

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Chukat:*** **Numbers 20:14 – 22:1**
 Haftarah: **Judges 11:12-33**
 B'rit Chadasha: **John 3:19-21**

We cried out to the Holy One ... and He heard our voice.

[Numbers 20:16]

Today's *Chukat* Meditation is Proverbs 8:12-31;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #11, *Yerushalayim* [Jerusalem]

Vayishlach Moshe mal'achim – Then Moshe sent out messengers ... *miKadesh el-melech Edom* – from Kadesh to the king of Edom Numbers 20:14a.

It is the appointed time for a new generation of *B'nei Yisrael* to rise up from the 2nd Desert Testing Ground – a generation that the Creator can use to alter the course of humankind in a positive way. The members of this new generation aren't ready for prime time just yet though; they still need to pass the most critical tests of socialization. They need to come forth from the desert leaning on the arm of their Beloved, brimming with Kingdom passion and vision, and exhibiting a level of *Kingdom Gravitas* exceeding that of the absolute best days of their forebears. They need to emerge from their season of wilderness testing with *fire in their eyes*. Instead of complaining about its circumstances, and demanding its own way in its own time, this generation needs to learn to humbly worship, to calmly wait upon, and to faithfully serve its King. The world has yet to see this generation functioning in its calling, so it does not yet know what to think of or do with this generation – but soon the nations will discover that the one thing that they cannot do with this rising generation is ignore it. The people that the Holy One is raising up out in the desert is about to become *the ultimate elephant in the room* for every culture, for every nation, for every economy, for every race and ethnicity, for every ideology, and for every glorious king and two-bit warlord or demagogue on the face of the earth.

People of the Kingdom Are Called to be the Elephant in the Room

The nation the Holy One is raising up in the Wilderness is not motivated by, nor is it subject to manipulation by, political ideology, ethno-centric social justice movements, virtue-signaling propaganda, economic pressure, or pseudo-intellectual bluster; it draws its inspiration from the *cherubim* and *serafim* that cry

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Holy, Holy, Holy in the courts of the Great King, and it takes its directions only from the One Who sits upon the greatest of all Thrones. This nation's potential to change the world does not therefore derive from or depend upon any institution, any academic brain-trust, any economic support mechanism, any demagogue, or any strategic alliance; that potential comes from *sh'ma*-ing the Voice, *sh'mar*-ing the Covenant, and meditating upon and then *asah*-ing the *mitzvot* of the Creator of the Universe. This nation's influence on other cultures does not depend upon political intrigue or protest movements; upon marches, riots, or revolutions; upon propaganda-promoting, history-re-imagining, or creative narrative-re-framing; upon fear-mongering, hate-mongering, or thought-policing; upon fake-news or fake-science; upon shouting inflammatory slogans, slinging hype, or shoveling fluff; its capacity to influence other cultures flows instead from the dynamic energy, joy, and shalom that come from living out the Torah – the Creator's instruction manual for modeling the well-lived human life - day after day, year after year. This new nation is not seeking to establish or promote any religious institution, nor send out signs-and-wonders specialists, nor peddle 'product'. This nation is not run by activists, anarchists, populist demagogues, rebel-rousers, reformers, or idealistic dreamers; it is instead made up of hundreds of thousands of simple, practical, down-to-earth, *sh'ma*-ers, *sh'mar*-ers, and *asah*-ers. Slick-talking propagandists, fear-mongers, race-baiters, class-warfare inciters, tantrum-throwers, accusers, and profanity spewers have no place in this group. This people has but one agenda - to model in front of the world *what the Creator of the Universe's definitions of love joy, peace, hope, and wisdom look like in human form*. This people actually thinks it can change the world by filling the atmosphere with practical demonstrations of the ways of Divine mercy, forgiveness, patience, gentleness, meekness, steadfast-faithfulness-to-covenant, self-control, wisdom, and love, that its people have learned through continuously dwelling in the *Secret Place of the Most High*.

It All Sounds Good in Theory ... BUT, Can Anybody Really Pull Something Like This Off in Real Time?

Alas, nothing truly glorious comes easily. Being born into, and invited to participate in, a generation of Return to Relevance is one thing, but actually persevering through the desert wanderings, overcoming the wilderness temptations, repelling the attacks of enemies bent on wiping us off the face of the earth, maintaining humility before and passion for the Bridegroom-King of Heaven, and walking out our individual and collective destinies all the way to and into the Land? Well that is something very, very different.

The Grand Redemptive Plan of the Holy One is destined to go forward over all the earth's terrain and all of its kingdoms – but it will do so in fits and starts, and over

a lot of dead bodies. As the Psalmist says:

*A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand;
But it will not come near you.*

*He will give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.
In their hands they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You will tread upon the lion and the cobra;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.*

[Psalm 91:7, 11-13]

If there is anything our little session of Kingdom boot camp in the world of Hagar and Yish'mael should have taught us it is that the law of sowing and reaping is real, and that *whoever therefore chooses to live by the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* - allowing himself/herself to get all up in his/her flesh, emotions, or pseudo-intellect; get offended; indulge outrage; criticize, judge, and/or shout slogans - *is* destined to get the same right back, with a ton of compounded interest. Only those who learn to reject the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and live instead by the fruit of the tree of life – i.e. *love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control* - can be trusted with the greatest tasks in the Kingdom of Heaven. There is no *shalom* to be found in offense, anger, complaint, criticism, judgmentalism, or labeling. There is not a single trace of *simchah* in any of those things. And there is no real *ahav* [unselfish love of/’for God, and all/everyone that He has Created] or *tikvah* [hope for the future redemption] - in any of them either. Why? Because these things represent the absolute antithesis of the message of Torah and are totally inconsistent with our calling to abide in Messiah.

As Shaul of Tarsus taught, from the Song of Moshe²: *“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. To the extent possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Holy One. Therefore if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with that which is tov.”* Romans 12:17-21. The way to leave a Kingdom-advancing impact in the world is to let Torah train us to *resist the urge to be offended, to find fault, to form opinions, to criticize, to judge*, and thereby to act like the serpent is our father. The key to

² Shaul is referencing and incorporating into his teaching Deuteronomy 32:35, from the Song of Moshe. That is where Moshe quotes the Holy One as declaring: *“Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them.”* Letting the Holy One – the Stronger Covenant Partner - bring about whatever judgment is necessary and appropriate, at the appropriate time, instead of declaring it ourselves, is an essential component of the Covenant. Our task is to approach others in humility, model shalom, simchah, love, and truth to them, and let the kindness of the Holy One lead them to *t’shuvah* if they will but *sh’ma*.

fulfilling our role in the grand redemptive and restorative plan is for us to fight the good fight daily – to overcome and keep overcoming both *the fleshly tendency* to impute negative characteristics to others and the pseudo-intellectual tendency to *apply negative labels* to others. The Holy One is training us to cultivate *patience with* and *humility*. Stand firm in the precious gift of Covenantal *shalom, simchah, ahav* and *emet*. We are not to be overwhelmed by darkness in men or cultures we encounter; we are bathe them in pure, gentle light.

Moving On

The earthly remains of Miryam now lie buried alongside her timbral in the sands of Desert of *Tzin*. Angrily attributing the label ‘*morim*’ [i.e. *rebels deserving of thirty-nine lashes*] to thirsty people in the Camp of the Redeemed, and claiming personal credit for procuring living water for them, has secured Moshe and Aharon burial places outside the land of Promise as well. We will miss these three famous siblings – but we must move on. Along the way we will meet - and have to learn to deal with - some of the people groups with whom we are going to have to learn to share the earth. The Holy One is not going to take us into the land of our inheritance without giving us some critical trials of our *socialization skills*. We must, therefore, decide how we are going to approach interaction with other people groups – people vastly different from, and often hostile to, us, the Torah that the Holy One has given us, and the *new way of life our Divine Bridegroom is teaching us*. We will not have the choice, any longer, of avoiding conflict through isolation. Hence our aliyah for the day begins: ***Vayishlach Moshe mal'achim miKadesh el-melech Edom*** – i.e. *Moshe sent messengers from K'desh to the king of Edom*. **Numbers 20:14a.**

I hope you understand, Dear Reader, that when it comes to matters of inter-cultural socialization, we really only have three options.

