

Shiur L'Yom Revi'i

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Chukat:*** **Numbers 20:1 – 13**
 Haftarah: **Judges 11:8-10**
 B'rit Chadasha: **John 3:16-18**

Then B'nei Yisrael, the entire witness-throng, came to the desert of Tzin

[Numbers 20:12(a)]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 8:1-11;

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

Vayavo'u V'nei-Yisra'el kol-ha-edah midbar-Tzin – *Then B'nei Yisrael, the entire witness throng, came to the desert of Tzin* Numbers 20:1a.

There has been a lot of death and dying in the camp since the *episode of the spies*. Four long decades spent languishing have etched the memory of that great national faith crisis in our collective DNA. Moshe and Aharon, Yehoshua and Kalev, and Elazar and Itamar, are all the only survivors of the great generation of the Exodus. In the place of those men's peer group has arisen a teeming, hungry horde – every member of which was under twenty years of age on that fateful *Tisha B'Av* in the year we left Sinai. We are older – but are we wiser? We will see about that.

It is springtime, and another new year is beginning. As we prepare to celebrate Passover once more, a great sense of destiny transition in the air. After nearly four decades in a holding pattern - provided for, watched over, and protected, but going nowhere - we are sensing that the time to move on from this watershed is drawing near. The Great Cloud of the Holy One's Presence seems to be lifting again. Yehoshua and Kalev are talking to the young men about what has to be done to prepare for a new journey with the Holy One. Elazar and Itamar are pressing the silver trumpets to their lips. The call for departure is sounding! Whatever awaits us beyond Paran – bring it on!

Arise Oh Holy One ... and May Your Enemies Be Scattered!

All around the camp people are busy pulling up tent pegs, stowing gear, and getting ready to sally forth again! At the center of the camp thousands of descendants of Levi are scrambling to get the *Mish'kan* broken down into its component parts. They will pack the ark, the shulchan, the menorah, the golden altar, the bronze laver and the brazen altar, with all their utensils, carefully – then we will be ready to move. Miryam is humming. Aharon is weeping tears of joy.

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Soon Moshe will lead us in the declaration: *Kumah Adonai v'yafutzu oyveicha* [Arise, O Holy One, and may your enemies be scattered!'] And off we will go.

Our season of self-imposed irrelevance in the desert of Paran is at an end. Enough of the 'wild donkey of a man' spirit of Yish'mael! Enough of his 'against every other man' orientation to life! Enough being manipulated by fearmongering and hatemongering! Enough *testing the Holy One!* Enough *blaming our leadership for our own coldness of heart!* Enough *dissatisfaction!* Enough *depression!* Enough *'Rav Lachem' rhetoric!* It is time to overcome. It is time to transcend. It is time for a new set of challenges, in another section of the '*latter days wilderness*'² obstacle course.

Time For A Restart – And A Different Kind of Challenge

While locked away in Yishma'el's World these many years we have been hidden, secluded, and protected from interaction with other people groups. Alas, we spent most of the *Parana years* sitting in sand-encrusted ivory towers, reclining in the seat of the scornful, judging everything and everybody. We thought we were ready to follow the Bridegroom-King Who redeemed us from bondage in Egypt and walk in His Ways to Hell and back – or at least to the Promised Land; but we found out quickly how shallow and shakable our commitment to Him – not to mention our attention span – were. The serpent ate our lunch. He 'had us' at the first whisper of murmur and complaint. Once we fell for that trick, he knew he could make us fly off into angst, outrage, or Paranoia – and lose sight of our mission and High Calling - at the slightest suggestion of interpersonal or political drama. We thus fell not only for the initial distraction of *murmur and complaint*, but also for his other tricks - indulgence of fleshly appetites and desires: sentimentality - and selective memory – about the way things 'used to be' in the 'good old days'; self-consciousness; paranoia; pessimism about the future; blame and slander of human leaders; doctrinal side-choosing; political/ideological polarization; sarcasm; cynicism; insubordination; civil disobedience; rebellion. Whew – what a toxic brew of distraction we have drunk!

So ... have we finally gotten the narcissistic negativity out of our system? Are we finally ready to deal with *real people*, with *real issues*, in the *real world* – without overreacting, freaking, raging, and losing our *shalom, simchah*, and sense of destiny at the drop of a turban? Are we ready to face *real* confrontations? To face *real resistance*. To face *real seasons of deprivation?* To face *real rejection?* To

² The *former days wilderness obstacle course* that the Holy One has designed to bring maturity to the Redeemed of the Holy One is prophetically patterned for us by the journey of the Exodus generation from Egypt to Sinai. The *latter days wilderness obstacle course*, on the other hand, is prophetically patterned for us by the journey of the rearranged camp from Sinai to the Jordan River.

