

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah B'ha'alotcha:** Numbers 12:1-16
Haftarah: Zechariah 4:6-7
B'rit Chadasha: I Corinthians 10:14-17

Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moshe?

[Numbers 12:8]

Today's Meditation is Revelation 2:18-29;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #7, *Kabat* [Ingathering]

Vatedaber Miryam v'Aharon b'Moshe – Then Miryam and Aharon spoke against Moshe ... *al-odot ha-ishah ha-Kushit asher lakach* – on account of the Kushite woman he had taken unto himself Numbers 12:1a.

The forsaken stretch of real estate between Sinai and Kadesh Barnea that Torah calls the *Wilderness/Desert of Paran* is no piece of cake – as we are discovering to our chagrin! The unclean spirits that have ruled that region with a mighty hand since the days of Hagar and Yish'mael delight in playing cruel tricks on visitors' psyches². Those voices of *toxic tumah* [i.e. the original authors of 'hate speech' and 'verbal abuse'] wreak havoc on everyone within earshot. They playfully tempt – then cruelly mock. They incite division – then instigate rebellion. They spout the lofty rhetoric of 'equity' and 'social justice' – then dehumanize anyone and everyone who does not bow the knee to their demons and regurgitate their *misinformation mantra slogans/bullet points* on cue. They bring out the worst in everyone. They are only satisfied when tempers are flaring, inflammatory rhetoric is flying, and negative emotions are running rampant.

Wasted Away Again in Old Paran-a-Ville

Welcome to the 'spin zone' of Paran-a-ville - or should we call it *Piranha*-ville, after the flesh-eating fish? In this toxic, emotionally charged, offense-and-outraged-fueled environment, self-absorption rules with an iron fist. At Sinai we were many races, many tribes, but one nation, one people, with one God; not here, however. In this desert tribe, ethnicity, socio-economic class, age, and gender are suddenly divisive issues again. Hello, Fear! Welcome back, Suspicion! Long time

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² Genesis 21:20-21 states that after being exiled from Avraham's household Yish'mael settled down, married an Egyptian maiden his mother Hagar procured for him, and raised up a kingdom of his own in the desert of Paran.

no see, Prejudice, Envy, Jealousy, Anger, Malice, Lust, Trouble-making and other friends of the ‘old man’!

What have we done in response to the challenge presented by Paran? We have come undone. We shed *shalom* like a blanket, tossed joy aside like a used-up vessel, and treated hope like one might do a childhood friend with whom one no longer finds anything in common but pleasant memories. We abandoned the call to ***ahavat l'reyeicha*** (*love your neighbor*) with the alacrity of rats racing away from a building on fire. We devolved into an unruly mob of narcissistic, hyper-emotional powder-kegs – tense, super-stressed, overly sensitive, anxious, petty, frustrated, suspicious, envious, entitled, offended, outraged, self-absorbed, survival-of-the-fittest obsessed, sexuality- and sensuality-driven, surly, and mean. The unclean spirits of Paran have done a masterful job of pushing all our buttons, pulling all our triggers, and stirring up all our latent pathologies. Oh, the base emotions that are welling up in our hearts! Oh, the self-serving, narcissistic thoughts that are flooding our minds! Oh, the toxic waste that is spewing out of our mouths! Vanity of vanities – everything in sight was suddenly vanity.

Who knew that the attitudes, conversations, and behavior of even the gloriously redeemed could deteriorate so quickly? We wanted to believe that we were above all that. We presumed that being chosen by the Holy One meant we were automatically holy like Him. We thought we were mature. We deluded ourselves into thinking a little revelation made us spiritual. Were we ever naïve! We are just discovering – the hard way – how easily a paper-thin veneer of spirituality can unravel. This, too, is a lesson we are supposed to learn in the wilderness. Let us retrace our steps, therefore, and see if we can figure out where it all went so horribly wrong.

How did it start? One moment one or two folks were expressing their displeasure about the food choices, texture, and flavor in this desert, then BOOM! They did not realize how contagious a little negativity can be. They never imagined that from the small seed of negativity they sowed, a rogue wave of discontent would quickly arise and inundate the camp. It is the *law of mood/attitude/vocabulary/tone-of-voice/reaction/behavior contagion*. Laughter breeds laughter; joy breeds joy; hope breeds hope; faith breeds faith; thanksgiving breeds thanksgiving; and kindness breeds kindness. But, alas, there is a dark side to the contagion story. Lust breeds lust; greed breeds greed; jealousy breeds jealousy; fear breeds fear; anger breeds anger; despair breeds despair; sarcasm breeds sarcasm; accusation breeds accusation; and complaining brings complaining. Wherever a seed of negativity is allowed to utilize a human heart as an incubator, it spreads like a wildfire. What infects one soon infects multitudes – indeed, as we find out in today’s aliyah, even the elect, anointed, and elite.

Keep your seat belts securely fastened around your waists, please Dear Ones – radar indicates severe turbulence ahead!

Welcome to THE NEGATIVITY ZONE:

Our New Slogan – “To Murmuring, Complaining, and Beyond!”

The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as ‘murmuring/complaining’ - *anan* - means to take up the *self-obsessed wail*. It connotes the *toxic tantrum-language and malignant attitude* of people who feel entitled to always get their way, and who, if deprived of anything to which they think they are entitled, see themselves as cruelly abused victims. Here is the way the cancer of negative energy works:

Absence/Loss of Child-like trust in the Holy One -> Self-reliance

Self-reliance -> Self-Obsession

Self-Obsession->a feeling of Entitlement

A feeling of Entitlement -> covetousness, jealousy, envy, and greed

Covetousness, jealousy, envy, and greed -> an attitude of Ingratitude

An attitude of Ingratitude -> a sense of Victimhood

A sense of Victimhood -> Complaining

Complaining -> speaking lashon ha ra toward others

Lashon ha ra -> acts of incivility, theft, destruction, and violence

Acts of Incivility -> response/backlash acts of incivility in kind

We always reap exactly what we sow – and we reap it with usurious levels of interest. As soon as the smallest seed of negativity is sown, that seed always finds soil in which it can root. Soon it sprouts and begins to multiply. People who were meditating on Torah, saying brachot [blessings] over everything they saw or ate, and delighting in the Sabbath quit doing those things – or at least quit doing them with any passion - and instead start giving in to their basest animalistic urges, appetites, instincts, drives, desires. Seeing their neighbors indulging in fleshly behaviors, even people who know better soon join the flesh parade. Some get all up in the flesh; others just let their pseudo-intellect – and all the serpent’s forbidden-fruit-corrupted ideas about ‘evil’, ‘unfairness’, and ‘injustice’ - run amok.

The process is vividly portrayed for us in the text of this week’s parsha. The downward spiral started with a few people waxing nostalgic about ‘better days’ – *i.e.* when according to a little creative misremembering they started talking about how back in Egypt we all ate leeks, onions, cucumbers, and melons every day until our bellies were full. This delusion led to disrespecting and blaspheming the Holy

One's precious gift of manna/daily bread. Then Moshe caught the virus, jumped out of the Spirit into the flesh, and rode his emotions off into a major rant, complaining about the unfairness of having to put up with the likes of us. Then, after the Holy One provided Moshe helpers in response to his *k'vetching*, Yehoshua threw a fit of his own – over the kindness and favor the Holy One showed Eldad and Medad. Who will be infected next?

***This Is Your Anointed Forerunner and Your Exalted Worship Leader.
This is Your Anointed Forerunner and Your Exalted Worship Leader
on the Toxic Drug called 'Negativity'. Any Questions?***

Ah, how about Miryam and Aharon? The model citizens of the “*Oh, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers (and sisters) to dwell together*” Kingdom are about to catch the virus too. Moshe's older brother and sister – his closest associates in the world - are about to join in the ‘*it's not fair*’/‘*it's not right*’/‘*prophet privilege*’ chorus. They are about to start spreading some *lashon hara* about their brother Moshe that would make the neighborhood *yenta* cover her ears and shake her head!

