

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Korach:** **Numbers 17:1-13²**
 Haftarah: **I Samuel 12:6-13**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 13:3-4**

This will put an end to their grumbling

[Numbers 17:10 (a)]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 29:1-2;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is *Petition #10: Tzadikim* [Men Who Do the Holy One's Will]

Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor – Then the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying ...
Daber el-B'nei Yisra'el – prophecy to B'nei Yisrael ... **v'kach me'itam mateh** - and take
from them a staff ... **mateh l'veit av** – a staff from each patriarch's house **Numbers 17:1-2**
[in Hebrew Bibles, this is presented as Numbers 17:16-17]

Paran is no one's idea of paradise. The sub-tropical heat here bears down with a vengeance. It causes flesh to chaff, nerves to frazzle, tempers to flare; and commitment to the Holy One as a Bridegroom-King, to His Covenant as a lifestyle, and to His Ways as a means of serving mankind, to flag. This season of tests and trials is weighing heavy upon us. We survived the ignominious debacle known as the 'sin of the spies'. We weathered the fierce summer storm called the 'rebellion of Korach'. But the trauma of these things has marked us for life. *Shalom* has left us. *Joy* has eluded us. We are not completely *lawless* or *faithless*, but we are trending pretty strongly toward *loveless*. We are sour. We are dry. We are cynical, sarcastic, hypocritically critical, judgmental, vindictive, and mean. We are emotional basket cases - easily frightened, easily angered, easily disoriented, and easily discouraged. We strain at gnats while swallowing camels. We are pseudo-intellectual powder kegs - easily propagandized, easily agitated, easily deceived, and easily distracted from mission. Our lights of faith, hope, and love have gone dark. Our passion for the Holy One, for our fellow man, for Creation, and for life, has grown cold. Our attitudes are horrible. Our relationships are fraying. We repeat words, phrases, slogans and bullet points spoken by ideologues, partisans, charlatans, and talking heads like brainwashed children, never stopping to think what those words, phrases, etc. even mean – much less what implications they carry for the Holy One's Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a Species, bloodline by bloodline, and for the Restoration of Creation to its intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and *shalom*. We are neither thinking, speaking,

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² If you are reading from a TaNaKh or Hebrew Bible the numbering of the verses of chapters 16 and 17 is different. In such a Bible, the passage under study begins at Numbers 17:16 and goes through 17:28.

behaving, or conducting our affairs like the great nation the Holy One calls us to be. We are not looking much at all like the *kedoshim* (i.e. kedusha-inspired and empowered ones) or the kingdom of priests that Heaven's Grand Plan requires. We are holding onto the Avrahamic calling by the slimmest of threads. But we are holding on, nevertheless. And we have a Friend Who sticks closer than a brother. And we will come out of this mess. Not too many days hence we will indeed come out of this mess - as blameless and harmless children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. We – or at least a remnant of us - will come out of this mess covered in the glory of the Holy One, flowing in His Energy, operating in His Attributes, and shining like the stars in the Heavens, holding forth the words of life. That's the whole idea. It has been the whole idea from the start. This desert is just a proving ground for our *emunah*. And these challenges we have been facing are just part of a great obstacle course designed for our development into a people who carry the Beauty Realm of our King wherever we go, who function as royal ambassadors of Heaven, and who model to the world what a holy nation looks like in real time.

But First, The Remnants of Our Former Man's Flesh Must Die!

The Holy One knows better than to turn us loose on the world until our flesh is good and dead – and as far beyond resurrection as possible. He does not want to subject the nations or His Creation to yet another ethnic culture ruled by the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. He knows the world has more than enough people who spread abroad the 'big seventeen' destructive flesh disorders afflicting fallen man, namely:

1. *Self-obsession/narcissism;*
2. *entitlement syndrome;*
3. *victimization syndrome,*
4. *jealousy,*
5. *class envy,*
6. *ethnic pride/cultural snobbishness,*
7. *sensuality,*
8. *sentimentality,*
9. *greed,*
10. *lust,*
11. *gluttony,*
12. *sloth,*
13. *offense,*
14. *outrage,*
15. *argumentativeness,*
16. *pseudo-intellectualism, and*
17. *cynicism.*

No Mas, Creation has groaned! *Rav Lachem*, the earth has sighed! And the outcry has reached the ears of the Holy One. Those cries are the very reason He redeemed

us from bondage at such a time as this. They are the reason He called Noah to build an ark, and the reason He called Avram to go out of Charan and form a new bloodline and culture. He envisions us humbly serving the world, teaching them His ways of love – and thereby providing the Kingdom of Heaven’s antidote to the poison at the root of the ‘big seventeen’. The Creator of all things has a Grand Plan to establish us as *a beautiful counterculture of salt and light – a peaceful, joyful, culture of faithful servanthood* that will model to all nations, and introduce to Creation at long last, our King’s *More Excellent Way*. We are, of course, not there yet – not by a *long shot*! But He knew that before He ever called us. He knows the healing power and kindness that He designed into us. And He knows exactly what it will take to bring *that* to the forefront to displace all the lies, the hate, and ‘junk sociology’ that we have learned thus far in life from our fellow men. So, He is not mollycoddling us. He is putting us through our paces. He is challenging us daily to decide who we love more: *our flesh*, with its urges, appetites, offenses, insecurities, and attitudes – or *Him*. He is testing the strength of our dedication to His Grand Redemptive Plan. Will we deny ourselves daily, and follow Him? Or will we deny Him daily, and pollute the world with even more of the ‘big seventeen’?

