

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Chukat:** **Numbers 20:22 - 22:1**
 Haftarah: **Judges 11:28-33**
 B'rit Chadasha: **John 3:21**

Then Yisrael sang this song: 'Spring up, O Well! Sing with Us!'
[Numbers 21:17]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 8:32 -36;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 11, *Y'rushalayim* [Jerusalem]

Vayis'u miKadesh – And moving on from Kadesh ... *vayavo'u V'nei-Yisra'el kol-ha-edah Hor hahar* – the entire witness throng of B'nei Yisrael came to the mountain of Hor. Exodus 20:22.

After a season of seclusion in the Wilderness, we are about to become *relevant to the world* again. Other people, nations, and cultures have been able to ignore us for almost four decades, but that is about to radically change. We are finally coming up from our wilderness proving ground. Our presence will soon be felt in nations, villages, marketplaces, and pasturelands. Our 'great nation' mission has been tested in the realms of theory, theology, and personal discipline in the spiritual realm; it is now time for that mission to be tested in the much more demanding realm of physical contact, conversation, and space-sharing with people of other nations, ethnicities, cultures, religions, and worldviews. So ... what exactly is this new, higher level of 'relevance' going to mean? It means we are about to change the world. It means we are about to have a dramatic impact on every culture, nation, and ethnic group on the planet. Will that impact be for 'good' or for 'evil' in any given situation? That will depend on two factors: 1. How well we do at walking in the Torah; and 2. How others respond to us - and react to the things we, as the Holy One's 'model' nation, say, do, and project in the course of *sh'mar*-ing and *asah*-ing Torah's wise and beautiful *mitzvot*.

What Does 'Kingdom Relevance' Mean in Real Time?

Kingdom Relevance – *i.e.* the kind of relevance the Holy One has in mind for His People - is not for the faint of heart. Only people who have been gloriously redeemed from a house of bondage by the Holy One with a mighty Hand and an outstretched Arm, who have been forgiven much, and who for that reason love the Bridegroom-King much, can embrace the kind of relevance our Redeemer has ordained for us. Kingdom Relevance means that wherever we go we carry the

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heavy weight of knowing that, by reason of the Covenant the Creator of the Universe made with our forbearer Avraham, those from the nations who choose to *bless us* will be blessed. But we also carry the even heavier weight of knowing that those people and nations who choose instead to *curse us* will, alas, experience a far less desirable fate. We are ‘the people on the point of the spear’, so to speak. That is what *Kingdom Relevance* means.

How does this work in real time? Let me give you an illustration. Most of the world has heard how the coal miners of yesteryear carried a canary in a cage into the mines with them. The bird’s sweet singing indicated that all was well in the mine. But if the canary stopped singing – or worse – this meant that the toxic levels of carbon monoxide had accumulated, and everyone was in serious danger from something they could not even see, hear, smell, taste, or feel. We, Dear Ones, are the Kingdom of Heaven’s version of a *caged canary*. We do not work in mines – we work in neighborhoods, towns, cities, geographical regions, cultures, and societies. As the caged canary was the toxic gas detector in the mines, so are we the *noxious atmosphere detectors* in the world. The first indicator that a society has become unfit for human habitation is for us to stop singing our sweet song of praise to the Holy One. Our distress is fair warning to all that a slow, silent killer is at work in the region, the culture, the society, and the nation. That is what it means to be chosen as ‘the people on the point of the spear’ of the Holy One’s Grand Redemptive Plan for mankind and Creation. This is Kingdom Relevance.

Put another way, we constitute the ‘plumb line’ that the Holy One drops into every society to separate the people with whom He can work via reward from those with whom He must work through tough discipline. We therefore have to live by different standards than other people. If we are not distinct from the people around us – at least in the ways spelled out for us in Torah - we lose our ‘edge’. We lose our ‘canary song’. And when that happens, for as long as it continues, the world *around us slowly starts a death spiral*.