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who radiate shalom Isaiah 52:7a. But, alas, the opposite is also true. There is nothing beautiful whatsoever about the feet – or the hearts, the minds, or the company - of those who choose instead to spread negativity. Who needs *shalom*, *simchah*, *tikvah*, and *emunah* when you can have *offense*, *outrage*, and an intoxicating *delusion of moral superiority*? Who needs *Ahavat Adonai* and *Avodat l'reyeicha* when self-obsessed judgmentalism feels so ‘right’ to our triggered flesh and pseudo-intellect?

A People of Kindness, Of Humility, of Joy, and Of Praise?

Suddenly, everyone seems to have forgotten how blessed we are. Suddenly no one seems to remember our assigned roles in the Great Redemptive Plan – [a] to always revere, praise, bless, exalt, honor, and emulate the One Who called us out of bondage, and [b] to always see the best in, and encourage, inspire, and empower, and thus bring the best out of, our fellow men. Suddenly we find ourselves – and each other – wasting vast amounts of our time, energy, and passion *anan-ing*. Suddenly all we can focus on is what is ‘wrong’ – with the world, with our lives, and with each other. Suddenly the only words and sentences our mouths can form and release into the world are words and sentences of murmuring, complaining, poormouthing, faultfinding, criticism, judgment, sarcasm, and ranting. Suddenly joy is nowhere to be found. Suddenly no one – in leadership or in the ranks - seems to have any *shalom*. Suddenly no one in the camp seems to be able to think of a single reason to be thankful. Suddenly absolutely everything is a pity or a shame, an outrage or a disgrace, an insult, an injustice, a travesty, a

conspiracy, or a catastrophe. Suddenly it is not well with anyone's – even Moshe, Yehoshua, Aharon, or Miryam's - soul. That is what *anan-ing* does to a person, a family, a community, and a nation, Dear One. It happens every single time. *Anan-ing* is like contagious disease; once it is allowed to incubate in one person it spreads rapidly, and winds up infecting everyone within earshot.

Alas, in today's aliyah Aharon and Miryam will join the rapidly growing *anan-ing* throng. Suddenly they are not pleased with the special role the Holy One has assigned to their 81-year-old baby brother. Off they go, *k'vetch-ing* all over the camp, to anyone who will listen about all things Moshe. *Oy veh* - how far we have fallen from the peace and cooperation of the sweet season *Tabernacle building!* Somehow we have gone from: ***Rise up, O Holy One! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You'*** to ... this nonsense. But how? How, in such a short period of time of desert wandering, did even Aharon and Miryam sink so low? How did they – and we - lose every ounce of spiritual credibility – even to one another, much less to the peoples of the world? It is a question we should not take lightly. You see, it is not just Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam who have sacrificed spiritual credibility on the altars of *k'vetching* and *anan-ing*. Look around you. Listen to the conversations going on – and that you are participating. Take a glance at your social media feed. Listen to the harsh, joyless, toxic words that you daily let slip out of your own mouth. Oh yes, listen carefully. Then pause, and *remember what the Holy One did in regard to Miryam.*

Remembering What the Holy One Did Regarding Miryam

Those who walk with the Creator of the Universe are not to be people of either personal offense or ethnic prejudice. We are given the capacity to see other people through their Creator's eyes of love and of long-term, cross-generational perspective. We are given the capacity – and the mandate – to *inspire instead of accuse* and to *bless instead of curse*. And that means we have no time to sulk, to rage, to criticize, or to judge. Our covenant ticket is for a throne in the Mercy-Driven Courts of Heaven; and that is inconsistent with our spending even a moment in the seat of the scornful while here on earth.

In order to teach us this essential truth the Holy One pulls no punches. He draws back the curtain to reveal our most revered prophetess, Miryam, and our glorious high priest, Aharon, first embracing, then indulging, and then spewing into the atmosphere some very dark energy – dark energy fueled by both *personal offense* (their latent jealousy toward Moshe) and *ethnic prejudice* (their negative attitude toward 'Cushites'). Their negativity did not have to be directed toward Moshe – it could have been directed toward anyone. It did not have to involve prejudice against the Cushites – it could have involved any racist attitude against ethnic group, any nationality, any race, any religion, any socio-economic group, any

vocation, any tribe, any clan, or any family. It is all toxic. It is all totally inconsistent with the mission to which we are called. It is all counterproductive. It is all unacceptable. If there is any personal offense or prejudice in your heart whatever, the Holy One knows that a little time in the wilderness will bring it to the surface. And when the wilderness reveals it, He can – and will - deal with it.

Before we jump off into the ‘what the Holy One did regarding Miryam’ narrative too deeply, it behooves us to consider carefully, and afresh, the 'one another' instructions of Scripture. There are many such 'one another' instructions.

- We are to LOVE one another - and do so 'fervently, with a pure heart';
- We are to SUBMIT/BE SUBMISSIVE TO one another;
- We are to BEAR WITH one another;
- We are to FORGIVE one another;
- We are to HAVE COMPASSION ON one another;
- We are to BE HOSPITABLE to one another;
- We are to HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH one another;
- We are to SPEAK TO one another;
- We are to HAVE PEACE with one another;
- We are to GREET ONE ANOTHER with a holy kiss;
- We are to INSPIRE ONE ANOTHER WITH SONGS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS;
- We are to COMFORT one another;
- We are to EDIFY one another;
- We are to EXHORT/ENCOURAGE one another in order to stir up love and good works;
- We are to CONFESS OUR SINS to one another;
- We are to PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER, THAT WE WOULD BE HEALED;
- We are to BE KINDLY AFFECTIONATE TO one another; and
- We are to HONOR AND GIVE PREFERENCE TO one another.

On the other hand, Holy Writ tells us we are not to do certain things to one another. Remember?

- We are not to LIE TO one another;
- We are not to hate one another in our heart;
- We are not to Carry a Grudge or Offense against one another;
- We are not to DEAL TREACHEROUSLY WITH one another;
- We are not to WRONG one another;
- We are not to LUST FOR one another;
- We are not to SPEAK EVIL OF one another; and
- We are not to GRUMBLE AGAINST one another.

Come, Dear ones! Let us return to our High Calling! And now, may we consider what the Holy One did regarding Miryam – and why.

The Honor of Being Called to and Embraced In Covenant

We have the honor of having been invited to participate in the Ultimate Great Adventure – *i.e.* walking through life in both *a cross-generational covenant* and a *continuous flow of delicious personal communion* with the Creator of the Universe. We are slowly learning what walking and communing with the Creator means – for us and the world - in real time. We are discovering that walking with the Creator means not only letting Him serve us our real-time Rabbi, our Life Coach, our Benefactor, and our Mentor – teaching us His Ways, guiding us through life’s challenges, and disciplining us - but also means *us serving Him* as His agents of redemption, restoration, and reconciliation. Walking with the Creator means growing up into the mature vessels of holiness and blessing that He created us to be. Walking with the Creator means growing in wisdom and favor and with man as we confront in humility and overcome in gentleness very challenge and situation life throws at us. Walking on earth as Kingdom Ambassadors means learning to love like our Bridegroom-King loves, and learning to hold onto *shalom*, and *simchah* [joy], and *tikvah* [hope] the way He does, whatever may be happening around us. Walking with Him Whom our soul loves means refusing to embrace the dark energy of anger, and offense, fear, disappointment, and despair. Walking with Him as Bridegroom-King means refusing to bow our knee, even a little bit to the false gods and philosophies of the pagan cultures – *i.e.* to their *perverse forms of entertainment, education, and self-expression*; to their fanatical *bent toward consumerism, toward connoisseur-ism, and toward materialism*; to their *toxic and self-obsessed indulgence of sensual appetites*, to their *political and ideological ideas, concepts, and theories*; to their agendas, to their popular trends, to their populist movements, to the false narratives they call ‘news’; to their causes, to their programs, and/or to their platitudes of political correctness. Walking in Covenant with the Creator means recognizing - and refusing to even listen to – much less repeat – any form of slander, accusation, opinion, fearmongering, propaganda, or demagoguery. This is not accomplished overnight. It starts with a dramatic encounter with the Bridegroom-King. It involves a delicious Divine Romance in which the Holy One captures our hearts, wins our trust, and inspires us to follow His lead. But from that point forward it requires a lot of cooperation from us – as He builds in us the passion, the patience, the perseverance, and the willingness to be broken for the sake of His Kingdom and made over into vessels fit for His service, who bring Him the honor He deserves. The road is long, with many a winding turn. But it is *worth it*. It is SO worth it! It is *worth it a thousand times over!*

So ... are you ready for another hard lesson from the Greatest Teacher in the Universe? This one has to do with how we choose to employ the capacities our Creator has given us for observation, for thought, for reasoning, and for speech. These are all designed to bring honor to Him, and to co-labor with Him in His Grand Plan of bringing Redemption, Restoration, and Reconciliation to the world. But we all too often use these precious capacities for very different purposes. We all too often use them to criticize. We all too often use them to judge. We all too often use them to moralize. We all too often use them to assign blame, to accuse, and to slander. We all too often lend them to the Adversary. That, Dear Reader, is our test *de jour*.