Option #1:

The Genocidal ‘Come In Like a Wrecking Ball’ Approach – Critically Judge and Try to Destroy Everyone Who Is Different From us

Our first option would be the *genocidal ‘come in like a wrecking ball’* approach. People who take this approach resent everyone who is not like them for daring to try to breathe the same air. A group following this option would label everyone else ‘*pagans*’, ‘*heathens*’, and/or any number of other derogatory labels. Under this approach, anyone who doesn’t think, speak, act, and react like you is regarded as lower than an animal. If we choose this option, we will declare war on the other people groups – and take them on wherever we find them. We will resolve to consider no *compromise over anything*, acknowledge no of shades of gray in interpretation, and offer no *tolerance whatever toward persons having other viewpoints* or *halakah*. We will stop up our ears, harden our hearts, wag our tongues, pull out our swords, wave them in the air menacingly, and charge forward

with reckless abandon, bent on obliterating whoever or whatever blocks our path. If we choose this option, it will be *kill or be killed*. Every inter-cultural social interaction will become a *winner take all* mixed martial art fight. It will, alas, be quite a trick to be the light of the world to people we complain about, criticize, suspect, fear, hate, and want to annihilate. So let's give some thought to the two other options.

Option #2:

The Chameleon Approach – Try to Blend In With Our Surroundings

Secondly, we can do the exact opposite. We can become so impressed by and enamored with the culture and ways of other people groups that we just *assimilate*. We can want to be like them instead of being who we are. We can try to fit in, and become just like them. If we choose this option we will offer our minds to their worldviews, philosophies, ideologies, priorities, values, and practices. We will seek pleasure in the things they seek pleasure. We will therefore wink at – and accept first as normal, then eventually as ‘good’ – both their cultural pathologies and their private perversions. We will offer our backs to their economic systems and our entrust our future – and that of our children and children's children – not to the Holy One but to *their human institutions*. We will adore their heroes. We will offer our dedication to their governments. And, eventually, we will bow our knees to their gods. This is the way chosen by Yehudah [Judah] when he went to live among the Kena'ani. See **Genesis 38**.

Eventually, however, the other guys always seem to wind up blaming us for all their cultural, economic, political, and personal problems. Eventually they will always wind up beating plowshares into swords, sneaking into our homes, and slicing our wives and children into little pieces before they kill us. For that is always the way it works for the people of the Most High. If we do not maintain our separateness and distinctness, they will always ultimately take social interaction option #1, and go genocidal on us.

Thus the route of assimilation actually comes with an even higher price tag than the warfare option. If we choose the assimilation option, you see, we will have to *lay aside the Holy One's Torah*. We will dilute, then abandon, the Holy Shabbat. We will replace our assigned participation in our Bridegroom-King's *mo'edim* with the sensually stimulating, idolatry-based observances of the cultures in whose political and economic systems we have chosen to immerse ourselves. We will abandon our Bridegroom-King's calendar and the rhythms of life He has established for us and start to live instead by the calendar and according to the biorhythms of the people around us. That means not only abandoning our Bridegroom-King and throwing away our own lives and destinies for a foreign-language song, but also inflicting horrible spiritual abuse on our spouses and

children in the process. And it means denying the world, in our generation at least, the Witness of the Holy One's Supreme Goodness and Wisdom³.

If we choose the route of assimilation we will have to lay aside that which makes us who and what we are. We have to *forget about our calling, our destiny, and our identity as the Holy One's Betrothed*. We have to *intermarry with and start looking, living, and thinking just like our neighbors*. We have to adopt their *lifestyles*, live by their *calendar*, wear their *styles of clothing* and adopt their standards of *personal appearance*. We have to eat what they eat. We have to fear what they fear. We have to love what they love and hate what they hate. We have to repeat politically correct catch phrases and spout politically expedient bullet points with a straight face and as close as we can come to a self-hating sneer. We will have to let them take control of our children's education and cheer while they pervert the precious seed of Avraham with animalistic *values and priorities*.

Surely there is a better option than either one or two above. What is the *third option*?

Option #3:

The Royal Ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven Option – Being Salt and Light in the Midst of a Flavorless and Darkened World

The third option is that we can *be who he has created and prophetically empowered us to be*. This option would entail taking a deep breath as we step into each encounter with the peoples of the world, holding our Divine Bridegroom's Hand, leaning close upon His Breast, and very, very carefully *sh'ma-ing* each of His words and instructions as He navigates a path for us through the obstacle course - and around the deadly booby traps – which our neighbors inevitably lay out for us. This option involves saying of the Holy One, “He is *my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust*” – then living like He is exactly that.

The third option is the one chosen by Avram, by Yitzchak, and by Ya'akov. And it is the option the Holy One always calls us to choose as well. But look yonder! Our first challenge of socialization approaches. Who will be the first people group we will encounter on our road back to relevance? It will be the descendants of Ya'akov's arch nemesis Esav. Gird up your loins Folks. This is *not going to be easy*. But one thing is for sure – it is time to choose an option.

It Is A Time for Living By the Voice - Not the Sword

More than 400 years before the events that open today's aliyah occurred, under far less than optimal conditions, an old man blessed his two sons. To the younger one he gave all his own inheritance in the land of Kena'an and the pre-eminent position

³ See Deuteronomy 4:5-10.

among his brethren. Genesis 27:27-29. To the older one he said “... *by your sword you shall live.*” Genesis 27:40. Many generations later the descendants of the two brothers are about to meet for the first time. The meeting will take place through emissaries. Here is the Biblical account, roughly transliterated from the Hebrew and translated into English:

Koh amar achicha Yisra'el

Thus says your brother Yisra'el,

v'hineh anachnu v'Kadesh ir ketzeh gevuleicha

'... behold, we are in K'desh, a city in the uttermost of your border.

Nabra-na e'art'zeicha

Please let us pass through your land:

lo na'avor b'sadeh uvecheirem

we will not pass through field or through vineyard,

v'lo nishteh mey

neither will we drink of the water of the wells:

v'er derech ha-melech

we will go along the king's highway;

nelech lo niteh yamin us'mol

we will not turn aside to the right hand nor to the left,

ad asher-na'avor gevuleicha

until we have passed your border'.

[Numbers 20:14-17]

The road to the younger son's inheritance runs right through the land occupied by the descendants of the elder son. But note that the descendants of the younger son seek only passage. They have no interest in conquest. They have no need – or appetite – for spoils of war. They covet no form of charity or assistance or support. They don't really even need food or water – all of which are abundantly supplied to them from Heaven. All they want is undisturbed passage. All they ask for is to be allowed to go through Edom's land unmolested. Just ... don't ... accost us ... on the roadway! Picture Ya'akov [Jacob], generations earlier, trying to bring his budding family to his father's tent at *Be'er Sheva*, but being intercepted by Esav and 400 armed horsemen along the way. See Genesis 32:3-6. Our forefather's experience has become the blueprint for the lives of his descendants. And so, like our forefather Ya'akov, we try to placate Esav through *polite diplomacy*. We appeal to “family ties”. We pledge to be respectful guests. We offer to enrich the descendants of Esav financially by purchasing from them water which we did not need because the Divine Bridegroom was still miraculously providing water and food for us wherever we went. But it was no use. Esav's descendants, the Edomites, promise to fulfill the prophecy of Yitzchak about them: “*by your sword*

you shall live.” For Torah tells us:

Vayomer elav Edom

Edom said to him,

lo ta'avor bi pen-b'cherev etze l'k'rateicha

'You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword against you'.

