

*Shiur L'Yom Shishi*¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Shelach Lecha:*** **Numbers 15:22-41**
 Haftarah: **Joshua 2:22-24**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Hebrews 4:1-3**

Vehayah lachem l'tzitzit – and they will be for you as fringes,
ur'item oto – and you will see Him
[Numbers 15:39]

Today's Meditation is Revelation 5:1-10;
Today's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition No. 8, *Mish'pat* [Justice]

Vechi tishgu – When you stray/err/sin ... ***v'lo ta'asu et kol-ha-mitzvot ha-eleh asher-diber Adonai el-Moshe*** – and you fail to make/build/do all these things the Holy One enjoins/directs through Moshe Numbers 15:22.

The 'chosen people' role that the Holy One has choreographed for us to play in this world has some great perks. Among these perks are: 1. uninterrupted access to the King's courts and counsel, 2. covenant blessings of abundance (conditional on covenant faithfulness, of course); 3. a 'lifted-head' perspective on unfolding events; 4. a script for life (*i.e.* the Torah); 5. a constantly regenerating inflow of *kedusha* energy from Heaven, and 6. the great "5K" gift bundle – *i.e.* *chayah, kavod, chesed, chochmah, and kippurim*, etc. Pretty amazing, huh? But, alas, our role in the Grand Plan is not without its costs and challenged. We are so noticeably 'different' from other people that some folks develop a fanatical, violent hatred of us. We are thus constantly finding ourselves on the unpleasant point of this or that person, group, nation, or 'social justice' movement's hate-rhetoric, or spear, or sword, or chariot charge, or terrorist attack, or rocket barrage, or IED, or WMD. Because every step we take is fraught with anger, we have to learn early to always be the 'more mature' person or group in every situation – *i.e.* to speak and behave like the 'adult in the room'. Day after day, year after year, in every situation and circumstance, we are to be like a steadfast lighthouse in the storm, shining rays of soothing, healing, life-giving light into the gross darkness in which the nations constantly immerse themselves. We can't respond to hate, slander, or violence in kind; we have to be the more civilized, more understanding, more forgiving, more solution-than-blame-minded, and more redemption-than-revenge-focused. Whatever the sensuality-driven, sexuality-obsessed, sentimentality-motivated, self-worshipping, unclean spirit-hosting gentiles that live around us may be freaking out about on any given day, we are called to stay calm and 100% focused on the

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Creator's Grand Plan and Endgame Strategy. Whatever the nations are raging about; whatever vain thing(s) have them in an uproar; whatever outrageous agenda or false narrative their elites are force-feeding on the masses; whatever vain imagination/delusion/deception they choose to indulge; whatever bandwagon of folly they are jumping on with both feet; whatever form of perverse lust or greed they decide it is time to normalize; whatever panic/paranoia/hysteria they are gnashing their teeth at; whatever signs they are carrying, banners they are waving, or slogans they are chanting; whatever 'new kid in town' they are falling all over themselves to swoon over; whatever trendy idea, concept, slogan, or plan to *save the world, right systemic wrongs, make money, win friends and influence people, or lose weight* that they are making speeches and writing books about; whatever villain – real or imaginary, individual, collective, or systemic – they are rushing to dehumanize; whatever virtue they are signaling; whatever culture they are canceling; whatever statue/monument they are putting up or tearing down; whatever historical narrative they are rewriting; whatever offense, outrage, greed, pride, or vengeance their media personalities, entertainers, opportunistic politicians, ideologues, educators, social engineers, pseudo-scientist, and religious/anti-religious fanatics, are merchandizing, monetizing, and/or marching in the streets over, our job is the same. We must politely decline their invitations to folly. We must stay rooted and grounded in the Covenant way. No matter what they say or do we must remain calm, stay humble, thankful, patient, and kind through disciplines of *emunah* (trust in the Holy One and faithfulness to His calling), *tikvah* (hopefulness), *ahavah* (*demonstrations of selfless love for the Holy One, for family and friends, and for all fellow men*), *tzedakah* (*exemplary speech and behavior that demonstrates the Holy One's will and ways*), and *shalom* (*the state of deep inner peace and sense of well-being that comes from knowing the Holy One and trusting that He is working all things together for good*). We are called to stay above all their drama - walk uprightly, stick to our King's Plan, and live out the terms of His Covenant. Doing this consistently day-by-day, Sabbath-by-Sabbath, New Moon-by-New Moon, Season-by-Season, and Year-by-Year enables us to operate/function in atmosphere-shifting levels of *ahavah* [*i.e. Kedusha-infused and Divine-image-reflecting love*], of *tzedekah* [*i.e. Kedusha-infused and Divine-image-reflecting uprightness*], of *simchah* [*i.e. Kedusha-infused and Divine-image-reflecting joy/gladness*], and of *shalom* [*i.e. Kedusha-infused and Divine-image-reflecting wholeness, wellness, fruitfulness, and serenity*]. We must respectfully eschew their demands that we share their offenses, indulge their delusions, and buy into their vanity of vanities.

The high calling of the Holy One upon our lives does not mean that He demands sinless perfection from us. He knows the weakness of our frames and psyches. He knows *stuff happens*. He knows that from time-to-time we will mess up – individually and collectively. We stray off course. We get distracted ... or seduced

... or conflicted ... or manipulated ... or triggered – and *BOOM*: some important stipulation of our Covenant with the Holy One gets overlooked. We get offended. We get all up in ‘opinions’ and ‘feelings’. We speak about things we do not understand. We transgress against our brother and/or our neighbor. We neglect the needs of a widow, an orphan, a poor person/family, or foreigner in our community. We let our – or someone else’s – emotions, attitude, or misdeeds - get the best of us. We make promises we can’t – or no longer want to – keep. We go to sleep – or we stumble, fall, and break things ... or people - on *our watch*. We find ourselves wandering away from the Pathway to life, health and peace that the Holy One has cleared for us – and engaging in a dangerous frolic of our own. In the words of iconic songwriter Joni Mitchell: “*Don’t it always seem to go – that you don’t know what you’ve got til it’s gone!*” [from the chorus of the song ‘*Big Yellow Taxi*’, by Joni Mitchell, c. 1970.] When we – the light of the world – transgress the Torah, simply saying “*Excusez moi, sil-vous-plait*” and going about our business while others are left to deal with the resulting mess is not going to be enough. When ordinary people, outside the covenant do something stupid, cruel, or evil, people sigh and innocents may suffer, but life goes on. Ah, but when we – the ‘great nation’ called to be a blessing to every family on the face of the earth – wander off into sin ... well, when that happens it sends out shockwaves that *shatter what is left of shalom of the world*.

Why does the world have to be so fragile? Why do the nations have to be so needy? Why can’t we just take a day – or maybe a decade or two – off this ‘light of the world/salt of the earth’ job? Why can’t we get outraged like the pagans do? Why can’t we flesh-out, fret over evildoers, embrace negative thoughts, indulge bad attitudes, go on rants, make accusations, spew sarcasm and cynicism, cast blame, go vigilante, and engage in toxic, self-centered and/or narcissistic behaviors – like the politicians, reporters, celebrities and high-paid athletes do all the time? Well, to whom much is given, much is required. If it is not us who model the ways of the King – then who? If not now – and I mean every ‘now’ – then *when*?