The Uncomfortable Back of the Seat of the Scornful

As alluded to previously, in today's aliyah the toxic poison of evil speech that has infected our Camp ever since we left Sinai strikes again.

Vatedaber Miryam v'Aharon b'Moshe

Miryam and Aharon spoke against Moshe

al-odot ha-ishah ha-Kushit asher lakach

because of the Kushite woman whom he had married;

ki-ishah Chushit lakach

for he had married a Kushite woman.

[Numbers 12:1]

The Holy One very badly wants us to understand that flesh is flesh – no matter who wears it, or what title, robe, tambourine, or dance outfit is attached to it. He wants us to know that absolutely no one's flesh - even the flesh of a leader in the community - is better than anyone else's flesh, or is ever exempt from disgusting thoughts, words, and behavior. So He pulls back the curtain and 'outs' Aharon and Miryam. He exposed them in what they probably would have considered the worst possible moment, as their minds were absolutely immersed in dark energy thoughts and as their mouths were spewing toxic tidbits of *lashon hara* back and forth. *Et tu, Brute? Et tu, Brute indeed!*

So there you have it. A redeemed prophetess and the anointed priest of the Most High cozied up in the seat of the scornful spewing complaint, criticism, and accusation? Say it isn't so! Alas, but it is. The temptation to employ the very faculties of speech that were given to man in order to bless the world to instead 'speak against' is very strong, isn't it? This is the crucible of the hour – and of the era – in which we live. Alas, the Redeemed of the Holy One in our day, much like Aharon and Miryam in today's aliyah, have all too often fallen right into the trap of 'speaking against'- and have, as a result, become known primarily for what they are *against* instead of what they are *for* and *about*. Everyone now has a pretty good idea what it is we are 'against'. But we have not been born at such a time as this,

called to covenant, and sent into the world to ‘speak against’ anything. We are sons and daughters of the Avrahamic Covenant. We are here to release blessings into the world [Genesis 12:1-3] – and to declare the wonderful works of our King [Psalm 78:2-7]. We are here to model to the world the ‘*more excellent way*’. In order for us to learn to do what we are called to do, and do it well, the Holy One knows that we are going to have to learn some hard lessons about the consequences – to us and the Redemptive Campaign of the Holy One – of doing the opposite of what we are called to do. We are going to have to learn the hard lessons of what happens when people whose identity, calling and mission on earth choose instead to sit down in the seat of the scornful and ‘speak against’ their fellow man.

Are Those Flesh-eating Paranas - In the Camp of the Redeemed?

Like our ancestors, if we look around ourselves we will find out that we have entered the Wilderness of Paran. The Spirit of Yishma’el is everywhere. All the ugliness of the flesh that we allow to penetrate and our hearts just keeps spewing forth from our tongues. Forceful jets of uncleanness continue to issue forth from the mouths of even the prophetesses and priests of the Holy One. No, do not ever think you – or I – or any other human being – is exempt or one whit better than our forefathers. But for the graciousness and patience of our King, there in the seat of the scornful - covered in the stench of gossip, criticism, accusation, and condemnation, just like Miryam and Aharon - go you and me. Our call is not to point out and correct others’ faults; it is to overcome and transcend our own – and then to model to others by walking in kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, patience, and humility how they can do so themselves.

Instead of releasing blessing and praise as they had been called and empowered to do, Aharon and Miryam yielded their thoughts, then their tongues, to the Accuser. Under the influence of the dark energy of personal offense, they allowed critical spirits and judgmental attitudes to usurp the precious gift of inspiring speech they had received. They spewed out words designed to pierce their brother’s heart like a sword and crush his spirit like a sledgehammer. They mis-appropriated the precious gift of vocalization that they had been given for the good of mankind, and used it instead to accuse, to condemn, to rant, and to speak evil.

Out of the Same Mouth Proceed Blessing and Curse?

Miryam was called as a *prophetess* of the Holy One. Aharon was the one who had the authority to declare persons “tamei” or “*tahor*”. Every word these two spoke carried incredible WEIGHT. Their words were therefore not to be their own, but the very words of the Holy One - because that is how they could be expected to be received and interpreted by the people. Especially in the environment of confusion and dissatisfaction that permeated the Camp, the people could not be expected to have the discernment to realize that in this case Miryam and Aharon were speaking

out of fleshly jealousy and self-promotion instead of revealing the heart and mind of the Divine Bridegroom they had undertaken to represent. To complicate matters, Miryam and Aharon even *disguised their slander with spiritual-sounding language*. Heaven help them. And Heaven help us when we allow ourselves to do exactly what they did to the people in our world.

Alas, Beloved – what has happened to Moshe and Aharon could happen to any of us.. All it takes is for a person’s passion for the Holy One and His Ways to give way to self-righteous revulsion toward another human being. Once we allow ourselves the flesh reaction of being repulsed at another human being, you see, we forfeit the joy of our salvation. We turn our back on our own deliverance. We exchange the sweet scalpel of the kindness and mercy of the Bridegroom-King for the sharp threshing club of human judgment. We lose the Presence of and the Passion for the Bridegroom-King. We allow ourselves to be walk according to the urges, desires and opinions of our putrid flesh – and the words of our mouths tell the story for all to hear.

A Warning from the Holy One About Using Theological Argument to Advance Your Personal Agenda

As human beings under the influence of the dark energy of personal offense are wont to do, Moshe and Miryam followed up their toxic brew of *lashon hara* with a chaser of self-righteousness. They actually tried to justify their inexcusable outburst of criticism and judgment against their brother with a conveniently vague, but high sounding, theological argument. They even invoked the Name of the Holy One in order to make it appear that He was on ‘their side’ of their petty personal offense.

Vayomeru harak ach-b’Moshe diber Adonai
And they said, “Has the Holy One indeed spoken only through Moshe?

halo gam-banu diber
Has He not spoken through us also?”
[Numbers 12:2a]

Miryam and Aharon were so immersed in dark energy at the time that that they probably even believed the Holy One was on their side. But if they believed that the Creator of the Universe was or would ever be on ‘their side’ – or anybody’s ‘side’ - in any dispute involving human conduct, they did not understand Him very well. And if you – or I – ever start to think that the Holy One is on ‘our side’ in any interpersonal or intercultural dispute, we will be totally deceived. Think of Yehoshua [Joshua], conversing with the ‘Angel of the Holy One’, in Joshua 5:13-14: ***And it came to pass, when Yehoshua was by Yericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Yehoshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our***

adversaries?” But He replied, “Lo [i.e. no, neither!], but as Commander of the host of the Holy One I have come.”

