

Shiur L'Yom Revi'i

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Mattot:*** **Numbers 32:1-42**
 Haftarah: **Jeremiah 2:8-13**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Philippians 3:16**

Don't bring us over the Jordan.

[Numbers 32:5]

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

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #14, *V'al Neesecha* [For the Miracles]

Umikneh rav hayah liv'nei Re'uven v'liv'nei-Gad atzum me'od - *The descendants of Reuven and Gad had an abundance of livestock ...* . **Numbers 32:1a.**

The war is finally over. The existential threat the Midyani posed to us has been quelled – well, at least for at least a generation. We have celebrated the safe return of every single member of our twelve-thousand-man strike force. We have rounded up the myriads of domestic animals the war left roaming around without a shepherd to lead them. We have taken in 32,000 pre-pubescent Midyani orphan girls who had no other hope of survival. And now, the cold, hard reality of ‘post-war’ sets in. Real wars are not virtual reality games fought on computer screens, you see. Real wars wreak real havoc - on real lives, on real families, and on real bloodlines. Real wars destroy farms, fields, orchards, forests, villages, and cities. Real wars leave deep scars on the earth – and all of its inhabitants. Real wars leave gaping wounds in the souls of both the victors and the vanquished. Real wars leave waves of destitute widows, orphans, and refugees – not to mention men who are maimed and a generation or two, at a minimum, of walking wounded.

Dealing With the Aftermath of War

Dealing with war's horrible aftermath is a major challenge for anyone who values human life. As Golda Meir, former Prime Minister of Israel said after Israel emerged victorious from yet another war waged upon it by our neighbors: *We can forgive the Arabs for killing our children. We cannot forgive them for forcing us to kill their children.*

People who value the Creator's gift of life do not wish to see anyone die – even in war - but especially after both the machinery and the hate-filled rhetoric of war have fallen silent. As yesterday's aliyah of Torah was winding down we were therefore taken aback by something Moshe demanded we do in the aftermath of the war we had just fought. When he saw the crowd of Midyani refugees Pinechas

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brought back from the battlefield he flew into a rage. He ordered our young men to take their swords back in hand and deliver a blow of death, first upon on every male child of the Midyani, and then upon every single Midyani woman of child-bearing age. Not since Egypt had we heard a human voice issue such a callous decree.

Stunned, and having heard no specific mention in the direct communications from the Holy One of the need to go beyond killing the Midyani men of war and commit wholesale slaughter of non-combatant women or children – we asked respectfully: *Was Moshe's order for post-war killing of refugees the Will of the Holy One? Or was it just ... well, was it just Moshe being Moshe?* No disrespect to Moshe was intended. We just felt like we needed to know for future reference.

Perhaps it would also be just as important to ask *if Moshe's command was heeded*. Did our war-weary young men really pull their swords back out of their scabbards and wreak wholesale slaughter on women and children? We know what Moshe *said he wanted us to do* – but we haven't exactly got a track record of doing everything Moshe tells us, now do we? Did anybody really *sh'ma* Moshe? Was his order passed through and/or approved by the council of elders he himself had begged the Holy One to appoint to govern the nation? Were the captive women and children of Midyan really slaughtered? Were the fatal blows he demanded ever struck? Interestingly, Torah does not bear record of it actually happening. Not a single Midyani woman or child's death – nor any mass execution – is described or mentioned as a historical fact anywhere in the text. Contrary to Exodus 32:28, there is no reference to anyone doing 'according to the word of Moshe'. The narrative quickly changes the subject - to a discussion of the manner in which the spoils of war were allocated. And in that context what we are told is that 32,000 'persons' [in Hebrew, *nefesh adam*] from the camp of the Midyani that were subsequently divided amongst the Hebrews. See **Numbers 31:42, 46**. If all the young boys and women were killed, who were these 32,000? Were they really all pre-pubescent girls?

