

*Shiur L'Yom Shenit*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Massei:*** Numbers 33:1 - 49
 Haftarah: Jeremiah 2:4-9
 B'rit Chadasha: James 4:1-3

“... *these are their journeys according to their goings out...*”
[Numbers 33:2]

Today's Meditation is Job 22:21-30;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #18, *Tzuri v'Goeli* [My Rock and My Redeemer]

To begin week #43 of the annual Torah cycle the inspired Writer of Torah interrupts the flowing narrative of Numbers to tell us that, during the 40 years of wilderness adventure which followed the wondrous event the world has come to know as the Passover, Moshe kept a journal.

Well . . . sort of. Moshe put the writing skills he had learned in Egypt to work recording for posterity the names of every place that the pillar of fire and cloud rested – and the Covenant nation encamped - during the Great Odyssey from bondage to destiny.

Are *you* keeping a record of *your* wilderness stations, Dear Reader? Are you keeping the 'wilderness stations' of your life in proper perspective? Do you understand from whence – and through what – the Holy One has brought you to equip you for such a time as this?

Do you have a testimony of the kindness, mercy, provision, protection, and blessing of the Holy One at each stage of your journey?

Remember as you read today's aliyah, and as you call to the forefront of your mind all the *massei* – i.e. experiences, good and bad, of the seasons of your life – that the Holy One has brought you through the challenges of all the past seasons of your life in order that you may both stand *where you are* and *as you are* today, and move confidently toward your destiny in the next season of your life?

And consider the fact that if the Holy One has indeed brought you and led you thus far, He will be faithful to take you into the inheritance He has laid out for you.

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Just *sh'ma* the Voice. *Just* follow the Cloud.

And please do not let yourself get too comfortable or content at any of the stations in the desert. We still have many places to go, people to see, and challenges to overcome – as the Holy One somehow manages to advance His Kingdom Agenda through us along the way.

The Stages of Our Journey

In today's opening aliyah from parsha *Massei* the travelogue that Moshe wrote at the Holy One's directive is presented for all to read. Here is how the prophetic travelogue is introduced:

Vayichtov Moshe et-motza'eyhem l'mas'eihem al-pi Adonai

Moshe wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the word/instruction of YHVH

v'eleh mas'eihem l'motza'eihem

and these are their journeys according to their goings out.

[Numbers 33:2]

For those of us who study Torah, Moshe's diary is going to be more than a touching, nostalgic trip back down memory lane.

What we will be studying in the opening chapter of *Massei* are the “*journeys*”, the “*travels*”, the *times of striking tents*”, and/or the “*points/places of departure*” which made up our ancestors' prototypical return to the land of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

Oops, I used the term *prototypical* again, didn't I? Prototypical means not merely historical, but *prophetic of something yet to come*.

Prototypical means *a real event of times past based upon the choreography of which an even more glorious future event is Divinely-programmed to occur at a 'book-end' date at the far end of the Holy One's prophetic timetable*.

For those with ears to *sh'ma*, you see, what our ancestors did four thousand years ago established the pattern the Holy One has foreordained that we – or our children - will follow in the end of days.

Establishing Our Point of Departure – From Ramses They Traveled

Moshe's travelogue of journeys begins with the departure of the Redeemed from Egypt. He establishes our point of departure by reminding us:

Vayis'u meRamses b'chodesh ha-rishon

They traveled from Ramses in the first month,

b'chamishah asar yom

on the fifteenth day of the first month;

l'chodesh ha-rishon mimachorat ha-Pesach

on the next day after the Pesach

yatz'u v'nei-Yisra'el beyad ramah l'eynei kol-Mitzrayim

the children of Yisrael were brought forth with a Mighty Hand in the sight of all the Egyptians

[Numbers 33:3]

Why did Moshe say we departed from *Ramses*? Was not the reality that we actually departed from various places – indeed wherever throughout the land of Egypt we or the mixed multitude that accompanied us on that fateful day had been assigned by Pharaoh to labor? Why did Moshe not say that we went forth from Goshen, or Memphis or Thebes, or just ‘Egypt’? What made Moshe specifically identify our ancestors’ most important point of departure as *Ramses*?

It is known that at the time of the Exodus Pharaoh maintained palaces in several cities other than the capital city of Memphis. At the Northern Egyptian city we now know as Ramses, a city in the region of Goshen, located on the east bank of the Pelusiac Branch of the Nile, excavations have uncovered a walled area within which Pharaoh maintained three separate palaces. All these buildings were constructed of unfired clay bricks – such as Torah says were made by the Hebrew slave population. See **Exodus 1:11**. These structures were finished out with limestone doorways and columns. All walls were covered with lime plaster.

Someone worked *very hard* to build all this – without any heavy machinery or power tools. Yes, that ‘someone’ was us.