In this case, because Aharon and Miryam were personally offended at Moshe, they were thinking, reasoning, speaking and behaving on under the influence of that offence. They did not approve of Moshe’s marriage – or, apparently, like his wife. Their words suggest they had a deep-seated feeling of disrespect for Cushite people. Under the influence of all these negative fleshly feelings they tried to justify all their negative feelings, attitudes, and opinions with a vague, meaningless, theological argument based upon a half-truth. Men and women are still doing things like that today, Dear One. They are still claiming the Holy One is on their side in personal, cultural, ideological, philosophical, and religious, disputes. And they are every bit as wrong as Miryam and Aharon were. Always be careful, therefore, about throwing the Holy One’s Name out in support of your personal dispute. Be careful of invoking His Name in support of your personal agenda – or suggesting that He agrees with and feels the same as you. Be careful of using your faculties of thought and speech to mix and intermingle *the holy* – i.e. our Bridegroom-King’s Name, Thoughts, Words, and Ways – with the profane – i.e. your *personal feelings about another person or situation* and/or your personal prejudice toward a group of people.

Behold what a fearful weapon – for good or for evil – is the tongue of man. It holds *the power of death and life*. **Proverbs 18:21a**. If used improperly it can defile the whole body. **James 3:6**. Or it can merely reveal the uncleanness that is already at work inside a person. **Matthew 15:18**. Exceedingly difficult to tame, the tongues of men and women – even redeemed men and women - can quickly become ***an unruly evil, full of deadly poison***. **James 3:8**. So, how about you, Dear Reader? Are you using the precious gift of speech in all your various spheres of influence as a *fountain of blessing*, to release Heavenly wisdom, mercy, longsuffering, patience, forgiveness, hope, and encouragement into every person, place and situation you encounter? Or has your mouth become a dysfunctional orifice through which you are leaking toxic waste into the environment?

Vayishma Adonai

[i.e. And the Holy One listened, heard, and responded accordingly]

The Holy One is always paying attention. That is why Yeshua said men will give account for every idle word they speak. **Matthew 12:36**. The Holy One not only hears what we say; He hears what is in our hearts. He sees far beyond – and knows far more than - what we see or feel in any given moment or lifetime. He has seen and known all situations and all people – and all the implications generation by generation - to the end from the beginning. He knows that all we mortals can see

is a brief, partial, woefully incomplete snapshot. He knows all we hear in a given situation is a tiny, self-interest colored fragment of what is really happening. He therefore knows better than to *ever* take sides in any of our petty interpersonal or intercultural disputes. He refuses to be our bouncer. He will not be reduced to the role of our ‘Muscle’, or ‘Hit Man’, or Enforcer. He is a Redeemer. He is a Healer. He is all about Restoration and Redemption – not what seems right and what seems wrong, or what seems fair and what seems unfair, or what appears just and what appears unjust – to mortal human beings.

The Toxic Discharges Left Behind By Self-Righteous Human Beings – And the Bloody Aftermath Those Discharges Leave in Their Wake

It did not take much exposure to the wilderness obstacle course for our ancestors’ thin veneer of spirituality – tied up in head knowledge rather than practical experience as it was – to totally evaporate. It does not take much time in the wilderness for the same thing to happen to us. Alas, the instant we cease to gaze in awestruck wonder at the Holy One who loved and stepped forward to redeem us and claim us as His People though we had nothing whatever to commend ourselves to Him we tend to start looking around critically at other people. And that leads to the formation of attitudes and opinions and philosophies and doctrines, creeds, and formulations of *halakah* that quickly calcify around us to create a cistern of toxic waste that eventually poisons everything we touch. The moment we cease to fill our ears and hearts and mouths with the beautiful, life-giving Words our Bridegroom-King has spoken we tend to start deteriorating from the inside out. The life-giving flow of love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that comes from abiding in His Presence begins to dry up in our soul - and into the void waves of uncleanness rush in. Pulses of dark energy change the key of our songs from major to minor, and from lilting melodies of praise and thanksgiving to lamentations of complaint and dirges of death. We cease to think our Bridegroom-King’s Thoughts. We cease to walk in His Ways. We cease to speak His Words of life in humility. We start instead to react in our flesh. We choose to indulge self-centered, self-justifying thoughts. We choose to walk in our own ways, and to speak words that wound instead of heal – words that spread darkness, dissension, and confusion instead of light, inspiration, restoration, and revelation. The longer we do that, the more our lives begin to reflect the following:

1. *fear* [which is the opposite of love],
2. *frustration* [which is the opposite of peace],
3. *a sense of despair concerning situations and trends* [the opposite of hope],
4. *an urge to engage in manipulative speech and behaviors* [the opposite of patience],

5. *criticism which wounds* [the opposite of kindness which leads to repentance],
6. *offended, self-righteous, unforgiving vindictiveness* [the opposite of goodness],
7. *staleness and laxity in spiritual disciplines* [the opposite of faithfulness],
8. *harshness* [the opposite of gentleness], and
9. *succumbing to fleshly-generated attitudes, moods, and emotions* [the opposite of self-control].

As these waves of uncleanness sweep over us, before we know it – quite without realizing it, and certainly without intending it – we start to spew forth rivers of foul uncleanness. We convince ourselves we are right and good and everyone who does not think, speak, act, hold religious meetings, reckon time, and look and dress like us is wrong and evil. We actually start to believe we have the right – indeed the duty - to judge our fellow man. We call such nonsense ‘discernment’, in order to justify it in our own minds. But we lie to ourselves. We are willingly deceived. The well of information from which we draw this thing we call discernment is not the Beautiful Mind and Gracious Heart of our Bridegroom-King - it is just our own snake bitten *bad attitude* dressed up in spiritual-sounding language. Discernment that leads to cynicism, sarcasm, criticism, judgment, complaint, and condemnation of others does not – cannot - come from the tree of life; it can only come from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The source of such toxic waste is not found in the wisdom of the Holy One – it emanates instead from the insidious whispers of the eternally offended one who always masquerades as an ‘angel of light’.

Alas, the moment we exchange the love, peace and wisdom we receive from our Bridegroom-King for the fear, anger, suspicion, criticism, dissatisfaction, and harsh opinion offered to us in the subliminal whispers of our mind, will, and emotions, we ‘go toxic’. Everyone but us can easily see how much Egyptian death-obsession remains in our hearts. We alone are blinded to the harsh reality of how much toxicity yet remains in us that our Divine Bridegroom is going to have to clean up before we can function as the glorious Bride He deserves. Thus even more important than our calling to guard our tongues is our calling to guard our hearts, for they are the wellsprings of life.

Let’s talk about what the gift of speech is for – and perhaps that will help us understand why all of the above listed items are *improper, sinful, irreverent, and destructive* usages of that gift.

For What Purpose is the Gift of Speech Given To Us?

The ability to articulate and express thoughts and emotions in the form of intelligible words is a precious gift of the Holy One that is unique to angelic beings and mankind. Other creatures can only groan or bellow or warble or squeak. The

Holy One can speak intelligently – indeed, creatively and prophetically - and He chose to make humans in His image. That means He consciously chose to create us with the capacity to speak intelligently, creatively, and prophetically as well. What an awesome *gift*. What a *wonderful privilege*. What a *glorious honor*. And correspondingly, *what a tremendous responsibility!* Why do you think He gave us this precious gift? He obviously did not empower humanity with His Precious gift of speech in order for us to wreak havoc upon each other and spread toxicity throughout His beautiful Creation. Look at what Adam did with the gift of speech before the Serpent perverted it. Everything Adam saw He spoke encouragement, meaning, purpose and destiny into. For Torah tells us:

*Out of the ground the Holy One God formed every beast of the field
and every bird of the air, and brought [them] to Adam
to see what he would call [i.e. speak words of purpose and destiny over] them.
And whatever Adam called each living creature that became its name.
So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field.*

*Then the rib that the Holy One God had taken from man
He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.
And Adam said: "This [is] now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
She will be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,
and they shall become one flesh."*

[Genesis 2:19-24]

Like Adam our mission in this world – and the reason why we have been empowered with the gift of speech - is to *find and acknowledge the dormant potential in every creature and person we meet* and then to *speak words of encouragement and edification and destiny directly to that dormant potential*. But look at what the serpent did with the gift of speech. It started with whispering about someone else – in this case the Holy One - behind His back: “*And he said to the woman: **Did God truly say** Genesis 3:1. It then proceeded to quickly to substituting his own shortsighted, ill-informed [at best] opinion for the truth spoken by the Holy One: *Then the serpent said to the woman, **You will not surely die.** Genesis 3:4. The serpent’s misuse of speech then proceeded further in the wrong direction – first by speaking slanderous accusations about another [the Holy One] and then by playing to Chava’s fleshly appetites instead of her spiritual destiny:**

***For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened,
and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.***

*So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes,
and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate.*

[Genesis 3:6]

Now look at what Adam did with the gift of speech *after the Fall*. The first thing he did was *recoil in fear and shame*. He shut his mouth. He quit speaking blessing and purpose and destiny. He retreated into his own thoughts. He looked for – and

quickly found - someone else to blame for the fear and shame he felt. He forgot who he was and what his mission on earth was all about. He forgot Who had given him life and in Whose image he had been made. He ran and hid behind trees and tried to disguise himself with fig leaves. He put up all the barriers he could to keep the Holy One from seeing, calling forth, and releasing the potential that was now trapped inside his self-inflicted prison walls of fear, shame, offense, anger, grief, and confusion.