[Numbers 20:18]

Alas, it appears that the sword and the arm of the flesh is all that our close kinsman Esav knows. It is *how he lives*. It is *his answer to every problem*. It is *his first response to every stimulus*. Ya'akov on the other hand does not live by the sword (although he owns one and can use it when attacked, as a later part of this week's parsha reveals). When possible Ya'akov's descendants choose to live *not by the sword but by the "voice"*. What do I mean? Remember when Ya'akov stood before Yitzchak, shamefully dressed in Esav's clothes, seeking Esav's 'blessing'? As you will recall at that time Yitzchak noted ***"the voice ... is Ya'akov's voice"***. Genesis 27:22. Ya'akov's voice is very distinctive. And it carries the authority of the Avrahamic Covenant. In that voice, you see, is *the Holy One's blessing for all nations*. So when Ya'akov's descendant Moshe sent a message to the King of Edom he let it be known that like Ya'akov he desired to interact not with the sword, but with *"the voice"*. Moshe did not say (nor could he have) that his people had *conquered* Egypt or *destroyed Pharaoh's army* by the sword. What he said – quite accurately - was: ***"We cried to the Holy One, and He heard our voice"***. Numbers 20:16. Oh Beloved ... is it not time we learned *the secret of the voice on earth that resonates in harmony with the Voice of the Holy One?*

Blessed are They That Know the Joyful Sound!

The word our English Bibles translate as "voice" is *qol*⁴. It is usually translated as "voice", "sound", or "noise", and can also mean resonance of a musical instrument. The first Biblical usage of the word *qol* is in Genesis 3:8, as follows:

*And they heard the voice [qol] of the Holy One God
walking in the garden in the day (or hour) of blowing/breathing:
and Adam and his wife hid themselves
from the presence of the Holy One God amongst the trees of the garden.*

The Hebraic picture is that of a *"natural" sound which emanates from the essence of something*. Do you get it? A dog does not meow – it barks. Barking is the *natural sound* which emanates from the dog's inner being. A cat, however, does not bark, it meows. Meowing is the natural sound that emanates from his inner being. A bird does not roar. A lion does not chirp. A cow does not oink. A pig does not moo. Each creature of the Holy One has a *peculiar sound that comes from, and fits with, the essence of what they were created to be*. It is the same with human

⁴ *Qol* is *kuf, vav, lamed*. Strong's Hebrew word #6963, it is pronounced a lot like the English word *coal*.

beings. Though we make many noises, we only have one “voice”. The question is whether we *live by* that voice - or choose to live by something else.

The Process of Hearing [i.e. Sh'ma-ing]

As any fifth grader knows *sound is energy, moving in waves*. We hear because the Holy One has *programmed our eardrums to be responsive to sound waves*. When sound waves enter the auditory canal and impact the eardrum, the eardrum begins to vibrate *sympathetically* - i.e. at the same frequency as the sound wave that impacted it. This energy is then translated into *electrical signals* that the nerves in the ear transmit to the brain.

The sound that emanates from the essence of the Holy One is a “voice”. And we who are created in the image of the Holy One should be responsive to that voice. When sound/voice emanates from Him, sympathetic vibrations should arise from deep within all His creations.

To *respond to the voice* of the Holy One is to **sh'ma** – “*Hear, O Israel ...*” To *live by the voice* is to live the *sh'ma* lifestyle – hanging on every word of the Holy One as if it were a lifeline, and letting the words of the Holy One *define who we are*, and *restructure how we think*, and *reshape what we talk about*, *how we respond to situations*, and *how we relate to others*, and *how we conduct our lives*.

The *Voice* is pure energy. To live by the Voice of the Holy One is therefore *to live by His energy, not ours*. It is literally to *feed off of and draw strength from His energy*. If we live by His Voice, you see, we actually begin to *resonate* that Voice (like the wood of an acoustic guitar resonates the sound made when the strings are plucked). A resonator does more than receive sound energy – it *vibrates sympathetically* with the sound energy it receives, and actually *emits consonant vibrations*, causing the energy of the originating sound to be *amplified, and transmitted*.

Contrast the Sword

The sword on the other hand *provides no energy of its own*. It depends totally upon the energy of the person who wields it. To live by the sword is therefore *to live by one's own energy* – and to, in the process, *reject the energy of the Holy One*. Living by the sword requires “tuning out” the Voice of the Holy One, such that one's spirit ceases to vibrate sympathetically with the energy of that Voice. Picture what Adam and Chava did (or tried to do) when they hid behind the trees of the garden. Picture as well what the Redeemed Community did at Sinai when they cried to Moshe “*let us not hear the Voice of the Holy One anymore, lest we die.*” We do the same thing when we decide – or accept it when someone else proclaims – that something our Divine Bridegroom has said – something that resonates with

energy from His Voice - is “not for today” or “not for us”. You see, the sounds that emanate from the Holy One are always consistent – they always have, and perpetually vibrate with, *the same frequency*. The Torah has the same frequency as the Prophets, as the Psalms, and as the B’rit Chadasha. Therefore nothing our Divine Bridegroom has ever said is *new*. And nothing our Divine Bridegroom has ever said has changed or can change. *Messiah’s teaching is Moshe’s teaching. Moshe’s teaching is Avraham’s teaching.* And all of these are merely resonators of the Voice of God. If you are the Holy One’s, therefore, I have a word for you – a word you desperately need to *sh’ma*. Here it is:

You were created to live by the voice, not by the sword⁵.

Understand these things about ‘the sword’:

The sword is wielded by the arm of the flesh

(i.e. the works one can accomplish by his own efforts independent of the Holy One).

The sword is only as strong or effective as the flesh of the one who wields it.

The voice, on the other hand, is the product of the Breath –

*the very thing that the Holy One took of Himself and placed into man –
the Ruach, or Spirit.*

The voice is as eternal and effective as its source - the Holy One Himself.

It is the voice by which we who are the Holy One’s are to live. Selah.

Our voice (esp. our prayers and blessings), when employed in harmony with **His** Voice (esp. His Torah, His prophets, and His blessings), yields life eternal.

Do you want to *pray* the will of God? Here is the secret. **Resonate the sound of Holy One’s Voice.** Resist the temptation to tell Him what to do (i.e. resist the temptation to wield *the sword*, supplying your own energy).

Next Wilderness Test: Can We Handle A Little Hostility from our Neighbors to the South - Without Losing Our Shalom?

In today’s aliyah we are going to have a little run-in with the descendants of Esav [the *Edomi’* (Edomites)]. When we sought to negotiate a simple right of passage through *Edomi’* territory, the *Edomi* would have none of it. They *flashed their swords*. They *bared their teeth*. They promised us a fight to the death if we did not turn around and leave without setting one foot on their territory. What will we do? How will we respond? Will we respect their decision – or try to force our will on them? Will we sulk? Will we complain? Or will we just shake our heads, pick up our tent pegs, and move along, whistling the songs of Tziyon as we go?

⁵ Please note that this does not mean that the Holy One’s people are pacifists, or that they do not or should not fight in a ‘time for war’. It merely means that the Voice of the Holy One is what they heed, and in the energy of which they function. At times appropriate to His purposes, the Holy One’s voice calls us to – and empowers for – battle. Living by the Voice includes fighting – in His power, not ours – at such times. Were we to shrink from battle in those times, we would not be living by the Voice.

In the Covenant, any time there is a viable alternative to puffing out one's chest and going *all Commando* on an antagonist, it is usually the better part of valor to take the 'other option'. This time, such an alternative was present – just take another route. So, rather than get all offended and dress for a battle the Holy One had never told us to fight, we chose to respond to the Divine Voice instead of the Edomi taunt. Moshe simply withdrew from the discussion, turned the Redeemed Community toward the south and east, and chose to “take the long way home”.

Thus Edom refused to give Yisra'el passage through his border:

For this reason, Yisra'el turned away from him.

Numbers 20:21

This had been a test orchestrated by the Holy One. It was the Edomi's land, not ours. We had no right to cross it without their permission. And however rude or unreasonable the refusal of permission, they had the right to refuse - for any reason or for no reason. Their bad attitude was not a reason to go to war with them.