face real mockery? To face real threats of violence? To face real persecution? Are we ready to endure the abduction and brainwashing of our little ones? To be called vile names, stalked mercilessly by terrorists, and to be attacked by vastly superior armies? Are we ready to be forced into wars for our very survival? Are we ready to face and overcome sorcery and witchcraft? Are we ready to be seduced with the most beautiful things the world has to offer? Are we ready to stay calm, stay on mission and assigned task, and finally start to have a real Kingdom Impact on the angry offended ones, on the sensuality obsessed ones, and on the wounded and suffering ones of the nations? Are we ready to deal calmly and wisely with the oppressors - and on the oppressed – of the world? With the strong – and the weak? With the rich – and the poor? With the intellectual and educated – and the ignorant and naïve? With the bitter – and the broken? With the materialistic – and the deprived? With the movers and the shakers – and the hopeless, the helpless, the homeless? With the seducers – and the seduced and enslaved? With the controlling people in the world – and the easily deceived and manipulated masses? With the 99 - and the 1? We will see, Dear Ones!

Are We Ready for Relevance?

It will be nice to see some new terrain - and some new faces – right? But ... *are we ready for this? Are we finally ready to become relevant to the world again? We found out shortly after leaving Egypt that simply being gloriously redeemed does not automatically make a person into either a faithful servant of or a credible witness for the Holy One. More recently, since leaving Sinai, we have found that simply being betrothed to the Bridegroom-King, and spending a season sitting under His Shade and basking in His love, does not automatically make a person a faithful servant of or a credible witness for Him either. The lessons we have learned along the way have been hard lessons. But they were absolutely critical for our calling and our mission. We had to learn that, despite all we have received from and learned about the Holy One, our ‘chosen nation’ flesh/old man is still every bit as stubborn and self-obsessed as any ‘gentile’ flesh/old man that we will ever encounter. We had to learn that, despite our being sons and daughters of Avraham, our ‘chosen people’ tongues remain every bit as sharp, cruel, and deadly as any taskmaster’s whip we experienced in the house of bondage.*

After all, these ‘*light to the nations*’, ‘*salt to the earth*’, and ‘*kingdom of kohanim*’ callings the Holy One has given us do not tend to make our lives a walk in the park. The lifestyle we are called to model to the world is definitely not for the faint of heart. We are *the special ops forces of the Kingdom of Heaven*. We are called to live on *the front lines of our Bridegroom-King’s Kingdom advance* against the kings and kingdoms - and the strongmen and strongholds - of this world. Our assigned place is always going to be at *the edge of the sword*, and at *the point of*

the spear. We had to learn that, if we are going to carry the wonderful redemptive plan of our Bridegroom-King to the nations of the world in an honorable and appropriate way, our flesh simply has to die - and our critical spirit simply has to be sentenced to silence forever.

Because we have allowed our attitudes, our speech, and our behavior to become far too toxic to carry our Bridegroom-King's love story to the nations, for a season He had to isolate us from all outside contact. We were slow learners – so our season of isolation lasted a whopping 38 years! The Holy One had to isolate us from outside contact – for our own sake, for the sake of the Grand Redemptive Plan, and for the sake of the nations to whom He desires to send us. If we had gone to the nations with the level of self-obsession, flesh-manipulation, and verbal toxicity that we were carrying around, we would have accomplished the exact opposite of what the Holy One has in mind for the tikkun process. So, the question on the table is: Are we now finally ready to be *thankful, joyful, and peaceful – even in the face of tests and trials*? Are we now at last ready to be *humble, respectful, and kind – even in the face of irritations, aggravations, provocations, and persecutions*? Are we now ready to be *patient, gentle, and selfless – even in the face of temptations and tribulations*? Can we now actually be trusted to interact with the nations of the world – the ones before whom we have been called by our Bridegroom-King to shine like candles in the darkness? Is our flesh really dead? And is our critical and judgmental spirit really ready to rest in peace?

What Lies Ahead for Us? And for the Nations?

Not since our toxic knee-jerk reaction to the majority report of the spies almost four decades ago have we once been allowed to set foot out of Yish'mael's world. Ever since we ran away from Kadesh-Barnea with our tail tucked between our legs the Holy One has had us wandering around the same little patch of desert – i.e. the desert floor surrounding the *Wadi Paran*. But now it is finally time for us to take our leave from the crazy, mixed-up world of Hagar the contentious shrew and Yish'mael the wild donkey of a man. Next stop - the broad patch of desert floor surrounding the wadi called *Tzin*. What awaits us in the valley of *Tzin* – and beyond? We are about to find out. The first verse of today's aliyah reads:

Vayavo'u b'nei-Yisra'el

Then went forth the descendants of Israel,

kol ha-edah midbar-Tzin

the entire witness-throng, into the Desert of Tzin

b'chodesh ha-rishon v'yeshev ha-am b'K'desh

in the first month, and the nation encamped at K'desh.

[Numbers 20:1]

Out of the frying pan, into the fire! The Holy One is taking us out of the land of Hagar and Yish'mael – but into the land of another very difficult person to live with and love – our estranged kinsman Esav! Welcome to the world of our namesake Yisrael's greatest nemesis. Perhaps someone should put a pot of lentils on to boil. I mean ... just in case that troublesome old birthright issue should happen to rear its ugly head again or something.

