

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah B'midbar:** **Numbers 3:1-51**
 Haftarah: **Hosea 2:14-20**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Corinthians 12:15-17**

I have taken the Levi'im from among the people of Israel ...
[Numbers 3:11]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 128:1-6;

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

V'eleh toldot Aharon uMoshe - And these are the cross-generational bloodline stories relative to Aharon and Moshe ... *b'yom diber Adonai el-Moshe b'har Sinai* – in the day the Holy Ones spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai. **Numbers 3:1a.**

Moshe and Aharon have become quite a leadership team. Though both were born to the same parents, in the same home, the circumstances of their early lives initially took them in very different directions. Aharon was raised by his birth parents in a slave hovel and spent his youth making bricks out of straw and mud; Moshe, on the other hand, was raised by Pharaoh's daughter and spent his formative years studying languages, history, literature, mathematics, social sciences, royal court etiquette, and architecture with Egypt's Elite. Then at Horeb, the Holy One brought the two long-lost brothers back together again. The collaboration was an instant hit. The synergy 'clicked'. Then came the confrontations with Pharaoh – and beyond. Over the course of the intervening year or so this dynamic duo has seen, heard, and done enough to now be considered *true patriarchs* – and not just patriarchs in relation to their tribe, but patriarchs for all of B'nei Yisrael.

A Book of Eye-Popping Action And Stunning, Expert Level Choreography

Sefer B'midbar is not a book about patriarchs, however – it is a book of *choreographed movement*. It is not a book about people developing or perpetuating a new kind of *status quo*; it is a book about engaging the people and places of the world, and extending the Kingdom of Heaven every nook, cranny, and culture thereof. It is not a book of and for theologians; it is a book for and about *doers* who shift atmospheres with just their presence and change the course of human history with their words and actions. It is a book about *seizing a day*, not *dreaming of one*. Before we march off toward the horizon and our individual and collective

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destinies, however, the Holy One wants everyone in His Camp to be in position, focused on the collective mission, and at least familiar – if not comfortable - with his or her assigned role in the fulfillment of that mission. And, for us, that has to start with our relationship with the Holy One.

Sefer Vayikra was all about learning to lie down in green pastures and rest by still waters under the watchful eye of the Great Shepherd. *Sefer B'midbar*, by way of contrast, is all about *walking with the Shepherd down real-time paths of real-time righteousness with Him, and ultimately passing with Him through the valley of the shadow of death.* In this *sefer* we learn the hard lessons about getting up off the study hall floor and following the Shepherd of our souls wherever and whenever He leads. In this *sefer* we discover *what the Kingdom of Heaven looks like in real time.* In this *sefer* we learn the difference between receiving revelation and living it. In this *sefer* we will learn *the hard lessons of spiritual life* – as we compare the holy examples of perseverance set for us by *Moshe, Aharon, Y'hoshua, Kalev, and Pinechas,* with the ‘common experiences’ of virtually everyone else in the Camp of the Redeemed. In this *sefer* we will be challenged to, as did Kalev and Y'hoshua, press on with the Bridegroom-King *even when our flesh is screaming at us to stop, our mind is telling us to turn around and go back, and/or our deceived heart is suggesting to us that we have no hope, and might as well just lay down and die.*

Kingdom Message #1 from the Book of Numbers:
The Collective Mission Always Trumps
the Individual's Desires, Dreams, and Comfort Zone

Not many days hence the Pillar of Fire and Cloud is going to move – and the Community of the Redeemed break camp. This time, however, we will not break camp as a rag-tag mob fleeing a raging madman and his oppressive regime. When we break camp this time we will do so as a mighty army marching out to be a light to the nations, and salt to the earth. So, take a moment, and look to your left and to your right. Can you count on the people who are standing beside you now to keep it together – and follow the Bridegroom-King with ever-increasing zeal – when the going gets tough in the desert season that lies ahead? Can they count on you?

The camp of the Redeemed is abuzz with excitement – but there a lot of unanswered questions in the air. When enemies attack, who will *stand and fight* – and who will *turn and run*? Who will *stand strong* – and who will *break rank*? Who will *march on* – and who will fall out by the way? Who will *be emboldened by the challenge* – and who will *let fear overwhelm them*? In the face of the challenges of the desert, who among us will stay calm and *be proven truly wise* – and who will over-react and *play the prating fool*? Who will *keep the lines of*

communication with and revelation from the Holy One open and flowing – and who will choose to listen instead to those the adversary employs to hawk the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Who will stay on task, on mission, on time, and on course – and who will get discouraged, distracted, seduced, and/or enlisted as a double agent by the enemy?

The great adventure is firing up again. The next phase of our journey from freedom to destiny is ready to begin. Our time of sitting, learning, and waiting is over. Divine Wisdom downloads are about to give way to thrilling action sequences. The heat is about to get intense. The terrain is about to get treacherous. The enemy is about to be upon us. The stakes are about to get high. So I have some questions for you to consider before we embark.

Question 1:

Do you know *who you have been redeemed to become?*

Have you have received a vision for *what the glorious, redeemed new you is supposed to look like – and in what ways and degrees that new you will be different than the past/present you?* Are you beginning to understand and embrace the processes to which the Holy One wants you to surrender in order that He can bring forth the new you from the residue of your past and the distractions of your present circumstances?