This time, by the empowerment of the Holy One, we actually *passed the test*. We did not over-react to either Edom's bad attitude or its taunts. We did not counteract evil with evil. We did not return insult for insult, taunt for taunt. We did not whine. We did not sulk. We did not take up offense. We did not *rail*. We did not *wail*. We did not engage our fleshly appetite for drama. We just moved on. Oh what freedom!

Here is a worthy saying: *Not every fight to which we will feel challenged by an adversary is a 'good fight' of faith. Fights over words, ideas, or material possessions - never have been and never will be 'good' fights.*

This time we got it right. But there many more tests just around the corner.

A Change in Altitude – To Mount Hor, Hormah, and Beyond!

A dramatic change of scenery – and a drastically improved perspective on life - is about to be offered to us. The mirages we have been seeing and the vain imaginations we have been indulging on the desert floor are about to give way to a stunning view of the world as it really exists from the vantage point of mountains. The first stop will be Mount Hor. *Mount Hor*. Then we will go to *Hormah*. A little later we will set up camp at *Obot*. Then we will take up a trek along the high ridges of the Eastern side of the Jordan Rift Valley. We will follow these ridges all the way to the high plain at the feet of Mount *Nebo* – from which we will be able to see the city of Jericho just to the West of the Jordan River.

What challenges does the Holy One have in store for us in these new, higher elevations? How will our newfound 'Kingdom Relevance' work its way out in these environs? Will *new levels* come with *new devils*? We are about to find out. I

hope you are ready for a change in altitude – and a much higher level of responsibility for your own attitudes and behavior!

Come, Let us Go Up!

First Stop: Mount Hor⁶ by the border of Edom! As a result of our avoidance of conflict with the Edomi the Redeemed Community traveled a very long distance and found itself at a place Torah calls *Mount Hor*. This tall mountain overlooking the Valley of Arabah and the land of Edom consists of two jagged peaks. In between the two summits lies a crevice or pass. The Holy One has ordained that some dramatic – and potentially prophetic – things are going to happen there. Part of it will involve the next phase of the changing of the guard. And part of it will involve the next phase of our return to relevance on the world stage.

First, this special mountain is going to be the site of the passage of Aharon and the establishment of Eleazar, Aharon's son, as our new high priest. The Holy One chose this location to appear to Moshe and Aharon, and say:

Ye'asef Aharon el-amav

Aharon will be gathered to his people.

ki lo yavo el ha-aretz asher natati l'b'nei Yisra'el

He will not go to the land that I am entrusting to B'nei Yisrael

al asher-meritem et-pi l'mei Merivah

because of rebellion against My word at the Waters of Dispute.

The appointed time has come for our dear brother Aharon to lay down and die. The intercessor we have so long relied upon to stand between plague and flesh and blood on our behalf is going to pass his mantle – and the legacy of the rod that budded – to someone else. Upon whom will his mantle fall? Who will take the roles of *High Priest of the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov*, and *Friend of the Prophetic Bride*, to the next level? Torah makes it clear, saying:

Kach et-Aharon v'et-El'azar beno

'[You - Moshe] take Aharon and his son Elazar,

v'ha-al otam Hor ha-har

and bring them up to Hor Mountain.

V'haf'shet et-Aharon et-begadav

Divest Aaron of his vestments

⁶ *Hor*, Strong's Hebrew word #2023, is spelled simply **hey, resh**. It is thus merely a form of the word *har*", meaning "mountain", or "high hill". Some believe to *Hor* to be the mountain now called *Jebel Harun* by the Arabs – a mountain situated on the eastern side of the valley of Arabah. This is the highest and most conspicuous mountain of the whole range of sandstone ridge of ancient Edom (now Southern Jordan), standing about midway between the Dead Sea and the Elanitic gulf. It has two summits [hence the combined name, *Har* (mountain) *Hor* (mountain) – English speakers might call it "twin peaks"]. If this identification is correct, the eastern side of this mountain houses the ancient fortress city of Petra.

v'hilbashtam et-El'azar beno
and place them on his son Elazar.

v'Aharon ye'asef umet sham
Aharon will then be gathered up and die there.'
[Numbers 20:23-26]

Miryam has already left us. Now it appears we are to be required to finish our Divine Mission without Aharon as well. The two of them will be part of the Great Cloud of Witnesses who will cheer us on. It is, it appears, the appointed time for the changing of the guard.

It is Time For a Changing of the Guard

Each year in the course of the week of *Chukat* we relive the appointed time for *the changing of the guard*. A hungry, resilient generation, desperate to catch the Holy One's vision for *what freedom and relevance are supposed to look like in real time*, is coming forth. This generation is called to displace the testy patriarchs and matriarchs of the last Exodus – traumatized survivors who, after seeing and participating in their great movement of deliverance, allowed *the easy yoke and light burden of freedom* to overwhelm them. Alas, as it was for our ancestors in the days of Moshe, so it often is for us. *Receiving deliverance*, it turns out, is relatively easy. The real challenge is *living responsibly* afterward. Great stories of personal and corporate redemption are one thing; living grateful, humble, inspiring, well-lived lives that pave the way for the future redemption of all men and nations turn out to be something else entirely. That is why there is, in the Kingdom, always *a need for a changing of the Guard*. The good news, you see, is that a *Great Awakening to Destiny* always takes place in the People of the Covenant simultaneously with the changing of the guard. Birthed out of tragedy, this Great Awakening to Destiny is an essential precursor to the *Great Return to Relevance* the Holy One has in mind for us.

According to Hebrew tradition Aharon passed into the afterlife in the heat of Summer, on the 1st day of the fifth month of the Biblical year [the month often called Av]. Three men went up the mountain. Only two returned. And just like that, Aharon was gone – and Elazar was our new High Priest. Our lives are fragile; but the Covenant is sure. As Ya'akov had been granted the honor of having his beloved son Yosef 'close his eyes' at death, so Aharon was granted the blessing of having the last thing he saw before stepping into eternity be his beloved son Elazar dressed in his own vestments of beauty and honor, ready to carry on in his stead.

Vayafshet Moshe et-Aharon et-begadav
And Moshe divested Aharon of his vestments,

vayalbesh otam et-El'azar beno
and placed them on [Aharon's] son Eleazar.

vayamot Aharon sham b'rosh hahar

And Aharon's death occurred there on the top of the mountain.

vayered Moshe v'El'azar min-hahar

And Moshe and Eleazar descended from the mountain.

[Numbers 20:28]

Aharon did not suffer violence. He did not suffer senility. He did not suffer at all. He just passed from this world to the next. One moment he was here; the next he was gone. ***Baruch dayan emet*** - Blessed be the true Judge. Goodbye old friend. ***Hamakom y'nachem etchem bitoch sh'ar availai Tziyon v'Y'rushalayim*** - May the Holy One comfort you among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Chayei Aharon – the Life of Aharon

According to Numbers 33:38-39 Aharon's age at the time of his death was 123 years. Aharon's years were lived during a critical time in the history of the world. His 'such a time as this' was truly monumental and world changing. Let us consider what the lessons of Aharon's life mean to us in our 'such a time as this'. Was Aharon's a life wasted – or a life well lived? Or was it – as most of ours are – a mixture of both?

We were not introduced to Aharon – whose name means 'light-bearer' – until he was well over 80 years old. He was an elder brother to Moshe – which means he was born in Egypt. Of the first eight decades of his life we know absolutely nothing except that he survived. It was not until his younger brother had an encounter with the Holy One at the thorn bush of Horev that we even knew Moshe had a brother. Out of the fire of the thorn bush the Holy One responded to the 'slow of speech and thick of tongue' protestations of His stammering prophet-to-be as follows:

Is not Aharon the Levite your brother?

I know that he can speak well - and look, he is also coming out to meet you.

When he sees you he will be glad in his heart.

Now you are to speak to him and put the words in his mouth.

And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do.

So he will be your spokesman to the people.

And he himself will be as a mouth for you, and you will be to him as God.

[Exodus 4:16]

Aharon therefore became the first person on the planet to receive the good news of deliverance from the mouth of Moshe. For Torah tells us:

And the Holy One said to Aharon, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moshe."

So he went and met him b'har ha-Elohim, and he kissed him.