Whether or not Moshe's decree was implemented, however, his call for the killing of all male children and women of Midyan is one of a couple of things commonly pointed to by the New World Order's pseudo-intellectuals today as proof for their premise that the Torah is just as bloodthirsty as the Koran. They want to believe – against millennia of evidence to the contrary - that we who follow Torah are just as likely to engage in wars of ethnic cleansing as fundamental Islamic terrorist organizations. Our Contemporary Western Culture, with its abhorrence of everything holy and its hatred of everything Hebrew, absolutely loves to sit in judgment upon our ancient texts and upon anyone who dares to venerate them. Our

culture loves to gorge itself on the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. People who immerse themselves in the ‘politically correct’ doublespeak of Contemporary Western Culture’s ideological, political, governmental, entertainment, ‘news’ media, educational, and religious institutions have been brainwashed into thinking that the main reason they exist is to apply derogatory labels and high-sounding moral judgments to - well, *to absolutely everyone but themselves*.

The Holy One, on the other hand, has never called us to look at the world - or each other - through the lens of either labels or judgment. His calling is simply to *sh'ma His Voice*, to *sh'mar His Covenant*, and to *asah His instructions for human life on planet earth in real time*.

It is not our mission – individually or corporately – to *criticize, condemn, label, or judge other people on the earth*. Our assignment is simply to *follow our Bridegroom-King’s leadership and humbly walk and to diligently co-labor with Him as He seeks to redeem as many as will listen from the lie of the Serpent and the toxic effects of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*.

The Absurdity of Viewing or Discussing the Actions of People and Nations in terms of ‘Morality’ or ‘Moral Equivalence’

Three of the most over-worked, undefinable rhetorical constructs of Western Philosophy being thrown around regularly by the pompous demagogues of our days are ‘*fairness*’, ‘*morality*’, and ‘*social justice*’. Since demagoguery is never based in anything positive, the rhetoric always focuses on the negative side of these vague concepts. Everything the talking heads do not personally like they condescendingly label with a negative pejorative. Their whole message is based on what they do not like. They are virulently ‘anti’ *this* and passionately ‘anti’ *that* – but they have no plan, no solution, and no counsel – just incendiary slogans shouted arrogantly with fists raised in the air, profane rants, and acts of violence that they excuse as ‘justifiable’ because of some remote ‘injustice’ having nothing whatever to do with either the persons committing the acts of violence or the persons victimized thereby. They do not promote anything that can be defined as ‘fair’, ‘moral’, or ‘just’; they just condemn and incite outrage over what they choose to label as ‘unfair’, ‘immoral’, and/or ‘unjust’.

The fallen human mind would much rather think of other people and things outside itself as ‘unfair’, ‘immoral’ and/or ‘unjust’ – and thus excuse itself from dealing with those things and those people in real ways, in real time. Oh Dear One, are you not beginning to see through the deception? All this talk of ‘unfairness’, ‘immorality’, and ‘social justice’ in the media and the marketplace is just linguistic

sorcery - a parlor trick performed by charlatans, designed to inflame the fallen emotions of, and therefore manipulate and control the thoughts and behavior of, the gullible masses.

Any time you hear people throwing around the labels ‘unfair’ and ‘immoral’, therefore, immediately understand that who you are dealing with is not your Creator, but some manipulative human being’s self-justifying rhetoric. Accusations of ‘unfairness’ and/or ‘immorality’ are not the Holy One’s way; they are instead just a form of mind-control and behavior-manipulation. In the Holy One’s Word there is no such thing as either ‘fairness’ or ‘unfairness’, ‘morality’ or ‘immorality’. These are chol concepts - mental constructs dreamed up by the fallen mind of man, ‘juiced’ on the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Moreover, they are based upon a shifting-sand mirage. Viewing the world or the actions of people, armies, or governments in terms of ‘fairness’ or ‘morality’ is like a blind man trying to paint images of unicorns on a gust of wind.

‘Morality’ and ‘Fairness’ are simply not Biblical terms. Their usage by human beings is evidence that they have surrendered their minds to the toxic effects of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. It is not part of the fruit of the Tree of Life. For you see, ‘morality’ and ‘fairness’ are like ‘good’ and ‘evil’ – these are all whatever fallen, self-interested men decide to say they are in a given moment. The Holy One does not traffic in such nonsense. And His Ambassadors of reconciliation should not traffic in them either. In every instance, for people of the Covenant, the issue is never ‘morality’ or ‘immorality’, ‘good’ or ‘evil’, or ‘fairness’ or ‘unfairness’ – it is simply ‘what does the Holy One say and feel about this particular person and situation?’