The most brilliant mind in the Universe created you. He has designed into you a vast reservoir of untapped potential in you. He has patiently watched over, nurtured and trained you. Only the *Ruach HaQodesh* [Holy Spirit] can awaken, activate, and engage that reservoir of potential. Ask the Holy One for that awakening; He will provide it. Then it will be up to you: will you choose to respond to His awakening, His activating breath, His nurturing counsel, and His intense protocols of training - or are you going to resist them in favor of the *status quo*.

Question 2:

Do you know *where in the Camp you fit in?*

What we are called to by the Bridegroom-King is much greater than ‘personal salvation’ - or even a ‘personal relationship’ with a personal savior. What we called to do is to take up a pre-designed, pre-planned role in a Kingdom that is much, much bigger than ourselves. We are called to join a throng that is madly in love with and passionately in pursuit of a Glorious King. We are called to become living stones fitly joined together with others from many tribes, tongues, and nations to form an eternal, unshakeable Kingdom – a Kingdom that will set the standard of righteousness both in this world and in the World to Come. While we are issued the invitation to this Kingdom separately and are each loved uniquely,

each of us is designed to serve as an integral component in a Great Master Plan – a Glorious Plan of Redemption for Creation which encompasses all ethnic groups and generations of man. As John Donne wrote ‘*No man is an island, entire unto itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.*’² We are called to become part of a great cloud of witnesses. The object of our prayers and meditations is never to be ‘*My Father ...*’; it is always to be to ‘*Our Father*’.

So, the question on the table becomes: *How well do you play with others, Dear Reader?* Are you capable of putting aside your own agenda and overcoming your own attitudes, offenses and opinions for the sake of being a ‘good soldier’ of the Kingdom? Will you be a trustworthy comrade – or will you instead act like a preening prima donna, a malicious malcontent, or a dissension-causing dissenter? Will you inspire others with humility, service, and enthusiasm for the Ways and Wisdom Bridegroom-King – or will you poison the spheres of influence you have in the camp and the world with sarcasm, cynicism, criticism, condemnation, negativism, judgmentalism, self-righteousness, and *l’shon ha ra*?

Are you prepared to, without a word of complaint, step out of the limelight – and leave your comfort zone – and be a supporting cast member, receiving no personal credit or accolades from others, when grunt work and humble service are what is needed for the purposes of the Kingdom?

Will you commit to never leave a fellow soldier behind? Or will you turn on your brothers and sisters when they get tired, hungry, wounded and hurting, and do not have the strength or energy to do what you think they should or be who you think they should be?

Question 3:

Do you know *why you have been called*
to take up your post at such a time as this?

Each of us has been assigned a number of *spheres of influence* in which we are to represent the love of the Beautiful Heart and release the wisdom of the Beautiful Mind of the Bridegroom-King in real time. No one can accomplish within those spheres what the glorious, redeemed new you can under the leadership of the *Ruach HaQodesh* [i.e. ‘*Holy Spirit*’ – *the Awakening, Refreshing, Empowering Breath of He Who is Holiness Himself*].

You are part of an absolutely brilliant plan. Every step you take, and every human

² John Donne, ‘No Man is an Island’, from Meditation XVII from ‘Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions’, c 1624. The entire meditation can be read online at <http://www.online-literature.com/donne/409/>

interaction you have, is potentially a ‘game-changer’ for someone – and for that someone’s generations and bloodline. There is no ‘down time’ in the Kingdom. There are no casual conversations. There is no time or place for pouting, for ranting, for zoning out, for freaking out, or for fleshing out. So ... do you understand the importance and magnitude of your calling? And do you have a feel for the limitations you will have if you continue to cater to – or try to operate in - *the flesh* [i.e. your *personal likes and dislikes*, your bodily appetites, urges, desires and desires, and your own intellect, discipline, endurance capacity, and strength]?

Most importantly, *do you understand who will get hurt if you do not stay at your post, faithfully performing the role assigned to you*, but flesh out and indulge yourself in anger, fear, lust, greed, self-righteousness, condemnation, and disdain?

Question 4:

Do you know what the banner of your tribe, the ensign of your clan, and the flag of your household look like – and are you ready to rally to them, take them up as your standard of identity,, and represent with honor and humility?

There is an amazing paradox at work in the Kingdom of Heaven. We are each assigned a physical family, clan, tribe, ethnic group, nation, era, and geographical region in which to be born. I call these our respective ‘platforms’ of life. From the point of redemption our first purpose in life becomes to encourage and enable the other people present in each of our various ‘platforms’ to see beyond those platforms transcend those ‘platforms’ together. Even in the instances in which we are called to physically distance ourselves from the platforms of our life we are not to dissociate from them altogether. Instead, wherever we go we are to elevate the reputation and potential of the people and bring honor to the platforms from which we came.

Question 5:

Do You Know Where each Platform of Which you are a Part Fits in the Overall Plan for and Mission of the Greater Camp?