***So Moshe told Aharon all the words of the Holy One who had sent him,
and all the signs that He had commanded him.***

Then Moshe and Aharon went and gathered together

all the elders of the children of Israel.
[Exodus 4:27-28]

And so, as we eavesdrop through the earpiece of Torah upon the conversations that took place at the top of Mount Hor between Moshe, Aharon, and Elazar on that appointed day, perhaps it is to be expected that our minds flash forward to the passionate language of Shaul of Tarsus, who prepared his young protégé Timotheus to take over his role as prophet to the nations with these words:

*O Timotheus! Guard what was committed to your trust,
avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions
of what is falsely called knowledge.*

II Timothy 6:20

*Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God
that is in you through the laying on of my hands.*

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

II Timothy 1:6-7.

Dealing With Death - Revisited

As we said when parsha ***Chukat*** began (with the “script” to be followed when one comes into contact with a corpse), a major theme of this week’s study is how the Holy One wants His Redeemed Community to deal with death. Shaul would later explain the Holy One’s heart in this matter: ***We don't want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you don't grieve like other peoples, who have no hope.*** 1Thessalonians 4:13.

When the Holy One speaks with Moshe about his brother’s death He does not leave Moshe without hope. He tells Moshe: ***Aharon shall be gathered to his people.*** The word our English Bibles translate as “gathered” is *asaf*⁷. It is a primitive verb root picturing *something ripe being harvested*. See for instance the first Biblical usage of the verb, which is in Genesis 6:21. There the Holy One is speaking with Noach. In discussing with Noach the provisions he is to take with him on the Ark, the Holy One says: ***Take with you of all food that is eaten; gather [asaf] it; and it will be for food for you, and for [the animals].***

This we know: *Whatever the outward circumstances, the Holy One’s people do not die as others die.* Our physical bodies may wither away in hospitals and nursing homes, or our remains may be found in wrecked airplanes or automobiles. The outer shells in which we live may be burned or butchered, “gassed”, incinerated, or blown to bits by a sniper’s bullet or a terrorist’s bomb. But think not it is the “grim reaper” or Ha-Satan, or even a modern-day anti-Semite who takes our lives. We who are the Holy One’s are not *killed*. We are only ***harvested***, at the precise time our Divine Bridegroom decrees. On our death certificates it should simply read:

⁷ Asaf is *alef, samech, feh sofit*. Strong’s Hebrew word #622, it is pronounced *aw-saf*

Cause of death: “It was just *harvest time.*” And while we grieve - and sometimes we grieve long and painfully - we do *not* grieve as those who have no hope. Our loved ones are not gone – they have merely been “*gathered to their people*”.

Circle the Wagons!

Elazar will not be given much time to settle peacefully into his new role as *kohen gadol*. As I warned you, the Camp of the Redeemed is about to come under attack from just about *every angle conceivable*. There will be *violent attacks from without*, from extremely hostile forces bent upon our destruction. There will be *devastating attacks from within*, from out-of-control appetites and urges and attitudes. There will even be *frightening attacks from living creatures of the earth, loosed upon us by Decree from Heaven*. We will need someone to stand and intercede between the dead and the living⁸. We will *need* a High Priest! Will Elazar be up for the challenge? Will he be able to stand between the porch and the altar in effectual intercession the way his father learned to do? This is his test – and it is ours.

The Attack from Without

As I have been explained in earlier studies this week, for the entire 38-year period of time we wandered around the floor of the desert one thing we never had to deal with was the hostility of the outside world. After all, people going nowhere and doing nothing on the backside of the desert do not tend to stir up too much animosity. But now here we are on the move again. We crossed the Valley of Arabah as an army majestic with banners. We stretch out as far as the eye can see - and we are kicking up dust wherever we go. And now peoples who live nearby are suddenly sitting up and taking notice of us again – wondering for the first time in a long time *who we are*, and *what we are up to*, and *what we are capable of*, and *exactly what our presence in their world is going to mean to them*.

We are *no longer irrelevant*. And some people are just not comfortable with that fact at all. With relevancy, it seems, always comes *animosity*. Enter the *warlord of Arad*, stage left. *Who*, you say, is the warlord of Arad? ***Arad*** is a Hebrew word derived from a verb root meaning ‘to sequester’ – i.e. to *isolate a person or thing by confiscation, appropriation, impounding, and seizure/capture*. ***Arad***-ing, as I call it, is the domain of *stalkers, abductors, kidnappers, and human traffickers*. To ***arad*** is to see a human being – or his children or worldly goods – as prey to be

⁸ See Numbers **16:46-48**: “So Moshe said to Aharon, “Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from the Holy One. The plague has begun. Then Aharon took it as Moshe commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. And he **stood between the dead and the living**; so the plague was stopped.”

stalked, taken captive, subjugated to one's own will, and either used for one's own fleshly purposes or sold to the highest bidder for a nice hefty profit.

As our ancestors had to learn to follow the Great Shepherd in dealings with such persons in the course of their journey, Dear Ones, so will we. As it was a necessary part of their Mission, it is a necessary part of our Mission. And as our patriarchs – the brothers of Yosef – had to deal with this aspect of darkness in their very own flesh [see **Genesis 37:19-24**] so do we. Be aware of – and beware - the spirit of Arad, Dear Reader ... in yourself as well as in others. Until we understand that *arad*-ing is simply one aspect of what fallen human nature always does, we will not be able to overcome it in accordance with the holiness to which the Holy One calls us when it rears its head against us, nor will we be able to transcend it with the humility and reverent fear with which the Holy One desires to empower us when it arises within us.

Who Is the 'King' – or Warlord/Strongman - of Arad?

Here is what Torah tells us happened after the community completed its mourning over the death of Aharon.

Vayish'ma ha-Kena'ani melech-Arad yoshev ha-negev

When the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev,

ki ba Yisra'el derech ha-atarim

heard that the Israelites were traveling along the Atarim Highway

vayilachem b'Yisra'el vayishub mimenu shevi

he attacked them and took some captives.

[Numbers 21:1]

We are not told the name of the king/warlord/strongman of Arad. We do not need to know it. He was just his little corner of humanity's toughest *strong man* or *warlord*. He was just the guy whose word the people of his culture considered to be their *torah*. We just need to understand the darkness out of which he operated - and still operates in the world. We by no means *sought* – or in any way *provoked* - a war with the people of Arad. We presently posed no threat to Arad⁹. We were, at the time, on the opposite side of the Jordan Rift Valley and the Dead Sea, and moving away from, not toward, Arad. But the strongman of Arad – and the dark spirit of *aradianism* that exists in all of fallen humanity, including each of us – tends to be a bit of a *control freak*. He couldn't just let us pass. The mind of an *arad-ian* is constantly devising manipulation protocols involving other people's lives. He likes to stick his nose – and his attitudes and opinions - into other people's business. Looking to increase *influence* and develop '*street credibility*',

⁹ Although in the Conquest season to come Arad's kingdom will be one of the many that the Holy One gives to B'nei Yisrael. See **Joshua 12:14[b]**

an *Arad*-ian spirit relentlessly pressures the human beings who yield to it to say and/or do something brash, anti-social and intimidating - all in order to make sure other people understand and fear/respect what he is capable of. The Aradian thrives on the idea of making people fear him. He (or she) wants people to be so intimidated by him that they will subordinate their wills and destinies and lives to the performance of his will. He (or she) is therefore slavishly driven to *go and stay on the offensive, to attack without provocation*, and to abduct, confiscate, and *force into subjugation someone totally helpless and unsuspecting*. The Aradian schemes as to how he (or she) can *use other people as pawns*.