What awaits us here in Esav's land? The key is found in three Hebrew phrases in the opening verse of our aliyah. The key Hebrew phrases I am talking about are “**b'chodesh ha-rishon**” [i.e. in the first month], **midbar Tzin** [i.e. the desert of Tzin] and “**b'k'desh**” [i.e. in/at K'desh]. Let's look at these phrases one by one.

B'chodesh ha-Rishon [In the First Month]

The Holy One does not specifically say “*and 38 years passed*” in so many words. But pass they have. Like Rip Van Winkle we lay down to sleep – and rose up to a whole new world. How do we know thirty-eight years passed by without so much as a footnote of warning, you ask? We know this because later in this same chapter we will learn about *Aharon's death* at Mount Hor, proximally in time to Miryam's death. But wait - in *parsha Massei* [see Numbers 33] we will be told explicitly that *Aharon died in the fifth month of the fortieth year*³. Since Miryam died four months earlier than Aharon, in the second month of the 40th year after the Exodus, that means the ‘first month’ referenced in Numbers 20, verse 1, has to be the *first month of the fortieth year after the Exodus*.

As we start our aliyah for the day we are – unbeknownst to us – only one new moon away from surrendering our beloved prophetess Miryam into the arms of death. The timing of today's aliyah then has to be the beginning of the year the “second generation” of the Redeemed will, under Y'hoshua [Joshua], finally enter the land promised to their fathers⁴. Between the last verse of yesterday's aliyah and the first verse of today's aliyah, therefore, 38 years have elapsed – and most of the generation of the Exodus have died in the desert. Why did they all die? It was not from hunger, for the manna did not fail to fall from heaven. It was not from thirst, for water did not cease to flow from the Rock. It was not from getting lost in the desert, for at no time did the Pillar of Fire and of Cloud cease to lead them in their wanderings. Their sandals did not even wear out. So why did they all die? They all died because their community *psyche* was simply too full of Egyptian

³ See Numbers 33:38: *Then Aharon the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the Holy One, and died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month.*

⁴ *Sefer Y'hoshua* [The Book of Joshua] tells us that the Community crossed the Jordan *at flood stage ... during the harvest*. **Joshua 3:15**. Immediately thereafter the people celebrate *Pesach*. Hence the events we read about today took place almost exactly one year before the crossing of the *Yardin* [Jordan].

nonsense to ever comprehend - much less apprehend - that for which they had been apprehended by the Holy One. They died because the Bridegroom's beautiful bridal chamber – and the idea of being the chosen Bride of the Creator of the Universe - simply *ceased to inflame their passions*. And so it was that over the course of 38 years the sand in the hourglass slowly ran out for everyone else who was over 20 years old at the time of the *chet meraglim* [sin of the spies]. Oh Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam are still with us – at least for the moment. And perhaps one or two stubborn old graybeards and grandmothers are still hanging around somewhere in the camp. But alas we know that even these will leave us soon.

Just as the Holy One told us after the *chet meraglim* [sin of the spies] our wandering in the desert of Paran would be *for forty years – one year for each of the forty days* [the 12 spies] *explored the land*⁵. Those 40 years are finally nearing an end. But weep not. Even as those we have been reading about since Exodus 1 are passing away a generation is arising, and a *new era* of destiny for the Community of the Redeemed is about to begin.

Vayavo'u ... Midbar Tzin

[and (the descendants of Israel) came to the Desert of Tzin]

We have discussed the *chronology/timing* of our *parsha ha-shavua*. Now let us discuss its *geography*. Ever since we left Kadesh Barnea with our tail tucked between our legs 38 long years ago we have been wandering around the same little patch of desert – the desert of *Paran*. The Cloud has moved several times over that period of time - but it has never moved very far. Never in 38 years since the sin of the spies have we once left Yish'mael's world. During this period the Holy One has kept us safe from harm and fed us with Manna – but if it has seemed like we were *going in circles* and *getting nowhere* ever since we threatened to stone Kaleb and Y'hoshua to death for suggesting we go up into the land of Promise and possess it as the Holy One had told us to do, well ... that is because that is pretty much exactly what has happened!

Korach's rebellion – and its disastrous aftermath – took place in the desert of Paran – the desert we have in these studies come to know as *Yish'mael's world*. The prophetic sign of Aharon's rod was given in this same region. The Holy One's instructions regarding the process through which reconciliation between the house of Aharon and the rest of the Community of the Redeemed was to occur were spoken to us in this desert as well.

