

*Shiur L'Yom Shishi*¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Mattot:*** Numbers 32:1-42
 Haftarah: Jeremiah 2:3
 B'rit Chadasha: Philippians 3:16

*Why will you discourage the heart of the children of Israel
from going over into the land which the Holy One has given them?*

[Numbers 32:7]

Today's Meditation is Job 15:11-16;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #17B, *Yihyu L'Ratzon* [The Expressions] – Part II

In the verses of Torah we will read today we will see the common vision and sense of shared destiny which we in the Camp of the Redeemed have been enjoying for the past several years start to crumble in the face of a whirlwind of tribal self-interest. Shaul of Tarsus will later remind us of the relative national unity our forefathers had known up to this point with the following words:

*... all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea;
all had mikveh along with Moshe in the cloud and in the sea;
all ate the same spiritual food,
and all drank the same spiritual drink.
For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them . . .*

[I Corinthians 10:1-4]

What on earth is about to disrupt our national unity? What could possibly be the catalyst for the Redeemed of the Holy One –who have been through so much together – to suddenly start to ‘go tribal’ on each other?

You may not believe it – but here it is! Two of the tribes that make up the Holy One's redeemed community are going to rise up and propose something that up until today most of us would have considered *absolutely incomprehensible*. They are going to make a request on behalf of themselves and their descendants forever that should cause all who read about it to *shrug their shoulders, purse their lips and shake their heads in bewilderment*.

Get ready for some *tribal trouble*! The unity of the nation of the redeemed is about to face its stiffest challenge since at least the rebellion of Korach.

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The Ugly Face of Tribalism

Unbeknownst to Moshe, Elazar, Y'hoshua, Kalev, or the vast majority of the Redeemed Community, a couple of tribal councils have started holding secret meetings. In certain parts of the Camp, a bold proposal has been formulated and debated in hushed undertones. Compromises, strategic considerations, and contingencies have been forged behind tightly closed doors.

For better or worse, *two whole tribes of the Holy One's redeemed community* have been conspiring to do something that a few months ago would have been *absolutely incomprehensible to everyone in the Camp* – including them.

The leaders of the tribes of Reuven and Gad – two stalwarts of the Southern flank of the Camp of the Redeemed – have been talking things over. They have made a pact between them. After much discussion amongst themselves they have made a decision that should cause all who read about it to *shrug their shoulders, purse their lips and shake their heads in bewilderment*.

Make no mistake – what they have been whispering about, debating, and fine-tuning in secret is no *sh'ma* response to a private visitation or instruction from the Holy One. What they are preparing to take public is instead a political decision made for material reasons by self-interested men. Such things are always fraught with danger.

Introducing the Trans-Jordanian Initiative

The political proposition the Rueveni and Gadi have devised is what I call '***the Trans-jordanian Initiative***'. It involves those two tribes breaking off from the rest of the nation and settling in the land recently conquered from the Emori kings Sichon and Og while the rest of the nation continues on to the land the Holy One covenanted to give as an eternal inheritance to all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. The Trans-Jordanian initiative involves two whole tribes forsaking the inheritance the Holy One has set aside for them in the land in which the patriarchs sojourned.

Perhaps they have heard that centuries ago the Holy One had told Avraham: ***“To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates.”*** Genesis 15:18. The Euphrates was a lot further East than the land they had decided they wanted. This land clearly fit within the scope of this ultimate patriarchal land grant. It was only *a matter of time* before this land was part of Israel anyway, right?

It all seemed very logical, I am sure. Logic has a strange way of following and confirming fleshly self-interest, you know.

What that means is that if the Trans-Jordanian initiative becomes a reality, the tribe of Menashe is going to be geographically as well as philosophically divided.

The Initial Public Offering

Moshe, Elazar, and the remainder of the 70 members of the Sanhedrin established at Moshe's request in Numbers 11 are apparently unaware all this political maneuvering has been going on to their South and West. Finally, however, the Reuveni and Gadi decide to go public and see how the leaders of the nation react to their bold proposal. Here is how Torah describes how they made their *initial public offering*:

Vayavo'u b'nei-Gad uvnei Re'uven

The Gadi and the Re'uveni came

vayomru el-Moshe v'el-El'azar ha-kohen

and spoke to Moshe, and to El'azar the Kohen,

v'el-nesi'ei ha-edah l'emor

and to the princes of the congregation, saying,

Atarot v'Divon veYazer

Atrot, and Divon, and Ya`zer,

v'Nimrah v'Cheshbon v'El'aleh uSvam uNevo uVe'on

and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and El'aleh, and Sevam, and Nebo, and Be'on,

Ha-aretz asher hikah Adonai lif'nei adat Yisra'el

the land which the Holy One struck before the congregation of Yisra'el,

eretz mikneh hi vela'avadeycha mikneh

is a land for cattle²; and your servants have cattle.