We must never succumb to the *Eliyahu syndrome*, feeling and acting like ‘*I alone am left*’. **I Kings 19:10, 14**. We must always keep in mind that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves. Whatever it may look or feel like to us at any given point in time, we are part of a Kingdom that is alive, ever advancing, unshakeable, and unstoppable. We may be called to pick up five smooth stones and run to join the battles of the hour, or we may be called to quietly establish ourselves as sleeper cells ready to spring into action at the King’s command. Our cadre may be assigned the task of providing logistics, intelligence, offering support, training, equipping, healing, or even rest and recreation. The key is not to rush to point of the spear screaming like lunatics when the King would have us to march in cadence, prepare meals, or provide tactical support – or sit pensively with

pen in hand and heart on sleeve when the King would have us draw the sword and charge. The Holy One has a Plan, and it is strategic. Within the strategies of His Plan He has many missions and tasks for His People to engage. Each is important. And oft-times the hidden, unappreciated missions and tasks are the most critical. Do you know what He has in mind for you to do? Are you willing?

Question 6:

How well do you handle CHANGE?

The Holy One's Kingdom seldom if ever stands still. Our flesh may appreciate the *status quo* and the comforts and conveniences of mundane sameness, but our spirit – and consequently our glorious, redeemed 'new' self – thrives on transformation. We must constantly be ready to move forward – at whatever pace and in whatever direction He establishes. We must cherish where we are going more than either where we have been or where we are. Maintaining the status quo, settling into comfort zones, and merely defending the territory we have been given is, for us, *mission failure*. Our calling is to follow the King *to the horizon*. We are called to the battle lines, the tip of the spear, the edge of the sword. Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, we are called to press on toward the goal for the prize.

So ... how well do you respond to BEING UPROOTED from familiar relationships and support mechanisms – not to mention physical 'space' - and TRANSPLANTED into a dramatically different environment?

Question 7:

How well do you deal with *Divine order* and *Divine structure*?

The Kingdom lifestyle is not a 'free-for-all'. The freedom to which He calls us requires discipline, direction, and surrender to the greater mission. The Holy One has to lead in the journey – and we have to keep pace. His Will and His Ways must be done. And our task is to find delight, joy, and strength in following His leadership and submitting to His Discipline. So ... how will you respond when *for a time - for the greater good* of the community as a whole - your individual needs and desires have to be subordinated to the Mission? Your Divine Bridegroom wants to know! And He wants you to know as well. And He wants you to understand that the answer to these questions will often depend upon what you have been feeding yourself – the fruit of the tree of life, or the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Will We Be Lifelong Pilgrims - or Fair-Weather Honeymooners?

As I said in the introductory study this week eating a steady diet of fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has 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. All these things are factors of a bad spiritual diet. Each can be easily changed. But for these ugly characteristics to be changed they must first be *revealed, acknowledged, renounced*, and cast aside. And then there has to be *a radical change in our spiritual diet*.

Let us look carefully, with some fear and trembling, at the characteristics that I have described as flowing from a steady diet of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.

Kingdom-Denying Characteristics

The first character I mentioned as a product of the ingestion of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the angry cynic. You know him/her don't you Beloved? He/she sits enthroned night and day, day and night on a threadbare 'seat of the scornful', imagining the rest of humanity casting crowns at his/her feet and crying '*Thou Only Art Wise! Thou Only Art Worthy!*'

He/she *always seems mad* about something or other. One day it's politics. The next day it's a doctrinal/theological issue. The next day it is those good-for-nothing parents or siblings or teachers or preachers or children of theirs. And he/she is always telling you how *the sky is falling any day now* and *the world is going to Hell in a hand basket*, how [if a woman] *all men are pigs and liars*, and [if a man] *all women are gold-diggers and heartbreakers*.

Do you want to march into war next to that guy/girl? I didn't think so. Neither does the Holy One want that guy/girl *representing His Kingdom to the world*. The *spirit of angry cynic*, the *spirit of self-centered, self-focused prima donna*, the *spirit of 'poor me, I am so misunderstood and unappreciated'*, and *the spirit of arrogant, self-righteous hypocrite* are all very, very un-Bridelike spirits. None of them belong in the Bridal Chamber our Divine Bridegroom has prepared for us.

Now here is the tough part. Are you ready? Do you promise not to shoot the messenger? Here goes. That 'angry cynic' spirit *resides, to one degree or another, in every one of us*. So do the spirits of '*poor me, I am so misunderstood and unappreciated*', '*I can do that better than he/she can*', and '*If they'd just listen to me ... !*' Ditto *the spirit of arrogant, self-righteous hypocrite*.

Oh me! We have all, I am afraid, at one time or another ingested the very same fruit of the very same tree. And now we *are* what we have *eaten!* So ... you look into your mirror - and I'll look into mine. If we look close enough I assure you we will both - to our dismay - probably see at least a shadow of one or more contemptible characters scowling back at us. The Holy One plans to *expose those*

spirits in all of us through Wilderness testing. Then He wants us to *acknowledge it* and *renounce those spirits* and to *change our daily diet from primarily the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to primarily the fruit of the tree of life*. But of course it is always *our choice*. If we absolutely refuse to let the foul spirits – or the diet which feeds them - go ... well, I suppose there are several nice places where we can lay down and die in the desert.