As we have discussed, the Holy One has had us *totally isolated* out here. It has been a little like solitary confinement. From the account of Torah of our activities

⁵ See Numbers 14:32-35.

in this area it appears that we have not encountered a single person from a foreign land since the Emori responded to our presumptuous attack by driving us out of Kadesh-Barnea. In almost four decades since then we have not bothered our neighbors ... and they haven't bothered us. Even Yish'mael's cantankerous descendants have left us completely alone. We have spent almost four decades wandering around some of the driest, most uninhabitable parts of the desert between the Sinai Peninsula and the land of Kena'an. There is hardly enough natural water or food or pasture in this stretch of desert to sustain a large family, much less a nation. Only by virtue of the manna that has fallen from Heaven and the water that has poured forth from a supernatural Rock have we been able to *survive* here. But survive we have. We have mastered the concept of *survival mode*. Simply surviving has constituted the sum total of what we have accomplished here in Yish'mael's world. As a result we have given no other human being on the planet any reason whatever to consider us a threat or be concerned in the least about our existence or our presence. Why should anybody bother us? In the eyes of the rest of the world we have *become totally irrelevant*. Toxicity, negativity, and temper do that to people. But suddenly all that appears to be ending. The cloud is lifting again, and this time it is heading in the direction of the *Edomi* [*i.e.* the descendants of Esav] the Ammoni and Moavi [the descendants of Lot], and of course more of the seemingly omnipresent Emori [Amorites] and Midyani [Midyanites]. Good-bye *Paran* – scene of monumental failures. Good-bye burial ground of the generation of the Exodus. Good-bye fathers and mothers of blessed memory. The time has come for us to *move on*. We are finally leaving Yish'mael's world – and entering the world of his nephew *Esav*.

B'k'desh [*i.e. at/in K'desh*]

In a poetic sense we have, it seems, come full circle. Thirty-eight years ago at a place called *K'desh* [*i.e. K'desh Barnea*] our fathers sent the spies into the land⁶. There, those whom the Holy One had redeemed from bondage with an outstretched arm and great miracles said “No thank you” to the bridal chamber that the Holy One had prepared for us as His Bride-to-be. The same men who walked as free men out of Egypt, who strolled dry-shod through the parted waters at the Sea of Reeds and heard the Voice of the Holy One thunder from Mount Sinai, decided they would rather die in the desert than enter the land the Holy One promised and face the “giants” that dwelt there.

That was a *long, long time* – and *a whole lot of death in the desert* - ago. Now we find ourselves led by the pillar of fire and cloud to another place called *Kadesh*. A new generation now stands poised on the brink of destiny – in much the position of

⁶ There are contrary opinions regarding whether the Kadesh in the desert of *Tzin* is the same place as the *Kadesh-Barnea* near the Desert of *Paran*, where the sin of the *spies* occurred.

our fathers almost four decades previously.

What our fathers did ‘*b’Kadesh*’ represents one of the greatest failures of our nation’s history. We now stand ‘*b’Kadesh*’ again. The question is what will we as a “new generation” do with OUR “*b’K’adesh*” moment? Will we make *tikkun* [repair] for the sin of our parents there? Will we be more “worthy” of the land than were our parents? Will we demonstrate superior spirituality?

Notice that after leaving the desert of Paran we actually walked quite a while without resorting to the flesh default of murmuring and complaining. Well, until Miryam died, that is. Then the same putrid flesh that had consistently plagued our fathers – and the same critical spirit that had taken over the vocal cords and tongues of our mothers – rose up and did its thing to us as well.

The Apple Doesn’t Fall Far From the Tree

The new generation has a distinct advantage over the previous one – never having been seduced or deceived by the prosperity and high level of culture of Egypt. But *advantage* does not by any means equate to superiority. The new generation, often called the “Joshua Generation”, is no more spiritual than the previous generation - as we find out right off the bat, here at Kadesh. The only reason the new generation will enter and possess the land is that *the Holy One wills it*, and will bring it to pass.

The new generation, you see, *simply does not have all the options the previous generation had* – the Holy One has seen to that. All this generation has ever known is wandering in the desert – and hence, all it will want is to *find a place to settle down, with orchards, vineyards, and grain fields* instead of constantly shifting desert sands. The Holy One has actually created *a hunger* for Eretz Yisrael in them - by denying it to their unenthused parents. All things work together for good for those who love the Holy One, who are called according to His purpose.

So ... what will the “Joshua Generation” do at Kadesh? Let’s read the account given by Torah and find out, shall we?

*... and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miryam died there, and was buried there.
There was no water for the congregation:
and they assembled themselves together against Moshe and against Aharon.*

Does that sound painfully familiar so far? Let’s keep reading:

*The people strove with Moshe, and spoke, saying,
“O, would that we had died when our brothers died before the Holy One!
Why have you brought the assembly of the Holy One into this wilderness,
that we should die there, we and our animals?”*

*Why have you made us to come up out of Mitzrayim to bring us in to this evil place?
It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates;
neither is there any water to drink.*

[Numbers 20:1-5]

Ouch! Please beware, fathers and mothers, what kinds of statements you allow to slip out of your mouths. Whatever you speak will inevitably, in time, come out of your sons'/daughters' mouths as well.