Enough Taking! We are Called to Be Givers, Not Takers!

The tests the Holy One has arranged for us to face in in this wilderness are tempting us to *take offense*. Our flesh itches to *take sides* in the power struggles of men. We are tempted to *join the ranks of ‘takers’* like Korach. His spinstmanship has us all caught up in debates over what is ‘good and evil’, ‘right and wrong’, ‘fair and unfair’, ‘moral and immoral’, and ‘just and unjust’. We are falling for the temptation to *take as the staple of our spiritual diet the corrupted fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the place of the Words of life of our Divine Bridegroom*. At some level or another these temptations *have affected us all*. Different garden; same old tree. Same temptation; same old result. Human rhetoric has seduced us away from mission-focus. A penny’s worth of hypocritical outrage over what Korach and his ilk arrogantly label ‘inequity’, undue ‘privilege’, and/or ‘social injustice’ has us forfeiting the part ordained for us in the Holy One’s redemptive plan.

Does anyone remember the glorious mission to which we were called at Sinai? We are to *become holy as our Divine Bridegroom in Heaven is holy* - and to thereby begin to reflect the Divine Light of His Countenance and testify of the Amazing Depths of His Love throughout the world. In order for this to happen we have to adopt a lifestyle of always *sh’ma*-ing the voice of the Bridegroom and always *sh’mar*-ing our covenant with Him. We have to learn, through testing in desert seasons like the present one, to focus all our energies and creativity on *asah*-ing His lifestyle teachings. See e.g. **Genesis 18:19-20** and **Genesis 22:18; Exodus 15:26;**

Exodus 19:5; Exodus 23:22; and Leviticus 26:14 ff. He who has not faced testing cannot hope to fulfill a great mission such as ours. Hence the pillar of fire and of cloud has led us into the wilderness of Paran. In the face of testing some of our number have succumbed. They lost focus. They *sh'ma*-ed other voices. They fell hook, line, and sinker, for the siren's song of Hagar and Yish'mael. These are now rushing headlong toward oblivion in the hot, dry desert. Others of our number are being *distracted off-of-mission* little bit by little bit as they try to *put out fires* and *respond to crises* rather than *emit Divine Light and love* as they have been called and Divinely empowered to do. Still others in our number are caving into the temptation to judge others for veering off path and have adopted an attitude of superiority.

Such are the temptations of the annual season we spend in the Wilderness of Paran, Dear Reader. How are YOU handling them so far? As Shaul of Tarsus would later say concerning the events about which we have been reading:

*Now all these things happened to them as examples,
and they were written for our admonition,
upon whom the ends of the ages have come.
Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*
[I Corinthians 10:11-12]

Watch Out! The Inmates Are Taking Over The Asylum!

Ever since we entered this Wilderness of Testing our camp has looked and felt more like a *war zone* than the beachhead and command center of Heaven that it is supposed to be. We seem to have lost communication with headquarters. He can still hear us, of course, but we seem unable to hear Him. In fact, we have quit listening. The inmates have taken over the asylum. Every man is doing whatever seems right in his own eyes. Disorientation has turned to *distraction*. Distraction has turned to *dissatisfaction*. Dissatisfaction has sired *disinformation*. Disinformation has given birth to *dissension*. Dissension has matured into *bitter division*. And for almost everyone in camp 20 years of age or older bitter division the result has been *disinheritance, disease, and disaster*.

We have not released fountains of *shalom* and *simchah* into the Wilderness of Paran as we were empowered and commissioned to; indeed, we have not even been able to hold onto the limited supply of *shalom* and *simchah* we had when we left Sinai. We have not filled the airwaves of earth with thanksgiving and praise; to the contrary, we have polluted those airwaves with murmuring, complaint, accusation, and despair. We have not modeled the wisdom of our Bridegroom-King to the nations of the world; indeed, we have not even set a decent example for our own children. We have not walked in mercy, kindness, patience, forgiveness, and love, as our Bridal Covenant ordains; we have chosen instead to behave like a

bunch of self-obsessed, pouting, loose-lipped, foul-mouthed shrews.

In the blistering heat of this desert we quickly forgot the vows we made to the Holy One on the mountain of the thorn bush. We let our hearts grow cold toward the *Divine Bridegroom* in Whose embrace we once reveled. We lost interest in *the Glorious Ambassadorial Mission* upon which we have been sent. We got *careless*. We got *carnal*. We let our fleshly appetites and attitudes take over while we put our spirits on ‘cruise control’. We *let our flesh do all the thinking, feeling, and talking for us*. And we sat back and watched the prevailing spirit of this wilderness – *i.e. Yish'mael's wild-donkey-of-a-man spirit* – take control of the Camp by default.

We were too naïve to understand how important it is that keep our redeemed hearts, eyes, ears, minds, and mouths fully engaged in *the great enterprise of Covenant lifestyle* at all places and at all times. Alas we did not have any idea how absolutely toxic things like *complaining about our circumstances* and *criticizing our brothers and sisters* could be for a people whose purpose and calling is supposed to be all about blessing, encouraging, exhorting, and edifying. At first we did know, and now we just do not care, that all of this could have been avoided if we had just *diligently guarded our hearts* against negativity.