The Harsh, Angry, Unforgiving, Merciless Judge in Us All

The second example of those who live off of a steady diet of the fruit of the tree of knowledge is the harsh judge. I dare say you have met him/her as well. He/she *sees only the worst in everyone* and *freeze-frames in his/her stream of consciousness forever the worst moments in the lives of everyone he/she knows*. Everyone who has ever been divorced is considered by him/her to be eternally ‘unfaithful’ and/or ‘a failure at marriage’. Everyone who has ever been unemployed is forever deemed ‘lazy’ and/or a ‘good-for-nothing bum’. Anyone who has ever lost his/her temper and said something he/she later regretted has an ‘anger management’ problem. And so on, and so forth, *ad infinitum, ad nauseum*. There is something – actually several things - wrong with everyone this person knows – and he/she is intent on *putting his/her finger on all of it and on pointing all of it out loudly so everyone else knows*, and of course *issuing moral-sounding decrees of condemnation* in the process.

Time does not allow me to go into detail about the other un-Bridelike spirits that enter the human heart through the fruit of the tree of knowledge. You know the self-righteous hypocrite, though, don’t you? Have you not had a long conversation with the drama queen lately? Have you not crossed paths – if not swords - with the preening prima donna? Do you not live, work or at least go to religious meetings with the obsessive-compulsive control freak? Well, those spirits are not Bride-like either. And yet once again the mirror does not lie. The main reason we all know these characters so well is not because these characters live *around us* – it is because *these characters live in us*. We saw that fruit and gobbled it down with gusto - never knowing it was crawling with these slimy, slithering, completely unBridelike worms.

Thank Heaven *it is not too late*. What the Bridegroom is doing with all this shaking, reshuffling, and realigning is trying to *flush out those spirits now*, before the battle begins. All this re-arranging and focusing on family above individuality is strategically designed to reveal, to expose, and to remove those unBridelike spirits that we will need to bury in the wilderness – one way or another.

That is why this week in Torah it has seemed that everything has been shaking,

changing, shifting, and rearranging at the camp of the Redeemed. We are to be a *rag-tag refugee camp* no more. We are now being placed on target to become a *well-organized military base* – an *army majestic with banners*.

But ... What is Levi's Portion?

There is *one group of people* in our midst however – one particular *tribe* – the members of which must be shaking their heads. While a flurry of activity is going on all around them, all has been very, very quiet among the people called the *Levi'im* - *i.e.* the descendants of Ya'akov's third son, *Levi*. Why? Why has *this particular tribe* seemingly been left out? Are they somehow *above* having to deal with the horribly unBridelike spirits the rest of the camp is being called upon to deal with?

Hardly. This is *Levi* we are talking about. You want to know about Levi? Ask Dinah, Ya'akov, and the folks who once lived around Shechem about Levi. Ask the family of the Egyptian taskmaster's widow about Levi. Ask the orphans of the 3000 slain in the aftermath of the Golden Calf sin about Levi.

Levi has a full cast of problematic characters – perhaps in greater quantity than any other tribe. And the descendants of Levi had at the time of the Exodus probably been just as intermingled according to the Egyptian world's *human valuation criteria* as had everyone else the Holy One redeemed.

As we start today's aliyah, however, we find that every single person with whom the Levi'im had intermingled in Egypt was now conspicuously absent – each gone to reunite with his/her family, under their tribal banner and family standard. Now the Levi'im – including their most prestigious members, Moshe, Miryam and Aharon - find themselves left conspicuously ALONE. What was the Holy One's plan for *them*, they must have wondered. Have you ever wondered anything similar, Beloved?

A Special Kind of Toldot

As it has been translated into English the third chapter of the book of Numbers begins by saying “*These are 'the generations' of Moshe and Aharon.*” The word our English Bibles translate as ‘generations’ in this phrase is the Hebrew noun *toldot*³. *Generations*, we suspect by reason of common English usage, means something like ‘*descendants*’. Please note a peculiar thing however. When the list of *'toldot of Moshe and Aharon'* is given we quickly find that only four of the descendants of Aharon – and none of the descendants of Moshe – are mentioned in the text that follows. The description of the ‘*toldot*’ of Moshe and Aharon makes

³ *Toldot* is Strong's Hebrew word #8435. It is pronounced *tole-dote*'.

no mention whatever either of Moshe's sons and grandsons or any of Aharon's grandsons – even though the latter group would have included the very significant character *Pinchas* [Phineas], whom we will meet later.

Hmmm. What kind of list of 'generations' is this? But wait – could it be that, in this context at least, the correct interpretation of the Hebrew word *toldot* is not 'generations' after all? Think about it. What Torah is about to discuss with regard to the tribe known as the *Levi'im* ['Levites'] is not going to have much at all to do with the 'generations' of Moshe and Aharon, but is going to be focused on something entirely different – namely, *the "lot", the placement in the camp*, and ultimately the *inheritance* in the Holy One, of the various clans and families descended from Levi. This is altogether consistent with the true meaning of the Hebrew word *toldot*, which can mean 'generations', but more particularly refers to the whole gamut of *family history* and *inheritance*.

For reasons we will discover later in this *Sefer*, Moshe is going to make some character-related choices that result in his having no inheritance in the Land of Promise to pass on to his descendants. No 'lot' whatever will fall to either of his sons or to any of their descendants. And we will also soon discover that, for totally different reasons, Aharon and his descendants are never to have any lot or inheritance in the land of *Eretz Yisrael* either. But the house of Aharon would have a very different kind of inheritance. Let's consider the substance of the Holy One's plan in this regard, shall we?