In order to for us to become who we are created to be and to do what we are created to do in the world we have to let the Holy One train us in the intricacies of being *effective caged canaries*. That is where the Torah comes in. We do not need to follow the Torah to gain the Holy One’s favor. We have that already, solely by virtue of the covenant. Torah is the Holy One’s essential ‘*How To Be The Effective, Productive Caged Canary You Were Created to Be*’ Manual.

Observing the Sabbath and the Holy One’s *mo’edim* is an essential part of our assigned *caged canary behavior*; and so is remaining thankful and joyful and at *shalom* in the face of disappointment, provocation, and persecution. Refraining

from eating unclean things is part of our assigned *caged canary behavior*; and so is refusing to listen to or repeat *lashon hara*, complaints, and accusations of wrongdoing.

Refusing to make, venerate, or to bow down to graven images or worship the false gods served by the other peoples of the world is an important part of our assigned caged canary behavior; and so is loving the Holy One our God with all our heart, soul, and strength, *sh'ma*-ing His Voice, *sh'mar*-ing His Covenant, and *asah*-ing all His wise instructions for life on planet earth. Honoring our fathers and our mothers is a critical part of our assigned *caged canary behavior*; and so is cleaving only to one mate, with whom we constantly pursue greater and greater degrees of unity of thought, speech, and behavior. Using honest scales and measures in business dealings is an essential part of our assigned *caged canary behavior*; and so is loving our neighbor as we ourselves have been loved by the Bridegroom-King, forgiving men's sins as our sins have been forgiven by the Holy One, and caring in practical ways for the poor, the widow, the fatherless, and the foreigner among us as we ourselves are consistently cared for in practical ways by the Creator of the Universe. Jealously guarding the privileges and responsibility of *tahor* [i.e. whole, clean] status is an important part of our assigned *caged canary behavior*; and so is zealously pursuing the Kingdom of Heaven of Heaven and its description of righteousness. Refraining from *occult practices is part of our assigned caged canary behavior*; and so is trying to manipulate, control, oppress, or 'use' other people for our own ends. Choosing to follow Torah's clear instructions to refrain from getting our God-designed skin pierced, tattooed, or from disfiguring our hair in any way, is a powerful part of our assigned *caged canary behavior*; and so is choosing to refrain from self-obsessed or fleshly indulgent behaviors that demean in the eyes of the world the superior pleasures of knowing, communing with, following, and serving our Glorious Bridegroom-King. These things, and so many more set forth in Torah, are designed to set us apart from the peoples and nations around us. They are designed to make us 'canary-like'. And if we ever quit singing our canary song, it means that there is something very, very toxic and dangerous going on for the world.

Our Calling As the 'People on the Point of the Spear'

The things the Holy One has us do in this world will inevitably get people's attention. They are supposed to. We are his *advance men* – those who proclaim, with words and lifestyle: ***Panei derech Adonai*** – i.e. *prepare the way of the Holy One!* We are not supposed to be anonymous. We are not supposed to be hidden – at least for long. We are supposed to be the canary in the cage for the cultures of the world – and if they refuse to see us that way, we quickly become their elephant in the room. We can try to live quiet, peaceful lives, or even fit in, all we want –

the people around us simply cannot let that happen. Our mere presence will eventually demand a response.