Each day it became more and more difficult to stay above the fray. Each day it became harder to focus on the destiny, purpose, and Divine mission to which we have been called. Each day it becomes more of a challenge to maintain a pure heart – either before the Holy One or with regard to each other. The airwaves are now filled with angry shouts. The rhetoric of blame, hate, fear, despair, and self-pity is spewing forth from our mouths in *toxic wave after toxic wave*. Accusations are flying. Rebellion has taken root.

Understanding Divine Pruning and Purging

As a result of the damage to mission the temptations of the wilderness has wrought, the protective hand of the Angel of the Holy One has lifted off of our camp temporarily in order to allow the death angel to visit our camp with carefully measured doses of cleansing Judgment. Just because the Judgment of the Holy One is cleansing and redemptive in nature and purpose however does not mean it is not horrifying. But, of course, if the Judgments of the Holy One were not horrifying they would not be effective in their intended effect. So we have watched in horror as Korach the Levi along with his co-conspirators Aviram and Datan from the tribe of Reuven disappeared into the bowels of the earth along with their households. **Numbers 16:32-33**. And so we stood terrified as one-by-one, all 250 tribal leaders who joined Korach's insurrection perished before our eyes in the consuming fire of

Divine Judgment – just like Nadav and Avihu. **Numbers 16:35**. So in stunned silence we watched 14,700 dear friends who had walked out of Egypt with us a little over a year ago die in a devastating *megafah* [*i.e.* plague]. **Numbers 16:46-49**.

The Holy One loves us all passionately and desires nothing but our good. But no one's individual comfort is ever going to be more important to Him than the redemptive mission to which we the *am segulah* of the Holy One have been called and empowered and are being trained to fulfill. Blessed is he who is not offended at this manifestation of the Bridegroom of Heaven.

Another, Different Manifestation of Our Bridegroom

The Holy One has heretofore shown us several aspects of His Personality. He has shown us His *Mighty Hand of Deliverance*. He has shown us His *amazing gentleness*. He has shown us His *wonderful nurturing capacity*. He has *carried us on eagle's wings*. He has intervened in human affairs on our behalf. He has *divided the Sea of Reeds for us*, to allow us to escape a genocide. He has *showered manna on us* sunrise-after-sunrise. He has *given us to drink of water from a rock*. He has *shown us His Glory* in a pillar of fire and of cloud. He has *made a covenant of betrothal with us*, taught us His Ways, and prophesied over us that we would be His *am segulah*, His *Heavenly kingdom's earthy diplomats*, and His *holiness-reflecting nation*. But all that was before the *sin of the spies*. Now, in response to the cancerous growth of our rebellion our Bridegroom-King has shown us another aspect of His Personality. He has shown us His *Fearsome Hand of Discipline*. And at this new revelation of our Divine Bridegroom *our hearts melt within us*. The devastation wrought by His measured Hand of judgment – and the realization that *we have brought this horror upon ourselves, by lo sh'ma-ing His voice and lo sh'mar-ing His covenant* – have rendered us shell-shocked.

What Happens Now?

As we begin today's aliyah, the question on everyone's mind, but which we cannot bear to ask, is "what happens now"? Is "it" over? Can we go on? Can we rebuild? Can we be reconciled to the Divine Bridegroom against Whom we have sinned so grievously? Can our betrothal – and the Divine mission that betrothal entails - be rescued from the burning ash heap we have created in the desert of our lives? In wrath will He – might we even dare hope that He would - *remember mercy*?³

We now all know that what we have seen at work in our midst this week is nothing other than the Holy One's Hand of discipline. The question is whether the training and discipline we have seen is intended as punishment for the sake of punishment ... or is for the sake of correction, rehabilitation, and training.

³ By using the term 'mercy' I do not mean either 'clemency' or 'amnesty'. I use the term mercy in the Biblical, Hebraic sense of *covenant-restoring conduct*.

Some wonder why there must be discipline at all. Is not God ‘all-loving’? Oh yes, Beloved. But the Holy One is every bit as all-wise as He is all-loving. He has a *Plan to Rescue Mankind – and Creation – from the destruction being wrought by man’s operation in the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. He has a Mission for His People to fulfill in that Plan. He knows what kinds of mission-pervverting thoughts, words, actions and movements must be stopped for the good of His Great Plan of Redemption - and exactly what it will take to stop those things. Think as a parent for a moment. If you take your child for a walk and see a serpent coiled up beside the pathway hissing and about to strike your child, do you not rush in and chop the head off of the serpent? If you see your child sticking his or her hand on a hot stove do you not slap the child’s hand and say “NO!” And if an intruder enters your home, binds your child with chains, and threatens to subject him or her to a life of cruel bondage, would you not do everything within your power to set your child free? These examples demonstrate the essence and the purpose of Divine discipline. They describe the foundation of all Divine judgment – at least this side of the final Judgment scene of the Great *Yom Kippur* to come. So do not get all sentimental, mushy, and foolish. Do you think you are wiser – or more compassionate – than the Creator? How arrogant! Human compassion is blinded by the faulty reasoning of a fallen and diseased mind. It is informed by cloudy vision. It is colored by self-interest and one’s own short-sighted Serpent-manipulated opinion of what is ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘fair’ and ‘unfair’, ‘moral’ and ‘immoral’, and ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.