The Eternal Connection Between the Tribe of Levi, the Mish'kan, and the Aharonic Priesthood

As we have discussed previously in these studies, Aharon is the Divinely chosen 'Friend of the Bride' in relation to the entire Betrothal Period that commenced with the great Theophany on Mount Sinai. **Exodus 19-20**. He is the designated person the Holy One has called to oversee the *Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover Process* through which everything unBridelike – every spot, wrinkle, blemish and other such thing – is to be removed from the hearts, minds, and souls of all who have captured the Holy One's heart with one glance of our eyes. As such, Aharon's special role is to *serve the whole nation*. After all "***the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction-because he is the messenger of the Holy One Almighty.***" **Malachi 2:7**. Instead of Aharon serving his tribe therefore, his tribe is to serve *him* - and of course his sons. Hence by Divine Decree the *Levi'im as a tribe* were about to be permanently attached to and joined-at-the-hip with the house of Aharon.

Today's aliyah of Torah is therefore about to tell 'the Levi'im story' – *i.e.* the role

they played in connection with the mass reshuffling and relocating which has been going on in the camp of the redeemed. The key verse is going to be Numbers 3:6, where the Holy One will instruct Moshe:

Ha-k'rev et-mateh Levi

Bring the tribe of Levi near,

v'ha-amadeta⁴ oto l'fnei Aharon ha-kohen v'shertu oto
and present them before Aaron the kohen, that they may serve him.

[Leviticus 3:6]

Just as all the other tribes descended from Ya'akov had *been shuffled like a pack of cards* by the Holy One's call, resulting in each person returning to his family and claiming his true identity and inheritance, so was it now to be with the families of Moshe and Aharon. No matter where in the camp the living descendants of Levi had settled or taken root, they now found themselves outsiders – because all the other tribes had re-arranged according to family, clan and tribe. Now it was the turn of the Levi'im to return to those of like parentage. So as today's aliyah begins, at and around the tents of Moshe and Aharon – the central figures in the house of Levi - suddenly arrived thousands upon thousands of unfamiliar faces. *Oy veh!* What were Moshe and Aharon, Elazar and Itamar, to *do* with all these newfound distant relatives? Where would they find space for these people to sleep, to eat, to set up their tents? What would be the nature of the inheritance they would share with them? These are the kinds of questions that will be answered in the course of today's aliyah. This chapter in Numbers will set forth the Holy One's plan, purpose and destiny for the *Levi'im* – as individuals and as a tribe.

Understanding Levi's Estrangement from the Rest of Israel

Who *is Levi* - and why was/is his tribe so “special” as to warrant this unique level of attention from Torah? Let us consider that for a moment.

First of all, the name ‘Levi’⁵ is of course a Hebrew name, made up of the Hebrew consonants *lamed*, *vav*, and *yod*. The verb root of the name Levi is *lavah* – *i.e. lamed, vav, hey*⁶. The verb root means *to join* or *to unite*, to *bring together that which has been separated*, or to *reconcile*. An illustrative usage of the verb is its first usage in Torah, where Leah, who has been feeling estranged from Ya'akov, expresses hope that upon the birth of her third son [who she named Levi] Ya'akov would be *lavah* [united, reconciled, joined] with her. She said:

Now this time will my husband be joined [lavah] to me-

⁴ The Levi'im are given the responsibility to set the *mish'kan* apart from the rest of the camp, to watch over and guard it, and do all the menial tasks associated with it, and to care for all its furnishings, vessels, and appurtenances.

⁵ Levi is properly pronounced *LEH'-vee* - not *LEE'* - VI.

⁶ The verb root *lavah*, from which the name Levi is derived, is Strong's Hebrew word #3867.

because I have borne him three sons." Therefore was his name called Levi.
[Genesis 29:34]

Levi – a proper noun derived from the verb root *lavah* - literally means “joined to me” or “united with me”. In Hebrew names are not merely polite titles – they are powerful *prophetic proclamations*. The prophetic implication is that Levi will, forever, be a “joiner”. That can of course be both good and bad. So let’s dig a little deeper into the family history.

The young man Levi, third son of Ya’akov by Leah, as we come to know him in Torah, certainly showed *no particular acumen for greatness*. He was hardly the “most likely to succeed” among his brethren. Embittered by the defilement of his younger sister Dinah by the Kena’anim (Canaanite) prince Shechem Levi “joined” his closest sibling, Sh’mon [Simeon] in a bloody conspiracy - to first defraud and then massacre the entire male population of Shechem’s city. See **Genesis 34:25-29**. Of this wicked “joining” Ya’akov on his deathbed stated:

*Shim'on and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords.
Soul, don't come into their council;
My glory, don't be united to their assembly;
For in their anger they killed a man; in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.
Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel.
I will divide them in Ya'akov, and scatter them in Yisra'el.*
[Genesis 49:5-7]

Wow. What a ‘blessing’, eh? Ya’akov decreed that Levi [and Sh’mon] were not to “join” with the rest of the other tribes. Levi and his descendants were, instead, sentenced by their father to be forever divided and scattered throughout Israel – *having no tribal inheritance/allotment of land in Eretz Yisrael of their own*.