The “Joshua Generation”, it turns out, is a whole lot like the “Moshe Generation”. Like fathers, like sons. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. If, when, and to the extent the “Joshua Generation” forgets who it is here to serve and walks according to the attitudes and appetites of its flesh; and if, when, and to the extent it yields its organs of speech to the critical spirit, this generation is no more – or less – worthy of the land than the previous generation. It is time to learn that lesson, and learn it well. Every generation must die to the flesh. Every generation must silence the critical spirit. No person, in any generation, can fulfill the great calling of *kedoshim* [holy ones] – or indeed accomplish anything significant in the Kingdom of Heaven - by operating in the flesh or by giving voice to a critical spirit.

Miryam Died There, and Was Buried There

It is now the appointed time of the Holy One for us to say goodbye to our beloved friend *Miryam the prophetess*. The little girl who kept watch like a mother eagle over the baby Moshe as he floated down the Nile in a wicker basket to an uncertain fate is about to leave us. The earthly tabernacle of the passionate lady who *in her late eighties* took timbrel in hand and led over a million women in a prophetic dance on the desert floor alongside the Sea of Reeds - and thereby taught all mankind the dynamics of corporate worship ‘in spirit and in truth’ – is about to go the way of all flesh.

Miryam's passing will be without much fanfare. Indeed all we are told about the event is “*And there Miryam died, and there she was buried*”.

The sages and storytellers of Israel have handed down the legend that Miryam's prophecy and her singing unto the Holy One had brought about the supernatural flow of water that followed us through our desert wanderings, and that, when she died, the water stopped flowing. They picture her as singing sweet songs of praise to the Holy One all along the way – causing subterranean springs emanating from the Rock of Horeb to burst forth and water the floor of the desert in harmony with her songs. Hence, it was at her death, the sages say, that the people found that “*there is no water.*” Perhaps it is so. It is at least a lovely legend. But, for us, it brings up an important question: *Who supplies us living water?* Who is in our *hydration up-line?* On whom can – and should – we depend on to provide us with

the sweet elixir of life?

Whence Cometh Water?

The word our English Bibles translate as water is *mayim*⁷. Remember that the Creation account of Torah tells us that *mayim* is one of the three ingredients that the Holy One used to create man – along with *the eretz* (the uncontaminated soil of the first week of Creation) and *the Ruach* (His own breath). The upshot of this is that Holy One created the human species to need and desire all three of the elements He used in their creation. The most physical and immediate of these needs/desires is the thirst for *mayim* (water). Man simply cannot live for any time at all without water.

But the source of water is not – cannot be - man, any more than man is or can be the source of the uncontaminated soil of the Tree of Life, or of the *Ruach* of the Holy One. The Holy One alone decides where water is deposited, and where it is absent. **Genesis 1:9**. May we therefore never make the mistake of looking to any political or religious leader for *mayim*, or for the *Ruach*, or for the *eretz* in which the Tree of Life is planted. Does water come to us from the merit of a sage, or prophet, or prophetess? Or does it come from the Holy One, by a sovereign act of grace, despite the lack of merit of ourselves or our leaders?

A good shepherd does not even pretend to produce water – all he does is lead his sheep “beside still waters” made available by the Holy One. See **Psalm 23**. It is to the Holy One we must go for *mayim*, and in Him alone that we must trust. It does no good to strive with the men who appear to be in charge over such an important need. This will be important to keep in mind in connection with the challenge Moshe is facing.

Moshe Has Another Meltdown

The next thing we encounter in this aliyah is the momentous ‘God-encounter’ which determines whether Moshe will – or will not - enter and possess Eretz Yisrael, the land of promise. The sequence begins with Moshe and Aharon praying regarding the water situation. The Holy One then gives Moshe some specific instructions regarding what to do about the sudden ‘water shortage’ in the camp. The Holy One is very specific:

*Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you, and Aharon your brother, and speak you to the rock before their eyes, that it give forth its water*⁸;

⁷ *Mayim* is *mem, yod, mem sofit*. Strong’s Hebrew word #432, it is pronounced *mah'-yim*.

⁸ At Refidim, before the revelation at Sinai, when the community had thirsted for water and complained, the Holy One had told Moshe, "*Strike the rock and water will come forth*" **Exodus 17:6**. Why now did the Holy One now instruct Moshe to speak to the rock instead of striking it? According to the sages, the key intervening fact is the giving of the Torah. The only method available to guide a person in the right path before the revelation at Sinai was to strike him harshly, as Pharaoh’s taskmasters had done – and the way

*and you will bring forth to them water out of the rock;
in this manner are you to give the witness throng and their cattle drink.*

[Numbers 20:8]

Do you notice the similarity in what the Holy One asked Moshe to do and what Rivkah [Rebecca] did for Avraham's servant in Genesis 24 - *i.e.* that which identified her as "Bride" material for the Holy One's child of promise? Avraham's servant came to the well and waited for the maidens of the city to come forth to draw water. The servant prayed that a girl would come and selflessly give him and all his camels water, and thereby show herself to be the 'right' one to wed the master's son. The one who came and did this was, of course, Rikvah.

Moshe is now given a similar opportunity. Like Rivkah, Moshe had the opportunity to give water to the people and their animals without complaint and without receiving anything in return. Selflessly. Humbly. Subserviently. Rivkah did, and became the mother of Israel.