The truth that applies as our parsha begins is that we as the appointed ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth *sinned against our covenant*. We abandoned our assigned mission as Witnesses of His Goodness. We turned instead to a lifestyle of complaining, arguing, and theologizing amongst ourselves. Instead of living out the glorious destiny to which we were called we turned into an obnoxious group of self-righteous know-it-alls who do nothing but complain, attend meetings where they talked about the Holy One as if He was not in the room, and invoked His Name even as they screamed accusations and insults at each other in the course of ‘doctrinal debates’. This kind of false ambassadorship/misrepresentation of the Kingdom and its King simply could not be allowed to go on. We needed a course correction. Our Bridegroom-King has, as a result, *smitten us with a powerful decree of discipline* that has brought us to our knees, if not our senses. We are now helpless before Him. Will He strike the *blow of death*? Or will He – dare we even hope for it – raise us up again in the arms of love we once knew so well, and breathe life into us once again?

He has torn us – *will He heal us?* He has judged us – *will He restore us?* He has

laid on us the cords of death – *will He resurrect us?* Oh yes, Beloved, He will. But first we need to come to *a startling revelation* about *ourselves* and *about the source of our problems*.

Stunning Revelation: The Crisis is not One of Leadership
As We Supposed ... But is One of Love

To truly appreciate what the Holy One does for us in today's aliyah one must comprehend the essence of the betrothal covenant the Holy One made with us at Mt. Sinai. He did not lead us to that mountain to declare to us His "laws". He led us there *to betroth us to Him forever* - as a bridegroom betroths himself to a bride.

We have previously discussed how the so-called "Ten Commandments" which He pronounced at Sinai in the hearing of every man, woman, and child He redeemed from Egypt constituted the preamble to a *shitre eyrusin* – betrothal covenant⁴. He was not, as He uttered those famous words, *commanding* us to do (and not do) things⁵ – He was *creatively and prophetically empowering us to be His Bride*. But there was more to our betrothal than even this. For the sake of developing the relationship the Holy One also agreed to *meet with us regularly*, to allow us to get to know Him, according to *a betrothal protocol*. He even provided a parlor on earth – the *Mish'kan* – where He would host our betrothal-period meetings.

At our request He agreed to conduct these meetings *through intermediaries* – *friends of the Bridegroom* and *friends of the Bride* - rather than face-to-Face. Who were the intermediaries? The *friend of the Bridegroom*, who would speak on His behalf, was Moshe⁶. The *friends of the Bride*, who would speak on behalf of the Betrothed Bride-to-be, were Aharon and his sons.

The continuing "ministry" activities of Aharon and his sons at the *Mish'kan* were designed to nurture, foster, and facilitate a growing intimacy between the Holy One and His Betrothed.⁷ Hence when we rejected Aharon and Moshe in Numbers 16 what we were doing was not "rebellious against leadership" as modern-day demagogues in religious organizations would have you believe⁸ – we were

⁴ This concept is discussed in detail in the Rabbi's son's commentaries to parsha *Yitro*, particularly in Thursday's Study.

⁵ This is not to deny that the Holy One's words have the power of and are to be honored as commandments. The point is that they are SO MUCH MORE!

⁶ This role would later be fulfilled by Y'hoshua, then by the *mish'patim* [judges], then by the *nevi'im* [prophets], then by Yochanan the Immerser, and ultimately by Messiah Yeshua in His first advent.

⁷ For an explanation of how this was designed to work refer to the Rabbi's sons' commentaries on parsha *Vayikra* and to Wednesday and Thursday's Shiurim with regard to parsha *Emor*.

⁸ This kind of out-of-context application of the events of this week's parsha is often encountered in churches of the charismatic movement, where pastors are often considered modern-day Moshes and worship-leaders modern-day Aharons.

breaking our betrothal covenant. We were running away and hiding from our Betrothed Bridegroom. This was the natural consequence of our rejection of the home He had prepared for us – *Eretz Yisrael* – based upon the report of the “spies”. Suddenly in a moment of weakness we concluded that we just *did not want what our Betrothed had to offer.* We wanted to go back to ‘momma’ [Egypt]. So we refused to meet with the Holy One to talk about it.

Our rejection was not of Moshe and Aharon – it was of the betrothal protocol. We rejected them not as men – or as leaders – but as *intermediaries.* And we thereby avoided – we thought - having to discuss our relationship problems with the Holy One. What is at stake therefore in parsha *Korach* is not the “leadership” of Moshe and Aharon. What is really at stake is the *Divine Betrothal* itself.

“And I ... Will Always Love You”

In today’s aliyah the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven beautifully and poignantly reaches out to His Beloved and restores her to the betrothal covenant. Contrary to popular theology the budding of Aharon’s rod is not about proving Aharon’s right and authority to “lead”. It is instead about the Holy One *prophetically declaring that He will bring betrothal interaction back to life again, will cause it to blossom, and to bring forth its intended fruit – the training and equipping of a pure, spotless Bride.* In wrath, He wants us to know, He *always* remembers mercy.

Hence in the aftermath of the great earthquake, the release from Heaven of tongues of supernatural fire, and the resulting plague, the Holy One speaks to Moshe. He proposes a strange kind of showdown – one *not involving any threat of death.* Here is how Torah records the Holy One’s instructions to Moshe:

V’kach me’itam mateh mateh l’veyt av me’et kol-nesi’eihem

Take a staff from each paternal tribe.

L’veit avotam shneym asar matot

‘Twelve staffs shall thus be taken from all the leaders, [one] for paternal tribe.

ish et-shmo tichtov al-mateihu

Let each man write his name on his staff.

V’hinachtam b’Ohel Mo’ed lifnei ha-edut

Place [the staffs] in the Communion Tent, before the [Ark of] Testimony

asher iva’ed lachem shamah

where I commune with you.