We do best when we leave the silly arguments about ‘morality’ to the political charlatans and self-appointed religious judges of our day. As the Psalmist says:

***Why do the nations rage, and the peoples imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Holy One and against His Anointed, saying,
“Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.”
He who sits in the heavens will laugh; the Holy One will hold them in derision.***
[Psalm 2:1-3]

Our mission is to know and follow the Holy One, guided constantly – and solely – by His *Words of life instruction* and His *Eternal Ruach* [*i.e.* breath, spirit]. We are to continually test and adjust what we see in His Words of Life with what His *Ruach* is saying – and vice versa.

Walking With the Holy One Means Making Real Decisions Involving Real People In Real Time

Walking in Covenant with the Holy One is completely inconsistent with sitting in ivory towers - or the seat of the scornful - applying theories and labels to concepts and ideas. Walking in Covenant with the Holy One involves making real decisions involving real people in real time. With that in mind, let's look at Moshe's decree regarding the Midyani women and children – whether or not it was followed by the Community - through his eyes. He did not think in terms of 'morality' or 'immorality'. He knew he had to think in terms of 'what would the Holy One do?' And he knew that whatever he decided, somebody was not going to like it. Any way he sliced it, he knew there would be critics and haters. That is the trouble with *Divine Ambiguity* – *i.e.* when the Holy One tells you what to do in general [in this case, the directive to 'strike the Midyani'], but does not specifically define the parameters, or give detailed definitions or specifications. Think about the injunctions to '*remember the seventh day, to keep it holy*', to '*be holy, as [the Holy One] is holy*' and to '*love your neighbor*'. What exactly does each of those look like? These are matters of the Spirit – far beyond human understanding.

Most of the Holy One's instructions are like this - containing at least one or two hazy areas of 'Divine Ambiguity'. That is intentional on the Holy One's part. He wants us to know that He is not looking for mechanical, robotic obedience. He is instead looking for humble, gentle souls who will respond to the areas of ambiguity in His directives by coming to Him with questions, and who will pursue clarification by engaging Him in drawn-out, interactive conversations, staying in touch, and making course corrections as directed.

While there was now a counsel of 70 elders in place to assist Moshe [Numbers 11:10-17], the reality – especially in light of the well-documented failures of the elders' assembly in the matters of the sin of the spies, the rebellion of Korach, and the plague of *Ba'al Peor* - was that Moshe was still looked at by the Community as the one to propose a plan of action. If he did not hear from the Holy One specifically, after prayer, he had to do the best he could, balancing his knowledge of the Holy One against the suggestions and urges of his own fallen flesh. Which brings us to the issue of what was to be done with the Midyani women and children Pinchas had rescued from the field of war. The text does not tell us that Moshe prayed about this. He had no direct word from Heaven specifically dealing with the women and children. So, he took it upon himself to make an executive decision. What he decreed was not the only possible interpretation of 'strike the Midyani'. But, perhaps based on personal experience, offense at Midyan (rejection by Yitro and/or Tzipporah of the Divine calling upon his life?), his decree in relation to all the males and the post-pubescent women Pinchas brought into the

camp was a decree of death. He filled the ambiguity sphere of the Holy One's instruction with judgment. Was it his spirit - or his flesh – that told him that was what the Holy One intended? It is a rhetorical question, of course. The real issue is what protocol do WE follow, and what criteria do WE use, when we are charged with filling in the 'ambiguity space' of one the Holy One's directives?

What Did Moshe Know And When Did He Know It?