Even within the camp, why can’t we all just be nice and get along? Why is there so much petty jealousy, greed, lust, anger, outrage, offense, arrogance, spitefulness, and hate? Why is there so little love, so little patience, so little trust in the Holy One to bring true righteousness and justice to bear on the earth His Way, in His Timing? Why is everyone not thankful, humble, joyful? Why are so many of us so irritable, so fragile, so easily offended? Why do we keep labeling, disrespecting, and slogan-shaming one another? Ah yes, now we remember – this kind of thing happens every year, and is especially prevalent during *this season*. The long, hot days of summer are upon us, and the desert sun plays tricks on us – making us see things that aren’t there, and blow anything that is there way out of proportion. The

heat – or in the Southern Hemisphere, the cold - triggers every negative flesh eruption, attitude, paranoid delusion, and knee-jerk reaction we still have left in us after Passover and Shavuot. Every conversation seems to turn into a complaint session, a blame-throwing event, a lashon hara conference, a paranoia party, an outrage outcry, and/or a pick-up-a-stone-and-chunk-it-at-someone-you-don't-like opportunity. Showing respect for other people merely because they are human beings like us, created in the image of the Holy One our God, and descended from a common ancestor, is simply too much to ask. Honoring them because they are valued by God? Absolutely unthinkable. That, the world tells us, would be a shameful betrayal of our new gods of ideology, emotionally charged slogans, 'group think', gender identity, racial identification, and skin pigmentation! Polite discussions are impossible. Red-faced rants – and arrogant taunts – are the new 'socialization' protocol. Rational thought has given way to inflammatory rhetoric, *shalom* has disappeared in the presence of offense, joy has been abandoned in favor of outrage, and passionate love for the Bridegroom-King has yielded the floor to demonization of this or that group of human beings whose presence we choose to characterize as the source of all the problems in the world. Hope? Kindness? Gentleness? Mercy? How boring! Angst, outrage, name-calling, blame-casting, and quarrelling are the 'new normal'. Meanwhile, tongues and larynxes that were formed to utter thanksgiving, blessing, and praise to the King are instead spewing fountains of discontent, complaint, and accusation against fellow man. The pettiness of human flesh – even among those who have been redeemed - is being exposed daily.

Why is this happening? It is all part of the redemptive plan. It is all just a test. Moshe will later say:

Remember that the Holy One your God led you all the way these 40 years in the wilderness, to humble you and to test you, and to make manifest what was in your heart - whether you would sh'mar His mitzvot ... or not.

[Deuteronomy 8:2]

So, how is the test coming for you? Is humility part of your new creation identity yet? And with regard to the *mitzvot* of the Bridegroom-King, well ... *are you IN – or are you OUT?*

Will We Live by the Mitzvot ... or Won't We?

A few months ago when the Pillar of Fire and Cloud led us away from Sinai we were brimming with idealistic *naiveté*. Having sat at Moshe's feet while he rattled off the powerful revelation downloads he had received on the mountain we had a vast – but alas untested - reservoir of 'head knowledge' about the Creator and His Ways. We were walking ivory towers. We were long on truth, but short on application. We were long on concept, and short on context. We knew *letter*. We

knew *label*. We knew *doctrine*; we knew *clichés*; and we knew *halakah* - but, alas, we did not know *life*. And we most definitely did not know the first thing about *love*. Like the five foolish virgins of Yeshua's parable we had a lamp - but we had no oil. **Matthew 25:1 ff.** We did NOT have a deep, meaningful relationship with the Bridegroom-King. We had not absorbed even a thimbleful of our Redeemer's characteristics of mercy, kindness, longsuffering, and covenant faithfulness. See **Exodus 34:5-7**. We had not internalized His *shalom*. We had not embraced His *joy*. We did not have a passionate life-commitment to walk in the Holy One's Ways. We had not learned true understanding of or respect for His Covenant. We had not learned how reverence for His Name - much less love for our fellow man - works in real time. We did not have any experience abiding in His Rest even though our flesh is experiencing irritation, aggravation, titillation, intimidation, and accusation. We did not have an *undivided heart* to even love the Wonderful One Who Stepped out of eternity into time in order to deliver us from bondage – much less to love our imperfect and oft-times downright ornery fellow men. We had no concept of *blessing those who curse us, doing good to those who hate us, or praying for those who spitefully use and persecute us*. We had no grid for *fretting not over evildoers* – much less *rejoicing in tribulation*. We had no personal frame of reference for *overcoming evil with good*. We had not by any means learned *in whatever state we found ourselves to be content*. So when we got to Paran and the unhappy, mocking spirit of Yish'mael hit us ... well, we discovered that despite all our knowledge, we were still at essence just *men of unclean lips*, dwelling in the midst of *a people of unclean lips*. We found out quickly that narcissism, naiveté, and an overflowing database of head knowledge about the Creator of the Universe are simply not helpful in the heat of the desert.

It seems that *passing dry-shod through the bed of a sea the Creator of the Universe has miraculously divided for you in a mad rush to get away from a bloodthirsty enemy is one thing; but navigating through a hot, dry desert when no one is chasing you presents a totally different level of challenge*. Welcome to that higher level, Dear One! Our sphere of *influence in and potential impact upon* the world around us is about to increase exponentially; but alas, so is the *level of difficulty* we are going to encounter - and so is our degree of *responsibility and accountability*. Now our every decision, our every action, our every word, our every indulgence of the flesh – not to mention every eyeroll, grimace, scowl, or turned up lip - has both short-term and long-term consequences. The obstacle course I call *the Wilderness of Paranas* is just our first of many tests.

***Welcome to the Tests and Trials – and Enhanced Levels of
Accountability - That Go With the Higher Level***

The Holy One introduced us to the new level of relevance to the world through the

rigors of a 3-day desert hike. We responded to the challenge with a childish outburst of murmuring and complaining. The Bridegroom-King lit a fire around the outskirts of the camp to interrupt our complaints, get us to run back to our assigned positions, and to close ranks around Moshe, Aharon, and the *Mish'kan*. We didn't get the message. We did, however, get the stress. The stress stirred up intense cravings for 'comfort food'. We threw a fit about it. And after throwing blame at everyone we could think of for our own pitiful lack of commitment and self-control, the Holy One gave us what we asked for. We stuffed our gullets like animals – so much so that an epidemic of bird flu broke out in the camp as a result of our gluttony. We still did not get the message. But we did take up the offense. Our attitude of negativity spread to Miryam and Aharon, and they started speaking *lashon ha-ra* about Moshe. *Tzara'at* covered Miryam's skin. Again, we failed to get the message. But we did dial up the cynicism. We sent out spies to reconnoiter the land the Bridegroom-King had promised to give us. When they came back with a blasphemously negative report about the land, we panicked – and cried out to be excused from participation in the Grand Redemptive Plan - and allowed to die in the desert. Once again, the Holy One gave us what we asked for. Everyone who cast a vote to stay in the desert of Paran rather than enter into the Bridal Chamber the Bridegroom-King had prepared for us were sentenced to do exactly that.

This is by no means the kind of result we expected when we left Sinai with banners flying and heads swimming with second-hand revelation. Why did the Writer of Torah have to include all these sordid stories in the Torah? Oh Dear One, have you not heard? All the things we have been reading about this week in the Divine Chronicles of Our Forefathers' Experiences in the Wilderness of Paran ***happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. I Corinthians 10:11.***

Are We Healed /Cured of the Negativity of Yish'mael's World – or Are We Just In Rehab?

In our studies this week we have seen an entire generation of Redeemed Souls face a critical moment of destiny shaping decision-making. All options were clearly presented. Every opinion got expression. All the pros and cons were considered. No one was caught unaware or uninformed. They just followed their hearts and their heads instead of their King. A fateful choice was made by a few – then adopted by an entire generation – with only *two dissenting votes* being cast for the Way of the Holy One. We would like to think that we would have made a different choice had we been in our ancestors' place. But are we really that different? Are we more spiritual? Are we more righteous? What folly will our corrupted hearts entertain if we do not occupy them with loving the Holy One our God with all of

them? Where will our easily seduced eyes wander and light if we do not make a covenant with and put a guard over them? To what will our wandering thoughts migrate if we do not discipline them to meditate upon the *mitzvot* and the *mercies* of the Holy One? What manner of toxic opinions and accusations will our uncircumcised lips utter if we do not surrender our capacities of speech to the uncompromising service of the Kingdom of our Divine Bridegroom?

Who Will Rise Up and Become True Sons of Yisrael?

When the fateful moment of choice came the men and women of the generation of the Exodus cried out with passion: ***Oh that we had died in Egypt; or that we could die in this desert!*** Numbers 14:2. Contrast this outcry with the passionate dying words of Yisrael and of his son Yosef, both of whom cried out with all that was in them ***do not bury me in Egypt!*** Genesis 47:29-30; 50:24-26. When it was Yosef's assigned time to die he told his brothers: ***Elohim will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov ... and when Elohim visits you, carry up my bones from here.*** Genesis 50:24-26. Such are the thoughts and the words of true sons of the Covenant.