V’hayah ha-ish asher ev’char-bo mateihu yifrach

The staff of the man who is My choice will then blossom.

V’ha-shikoti m’alay et-tlunot b’nei Yisra’el

I will thus rid Myself of the complaints of Israel

asher hem malinim alechem
that are being directing at you.'

Vayehi mimachorat vayavo Moshe el-ohel ha-edut

The next day Moshe went to the Testimony Tent,

V'hineh parach mateh-Aharon l'veyt Levi

and behold, Aharon's staff, representing the house of Levi, had blossomed.

V'yotze ferach v'yatzetz tzitz v'yig'mol sh'kedim

It had given forth leaves, and producing blossoms and ripe almonds.

The message is clear: of all the men from all the various tribes of Israel only one man belongs in the *K'dosh Ha-K'doshim* [Holy of Holies]. That man is Aharon. The reason Aharon belongs there has nothing to do with his own merit. Nor does he belong there because he holds a title or position of authority granted to him by men. He belongs there for one reason and one alone - because *he has been designated by the Divine Bridegroom as the friend of the Bride. He is the Divinely recognized advocate and representative* of the people with whom the Holy One cut covenant at Mount Sinai. Through Aharon's intermediation [prophetic as it is of Messiah's ultimate eternal intermediation in Heaven] the Bride-to-be of Sinai is still very, very welcome in the Holy One's parlor for betrothal interaction – even in the midst of the 'death in the desert' period of the Holy One's discipline.

The Root of the Problem Is Revealed At Last

The Holy One decreed that He would cause the *matteh* of the man designated as "friend of the Bride" to sprout - shoot forth supernaturally with green leaves. So Moshe obtained a rod from the leader of each of the tribes. Aharon's staff was chosen to represent the tribe of Levi. The staves were then put in the *Mish'kan*, before the "Ark of the Testimony". Torah records that:

*Moshe laid up the rods before the Holy One in the tent of the testimony.
It happened on the next day that Moshe went into the tent of the testimony;
and behold, the rod of Aharon for the house of Levi was budded,
and put forth buds, and produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.*

[Numbers 17:7-8]

The rods stayed in the *Mish'kan* all through the night. The next day Moshe went into the tent of the testimony to find that one – and only one - of the rods had sprouted. It was the rod of Aharon, for the house of Levi. But look again. A little sprouting was not all that Aharon's rod had done. It was also covered with buds. In other places it had even produced mature blossoms. And can you believe it – it had even produced a few first fruits clusters of ripe almonds! **Numbers 17:7-8.**

This was indeed a miracle. But what did it mean? Notice what happened when the miracle of Aharon's rod – the rod of the friend of the Bride – was revealed to the people.

The Holy One said to Moshe, “Put back the rod of Aharon before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the children of rebellion; that you may make an end of their murmurings against Me, that they not die”
[Numbers 17:10]

Note carefully that the Holy One did NOT say that the sign of Aharon’s rod was given so that the people would “make an end of their murmurings *against you* [*i.e.* Moshe]”, nor did He say it was given so that the people would “make an end of their murmurings *against Aharon*”. He said the purpose of the sign was that the people would “make an end of their murmurings against Him – *i.e.* the Holy One. The purpose of the sign of the budding rod – the restoration of life to that which was cold, hard, and dead – was *to testify that the Betrothal relationship, though dormant, was alive, and well, and would burst forth in vibrant color, fragrance and fruit* in His timing, by His sovereign act. Blessed be His Glorious Name Forever!

Crossing over from Death to Life

At the conclusion of the “test” of the rods/staves, we finally stop grumbling - for a while at least. We agree to restore Betrothal communications with the Holy One through the mediation of Moshe and Aharon. However, our ancestors made some fascinating statements describing how they felt after the judgments they have just witnessed/experienced. Here is how Torah records our ancestors’ words:

*The children of Yisra’el spoke to Moshe, saying,
“Behold, gavanu [we perish⁹],
avad’nu [we are undone¹⁰], kulanu avad’nu [we are all undone].
Everyone who comes near¹¹,
who comes near to the Mish’kan of the Holy One, dies¹²:
will we perish¹³ all of us?”*

Do these words sound *morbid* to you? If so, you miss the point entirely. These words mean that – temporarily at least - we have *rediscovered the fear of Heaven*.

⁹ The Hebrew verb translated into English as “die” [above, as “are dying”] is *gimel, vav, ayin*, Strong’s Hebrew word #1478, transliterated *gava’* and pronounced *gaw-vah’*. It is first used in Torah to describe what the Holy One would, through the Flood, cause to happen to everything in which He had put the breath of life. **Genesis 6:17**. Remember Yeshua’s teaching that unless a grain of wheat fall to the ground and *die* it remains a single seed – but if it dies it produces many seeds. **John 12:24**. The *death involved is the death of self-interest, of self-sufficiency, and of self-determination*.

¹⁰ The Hebrew verb translated into English as “undo” [above, as “are undone”] is *alef, beit, dalet*, Strong’s Hebrew word #6, transliterated as *abad*, and pronounced *aw-bad’*. This verb is first used in Torah in Exodus 10:7, where Pharaoh’s advisers, even before the final set of plagues, describe Egypt as *abad’*. The word is also sometimes translated “go astray”, and can merely mean “under judgment”.

¹¹ The Hebrew word is *karav*, from which the term *korban* [approach through surrogate] is derived.

¹² The verb here is not *gava*, as in verse 12, but *mut*.

