

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah B'ha'alotcha:** Numbers 11:1-35
Haftarah: Zechariah 4:1-5
B'rit Chadasha: I Corinthians 10:13

And the people complained

[Numbers 11:1]

Today's Meditation is Revelation 2:12-17;

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

V'yehi ha-am kemit'onenim - *And it came to pass that the people complained ...* **ra b'oznei Adonai** - *malignant self-obsession in the ears of the Holy One. Numbers 11:1.*

Our days of sitting in the shade of Sinai delighting in daily downloads of Creator Speak are over. Moshe heard it first, when the Holy One told him: “**Rav lachem shevet b'har hazeh** .. *enough sitting around at this mountain!*” Soon after that the Cloud began to move, and what were we supposed to do? Ready or not – and like it or not - we found ourselves folding up the Tabernacle, packing up our wives, children, and belongings, and taking our ‘snow globe’ lifestyle on the road. Oh, it was exciting, of course. But we grossly miscalculated the difficulty we would have in putting the stunning ‘cheat codes’ for a life well lived that we learned at Sinai into practice in real time. We badly underestimated the level at which this dangerous a march, through treacherous terrain, under extreme conditions, would have on our minds, bodies, and souls. We weren’t prepared for this degree of spatial, visual, and topographical disorientation. We did not count on the heat being anywhere near this intense! We did not count on our self-talk – much less our conversations with one another - becoming so negative so soon. After 11 ½ months learning the Deep Wisdom of Torah from the mouth of the Holy One Himself we thought we were a whole lot better, stronger, tougher, wiser, and more holy than this! Our newfound calling to greatness and our commitment to the Holy One’s Grand Plan of *kol-Tikkun* are being tested by fire – and well, let’s just say that what is coming forth looks more like *sputter-stall-spin-out-crash-and-burn* than *catch-the-thermal-drafts-rise-up-and-soar*.

V'atah Nafsheinu Y'beishah ... But Now Our Souls Are Drying Up!

Whatever we were expecting in the way of life-after-Sinai ... well, let’s just say *this is not it!* There is no yellow brick road. There is no emerald city. There is no peaceful village. There is no sign of human life. There are no resorts. There are no

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hotels. There are no roadside parks. There are no rest areas. There are no oases. There are no coffee shops or shopping centers. There is no shade. All we have seen for three long days of marching is sand. All we have smelled is each other – and it is by no means a ‘pleasing fragrant aroma’. All we taste as we march is the salt of our own sweat. Who knew it would be so hard? Who imagined the terrain could be so menacing? Who dreamed it could be so stressful? Who comprehended that our legs would get so sore, that our skin would get so sunburned, and that our throats would get so parched? Who conceived that the great reservoirs of shalom, joy, hope, and emunah which flooded our souls at Sinai could – WOULD - dry up so quickly and so thoroughly? Who understood the strange tricks the desert tends to play on the human mind? Who considered the way the unclean species and spirits that inhabit the dry places trigger the darkest of human emotions? Ravens follow close behind us, mimicking and mocking all the way. Vultures circle overhead. Horned vipers sidewind and make a cacophony of hissing and rasping noises designed to intimidate us. Hyenas snicker. Jackals howl. Cobras rise up and spit venom in our direction as we pass. The message of each species is perfectly clear: this is *our home ... and you, son of man, are not welcome here*. Still, the Pillar of Fire and Cloud leads us on. Further and further into the no-man’s land that these creatures call home it takes us. And as long as we have breath in our lungs and the strength to put one sandaled foot in front of another, by the grace and for the sake of our King and His Grand Plan – we follow.

Deserts Are Us ... And We are Deserts

The first tests the desert is going to present to us related to MOOD, ATTITUDE and VOCABULARY. Our calling in the King’s service is to process all thoughts, all stimuli, all emotional reactions, all body language, all speech, and all behavior through the lens of our Covenant with the Creator of the Universe. We are called to bring light – not darkness – wherever our feet may tread. We are called to serve the Holy One, our fellow man, and the Ecosystem – not to react to every discomfort like a bull in a China shop. We are called to model what it looks like to a human being who deserves nothing to be grateful for and make the best of whatever he/she is given – not to demand to have everything our flesh desires. We are called to bless, not curse. We are called to carry *shalom, simchah, and emunah* [KJV ‘peace’, ‘joy’, and ‘faith’] – not offense, discontent, and cynicism. We are called to be vessels of unending praise – not bitter fountains spewing the toxic slime of discontent. We are called to fill the space around us, and ultimately every space over which the Holy One sees fit to give us direct influence, with *tzedekah umishpat* [KJV ‘righteousness’ and ‘justice’]; not rage against the injustices we see committed by other people within their own spheres of influence. We are called to love mercy - and to dispense it liberally in every situation we encounter; whining, complaining, and ranting about things we don’t like sends the exact opposite

message. We are called to walk humbly with our God; complaint is not supposed to be in our vocabulary – because complaint constitutes the absolute, eternal antithesis of humility. Complaint is merely an eruption of malignant self-obsession. We are not – and must not allow ourselves to think, speak, or behave – like the people of the nations. We are the Redeemed Ambassadors of the Creator of the Universe; and if even we murmur and complain, rant and rage, and argue and sling sarcasm just like everybody else – how will be the world ever see the goodness – and hear of the wonderful works, wisdom, and ways - of the King? Every complaint that escapes the lips of one who has been redeemed is like a poison-tipped arrow driven into the heart of the next person the Holy One wants to redeem – and constitutes the ultimate insult to our Covenant Partner in Heaven.