This ‘royal precinct’ at Ramses, you see, was established during Moshe’s lifetime. The city, then known as *Perunefer* [Egyptian for ‘happy journey’] was at that time a busy commercial and military center. Trading ships from the Mediterranean could navigate the Nile as far as *Perunefer*, making it the perfect place for a seaport. In addition, the city was the beginning point of the famous “*Horus Road*” – i.e. the ancient overland trade route that lead through Kena’an to Phoenicia. This ancient trade route was, in Moshe’s time, known as the “Way of the Philistines”.

Recording Ramses as the point of departure of the Hebrew nation – and the mixed multitude – serves as a reminder not only of the geographical region surrounding the palace complex there, but the blood, sweat, and tears that we all as slaves had been forced to exert there. We did not just leave *a place* – we left a long season of

horrible *bondage*. We left our dead there. We left our childlike innocence there. We left our joy there.

A mention of Goshen in Moshe's travelogue might elicit a few nostalgic, pleasant memories for us. Ramses, on the other hand, was a reminder only of the intense pain bondage to Pharaoh brought to our lives. Truly, no slave who had ever felt the taskmaster's whip while working on the palace complex there could possibly regret leaving Ramses for a second.

How about you, Dear Reader? How do you remember your point of departure on the great journey of *emunah* [trust/faith]? Do you remember it fondly? Does it hold a tender place in your heart? Is what happened there, before your release from bondage, thought of by you as a 'glory day' - or an odious reminder of the absolute lowest point of your life?

To the Egyptians the name Ramses meant '*son of Ra [i.e. the sun god]*'. Transliterated into the Hebrew tongue the name meant '*drawn forth from evil*' or '*emerging from calamity*'. Indeed, that is exactly the picture drawn by the next verse of Moshe's travelogue, which describes what was happening in Ramses as the Hebrews left with the following poignant words:

UMitzrayim mekabrim

The Egyptians were burying all their firstborn,

et asher hikah Adonai bahem kol-bechor

whom the Holy One had killed among them.

uveloheyhem asah Adonai shfatim

As also on their gods the Holy One was executing His judgments.

[Numbers 33:4]

There is nothing whatsoever at Ramses for which to look back longingly or nostalgically. Perhaps Moshe chose it to represent our collective point of departure for that reason. Perhaps he wanted us to close the book, turn the page, move along . . . and *never look back*.

Our First Encampment as Free Men – at Sukkot

The first few steps of freedom had to have been exciting and delightful. But marching through a desert in the heat of the day – even in Springtime – will quickly sap anyone’s enthusiasm. From sunburn to heat rash to sand fleas to the mundane rhythm of one step in front of another a hundred thousand times, our bodies soon needed a place to rest. Our spirits also needed a space and time in which to drink in and meditate upon the fact that we really were at last free.

The place the Holy One provided us to do these things is identified by Moshe’s travelogue as ‘*Sukkot*’. **Numbers 33:5**. There, without Pharaoh’s guards watching our every move for the first time in our lives, we sat down and we ate *matzah* baked in the open air from the wheat flour which we had ground and bundled up in haste the preceding night.

That is where we ate our first meal as *free men*. We ate not as pilgrims looking for a promised land but merely as refugees fleeing from a madman. At that point we were just happy to have escaped genocide. Any concept of *who we were destined to become* or *what we were called to do* with the precious gift of freedom in the days, years, generations, and millennia to come was far from us.

The Hebrew word *sukkot* means ‘temporary shelters’. This was not our destination – it was merely *a temporary place to get out of the sun* and collect ourselves for the long odyssey ahead.

But since *Sukkot* was the first place we would either take a meal or put our children to sleep as free men, the Holy One wanted to make sure we would never forget it. Indeed, the Holy One instructed us to commemorate our short stay in these temporary shelters for seven days each year. We do not just leave our homes and wander around during *Chag Ha-Sukkot* [i.e. the Feast of Tabernacles] – we build ‘temporary shelters’ [i.e. *sukkot*], and sit, eat, and sleep in them to relive and celebrate the closing of one era of our lives and the beginning of another, holding far more promise.

Our Second Encampment – at Etam at the Edge of the Desert

Moshe’s journal reminds us that the next place we encamped after leaving Sukkot was *Etam*. **Numbers 33:6**. All the text of Torah tells us about this place, other than giving us its name, was that it was ‘*biktzeh ha-midbar*’ – i.e. at *the outer edge of the desert*.

If you have ever traveled across a large desert by automobile you can imagine what

kind of this place this was. For those who like us were getting ready to head off into the desert this place meant *'last chance' to stock up on water and to prepare one's heart, mind, and soul for the grueling ordeal ahead.*

There is something about seeing a vast, dry, hot, sprawling desert looming before you that un-nerves even the saltiest traveler. The desert is, after all, an extremely hostile, potentially deadly environment for human beings. Extremely high temperatures during the day can lead to *heatstroke*. Plunging temperatures at night *can chill to the bone*. Arid conditions can lead to *dehydration*. Sandstorms so severe that the unprotected suffocate on sand come up without warning and can last for hours or even for days. Even if the heat or a sandstorm doesn't kill you, it can so disorient you to the point that you lose your sense of direction, wander in circles, and begin to see things that are not there.