Every time we misuse the precious gift of speech we do to the hearer - and to ourselves – the very same thing. We erect prison walls around the amazing God-given potential put in us and in the person we infect with our serpent-venom. And that is why most human potential for goodness is now hidden away where human eyes cannot see it. It is still there. But in the way are hedges of trees, camouflages of fig leaves, prison walls of fear, shame, offense, anger, grief, and confusion.

Our Mission, Should We Choose to Accept It ...

That is where the redeemed sons and daughters of the living God come in. Our mission in this world is to find and acknowledge the dormant potential in every person we meet and then to speak words of encouragement and edification directly to that dormant potential. Isaiah 61:1-4 describes this mission in detail. It is and will throughout this age continue to be:

*... to declare **GOOD NEWS** to the poor, to **HEAL** the brokenhearted,
to proclaim **LIBERTY** to the captives and the **OPENING OF THE PRISON**
to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Holy One's **FAVOR**
as well as the day of His **RECOMPENSE/VINDICATION**;
to **COMFORT** those who mourn; to **CONSOLE** all who mourn in Tziyon;
to give them **BEAUTY** for ashes, and the **OIL OF JOY** for mourning,
and the **GARMENT OF PRAISE** for the spirit of heaviness;
in order that they may be called **trees of righteousness**,
the planting of the Holy One that He may be glorified."*

Since this is our mission ... well Beloved ... *what is with all the negativity?* It is time to resist the urge to judge, accuse, condemn, take offense, reject, ostracize, and shun. It is time to leave the seat of the scornful to its rightful serpentine inhabitant. It is time to shut down the sarcasm, cynicism, and criticism spigot. It is time to release LIFE, HEALTH, and PEACE, and BLESSING instead of death, wounding, frustration, and arrogant judgmentalism. It is time we used our gifts of speech to call forth BEAUTY out of all the ugly, stinking ash heaps of humanity. It is time we used our gift of speech to call forth JOY out of people trapped in – or for that matter voluntarily indulging themselves in – prisons of depression, despair, and just plain bad attitudes. It is time we used our words to release the fountains of praise buried for years beneath oppression, bondage, poverty, ignorance, grief, fear, anger, unforgiveness, and shame.

It is extremely easy to get distracted from our mission. And while there are many ways this can happen for any individual, the surest and deadliest way to get distracted from – and therefore fail to fulfill - our mission is to *let ourselves focus instead on the darkness and ugliness within which that person's dormant potential is presently trapped*. If we do this we find ourselves *reacting against and speaking to that darkness and ugliness instead of to the potential locked up inside the person[s] the Holy One has placed within our sphere of influence*.

How To Sabotage the Kingdom's Advancement

Want to know how to stop the Kingdom from advancing in your sphere of influence? It's easy. Just get self-obsessed, critical, judgmental, and negative. The most effective mission-killers in the world are our own unsundered attitudes of entitlement, victimization, outrage, complaint, and accusation. Every time we let negativity, criticism, accusation, hypocrisy, and self-promotion escape our lips we both *put out our own light* and *cause our salt to lose its savor*. Judgment and criticism are *the serpent's way*. We are not here to do the serpent's dirty work for him. So why on earth don't we stop doing it?

We have such a *wonderful calling*. In us *all the families of the earth are to be blessed*. **Genesis 12:3**. We are to be *a kingdom of priests*. **Exodus 19:6**. We are to *shine like the brightness of the firmament, and turn many to righteousness*. **Daniel 12:3**. We are to *do all things without complaining and disputing that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life*. **Philippians 2:14-16**. Why would anyone in their right mind choose instead to spread *negativity, condemnation, and serpent-venom*? No one in his right mind would. After all, negativity is a form of insanity. The Holy One has not given us a message of anger. He never stops loving and wanting the best possible destiny for every human being He created ... and He wants us to never stop doing those things either. He never doubts for a second His ability to redeem, to restore, to rehabilitate, and to redirect either the most hardened criminal or the most self-righteous hypocrite. He wants us never to doubt that either. So He gives us the gift of speech - and sends us out to call forth the dormant seeds of goodness hidden just beneath the surface of the people we encounter. He intends for us to be to them as the gentle rains and increasing daylight of springtime are to the dormant seeds of plant life hidden just below the earth's surface.

Our Bridegroom-King wants us to open our mouths with the same heart Moshe had when he said: ***Let my teaching drop as the rain - my speech distill as the dew; as raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the Holy One, and ascribe greatness to our God.*** **Deuteronomy 32:2-3.**

There is now no condemnation in Messiah. We are therefore to speak only blessing, never cursing. We are to speak only healing, not wounding. We are to speak only encouragement and exhortation, not criticism. We are to speak only hope, not cynicism. We are to speak only purpose, not sarcasm. We are to speak only restoration, not doom and destruction. We are to speak only edification, not accusation.

Life and death are in the power of the tongue. Let us *choose life*. As the Holy One taught us in connection with His Protocol for the Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover we call the Book of Leviticus: ***Do not go around spreading slander among your people, and do not stand idly by when your neighbor's blood is flowing.*** Leviticus 19:16.

Our neighbor's blood is *always flowing*, Dear Reader! Our neighbor's potential for goodness is always trapped inside some crusty shell of condemnation, shame, anger, offense, wounding, or fear. We are not to "stand idly by". Our mission is to partner with the Holy One to bring liberation.

The Ultimate Evidence of Internal Uncleaness - Lashon Ha Ra

In Hebrew the word our English Bibles translate as 'tongue' is *lashon*. The primary subject of today's Torah aliyah is the kind of misuse of the tongue that the Hebrew sages have come to call *lashon ha ra*. This broad categorization covers every situation and context in which the tongue that the Holy One gave to us for the purpose of releasing blessings is instead used to speak evil or condemnation. *Lashon ha ra* includes but is not limited to:

- *speaking words of gossip,*
- making *accusations concerning another* outside the context of Torah-ordained proceedings designed to bring about justice in the Community,
- moralizing* about someone else's behavior or appearance,
- ridiculing* another,
- sarcastic criticism* of another,
- name calling,*
- character assassination,*
- complaining* about [or coveting out loud] another person's wealth;
- complaining about *one's own circumstances* or relationships;
- judging* another person,
- unfavorable comparisons* (e.g. one child to another, or one leader to another); and
- blasphemy*

Please do not hold yourself out as being 'Torah observant', or 'serving _____ (please insert your preferred pronunciation for the Holy Name here) while your

mind and/or mouth/keyboard are engaged in any of the above. And please don't act shocked and misunderstood when you inevitably start to reap from others exactly what you have sown – with interest.