¹³ The Hebrew phrase translated “all perish” is *taminu l’gava*, literally meaning be consumed with, or by, or totally given over to, death.

These words mean that finally there is, once again, in our midst the *sanctification of the Name of the Holy One*. At last, for a little while at least, we have received from the Holy One the precious gift of humility, and the understanding that only by His Divine favor, and His mercy, do we even draw our next breath - much less approach His Throne, or function as His holy people.

The flesh is indeed dying at last. And it is taking with it the critical spirit. *Hallelu-Yah!*

What Is That In Your Hand?

You will recall that when Moshe first met the Holy One at the ‘burning bush’, the Holy One asked him a strange question – “*What is that in your hand?*” Exodus 4:2. Moshe replied: “*A rod.*” What’s the big deal? What’s a *rod*? A “rod”, is nothing but a tree branch, separated from its life source, stripped of its outer garments [bark]. It is *dead*. Though it may appear strong outwardly, inside it is in the process of decaying. A rod is like *dry bones* rotting in a graveyard. “*Can these bones live?*” Ezekiel was asked.¹⁴ Moshe might have been asked “*Can this dead branch [representing the smitten betrothal covenant] yet produce life?*”

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “*rod*” in this passage is *matteh*¹⁵. The verb root of this word is *natah*¹⁶. This verb root means to *stretch out*, to *extend*, to *spread out*, to *offer by outstretched hand*, as *food to an animal*, by holding the object out toward the recipient. Two illustrative usages of this verb root are found in Sefer *B’reshit* [the book of Genesis]. The first is Genesis 12:8, wherein Avraham, upon coming for the first time to Mount Moriyah, to the site which would become the Temple, was said to have made *natah* with regard to his tent, by building an altar (*as an extension of his tent*) and calling upon the name of the Holy One. Here is how Torah records this significant event in Avraham’s life:

*And [Avraham] removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel,
and pitched [natah] his tent,
[having] Bethel on the west and Ai on the east,
and there he built an altar unto the Holy One, and called upon the name of the Holy One.*

What Avraham did with his tent - i.e. raising up from it an altar, and calling upon the name of the Holy One - was what Aharon was to do on behalf of the Bride-to-be. He was to *extend* her, *enlarge* her, and *incorporate into her an altar-life*.

The second illustrative usage of the verb root *natah* is in Genesis 24:14, in the record of the search for a bride for Yitzchak. Avraham’s faithful servant, in

¹⁴ Ezekiel 37:3.

¹⁵ *Matteh* is *mem, tet, hey*. Strong’s #4294, it is pronounced *mat-teh*’.

¹⁶ *Natah* is *nun, tet, hey*. Strong’s word #5186, it is pronounced as *naw-taw*’.

seeking out the woman who would be Yitzchak's bride, asked the Holy One for a sign, saying:

I will say, 'Please let down [natah] your pitcher, that I may drink.'

She will say, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink.'

What Rivkah eventually did with her pitcher of water when she held it out for the servant of Avraham to drink from it represents what Aharon was to do on behalf of the Betrothed Bride. *That which the Bride was willing to pour out, He was to present to the Holy One on her behalf.* Thereby, through the Holy One's Eyes, that poured out by the Bride for His servant *becomes much more than a cup of water.*¹⁷

As can be seen from these first two Biblical usages the word *matteh*, which is translated as "rod", provides a word picture – a picture of something which comes forth from a person, as *an extension of that person*, which:

[a] *is an outgrowth of that person's relationship with the Holy One* (e.g. Avraham's building of an altar as an extension of his tent), and

[b] *blesses, nourishes, and/or refreshes those who come in contact with it* (e.g. Eliezer the servant, who was blessed, nourished, and refreshed by the water from Rivkah's pitcher, which she extended to him).

Hmmm - What is that in your hand, Dear Reader?

Almond Blossoms: The Symbol of Resurrection Life

Unlike the test of the 250 censers that we witnessed yesterday, the test of the *mattot* [rods] was conducted pursuant to the Holy One's specific instructions. Supernaturally, this test, which was creative instead of destructive, was the Divine Bridegroom's way of saying "*Oh, yes, My Beloved, I will ... always ... love you!*" It sent the message loud and clear "*I am still in the Secret Chamber, waiting for My Beloved!*" And that is just the 'surface' revelation of this passage. Consider with me a few additional aspects of the *prophetic significance and meaning* of the 'miracle of Aharon's rod'. Unlike the plagues in Egypt, the miracle at the Sea of Reeds, and the provision of water from a rock, the sign of the sprouting, budding, fruit-producing rod was not *Moshe's miracle*. It had nothing to do with the rod – or the ministry - of Moshe. This miracle was *the Holy One's alone*. And this sign was intended as a sign for all people, in all generations. That is, of course, why it is memorialized in the Torah.

Remember that all 12 of the rods were left overnight in proximity to the Torah and

¹⁷ Hence Yeshua's teaching that he who so much as gives one of His talmidim a "*cup of water*" [as Rivkah gave Eliezer, Avraham's servant in Genesis 24] will certainly not lose their inheritance/reward. **Mark 9:40.** See also **Matthew 25:34-36.**

immersed in the Manifest Presence of the Holy One. Eleven were totally unchanged by the experience. *Oy veh!* But Aharon's rod was different. With a little time in proximity to the Torah and immersed in the Manifest Presence of the Holy One Aharon's rod was transformed from a dead branch, cut off from its life source, into a *living, vibrant, and fully productive almond tree*. It not only sprouted new life as the Holy One had decreed – it burst forth with *buds*, and exploded with *mature flowers*, and even cast forth a first fruits cluster of *almonds* representative of a great future harvest. What about the other rods/staves? Every one of them was just as dead, barren, and cold as it had been the night. How could this be? The real miracle was not that Aharon's rod did what it did when immersed in the Manifest Presence of the Holy One – the real miracle was that, sadly, the other rods did not.