This is Moshe's hour in the crucible. His life and his ability to lead the people into Eretz Yisrael hang in the balance. The "test" of Genesis 24 is laid out for him. Will Moshe *sh'ma* the words of the Holy One? Or will he instead follow the path of Adam and Chava and do 'what is right in his own eyes'?

What did Moshe do? Let's let Torah tell the story:

*He gathered the q'hal [assembly] together before the rock,
and he said to them, "Hear now, you mar'im⁹ [rebels];
shall we bring you forth water out of this rock?"*

*Then Moshe lifted up his hand, and struck the rock with his rod twice:
and water came forth abundantly, and the witness throng drank, along with their cattle.*

[Numbers 20:10-11]

Moshe has had another 'moment'. You know what I mean. I mean 'that kind' of a *moment*. I mean one of those moments we have where we hope the angels with the 'this is your life' spy-cams of Heaven aren't recording for posterity. I mean one of those moments we really, really hope we don't have played back for us – and the world – to see on the Day of Judgment. Yes, even Moshe has *that kind* of moments. This isn't the first time. Remember Numbers 11 [parsha *B'ha'alotcha*], where he said to the Holy One:

L'mah ha-re'ota l'avdeicha v'lamah lo-matzati chen b'eyneicha

parents do with children who disobey. After the Torah was given, however, the way to correct is not through striking, but through sincere and warm speech, correcting one with the words of Torah.

⁹ The word *mar'im* is derived from the verb root *marah, mem, resh, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #4784, pronounced *maw-raw'*, and defined by Strong's to mean: "to be contentious, be rebellious, be refractory, be disobedient towards, be rebellious against".

'Why are You treating me so badly? And why do You not like me anymore?

lasum et-masa kol-ha-am hazeh alay

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

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

I cannot be responsible for this entire nation!

ki chaved mimeini

It's too hard for me!

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

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

That, of course, is not by any means all. When Korach behaved so badly in Numbers 16 Moshe had another 'moment'. At that point Torah tells us Moshe became angry and prayed to the Holy One:

al-teifen el-minchatam

'Do not accept their offering [specifically, grain surrogate]!'

[Numbers 16:15 (a)]

Oooh. '*Do not accept their offering*'? That might not be the example of *intercession we need, folks!* Every time I read the '*al-tefen el-minchatem*' part of Moshe's rant I shudder. Moshe may have the authority to bind things on earth – but he does NOT have the authority to bind things in Heaven. He does not – and we do not – have the right to tell the Holy One whose offering – or faith confession, or praise, or halakah, or prayer – He can and cannot, or should and should not, accept. I instinctively brace to hear a few million angelic voices from Heaven shout "*Rav lachem, Moshe!*"

Oh, it is not that Moshe's temper-tantrums are, of course, understandable from a human perspective. Any temper tantrum can be justified if we look hard enough for a flesh-pleasing reason. Moshe has not lacked for provocation. I do not suggest that you or I could have done half as well or put up with half as much. But whether they are understandable or justifiable to the fallen human mind or not such outbursts are simply not the kind of thing that encourages the granting of additional authority in the Holy One's kingdom. They call it 'losing one's temper' for a reason. It is to have something one moment – and then lose it. That is not the kind of stewardship that the Holy One rewards with greater responsibility. While Moshe's repetitive tendency to indulge himself in 'moments' of self-wallowing at times when it is critical that the Holy One's glory is at the forefront of everyone's thoughts, will not, because of the Holy One's grace, lead to public censure punishment, it will cost Moshe the privilege of leading the Holy One's people into the land of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. As the last verse of today's reading puts it:

*Vayomer Adonai el-Moshe v'el-Aharon*¹⁰

Then the Holy One said to Moshe and Aharon,

*ya'an lo-he'emantem bi l'ha-k'disheni l'eynei b'nei Yisra'el*¹¹

'You were not faithful to sanctify Me in the sight of the Israelites!

lachen lo tavi'u et ha-k'hal hazeh

Therefore, you will not bring this assembly of called-out ones

el ha-aretz asher-natati lahem

to the land that I have given you.'

[Numbers 20:12]

Oh, Moshe. Oh Aharon. Oh Miryam. We will miss you more than you can imagine. We will always remember what you have done - how you taught us who the Holy One is, who we are in Him, and what the Covenant Lifestyle is all about. We will miss you terribly - but *we will go on* without you. We have simply *come too far to turn back now*. And a fire shut up in our bones burns hotter and hotter each day. And a voice from within that fire says *'Do not stop until you get to the land of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya'akov, and claim your inheritance.'*

Questions For Today's Study

1. Now let's answer some questions:

[A] Read the article on Miryam's life in Smith's Bible Dictionary or in the Encyclopedia. Write a one-page "eulogy" for her, recalling the important events her life. Look in the Siddur [prayerbook] for a prayer or blessing to speak over her death. Read the mourner's *Kaddish*.

[B] In Numbers 20:1, the Torah tells us that Miryam's death occurred in "the first month". What month [according to the Biblical Hebrew calendar] is that, and what festival(s) was/were to be observed in that month?

