

Introduction to Parshot #s 42-43 – Mattot & Massei¹

READINGS:	<i>Torah Mattot:</i>	Numbers 30:1—32:42
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	Jeremiah 1:1 – 2:13
	<i>B’rit Chadasha:</i>	Philippians 3:12-16
	<i>Torah Massei:</i>	Numbers 33:1—36:13
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	Jeremiah 3:4 – 4:2
	<i>B’rit Chadasha:</i>	James 4:1 –12



To the hosts!
[Numbers 31:6]

This Week’s Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #14, *V’al Neeseicha* [And for the Miracles]

***Vayedaber Moshe el-rashei ha-matot liv’nei Yisra’el* – Then Moshe spoke to the heads of the staves/tribes of B’nei Yisrael Numbers 30:1a.**

Our study of *Mattot* and *Massei* always takes place during *the Three Weeks Between the Straits*. This intense period of communal mourning extends from the 17th day of the fourth Biblical month [*i.e. Tammuz*] through the 9th of the fifth Biblical month [*i.e. Av*]. During this 21-day period the sages call upon us to remember the worst days of our people, rededicate our lives and households to the Holy One, to His Covenant, to His Ways, and to His Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan. This is the beginning of a lengthy season of taking inventory regarding how far we have strayed from our King’s Grand Plan, diagnosing how we got off track, and making teshuvah. We start this process – which will continue in one form or another until *Yom Kippur* - with *the Three Weeks* of remembering the sins our ancestors committed against the Holy One in the days leading up to the Babylonian and Roman invasions – because it was those very sin patterns that led to foreign armies desecrating Jerusalem and destroying the *Beit HaMikdash* [*i.e. the*

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Temple] where the Holy One had dwelt with us.

In this three-week period in the year 586 BCE the first Temple was destroyed and our people were taken into captivity. The foreign army doing the invading at that time belonged to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Over six centuries later, in this three-week period in the year 70 CE, the Second Temple was destroyed by the Roman armies, and our people were banned from even entering Jerusalem. We lost our home. We lost our center of gravity. And the world lost the Manifest Presence of the Creator of the Universe. And *here we are* again – right in the middle of the most ominous three-week period on the Covenant calendar. We have, in the past, been susceptible to horrible sin episodes in this season of the year. Is it something about the heat? Or is it more about the approaching season of harvest? We tend to lose passion for *sh'ma*-ing the Voice of the Holy One, for *sh'mar*-ing His Covenant, and for *asah*-ing His mitzvot. We get lethargic. We disengage from our mission. We get lazy and sloppy in regard to our assigned tasks. We lose energy, lose focus, and lose purpose. We are easily distracted. We are easily offended. We throw away our shalom for a penny's worth of fleshly outrage. We throw away our *simchah* for a few seconds of fleeting pleasure, an evening of entertainment, or whatever perversion the pagan peddlers of the world happen to be peddling. We quit emitting light. We cease to release a pleasing, fragrant aroma into the world. We start to draw unclean spirits the way roadkill draws vultures. And we begin to attract predators the way a sheep gone astray attacks a pack of wolves.

The theme of our studies last week was '*prepare yourselves for war*'. The theme this week will be '*BATTLE STATIONS everyone!*' The '*time of war*' is now officially upon us. The watchman is crying aloud in the streets. The sound of the shofar is piercing the air. The hour draws nigh. Just over the next ridge the hand of the archer is even now reaching for his bow. A short distance beyond your line-of-sight horses trained for war are pawing the earth and straining impatiently at the reins. The burnished metal of a thousand swords glistens in the morning sun. The drones are in the air. The missile-launchers are loaded and aimed at your city, your neighborhood, your house, your head, and your loved ones' hearts. Are *you* ready? Has *your household* been prepared against this day? Don't panic. Don't run. Don't raise your voice. Don't blink. The eyes of the nations are upon you. This is your moment. The resistance is real. The danger is palpable. But the King is with you. And His Word is in you. Now, stay CALM, stay HUMBLE ... and SHINE!