All the horrible things of which we have been reading in Torah this week thus took place *with the bones of Yosef still lying unburied in a box in the middle of the Camp*. Those who have shouted ***Oh that we had died in Egypt, or that we could die in this desert!*** had to ignore those bones and reject their testimony of deliverance. The generation of the Exodus allowed their fleshly appetites, attitudes, and opinions to not only derail their own destiny, but to forsake the Patriarchal inheritance. Their decision to reject the Promised Land and die in the desert dishonored both the legacies of Yisrael and Yosef and the Covenant of the Holy One for the grandeur of which these men had lived and died. The ones who cried out "Oh that we had died in Egypt" may have been physically related to Ya'akov – but they were most definitely not true spiritual sons of Yisrael. And it was to the sons of *Yisrael* that the Holy One told Moshe He was 'giving' the Land. Numbers 13:1-2.

So, for those who chose death outside the Land of Covenant, the window of opportunity has closed. Yosef's bones, which these men carried with them from Egypt, will have to wait to find the place of rest he requested in the land where he learned to dream the dreams of the Bridegroom-King. The Divine portal into the Highest and Best Will of the Holy One for His people will not reopen for four decades. Out of the over 600,000 men of the generation who the Holy One brought forth full grown from Egypt only two men - *Y'hoshua* son of Nun of the tribe of Efrayim and *Kalev* son of Yefuneh of the tribe of *Yehudah* - will live to see that window of Divine opportunity open again.

What about the people milling around the Camp of the Redeemed and claiming the Name of the Holy One in our day? Whose ‘sons’ – in the Hebraic sense - are we? Who is *our* true father? Whose way will we choose when the critical moments of choice arise?

What Can We Learn From This? And Where Can We Go From Here?

Once the Divine Decree is written and sealed for 40 years of wandering in Yish'mael's world the question on everyone's mind becomes 'so ... *where do we go from here*'? Physically and geographically, of course, the answer is now pretty easy. Our options are limited. The question is no longer if we will die in this wilderness – it is simply a matter of when we will do so, by what means our death will occur, and at which station along the wilderness way it will happen. Our lot is therefore just to follow His pillar of fire by night and cloud by day to whatever stations the Holy One in His wisdom chooses for us to pass through. At each station we pass in this desert we will lay to rest a predetermined number of those who chose this way of life over entering and possessing the *land of milk and honey*. At each oasis our children will learn another lesson about the faithfulness of the Holy One, and how preferable His Will is over the ways of men. Station by station, decade by decade, a passion will build in their hearts to obtain and possess that for which their fathers had neither vision nor stomach. The generation of people who by reason of the sin of the spies grew up without knowing a home of their own will be the ones who ultimately refuse to settle for nothing less.

Moshe's task is now about to change dramatically. From this point forward his service to those who walked alongside him out of Egypt will diminish. Those men and women have made their choice – to die in the desert, or even worse, to *go back* into bondage. Each of these redeemed souls is still greatly loved and tenderly cared for with manna from Heaven and water from the Rock, but the prophet's mission over the next thirty-eight years must now shift to the generation that is going to come of age in the desert. From this point forward Moshe's primary job will be to create in the children of those who have chosen to die in the desert a passion that their parents never possessed - a delight in *Judea, Samaria and the Galilee*; a thirst for the waters of *Be'ersheva, En Gedi, Gichon and Gamla*; a longing to ascend *Olivet, Scopus, Ofel, Tziyon, and Moriyah*; a craving to stand atop *Ebal and Gerizim, Gilboa and Tabor*; and a dream of *Carmel and Hermon* that cannot be quenched by nostalgia for Egypt, or for that matter, for any other land of exile. His task will be to awaken in them a great cry: *if I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand lose its cunning – let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!* Ps. 137:5-6.

Teach Them Faithfully To Your Children ...

Moshe's primary task from this day forward will be to walk among the children in the camp and pour over them daily the living water of the Words of Torah he has

received at Sinai. His job will be to inspire the young ones in the Camp to treasure, cherish, and carefully guard the Covenant, and to nurture them as they grow. Moshe will become their rabbi; they will become his *talmidim*. His job will be to model for them the skill of walking with the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven; they will become his apprentices. What will he teach them? He will teach them that Torah is not a creed, and that neither is it a code of conduct. He will teach them that strict observance of Torah's *mitzvot* is not intended to be their means of entry into the World to Come. He will teach them that Torah is the very Word of the Creator of the Universe, a part of the atmosphere in which He has created and ordained for mankind to dwell and find purpose and meaning. He will teach them that Torah is meant to be to the human soul what food and water are to the human body.

The Holy One has a very specific blueprint He wants Moshe to follow in fulfilling this new life mission. He began to lay out this blueprint yesterday. In the first man/God-encounter after the sin of the spies the Holy One told Moshe to begin the training of the generation who would possess the land a few years hence with instructions regarding how He wants them to make free will *korbanot* – *olahot, sh'lamim, and minchot* - *when they come into the Land. Numbers 15:1-21*. Today the Holy One follows up the detailed instructions He told Moshe to teach the youth in the Camp regarding presenting free will *korbanot* in the Land with instructions about *how to deal with every sin against the Covenant which they will commit while living in the Land*. You do understand that the Holy One knows we will still have the 'sin problem' even after we enter into His Rest, don't you? You did not think He expects perfection from us in the Land any more than He expected it from us in the Wilderness, did you? You 'get it' don't you? That *the Holy One has pre-programmed repentance and grace and forgiveness into the Covenant at every turn*, I mean.

The generation to which Moshe is to teach the principles of Covenant Renewal is a generation that did not participate in either the *chet ha-egel* [calf sin] of Sinai or the *chet ha-meraglim* [sin of the spies] of *Kadesh Barnea*. Their fathers and mothers were the stars of these sin scenarios; they were too young at the time. So this teaching about the Divinely ordained process of dealing with sin is all about the future, not about the past. Here is how these instructions begin:

*Again the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying,
Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them:*

When [Hebrew, ki] you inadvertently err/stray [i.e. breach the Covenant; Hebrew, shagah] and fail to observe [Hebrew, asah] all these commandments [Hebrew mitzvot] that the Holy One has spoken to Moshe ...

[Numbers 15:22]

It is as if the Holy One says right up front to the generation which He was raising up in the Wilderness, “*Let’s talk about the ‘s’ word*” [sin] *right up front – I want you to know how to deal with it before you ever do it.*”

Learning What ‘Sin’ Is – Where It Comes From, How it Manifests, and How the Holy One Wants us to Deal with It!

The word “sin” is an English word. That means it did not come into existence until approximately 2,500 years after the events we have read about in this week’s parsha². So whatever happened at Kadesh Barnea as a result of the spy-fiasco, like what happened at Sinai involving a golden calf, was not initially called ‘sin’. The writer of Torah chose to describe by using a noun derived from the *shoresh chata*³ - *chet, tet, alef*. This ancient Hebrew verb conveys the image of *a person in covenant with another missing an assigned Covenant step and stumbling, or casting a stone at a Covenant target and missing the mark*. The concept is Hebrew through and through. It arises out of, and has real meaning, only in the context of covenant. It is all about relationship. It means thinking, saying, or doing something inferior to what our Covenant Partner designed for us to think, say in order to co-labor with Him in the unfolding and revelation of His Grand Redemptive Plan. Unlike the English concept of ‘sin’, *chata* is not a matter of *morality*; morality is just a concept produced by minds corrupted by ingesting the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. *Chata* is a matter of *relationship*. Hence the apostolic writers define all ‘sin’ as a *breach of a covenant duty* [I John 3:4] or a departure from an *understood Covenant protocol* [James 4:17].

When we are in any relationship – be it with the Holy One or with a fellow human being – there are certain expectations that arise regarding how we, and the other party, will think about us, speak to and about us, and act toward and concerning us. There are protocols of behavior that we inherently know are appropriate to and healthy for the relationship. And on the other hand we understand that there are other ways of thinking, speaking and acting toward or in relation to the other party that would most definitely tend to have a negative effect on the relationship.