Few recognizable landmarks exist, and what do exist are often obscured by the shifting of sand dunes. And did I mention that deserts are inhabited by *venomous snakes and scorpions?*

Perhaps however there was something about the place Torah calls ***Etam*** that took the 'edge' off the prospect of heading off into the desert.

Consider that in Hebrew the name ***Etam*** is spelled *alef, tav, mem sofit*. *Alef – Tav*. Does that mean anything to you? If I translated it into Greek, it would be *alpha-omega*. Does that help?

The letter ***Alef*** – the first letter of the Hebrew *alef-beit* - is a Hebraic pictograph representing *He Who came before* – i.e. the Holy One Himself. The letter ***Tav*** - the last letter of the Hebrew *alef-beit* - is the Hebraic pictograph of a covenant sign – the mark that promises fulfillment of all covenant undertakings.

The letter ***Mem*** in *sofit* form, as used in the name ***Etam***, is a Hebraic pictograph representing the ultimate water-source, namely the *River of Life* of Revelation 22.

Put all those images together, and the word ***Etam*** forms a mural of the *Holy One* showing forth a *covenant sign* involving an *endless supply of living water* flowing from His Throne.

That image is what the Holy One intends to teach us that He will sustain us no matter what troubles or challenges or deprivations we may encounter in the days ahead.

Our Third Encampment – at Pi Hahiro

The first set of troubles, challenges, and deprivations in our Great Journey would come upon us at the next encampment – a place on Egypt’s Northeast border called *Pi Hahiot*. It was located right beside the Sea of Reeds.

Yes – **that** sea of reeds, Dear Reader! You remember the place now, don’t you?

Some Hebrew sages have noted that the name *Pi Hahiot* literally means ‘*the mouth (or entrance) of the pits/caves/holes*’. They have suggested that the “pit” in question was not just the sea of reeds, but was the entrance to *sheol* [i.e. the unseen world of spirit beings and what humans think of as ‘afterlife’]. I doubt the Hebrew refugees who saw the great clouds of dust from the charge of Pharaoh’s army and heard the war cries and the rumbling and roar of the chariots and horses at this location would argue that description.

Here is the way *Sefer Sh’mot* [the Book of Exodus] described the great travail in the camp as Pharaoh’s army approached from the West:

*When Pharaoh drew near, the children of Yisra'el lifted up their eyes,
and behold, the Mitzrim were marching after them;
and they were very afraid.
And the descendants of Yisrael cried out to/screamed at the Holy One.
[Exodus 14:10]*

Pi Hahiot was the place we learned that the Holy One understands human fear, and is quick to overlook and forgive the bad behavior that emanates from that fear. *Pi Hahiot* was also the place where for the first time we were instructed and empowered to ‘*stand and see et-yeshuat YHVH* [i.e. the alef-tav, the Yeshua of YHVH].’ Exodus 14:13.

Our Fourth Encampment – At Marah

From *Pi Hahiot* the Holy One’s pillar of cloud and fire led us through the Sea of Reeds, then on a three-day march to a desert station we have come to call ***Marah***². This new location was just a small oasis in the desert with a little pool of water at a deep place in a *wadi*. It was not *running water*. It was not clear, sparkling water. But it was wet. And we were *very, very dry*. To us, the sight of Victoria Falls couldn’t have been more beautiful.

We rushed to the pool, cupped our hands, and brought the water to our parched

² ***Marah***² is a noun derived from the verb root *marar*². Those who have participated in a Seder at ***Pesach*** are familiar with this word. It is the name given to the bitter substance in which we dip the *matzah* [unleavened bread], to remember the ‘bitterness of bondage in Egypt’.

tongues. And that is when the disappointment struck. The water was **bitter**. It was undrinkable. It all seemed like a cruel joke.

As the bondage of Egypt was bitter, so were the waters of *Marah*. And it was at Marah that we became bitter as well. We became bitter *at each other*. We became bitter *at Moshe*. And we became bitter *at the Holy One*.

And here is the most marvelous part - *the Holy One orchestrated the whole thing*. The very first place He led us after we sang the glorious Song of the Sea was right here, to this *place of bitter waters*.

He did it *on purpose*, because the Holy One knew that the infatuation we had felt at *Yam Suf* – while it was wonderful - would not sustain us in our relationship for long. He wanted more from us – and *for us* – than infatuation and ecstatic praise.

What more did He want? He wanted *a partner in the redemptive process*. He wanted us to reach our potential, our purpose, our destiny.