Remember that Moshe had lived among the Midyani for forty long years. He had spent decades tending the sheep of the highest-ranking Midyani diplomat on earth, Yitro [Jethro]. He had married one of this influential Midyani's daughters. He had sired two Midyani children by this Midyani princess. Almost forty years later, he knew the children he had sired through his union with her would never be his children - would never be Hebrews – would never be part of the Community of the Redeemed – and he knew why. He knew how from the moment of conception Midyani women trained and indoctrinated their children – both male and female – in the ancestral Midyani forms of sorcery, idolatry, deception, seduction, subversion, and perversion.

He knew very well from personal experience and from extensive observation that Midyani whose lives revolved around Ba'al Peor and Hebrews whose lives revolved around the worship and service of the Holy One just do not mix well. He knew from heartbreaking personal experience that it was not to be expected that either Midyani women or any child born to or raised by them would ever break away from Ba'al Peor and the abominable perversions associated with him and become true devotees of the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov. Tziporah had not done it. At least according to the record of Torah, Yitro had not done it². Even Moshe's own half-Hebrew/half-Midyani offspring, Gershon and Elazar, had not done it.

Moshe had to decide – was bringing the widowed women and fatherless children of Midyan into the Camp of the Redeemed, just before the invasion and conquest of Eretz Yisrael began, for which they were being prepared, something that could be risked? Moshe decided it was not. It is hard to judge him for that. It is certainly not our place to criticize or second-guess him, several millennia after the fact. The point of the story is that real war is not a game. In a real war, there is a real aftermath, and real decisions – very tough decisions - have to be made concerning real people.

Nobody has ever behaved – or will ever behave - completely righteously in the context of war. So please never take it upon yourself to judge or condemn others

² See Exodus 18:27 and Numbers 10:30.

for what they do or say in the course of – or in the immediate aftermath of – battle. With whatever measure you judge, you see, it will eventually be judged unto you.

The Dark Side of Tribalism Raises Its Head!

In the verses of Torah we will read today we will see the common vision and sense of shared destiny that 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. Unbeknownst to Moshe, Elazar, Yehoshua, 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 the leaders of these tribes have been whispering about, debating, and fine-tuning in secret is no *sh’ma* response to an 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 self-interest, tribalism – and danger.

Introducing the ‘Trans-Jordanian Initiative’

I call the controversial political proposition the Reuveni and Gadi have devised ‘*the Trans-Jordanian Initiative*’. The plan is radical. It involves those two tribes breaking off from the rest of the nation and settling in the land recently conquered from the Emori - 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 the elders of Reuven and Gad are justifying this on the fact that centuries ago the Holy One 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. 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 witness throng, 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 that the Holy One struck before the congregation of Yisra'el,

eretz mikneh hi vela'avadeycha mikneh
is a land for cattle³; and your servants have cattle.

Vayomru im-matzanu chen b'eyneycha
They said, "If we have found favor⁴ in your sight,

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

al-ta'avireinu 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 Reuven 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, Yehoshua, 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 Reuveni 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? Is it possible that they now believe Avraham Avinu was a silly old fool for

³ 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 domesticated animals that are bought and sold – including sheep, goats, oxen, camels, donkeys, or horses as well as cows. The verb root is *qanah, kuf, nun, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #07069, pronounce *kaw-naw'*, and meaning "he acquires", or "he purchases".

⁴ 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 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 the "new testament", and cannot be understood and appreciated fully when viewed solely in a "new testament" context.

settling only for the land the Holy One would show him, in which sat a city whose builder and maker was God?

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

The elders of Gad and Reuven had eaten a bowl of red porridge prepared for them by the Serpent. Like Chava and Adam, they 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 someone else's pastureland. They saw a few fields of grass, contented cattle, and a scenic ridge of mountains - and decided that this little patch of earth was not only all they had ever wanted but all they and their descendants could ever hope for.