So if you are going to continue to use the word ‘sin’ in your religious conversations, please be sure you understand that what term refers to is not some vague concept of *moral failing* – it instead describes *a thought, word, or action that should be understood to cause damage to a relationship*. If you chose to

² English did not begin to form into a language until the 5th Century C.E. - around that time Germanic invaders of the Isles interacted with the primitive inhabitants of those isles and a mixture of tongues that came known as “Old English” or “Anglo Saxon English” began to develop. This development continued up to the Norman Invasion in 1066 CE, when a French influence was added, causing the language to morph into what is now called “Middle English”. Somewhere in the 15th Century CE a great vowel shift took hold, and what is now considered ‘Modern English’ started to take root.

³ In Hebrew this is written *chet, tet, alef*.

entertain thoughts about your brother, or speak words about him, that portray him as less than he is created to be – or if you fail to see and speak blessings over the potential good in your brother - that is *chata*. It is destructive of the relationship. Similarly, if you speak to your sister in a condescending, demeaning, manipulating, intimidating, or humiliating way – or if you fail to speak that which is encouraging, edifying, and inspiring when you have the opportunity - that is *chata*. Such speech – or silence when speech would be helpful - damages the relationship. If you strike your brother, or take your sister’s clothes, or embarrass any person publicly, or fail to assist him or her when he is in desperate need of assistance, that is *chata*. Such actions frustrate the purposes of the Covenant. Such actions turn relationships into rubble.

Remember, the two ‘primary’ instructions for living are both about relationship enhancement. We are to love the Holy One our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our strength. And we are to love our neighbor as our selves. So if you want to understand what ‘sin’ is, just keep in mind that whatever thought, word [or lack thereof] stops any healthy relationship-building process is ‘sin’.

In relation to the Holy One, that which fosters the healthy relationship-building process is *clearly set forth for us*. We do not have to speculate. We do not have to wonder. We do not have to make it up as we go. He has told us specifically how to maximize our relationship with Him. It is to acknowledge Him as our only God, and meditate upon, talk about, and practice the thought life, speech, and actions described in Torah. **Deuteronomy 6:4-9; and see Psalm 1 and 119:1-16**. Torah, you see, is not about either earning favor from God or about attaining morality for God. If you look at and approach Torah that way you will defeat the Covenant purpose. You will pervert Torah into a tool of self-righteousness, something you yourself do to feel better about yourself - instead of letting Torah be all about honoring your Covenant Partner in Heaven and building an ever-stronger relationship with Him. Torah is simply the protocol for valuing and building a relationship with the Holy One the way He, in His Wisdom, has told us is the most effective way possible. But what if we slip up or stumble in relation to some aspect of this protocol? What if we *entertain a Serpentine thought*? What if we *yield the use of our tongue to a Serpent-conceived accusation*? What if we *indulge a Serpent-seduced appetite*? If we do such a thing ... is it over for us? Is our relationship with the Holy One ruined forever? Not on your life.

If there is anything the desert of *Paran* has taught us it is that no matter how holy a human being thinks he or she is, there is no way he or she can ever “fulfill” every protocol of the Torah of the Holy One by human effort. I strongly suspect that one of the primary purposes the gory details of our ancestors’ death-spiral of missteps in the desert in the narrative of the events that transpired between the time they left

Sinai and the debacle of the *meraglim* was to erase from our minds any illusion that we or anyone else could, in our flesh, do everything – or indeed anything - He said perfectly. What starts in the flesh can never end up in the Spirit – and the Torah is of the Spirit. **Romans 7:14**. The carnal mind is always at enmity with God; for it will not subject itself to the Torah of the Holy One, nor can it. So, then those who are operating in the flesh cannot please God. **Romans 8:7-8**. The Holy One wants us to understand from the get-go that we *need Him* – and His Ruach (breath, spirit) – and that our needing to lean on, and follow the leading of, the Ruach is how it absolutely must be. That leaning and response to leading is, after all, what builds the relationship between a man and the Holy One. He wants us to know that He does not expect us to be able to accomplish any Covenant-building actions on our own. He wants us to know this Covenant will always require us to trust Him, lean upon Him, and let Him lead us through the Covenant-commitments His Way. We have to accept His ‘easy yoke’ – and let Him do the heavy lifting as we co-labor with Him in the safe and effectual confines of that yoke.

This Betrothal Covenant lifestyle is all about building a relationship with Him, and becoming One *with Him* so that we can accurately speak and act on His behalf and for His glory – not about us doing great works to impress Him or anyone else. It is about time we figured that out, accepted it, and got on with the program. It is the spirit of the bondwoman and her son that is at work in us that keeps us striving, contending, and complaining how it is all someone else’s fault. Rather than let us wallow in self-pity over that fact, however, the Holy One takes the opportunity to lovingly reiterate for us his instructions on the very important subject of how to deal with, and overcome, our occasional failures. He acknowledges that He has always understood perfectly that we would not — will not — indeed cannot - always follow His loving instructions for our lives.

V'chi tish'gu v'lo ta'asu et kol-ha-mitzvot ha-eleh

When you stray/wander and do not build/do all these life-instructions

asher-diber Adonai el-Moshe ...

which the Holy One spoke to Moshe ...

[Numbers 15:22]

The Bridegroom of Heaven understands our challenges – and our weaknesses – far better than we do. He fully expects us to breach the protocols of our betrothal covenant from time-to-time. He can work with that – if we can! Knowing our faults and foreknowing every *chet* against Him we will ever commit, He is committed to love us passionately and unselfishly anyway. He will not get mad or discouraged and walk away in a huff – and He doesn’t want us to do so either. He therefore lays out for us - in advance of us ever sinning – a safe and instructive protocol that He wants us to follow in order to interact with Him even when we have messed up badly – with an eye toward ‘mending the breach’. He thereby

intends to turn that which the enemy of our souls meant to destroy us into a launching pad for our growth, development, and empowerment. He wants us to know that in Him, through His Torah, we can always find *forgiveness* and *restoration*. He wants us to know that our failures at covenant faithfulness can actually be - instead of a trap door leading to condemnation and judgment – a **springboard** leading to higher and higher levels of intimacy and covenant participation than we have ever hoped or dreamed — much less heretofore experienced.

The Basic Protocol: Always Run To the Bridegroom-King - Not Away!

The foundational basis of the protocol the Holy One gives us for restoring shalom to the covenant relationship after we sin is actually strikingly simple: When we fail He wants us to run to Him instead of running away from Him the way Adam and Chava did. Our *sin* does not separate us from Him, you see – it is only *our stubborn, independent, self-will* that can do that.

If we say we have no sin we are just deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. I John 1:6. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I John 1:7. So He has made a way for us to *run to Him*. We come not in our own righteousness, but solely *in the merit of a sinless surrogate*. We must come in the merit of a Lamb without blemish. And since every good and perfect gift comes from above, the truth we must recognize is that He even provides the Lamb that serves as our surrogate.

The protocol that our loving Divine Bridegroom has established for us, you see, *points us back to when a Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world*. It *points us back to when blood was shed by an innocent* in order that garments could be given to Adam and Chava. It *calls to our remembrance a ram provided for Avraham*, seemingly out of nowhere, given in substitution for the life of Yitzchak, on Mount Moriyah. The Holy One says it very clearly in today's aliyah:

Tish'gu [when you stray, wander, err],
and lo ta'asu [do not build/do] *all these mitzvot that the Holy One has spoken to Moshe,*
even all that the Holy One has instructed you by Moshe,
from the day that the Holy One gave mitzvah,
and onward l'doratechem [throughout your generations]; *then it shall be,*
if it be done l'sh'gagah [through straying, wandering, erring],
without the knowledge of the community,
that all the people shall make korban [approach]
*through the surrogacy of one young bull for an olah*⁴,
*for a sweet savor to the Holy One, with the minchah*⁵ *of it and the drink-offering of it,*

⁴ For an explanation of the *olah*, see Monday's Study of the 24th parsha, parsha *Vayikra*.

⁵ For an explanation of the *minchah*, see Tuesday's Study of parsha *Vayikra*.

*according to the ordinance, and one male goat for a chata't*⁶.