You see, after the ecstatic experience at the Sea of Reeds, some of us thought we had ‘arrived’. I mean, we had danced before the Holy One with all our might, and ‘sung a new song’ in the Spirit. We thought we were now ‘spiritual’. We *mistook the stirrings of fervency and passion we had experienced for spiritual maturity*. We *thought* we were ready to be His Bride.

But we weren’t. Not by a long shot. Being free from Egypt, and infatuated with the Holy One, was ‘entry level’ stuff. We had yet to learn to *eat what He feeds us*. We had yet to learn to know – much less begin to respond to - *to the sound of His Voice*. We had yet to learn *His Ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving*. We had yet to *shed our slavish shrew-like ways and take on a peaceful and patient worldview and gentle yet nurturing lifestyle worthy of His Bride*.

And so the Holy One, ever the faithful Bridegroom, picked up the pillar of cloud and led us to *bitter waters*. And He let us stew about it a little while. Because He wanted our relationship to be REAL. And then, *Sefer Sh’mot* tells us:

Sham sam lo chok umishpat

It was there that [the Holy One] taught them a statute and a judgment,

V’sham nisahu

and there that He tested them.

[Exodus 15:25(b)]

This part of the Marah narrative – the part where it says the Holy One taught us ***chok umishpat*** – usually translated into English as a statute and a judgment - and

that He *tested us* - is not something that gets much attention today. But it is a VERY, VERY IMPORTANT PART OF WHAT HAPPENED AT MARAH.

The teaching of the ‘statute’ and the ‘judgment’, and the ‘testing’ of His newly redeemed community were, you see, the whole purpose for which the Holy One orchestrated and choreographed the ‘bitter waters’ experience at Marah.

It was at *Marah*, you see, that the Holy One began to train us to listen to His Voice. It was there He began to teach us essential ‘survival techniques’ for our new life as servants of the Most High God. He started the real process of training with ***chok umishpat*** – i.e. a ‘statute and a judgment’ – He gave us at *Marah*.

The survival techniques the Holy One wanted us to learn before we moved on from Marah are clearly identified in the account of *Sefer Sh’mot*. Specifically, the Holy One told us:

*'If/as/to the extent you **sh'ma** the Holy One your God
and **do what is upright in His eyes,**
carefully **giving full ear to all His directions**
and carefully guarding all His instructions
then I will not strike you with any of the sicknesses that I brought on Egypt.
I am the Holy One who heals you.'*

With these words the Holy One revealed to us **four specific things** that would form the foundation of our walk with Him.

1. The Sh'ma Life-Focus

First of all, He made it clear that we absolutely must learn to ***sh'ma every Word from the Holy One's mouth***. The details of what this means will be spelled out later – when we reach Sinai. But the quintessential principle of our new identity is clear; *we must not live by bread alone . . . but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Holy One*.

We are no longer to live by [which means *in bondage to*] *our appetites or our emotions – or any societal priorities, definitions of success, dreams or values*. We are instead from this point forward called to *structure all aspects of our lives **around and upon** our Divine Bridegroom's instructions for living*.

This is *HUGE!* And this is just *essential new approach to life #1*.

2. The Asah-ing Energy Focus

Secondly the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven told us that *we will have to learn to **do** [Hebrew *asah*, meaning to build, to craft, to form as an artisan] **what is upright in His***

eyes. Hmmmmn. What exactly does this mean? Well, first of all it means we absolutely must **unlearn** *the way of survival we developed in Egypt, which was to always do and spend our time, energy and passion building that which pleases men.* In our former way of life in Egypt, the taskmaster cracked a whip and said *jump*, and the first thought that crossed our mind was ‘how high’. In the land from which we came we quickly learned that Pharaoh had a taste for storehouses, so we built them high and strong.

It means we need to learn how to **THINK LIKE THE HOLY ONE THINKS.** It means we need to learn how to SEE PEOPLE, SITUATIONS, TIMES, AND THINGS THROUGH **HIS PERSPECTIVE** instead of through the imperfect lenses of our own ideals, our paradigm of self-interest, our short-sighted grid of opinions and defense-mechanisms, and our woefully inadequate senses of human ‘justice’ and ‘fairness’.

This means we can never again just mindlessly rush to do what some earthly taskmaster, political or religious leader demands without first passing it through the Divine Prism of the Living Words of our Glorious Bridegroom. It means we cannot do just what some Pharaoh or Imam or president or king orders us to do OR what some temptress or manipulative friend seductively suggests, winsomely cajoles or irritatingly nags us to do – but must instead do only what HE, the Divine Bridegroom, has said is right, and proper, and just for us to do.

Wow – what a **shift!** What a **dramatic life-style restructuring!** If nothing else, this makes it clear that if we are going to commit to do what is upright in the Holy One’s eyes instead of following the crowd or our own hearts, our first priority is going to have to be *to actually get to know Him a whole lot better.*

We are going to have to have a real, substantive, give-and-take kind of relationship with Him.