Vayomru im-matzanu chen b'eyneycha

They said, "If we have found favor³ in your sight,

² The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as "cattle" is ***mikneh*** [*mem, kuf, nun, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #4735, pronounced *mik-neh'*]. It means any kind of livestock – not just cows. The verb root is ***qanah***, [*kuf, nun, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #07069, pronounce *kaw-naw'*, and meaning "he acquires", or "he purchases". Adding the mem to the front of this word implies that the thing purchased or acquired *moves* (like, in this case, sheep, goats, and oxen).

³ The word our English Bibles translate as "favor" or as "grace" in this passage is ***chen*** [*chet, nun sofit*, Strong's Hebrew word #02580, pronounced *khane*]. It is what Noach and Avraham found in the Holy One's sight [**Genesis 6:8, 18:3**], and by what Lot was saved from the destruction of S'dom and G'morrah. **Genesis 19:19**. It is clearly this Hebrew concept that Shaul was referencing when he said "**By GRACE** [Hebrew ***chen***] **are we saved through faith** [*emunah*] . . ." **Ephesians 2:8**. Grace is NOT a concept introduced by

yutan et ha-aretz hazot l'avadeycha l'achuzah
let this land be given to your servants for a possession/inheritance;

al-ta'avirenu et ha-Yarden
don't bring us over the Yarden."

[Numbers 32:2-5]

What? Did they really just say: “*Don’t bring us over the Yarden*”?

Talk about some emotionally-charged words! The leaders of Rueven and Gad could not have phrased their request much more offensively.

After all, crossing the Jordan is . . . well, for a Hebrew, crossing the Jordan is what *makes us a Hebrew*. Avraham crossed the Jordan. Ya’akov crossed the Jordan. And crossing the Jordan is about all Elazar, Y’hoshua, Kalev and Pinechas – and their ilk – have been able to think or talk about for years.

Moshe was incensed. He could not believe what he was *hearing*.

Do the Gadi and the Rueveni even know what they are *saying*? Are the members of those tribes really ready to *throw away the inheritance the Holy One has lovingly prepared for them in Eretz Yisrael* in favor of the first piece of ground they see that will sprout a little grass in the springtime?

Are they really content to wolf down *cucumber sandwiches on stale bread* when a gourmet meal awaits them on the other side of the Jordan?

Is it possible that they have suddenly decided, like their fathers did at Kadesh-Barnea, that they know *better than the Holy One* what will make them happy?

Oh my goodness. Don’t look, father Avraham . . . *they are throwing the inheritance the Holy One promised you and your descendants forever . . . for a song!*

Preferring the Immediate Fulfillment of Fleshly Appetites Over One’s Divine Destiny

The elders of Gad and Reuven had eaten Soup prepared for them by the Serpent. They, like Chava and Adam, had succumbed to the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. They coveted – indeed salivated over – a little patch of

the “new testament”, and cannot be understood and appreciated fully when viewed solely in a “new testament” context.

someone else's pastureland. They saw fields of grass, contented cattle, and a scenic ridge of mountains - and sighed. Seeing only in the physical realm, and thinking only of the temporal matters and immediate realities right in front of their eyes, they decided that this little patch of earth was not only all they had ever wanted but all they and their descendants would ever desire.

Suddenly they were convinced that the Holy One's plan for their lives and their families – which consisted of living in community with all the other tribes – well, it just *would not do at all*. How, they reasoned amongst themselves in their short-sightedness, could anything other than the things right before their eyes ever make them or their loved ones happy?

Oh Dear Reader, never forget that *eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him!* Isaiah 64:4; I Corinthians 2:9.