The Season of Wilderness Testing Begins

The stretch of desert we have just entered is not a walk in the park - or a rose garden of some kind. It is not our place of rest. It is *a test*. But what kind of a test is it? In reality it was only a test of moderate at best difficulty. This test did not involve the shedding of a single drop of blood. It did not involve a call to die nobly for our King. It did not even involve a call to suffer persecution. It did not require us to endure torture. All it involved was a moderate degree of physical discomfort. It was just a little burst of heat, a little twinge of thirst, a little bite of hunger, a little soreness in the legs, a few blisters on the feet, a little sand in the eyes, a little stinging from sand-flea bites, and a little programmed tedium.

The Holy One knew how little it would take to make our uncircumcised, overactive, untamed flesh show its ugly head. He knew how quickly our uncircumcised heart would turn back to the dark side. He is fully aware of how susceptible our uncircumcised ears are to gossip. He knows very well how gleefully our uncircumcised lips revert to complaint, cynicism, fatalism, and *lashon ha ra*. He did not push us one step farther than absolutely necessary. He knew that in order for us to successfully navigate this test – and to begin to function as the light to the nations that He has called us to be - that we would have learn the hard way to *stay focused on His Glory, on His promises, and on the Awesome Love He has for us and we have for Him*. He knew we would have to learn through trial and error what it takes to stay focused on who we are in the process of becoming by virtue of the power of the Holy One’s prophetic words.

He knew we would have to stay focused on the purpose for which the Divine Bridegroom redeemed us from Egypt, brought us to Sinai, and now leads us along this carefully designed wilderness obstacle course. He knew we would have to stay focused on the DESTINY He has not only *ordained for us* but has by the Breath of His Mouth *empowered us to obtain*. He knew we would have to learn through the

school of hard knocks how important it was to stay calm, stay on task, stay zeroed in on the mission, stay unified, and resist the temptation turn on each other and on our leaders.

How are we to keep such a focus in the *heat*, the *sandstorms*, and the *stinging of the sand flea bites*? How are we supposed to focus on *purpose*, and *destiny*, and *calling*, and *covenant* - when our *feet hurt*, and our *muscles ached*, and our *eyes burned*, and our *nasal passages were afire with dust*, and our *bellies cried out for food*, and our *throats were parched and our tongues swollen with thirst*; when our *neighbors and children were fussy*, and when the *serpents and scorpions that called this forsaken wasteland home alternately seem to mock us, then stalk us, then mock us again*?

What is the secret to staying focused on bridal passion when our Bridegroom is not cooing over, caressing, and pampering us? Here is a wise saying: *He who blesses the Holy One at all times has no time to complain*. Here is another wise saying: *He who receives every meal and every circumstance in his life with gratitude has no time to feel sorry for himself*.

A Test of Patience, Perseverance, Perspective, Trust, and Focus

Torah says that after a mere three days of journey the people *complained about the hardship*. Hmmmmn. What hardship, exactly? Where exactly was the hardship? Let us stop and consider the empirical facts. We are a supremely blessed people. We have seen the Creator of Heaven and Earth redeem us from bondage to the most powerful nation on earth by His mighty Hand and Outstretched Arm. We have seen Him part the Sea for us with a breath of His mouth and deliver our souls from Pharaoh's mighty chariot corps. We have been set apart to Him as His treasured possession. We have basked in His Precious Bridegroom-Paradigm Presence for an 11-month extended "honeymoon". Throughout that honeymoon period He met with us daily to affirm us and to teach us His ways. He fed us and provided for us day after day, week after week, and month after month. He proved to us beyond a shadow of a doubt that we can trust both in His goodness and in His provision for our every need. Under His banner of love we have danced, and shouted, and sung, and waved our flags, and marched in festal procession with banners. We have listened to prophecy, preaching, and teaching to a point well beyond the ability of our minds to comprehend - or our hearts to receive. We have held *repentance meetings* and *dedication ceremonies*. We have "redeemed the land" at the site of the sin of the golden calf; we have noisily travailed in intercession. And we are still addicted to complaining.

We have indeed learned much at Sinai. But alas it is what we have NOT learned at

Sinai – and could never learn anywhere but in the heat of the wilderness - that the Holy One is about to bring to the surface.

Alas For What We Apparently Have NOT Learned

Alas, it seems we have *NOT* learned that noise, or movement, or emotions - however they may stir our flesh and draw a crowd - are not the same thing as worship. We have *NOT* learned to patiently trust in the Divine Bridegroom's boundless love and glorious plan rather than in the efficacy of our own actions. We have *NOT learned* that the working of faith is quiet and steadfast and pervades every moment of the day, every breath we breathe. We have *NOT learned* that *faith* is total surrender to and complete submersion in the will - and sovereignty - of the Holy One our God. We have *NOT LEARNED* that faith has nothing whatever to do with demanding our "rights" from the Holy One, or with bending His covenant promises out of context and out of time to satisfy the desires of our flesh. We have *NOT learned* to privately, without depending upon music or a song leader, with our families bless the Holy One and thank Him for what He has done and is doing in our lives - each time we rise up and each time we lie down; each time we look upon our wives or husbands, or parents, or children; each time we partake of whatever food He has graciously provided; each time we are privileged to see the sun rise and to see it set; each time we behold the beauty of the clouds and stars; even each time our digestive system works the way the Holy One designed it to! And as a result of not learning these things we are about to find out that not only are we *not ready to die for what He has promised* – *we are not even ready to walk three days in the heat and dust to claim our inheritance!*

But Wait ... Why Are You Downcast, O My Soul?