Getting Very, Very Real

Speech is powerful stuff. Why do you think the media so loves 'sound bytes'? The Bible is full of uplifting testimonies of the faithfulness of the Holy One; the world around is full of zingers, barbs, and burns. Why do you think the ungodly sources in the world encourage us so strongly to be as *cunningly sarcastic*, as *daringly irreverent*, as *sensually suggestive*, and as *downright profane* as possible in our discussions and discourses? The *Ruach* however teaches that for us speak negatively regarding any of the Holy One's creations - including even Ha-Satan the accuser - constitutes *lashon ha ra*. Moreover, negative talk about others does not cease to be *lashon ha ra even if what is said is 100% true*, or if *spoken in an attempt at dark humor*. Why is what we, as sons and daughters of the Kingdom of Heaven, let come out of our mouths so important? Because the Holy One has chosen speech as His medium of creation and redemption. And we are called to be like Him, and model His Attributes before the world at all times. That means that we are to be speaking life, health, wholeness, wellness, blessing and peace. Every negative, complaining, accusative, sarcastic word that issues forth out of our mouths or off our pens and keyboards reflects negatively on our Divine Bridegroom. Hence to accuse or judge or criticize or curse another (outside the established legal system of the society) is in effect to blaspheme the Holy One, who made that individual, and to impugn Yeshua who bore that person's sins as the *Korban Chattat* (surrogate sin bearer). Gossip and ridicule are thus nothing more than *blasphemy in its seed form*. And so the reason we who are called to be the holy people of the Most High are not supposed to "stand idly by" when gossip, ridicule, or the like is spoken, is because we are, at such moment, in a "weed patch", where blasphemy is growing - in the person who is doing the speaking, and alas, if we receive and internalize the *lashon ha ra*, in us as well.

Let's All Forget About What the Holy One is Doing and Start Expressing Opinions About Moshe's 'Mixed Marriage'!

The ostensible basis of the accusation of Miryam and Aharon is that Moshe has married a "Kushite"³ girl. Why all of a sudden did this become an issue to Miryam and Aharon? Is it possible the stress and deprivation and frustrations of the wilderness experience brought out the worst in Miryam and Aharon every bit as much as it did in the ordinary people in the camp? But let's look deeper at this allegation and see if we can decipher the underlying problem that led to the *lashon*

³ Other translations say 'Ethiopian' [Complete Jewish Bible], or 'dark-skinned'.

ha ra. The Hebrew word used to describe Moshe's wife⁴ is *kaf, vav, shin, yod*, pronounced ***koo-shee***. This word is used to describe a descendant of Cham [Noach's dishonored son] through Cham's son *kaf, vav, shin* [Kush]. Kush was the progenitor of the southernmost peoples located in Africa, which are believed to have migrated from the southern parts of the Nile (Ethiopia). Most probably, all of those who became what is known today as 'Ethiopian Jews', as well as most of the tribes of Africa, descended from Kush. Torah makes it clear, however, that *Miryam's real complaint had nothing to do with Moshe's marriage – and had everything to do with her jealousy over Moshe's calling*. What Miryam's *lashon ha ra* was really about, it appears was a *power struggle* – just like we see today in corporations, unions, churches, synagogues, and, alas, even *families*. The issue was not really about Moshe's marriage at all. That was just *a convenient smokescreen* for Miryam's *real gripe*. The real issue was '*which one of them should be considered the greatest*'⁵. And when that, rather than the redemptive power of the Holy One, is what people in the Camp are choosing to think and talk about, there is something very dangerous afoot. It goes back to the earliest of days – to Genesis 4:6-7: "***So the Holy One said to Kayin, Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.***"

Sin Lies At the Door - and Its Desire is for You!

Remember that Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam – like Kayin and Hevel - were natural born siblings. Whatever Moshe might be to everyone else in the world, to Aharon and Miryam he was just '*little brother*'. How ugly we think we can behave toward our nearest of kin. How prone we are to criticize and judge and condemn our brothers and our sisters. How jealous we can become of "little brother" when he excels and receives recognition independent of us.

Let's look beyond the "low blow" attack on Moshe's marriage to the real cause of the problem. Miryam and Aharon said: ***Harak ach-b'Moshe diber Adonai halo gam-banu*** [i.e. *Has the Holy One indeed spoken only with Moshe? Hasn't he spoken also with us?* Numbers 12:2b.

Is That The Voice of Yosef's Ten Older Half-Brothers I Hear?

Do you recognize the voice of the half-brothers of Yosef in Miryam and Aharon's statements? When Yosef told his brothers his dreams do you remember what they said? Torah tells us: ***his brothers said to him, "Will you indeed reign over us? Or will you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. *** And his brothers envied him ... " Come therefore, let***

⁴ *Cushi* is Strong's Hebrew word #3571.

⁵ The same kind of quarrel occurred between Yeshua's talmidim at Pesach c.29 CE. Luke 21:24.

us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we will say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We will see what will become of his dreams!" Genesis 37:8, 11, 20.

Did you know that when one is the subject of gossip, slander, sarcastic criticism, ridicule and the like Torah considers it every bit as serious as if that person's *life was in danger*? There is, you see, in every negative word we speak about our fellow human being the seed of *assault, battery and murder*. That is the basis of the eternal truths Messiah taught in Matthew 5:21-26. As He said:

"But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause will be in danger of the judgment.

Anyone who calls his brother "Good-for-nothing!" will be liable to the authorities; but whoever says "You fool!" incurs the penalty of burning in the fire of God."

Anger if unchecked gives rise to slander. Slander if not unchecked gives rise to malicious attack. And the blood of our brother flows bright and red while we stand idly by. As it was with Yosef and his brothers, so it is with us. We were created and given the gift of speech for more than this.

Lashon ha ra is a curse, literally and figuratively, naturally and spiritually. Don't let it tickle your ears. Don't let it tantalize your mind. And never, never let it fall from your lips. Curses should never come forth from mouths anointed to bless. We have too many important and wonderful things to release on the earth than to contaminate ourselves or the world with complaints, accusations, criticisms, sarcasm, and other forms of negative speech.

Divine Intervention

The Holy One did not stand idly by in this particular high profile intra-family dispute. He made it clear that there **is** a qualitative difference in the way He communicates with Moshe and the way He communicates with Miryam and Aharon. Torah records the conversation as follows:

The Holy One came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aharon and Miryam; and they both came forth.

He said, Hear now my words: if there be a prophet/prophetess among you,

I, The Holy One, will make myself known to him/her in a vision,

I will speak with him/her in a dream. My servant Moshe is not so;

***B'chol-beyti ne'eman hu* [he is faithful in all my house]:**

***with him will I speak peh el-peh* [i.e. mouth to mouth],**

even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the form of the Holy One shall he see ...

[Numbers 12:5-8]

Why this qualitative difference? Why was the best revelation Miryam or Aharon could receive "in a vision", or "in a dream", while Moshe could receive revelation intimately as in a *lover's kiss* with the Holy One?

The Secret To Moshe's Peh-al-peh Form of Revelation

A good part of the secret to Moshe's relationship with the Holy One is found in verse 3: *Now the man Moshe was **anav me'od** [very humble], above all the men who were on the surface of the eretz.* The secret of deep intimate communion with the Holy One is not to be found in fasting, or study, in great works of faith, or in years of service. It is found instead in *humility* – submission of every aspect of one's life to the Holy One and to His ways of approaching life as outlined in the Torah. And that humility comes at a price – witness Moshe reaping exactly what he sowed when he got all negative about B'nei Yisrael. As we are told elsewhere in the TaNaKh:

How shall I come before the Holy One, and bow myself before the exalted God?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

Will the Holy One be pleased with thousands of rams? With tens of thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my disobedience? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does the Holy One require of you,

*but to act justly, to love mercy, and to **walk humbly with your God?***

[Micah 6:6-8]

Miryam's Mercifully Quick Relatively Painless Lesson in the Discipline of Humility

[Alas, Aharon's Lesson Will be Neither Quick Nor Painless]

Miryam, like most of us, though gifted in many ways, was a bit of a slow learner concerning the important matter of true humility. The Holy One had blessed her with wonderful giftings/empowerments. She had been given the opportunity to play 'key roles' in both the deliverance of Israel from bondage and the development of Israel as the Holy One's chosen nation. But she misunderstood – as do most of us - that the Holy One could have done every bit of what He did through her *totally without her*. She began to view the undeserved giftings and anointing she had received as an *entitlement*. She began to think of herself more highly than she ought.