V'chiper ha-kohen [the Kohen will make atonement/covering]
for all the congregation of the children of Yisra'el, v'nislach [and they will be forgiven].
*For it was a mistake, and they have made korban, an olah made by fire to the Holy One,
and their chata't is before the Holy One, for their error.*

*And all the community of the children of Yisra'el v'nislach
and the stranger who lives as a foreigner among them;
for in respect of all the people it was done b'sh'gagah* [though straying, wandering, erring].
[Numbers 15:23-26]

The Holy One wanted His covenant people to know what is supposed to happen when a redeemed person, or the community of the redeemed, “sins” by transgressing a *mitzvah* of Torah. The answer varies, according to the Holy One, depending upon whether the transgression was *b'shagagah* or was *b'yad ramah*.

Levels of Covenant Infidelity: B'Shagagah and B'yad Ramah

The kind of transgression of Torah that is described in the passage we have been studying today is in the Hebrew, called *b'shagagah*. Our English Bibles translate this as ‘inadvertent’, or ‘unwitting’. The Hebrew verb root from which the phrase *b'shagagah* is derived is *shagag*⁷. This verb root paints a picture of someone *straying off a path, through inattention or deception*. It just means *to err, or to breach a covenant*. It refers to transgressions occurring by reason of *inattention, distraction, carelessness, stress/duress, ignorance, misunderstanding or inadvertence*⁸. Beginning with verse 30 of today's aliyah however the Holy One goes on to discuss another, far more sinister kind of transgression. This kind of transgression is described in Hebrew by the modifying phrase *b'yad ramah*. In regard to that kind of sin, are told:

*But the soul that does such things b'yad ramah,
whether born in the land or a stranger, blasphemes the Holy One;
and his soul is to be karat* [cut off] *from m'karav* [the communal approach of] *his people*.

B'yad ramah is usually translated ‘*in presumptuousness*’. Literally however it means ‘*with an uplifted hand*’. The word *yad*⁹ literally means a *hand*.

In the Holy One's Divine Order how a breach of the betrothal covenant is to be handled differs depending on whether the transgression in question is *b'shagagah* [through straying, wandering, or erring] or is *b'yad ramah* [with an uplifted hand]. To help understand these two Hebrew concepts and the Holy One's approach to these different types of “sin”, picture a police officer in an intersection directing traffic.

⁶ For an explanation of the *chata't*, see Thursday's Study of parsha *Vayikra*.

⁷ *Shagag* is *shin, gimel, gimel*. Strong's Hebrew word #7683, it is pronounced *shaw-gag'*.

⁸ The first Biblical usage of this verb root is in Genesis 6:3. See also *Iyov* [Job] 12:16, where the word is translated ‘deceived’.

⁹ *Yad* is *yod, dalet*. Strong's Hebrew word #3027, it is pronounced *yawd*.

What does the officer do to let the oncoming drivers know it is time to stop? He or she lifts up his arm and shows the palm of his or her open hand [*yod*] to the oncoming drivers. This signifies the command to “stop; *i.e. do not proceed any farther!*” If a driver through inattention or carelessness, or because he or she misinterpreted the officer’s gesture, proceeds into the intersection, this is a *chata’at b’shagagah* - a *straying into forbidden territory by mistake, ignorantly*. On the other hand if a driver saw the open hand of the officer, and understood exactly what it meant, and brazenly decided to go ahead and enter the intersection anyway, that person’s act of entering the intersection would be *b’yad ramah* - *disregarding an open-handed warning*. *But what is the difference?* you might say. In both cases did not the driver transgress the officer’s instruction? In both cases was not the safety of other drivers compromised? In both cases will not the police officer give the same “ticket”? If Torah was accurately characterized as “law” in the sense modern Westerners think of law, then the answer would be that there is no difference whatever, and the exact same ticket should be given to - and the exact same penalty extracted from - both drivers.

The Beauty and Wisdom Of the Holy One’s Torah

Contrary to popular opinion among King James’ translators and contemporary leaders of Christendom, however, Torah is not and never has been “law” as that term is understood in Western culture. Instead Torah is and has always been the ultimate expression of Divine *grace*.

According to Torah for a person to proceed to violate a *mitzvah* even with an open hand in front of him or her warning him/her to stop is much different than to violate a *mitzvah* through inattention or deception. Why? The *mitzvah* [instruction for covenant-affirming action] is still violated, isn’t it? The will of the Father is still frustrated, isn’t it? “Yes” the *mitzvah* is violated in both cases; but “no” the will of the Father is not frustrated in the case of a *chata’at b’shagagah*. How can I say that? Because the will of the Father is not and has never been that we legalistically obey Him like good little robots. His will is that His betrothed Bride-to-be *learn to love Him*, and to *heed His warnings*, and to *live a life that fulfills their high calling, leads them to their inheritance in this world and in the world to come, and draws other people – fallible human beings just like them - to run to and embrace Him* as well. Torah is a recipe for a *long-term, ever-deepening covenant relationship* - the walking out of *intimate fellowship over a lifetime of good and bad seasons*. Torah is at its essence neither a book of ordinances nor a penal code. Torah is instead a *master’s teaching manual for life designed to, over a course of years, lead adherents to become like the Holy One in areas of thought, heart, motivation, word, action, and selflessness*.

The goal of Torah is not to frighten, expose, catch, or condemn lawbreakers. The goal of Torah is instead *to teach and train beloved children in a truly world-changing lifestyle of righteousness*. Hence, unlike codes of “law”, Torah makes a great distinction between *chata’at b’shtagahah* and *chata’at b’yad ramah*. The one (or the nation) which commits *chata’at b’shtagahah* is told to “come to Daddy” [the word we translate as “offering” actually means “*approach*”, or “*draw near*”] in repentance. We are told to do this through presenting at the altar another living being with which we identify ourselves, acknowledging that our excursion into forbidden territory, behavior, etc. has horrible consequences. When the *Mish’kan* and Temple were standing the ancients did this through carefully selected animals without spot or blemish. As they watched the life slowly ebbing from the carcasses of those animals, they visualized their own sins being judged. As the blood of those animals poured out on the ground they visualized their own sins being carried away.

We do the same thing today - just *sans* the animals. Today we approach the Holy One through claiming Messiah’s sacrificial death as our *korban chattat* [substitutionary sin-forgiveness protocol]. We fellowship with Messiah in His suffering, identifying with Him as our sin carrier, the way the ancients fellowshipped with the animal chosen for their *korban* and laid their hands upon its head as if to say “this should have been me!”

Through the *korban* process (then and now) the Father makes Himself available to us and grants forgiveness. At our Loving Father’s knee we then *learn righteousness* – which, after all, is the Father’s will for us. The protocol of *chata’at b’shtagahah* is thus designed to be a learning tool for us, teaching us and the world that there is, and has always been, a “better way” than judgment. The Holy One has always, you see, called for repentance [Hebrew, *t’shuvah*] and restoration. He provided for the means of repentance before the foundation of the world. He incorporated it into the Torah He gave us at Sinai. He established repentance [Hebrew, *t’shuvah*] as the pathway back to life and peace, and to restoration of intimate fellowship with the Holy One our God. As it was for the ancients, so it is for us.

But What If I Break the Betrothal Covenant B’yad Ramah - Willfully and Intentionally?

Ah you say, but what about the one (or the nation, or generation) that commits *chata’at b’yad ramah*? Torah says of such a person that “*his soul is to be karat [cut off] from m’karav [the approach of] his people.*” **Numbers 15:30**. It is more or less “the plank” for him/them. Isn’t that “legalistic”, you might ask? If it is, it is *self-inflicted* legalism. When one intentionally refuses to heed an “open hand” he *voluntarily exits the kingdom of the Holy One and chooses the dominion of death*. He steps outside the realm of the grace which the Holy One made available to him, and

enters the realm of law and of death completely *of his own accord*.