Do we have a reason to complain? Are our complaints justified? Is our negativity 'okay', or 'understandable'? You be the judge! But keep these things in mind. The eleven months we just spent sojourning under the Holy One's *Chuppah* at Sinai were the stuff dreams are made of. Our time on the mountain of the thorn bush was restorative, repurposing, and transformative. Day after day we sat in our Bridegroom-King's Shade. Sabbath after Sabbath we ate of His Bounty and drank deeply from His Streams of Living Water. New moon after new moon we had *mikveh* in His fountains of Wisdom. The Creator of the Universe drew us to Himself in order that we could run together. He called us His own. We turned our face toward His; He responded by kissing us with the kisses of His Mouth. He carried us into His Chambers. He bathed us in His Shalom. He clothed us in His Righteousness. He knit our hearts with His. He empowered us to visualize, for the first time, the beautiful sparks of potential that He had hidden within our fellow man. He invited us into His Brilliant Mind. He stunned us with the simplicity, yet magnificence, of His Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a Species and

for the Restoration of Creation to its intended state of beauty, fruitfulness, and harmony. He became our Rabbi, teaching us the *joy* of His Presence and the *blessing* of His Ways. He released over us – and into us and our families - the healing virtue of His Words. He taught us how to *inhale*, and *hold*, and *have our mind-altered by*, His Spirit – the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, of Counsel and Might, and of Knowledge and Reverent fear. He taught us how to bring this Spirit, and His essential attributes of mercy, compassion, forbearance, faithfulness to covenant, willingness to forgive instead of judge, and cross-generational vision, into all our thought processes, our vocabularies and patterns of speech, our perspectives, our priorities, our actions, our relationships, and indeed every aspect of our lives. He made us feel His great love for us in every fiber of our being. Day after day we reveled in His *sweeter than wine* love, His *stronger than death* love, and His *more certain than the sunrise* love.

Now, however, our sweet season of Sinai has, come to a close. The Cloud of our Bridegroom-King's Presence has lifted. The silver trumpets have sounded. And all 2 1/2 million or so of us have scrambled to the various battle stations to which the Bridegroom-King assigned us. We have left all the peaceful shade – as well as the delicious memory - of Sinai behind in a cloud of dust.

Our newly re-arranged camp - the moveable City of God – kicked off the new campaign with a majestic procession. Millions of sandals hit the sand in cadence. Caution was thrown to the wind, and off we all headed, one-by-one, into the vast foreboding desert. Our tribal banners were flying high. Our household flags and clan standards waved majestically with every desert breeze. Our spirits soared. We marched with a swagger – with the high praises of God in our mouths, a two-edged sword in our hands, and dreams of communal utopia floating through our heads. The Pillar of Cloud moved, and first the *kohanim*, then the Levi'im who carried the Ark of the Covenant, stepped lively. The tribe of *Y'hudah* [Judah] fell in next, singing out a rhythmic cadence of praise as they marched. Then one-by-one all the other tribes joined the throng. Together, like a mighty army off to conquer the world, we followed the pillar of cloud and fire away from the plain of Sinai right squarely into the face of the scorching heat and dark spiritual malaise of the desert of *Paran*. As yesterday's aliyah described it:

*So they departed from the mountain of the Holy One on a journey of three days;
and the ark of the covenant of the Holy One went before them*

[Numbers 10:33]

We are beloved, chosen children of the patriarchs. We have been gloriously redeemed from the house of bondage. We have been sitting at our Bridegroom-King's banqueting table, under his banner of love, for 11 ½ cycles of the moon.

We have been soaking up love. We have been absorbing revelation like water. We have been processed through phase after phase of the Ultimate Divine Bridal Makeover. We have the information, the database, and the protocols in our heads - now it is time for our practical exam. Can we do in real time what we have been taught to do in ‘soaking’ time?

We can do this, right? We have the Pillar of Fire and Cloud to guide us, and the Manifest Presence of the Bridegroom-King in our camp to inspire us, don’t we? We are at most 175 miles away from our promised inheritance, correct? Surely, *nothing can possibly stop us now!*

Nothing’s Gonna Stop Us Now ... Right?

Alas, we are in for a few surprises. By the conclusion of a three-day march in the hot sun of the desert our fragile façade of spirituality is going to *come undone in a most un-flattering way*. Once we set foot in the desert of *Paran*, you see, the prevailing territorial spirit there - the spirit of *Yish’mael* - will begin to attack our flesh. This unclean spirit will scoff at our praise. It will mock our trust in the Holy One. It will challenge our *shalom*, deride our joy, and ridicule our love. In rapid succession it will attack our passion, our energy, our enthusiasm, and even our sense of who – not to mention *Whose* - we now are. The tests will come fast and furious – and from every conceivable angle. They will challenge us psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, physically, relationally, and spiritually. Whatever spots, wrinkles and blemishes we still have will be revealed. Whatever areas of vulnerability we have not surrendered to the Holy One will be exposed, painfully probed, and masterfully exploited. Everything about us that can be shaken *will* be shaken.