More recently another notorious episode of violence involving the tribe of Levi occurred at Mount Sinai, in connection with the sin of the golden calf. Torah tells us that when as the golden calf celebration was in process Moshe returned to the Camp and saw the debauchery going on. Torah then tells us:

*Moshe stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Whoever is for the Holy One, arise!"
All the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.
He [i.e. Moshe] said to them, "Thus says the Holy One, the God of Yisra'el,
'Every man put his sword on his thigh,
and go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp,
and every man kill his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor."

The sons of Levi did according to the word of Moshe:
and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.*
[Exodus 32:25-28]

Please note the similarity of the actions of Levi’s descendants in this instance with the actions of Levi in the aftermath of the rape of Dinah. Again we have Levi

“joining”. This time, [through his descendants] he “joined” Moshe. Again, the purpose of the joinder *was for vigilante-style violence - specifically to inflict death on persons Levi saw⁷ as wrongdoers*. Just as Levi conspired with Sh’mon to inflict death on those who raped Dinah, so his descendants conspired with Moshe to inflict death on those who participated most visibly in the worship of the golden calf. As they saw it, just as Shechem had defiled Levi’s sister *Dinah*, those who worshipped the golden calf had defiled the Holy One’s Betrothed Bride. In both cases Levi strapped sword onto thigh and *took vengeance*. Levi assumed the role of *kinsman avenger* for his sister *Dinah*; his descendants assumed become the *kinsman avengers* for the Holy One’s Bride-to-be.

We cannot argue with the *passion* of Levi, nor his *loyalty*. We cannot even question his *motives*. His heavy-handed *methods*, and his taking of the law into his own hands, on the other hand ... well, our patriarch Ya’akov probably said it best: **“Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel.** Hence we see that when in preparation for leaving Sinai a ‘census’ was taken of the people of Israel the Holy One followed the counsel of Ya’akov in his deathbed prayer and prophesy and *did not include the descendants of Levi in the main census of the nation*. **Numbers 1:49.**

Divided from, yet scattered among, his brethren – that was to be Levi’s lot. A tribe *without an inheritance in Israel*, disowned from the land and prosperity-based promises of the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham, and renewed with Yitschak and with Ya’akov – that was the portion of Levi. A tribe whose lot in life it was to *serve* the other tribes - and even the household of Aharon – that was the *toldot* of Levi. A tribe whose service, we shall find, was of the most menial kind, carrying this, cleaning that, and doing whatever else Aharon and his sons directed - that was what Levi was decreed by Divine Word to become.

Most do not understand this. I hear people speak with envy concerning the Levi’im

⁷ This time it appears, at least on the surface of the text, that the Holy One may have agreed with Levi’s assessment of the situation. It not likely, however, that the *specific means* employed by Levi to inflict judgment were what the Holy One intended. Moshe said “thus says the Holy One”, but when Torah is relating something the Holy One said to Moshe (which it does very, very frequently), a specific literary formula is used: ***Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe*** [literally ‘*and the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying*’:]. That formula is conspicuously missing in the text of Exodus 32:25-28. And note, in verse 28, that Torah does not say that the sons of Levi did “according to the word of the Holy One”, but merely that they acted “according to the word of Moshe.” Compare the usual formula used to describe fulfillment by the people of the Holy One’s instructions, at Exodus 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31, 32, 42, and 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 29 and 32. This leaves in serious question whether the Holy One really did say what Moshe said he said [strap on your sword and kill] – or whether instead Moshe acted presumptuously as he did later when he struck the rock at Merivah. One thing is clear – even without Levi’s help the Arm of the Holy One was by no means too short to strike down those who sinned with the calf-god.

because they got to work with the Holy things of the *Mish'kan*. The reality however was that they were *ever near* the glory of the Holy One but *never able to enter into it*. The reality is that they lived their lives *in the midst of* the Redeemed Community but *never were a full-fledged part of it*. The reality is that they were employed to *sing the songs and play the music of the Holy One* but did so only as *professional singers and musicians* – and were thus unable to enjoy, comprehend, or appreciate it. The reality is that they were commissioned to teach *the Words of the Holy One's Torah*, but were never to know the wonder of *living it out*, and of being the light to the nations which the Holy One called Israel to be.

Do not envy the Levi'im. Unlike the Levi'im, may each of you know the fullness of the blessing of the Holy One - and may Torah, and songs of worship, and the experience of the manifest presence of the Holy One, be *life* to you. May you be neither “joiners” to nor participants in conspiracies or rebellions. May you never practice ways of violence toward your brethren or toward outsiders – even flagrant sinners. May you learn to *let vengeance - however much deserved - be the Holy One's to decree and to carry out*.

Questions For Today's Study

1. The Holy One tells Moshe that this mass of people now coming to him because of blood ties - the *Levi'im* - are to be set apart to the Holy One. They are given a place for their tents between the other tribes and the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle, or Tent of Meeting]. Their tents are to be arranged, like the rest of the Israelites, by clans and families.

There are four clans in the tribe of Levi - the *M'rari'im*, the *Gershonim*, the *K'hatim*, and the *kohanim* (Moshe, Aharon, Eleazar, Itamar, and their families). Once these clans are positioned, they are given functions to perform, by clan. Note that their placement and identity determines their function, not the other way around; note also that they were not chosen for these functions on the basis of talent, ability, or any kind of merit.