***We Are Not Called to Serve As Arad's Pawns,
But as Heaven's Knights***

In dealing with *Aradians* it behooves us to understand that the People of the Covenant will always be the most highly prized subjects of their schemes. Alas, it seems that if we are to be who we were created and called to be, an unpleasant encounter with *Aradians* is inevitable. All we have to do is travel a highway in their general vicinity and they begin to take counsel together to plan their inevitable attack. Why do they attack us, you ask? What did we ever do to them, you wonder? It is simple. It is because, as representatives of the Great King Who Truly Controls Men's Destinies and Earth's Affairs, our opinion really matters. The *Aradian* senses instinctively that if he or she can intimidate the sons and daughters of the King, he can truly inflict his or her chosen brand of negativity upon the world without hindrance. *Arad*-ians are simply people who have allowed themselves to become steeped in the thoughts, attitudes, and ways the realm of Darkness. As Darkness-loving men they instinctively over-react to our Light. They develop a revulsion against both *who we are called to be* and *what our presence in their world means for the Darkness they love so much*. And though for public consumption such people love to talk about things like Hospitality, Tolerance and Diversity, they are not by any means hospitable toward nor one bit tolerant of *our particular kind of diversity*. We have the promise of true influence and impact upon the world. And we are, therefore, the chief obstacle to their brand of artificial influence and impact.

The spirit of *Arad* is a driving spirit. It drives its hosts relentlessly. The *Arad*-ian philosophy driven men and women actually perpetrate the attacks on us are merely pawns. The spirit that controls them whispers in their ear them to drive the sons and daughters of the Great King – the heirs of His Wisdom and the Knights of His Great Chess Game of Redemption - into the sea. And like Pharaoh's army at the Sea of Reeds they are Hell-bent on doing just that. Familiar spirit; Familiar hatred. Familiar goal; familiar strategy; and familiar result.

The First Skirmish of the Great Mid-East War

The King of Arad intends to fire the first shot on the Great Battleground of world events and influence. Under the cover of his favorite environment – darkness - he launches an audacious strike without the slightest provocation and with not a hint of warning. He sends flesh and blood special forces into our camp with mayhem on their minds. He has them abduct some of our best and brightest. And he holds them captive who knows where, while subjecting them to who knows what kind of torture and abuse – all so that we, and the rest of the world, will be intimidated into submission.

So *this* is what Kingdom Relevance is sometimes going to be like? What are the Holy One's Holy People to do in response to such aggression? Are we to do nothing – and thereby leave the poor souls the Aradians have taken captive to be tortured, enslaved, and/or killed? This requires wisdom. This requires humility. This requires patience. This requires cool heads and calm voices. This requires conversations with the Holy One. Are we up for it? Will we let the Holy One tell us what to do – or will we try to tell Him what we intend to do, and ask Him to bless our plan? I am afraid, in this instance, we chose the latter tact. Torah tells us:

V'yidar Yisra'el neder l'Adonai vayomar

And the Israelites made a vow to the Holy One, saying

im-naton titen et ha-am hazeh b'yadi v'ha-charamti et-areyhem

'If You give this nation into our hand, we will render their cities taboo.'

At least the first response of the Generation of the Return was not to go rush off to war in a furor. At least their first response was not to seek a political consensus. The 'vow' methodology was probably not the most effective means of transacting Covenant business with the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven. The 'deal' the generation of the Return negotiated with the Holy One may have not been the best deal they could have cut with Him. But it was these people's sons and daughters, husbands and wives, who had been carried away captive by and subjected to torture by the Aradians. This was not a matter of political theory, morality, or ethnicity; it was a matter of *what family has to do for family* in times of deep, deep crisis. And the Holy One is always a whole lot more concerned about the survival and nurturing of His Bride-People than He is the methodologies those people employ in wars of absolute necessity, such as this one. This is a war foisted upon us against our will, but it was one we *can by no means afford to lose*. So the Holy One saw to it that we did not lose. Hence we are told:

Vayish'ma Adonai b'kol Yisra'el

And the Holy One heard and heeded Israel's voice,

vayiten et ha-Kena'ani

and He gave the Canaanites over to them.

When the Holy One gave the *Kena'ani* of Arad who had taken Hebrew captives

over to B'nei Yisrael, He obviously knew what our ancestors would do. They would do exactly as they had vowed to do – they would *declare their cities taboo*'.

V'yacharem et-hem v'et-areyhem

[The Israelites] declared them and their cities taboo.

vayikra shem ha-makom Chormah

And they called the name of the place Chormah [i.e. Taboo!].

What did it mean for the Redeemed Community of the day to declare the cities of the attacking Kena'ani 'taboo'? In Hebrew the word our English Bibles translate as 'taboo' is *charem*¹⁰. It means 'shut'. In English we might say 'shut down', or 'boarded up'. At the very least it means that the cities from which the terror attacks of the Kena'ani under the King of Arad emanated were *emptied of residents* and then *boarded up*. Our ancestors wanted nothing to do with anything the Aradians who attacked them held precious or valuable. We were not intended to have any desire for any of the 'things' of the Canaanites. The Holy One had long ago determined that those things were, are, and will always be toxic not only to us but to all mankind. Everything pertaining to those who attacked us was indeed 'taboo' – i.e. off-limits to us – and was *set aside for destruction* by the Holy One.

As soon as we got as the episode was over, we moved on. We did not push on into Kena'an. That is not the direction in which the Pillar of Fire and Cloud led us. Instead, as Torah puts it:

Vayis'u meHor hahar

Then [the Israelites] arose from the Mountain [called] Hor,

derech Yam-Suf lisbov et-eret Edom

going by way of the South Sea so as to skirt the territory of Edom.

The Second Attack – the Attack From Within

The next thing that is recorded in Torah is unfortunately not an outpouring of praise for our deliverance from our enemies. It was instead a now familiar refrain - *a groundswell of complaint over our circumstances*. New generation, same old familiar *non-Canary like song*. Alas, it seems that each generation of the Covenant – indeed each redeemed individual - must deal with, and learn to partner with the Holy One in transcending, the dark veins of negativity that the Fall has ingrained deeply in our own souls. Torah describes how even the generation destined for glorious conquest suffered the slings and arrows of this universal internal adversary.

Vatiktzar nefesh ha-am b'darech

The people began to become discouraged along the way.

¹⁰ Charem is *chet, resh, mem sofit*.

Vayedaber ha-am b'Elohim uv'Moshe

The people spoke out against God and Moshe,

lamah he'elitunu miMitzrayim l'mut b'midbar

'Why did you take us out of Egypt to die in the desert?

ki eyn lechem ve'eyn mayim

There is no bread and no water!

V'nafsheinu katzah b'lechem ha-k'lokel

We are getting disgusted with this insubstantial food.'

Complaining about circumstances again? Did you think our ancestors were beyond all that? Do you think you are? You might be surprised what comes out of your mouth when things do not go your way. This is *the attack from within*.

Complaint #1: No Bread

“No Bread”, you say? But ... have you checked the *morning sky* lately? It is true that we still actually have to go out and *collect* the manna. And yes, we still have to *carry the manna back to camp in heavy baskets*. Then we actually have to work with the manna, knead it into dough, let it rise, bake it, make sure it doesn't get too crusty, etc. But should we really expect ready-to-eat bread, pre-sliced loaves from Heaven in plastic containers to drop into our laps three times a day?

Complaint #2: No Water

“No water”, you say? But ... what do you call that never-ending stream of water that has been flowing from the rock at Merivah for all of us? Is the problem that we have to *take water jars out to the stream every morning* to collect the water? Is it really such a problem that we actually have to spend precious time and energy at the stream filling those water jars, carrying them back to camp, and having to work with someone else to pour the water from the big jars into smaller containers people can drink from?

Note that the people who are doing the complaining now are not the same ones who complained in previous passages like Exodus 15:22-24 [at *Marah*, the place of bitter waters], like Exodus 16:2-3 [in *the desert of Sin*, where there was no meat to eat], and like Exodus 17:1-4 [at *Refidim*, where there was no water at all]. The people who complained back then, in those other places, have all died. The bodies of those people are literally strewn across the desert floor. So who is this that is doing all the complaining *now*? Who are the ‘*disgusted ones*’ who see manna from Heaven and water from a rock as such ‘a big bother’? Uh-oh – I am afraid it is none other than the ‘*Joshua Generation*’ – the people who were under age 20 at the time of the *chet ha-meraglim* [sin of the spies]. Hmmm. It appears the apple really doesn't ever fall too far from the tree. Which brings up another point for you parents out there – please, please be careful what things you murmur and complain about.