The Holy One is not angry with us – nor is He worried about us. He knows the end from the beginning. He is not wringing His Hands. He is not wondering ‘How did this happen?’ He is wise. And He is at *shalom*. After all, He knew the full depths of our human frailties, individual and collective, before He ever sent Moshe to awaken us to our true identities and destinies and call us out of Egypt. Before He ever caused the Cloud to lift from Sinai and put us on this journey He knew full well that none of us were anywhere near as ‘*sold-out*’ to His plan, as *passionate about Him*, or as *willing to endure hardship for the glory of our great Bridegroom-Kingdom* as we imagined ourselves to be. So our reaction to the relatively slight inconvenience and discomfort of a 3-day march in the desert will come as no surprise to Him whatever. He has led us here on purpose, knowing full well how we would respond. He knew He had to dispossess us of the idea that we could do any of this ‘Torah-lifestyle’ stuff in our own strength.

Why else would He make us walk three days in the heat and flying sand – and the incessant mocking of the spirit of Yish'mael - before causing the pillar of fire and cloud to stop and allow us to rest? He could have carried us on eagle's wings. He could have translated us to Kena'an in the blink of an eye. He could have covered us with a Cloud and had angels fan us with their wings and feed us raisin cakes all along the way. He could have showered down cool, refreshing fruit juice from Heaven in little glasses with toothpick umbrellas in them at twenty-minute intervals. He's the One Who chose the route. He's the One Who chose the day and the hours of travel. He's the One Who made it hot, and dry. And He's the One Who led us right into the midst of Yish'mael's World.

Why did the Holy One choose to do this way? What was His Plan? Could it be that He planned things this way precisely so that we would have no choice but to come face-to-face with the darkest, most sinister forces of our divided hearts and our wicked flesh? Could it be that He did it to expose the half-hearted nature of the commitment to Covenant from which we still suffer - but which of course our time sitting comfortably under the Bridegroom's glorious *banner of love at Sinai* had done nothing to stir up?

As Moshe will remember this moment years later: "*So we departed from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness that you saw on the way to the mountains of the Amorites, as the Holy One our God had commanded us. Then we came to Kadesh Barnea. Deuteronomy 1:19.* I hope you caught that 'great and terrible wilderness' part. We are about to find out exactly what is so 'great and terrible' about Paran. The first verse of today's aliyah says:

V'yehi ha-am kemit'onenim

And it came to pass that the people complained²

ra b'oznei Adonai

[it was as an eruption of] malignant self-obsession in the hearing of the Holy One

The wilderness is the testing ground our Bridegroom-King has prepared for us – and this is indeed a season of testing! The first test level of testing is always in the area of our *attitude* - *i.e.* how we will approach life and react emotionally to life's challenges. The second level of testing is always of *our confession* – *i.e.* what kind of language we will allow to come out of our mouths in response to the challenges we face. The third level of testing is always of *our behaviors* – *i.e.* what courses of action/inaction we will take and what coping methods we will employ when challenged by life.

² Rashi comments that when the people were complaining they had no real cause to complain; they were merely looking for an excuse to separate themselves from the Almighty. By inventing a complaint they felt justified in keeping a distance from the Creator.

What is it that you allow to mess with your attitude, Dear One? What does it take to stress you out? What kind of petty irritation does it require for you to lay aside your *shalom* and *simchah* and get upset, or bummed, or bored, or outraged? What kind of aggravating circumstance does it take to elicit *words of* complaint from you? What is it that you will allow rob you of your gratitude, and interrupt your Court-of-Heaven conversations of thanksgiving and praise? How much does it really take to steal the smile from your face, the *shalom* from your heart, the blessing off your tongue, and the sweet songs of Tziyon from your lips? These are questions that need to be answered. You need to know what your ‘triggers’ are. You need to know where your flesh is still resisting the Holy One’s Ultimate Divine Bridal Makeover protocols. That is what the desert is all about. The Holy One knows. The adversary knows. The people closest to you know. It is time you found out as well.

There is something that still steals your *shalom*, isn’t there? There is indeed. And the Holy One knows that a few minutes in the Wilderness of Paran will bring it to the surface so you can face it and deal with it. The Holy One knows, you see, that however spiritual we may think we are, we are deceived. He knows that there is always some pocket of darkness remaining in all of our souls that is still very much in need of illumination by His Light – and literally crying out for His redemptive touch.

Keeping Our Perspective

As you read and meditate upon the disturbing narrative that begins with today’s aliyah of Torah please try to keep a Divine perspective of patience and love. Understand that the Holy One did not in any wise set His affection upon or redeem us because we were meritorious, or disciplined, or full of ‘faith’. He really didn’t. He redeemed us not for any goodness He saw in us, but despite our lack of it. He redeemed us for His own glory – to demonstrate to all the powers of heaven and earth that *He is God – and that He can make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear any time He wants.*

So do not think for a second that the Holy One is shocked – or offended - by our instant unraveling as soon as we hit the desert. The Holy One knew full well before we ever left Sinai – indeed before He brought the first ‘plague’ on Egypt on our behalf - that we were nothing more than a bunch of whiny brats who would be unable to be stoic and keep our ‘holy’ appearance in the face of the withering heat and stifling dust of the desert.