[C] According to Torah, what event in Miryam's life are we specifically told to remember/commemorate? Why?

2. Upon the death of Miryam the supernatural waters that the Holy One had made available to B'nei Yisrael throughout their recent wilderness wanderings ceased to flow, and the people began to grumble again. This water shortage led to the one of the most famous passages in Scripture – the scene where Moshe cursed the people,

¹⁰ The sages say that Aharon received the same sentence as Moshe, despite not being the one who struck the rock, because the act of striking was repeated. At first, they reason, Aharon might not have known what Moshe was about to do and could justifiably claim innocence. After Moshe struck the first time however Aharon did not protest. Admonishing Moshe that "*We were told to speak, not smite.*" Hence Aharon was also liable and equally punished.

¹¹ Note that had Moshe spoken to the rock the Holy One would have indeed been sanctified. Anyone who saw, say the sages, would have come to the conclusion: "*If a rock, which does not speak and does not hear, performs the Holy One's will, how much more so are we required to listen to Him!*"

calling them rebels, and angrily and arrogantly struck the rock from which the Holy One promised to bring forth water instead of speaking to it in the Holy One's Name, as directed.

The biggest tragedy in today's Torah, however, is not that Moshe and Aharon have forfeited their inheritance in the land of promise [the one in *this* world, that is]. The greatest tragedy involved what most people call the '*Joshua Generation*' – the sons and daughters of the people the Holy One redeemed from Egyptian bondage – the ones who would in fact enter into and possess Eretz Yisrael. I personally do not like to call this generation the '*Joshua Generation*'. I prefer to call them the '*Yitzchak Generation*'. Let me tell you why. In chapter 20, verses 3-5, Torah says: *The people strove with Moshe* The word our English Bibles translate as "strove" in this verse is *resh, yod, beit*, pronounced *roob*¹². It is a primitive verb root meaning to strive, to contend, physically and/or with words, to conduct a case or suit (i.e. to sue or lodge a formal complaint against), or to quarrel with someone. The first Biblical usage of this verb is interesting:

*And the herdsmen of Gerar did strive [ruwb] with Yitzchak's herdsmen,
saying, 'The water [is] ours'
And they dug another well, and strove [ruwb] for that also
[Genesis 26:20-21]*

Yitzchak [Isaac] was the "second generation" Patriarch. He went back to the places his father had sojourned, re-opened the wells his father had dug and made them useful again after they had been "stopped up" by the Ph'lishtim.

In today's aliyah 'the people' discussed are the second generation of the Holy One's Redeemed Community. Their fathers are all dead – having died in the desert, rather than enter into and possess the land of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, because of what happened at this very place. The children, now adults, return to the place their fathers sinned the decisive *chet ha-meraglim* [sin of the spies] – a place called *Kadesh*. A place by the same name is where they find themselves when Miryam dies.

38 years previously, in a place called *Kadesh*, the fathers of this generation sent out *ha-meraglim* – the spies. After hearing their report these folks' parents bowed their necks one last time against the Holy One and cast their vote to die in the desert rather than enter the land of Israel and face its inhabitants. The well their fathers knew – the well that provided water from a rock wherever they went, has dried up. Their fathers had not lacked for water here. What they had lacked was trust in the power of the Holy One's word and in the depth of the Holy One's commitment to do for them what He had promised.

¹² This is Strong's Hebrew word #7378, transliterated as *ruwb*.

Now it is time for the *Yitzhak generation* to “re-open” the well that their fathers knew, but not make the same mistakes their fathers made. They do not make a very good start.

[A] Where was the last place the Israelites complained about a lack of water?

[B] What happened at that place?

[C] What does the name of that place mean?

3. The Hebraic commentators state that Miryam’s death took place in the 40th year after the Exodus - within a year of the entry of B’nei Yisrael into *Eretz Yisrael*. Obviously, time is running out for everyone else who was over 20 years old at the time of the *chet ha-meraglim* [sin of the spies]. The question is what will happen to Moshe and Aharon - will they make it, and go into the land with Kalev and Y’hoshua? Or will their bodies be strewn across the desert like the generation of the *meraglim*? In today’s aliyah Moshe’s destiny is both “sealed” in heaven and revealed on earth.

[A] In what verse does Moshe find out the effect of the sin he commits in today’s aliyah?

[B] Write that verse and meditate on it.

[C] What does that verse tell you about the character and nature of the Holy One?

[D] Remember that Moshe wrote the Torah, including this passage. The sages tell us that Moshe specifically requested the Holy One for permission to put the details of this passage into the Torah. Why do you think he would do such a thing?

[E] What were the complaints of the people against Moshe and Aharon?

[F] What did Moshe and Aharon do in immediate response to those complaints?

[G] List, in order, the things the Holy One told Moshe to do “in order to give the congregation and their cattle drink”.

4. When Moshe returned to stand before the witness-throng [Heb. “*edah*”], he released his own personal fury on them, and called them a name.