We are going to have to *make an effort to learn to recognize what is – and is not - upright - and worth spending time, money, passion and energy on - in His eyes.*

3. The Single-Focus Approach to Life

Thirdly the Holy One told us at **Marah** that we must learn to **‘give full ear to all His directions’.**

Full ear.

Undistracted, undivided attention.

Unconflicted loyalty.

Oh, my – this is **SERIOUS STUFF!** That means that we must *focus hard on hearing everything He has to say*. It means we must not listen to any other voice or seek out for ourselves any other source of information.

It also means we must *not let ourselves be distracted by the affairs of life, by the drama and trauma of interpersonal relationships, or by the crises of politics or weather or finances*.

And it means we must *value the Holy One's messages to His Creation above all other communications*.

4. The Sh'mar-ing Heart- and Passion-Focus

Fourthly the Holy One told us at **Marah** that in addition to all the above **carefully guard** [Hebrew, *sh'mar*] **all His instructions**.

Wow. The redemption the Holy One has wrought for us is about a whole lot more than just us getting set free from bondage. He wants His redemption to be for us the *beginning of a totally new life, characterized by a stunningly different lifestyle*. And He is warning us that His instructions as to how life should be lived are not just to be viewed by us merely as additional information we process intellectually along with other theories and philosophies of life, or as interesting reading, or as helpful suggestions for success. He warns us that keeping His instructions for living always in the forefront of our minds, and free and clear of psychological sociological, cultural barnacles is absolutely MISSION-CRITICAL.

This means that if we are to survive we must learn to **treasure** His instructions for living as absolutely *our most valuable possession in the world*. It means we must devote serious time, effort, and energy in *meditating on them* and *memorizing them* and *talking about them* and *applying them to real life situations* every day of our life. It means we must be very diligent to follow His instructions and directions for living *wholeheartedly, excitedly* – even *passionately*. It means we must be careful not only *leave nothing He tells us to do undone*, but also that we must be careful *not leave anything He tells us to do half-done*.

Doing all of four of these things consistently is, of course, far beyond human capability. And that is, I suspect, is precisely the point. The Holy One wanted us to know that ***we absolutely cannot do the things we have to do in order to survive the wilderness experience in our own strength or power*** – instead we absolutely

must learn to *rest in Him*, and to *trust in Him to supply us His strength and accomplish that which is necessary through us using His power*.

It was at *Marah*, therefore, that the Holy One us a down payment on and prepared our hearts to receive the Torah. He chose the place of bitter waters as the place where He would begin to introduce the radical lifestyle shift to which He has called us.

Our Fifth Encampment – at Elim

The next place the Holy One had us encamp is a mysterious oasis called ‘*Elim*³. The name *Elim* is believed to be the plural form of the noun *ayil* [*alef, yod, lamed*, often translated ‘*ram*’⁴, but literally meaning ‘*strong one*’⁵]. Much like beautiful *Ein Gedi* in Eretz Yisrael, this oasis was most likely populated by abundant populations of deer and mountain goats, watched over by *the ‘strong ones’* – i.e. the dominant bucks and rams - of those species.

The *Ruach HaQodesh* does not give a whole lot of details about our stay at this place. In fact, all we are really told by Torah about this place is that it had *12 springs* and *70 date palms*. But perhaps the most important thing about Elim is what it did *not have*. It had no Pharaoh. It had no chariot corps. There was not a drop of bitter water anywhere.

Ah, *twelve springs* - one for every tribe.

Seventy date palms - one for every tribal elder to sit under and discuss the life instructions we received at ***Marah*** with us.

Nothing else to do but *snack on fresh, juicy dates* and *sip cool water in the shade of swaying palm fronds*.

A land of milk and honey awaits us, of course. This little oasis, while beautiful, and a welcome break from our long trek through the desert, was by no means the Holy One’s best. It was not our *final destination* – much less our *place of ultimate destiny*.

But it was where the pillar of fire and cloud stopped. It was where Moshe has instructed us to set up camp. And for a few brief but wonderful days, that was all that really mattered.

³ *Elim* is spelled *alef, yod, lamed, mem sofit*/ Strong’s Hebrew word #362, it is pronounced *ay-leem*’.

⁴ As in Genesis 15:9 and 22:13.

⁵ As it is so translated a few verses earlier, in Exodus 15:15 [part of the Song of the Sea].