The lesson is a hard one to learn. But here is the true state of things:

1. The Holy One doesn't need your talent – or mine - and neither does the world.
2. The Holy One doesn't need your 'anointing' – or mine – and neither does any aspect of Creation.
3. The Holy One doesn't need your wisdom, counsel, or prophetic gifts – or mine – and the redemptive plan of our Wise, Loving, and all-powerful Creator will proceed *without skipping a single beat* even if you – or I - fall off the planet tomorrow and are never heard from again.

We are not – will never be — are not supposed to be, 'needed'. We are just given opportunities to serve, and the privilege to be participants rather than spectators in the great plan of the Holy One our Awesome and All-Powerful God. If we are

going to survive in the desert, and reach the place of rest to which we are called, and become who we are created and redeemed to be, we absolutely must get over ‘the need to be needed’. That need is a destructive aspect of childish self-absorption that has no place in the life of the Holy One’s Betrothed Bride to Be. Such an attitude focuses all the attention on us and what we do instead of on *the Holy One*, on *His plan*, and on *His Glory*.

Only when we understand these things will we be free to *become who we were created to be* and to *function in the Redeemed Community in a way that brings honor and glory to the Holy One* – and thereby begin to fulfill the Divine Destiny for which we were created, redeemed and Betrothed to the Holy One at Sinai.

Uh ... But What About Miryam?

So what happened to Miryam? The Holy One quietly, without fanfare, allowed the uncleanness that she had harbored deep in her heart – beneath all the flowery prophecy and praise - to manifest in her skin for all to see. Torah records that when the Billowing Cloud of the Presence lifted, *behold* - Miryam was *tz’arat*-stricken! Her skin was ‘white as snow’. For all time, as a warning to all of us, her deepest secrets of unbridled cynicism, self-obsession, and victimization were laid bare. Across the millennia we the 21st Century reader of Torah can still see them clearly – almost as clearly as the people who had marveled at her prophetic pronouncements and worshipped to the beat of her tambourine. It happened in an instant. Sores erupted all over her body. Lesions by the thousands formed simultaneously on her skin and covered her from the top of her head to the soles of both her feet. The lesions swelled rapidly, and throbbed, and stuck out for all to see like a thousand sore thumbs. Whole patches of her skin turned strange colors. Some areas turned scaly. Her skin veritably oozed with discharges of pus. She itched all over, and hurt all over, and burned all over. The effect of it all was both *debilitating* and *humiliating*. She who had led worship at the Sea of Reeds now couldn’t even hold a tambourine, much less even think of beating one against her hand, hip or leg. She could not dance. She could not sing. One by one, her gifts and anointings were all disabled. Her spiritual light was completely punched out. Her prophetic voice was silenced.

Oh my! All over a little tidbit of *lashon ha ra*. Are you *getting this*? Is the image etched in your mind? Is it making you uncomfortable? Is your tongue cleaving to the roof of your mouth? It should be. For the Holy One will later tell us clearly that it is His Will that what happened to Miryam that day *never, ever be forgotten*. Her brother Moshe will record this instruction for posterity as follows: ***Remember what the Holy One your God did to Miryam, by the way as you came forth out of Mitzrayim. Deuteronomy 24:9.***

Remember, Dear Reader. Remember it well - and *take it to heart*.

The Closing Verse of Our Parsha

Fortunately for us all the parsha does not end with Miryam's discipline and disgrace. After the corrective discipline runs its course Torah makes it clear that Miryam is *completely healed* and *totally restored* both to her place and to her function in the camp. After all Torah is not about judgment – it is about *restoration* and *redemption* and *OVERCOMING*. And so, while we are exhorted to 'remember' what the Holy One did to Miryam, we are not called – or encouraged - to either judge or ridicule or pity her for it. We are not to take up an offence *against her* or *for her*. We are not to be offended. We are to take the lesson she learned to heart, as if it had happened *to us*. Because if we were to be honest, it *should* have happened to us - many, many times over. But thanks be to the Compassionate One that our Covenant Partner – our God Who brought us forth from the slave camps of Egypt and betrothed Himself to us forever on Sinai – and Who loves us far too much to leave us the way we are! For when His corrective discipline – which always seems harsh for the moment it is being endured, as it did for Miryam – is completed, we always find ourselves *better people*, with not only more *fear of Heaven* but a greatly enhanced reservoir of *appreciation for our fellow man*. And so our parsha does not leave Miryam in exile from the camp. We wait for her to be restored according to the Torah. We welcome her back with open arms. And then we move on together.

Vatisager Miryam michutz l'machaneh shiv'at yamim
Miriam remained quarantined outside the camp for seven days,

V'ha-am lo nasa ad-he'asef Miryam
and the people did not move on until Miryam was able to return.

V'achar nas'u ha-am meChatzerot
And then the people left Chatzerot,

vayachanu b'midbar Paran
and they camped in the desert of Paran.

[Numbers 12:15-16]

We had better get acquainted with and acclimated to this place called *Paran*. We are going to be here awhile. And we will find out soon enough that ... well ... *Sinai it isn't*. *Paran* is a 'place of caverns; a wilderness area bounded on the north by Palestine, on the west by the wilderness of Etam, on the south by the desert of Sinai, and on the east by the valley of Arabah.'⁶ It is first mentioned in Torah as the barren area Southwest of Be'er-Sheva to which Hagar and Yish'mael fled after being cast out of Avraham's camp. See Genesis 21:20-21: ***And the Holy One was***

⁶ *Paran* is *peh, alef, resh, nun*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #6290. If you want to see a picture of this area go to bibleplaces.com and click on 'wilderness'.

with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and he became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

If you remember nothing else about this lesson, remember this: We are about to enter Yish'mael's world. And if we are not careful here we will find ourselves taking on Yish'mael's traits – those that got him banished from Avraham's home. How could such a thing happen? The noun *Paran* is etymologically derived from the Hebrew verb root *pa'ar*⁷. The first usage of this verb root in Torah is found in Exodus 8:9, where in a conversation between Moshe and Pharaoh concerning the invasion/plague of 'frogs', or 'swamp creatures', Moshe says: *Accept the honor [Hebrew, hitpa'er] of saying when I shall intercede for you ... to destroy the frogs/swamp creatures from you ...* The phrase *hitpa'er*, a form of the verb root *pa'ar*, has proven difficult to translate. Rashi renders it 'try and show off'. Ibn Ezra translates it 'let me give you the honor,' [Sekhel Tov; Ibn Ezra]. Radak prefers 'demonstrate your status to me' [Radak, Sherashim]. Ibn Yanach translates the phrase 'give me the order' [Ibn Yanach]. In light of the essential meaning of the verb root *pa'ar* I would probably translate Moshe's '*hitpa'er*' request to Pharaoh as 'Show your glory' or 'show how great you are'. That is the essence of what we are unfortunately about to experience in *Paran*. Over the next few weeks in Yish'mael's world we are going to be tempted to think, speak, and act like Yish'mael. We are going to be 'against' people. We are going to '*strut our stuff*' like a wild donkey of a man. Everything we do is going to draw attention to *ourselves* instead of the Holy One. We are going to 'cop an attitude', and throw tantrums – like the spoiled children we are. Oh, we have plenty of revelation; after all, we have just spent almost a year at Sinai! We have plenty of spiritual experience; after all, we have lived for months in the Manifest Presence of the Holy One. But revelation and knowledge *without high levels humility* do not, by any means, equal Godly wisdom. We have tons of informational knowledge about the Holy One, but we have yet to conform ourselves to His Likeness. And alas, as a result of our lack of humility, wisdom, or transformation we are going to start looking a whole lot more like Yish'mael – into whose world we have now come – than like the chosen seed that we are. Until we learn humility, seek after wisdom, and surrender to the process of Divine transformation in real, tangible ways, our wilderness experience is not going to be pretty. It is, however, absolutely essential that we be here. The Holy One's plan of redemption for the world requires that we learn the lessons of *Paran*, and learn them well – however painful they may be. The level of pain and discomfort we experience as we learn those lessons is all up to us. As long as we choose to remain just another voice of *lashon hara* amongst a

⁷ *Pa'ar* is *peh, alef, resh*. Strong's Hebrew word #6286 it is defined by Strong's as *to glorify, beautify, and/or adorn*.

nation of people of uncircumcised lips, the heat of the coal from the altar will continue to burn into our un-surrendered flesh.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Yesterday the “evil speaking” encountered in the community of the Redeemed was complaining about one’s life circumstances - [a] all the walking/marching done since leaving Sinai, and [b] the selection of food. Both were merely external manifestations of a spiritual problem, as Yeshua pointed out in Matthew 15:10-20.