So it is with people. Many can experience wonderful encounters with the Holy One – and then go right on with their dry, barren lives as if nothing had happened. Few and far between are those who actually allow the Presence of the Holy One and the supernatural energy of the Torah to reconnect them with their true 'in the image of Elohim' identity.

If the Holy One asks you "*Son of Man, can this rod live?* What will be your answer? If the Holy One shows you the rod you hold in your hand, appearing to be dead and fatally separated from its life force, and then asks you '*what do you see?*', how will you respond?

Interpreting the Sign of the Budding Rod Prophetically

What meaneth the sign of the budding rod? What is the prophetic interpretation? One thing this sign means is that with the Holy One, that which is dead can live again. As we pray in the second paragraph of the *Sh'moneh Esrei*:

Mi chamocha ba-al g'vurot

Who is like You, Master of Miracles?

Melech maymis u'm'chai'ah

O King, Who causes death, then restores life

u'm'tz'miach yeshuah

and Who causes salvation to burst forth like a sprout

v'ne-aman atah l'hachai'ot maysim

and Who can be trusted to resurrect the dead

Baruch Atah Adonai m'chai'yah ha-maysim

Blessed are You, O Holy One; in You the Dead have life

Another thing this sign means is that *the betrothal covenant the Holy One made with the descendants of Avraham on the mountain of the thorn bush remains alive and well* – even if it is presently only showing signs of life in a small remnant. The

sign of the sprouting, budding, flowering, and fruit-producing rod also means that the Holy One *has not – and will not - totally cast off His people* - despite our sin. It means that however low we have sunk or will sink, and however pitiful and shell-shocked a condition we are in or will descend into, He still sees us as *His Betrothed Bride* - in all the beauty and potential He prophetically declared over us at Sinai.

The sign of the rod means that because of the steadfast love and covenant faithfulness of the Holy One, from every episode of rebellion and covenant unfaithfulness about which men will ever read - in Scripture or in history - will arise a new generation, a remnant, which will spring forth out of the aftermath of the judgment of the Holy One *like the almond tree in spring*. The almond tree, you see, is the first tree to blossom in spring. It is thus the first sign of new life after the winter. It is a symbol of *hope*, and of *life*, and of *resurrection*. In it is the *promise of a bountiful harvest* – for those who will let themselves be transformed by time spent in the Presence of the Torah and in the Manifest Presence of the Bridegroom-King.

You do not have to prophesy to almond branches. You don't have to lay hands on them. You don't have to evangelize them. You don't even have to preach to them. Just place them *in proximity to the Torah*¹⁸, as Moshe did - and *let the miracle happen!* How do you place the almond branches of the Holy One in proximity to the Torah? *Live it* [the Torah] *humbly in their midst*, with fear of Heaven and trembling at the Beauty and Power of His Word. *Be the living Torah* in your world, even as Messiah was the Living Torah when He walked the earth wearing the cloak of humanity. That is *our part*. The Holy One does the rest. And He has promised that a remnant – the remnant He has chosen - will respond.

When will it happen, you ask? When will the almond branches spring back to life? 'Overnight', the text reveals. In *the hour when all seems darkest*. In *the hour when nothing seems to be happening*. In *the hour when men cease their labors*. When *no man or ministry can claim the glory*. That is when it will happen.

How long will it take, you ask? It will happen *instantaneously, supernaturally*. We will 'wake up', and see it has happened - *quite without our help*. It will not be 'our' miracle, any more than the budding of Aharon's rod was Moshe's miracle. It will be the Holy One's miracle alone, and *He alone will get the glory*. *What fruit will it*

¹⁸ The Holy One told Moshe to take the 12 rods or staffs into the *k'dosh k'doshim* [holy of holies], where the tablets of the Torah were kept. The atmosphere there was infused with holiness and with power, through a combination of elements consisting of [1] the *Torah*, [2] the *k'poret* [covering/mercy seat, sprinkled with blood] and [3] the *Sh'kinah*/glorious presence of God.

produce, you ask? What will be the evidence that the miracle has occurred? The cold, dead branch previously used as a ‘rod’ will produce ‘almonds’. Ah Beloved, consider the almonds.

Almonds: The Fruit of the Holy One’s Covenant Faithfulness

The Hebrew word for almond – the fruit that the Holy One caused to burst forth fully ripe from the dead wood of Aharon’s rod - is *shaqed*. It is derived from a Hebrew verb root that means to be watchful, to *be on alert*, to *never slumber or sleep*. The spiritual meaning of the almond is stated clearly by the Holy One in Yirmayahu [Jeremiah] 1:11-12:

*Moreover the word of the Holy One came to me, saying, “Yirmayahu, what see you?
I said, I see maqqel shaqed [a rod of an almond tree].*

*Then the Holy One said to me, You have seen well: “I am watching [shaqed]
to see that My Word is asah-ed [i.e. done, built, lived out, fulfilled]”.*

Do not miss the connection between the *asah*-ing of Torah – *i.e.* interacting with it, applying human energy and creativity to it, and thereby building something beautiful and useful with it, the way a potter interacts with clay, applies human energy and creativity to it, and thereby builds something beautiful and useful with it - with the budding of the almond tree.