It is very much like the choice of those who participated in *chet ha-meraglim* [the sin of the spies]. It is a matter of hardening of the heart. It is a product of an *individual's conscious choice of lawlessness over Torah*. And lest you say “but perhaps it was not an informed choice”, you must understand the rest of Torah. No punishment of Torah can be inflicted without the testimony of at least two “witnesses”. According to the ancient rulings of the elders of Israel, a “witness”, in this context (unlike in secular “law”), cannot be merely a passive observer. In order to be a “witness”, according to the elders’ interpretation of Torah, dating back long past the advent of Torah, one must not only observe the person violating the mitzvah, *but must also warn the person*, and the warning must not only specifically state that what the other is doing is a violation of Torah, but also must specifically state the prescribed consequences for that sin. This includes, of course, the procedure for making *t’shuvah*, and the sentence that Torah prescribes in event the person is unwilling to repent after being warned. And, if that is not enough “grace” or you, keep in mind that at least two such warnings must be given, by two different people. The two “witnesses” are the *yad* - the open hand saying: “*Stop! Don’t go there! Please stop before it is too late! Turn around and go back home, now! Stop ... or you will die!*” Do you get it now? The sin of the community with the spies was *b’yad ramah*. There were two witnesses – Y’hoshua and Kalev - that delivered a very clear warning. But pause now, and consider two case studies.

Torah Case Study #1: A Man Found Gathering Wood on the Sabbath

The first study we need to consider is the one Torah presents to us in the context of distinguishing breaches of covenant committed *b’yad shagagah* and those committed *b’yad ramah*. The Holy One has wisely inserted into the narrative of Torah at this critical stage of wilderness testing the story of *Ish Mekokesh* – i.e. a *gathering man*. Here is what Torah tells us about what happened:

Vayihyu v’nei-Yisra’el bamidbar – *Then it came to pass, while B’nei Yisrael was in the desert ...* ***vayimtze’u ish mekoshesh etzim b’yom ha-Shabat*** – *they came upon a man gathering wood on the Sabbath.* ***Vayakrivu oto ha-motz'im oto mekoshesh etzim*** - *And those who found him gathering wood brought him near ...* ***el-Moshe v’el-Aharon v’el kol-ha-edah*** - *to Moshe and Aharon, and to all the witness-throng.* **Numbers 15:32-33.**

If you will recall, while we were encamped at Sinai part of the revelation download the Holy One gave us was: ***Ushmartem et-ha-Shabat*** - *you are to cherish and carefully guard the Sabbath ...* ***ki kodesh hi*** – *for it is holy;* ***lachem mechaleleiha mot yumat ki kol-ha-oseh vah melachah v’nichreitah ha-nefesh hahi mikerev ameyha*** – *anyone doing any work has cut his soul [i.e. his will, his mind, and his emotions] off from his people, and therefore, Death, surely Death!* **Exodus 31:14.** Then, after forgiving

the people for sinning with the Golden Calf, the Holy One reiterated: ***Sheshet yamim te'aseh melachah*** – on the six days you are to do all your regular work ... ***uvayom ha-shvi'i yihyeh lachem kodesh Shabat Shabaton l'Adonai*** – but the seventh day is to be holy unto you, and a day of sitting before the Holy One. ***Kol-ha'oseh vo melachah yumat*** – all who do regular work on it – Death! And the Holy One then added: ***Lo-teva'aru esh b'chol moshvoteychem b'yom ha-Shabbat*** – do not kindle a fire in any of your settlements on the seventh day. **Exodus 35:2-3**. So – after the hard lesson of the golden calf incident, the Holy One made it clear that it was not only doing creative, remunerative work, but even kindling a creative fire for such work, that blasphemes the holiness and evaporates the blessing of the 'day of *just us, just trust*'. Hmmmmn, someone apparently wondered – what if we don't actually physically *kindle* the fire, but merely take a few minutes away from delighting in and honoring the Sabbath to gather sticks/wood in contemplation of building a creative fire when Sabbath is over? There is a dark tendency in man, you see, to want to *test and prod the boundaries of holiness* instead of *honoring and reverently safeguarding those boundaries*. As Yeshua taught, however, in the Kingdom, thought is equivalent to action, and the first step taken in furtherance of a transgression is equivalent to the completion of the deed in fulness. See **Matthew 5:21-30**.

According to Rashi, people who saw *ish mekoshesh* gathering bundles of sticks for a fire reminded him of what the Holy One had said about the holiness of the Sabbath and warned him of the dire consequences of breaching this very special aspect of the Covenant; yet the man ignored them and continued picking up stick after stick. If so, you should realize, that would have made his breach of covenant one of the *b'yad ramah* variety. But there are still questions that preclude a rush to judgment on our - or anyone's – part. First of all, *who was this Ish Mekokesh, any way?* Was he even a Hebrew? Was he one of the mixed multitude? Was he perhaps the half-Egyptian 'blasphemer' who had been driven away from the Camp a few months back, after stones of remembrance were set up against him? Could he have been an Amaleki, an Emori, a Kena'ani, or even a Midyani? Could he have just been a wandering vagabond or runaway slave who happened upon our camp by accident, at just the wrong time, on just the wrong day? Also, *why – for what purpose - was this man gathering wood?* If he was a Hebrew or a mixed-multitude resident of the Camp, gathering wood to light a fire by which to warm himself during the night or to cook a little food were both totally unnecessary – and indeed insulting to the Holy One. After all, the Holy One was freely providing manna for all residents of the Camp, and though this was the Shabbat, a double portion for every single person in the camp had been generously provided the preceding day. Also, remember that the Pillar of Fire by night was present at all times to keep everyone in the Camp warm throughout the cool desert nights. So *why go out and gather wood?*

Note, what the ones who saw *Ish Mekokesh* gathering wood on the Sabbath did not do - they did not overreact. They stopped the improper activity – for the man’s own good as well as the well-being of the camp - but they did not rush to judgment. They did not presume to take the Torah into their own hands. They did not shoot the man through with arrows; nor pick up stones with which to pelt him. They did not let their minds run to the dark areas of deciding what crime he had committed, whether his breach of covenant was *b’yad shagagah* or *b’yad ramah*, or what punishment, if any, he deserved. They refused to take upon themselves the role of judge, jury, or executioner. They refused to claim the authority that the Holy One had given to Moshe, Aharon, and the Sanhedrin. The men who found *ish mekokesh* did just one thing – they ‘brought him near’ to the appointed authorities. Declaring guilt and decreeing appropriate punishment are not the province of ordinary citizens. Vigilante ‘justice’ is simply not something citizens of the Covenant community are ever supposed to engage in. If called as witnesses in a legal proceeding to determine fault we are to testify of what we saw and heard; if not called, we are to keep quiet, and trust the Holy One to ‘do righteousness and justice’ in His own way, in His own time, to achieve the maximum good for the Covenant Community and for the world – leaving room for the restoration of even the suspected wrongdoer’s heart and bloodline.

So, what did the ones who actually had been given authority to deal with such matters, do? They refused to judge by the sight of their eyes or the hearing of their ears. They did not assume guilt based upon rumors, reports, accusations, or allegations. They instead sought the counsel of the Holy One. They trusted the Holy One to know if the witnesses against this man were or were not credible, disinterested, and true. They trusted the Holy One to decide, in His omniscience, if this man – and his bloodline or potential bloodline – could be redeemed. What a lesson there is for us in this story! We are never, EVER, to rush to judgment based upon accusations or assertions – or even what we see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears. We are not to make assumptions regarding the future of a person based on what we perceive with our senses, or feel with our emotions, about past conduct on his part. There is always far more to every story than we can ever know. We have to trust the Holy One to sort out what has happened, why it has happened, and what steps need to be taken in response, not for any man’s idea of ‘justice’, but simply *for the sake of the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth*.

In the case of *ish mekosheh*, the Holy One’s counsel to those He had placed in authority was matter of fact and stern: ***Mot yumat*** – death, surely death. ***Ha-ish ragom oto va'avanim kol-ha-edah michutz l'machaneh*** – the whole witness-throng is

to pile up/heap up stones against the man outside the camp. **Numbers 15:35**. Apparently, the Holy One, who knows the end from the beginning, and knows what is in the heart of all men, knew beyond question that this man was so corrupted in mind, soul, and spirit that he had no interest in making *teshuvah*, returning to Covenant, and being redeemed. *Selah!*

Now let us contrast this case study with another, far more familiar one.