Do not try to tell that to the Rueveni and Gadi, though. They have made up their minds. They will gladly renounce the promised future inheritance the Holy One had set aside for them on the West of the Jordan, in the land of the Patriarchs. They set their hearts instead on settling right where they were in the trans-Jordan - in the land of the very descendants of Lot who had hired Bila'am to curse them and had conspired with the Midyani to seduce them away from the Divine Bridegroom. Their pitiful cry rings out over the centuries in our ears:

... don't bring us over the Yarden
[Numbers 32:5]

How many voices today *echo a similar cry?*

He Who Speaks to the Holy One face-to-Face Responds

Moshe's reaction to the Rueveni and Gadi is viral.

*Shall your brothers go to the war, and you sit here?
Why are you discouraging the heart of the children of Yisra'el
from going over into the land which the Holy One has given them?
What you are doing is just like what your fathers did
when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land.*

* * *

*Behold, you are risen up in your fathers' place,
The offspring of sinful men,
to cause the fierce anger of the Holy One to burn toward Yisra'el.*

[Numbers 32:7-8, 14]

Moshe's experience with the "Joshua Generation" is not starting out very well.

Indeed Moshe can see in the ‘new’ generation all the weaknesses and short-sightedness of their fathers. He has recently seen how quickly these young ones will abandon the ways of the Holy One to go chasing after the blatant sensuality and sexuality of the culture in which they find themselves – reference the sin of *Baal-Peor*. He now sees that they tend to be so *blinded by immediate material concerns and the first little piece of comfort that they experience* that whole tribes of them will settle for far less than what the Holy One has planned and prepared for them.

How quickly, Moshe notes with sadness, the “fire in the eyes” and the passion in the souls of this generation tends to go out.

Alas, it is not just a couple of tribes of the days of the “Joshua Generation” which exhibits this short-sighted tendency.

Making the Choice – Our Way or His Way?

Please realize that the will and the timing of the Holy One – and the inheritance and destiny He prepares lovingly for His People - is far superior in every area to *our will* or to any inheritance or life we could choose or claim for ourselves.

There are always *alternatives to the Holy One’s will for us*.

Some are *perfectly logical*.

Some appeal to our *senses*.

Some appeal to our *laziness*.

Some are chosen for us by those we consider “leaders” in our community.

Later in Torah we will learn that half the tribe of Menashe will join Gad and Reuven in making their final destination the semi-arable land of the Emori on the East side of the Yarden. Apparently, word of the decision made by the tribal leaders of Rueven and Gad made its way to the leaders of Menashe, on the far Northwest corner of the Camp. The leaders of that tribe met hastily to consider the proposal. One half of the clans of Menashe were in favor of the Trans-Jordanian initiative, and wanted to throw in their lot with the Reuveni and Gadi; the other half of Menashe’s clans, however, wanted to continue on to the Promised Land as originally planned. This will wind up splitting a tribe right down the middle - for generations to come.

What a pity that we so easily follow others into error and deception.

And it is all because we do not intimately know either the goodness of the Holy One or wisdom of His Torah.

If we knew either, we would not be so easily deceived and led astray.

Look carefully and *objectively* at the situation presented in today's aliyah of Torah. The Holy One had promised to all His People *a land flowing with milk and honey – a land more than large enough for all the tribes, with more than enough pastureland for all the animals the tribes could ever amass.*

There was no possible way the arid land East of the Jordan – the land captured from *Emori* (Amorite) kings Sichon and Og - was even equal to, much less superior in any way over, *the land the Holy One had promised. Kena'an* (i.e. the land to which the Holy One led Avraham, and which promised to give to their descendants forever) *was far more fertile - and far more secure - than the trans-Jordan area* that presently had stolen the hearts and blinded the eyes of these “settling” tribes.

So when the two and a half tribes set their hearts on what they saw in the trans-Jordan what they were doing was *not only rejecting the inheritance the Holy One had planned for them* - the highest and best they could receive; *they were also rejecting their true identity as heirs of Avraham.* They were also rejecting *their God-ordained destiny, and their eternal place and function* in the community of the Redeemed.