[A] What name did he call them?

[B] What is the Hebrew word he used, and what does it mean?

[C] After calling the people this name, he asked them a question. Write the question.

[D] Assume you were an angel assigned to watch over the assembly, and heard Moshe ask this question. Can you write a response to Moshe’s question? Remember, an angel’s task is always to glorify the Holy One.

[E] What was the place where Moshe’s fate was sealed called?

[F] What does this Hebrew word mean?

5. In today's Haftarah reading B'nei Yisrael is under attack by Ammon. The search for a leader – a hero – to save the day has led to the hideout of a man named Yiftach, the son of a prostitute, toughened by rejection, and surrounded by a band of misfits and ne'er-do-wells. The very people who rejected and banished Yiftach from the Community now come to him, wanting to make him their “leader” to fight off the Ammon'im. Yiftach is skeptical to say the least. What do the elders of Israel say to Yiftach [Jephthah] to get him to come and help them?

6. In the B'rit Chadasha aliyah for today *Yochanan* [John] interrupts the record of the conversation Yeshua is having with Nicodemus with some very famous commentary – something the whole world knows simply as “John 3:16”.

*For the Holy One so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Okay. We all *know this verse*. We have *taught it to our children*. We have even *seen it painted on highway overpasses and tenement walls*. But *what does it mean?*

The true test of fidelity to the Holy One and His Word is not whether one can memorize and quote the four lines of John 3:16. The true test is *whether one can understand and interpret those four lines* in light of the context of the entire Bible - and in light of all the covenants and interactions the Holy One has established.

The first thing we must realize is that *we cannot understand John 3:16 unless we first come to grips with Genesis 1:1-3, Genesis 2:6-7, and Genesis 3:15, 22-24*. We cannot envision what is meant by the four lines of John 3:16 until we have come to grips with Genesis 12:1-3, and Genesis 22:9-18, and Exodus 19:3-8.

I could go on of course. John 3:16 is not a Scripture given in a vacuum. It is given in a context. And that context includes, but is by no means limited to, the rest of the passage we read today, which can be translated as follows:

*For the Holy One didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world,
but that the world should be saved through him.*

He who believes in him is not judged.

*He who doesn't believe has been judged already,
because he has not believed in the name of the only born Son of the Holy One.*

[A] In what sense is Yeshua the Holy One's “son” [Hebrew, *ben*]? [Be sure to think Hebraically on this issue. Remember than sonship is not, from a Hebraic standpoint, necessarily determined solely by biology.]

[B] In what sense can Yeshua be considered the Holy One's “only begotten” son?

[C] Yesterday we studied what the Holy One means by “eternal life”. We

found that Yeshua had defined that term in John 12:50 and John 17:3. Does this affect your understanding of John 3:16? If so, how?

[D] When Yeshua came into the world through Miryam [Mary], at His first advent, did He come to “judge”?

[E] If not, why (for what) did He come?

[F] How was He to accomplish that?

[G] Instead of the word “judge”, verses 17 and 18 use the word “condemn”. Look up that word in Strong’s, and write the Greek word and its definition. What Hebrew word would Yeshua have used instead of “condemn” or “judge”? Look up those words in Strong’s and Gesenius, and describe the Hebraic word picture that they portray. [Hint: you may want to get started by looking up “condemn” and “judge” in Richards’ and/or in Vine’s word study texts].

7. In John 3:18 Yeshua makes a statement to Nicodemus, the Pharisee who has come to Him by night.

[A] Which definition of the word “condemned” is Yeshua referring to in this conversation?

[B] The “dividing line” mentioned by Yeshua in this verse is “*belief in the name of the only begotten Son of God*” [KJV]. What does this mean (from a Hebraic perspective)? [Hint: read this verse in the Orthodox Jewish B’rit Chadasha¹³ and the Jewish New Testament (with Commentary) before you answer, and also consider the rich meaning of the Hebrew word which is translated into English as “believe”].

*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 8:1-11

*Doesn't wisdom cry out? Doesn't understanding raise her voice?
On the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet, she stands.
Beside the gates, at the entry of the city,
At the entry doors, she cries aloud:*

*"To you men, I call! I send my voice to the sons of mankind.
You simple, understand prudence. You fools, be of an understanding heart."
Sh'ma [hear] for I will speak excellent things; the opening of my lips is for right things.
For my mouth speaks truth.*

¹³ The Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha translates this verse as follows: “*The one of emunah who is mekabel Moshiach (accepting the person of the Ben HaAdam, Rebbe, Melech HaMoshiach) is not judged, but the one without emunah who is not mekabel Moshiach, already has been judged and given the psak din (verdict) of "condemned," because he has no emunah in ha-Shem of the Ben Yachid of [the Holy One].*”

*Wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the words of my mouth are in righteousness.
There is nothing crooked or perverse in them.
They are all plain to him who understands,
right to those who find knowledge.*

*Receive my instruction rather than silver;
knowledge rather than choice gold.
For wisdom is better than rubies.
All the things that may be desired can't be compared to it."*