Torah Case Study #2: A Woman Brought to Yeshua After Allegedly Being Caught in the Act of Adultery

In John 8 the story is told of Yeshua's dealings with a group of men who sought to test Him by throwing at his feet a woman they claimed had been caught in the act of adultery. Yeshua was not sitting in Moshe's seat, so He refused to judge her case. Instead, He made a simple suggestion: ***“He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone!”*** John 8:7. Of course, upon hearing this each accuser, being convicted by *their* conscience, dropped his stone and walked away. Left alone with the woman, Yeshua addressed her directly for the first time, and asked her two questions: *1. Where are your accusers? and 2. Has no one condemned you?* He then said: *‘Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.’*

Yeshua challenged the ones who brought the woman forward for public humiliation. He inquired *as to whether they had fulfilled the Torah's requirements for “witnesses”*. In Torah terms – with which they, and He, were all very, very familiar – by saying “Let him who is without sin cast the first stone”, he was challenging the woman's accusers and self-appointed judges as to whether they had, as the ancient interpretations of Torah passed down for generations required of witnesses, prior to accusing her publicly, [a] gone to her privately to warn her in love; [b] encouraged her to make *teshuvah* and be restored to the Holy One and His calling on her life; and [c] warned her of the penalty the Holy One, in Torah, prescribes for adultery? The answer to all these questions was, quite obviously, a resounding “no”. Hence there were no *witnesses* which Torah – or Messiah - would recognize. And that being the case, they knew that to cast a stone at this woman under these circumstances would have been just as wrong as was her alleged adultery. Hence there was no execution. Hence a Beloved daughter was restored to the bosom of her Father, and taught righteousness. Hence the Torah was fulfilled. This was not a new teaching – or a new Covenant, or a new dispensation of grace – that Yeshua was setting forth. This was simply the Holy One's wonderful Torah being lived out and applied exactly the way it was intended. This procedure, with these safeguards, is Covenantal grace, not some quick-to-jump-to-conclusions-and-judge-and-condemn form of “law”.

Why Are You Downcast?

One more thing about the woman “caught in adultery”. The apostolic text tells us this woman was made to stand before the assembly. See her standing there in your mind’s eye. Feel her shame and her fear. Let the magnitude of her predicament sink in on you for a moment. Had she looked up at the faces of those before whom she stood, she might have been confronted with angry stares. She might have encountered self-righteous smirks. She might have seen indifference. She might have even detected a note, here or there, of condescending pity. But do you really think she would have the chutzpah to look up at their faces, Beloved? I do not. I believe that, in shame, her eyes were cast down - down toward the place where the garments of her accusers almost touched their sandals. What, then, would she see? Ah, that is one of the most beautiful hidden secrets of the passage. What the accused woman would have seen, during this entire episode, on the corners of the garments of each of her accusers, and on the corners of the garment of the One to whom she was brought for judgment, was something from the concluding passage of today’s aliyah and this week’s parsha. The Holy One spoke to Moshe, telling him to speak to the generation that would enter and possess the land, and tell them:

v'asu lahem tzitzit al-kanfei vigdeihem l'dorotam

and have them make tassels on the corners of their garments for all generations.

v'nateinu al-tzitzit ha-kanaf ptil t'chelet¹⁰

They shall include a twist of sky-blue wool in the corner tassels.

V'hayah lachem l'tzitzit ur'item oto

These shall be for you tassels, and you will see Him,

Uz'chartem et-kol-mitzvot Adonai v'asitem otam

you are to remember all of the Holy One's commandments so as to do them.

V'lo-taturu acharei l'avchem v'acharei eyneichem

You will then not stray [Heb. tur – to 'tour', explore] after your heart and eyes,

asher-atem zonim achareihem

which [in the past] have led you astray in pursuit of them.

L'ma'an tiz'keiru v'asitem et-kol-mitzvotai v'heyitem

You will thus remember and do all I instruct you,

k'doshim l'-Eloheichem¹¹

and you will be holy ones unto/for your God.

[Numbers 15:37-40]

This is the so-called ‘law of the fringes’. I call it the ‘yellow ribbon’¹² of the

¹⁰ *Techelet* (*te-khe'let*) was a blueish hue produced by using a specific dye obtained by crushing the body of, and extracting the bodily fluids from, a particular type of salt-water snail [Hebrew, *chilazon*].

¹¹ This is of course the 3rd paragraph of the *sh'ma* prayer most of us pray daily.

¹² I refer, of course, to the custom in America of tying yellow ribbons on trees, on gates, and on other places, as a symbolic statement that someone [often a soldier away on duty] is *missed*, and that we want them to know they are *not forgotten*, but are *cared for* and *needed back home*. This custom was

Kingdom of Heaven. Every time we see the fringes, like yellow ribbons they say:

*“You can come home, My child! I am waiting for you patiently, missing you terribly,
and thinking of you often. I am ever longing to see you again,
and to welcome you back to My side where you belong.”*

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as ‘tassels’ or ‘fringes’ is *tzitzit* – *tzade, yod, tzade, tav*. The noun is derived from a verb root¹³ from the realm of agriculture meaning to bud, to blossom, to flower, and produce fruit. The verb is employed in the story of the sign of Aharon’s rod. The idea of the *tzitzit* we are to wear on our garments is that we are to be showing signs that there is a powerful life-force at work within us to bring forth beautiful fruit. As the spies brought forth evidence of the fruit-producing capacity of the Covenant-blessed land, so we are to wear *tzitzit* as evidence of the fruit-producing capacity of our Covenant-blessed lives.

Consider the word picture associated with the Hebrew verb from which the word *tzitzit* is drawn. The first letter is *tzade*, which presents the image of a righteous or devout man, bowing in submission to the Hand and creative direction of the Holy One. The second letter is *vav*, representing a joinder. The third and final letter of the verb is *tzade sofit*, representing the ultimate righteous or devout man bowing in submission to the Hand and creative direction of the Holy One. The verb thus pictures the act of *a righteous man joining Himself to and becoming one with the ultimate righteous man – i.e. Yeshua Ha-Mashiach*.

What the woman caught in the act of adultery was seeing, if her eyes were open as she stood or knelt before Yeshua and her accusers, were, of course, *tzitzit* - fringes, or tassels, of white thread, tied in a series of knots, with one blue thread running throughout. What she would have seen – almost certainly did see - was that which the Holy One said, to a generation of wayward sons and daughters, should serve to all generations of the Holy One’s people as a reminder of “all My *mitzvot*”. It was that which the Holy One told us to wear that we would *see HIM*; and that we remember the *mitzvot* of His Betrothal covenant, and to do them - *that you not go after [Hebrew, tuwr] the lusts of our own hearts and eyes, which lead us astray*. As the woman accused of adultery stared at Yeshua’s *tzit-tzit* I believe she realized that it had *been the very One – i.e. the ‘Him’ - those tassels were there to direct our vision toward*, and the very things those tassels had been given to warn us against, that had brought her to this place, before these men. Following after her own heart and eyes had, you see, led this woman to this moment, this place, and this Man. Following after their own heart and eyes had also led her accusers to this moment,

memorialized in a secular song a few years ago called “*Tie a Yellow Ribbon ‘Round the Old Oak Tree*”, by a popular musician named Tony Orlando.

¹³ The verb root is *tzutz* – i.e. *tzade, vav, tzade sofit*.

this place, and this Man. As they all gazed upon the four white strings, doubled over to make eight strands, then woven and knotted around the blue thread, they were all simultaneously being drawn back to the path of righteousness.

The heart of the Holy One, as represented in Torah, has never been found in a declaration to one who is truly penitent: “*Depart, you worker of iniquity, into the eternal fire prepared for ha-Satan and his messengers*”. The Holy One’s message to such a one has always been “*Neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more.*” It’s better than the message of the yellow ribbon. It’s the message of the thread stained with the Bluest of Blood. Therefore as the Holy Spirit says: “*Today if you hear His voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years.*” Hebrews 3:7-9.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. The first section of today’s aliyah deals with the actions that are to be engaged in if a person or a nation “sins”. Three scenarios are presented.

[A] What two things were to be done when a large portion of the Holy One’s redeemed community failed, because of ignorance, misinformation, corrupt leadership, or deceptive teaching, to live according to Torah?