Some Encampments We Never Read About in Sefer Sh'mot

After we left Elim, according to Moshe's diary, we made a series of stops that were, with one exception, not part of the record of *Sefer Sh'mot*. Here is how the travelogue records these stops:

*They moved from Elim and camped by the Sea of Reeds.
They moved from the Red Sea and camped in the Wilderness of Sin.
They journeyed from the Wilderness of Sin and camped at Dofkah.
They departed from Dofkah and camped at Alush.*
[Numbers 33:11-13]

We do not have any historical record of how the Holy One interacted with us – or we interacted with each other or His Creation – at our second stop by the Sea of Reeds [presumably on the other side, further North, this time], or at *Dofkah*, or at *Alush*. The Holy One's dealings with our ancestors in those places are shrouded in mystery. But we – or our children – will one day revisit those locations, and I am sure the Holy One will have some glorious surprises for us there when we do.

Now for the exception – the Wilderness of Sin. With regard to the Wilderness of Sin, that is a place we should remember well. *Sefer Sh'mot* tells us:

*They . . . came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai,
on the fifteenth day of the second month
after their departing out of the land of Mitzrayim.*

The Wilderness of Sin had no bubbling springs, palm trees, or scrumptious dates. The place was hot, dry, and barren. It was so hot, dry, and barren, in fact, that the narrative of *Sefer Sh'mot* tells us:

*The whole congregation of the children of Yisra'el murmured
against Moshe and against Aharon in the wilderness;
and the children of Yisra'el said to them,
"We wish that we had died by the hand of the Holy One
in the land of Mitzrayim, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread,
for you have brought us out into this wilderness,
to kill this whole assembly with hunger."
[Exodus 16:1-3]*

Of course, the murmuring and complaining and *k'vetching* we did in the desert of Sin did not by any means take the Holy One by surprise. He knew it was going to happen all along. In fact, He actually *orchestrated the events that would bring it about* very carefully.

The Holy One was ready to introduce us to the concept of 'daily bread' ***His Way***. It was in the Wilderness of Sin, you will recall, that He first provided *manna from*

Heaven. It is here in this part of the Wilderness that He introduced the Bride Diet He desired for His Bride to eat in order to wean her off the fleshly tastes and appetites she acquired in Egypt. From that location forward, each Sunday morning through each Friday morning, the Holy One made sure that our ancestors woke up to a veritable buffet of manna. Each morning Sunday through Friday our ancestors would go out and pick up manna. They did not have to work to produce it – but they did have to go out physically onto the desert floor and gather it, and they had to plan meals around it, and they had to prepare it as they saw fit.

It was also here in the Wilderness of Sin, in conjunction with the gift of manna, that the Holy One re-introduced the Redeemed Community to *the most wonderful gift He will give them this side of Messiah – i.e. the Seventh day Shabbat [Sabbath]*.

The introduction was brief. The Holy One just instructed Moshe concerning the effect of the Shabbat on the *Manna* [Hebrew, *man hu* (*what is it?*)] He was about to start showering upon them from Heaven. He had Moshe teach our ancestors:

You must see/realize - the Holy One has given you Sabbath bread.

That is why He gave you food for two days on Friday.

[On the Sabbath] every person is to remain in his residence.

Everyone is to stay in his makom [place] on the 7th day.'

[Exodus 16:29]

The Encampment at Refidim – Water from a Rock and Our First War

The next stop along the Bridal Pathway prepared by the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven for His Beloved was a place called *Refidim*. Here again the issue will appear to be water to drink. But this time the Holy One did not simply show His Redeemed multitudes how to sweeten bitter water. He instead demonstrated both His Love and His Power to us in a *totally new and even more wonderful way*. He actually *brought forth ever-increasing streams of free-flowing living water for us from a rock*. These streams of living water will sustain us in the desert supernaturally for decades. With only one interruption we will enjoy their refreshing presence until we get to the Promised Land.

Also at Refidim we fought our first war. The Holy One apparently felt that our training had progressed to the point where experiencing a little warfare would *do us good*. Hence when Amalek attacked the Holy One did not stop them in their tracks as He had stopped the Egyptian approach at the Sea of Reeds, nor did He even intervene physically to provide a way for us to escape the battle.

There was no ‘*Stand and see the deliverance of the Holy One*’ this time. This time it was ‘*Choose Men, and Prepare for Battle!*’”

We had to learn at *Refidim* that the Holy One our God has *a fresh Word of instruction for every challenge He allows us to experience – and that our job is to seek fresh revelation from Him, and be responsive to every Word He releases, in every season.*

At *Refidim* we also learned that we cannot always just sit back and wait for the Holy One to provide us a miraculous deliverance for us. Part of our training as the Betrothed Bride-to-Be of the Creator of the Universe involves learning when and under what circumstances we are called to lace up combat boots and run to the battle.

But while this time we had to pick up swords, stand in the breach, and fight hand-to-hand and tooth and nail, we discovered that the Holy One was right in the midst of us, empowering us and protecting us. At *Refidim* we learned that what happens when the Holy One's people are attacked and has to respond with force has a lot more to do with what is going on above, in the spiritual realm, than with the weaponry and warfare skills possessed by our warriors.