How will people respond to us? Ah, that is a weighty matter. As the Holy One declared to Avram: *V'avarechah mevaracheicha umekaleleicha a'or* – i.e. *and I will bless those who bless you, and he who will curses you I will curse*. **Genesis 12:3**. As it goes for the Covenant People of the Holy One, therefore, so it goes for the cultures in which they live. Some people groups we encounter, of course, fixate on the differences between us and them. They ignore our shared humanity. They forget our common ancestry. They suffer from covenant envy. They cannot handle our wholeness and *shalom*. They want us to be selfish, covetous, vexed, angry, anxious, and soul-numb like they are. They want us to curse like they curse, to hate like they hate, and to party like (and when) they party. They want us to get easily seduced, deceived, and outraged by the same things that seduce, deceive, and outrage them. They want us to fear like they fear, and to suffer like they suffer – just a whole lot more. They feel intimidated by our relationship with the Creator. Such people tend to react to our presence in their world by gnashing their teeth at us. They mock our love of the Holy One. They despise our Sabbaths, our special Kingdom diet, and our Torah-prescribed ways. They refuse the blessing the Holy One seeks to give them through us. They make up and publish ridiculous blood-libels about us – and thoroughly convince each other they are true. They blame us for all their problems – indeed pretty much for every problem that has ever existed in the world. They fantasize about driving us into the sea. They harass us. They hurl insults and epithets – and occasionally stones or missiles – at our wives and children. They call us pigs and apes - or ‘dirty Jews’. They threaten – and try to incite - all sorts of atrocities against us. They teach their children that we are subhuman – *pigs, apes, vermin, and dogs* and so forth and so on.

The people and people groups who respond to our presence in the manners just described, however, are the *moderates*. We have to learn to deal with them – and walk and work calmly and kindly – albeit carefully – alongside them every day. We have to get over the pathological fleshly desire to be loved or appreciated – or at least understood - by them for who we are or for what we are called by the Creator of the Universe to do. We have to walk a fine line – the narrow path of Torah. We have to hold tightly to our Bridegroom-King’s Hand, stay in step with His every movement, and *sh'ma* His every whisper. From time to time these folk will get in a frenzy, will beat war drums, will rattle sabers, and will make wild threats of annihilation. A few radicals among them will respond to the incitement and engage in actual attacks. There will be some broken windows. There will be a few bloody noses. There will be some vandalized cemeteries. There will be some defaced synagogues. There will, alas, even be a few premature funerals. But by

and large the people in this group are mostly just making noise. By and large we are more on the sharp edge of their tongues than we are on the actual point of their spears.

Other people groups we are called to encounter, however, tend to take a far more violent tact. They plot. They scheme. They conspire. They propagandize. And then they attack. Most of them are cowards, so they attack innocents – especially our women, our children, our aged, and our infirm. Some attack with stealth, sneaking into our camps and taking prisoners. Others mount armies and come at us with full frontal assault. With regard to these people and nations, we have to get used to *being on the point of the spear* at all times.

Our assigned task is to deal with each people group, and each level of hostility, humbly, calmly, wisely, and honorably. Over-reactions to offensive talk or aggressive – or even violent - behavior from these people are not something we have the luxury of indulging. We have to be wise as serpents, even as we remain harmless as doves. We have to learn to deal with each person – and each culture – and each threat or attack - in a way that will both bring honor and glory to, and reveal the Great Kindness and Goodness, of our King. Vengeance is not our portion. Wrath and judgment are not supposed to be our gift to the world. We have to learn to never speak, behave, or react in any way that would push any of these hostile groups into the darkest, most ominous reaches of the ‘wrong’ side of the Holy One’s ‘plumb line’. If the people we make uncomfortable just by being who we are called to be and doing what we are called to do cross the plumb line into the ‘those that curse you’ realm, that is their business. Our task however is to be very, very careful not to step out of the assigned roles the Holy One has given us and precipitate their movement with our own misconduct. That is why indulging offense, unforgiveness, anger, outrage, panic, or paranoia are all so totally inconsistent with our calling - and counter-productive to our assigned mission on earth. So are complaining, whining, pointing fingers, and causing and/or getting caught up in drama. So are pontificating, proselyting, propagandizing, and exaggerating. So are any hint of disrespect for life – including the lives of our enemies - and anything remotely resembling or which they can interpret as spousal abuse, child abuse, or substance abuse. So are arrogance, boasting, chest thumping, or grandstanding. So is deception, dishonesty, and any manifestation of greed. So are deception, manipulation, and any kind of harassment, incitement, or oppression. So are angst and depression and despair. And so are coarse talk, giving in to lust, or engaging in any perverse form of sexuality. We have to learn to see every challenge we face and every attack the Holy One allows against us as training protocols – protocols that can be used to help us *sharpen our skills of Covenant lifestyle*, sweeten the sound of the canary song He has placed on our

tongues, and steady the shaking of the great plumb line.