Whether you realize it or not, your children are *listening* - and they are *learning*. If you do not want to hear complaints about circumstances come forth from your children's mouths ... well, Beloved, be very careful what comes out of yours! It is called sowing and reaping.

Right now however we have more immediate problems to deal with. What is that I see ahead? I think I see ... yes indeed, it appears to be – *Yikes!* Look out everyone – there are *serpents loose in the camp!*

The Third Attack - Serpents Are Loose In the Camp!

Numbers 21:6 states that in apparent response to all the murmuring and complaining of the Joshua Generation about the food, the water, the desert, and so on the Holy One actually sends *serpents* [Hebrew, *nechashim*] that are *fiery* [Hebrew, *sarafim*] among the people.

Vayeshalach Adonai ba'am et ha-nechashim ha-serafim

And the Holy One sent poisonous snakes against the people,

V'yenashchu et ha-am

and when they began biting the people

v'yamot am-rav miYisra'el

a number of the people of Israel died.

The Holy One sent serpents into our Camp? Now that is *tough love!* The fiery serpents came, and they did what serpents do. They opened their mouths and bit down on whatever tender piece of flesh their fangs could find exposed. Some of those who were bitten died.

Vayavo ha-am el Moshe vayomeru

The people came to Moshe and said,

chatanu ki-dibarnu v'Adonai

'We have sinned by speaking against you and the Holy One.

vavach hitpalel el-Adonai v'yaser me'aleinu et ha-nachash

Pray to the Holy One and have Him take the snakes away from us.'

vayitpalel Moshe be'ad ha-am

And Moshe prayed for the people.

It seemed fitting that, since it was the serpent which spoke against the Holy One in *Gan Eden* to Chava about what was and was not good for 'food', it is the serpent's offspring which are used by the Holy One as rods of discipline against Yisrael for speaking against the Holy One regarding what kinds of 'food' and 'water' were acceptable. Nevertheless, the Holy One's disciplining of His covenant people is always designed to bring about *t'shuvah*, *healing*, *growth* and *maturation* rather than to inflict *judgment*, *punishment*, or *retribution*. So the Holy One puts *strict*

limits on the amount of suffering His people will have to endure from the rods of discipline He has sent into their camp. Here is how Torah records what the Bridegroom told Moshe to do to mitigate the plague of fiery serpents:

aseh lecha saraf vesim oto al-nes

'Make/mold for yourself a Seraf and place it on a banner.

V'hayah kol ha-nashuch v'ra'ah oto v'chai

Everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.

Okay, so let's get this straight. In order to deal with the problem of *ha-nachashim ha-serafim* in the camp, the Holy One wants Moshe to make/build something that in Hebrew is written as a '*saraf*'. Here is the interesting part about the instruction recorded in the Hebrew text of Torah. Our English Bibles translate '*saraf*' as '*serpent*', or in some translations '*venomous snake*'. But anyone with even a little knowledge of Hebrew knows that the word the Bible uses for serpent – in this passage and others - is not *saraf*; it is instead *nachash*.

Contrary to popular theology the Holy One never told Moshe to make/build a ***nachash*** [serpent] and put it on a pole¹¹. Instead the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven told Moshe to make/build a *saraf*. If we are to build what the Holy One wants, instead of what we think is needed, should we not pay close attention to the blueprint He gives us? So ... is it not pretty important to find out exactly what the Holy One means by a '*saraf*'? *Saraf* and ***nachash*** are two very different Hebrew words, which come from completely different verb roots and therefore have very dis-similar meanings.

Hebrew is a verb-based language – hence nouns [such as *seraf* and ***nachash***, among thousands of others] are traceable to a *verb root*. The verb root from which the noun is derived is *saraf* [*sin, resh, feh sofit*], which means *to burn with a consuming fire*. The verb root *nachash* [*nun, chet, shin*] on the other hand means *to hiss, or whisper*, particularly as a *soothsayer, medium, or necromancer does when engaging in occult arts*. The noun *seraf* thus means – or at least describes - a '*burning one*', while the noun ***nachash*** means – or at least describes – one who *hisses or whispers like a practitioner of occult arts*. There is a world of difference between these two images.

Perhaps you are more familiar with the plural form of the Hebrew word *seraf*. The plural of *saraf* is *serafim*. In English Bibles you probably have seen this word transliterated into English as '*seraphim*'. Now are you getting the picture? ***Serafim*** are the creatures the prophet Isaiah is going to see flying above the throne of the Holy One when the Holy One is lifted up and His train is filling the temple.

¹¹ The word commonly translated by English Bibles as pole in this verse is ***nes***, which does not mean 'pole', but instead means 'banner' or 'standard'.

Serafim are the creatures with six wings and whose primary purpose in creation is to cry out, over and over again, ***‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Holy One Almighty! The whole earth is full of His glory!’*** And, perhaps most relevant to what is being discussed in this portion of the Book of Numbers, a *saraf* is the creature who took a live coal from the altar of the Holy One, flew to Isaiah, then touched the coal to the repentant prophet’s mouth and proclaimed on behalf of the Holy One ***“... your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for”***.

There is *healing* in the Isaiah 6 image. There is *restoration* and *life* in that image. Indeed, in the face of such an image small concerns like what kind of food is on the menu for the day and how water will be collected and distributed fade into insignificance. Confronted with such an image people of God have no time or inclination to complain or murmur – to the contrary, they are compelled to fall on their faces before the Holy One like the *serafim* and proclaim along with them over and over again: ***“‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Holy One Almighty! The whole earth is full of His glory!’*** *Selah*, Beloved! *Selah* indeed.

So ... Why did Moshe Make the Image of a Copper Serpent Instead of a Seraf as He Was Told?

Interestingly, Torah tells us that Moshe did not follow the Holy One’s instructions. Instead of making a *saraf* as instructed he made/built a *nechash nechoshet* – i.e. a *serpent of copper*. Hmmmmm. Why on earth would he do that? We can only speculate. Perhaps Moshe just did not know how to make a *saraf*. After all, Betzalel and Ohaliav, the anointed master craftsmen who made the Tabernacle, were part of the generation who died in the desert. Or perhaps Moshe lacked the proper materials. Or perhaps Moshe just did not think the people were ‘ready’, at this stage in the nation’s development, to be confronted with the image of a *saraf*, with all the implications and responsibilities that image would entail. Whatever the reason, here is what Torah tells us Moshe did instead of making a *saraf*:

Vaya'as Moshe nechash nechoshet

Moshe made a copper snake

vayesimeihu al ha-nes

and he placed it on a high banner.

Instead of being confronted with the image of a *saraf* Moshe provided for the people in the camp who had been bitten to look upon the image of the very creature who bit them - a *nachash* – *or snake* [so called, as we said earlier, because a snake hisses or whispers like a practitioner of occult arts]. Was the *snake* image perhaps chosen by Moshe as a literary throwback to the famous *nachash* [serpent] of the Garden of Eden? Or was he making the point that just as the people had formed the bronze *nachash* with their own hands, so they had by their own actions brought the

fiery serpents into camp by their poisonous speech?

Whatever Moshe's motivation was in choosing the *image* of a snake over that of a *saraf* the Holy One chose to go ahead and honor it.

V'hayah im-nashach ha-nachash et-ish

And it happened that if a snake bit a man,

V'hibit el-nechash ha-nechoshet v'chai

he would gaze at the copper snake and live.