Do you really think that either that you or I, in our 21st Century smugness, are one iota better or more meritorious - or one bit more disciplined or ‘full of faith’ - than

the members of the ancient Redeemed Community about which we read in today's aliyah? If so, do you know what the basis of that belief is? It is called PRIDE – and it is the epitome of foolishness. So please resist the tendency to mock or look down upon the human beings at the center of the narrative; choose instead to identify with them, empathize with them, and internalize the lessons of the sands of Yish'mael's world. We must get it through our heads – no incident of Divine Deliverance ever has anything to do with any human being doing anything 'right'. Every incident of Divine Deliverance is for HIS GLORY³ and for the advancement of His Kingdom. The personal comfort and convenience of our flesh is not even close to the top of His priority list. His Great Plan of Redemption has a much more significant 'endgame' objective.

We must not, therefore, think of ourselves more highly than we ought. We must not think that any amount of Torah observance – or prophesying or preaching or teaching, or evangelizing, or soul-winning, or fund-raising, or interceding, or church or synagogue building, or flag-waving or banner-carrying or singing or dancing or worshipping - can effectuate or earn *or in any way justify* our deliverance. Our deliverance is a *covenant-fulfilling act* of our *covenant-keeping God*. The reasons He has set His affections on us, and redeemed us, and spoken marvelous prophetic empowerments over us are two: 1. To make good on the Promises and Purposes of *His covenants with Adam, with Noach, with Avraham, with Yitzchak, with Ya'akov*, and 2. in order to demonstrate His transforming power to all men. As much as He loves us the Holy One does not - will never - allow His redemptive plan for Creation to *depend upon* us. He who began a good work in us – and in Creation - will be faithful to complete it.

In the next few days and weeks, in Torah and in our lives, we must keep blessing the Holy One and not let ourselves be distracted by the grumbling going on *around us ... or* that which tries to come forth from *within us*. As the seasonal sun beats down on you *just stay calm*. Take a lot of deep breaths. Keep thinking about the Beauty of the Divine Bridegroom as He revealed Himself to us - first in Egypt and then at Sinai. And train your mouth to thank, and bless, and praise Him over and over again. Like the saints of Revelation, train your mind to focus only upon His *glory*, His *splendor*, His *wisdom*, His *power*, His *goodness*, His *provision*, His *overwhelming love*, and His *awe-inspiring majesty*. As you are doing these things, just place one foot in front of you on the sand. Then place your other foot in front of that one. Then place the first foot in front of the second ... and so on and so on. Repeat the process over and over and over and over again ... *until you hear His sweet, sweet Voice say it is time for Sabbath Rest*. In the process our Bridegroom-King will not just deliver us *from the bondage of the soul ...* He will

³ See Isaiah 63:11-14.

deliver us *to* the destiny He has in store for us. *If* we let Him, that is. But for most of us that turns out to be a big ‘if’.

Toast, Anyone?

The first test of whether a person – man, woman, or child – is submitted to and cooperating with the Holy One in His redemption process is *what a man allows to come into his heart and out of his mouth*. Yeshua said: ***What comes out of your mouth is actually coming from your heart, and that makes a person tamei.*** Matthew 15:18.

Listen very carefully to what comes from your mouth, Dear One – it will tell you *exactly* what is in your heart. If you listen to the words you speak they will tell you – and everyone else - very clearly if you are *submitting to and cooperating with the Holy One’s redemptive work* – or are *resisting and rebelling against it*.

Every time you open your mouth, be cognizant of what comes out. Is it blessing – or cursing. Is it inspiring – or insulting. Is it *shalom* – or is it sarcasm? Is it *lashon ha kodesh* – or *lashon hara*? Is the sum and substance of what comes out of your mouth thanks to and praise for the Holy One? Is your assigned sphere of influence being continually blessed by your speech? Or is what comes out of your mouth more frequently *complaining* about your circumstances? Or is what you most like to talk about *partisan politics* – i.e., expressing your opinions as to who should be – and should *not* be - doing what, in family, in community, in government – and in synagogue/church? Or is your speech full of *criticism* of other people? Or of *their doctrine* or *their form of religious observance*⁴? Or do you tend to *harp on other’s faults or alleged misdeeds*? Or obsessing on what wrongs have been done to you? Or do you lean toward *flattery*? Or are you a master of *guilt-trips and manipulation*? Or do you use your gift of speech for *self-promotion*? Or does your tongue give voice to your *obsession with material things*? In your conversations, do you speak more about the King, His Glorious Kingdom, and His Wonderful Plan of Redemption, that you do about things like:

Cars? Trucks? Boats?
Houses?
Clothes?
Food?
Health?
Money? The Stock Market? The Economy?
Job issues?

⁴ The Chofetz Chaim taught: Before embarking on an ideological campaign against other one must ask himself: “Am I honestly promoting the cause of truth, or am I involved in a personal feud disguised as an ideological debate?” Ideological disagreement should never lead to personal animosity. When Torah scholars disagree, their dispute is over ideals, and is never personal.