[A] What does complaining about life circumstances or food say about one’s spiritual condition?

[B] In today’s aliyah who engages in *lashon ha ra*?

[C] What is the nature of the *lashon ha ra* engaged in?

[D] What does this type of *lashon ha ra* say about the spiritual condition of the one speaking it?

2. Considering Leviticus 19:16 as well as the aliyot of the last two days and the passages in Ya’akov [James] and Matthew we have read today, write out a code of conduct [rules to live by] having to do with what comes out of your mouth.

3. Verse 3 of today’s aliyah describes Moshe as “*very meek*” [KJV].

[A] Look up the word “meek” in Strong’s and Gesenius. Write the Hebrew word and its conceptual definition [Remember: focus on the *word picture* you begin to see as you study this out].

[B] How can you measure the degree of “meekness” that is in your life?

[C] How can you increase the degree of “meekness” that is in your life?

[D] Do you see any connection between verse 3 and what Ha Shem says in verses 7 and 8? If so, what is the connection? Explain.

[E] Do you see any connection between verse 3 and what happens in verses 11-14? If so, what is the connection? Explain.

4. Miryam was a leader of community song and dance - See Exodus 15. Aharon was the high priest, and as such was to pronounce the Holy One’s blessing on the people and declare people to be “*tahor*”.

[A] What was the significance of *Lashon Ha ra* coming out of the mouths of these two?

[B] What do you think the message of today’s verses is for us who read these passages?

5. In today’s Haftarah the angel of the Holy One “explains” to Zechariah the vision he has seen of the two olive trees and the menorah attached to them by a piping system. Here is the passage with which Haftarah *B’ha’alotcha* concludes:

*"This is the word of the Holy One to Zerubbavel, saying,
'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the Holy One of Hosts.
Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbavel you are a plain; and he will
bring out the capstone with shouts of **grace, grace** [Hebrew, *chen, chen*⁸] to it!"*

[A] Can you explain the “explanation”?

[B] Look up Zerubbabel in your Bible Dictionary and answer these questions:

(1) who was he?

(2) when did he live?

(3) what did he do?

(4) who does he symbolically represent [remember Zechariah 3:8]?

[C] Read Revelation 11:1-12. Then read Zechariah 4:11-14. Who do the believe the two olive trees of Zechariah’s vision (and John’s vision) represent?

6. Zerubbabel is told in verse 7 to bring forth a “headstone” [KJV] or “capstone”

[A] In Strong’s and Gesenius look up the word translated as “headstone”, and write the Hebrew word and its definition.

[B] The people were to say “Grace, grace unto it” when the “headstone” was brought forth. Look up the word translated “grace” in Strong’s and Gesenius. What is the Hebrew word, and what is the underlying Hebraic concept?

7. In today’s assigned B’rit Chadasha passage Shaul of Tarsus warns against any and all forms of “idolatry”. He actually urges us to “flee” it. *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men. Judge⁹ what I say. I Corinthians 10:14-15.*

[A] Look up the word “flee” in Strong’s. What is the Greek word? What is the definition? What Hebrew word and concept correspond to this?

[B] Why do you think Shaul does not say to “confront”, “challenge”, or “rebuke” idolatry [or the “spirit of idolatry], but urges us to *flee* from it?

8. In verse 16 Shaul calls “the cup of blessing we bless” the “communion of the blood of Messiah” and the bread which we break he calls “the communion of the body of Messiah”.

⁸ The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “grace” is *chet, nun sofrit*, Strong’s Hebrew word #2580 *chen*, pronounced *khane*. The first Biblical usage is in Genesis 6:8, where it is said that Noah [Noah] found *chen* in the eyes of the Holy One. Avraham, when he besought the Holy One and the angels en route to destroy S’dom to judge it to stay with him for a while, and take refreshment, said “If I have found *chen* in your sight, do not pass me by.” **Genesis 18:3**. When Moshe besought the Holy One to show him His glory, Moshe said: “*If I have found chen in Your sight, teach me Your ways*”. **Exodus 3**.

⁹ The Greek verb English Bibles translate as “judge” is *krino*, Strong’s Greek word #2919, pronounced *kree’-no*. It means to carefully examine or scrutinize something or someone, and analyze its/his substance and essence, and to come to an opinion concerning that thing/person. Shaul invites the reader of his letter to check out what he has been saying about temptation – and the Holy One’s covenant faithfulness in regard thereto – in their own lives.

*The cup of blessing which we bless, isn't it a communion¹⁰ of the blood of Messiah?
The bread which we break, isn't it a communion of the body of Messiah?*

[A] Read this verse in the Complete Jewish Bible, the Jewish New Testament, or the Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha. What does it say? To what “feast” day on the Holy One’s calendar does this suggest the “cup” and “bread” of which Shaul speaks pertains?

[B] In Strong’s Concordance look up the word our English Bibles translate as “communion”. What is the Greek word that has been translated “communion”, and what does it mean?

[C] Search out, through Strong’s, Gesenius’ Lexicon, or other sources, the Hebrew word that would correspond to the Greek word translated as “communion”. Write the word you believe is most appropriate, in Hebrew letters, with vowel sounds, and describe the Hebraic concept underlying that word. [Hint, Gobel, in the *Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha*, renders it a form of the verb *dabak* (dalet, beit, kuf), Strong’s Hebrew word #1692].

[D] What exactly is the “communion” of which Shaul is speaking? Is it the Kiddush and HaMotzee of Shabbat and the Festivals? Is it specifically the “third cup” of wine and the *matzah* of the Passover seder? Is it a new ritual initiated by Messiah Yeshua, independent of the *Mo’edim* [Divine Appointments set forth in Leviticus 23]? Explain your answer.

May He touch our mouths with a coal from His altar, and may our lips not become tamei again.

*May He purge our hearts of every evil inclination, that we might give Him pure praise,
and that we might bless, and not curse, our family members and our neighbors.*

And may each of us find true communion with the Holy One our King

In the humility of Moshe as made perfect in Messiah.

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Revelation 2:18-29

*"To the angel of the kehillah in Thyatira write: "The Son of God,
who has his eyes like a flame of fire,
and his feet are like burnished brass, says these things:*

***I know your works, your love, faith, service, patient endurance,
and that your last works are more than the first.***

***But I have this against you, that you tolerate your woman, Izevel,
who calls herself a prophetess. She teaches and seduces my servants
to commit sexual immorality, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.***

I gave her time to repent - but she refuses to repent of her fornication.

Behold, I will throw her into a bed, and those who commit adulteration with her

¹⁰ The Greek word English Bibles translate as “communion” is *koinonia*, Strong’s Greek word #2842. It does not refer to a sacrament [i.e. the “Lord’s Supper” as practiced in evangelical churches]. It literally means *an intimate sharing among friends*.

*into great oppression, unless they repent of her works.
I will kill her children with Death, and all the kehillot will know
that I am He who searches the minds and hearts.
I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.
But to you I say, to the rest who are in Thyatira,
as many as don't have this teaching,
who don't know what some call 'the deep things of Ha-satan,' to you I say,
I am not putting any other burden on you.
Nevertheless, hold firmly that which you have, until I come.
He who overcomes, and he who keeps my works to the end,
to him I will give authority over the nations.
He will rule them with a rod of iron, shattering them like clay pots;
as I also have received of my Father:
and I will give him the morning star.
He who has an ear, let him sh'ma what the Spirit says to the k'hillot.*