling] for a door of hope.
 She will respond there, as in the days of her youth,
 as in the day when she came out of the land of Egypt.
 And in that day, says the Holy One,
 you will **call Me 'Ishi'** (my Husband) **instead of 'Baali'** (my Master).

I will **betroth you to Me forever;**
 Yes I will betroth you to Me in **righteousness,**
 in **justice, in kindness, and in compassion.**
 I will betroth you to Me in **faithfulness;**
 and you will intimately know and be known by the Holy One.

A Look Ahead To the Apostolic Readings
Corresponding to Parsha B'midbar: The More Excellent Way
 I Corinthians 12:7 – 13:3

We also will be spending some quality time with *Shaul of Tarsus* this week. In particular, we will be studying a part of Shaul's challenging letter to the called-out ones in the city of Corinth in which he exhorts them regarding the cultivation and exercise of *pneumatikon* and *charismaton* – i.e. functional evidences and out-workings of the *Ruach HaQodesh [Holy Spirit]*. He begins the dissertation we will be studying with the following words:

... *And concerning pneumatikon*
 [often translated as 'spiritual gifts' or 'manifestations of the Spirit']
brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.
[I Corinthians 12:1]

Shaul did not want those whom he had been privileged to introduce to Messiah and the essence of Torah to be *uninformed* in any regard, of course. But he particularly felt it necessary that the people in Corinth, where pagan and occult practices were practiced openly, be taught in depth concerning the work the *Ruach* can be expected to do *in* and *through* those whom He indwells through faith in Messiah. Neither should we be content to remain ignorant regarding such things. Shaul begins his exhortation concerning manifestations that should be expected among those who are truly indwelt by the *Ruach* by teaching that spiritual abilities are to be *utilized and displayed only in sh'ma-response to the Ruach*.

... *the manifestation of the Ruach is given to each one for the profit of all:*
*to one is given the **word of wisdom** through the Ruach,*
*to another the **word of knowledge** through the same Ruach,*
*to another **faith** by the same Spirit,*
*to another **gifts of healings** by the same Ruach,*
*to another the **working of miracles,***
*to another **prophecy,** to another **discerning of spirits,***

*to another different kinds of tongues,
to another the interpretation of tongues.
But one and the same Spirit works all these things,
distributing to each one individually as He wills.*

Shaul then makes it clear that the *pneumatikon* are not to be sought or utilized for purposes of either self- or organizational promotion. They are not provided for purposes of either *entertainment* or in validation of *men's ministries*. The release of *pneumatikon* is instead designed to play a very integral part of the Holy One's plan for the redemption of man and the restoration of all things. More specifically Shaul taught:

*The Holy One has appointed amongst the called-out ones: first apostles,
second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings,
then helps, then administrations, then varieties of tongues.*

However, lest the human beings who function in these capacities think more highly of themselves than they ought, and lest some seek to make a privileged 'clergy-class' out of those who function in those capacities, Shaul cautions that while *pneumatikon* are neither to be ignored or scoffed at, neither are they to be over-emphasized at the expense of basic Torah lifestyle principles:

*... earnestly desire the best. And yet I show you a more excellent way.
Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love,
I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
And though I have the gift of prophecy,
and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith
so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,
and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*

Do not be impressed by the works men do. Do not be awed by gifts they either possess or seem to possess. Neither give credence to the titles they claim for themselves. Let the Holy One assist you to become a sold-out follower of *the more excellent way*. After all, through your trials in the desert of life you are being re-created daily in the image of the ultimate Relentless Lover.

*May all the People of the Holy One begin to see themselves as they were created to be,
and claim their identity, their inheritance, and their families.*

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus For the Week

The Fifth Petition: Rofei - The Petition for Healing and Health

Rofeinu Adonai v'nerofe

Heal us, Holy One, and we will be healthy

hoshieynu v'nivosheyah

Rescue us, and we will be saved

v'halay r'fuah sh'layma l'chol makoteinu

Bring complete healing for all our afflictions

ki El Melech rofei ne'aman v'rachamon atah

for You, God and King, are a Faithful and Compassionate healer

Baruch Atah Adonai rofei cholai amo Yisrael

Blessed are You, O Holy One, Healer of the Afflicted among His People Israel