Education?
Music?
Fitness? Appearance?
Leisure time?
Entertainment options?
Vacations?
Politics?
Religious form, doctrines, or institutions?

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And, alas, it speaks very, very loudly. Everyone around us hears it – even if *we* cannot.

If each of us would all spend one day with a tape-recorder hung around our neck, recording every word we spoke, I suspect we would be appalled at what we heard at the time of playback. We would see how our words really do reflect what is in our hearts. But the Holy One has something even better than a tape recorder. He has *ears that hear* every word. When the Redeemed Community ‘*complained about their hardships*’ [Hebrew *v’yehi ha-am kemit’onenim*], every word they spoke was *b’oznei Adonai* [literally, *in the ears of the Holy One ...*].

You have the Holy One’s ear, Dear One. Do you really want to complain in His hearing about His World – or about some other person He has created and loves? *Go ahead - make His day*. Do you really want to focus on how bad you think everyone else is, and how great [or how needy] you think you are? Before you speak such things you might do well to remember these words from today’s aliyah:

Vayish’ma Adonai v’yichar apo

And when the Holy One heard it, His senses were inflamed,

v’tiv’ar-bam esh Adonai v’tochal bik’tzeh ha-machaneh

and the fire of the Holy One flashed, consuming the edge of the camp.

I am not saying that the Holy One will ‘fry’ us if we complain or criticize or babble Serpent-mentality nonsense all day. If He did that regularly you and I would have been *toast* a long time ago. That would, of course, bring Him no honor. What I am saying is that the Holy One hears every word we speak – and *knows exactly what is in our hearts at every moment*, even if we don’t. We have His complete attention. We are His favorite rehabilitation project. And He is anything but an amateur at the art of rehabilitating fallen souls and reconstructing broken lives.

We cannot fool our Bridegroom-King into thinking that we are spiritual, and beyond the need of His Masterful Reconstructive Touch. He is never deceived by our pretense of piety. He knows full well exactly how much redemption and deliverance He still needs to do in us. The question is – do *we*?

The Spiritual Disease of Lashon Ha Ra Spreads and Reaches Pandemic Proportions

Beginning in verse four of today's aliyah the murmuring of the Holy One's Redeemed Community enters into a second phase. In phase I we 'complained about our hardships in the ears/hearing of the Holy One'. Beginning in verse 4 we take *kvetching* to a whole new level. Here is how Torah records it:

V'ha-asafsuf⁵- asher bekirbo hit'avu ta'avah

The gathered masses began to have strong cravings,

vayashuvu vayivku gam b'nei Yisra'el

and the descendants of Israel also turned aside and wept,

v'yomeru mi ya'achileinu basar

and they said 'Who is going to give us some meat to eat?'

Zacharnu et ha-dagah asher-nochal b'Mitzrayim

'We fondly remember the fish that we could eat in Egypt

chinam et ha-kishu'im v'et ha-avatichim

at no cost, along with the cucumbers ... and the melons,

v'et-he-chatzir v'et ha-b'tzalim v'et ha-shumim

and the leeks ... and the onions ... and the garlic!

V'atah naf'sheinu y'veishah

But now our spirits are dried up,

eyn kol bilti el-haman eyneinu

with nothing but the manna before our eyes.'

v'yishma Moshe et-ha-am bocheh l'mishpechotav

And Moshe heard the people crying out in grief with their families

ish l'fetach aholo

each man at the entrance of his tent.

The Hebrew verbs describing our complaining get more emphatic the farther we get from Sinai. Instead of 'complaining' [as they did back in verse 2], the people now 'wail', 'weep', 'mourn', and 'cry out in grief'. The *k'vetching* is increasing both in *volume* and in *emotion*. And more and more of us are jumping on the bandwagon and joining in the chorus of complaint.

⁵ The Hebrew word is a duplicated form of the noun *asuf*, *alef*, *samech*, *peh sofit*, Strong's Hebrew word #624, meaning 'gathered ones'. In the duplicated form, it means 'gathered multitudes. This is NOT the same phrase translated as 'mixed multitude' in Exodus 12:38, to describe the remnants of the nations who accompanied B'nei Yisrael. That group was called *eruv rav*. There is, therefore, no basis for concluding, as have some writers, that the persons who instigated the complaining were people from other nations, rather than natural descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov.

To hear our wailing one would think that someone or something very close and important to us has died, or been lost, and we are mourning it. We have stopped in the middle of the desert, have sat down in the dust, and grieved, wailed, wept, mourned. Over *what*, Beloved? Not over the end of the honeymoon at Sinai - but over *the menu choices we* [utilizing selective memory] *seem to think we had back in Egypt!* We are weeping and mourning and fretting over Hilfiger and sport utility vehicles purchased on the MasterCard that has expired! Over chain restaurant meals bought with our lifeblood! “*We have sustained a great loss*”, we concluded. “*We need inner healing*” we decided. And we sat down and wailed.

But it was not *inner healing* our ancestors needed - or that we need. What they needed was – and what we need is - *more distance from Egypt*. By sitting down and wailing in the dust however what we got more distant from was not Egypt, but *the Holy One* - Who after all was still moving forward at the head of the camp toward the land and inheritance He had promised us. And even today He will tread the winepress alone ... if no man goes with Him.