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 shortsightedness, 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 Reuveni 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?*

Moshe Responds

Moshe is shell-shocked. His utopian vision of all tribes of *B'nei Yisrael* being all for one and one for all, and therefore entering and possessing the land of the patriarchs, and building a Kingdom-of-Heaven-scented society that would change the world, *together, in harmonious unity* – in the same inspired spirit of mutual respect and co-laboring with which they banded together to build the *Mish'kan* back at Sinai - is crumbling before his eyes. The Holy One never actually said that is the way it was going to be – but Moshe had assumed it – wished it – to be so. He has also gotten used to running the show himself, and doing everything his way. In the 39 years that have passed since the debacle resulting from the counsel of Yitro, taking advice or counsel from anyone but the Holy One has not been part of his

leadership style. Changes of plan or protocol – especially proposals for change introduced by anyone other than himself – are way out of his comfort zone. His initial response to the proposal of the Reuveni and Gadi is therefore more of a *lashon hara* rant than a reply:

*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 “*Desert-Floor Generation*” is not starting out very well. Moshe 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 shortsighted 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 Reuven 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. How easy it is to follow others into error and deception - all because we do not intimately know either *the goodness of the Holy One* or *the wisdom of His Torah*. If we knew either, we would not be so easily led astray.

Look carefully and *objectively* at the situation presented in today's aliyah. 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 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. In the long run, however, 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 hurtle, 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 foreign culture seductions, 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.

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!*’

Of Choices – 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 alter 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 – not just for us, but for our families and our progeny. 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 true was that, once at ease, they had simply quit listening for the Voice that had brought them to that state. 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. Then it would have to go 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. In the meantime, 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, about the meaning of *Mattot* being *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] Get out your Bible Atlas and locate “Jazer”, “Gilead”, “Atarot”, “Mount Nebo” and “Dibon”. What do you think was attractive about these areas?

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

[E] What “vow” or “oath” did the men of these tribes make in order to get Moshe to reconsider their proposal?

[F] Read Joshua 22:1-9. Did these men fulfill their vow and oath? How long did it take for these men to return to their families?

[G] Read Joshua 22:10-34 and Judges 12:1-6. What were the results of the decision of these men to take an inheritance outside of the Promised Land?

2. Today’s haftarah [verses 11-13] from the book of Yirmayahu [Jeremiah] mentions an “exchange” made by Israel’s priests, religious leaders, prophets, and rulers.

*Has a [pagan] nation ever exchanged⁵ [its] gods,
which are not even really gods at all?*

⁵ The word our English Bibles translate as “exchange” is *yamar* [*yod, mem, resh*, Strong’s Hebrew word #03235, pronounced *yaw-mar*]. It means to barter, or trade, one thing for another, or to wear someone else’s clothes and pretend to be (or be like) someone else. Contemporary “pop” English might translate it “*wanna-be*”.

*But my people have exchanged their glory for that which does not profit.
Be astonished, you heavens, at this,
and be **horribly afraid**, be **devastated** at it, says the Holy One;
For my people have committed two evils:
**they have forsaken Me, the Spring of living waters,
and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.**
[Jeremiah 2:11-13]*

An “exchange” [see verse 11 above] is a barter transaction -- a business deal -- where a person *voluntarily gives up something he or she already possesses* – why? Because he or she *values or wants something else more*.

Never barter away the Holy One’s gifts to you. Never exchange His Glory for a few moments of pleasure or a day in the sun.

[A] Read Romans 1:21-23⁶. Then re-read Yirmayahu 2:11. Write up a “contract” between Israel and Ha-Satan (the adversary) agreeing to the “exchange” those verses talk about.

[B] What two separate sins does the Holy One say that His people have committed in connection with this “exchange”?

[C] Distinguish between and explain each of these sins.

3. In today’s reading from the Brit Chadasha Shaul of Tarsus [Paul] speaks of attaining, of walking in things attained, and in holding true to things attained.

*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?

[E] Imagine you were asked to write a newspaper article about your spiritual life. Write an article, entitled “**Called Upwards**” and include three paragraphs, with the following three headings: (i) what I have attained in my spiritual life; (ii) how I am walking in line with what I have attained; and (iii) what is the “rule” by

⁶ Romans 1:21-25 reads as follows: “[K]nowing the Holy One, they didn't glorify him as God, neither gave thanks, but became vain in their reasoning, and their senseless heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and **traded** the glory of the incorruptible the Holy One for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things. Therefore the Holy One also gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves, who exchanged the truth of the Holy One for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”

which I live my spiritual life.

*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 Challenges 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!*