The Holy One is a whole lot more interested in *healing and redeeming hurting people* than He is in making sure His servants get everything just right. We never get things just right. You don't. I don't. Nobody does. We always tend to substitute what we know how to do, or think is appropriate, for what He says to do. Now go and apply that truth to your attempts to walk the Torah lifestyle - and I suspect that you will start seeing a whole lot more people will be healed and redeemed than you ever thought possible. The power of healing was *not in the snake*, you see. It would not have been in the *saraf* had Moshe done exactly what the Holy One told him to do. Neither is the power of healing ever going to be in you or me, or in our poor attempts at 'ministry'. The power to heal and redeem and bring life, health and peace is in our Divine Bridegroom, and in Him alone. What was that the *serafim* proclaimed? Oh yes, now I remember: ***Holy, holy, holy is the Holy One Almighty! The whole earth is full of His glory!*** Our song is similar. It is *ali ve'er, enu lah* – *i.e. spring up, o well! Sing with us!*

Questions For Today's Study

1. More than 400 years before the events that open today's aliyah occurred, an old man blessed his two sons. To the younger one he gave all his own inheritance in the land of Kena'an, and the pre-eminent position among his brethren. **Genesis 27:27-29.** To the older one, he said "... ***by your sword you shall live.***" **Genesis 27:40.** In today's opening verses, many generations later, the descendants of the two brothers meet for the first time -- through emissaries.

[A] Find out the location of Edom's territory by using a Bible Atlas.

[B] What modern nation holds the territory which once belonged to Edom?

2. Through messengers, Moshe and the king of Edom engage in a diplomatic argument.

[A] What is the subject of the argument?

[B] What does Moshe offer to make what he requests permission to do more acceptable to this king?

[C] What is the response of this king?

[D] What is Moshe's second offer?

[E] What is the king's response to the second offer?

3. With regard to what occurred at Merivah, answer the following questions:

[A] What "name" did Moshe [with Aharon's apparent agreement] call B'nei Yisrael at Merivah?

[B] How does the Holy One describe [verse 24] the actions of Moshe and Aharon at Merivah? Do you see a connection between the name Moshe called B'nei Yisrael the "curse" he experienced (dying before entering the Land)? Explain.

[C] At *Merivah*, did Moshe and Aharon live by the "the voice" or did they live by "the sword"? Explain your answer.

4. Aharon dies at Mount Hor. Before he dies, however, Moshe takes Aharon and Elazar up on the mountain and anoints Elazar to succeed Aharon as high priest.

[A] Imagine you are the son of a priest who was alive and saw everything that happened that day on Mount Hor. Write an entry in your diary or journal describing what you saw, how you felt about it, what everyone was saying back at the camp, and how it affected the community.

[B] Write a "eulogy" for Aharon, listing and commenting on the major events of his life, from childhood on. Be creative, but try not to get too far away from the Bible. Smith's Bible Dictionary should be of help. You may also want to look in the Encyclopedia, or in other source material. Be prepared to share your eulogies for Aharon and for Miryam at the Shabbat table.

5. In chapter 21 of Numbers, three kings make war against B'nei Yisrael. When attacked by them, Israel has no choice but to use the sword. But the battle, and the victory in that battle, was not won by the sword. It was won by "the voice".

[A] Who were the three kings who attacked Israel in today's aliyah?

[B] What were the three nations or kingdoms of which these men were kings?

[C] Re-read Exodus 23:20-23. List the things the Holy One had promised to do for B'nei Yisrael in connection with battles they would encounter on their way to the Land.

[D] According to the passage in Exodus, what were the conditions for these promises?

6. Soon B'nei Yisrael again begins to murmur and complain.

[A] List the complaints that are made this time.

[B] What form of judgment does the Holy One send?

[C] Look up the word translated "snakes" [KJV "serpents"] in Strongs and Gesenius. What is the Hebrew word? What is the root word? Look up the root

word and write its meaning.

[D] On what two previous occasions has the snake/serpent played a part in Torah?

[E] Look up snake and/or serpent in the Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols and/or in a book on dream interpretation. What do you think a snake/serpent symbolizes?

[F] What adjective is used in verse 6 to describe the snakes/serpents? Look up this word in Strong's and Gesenius and write the Hebrew word and its meaning.

[G] What events led to the giving by the Holy One of an "antidote"?

[H] What "antidote" was given?

[I] Was this what B'nei Yisrael had asked for? [Hint: look at the request made by B'nei Yisrael to Moshe in verse 7]

[J] What difference is there between what the people prayed for and what HaShem provided?

[K] What does this difference tell you about the character and motivation of the Holy One? Of the human heart?

7. The Haftarah we are reading is from the book called "Judges". In Judges 11:12-27, a conversation [through messengers] is taking place between two men.

[A] Who are the two men?

[B] What is the subject of the conversation-- what are these two men arguing about?

[C] In verse 27, who does *Yiftach* [Jephthah] say will "judge" between B'nei Yisrael and the surrounding nations [in this case, Ammon]?

[D] Look up the word which verse 27 translates as "judge". What is the Hebrew word, and what does it mean?

8. In Judges 11:14-23, *Yiftach* [Jephthah] chronicles, as a part of his discussion with the king of Ammon a number of events. All of these events took place during the wilderness wanderings, close to the end -- where we are today in the Torah -- and form part of the history of our fathers. How are these events being repeated today, in what we believe are the last days?

9. Also in today's Haftarah we see the half-Israelite, half-Canaanite *Yiftach* [Jephthah] at his best and at his worst -- in that order.

[A] What happened to Yiftach in verse 29 that caused him to be at his best?

[B] How do you explain what Yiftach did in verses 30-31.

[C] Do you think the Holy One was pleased with what Yiftach did in verses 30-31?

[D] Do you think what Yiftach did in those verses had any effect on what happened in verses 32-33 [Yes, you may read ahead just this once!]?

[E] What do you think led Yiftach to make such a rash vow to The Holy One?

[F] Do you think Yiftach had ever been taught Torah? Why or why not?

[G] Why do you think the Holy One gave Yiftach success in his war against the Ammoni'm [Ammonites]?

10. In today's reading from the B'rit Chadasha, Yeshua continues his conversation with Nicodemus, the Pharisee who has come to Him by night. Yeshua discusses the effect the coming into the world of the Torah [first at Sinai in tables of stone, now in living form as Yeshua Himself] is having on people.

... the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

[Yochanan (John) 3:19-20]

[A] How does Yeshua describe the Torah?

[B] What is the "darkness" of which Yeshua speaks? [Remember, these remarks are addressed to a man who came to speak with Yeshua only under cover of "darkness"]

[C] What does Yeshua say people have loved more than the Light?

[D] What is His explanation as to why people have made this choice?

[E] Look up the words translated "works" and "evil" [KJV] at the end of verse 19. Write the Hebrew words and their definitions.

[F] What Hebrew words would probably have been used by Messiah instead of the Greek words (especially since this conversation was with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who spoke Hebrew and disdained Greek as a polluted language). Describe the Hebraic pictures those Hebrew words project.

[G] Having completed this exercise, what do you think Yeshua meant when He told Nicodemus that the "works/actions" of people are "evil/wicked"?

[H] Compare the "light" Yeshua is talking about with the "sound/Voice" discussed at the beginning of this study. Light is also energy. What is the connection between the "light" energy emitted by God us-ward and the "sound" energy emitted by God us-ward? [Hint: You may wish to read and meditate on the six verb-phrases of the Aharonic Blessing before you answer.]

*May you find your voice, and may you sing to the well of life;
and may you live by the voice and not the sword. And may His light flood your life.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 8:12-31

"I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge and discretion.

The fear of the Holy One is to hate evil;

Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.

Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom; I am understanding, I have strength.

By me kings reign, and rulers decree justice.

By me princes rule, and nobles, all the judges of the earth.

I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me.

Riches and honor are with me; enduring riches and righteousness.

My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.

I traverse the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice,

That I may cause those who love me to inherit wealth,

That I may fill their treasuries.

"The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way,

Before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting,

From the beginning, before there was ever an earth.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,

When there were no fountains abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled; before the hills, I was brought forth;

*While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields,
Or the primal dust of the world.*

When He prepared the heavens, I was there.

When He drew a circle on the face of the deep; when He established the clouds above;

*when He strengthened the fountains of the deep; when He assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters would not transgress His command,*

When He marked out the foundations of the earth,

Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman.

And I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him,

Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.