And they did it all because **the lusts of their eyes distracted them.** Like Chava in the Garden they allowed themselves to be convinced to want *what they saw in front of them* that they eschewed *what the Holy One had promised to them.*

Settling for Someone Else's Idea of Your Destiny

The leaders of the tribe of the first-born, Reuven, and of the tribe of Gad, “took the tour” of *the inheritance the Holy One had ordained for the Moavi*, Lot's descendants, and *coveted* it. To adopt someone else's inheritance, however, is to adopt that person or nation's *identity* and *destiny*. It was not just the land of the Moavi these descendants of Reuven and Gad took for themselves - they also took for themselves and their children and children's children the timing and violent nature judgment and death the Holy One had ordained for the Moavi. They became the first part of Israel to be conquered and carried away into captivity. When King Sannacherib of Assyria invaded the area, conquered it, and exiled the Hebrews living in the Northern kingdom in the 8th Century BCE, the tribes of Reuven and

Gad were the first ones conquered and sent away into exile. They, and the half-tribe of Menashe which later joined them, were the first of the ten ‘lost tribes’ to become ‘lost’.

Recognizing the Destiny-Impacting Choices Of Life

It is always sad to see someone throw away his or her destiny for something of significantly lesser value. But it happens every day.

Some today do it for money, or for clothes, cars, and houses, for entertainment, for a job, for a lover, for the approval of others, or for a feeling of importance, or a sense of ‘belonging’ where they are.

The Holy One gives us the option to make such choices.

He tells us what His Will for us is. He sends His Spirit to awaken desire for His Will in us. He sends prophets and apostles and teachers and shepherds to keep the passion alive for His Will and to guide us into it.

But in the long run, each of us must choose what is important to us, and what is not.

We can - like some of our ancestors - choose to stay in places like Egypt, from which the Holy One has set us free.

Even if we successfully navigate that hurdle, and choose to leave the Egypts of this world, we can choose to die in the desert rather than enter into His Higher Plan.

Even if we keep our focus through the wilderness years and make the choice not to die in the desert, however, we are still not ‘home free’. We face yet more choices. We can still choose to waste our passion and our energy on false religion, on Midyanite women, or on material possessions, and/or on a homeland and way of life destined to pass away with the next change in the balance of political power in the world.

The Divine Bridegroom is always calling us forward, after Him.

But the fallen world – not to mention the lusts of our own eyes, the lusts of our own flesh, and our own pride of life – are always standing in life’s midway shouting ‘*step right up, ladies and gentlemen, toss the ring, and walk away a winner!*’

The Choices We Make – and Their Consequences

In the journey of life there always seem to be *choices* to make. At every crossroads in life we must choose if we will go to the left, to the right, straight ahead, back toward whence we have come – or if we will just sit down and do nothing at all.

Some of the choices life calls upon us to make only affect the timing of our growth. I call these life's '*growth or regression choices*'.

Other choices that present themselves to us along our journey primarily affect the level of fruitfulness we will experience in a particular season. I call these life's '*fruitfulness or barrenness choices*'.

Still other choices life presents to us affect primarily the purity and clarity of our witness, vision, perspective, and walk. I call these life's '*purity or mixture choices*'.

Yet other choices can dramatically altar the level of intimacy we will be able to experience in our interactions with our Divine Bridegroom. I call these life's '*intimacy or independence choices*'.

All these types of choices can have serious consequences. Most of those consequences, however, are short term and easily remedial.

But there are choices we are called upon by life to make that have long-term consequences, and are not easily remedial at all. These are what I call '*destiny or appetite choices*'. Such choices affect not only our destiny but also the destinies of our children and, potentially at least, our children's children for many generations.

It is extremely important to consider the consequences of such choices before we make them!

The good news is that whenever such choices present themselves to us, the Holy One's Voice always speaks to us softly. If we will listen, His Voice will encourage us to settle for nothing less than His Best.

That Voice will continually call us back to His Torah, where He has defined for us how to recognize the good, the true, the meaningful in life, how to pursue and receive those things, and how to steer clear of disastrous deceptions and distractions such as plagued our ancestors.

Alas, the Holy One's Voice is never the only voice audible on the great boulevard of life. Other voices will inevitably pitch their proposals and suggestions our way, trying to interest us in any number of things other than and inconsistent with the destiny the Holy One has ordained for us and our progeny.

***The High Cost of Choosing the World's 'Good'
Over the Holy One's 'Best'***

Many other roads intersect the Ancient Paths the Holy One has mapped out for us to travel on the journey of life. We each have the freedom, at every crossroads, to *choose something less* than the Divine pathway to life and health and truth and peace. But when we are taking about *destiny or appetite choices*, the consequences of making wrong decisions at these crossroads can be disastrous.