Moshe Has A Major ‘In-the-Flesh Melt-down Moment’ of His Own

A long, long time ago - it now seems - Moshe was just a shepherd tending his father-in-law’s sheep in the wilderness. The Holy One as you will recall rudely interrupted this fugitive-from-Egyptian-justice-turned-shepherd’s tranquil day, set a bush on fire in front of him, and called him to an absurd task. He was to go, stand before Pharaoh, and tell him to ***Shelach et ami*** [Let my people go!].

In the months that have elapsed since that day Moshe has learned that standing before Pharaoh and saying things sure to get him killed was actually the *easy* part of the job. The really *hard part* is what came after Pharaoh was out of the picture – when Moshe had to deal as best he could with all the sanctified ‘delivered folk’ in the Redeemed Community. Why didn’t you just let me keep *sheep*, Moshe must have thought. But here is how he expressed it to the Holy One:

L’mah ha-re’ota l’avdeicha

'Why are You treating me so badly?'

v’lamah lo-matzati chen b’eyneicha

And why do you not like me anymore?

lasum et-masa kol-ha-am hazeh alay

And why have you placed on me the burden of all these people?

Lo-uchal anochi levadi laset et-kol ha-am hazeh

I cannot be responsible for this entire nation!

ki chaved mimeini

It's too hard for me!

V'im-kachah at-oseh li horgeni na harog im-matzati chen

If You are going to do this to me, just do me a favor and kill me!

b'eyneicha v'al-er'eh b'ra'ati

Don't let me see myself get into such a terrible predicament

Moshe, you see, is having *a moment*. You know what I mean. I mean ‘that kind’ of a *moment*. I mean one of those moments we hope the angels with the ‘this is your life’ spy-cams of Heaven aren’t recording for posterity. I mean one of those moments we really, really hope we don’t have played back for us – and the world – to see on the Day of Judgment. I mean a moment when he quit pouring out revelation from on high as he was called and empowered to do and poured out streams of destructive serpent venom instead.

Yes, even prophets of the Most High sometimes *have that kind* of moments. And when it happens, there is always big trouble about to unfold – for the prophet, for his family, and for everyone in the vicinity.

Welcome to the next test of the wilderness – the *test of less-than-perfect human leadership*. Putting human beings on pedestals is a recipe for disaster every time; and alas, so is expecting, much less demanding, perfection from them.

Questions For Today's Study

1. A short way into our journey from Mount Sinai to *Eretz Yisrael* we began to lose focus and revert to a slave mentality.

[A] Look up the word translated “complain[ed]” in Strong’s. Write the Hebrew word and its definition.

[B] What was the Holy One’s reaction to the complaining?

[C] What does verse one say the Holy One did to discipline the people?

[D] Do you think the fact that this judgment fell on those “in the outlying parts of the camp” means that just members of the tribe of Dan [the rear guard] were stricken? Or do you think the ones stricken were stragglers, from various tribes, who had fallen out of formation and gone back to their haphazard slave-like travel plans?

[E] What did the people do when the Holy One sent this judgment?

[F] How did Moshe respond?

[G] What did Moshe name the place where this judgment occurred, and what does that name mean?

2. Beginning in verse four murmuring enters into a second phase.

- [A] What is the subject of the complaint this time?
- [B] What group of people did this complaint start with?
- [C] Name the six things the people lusted after (as opposed to the “seven species” promised in Eretz Yisrael).
- [D] How did B’nei Yisrael describe its “soul” in verse six?
- [E] In verses 7-9 the Holy One describes the Manna and how it was provided, gathered, prepared and eaten. What was wrong with the manna? What was wrong with the people?
- [F] What was the occurrence that caused Moshe to despair?
- [G] Read Moshe’s comments to the Holy One in verses 11-15. Write your thoughts on Moshe’s words.

3. In verses 16-17 the Holy One addresses Moshe’s leadership. In verses 24-30 He ordains and empowers new leadership as Moshe in frustration demanded.

- [A] What did the Holy One instruct Moshe to do in order to relieve some of the pressure Moshe was feeling?
- [B] How is this different from what is recorded in Exodus 18:14-26?
- [C] Verse 16 contains instructions to Moshe about a gathering of people that Moshe was to arrange.
- [D] Where was this to take place?
- [E] Look up the words that verse 16 translates as “elders” and “officers” [KJV]. Write those words and the definitions given those words by Strong’s.
- [F] Where are these men to gather?
- [G] What does the Holy One promise to do in verse 17?
- [H] In verse 25, a vivid description is given as to how the Holy One fulfilled this promise. List in chronological order what happened.
- [I] Look up the word translated “prophesy[ied]” as used in verses 25 and 26. Write the Hebrew word and its definition. What do you think this means in this context?
- [J] Why was Joshua upset about what occurred with Eldad and Medad?
- [K] What was Moshe’s response to the actions of Eldad and Medad?

4. In verses 18-20 and verse 23 the Holy One addresses the murmuring of the people.

Speak thus to the people, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and eat flesh; for you have wept in the ears of the Holy One, saying, “Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Mitzrayim.

Therefore the Holy One will give you flesh, and you will eat. You shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days, but a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome to you; because that you have rejected the Holy One who is among you, and have wept before him, saying, “Why came we forth out of Mitzrayim?”