The Holy One is watching over us. He has, in giving us Torah, prophetically empowered us to *asah* it. He is watching to see His Torah *asah*-ed. So consider this. When a sentence of death seems to hang over you; when it seems that your spirit is dead, and producing no fruit, and that you have been cut off from the life source – remember, the Holy One is *watching!* He has declared a ‘*watch*’ night over you. He neither slumbers nor sleeps. He is watching - watching to see that His Word - His Torah - is *asah*-ed - by you and in your life. Son of Man, He says: “***Prophecy to these bones***” So be quiet, Dear Reader, and listen for His Voice. It will indeed come. And it will say to His Bride “***Kumi talitah!***”

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Let us look more closely at the events of today’s aliyah by searching out the answers to a few questions:

[A] What was eventually done with the rod/staff of Aharon (after this test)?

[B] What purpose was this to serve?

[C] How would the staff fulfill this purpose?

[D] Why did the Holy One say He wanted to put an end to the grumbling of the redeemed community against *Him*?

[E] In your opinion, were the judgments of chapter 16 primarily “retributive” – designed to pay sinners like Korach back for their sins – or primarily “restorative” – designed as a form of discipline to bring the Redeemed

Community back to its senses and its proper relationship with the Holy One?
[Explain your answer].

2. At the conclusion of the “*test*” of the rods/staves, our ancestors made some fascinating statements describing how they felt after the judgments they have just witnessed/experienced

[A] List, one by one, the four statements the Redeemed remnant make. Pick out of each statement the operative verb. In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up each Hebrew verb and its verb root. Then, for each verb, describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing.

[B] What question do they ask of Moshe after making those four statements.

[C] How many of the four statements were true?

[D] What answer did Moshe give to their question?

[E] What was [is] the correct answer to their question?

3. In today’s Haftarah [Samuel] a successor to Moshe as “friend of the Bridegroom”, recounts the history of Israel from the time of the Exodus through the period of the Judges, up to the date he was speaking – the day of the coronation of Shaul as Israel’s first king. Here is the “Friend of the Bridegroom’s” prophetic address on the day our first king was inaugurated:

*Sh`mu`el said to the people, It is the Holy One who appointed Moshe and Aharon,
and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Mitzrayim.
Now therefore stand still, that I may plead with you before the Holy One
concerning all the righteous acts of the Holy One,
which he did to you and to your fathers.*

*When Ya`akov was come into Mitzrayim, and your fathers cried to the Holy One,
then the Holy One sent Moshe and Aharon,
who brought forth your fathers out of Mitzrayim, and made them to dwell in this place.*

*But they forgot the Holy One their God;
and he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hatzor,
and into the hand of the Pelishtim,
and into the hand of the king of Mo`av; and they fought against them.*

*They cried to the Holy One, and said,
‘We have sinned, because we have forsaken The Holy One,
and have served the Ba`alim and the `Ashtarot:
but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve you.’*

*The Holy One sent Yerubba`al, and Bedan, and Yiftach, and Shemu`el,
and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side; and you lived in safety.*

*When you saw that Nachash the king of the children of `Ammon
came against you, you said to me, “No, but a king shall reign over us”;
when the Holy One your God was your king.*

*Now therefore see the king whom you have chosen, and whom you have asked for:
and behold, the Holy One has set a king over you.”*

[1Samuel 12:6-13]

[A] What pattern of behavior on the part of Israel can you see outlined in this history?

[B] What pattern of behavior on the part of the Holy One can you see outlined in this history? How does that pattern relate to the events of today's aliyah, and the "sign" of Aharon's rod?

[C] According to Samuel why were the people clamoring for a king?

4. In today's B'rit Chadasha reading Shaul teaches concerning the reasons and purposes for which the Holy One establishes civil governments and political/national rulers in the secular arenas in which the Holy One's people, who are dispersed throughout the world, have their residences.

Rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil.

Do you desire to have no fear of the authority?

*Do that which is good, and you will have praise from the same,
for he is a servant of the Holy One to you for good.*

*But if you do that which is evil, be afraid, for he doesn't bear the sword in vain;
for he is a minister of the Holy One, an avenger for wrath to him who does evil.*

[Romans 13:3-4]

[A] What kind of behavior on the part of the Holy One's people is supposed to keep them us free from fear of - and in good relationship with - secular authorities?

[B] Shaul says the king (or President, or other leader) is the Holy One's "servant" for *two specific purposes*. What are the two purposes?

[C] If we are having trouble with a secular authority, what is the first question we should ask ourselves?

[D] The Roman emperors Nero and Hadrian, as well as James II of England, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Germany's Hitler, and Russia's Lenin were secular authorities, yet we know that even Godly people were persecuted by, and had trouble with, these men and their governments. What, if anything, do you think justifies, in the Holy One's sight, rebellion against a secular leader?

May the Holy One be watchful over our lives today, and may His Word be fulfilled in each of us.

And may we, like Avraham and Rivkah, extend our hand

in order that the things the Holy One has entrusted to us

may be shared with and delighted in by men of all tribes, tongues, and nations.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 29:1-2

*He who is often rebuked and stiffens his neck
will be destroyed suddenly, with no remedy.*

*When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice;
but when the wicked rule, the people groan.*