Oh, the Holy One requires us to do our part, to be sure. We have to prepare and train and provide weapons to our young and old men alike. We have to stand firm against our enemies, and be willing to endure horrible injury and/or death – and to sometimes inflict those things on others. We have to care for our wounded and bury our dead with honor.

But this we know: *anyone who attacks Israel attacks the apple of the Holy One's eye.* And the Holy One's *watchful care is very, very real, and very, very tangible.*

The Most Important Encampment of All – the Wilderness of Sinai

The description Moshe's journal gives to the encampment at Sinai is curiously short and curt. This entry merely says:

***They departed from Refidim and camped in the Wilderness of Sinai.
They moved from the Wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibrot Hattaavah.
[Numbers 33:16-17]***

Moshe will speak much more on the events of this transformative encampment in *Sefer Devarim* [i.e. the Book of Deuteronomy]. For now it is enough for us to remember that the 'Wilderness of Sinai' is where we ceased being a rag-tag group of refugees happy just to be free from the taskmaster's whip and embarked upon the process of becoming a kingdom of priests and a holy nation unto the Creator of the Universe.

The Journey from Sinai to the Plains of Moav – In Summary Style

According to Moshe's journal of way stations, the Holy One had us encamp at 20 different stations the names of which we do not recall from the narrative of *Sefer Sh'mot*. All of these encampments appear to have been in the *Wilderness of Paran* – which we have come to know in these studies as 'Yish'mael's world'.

When we left the *Wilderness of Sinai*, we encountered a whole new level of 'wilderness'. The Wilderness of Paran was strange and foreboding. There were *hidden dangers* and *trap doors* everywhere.

This place called **Paran** was our 'new home' for 38 ½ years. It is described in Torah as the barren area between Be'er-Sheva and Egypt to which Hagar and Yish'mael settled after being cast out of Avraham's camp. **Genesis 21:20-21**.

This was indeed Yish'mael's world. The 'spirit of Yishma'el' attacked, oppressed, and threatened to infect everyone who entered that world. What is Yish'mael's spirit? It is the attitude and approach toward life which necessitated that Yish'mael be forever banished from Avraham's household. Remember when Yish'mael and Yitzchak were growing up together in Avraham's household? When Yitzchak was weaned, Avraham held a celebration. Here is how Torah describes what happened:

*And Avraham made a great feast on the day that Yitzchak was weaned.
And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian,
whom she had borne to Avraham, **scoffing**.
Therefore she said to Avraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son;
for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son"*

Yish'mael has a *scoffing* spirit. It is a spirit that neither recognizes nor values, but instead speaks evil of, that which is set apart to the Holy One. It is unhappy, ungrateful, irreverent, and overflowing with aggression.

Why do I say seemingly unkind things like this? Remember back when Hagar was pregnant with Yish'mael? An angel of the Holy One appeared to her and described the son she would bear prophetically as follows:

*He shall be a wild donkey of a man;
His hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him. . . ."*
[Genesis 16:12]

That prophecy, of course, came true. Yish'mael took on all the characteristics his mother Hagar had exhibited after she got pregnant and none of the characteristics of his father Avraham.

*He adopted his mother's attitude of **angry, self-righteous insubordination**.*

*He adopted his mother's attitude of **entitlement**.*

*He adopted his mother's concept of **victimization**.*

*And worst of all he picked up his mother's idea that **Eretz Yisrael was not his home, that Avraham's chosen seed was an inferior people, and that the Holy One was not his God.***

It was at the various way stations of the Wilderness of Paran that we began to see ourselves start acting like 'wild donkeys' who bucked and kicked against, and scoffed and mock and 'brayed' *lashon ha-ra* concerning the Holy One and everything and everyone the Holy One has set apart as holy. This wilderness is where *lashon ha ra* started coming from our mouths minimizing the Divine Bridegroom's covenant, angrily attacking His faithful remnant, and totally rejecting His land of promise in favor of Egypt – or the nearest desert.

In the Wilderness of Paran we learned the seven primary characteristics which operate as telltale signs that the 'spirit of Yish'mael is at work – whether in us or in others. These telltale signs are:

- 1. An irreverent, mocking tongue;*
- 2. An untamable, wild donkey-like attitude;*
- 3. An argumentative, combative approach toward other people and situations;*
- 4. A tendency to devalue the land of Eretz Yisrael, and bind their hearts to another land;*
- 5. A tendency to choose foreign ways over the ways of the Holy One and the covenant which the Holy One made with Avraham;*
- 6. An attitude of special entitlement,*
- 7. Blaming the faithful remnant of the Avrahamic covenant for all problems.*

Most of our number never made it out of the wilderness of Paran. That is where a new generation arose to take their place.

From the Wilderness of Paran Moshe's journal reminds us that the new generation of Redeemed souls started their ascent to the present location. They encamped at Mount Hor, where Aharon surrendered his priestly garments and functions to his son Elazar, died, and was buried.