Consider the tribes of Gad and Reuven, as well as the half-tribe of Menashe. The individuals in these tribes had all come a long way by the time of the events described in today's aliyah.

They had once heard the Beautiful Voice of the Holy One, their Bridegroom, calling them to the Bridal Chamber along with every other son of the Covenant.

But now when they looked around it seemed that they heard they heard only the lowing of cattle. The Voice of the Holy One seemed distant – and they never considered that the reason this was so was that they had, once they were at ease, simply quit listening for the Voice that had brought them this far. And when they looked around at what was intended by the Holy One as only an encampment, their eyes saw only two things – lots of 'cattle' (recently acquired from the Midyanites, when the Holy One enforced His judgment against them) and the grass on the hills of the land of the vanquished Emori [Amorites].

And they said: "It is enough for us."

And their hunger for the things of the Holy One faded.

And the fire in their eyes flickered and went out.

And they thereby gave away their inheritance for a fraction of its value – much as their great uncle Esav had many, many years ago.

Extensions of Israel – Mattot

While the elders of the tribes of Gad and Reuven [joined by half of Menashe] chose

“second best” for themselves and their families, the Holy One did not dismay. He is brilliant, and all-knowing, and He always has an alternative plan for them and their brethren of Israel almost as good as His original, perfect Will. He accepted the choice made by the Reuveni, the Gadi, and the half-tribe of Menashe. And He made the territory chosen by these tribes on the East Bank of the Jordan a “buffer” zone for Eretz Yisrael.

Now, before any invading force could enter Eretz Yisrael from the East it would first have to go through the warriors of Gad and Reuven, and then through the champions of the half-tribe of Menashe.

At the very least, the rest of the tribes of Israel would be warned about a coming invasion – and would have a chance and some precious time to mount a strong defense.

And under the Holy One’s alternative plan, Gad, Reuven, and the half-tribe of Menashe would actually model for subsequent generations what it means to live “*in Diaspora*” – as *extensions* of Israel.

Now you may recall what we learned earlier this week, Dear Reader, about the meaning of the name of our parsha, *Mattot*. It means *extensions*.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Let’s begin our concluding study of parsha *Mattot* with some basic questions:

[A] Which tribes did not wish to take their families across the Jordan River into the land promised to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov?

[B] What reasons did these tribes give for wanting to settle East of the Jordan?

[C] Why did Moshe react negatively to the choice made by these tribes?

2. Today’s haftarah verse consists the final Words of the first prophetic message the Holy One gave Yirmayahu for the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

Israel was holiness to YHVH - the firstfruits of His increase.

All that devour him will offend;

Disaster will come upon them,” says the Holy One.

[Jeremiah 2:3]

[A] The Holy One begins this message with two separate descriptions of what Israel was called to be. What are the two descriptions of this prophetic word?

[B] The Holy One tells Yirmayahu to remind His People at Jerusalem of His jealousy over them. What two things does the Holy One promise will happen to

those who seek to devour Israel?

3. In today's suggested reading from the Brit Chadasha, Shaul of Tarsus [often called Paul] speaks of attaining, of walking in things attained, and in holding true to things attained. He says:

*Nevertheless, to the extent that we have already attained,
let us walk by the same rule. Let us be of the same mind.*

[Philippians 3:16]

[A] Look up the word "attained" in Strong's Concordance. Write the Greek word and its definition.

[B] What Hebrew concept is Shaul expressing by using this Greek word?

[C] Look up the word "rule" in Strong's Concordance. Write the Greek word and its definition.

[D] What Hebrew concept is Shaul expressing by using this Greek word?

*May the Holy One's Word and His Will for your life be your passionate desire,
and may you not be led astray, by the lusts of your hearts and eyes,
to settle for things less valuable.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Job 15:11-16 [Elifaz the Temanite rebukes Iyov (Job)]

*Are the consolations of God too small for you,
Even the word that is gentle toward you?*

*Why does your heart carry you away? Why do your eyes flash,
That you turn your spirit against God,
And let such words go out of your mouth?*

*What is man, that he should be clean?
He who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?*

*Behold, he puts no trust in his holy ones;
Yes, the heavens are not clean in his sight:
How much less one who is abominable and corrupt,
A man who drinks iniquity like water!*