[A] In Numbers 3:6 the Holy One told Moshe: *Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aharon the Kohen, that they may minister to him*. In your Strong's Concordance look up the Hebrew verbs our English Bibles translate as “set” [KJV “present”] and “minister” in this verse, and:

- [i] Write these Hebrew verbs in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings;
- [ii] Write the English transliterations of these Hebrew verbs;
- [iii] Write the pronunciation of these Hebrew verbs;
- [iv] Using your Gesenius, trace out the *pa'al* form of these verbs, and discuss (with each other, ‘yeshivah’-style’, and then on paper) the Hebraic word picture each of these verbs demonstrate

[B] List each function the Holy One assigned to each clan of the Levi'im in the verses of today's aliyah, then write a brief general summary of what you see as the unique role of the Levi'im [Levites] in the Redeemed Community of Israel.

2. In verses 11-13 the Holy One accepts the descendants of Levi in the place of the firstborn sons of the families of all the tribes, saying:

"Behold, I have taken the Levi'im from among the children of Yisra'el instead of all the firstborn who open the womb among the children of Yisra'el; and the Levites shall be mine: for all the firstborn are mine.

On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Mitzrayim I made holy to me all the firstborn in Yisra'el, both man and animal. They shall be mine. I am the Holy One."

[A] Why are the "firstborn" of Israel uniquely described in Torah as *belonging to* the Holy One?

[B] What was the original instruction regarding the "firstborn" of Israel? [Hint: read Exodus 13:1-2].

[C] When were the Levites originally "set apart" and why? [Hint: read Exodus 32:25-29].

[D] Explain in your own words what "setting apart" the firstborn means.

[E] The Holy One is also described as having a "firstborn" Son. Who is He, and how did the Holy One set Him "apart" [You will want to look up all references to "firstborn" in the B'rit Chadasha, and look at Isaiah 9:6-7 and Zechariah 12:10-14; also don't forget Hebrews 1:1-9, 2:9-13].

[F] As we all know the earthly tabernacle has not functioned since 70 C.E. when the Romans destroyed the Second Temple. Thus for almost 2,000 years now the Levi'im clans have been unable to perform any of the functions set forth for them in today's aliyah. Do you think the "function" of the Levi'im, as described in today's aliyah, is permanently destroyed? Explain your thoughts on this issue – being sure to keep in mind the fact that the Holy One has accepted the Levi'im in lieu of the firstborn of Israel.

3. Beginning in verse 14, the Holy One instructs Moshe to *count* the Levi'im. But the Holy One already knows their number. So why should they be "counted". The issue is not so much *math* as it is *association*. The Holy One does not command that the *Levi'im* [or any of the tribes] be numbered by their occupations, by their talents/abilities, by their "gifts", by their "friends", by their age groups [infants, toddlers, preschoolers, K-6, preteens, "youth", college and career, young marrieds, etc.] or by any of the other methods the "church" and "synagogue" have historically "numbered" and separated people.

The Holy One, it seems, has another idea – a revolutionary concept! *People count most in their families!* You see, the Holy One actually thinks He put people in families for a *reason*. The Holy One thinks families are more important than

“buds” and “homies” and ball teams and work associates. The Holy One says “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together.”

[A] How were the Levi'im to be numbered? What was to be their source of identity?

[B] How did the method of counting Levi'im differ from the method of counting the other tribes?

[C] What are the four “clans” or divisions of the Levi'im?

[D] How many were in each “clan” or division?

[E] On which side of the Tabernacle was each “clan” to camp and to march?

[F] How many “living creatures” surround the Heavenly Tabernacle in Revelation 4:6-10? Does this give you an idea of what the real function of the Levites was? Explain.

4. What were the “job descriptions” of each of the four “clans” or divisions of Levi'im? If you were born a son of a *Merarim* [Merarite], for instance, what would be your purpose in life - whether you were musically inclined, intellectual, physically strong or weak, fast or slow, attractive or plain, artistic, or whatever?

5. What happened to anyone besides a Levi [Levite] who “approached” the *Mish'kan*, seeking to officiate in its activities? [See verse 10 and verse 38]. Why do you think this was?

6. In Hoshea [Hosea] 2:14-20 the Holy One speaks of an “alluring” He will do and of a “renewal of vows” in the future.

*Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
And bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.
I will give her vineyards from there, and the valley of Akhor for a door of hope;
And she will respond there as in the days of her youth,
And as in the day when she came up out of the land of Mitzrayim.
It will be in that day," says the Holy One,
"That you will call me Ishi ['my husband],' and no longer call me Ba'ali ['my master].'
For I will take away the names of the Ba'alim out of her mouth,
And they will no more be mentioned by their name.
In that day I will make a covenant for them
with the animals of the field and with the birds of the sky,
and with the creeping things of the ground.
I will break the bow, the sword, and the battle out of the land,
And will make them lie down safely.*

[A] List the things the Holy One says will occur in connection with the “alluring” He will do.

[B] Look up the word translated as “allure” [KJV].

[i] Write this Hebrew verb in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings;

[ii] Write the English transliterations of these Hebrew verbs;
 [iii] Write the pronunciation of this Hebrew verb;
 [iv] Using your Gesenius' Lexicon trace out the *pa'al* form of this verb, and discuss (with each other, 'yeshivah'-style', and then on paper) the Hebraic word picture this verb paints.