How are you coming with the development of these things? The Holy One wants you to know. So ... first test of the new season, coming right up.

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 Hor² 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:

² *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.

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

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*.

The Appointed Time For the 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*. Circumstances – often including the death of aging parents – requires a generation of hyper-emotional young people to start the process of maturing into patriarchs and matriarchs, elders and statesmen. Being called, they always discover, is relatively easy. The real challenge is *living responsibly* within the parameters of the calling they have received in its aftermath. Great stories of personal, generational, and national calling 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 Timotheos to take over his role as prophet to the nations with these words:

*O Timotheos! 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*³. 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 Noah. In discussing with Noah 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: *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”.

When People Under the Influence of the Serpent Attack Us ...

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 living⁴. 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

³ Asaf is *alef, samech, feh soft*. Strong’s Hebrew word #622, it is pronounced *aw-saf*

⁴ 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.”

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. 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 *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. Beware the dark energy of isolation, 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 mimeinu 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 Arad⁵. 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*', 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.

⁵ 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]**

Aradians 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. Please keep in mind, therefore, that the men and women who actually perpetrate the attacks on us are merely pawns themselves. 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 or morality; 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 *could 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*⁶. 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.

⁶ Charem is *chet, resh, mem sofit*.

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-eretz 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.

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'nafshenu 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?

Okay, all tongue-in-cheek sarcasm aside, please note if you will 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 hameraglim* [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 of the Redeemed!

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 fiery serpents 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' that 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 pole⁷. 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 of the noun *seraf* 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 *sarafim*. In English Bibles you probably have seen this word transliterated into English as '*seraphim*'. Now are you getting the picture? *Seraphim* 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. *Seraphim* 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 such as 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.

⁷ 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'.

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*. Hmmmmn. 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 nachash nechoshet

Moshe made a copper snake

vayesimeihu al ha-nes

and he placed it on a 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*. 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. Today's aliyah introduces us to a new place – the mountain called Hor.

[A] When our ancestors reached the next location in our journey around Edom, what word comes from the Holy One?

[B] What is the reason stated by the Holy One for the instructions he gives at this location?

[C] What “name” did Moshe [with Aharon's apparent agreement] call B'nei Yisrael at Meribah?

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

[E] At Merivah, did Moshe and Aharon live by the “the voice” or did they live by “the sword”? Explain your answer.

2. Aharon dies in today's aliyah. Before he dies, Moshe takes Aharon and Eleazar up on Mount Hor and anoints Eleazar 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.

3. In Numbers chapter 21 three kings of nations around Eretz Yisrael make war against B'nei Yisrael. When attacked Israel has no choice but to use the sword. But the battle, and the victory in that battle, were not won by the sword. They were won by “the voice”.

[A] Who were the three kings who attacked?

[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?

4. In verses 4-5 B'nei Yisrael again murmurs and complains.

[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 it's 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 the Holy One provided?

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

5. 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 what Yiftach did in verses 30-31 was the Holy One's Will?

[D] Do you think what Yiftach did in those verses had any effect on what happened in verses 32-33?

6. In today's B'rit Chadasha reading, Yeshua's discussion with Nicodemus will conclude.

[A] What does Yeshua say is the natural reaction of those who "do evil" to the coming of the light?

- [B] Why will those who do evil not come to the light?
[C] Who does Yeshua say willingly comes into the light?
[D] Why does Yeshua say that people come into the light?

*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.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 8:32-36

*Now therefore, listen to me, [my] children,
for blessed [are those who] keep my ways.
Hear instruction and be wise and do not disdain [it].
Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates,
waiting at the posts of my doors.
For whoever finds me finds life, and obtains favor from the Holy One;
But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul;
all those who hate me love death.*