They then encamped at Kadesh, where the King of Edom threatened them with genocide if they set foot into his territory, and they held their peace, and moved on.

Then, as we have been reading lately, they had to deal with a series of attacks launched against them in rapid succession by the Kings of Arad, of Cheshbon, and of Bashan – as well as a conspiracy launched against them by the Kings of Moav and the Midyani.

The journal of departures concludes with these words, which bring us current:

*They departed from the mountains of Abarim
and camped in the plains of Moab by the Yarden, across from Yericho.
They camped by the Yarden, from Beth Yesimot
as far as the Abel Acacia Grove in the plains of Moav.
[Numbers 33:48-49]*

Never forget where you came from, Beloved. But also never forget that every place you have seen thus far is merely a way station – a watering hole – a learning zone. Your destiny lies ahead of you. And the Holy One is calling for you leave behind the things of the past and wholeheartedly enter into it.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Let's get started with a few basic questions.

[A] According to Strong's Concordance and Gesenius' Hebrew-English Lexicon, what are the English meanings associated with the Hebrew word *Massei*?

[B] List the places B'nei Yisrael camped in the order given.

[C] How many places altogether did B'nei Yisrael camp?

2. Beginning in verse 50 of the 33rd chapter of Numbers, the Holy One instructs the new generation of B'nei Yisrael, who will accompany Y'hoshua [Joshua] and Kalev [Caleb] into Eretz Yisrael, what to do when they cross over.

*And the Holy one spoke to Moshe in the plains of Moav
by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying:*

"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them:

*'When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Kena'an,
drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you,
destroy all their engraved stones,
destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places;
dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it [yourselves]
for I have given you the land to possess.*

*And divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families;
to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance,
and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance;
there everyone's inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot.*

*You will inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.
But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you,
those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides,
and they will harass you in the land where you dwell.*

Moreover in due time I will do to you what I thought to do to them."

[A] List the seven specific instructions given in verses 52-54.

[B] List the things does the Holy One says will happen if B'nei Yisrael fails to drive out the inhabitants of the land?

3. In today's haftarah reading Yirmayahu begins to sound the prophetic 'wake up call' in preparation to calling the People of the Holy One to return to Him and His ways. Yirmayahu is used by the Holy One to point out the ways in which the people of Israel had strayed away from their identity, mission, and destiny in Him.

*Hear the word of the Holy One,
O house of Ya'akov and all the families of the house of Israel.*

The Holy One says

"What injustice have your fathers found in Me,

*That they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters?
Neither said they: "Where is the Holy One
who brought us up out of the land of Mitzrayim, who led us through the wilderness,
through a land of deserts and of pits,
through a land of drought and of the shadow of death,
through a land that none passed through,
and where no man lived?"*

[Jeremiah 2:4-6]

[A] Name three things the Holy One revealed in this part of the prophetic message of Yirmayahu had led the leaders of Israel astray?

[B] What important question had the leaders of Israel in Yirmayahu's day ceased to ask?

[C] Have you asked that question this week with regard to your life? Pray, then answer the question in your own words.

4. In today's reading from the apostolic Scriptures Ya'akov [James] - the half-brother of Y'shua HaMaschiach - speaks to us on the root cause of all dissension within the Redeemed Community.

*Where do wars and fightings among you come from?
Don't they come from your pleasures that war in your members?
You lust, and don't have. You kill, covet, and can't obtain.
You fight and make war.*

*You don't have, because you don't ask.
You ask, and don't receive, because you ask amiss,
so that you may spend it for your pleasures.*

[A] According to Ya'akov what is the source of fights and quarrels?

[B] Think back to the last fight or quarrel you had with anyone. Can you pinpoint what the real cause of that fight or quarrel was?

[C] Ya'akov also states two reasons we are not functioning as intercessors. What are the two reasons he gives?

[D] What is the effect of too close a relationship of the ways and values of the world?

*May each of you progress at the Holy One's pace and not your own,
through each phase of spiritual development, preparation, and revelation
which Maschiach has lovingly planned for you.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study
Job 22:21-30

*"Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace;
Thereby good will come to you.
Receive, please, instruction from His mouth, and lay up His words in your heart.*

*If you return to the Almighty, you will be built up;
You will remove iniquity far from your tents.
Then you will lay your gold in the dust,
And the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks.
Yes, the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver;*

*For then you will have your delight in the Almighty,
And lift up your face to the Holy One.
You will make your prayer to Him,
He will hear you, and you will pay your vows.
You will also declare a thing, and it will be established for you;*

*So light will shine on your ways.
When they cast you down, and you say, 'Exaltation will come!'
Then He will save the humble person.*

*He will even deliver one who is not innocent;
Yes, he will be delivered by the purity of your hands."*