* * *

*And the Holy One said to Moshe, “Has the Holy One's hand grown short?
now shall you see whether my word shall happen to you or not.”*

[A] What does the Holy One instruct us to do in verse 18? What does this consist of, and why do you think the Holy One – if *anger* is His real motivation as our English texts insinuate – told us to do this?

[B] What does the Holy One promise He will do for us?

[C] What did the Holy One say to Moshe [v. 23] when Moshe expressed doubts about the Holy One's promise?

5. In verses 31-34 the Holy One fulfills His promise to send quail.

*There went forth a wind from the Holy One, and brought quails⁶ from the sea,
and let them fall by the camp, about a day's journey on this side,
and a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp,
and about two cubits above the surface of the erez.
The people rose up all that day, and all the night, and all the next day,
and gathered the quails: he who gathered least gathered ten omers:
and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.*

*While the flesh was yet between their teeth,
before it was chewed, the anger of the Holy One was kindled against the people,
and the Holy One struck the people with a very great plague.*

*The name of that place was called Kivrot-Hatta'avah,
because there they buried the people who lusted.*

[A] What “natural” means did the Holy One employ to bring in the quail?

[B] How did The Holy One turn this “blessing” into a judgment “curse”?

[C] Look up in Strong's the word translated “plague” in verse 33. Write the Hebrew word and its definition.

[D] What was the Hebrew name given to the place where all this transpired? What does that mean in English?

6. Beginning in Zechariah 4:1 the most major post-Exilic prophet's fifth “night vision” is unfolded. This vision is of the Menorah and the way in which it is filled with oil without human intervention or participation. Contrast this with the opening verses of *B'ha'alotcha*, when the Holy One directs Aharon in the lighting of the Menorah of the *Mish'kan*.

[A] What did Zechariah see?

[B] Draw a picture of what you think this vision looked like.

[C] Can you answer Zechariah's question [verse 4]?

⁶ The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as **quail** is *s'lav* - *shin, lamed, vav*, Strong's Hebrew word #7958 pronounced *sel-awv'*. This noun is from the verb root *shalah*, pronounced *shaw-law'*, meaning *he prospers, he is at rest, he is quiet, or he is at ease*.

7. In today's B'rit Chadasha verse - I Corinthians 10:13 – Shaul of Tarsus concludes his discussion of the example of the sin and judgment of B'nei Yisrael in the desert by speaking of “temptation”.

*No temptation⁷ has taken you but such as man can bear.
God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able,
but will with the temptation also make the way of escape⁸, that you may be able to endure it.*

[A] Look up the Greek word translated “temptation” and write that word and its definition.

[B] See if you can find the Hebrew word that would have been used in this context by looking up “temptation” in a Lexicon or in Strong's Concordance. If you find such a word, write the Hebrew word and whatever definition or interpretation you find. How, if at all, is that different from the Strong's definition of the Greek word?

[C] What limits does Shaul say the Holy One places on the “temptations” that He permits you to experience?

[D] What aid or assistance does Shaul say the Holy One provides to all of us in connection with these “temptations”?

May your heart be filled with praise and gratitude - no matter what your circumstances.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Revelation 2:12-17

To the angel of the k'hillah in Pergamum write:

***"He who has the sharp two-edged sword says these things:
"I know your works and where you dwell - where Ha-satan's throne is.
You hold firmly to my name, and didn't deny my faith
in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one,
who was killed among you, where Ha-satan dwells.***

***But I have a few things against you, because you have there some
who hold the teaching of Bila'am, who taught Balak
to throw a stumbling block before the children of Yisra'el,
to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication.
So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans⁹ likewise.***

⁷ The Greek word our English Bibles translate as “temptation” is *peirasmos*, pronounced *pi-ras-mos'* [Strong's Greek word #3986]. The Greek word refers to a testing, proving, or assay-like trial of a man's fidelity, integrity, virtue, and constancy.

⁸ The Greek word our English Bibles translates as “escape” is Strong's Greek word #1545 *ekbasis*, pronounced *ek'-bas-is*. Strong's defines this as *an egress, way out, or an exit*.

⁹ “Nicolations” refers to followers of the way of Nicolas, which means *conqueror of the people*. *Nicolas* is the *Greek* translation of the Biblical name Bila'am [Balaam], from *Hebrew* "Belang Am," "Destroyer of the people." Hence Nicolations are modern-day Greek-mentality persons who do what Bila'am did – seduce the Holy One's people to forsake the Torah. Faucett in his commentary on Revelation says: “The

*Make t'shuvah, therefore, or else I am coming to you quickly,
and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*

*He who has an ear, let him sh'ma what the Spirit says to the K'hillot.
To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna,
and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written,
which no one knows but he who receives it.*

name [Nicolations] like other names, Egypt, Babylon, Sodom, is symbolic. Compare Rev 2:14, 15, which shows the true sense of Nicolaitanes; they are professing believers who like Balaam of old tried to introduce a false form of freedom, that is, *licentiousness*. These Nicolations abused Paul's doctrine of grace into a plea for lasciviousness [see **II Peter 2:15-16**; and **Jude vv. 4, 11** both of which describe the same sort of seducers as followers of Balaam].”