[C] To what location does the Holy One say He will "allure" Israel?

[D] List the things the Holy One says in this passage will occur in connection with the "renewal of vows".

7. In the concluding verses of the haftarah aliyah the Holy One promises that He will "betroth" Himself to Israel again as He did at Sinai.

*I will betroth you to me forever.
 Yes, I will betroth you to me in righteousness,
 in justice, in lovingkindness, and in compassion.
 I will even betroth you to me in faithfulness;
 And you will know and be known by the Holy One intimately.*⁸

These words are the words of love observant orthodox Jews whisper each morning during prayer as they wrap their hands in *tefillin* [phylacteries]. Let's get to know these words better.

[A] In Strong's look up the word translated as *betroth* [KJV].

[i] Write this Hebrew verb in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings;
 [ii] Write the English transliterations of these Hebrew verbs;
 [iii] Write the pronunciation of this Hebrew verb;
 [iv] Using your Gesenius, trace out the *pa'al* form of this verb, and discuss (with each other, 'yeshivah'-style', and then on paper) the Hebraic word picture this verb paints.

[B] The Holy One says in this passage that the second betrothal of which He is prophesying will be a seven-fold, complete, perfect betrothal. He says the betrothal will be FOREVER, TO HIM, IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, IN JUSTICE, IN LOVINGKINDNESS, IN COMPASSION, and IN FAITHFULNESS. In Strong's, look up the words our English Bibles translate as "forever" [Hebrew *l'olam*], to me [Hebrew *li*], righteousness [Hebrew *tzedek*], justice [Hebrew *mishpat*], lovingkindness [Hebrew *chesed*], compassion [Hebrew *racham*], and faithfulness [Hebrew *emunah*]. For each of these words:

[i] Write this Hebrew word, and its verb root, verb in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings;

[ii] Write the pronunciations of each of these Hebrew words;

[iii] Using your Gesenius, trace out the *pa'al* form of each such word

⁸ The verse, transliterated from Hebrew, is a beautiful love song: "*Ve'erastich li le'olam ve'erastich li betzedek uvemishpat uvechesed uverachamim. Ve'erastich li be'emunah veyada'at et-Adonai.*"

and its verb root, and discuss (with each other, ‘yeshivah’-style’, and then on paper) the Hebrew word picture each of these words paints.

[C] Notice that the passage ends with the effect of the seven-fold betrothal – “*and you will know the Holy One*” [Hebrew *veyada'at et-Adonai*]. Read the words of Yeshua in John 17:3.

[i] What did Yeshua have to do with the “second betrothal” prophesied in Hosea 2?

[ii] What does *knowing* [Hebrew *yada*] *the Holy One* have to do with eternal life?

8. In the B’rit Chadasha reading for today various different people or groups who follow Rabbi Yeshua are likened to hands, feet, eyes and ears.

*If the foot would say, "Because I'm not the hand, I'm not part of the body,"
it is not therefore not part of the body.*

*If the ear would say, "Because I'm not the eye, I'm not part of the body,"
it's not therefore not part of the body.*

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

If the whole were hearing, where would the smelling be?

[I Corinthians 12:13-15]

[A] What types of functions would you expect the “hands” of Yeshua’s body to perform?

[B] What types of functions would you expect the “feet” of Yeshua’s body to perform?

[C] What types of functions would you expect the “eyes” of Yeshua’s body to perform?

[D] What types of functions would you expect the “ears” of Yeshua’s body to perform?

[E] Are the functions you have assigned to each part of the body related to each other? Explain.

[F] The body of Messiah is “*fearfully and wonderfully made*” [Psalm 139:14]. You and I are “*knit together*” in the womb of our mother [Israel]. We have been strategically placed, and have strategic functions to perform, at the direction of the “Head”—Yeshua Himself. We are a *living organism*, not an organization. How is this like the camp of the Redeemed Community that we have been discussing in this week’s Torah studies?

[G] We have seen that everything in the Holy One’s kingdom, as described in Torah, revolves around the family and the home. We have seen through the Holy One’s dealings with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov that the family and the home are designed to be the epicenter of spiritual blessing for the world. We have seen through this week’s aliyah that each Redeemed person’s inheritance in the Holy One’s kingdom is based primarily upon His family lineage - not on what he or she “does” or accomplishes for God (this does not in any way conflict with the issue of

“crowns”). With this in mind, *how (i.e. on what basis) do you think the Holy One decides to allocate spiritual functions [some call them “spiritual gifts”] among His people?*

Does one’s family have anything to do with it, or when one becomes a “New Creation”, are family ties *broken?*

*May the Holy One’s People, in every city and land, come to know our true identity,
and may each of us take the place ordained for us,
in the living organism which is Messiah’s Body - which knows no walls.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 128:1-6

*Blessed is everyone who fears the Holy One, who walks in his ways.
For you will eat the labor of your hands.
You will be happy, and it will be well with you.
Your wife will be as a fruitful vine,
In the innermost parts of your house;
Your children like olive plants, Around your table.
Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the Holy One.
May the Holy One bless you out of Tziyon,
And may you see the good of Y’rushalayim all the days of your life.
Yes, may you see your children's children.
Shalom be upon Yisra'el.*