[B] What incident has occurred in this week’s parsha that would be the kind of event that would bring about the need for these two things to be done?

[C] What was to be done when an individual committed *chata’at b’shtagagah* [see definition and explanation above]?

[D] What was to happen when any individual committed *chata’at b’yad ramah*?

[E] To what specific sin was each *chata’at b’yad ramah* likened in verse 30?

[F] According to verse 31 what two things must a person be found to have done before he can be found to have committed *chata’at b’yad ramah*?

[G] What do you think it means to be “cut off” as state in verse 31?

2. The next section of today’s aliyah is reminiscent of Leviticus 24:10-23, in which a man verbally blasphemed the Name of the Holy One in front of more than two witnesses and was, after a trial, eventually taken outside the camp and stoned to death. In today’s aliyah, verses 32-36, the story is told of one caught by more than two witnesses “gathering sticks” [traditional English translation] on the Shabbat. The ending of the two stories is the same. The man against whom stones were piled up in chapter 15, verses 32-36, had been found “gathering sticks” on the Shabbat. Gathering is *qashash* [pronounced *kaw-shash*], meaning to forage for straw, stubble or wood. What he was specifically found foraging for was *etz* [pronounced *ates*], usually meaning *lumber - wood or sticks used, or to be used, specifically for*

*carpentry or building purposes*¹⁴.

[A] Read Exodus 20:8-11, Exodus 31:12-14, and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. Write a brief summary of what Torah tells us we *should* do on the Shabbat.

[B] Considering the same passages, write a brief summary of what Torah tells us we should *not* do on the Shabbat.

[C] Based upon what you learned in the opening paragraphs of today's study concerning "witnesses" and the testimony which had to be given in order for a person to be put to death under Torah, write an imaginary "eyewitness" account for what happened in Numbers 15:32-36, that led to the man's execution by stoning.

[D] How was what this man did comparable to "blasphemy"? [Hint: don't forget the teaching of Numbers 15:30-31].

3. In the concluding five verses of this week's parsha, Moshe is told to instruct all generations of the Holy One's people to wear something special which will distinguish them from all other peoples of the earth.

[A] What special thing are the Holy One's people told to wear?

[B] What does the color *blue* symbolize? [Hint: see Exodus 24:10 and Ezekiel 1:26]

[C] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word translated as "look" in verse 39. Write the Hebrew verb and describe the hieroglyphic word picture that you see developing around this word.

[D] What is supposed to happen to us when we "look" at the *tzit-tzit*?

[E] What things is looking at the *tzit-tzit* supposed to remind us *not* to do?

4. Verse 39 of today's Torah reading indicates that we are not to 'go after' the things our hearts and eyes are attracted to. The Hebrew word translated 'go after' is *tor* [pronounced 'toor'], and is the root word for the English words "tour" and "tourist". We are not to take a "tour" of the things that attract our flesh, nor act like "tourists" in the domain of darkness - gawking at and dressing like the natives, allowing ourselves to be entertained by the culture, taking snapshots, and buying souvenirs there. We are to look at the *tzitzit*, and remember we are citizens of another Kingdom, and we are *pilgrims* here, *not tourists*.

¹⁴ The Hebrew word *etz* is, however, also used in Torah to refer to a tree. For instance, the 'tree of life' in the Garden of Eden is, in Hebrew, *Etz Ha-Chayim*. Hence, some have seen in the reference to gathering *etzim* [trees] something much more mystical and spiritually dangerous than merely picking up sticks – some have seen the man in this narrative as somehow equating [lumping together as the same thing] the *tree of life* [symbolizing Torah] and the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* [symbolizing information obtained through human reasoning and fleshly knowledge].

This interesting idea brings me back to the statement made earlier this week, in discussing the report of the *meraglim*: *we* [who are the Holy One's] *are never to base any of our decisions on the basis of any of the information we obtain by spying. the Holy One's people are to make decisions based solely upon REVELATION.*" See Monday's Study of parsha *Shelach Lecha*, particularly under the headings "Should I Spy?" and "The Report of the Spies".

The use of the Hebrew word *tuwr* completes the cycle of this week's parsha. As you will recall, the parsha began with the instruction that 12 men be sent to "spy out" the land of Israel. The verb translated "spy out" is *tuwr*. The *meraglim* were to *tuwr* the land of Kena'an (Canaan). We likewise are privileged to *tuwr* the Kingdom of Heaven in this life, knowing that we will possess and experience it in its fullness in the life to come. Let our report concerning the land and all things that appertain to the Kingdom and the Covenant be like unto that of Kalev [Caleb] and Y'hoshua [Joshua]!

5. In today's haftarah aliyah the spies sent out by Y'hoshua conclude their *tuwr* of the land of Kena'an and of Yericho's defenses. After hiding for three days in the hills to escape some men who are pursuing them they return to give their report to Y'hoshua, saying: *"Truly the Holy One has delivered into our hands all the land; and moreover all the inhabitants of the land do melt away before us."*

[A] Verse 23 says these spies told Y'hoshua *"everything that happened to them"*. Imagine you were one of these spies, and write out your report of the "everything that happened".

[B] In verse 24, the spies express the conclusion they have drawn from what they observed in the course of the *tuwr* they have just conducted. What do they say they observed, and what do they conclude based upon that observation?

[C] Based upon the fact that these men had to hide on a mountain for three days to escape pursuers from Yericho, do you think their observation about the inhabitants of Kena'an was based on physical or spiritual insight? Explain.

[D] Get out your Bible Atlas, and check the area around Yericho for possible mountains to which the spies could possibly have escaped. What mountain do you think the *meraglim* ascended in verse 22 and descended in verse 23?

[E] Remember Moshe's instructions to the *meraglim* in Numbers 13?

*And Moshe sent them to spy out the land of Kena'an, and said unto them,
Get you up this [way] southward, and go up into the mountain:*

Do you think *"the mountain"* to which Moshe was referring was the same or different than *"the mountain"* which the spies sent by Y'hoshua ascended? Explain your answer.

6. In today's reading from the B'rit Chadasha the writer of the letter to the 1st Century Messianic Jewish Community scattered throughout the world summarizes his discussion of the desert deaths of the members of the generation of the Sinai revelation with some startling comments. Note the highlighted portions:

*Let us therefore fear, lest perhaps a promise being left of entering into his rest,
anyone of you should seem to have come short of it.
For indeed we have had good news preached to us, even as they also did,
but the word they heard didn't profit them,*

*because it wasn't mixed with faith by those who heard.
For we who have believed do enter into that rest, even as he has said,
"As I swore in my wrath, they will not enter into my rest;"
although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.*

[Hebrews 4:1-3]

[A] What is the writer referring to as “the promise of entering His rest”?

[B] We are told in verse 1 to “be careful” of something. Of what are we to be careful?

[C] Why was the “good news” of “no value” to the generation that perished in the desert?

[D] What does it mean that the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, long after Yeshua’s death, resurrection, and ascension, described the “good news” we have heard as identical to the “good news” heard by the generation that experienced the giving of the Torah at Sinai?

[E] What does the writer mean when He says, in concluding his discussion, that “*the works were finished from the foundation of the world*”?

*May you find His mercy meeting you at every turn,
and may you enter His rest this Shabbat. Shabbat Shalom!*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Further Study

Revelation 5:1-11

*I saw, in the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a book
written inside and outside, sealed shut with seven seals.*

I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice,

"Who is worthy to open the book, and to break its seals?"

*No one in heaven above, or on the eretz, or under the eretz,
was able to open the book, or to look in it.*

And I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look in it.

*One of the Zakenim said to me, "Don't weep. Behold, the Lion
who is of the tribe of Yehudah, the Root of David, has overcome;
He who opens the book and its seven seals."*

*I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures,
and in the midst of the Zakenim, a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain,
having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God,
sent out into all the eretz. Then he came,*

and he took out of the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

*Now when he had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four Zakenim
fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense,
which are the prayers of the holy ones. They sang a new song, saying,*

"You are worthy to take the book, and to open its seals:

For you were killed, and bought us for the Holy One with your blood,

Out of every tribe, language, people, and nation,

and made them kings and Kohanim to our God, and they reign on eretz."