A Two Parsha Travelogue

Our first *parsha*, *Mattot*, will begin with the Friend of the Bridegroom's final '*pre-war preparation*' teaching. The Captain of the armies of Heaven will give us a

brief discourse about the making, annulling and keeping of ‘vows’ and ‘oaths’. Why does Moshe choose this moment to speak to us on the subject of *vows* and *oaths*? Because He knows that people who are preparing to go – or to send their loved ones – off to war are hard-pressed not to make vows. “*If God brings me back home safely ...*” they say. “*If God protects you from the enemy’s arrows ...*” their loved ones whisper in reply. And each of the parties follow these words with glorious commitments of the noble things they will do ... ‘if’ the Holy One meets the condition they have laid out. Some vows like this are made out of *fear*. Others are made out of *passion*. Some are made thoughtfully and prayerfully; others are blurted out on the basis of nothing more than a fleeting emotion. Moshe however wants our words – the words of the earthly ambassadors of the Holy One’s Kingdom - to be *as our Bridegroom-King’s Words are*. He wants the words of those who represent the King to the world to be *flowing in wisdom, full of covenantal power and authority, and 100% trustworthy*.

When Moshe’s teaching on vows is complete the war for which we started preparing last week will commence in earnest. We will receive a directive from the Holy One that we are to *make war upon the Midyani people*. Trying to live in peace with those who wish us nothing but harm will suddenly no longer be an option. We will then *gird up our loins*, and take up our arms - and a thousand men from each tribe - twelve thousand of us in all - will *run to the battle*. A narrative report of the war will follow. The fighting will be fierce. Blood will flow freely. Princes and paupers alike will fall to the sword. Many women and children will die as well. Many will be taken captive. This narrative will in turn be followed by a description of the process through which the soldiers from the Camp of the Redeemed who physically fought in the war were restored to *tahor* status and full fellowship with the community after their immersion in the life-changing realm of warfare and death.

We will then read a detailed narrative discussing the process through which the *spoils of the war on Midyan* were divided. This will lead us to *a time of special thanksgiving and holy reverence*, as we approach the Holy One communally to express our gratitude for not only the victory He provided us over those who conspired to destroy us, but the *supernatural assistance He gave us* in preserving us from death.

Mattot will then conclude with an explanation of how it came to be that rather than claim their inheritance inside the Promised Land proper the tribes of Reuven and Gad as well half of the tribe of Menashe decided to settle outside Eretz Yisrael on land lying east of the Jordan River.

Our focus will then turn to the final parsha of Sefer Bamidbar – *Massei*. In this parsha the Holy One will introduce us to the journal He has had Moshe keeping relative to all the way stations we have encountered thus far on our odyssey. Moshe apparently thinks the Holy One wants His Covenant People in every generation to always remember *where we came from* and *what the Holy One did in us at each way station along the way*. As soon as Moshe’s brief retrospective travelogue concludes, however, the Holy One will turn our focus squarely to the future. The last three chapters of the parsha will lay out for us the first five primary assignments of the mission for which the Holy One has brought us to the precipice of the Inheritance to Avraham, to Yitzchak, to Ya’akov, and to their progeny forever. Here is a summary of both the retrospective and forward-looking sections of the parsha in mildly expanded outline form.

1. The Retrospective Element:
The Precious Gift of Revelatory Perspective

At the mere mention of the names of the places we visited – and where we sometimes danced, sometimes wept, sometimes soared to spiritual heights, and other times spiraled downward to spiritual depths - we find ourselves brimming with emotions ranging from nostalgia to grief to ecstatic joy. And the ***precious gift of perspective*** that Moshe’s journal provides at this strategic point in our walk with the Holy One will both *heal us* and *inspire us*.

A walk down memory lane is not, however, all that is contained in parsha *Massei*. The Holy One will quickly turn our attention away from our past to the glorious future that awaits us the other side of the Jordan Rift Valley.

2. The Prospective Element:
The Five Primary Assignments of the Mission To Which We Are Called

A. Assignment #1:
Evict, Purge, and Purify

First, the Holy One will prophetically declare over us that when we return to the Promised Land our assignment is not merely to displace the current inhabitants of the land but to strategically cleanse and purify that land. He will instruct us to *search out and destroy all the idols and root out all the idolatrous altars* with which the prior inhabitants have polluted the high places and groves. The Holy One plans to use the land of Kena’an – reconstituted as *Eretz Yisrael* - as the stage for the Great Passion Play He intends to put on for the world – and a special, noticeable, and beautiful level of purity of both the land and its inhabitants is a critical element of His Script.

The Holy One will warn us that should we fail to *sh'ma* His Voice in this regard, and allow any of the land's idol-worshipping inhabitants to remain there, they will become *barbs in our eyes* and *thorns in our sides*. The Divine Passion Play He has written for this stage will still go on; but the role we play will change dramatically.

B. Assignment #2:
The Build-Out Plan – Establishing the Boundaries

The focus of the narrative of *Massei* will then turn to the substance of the promise of the Promised Land itself. The Holy One will start by establishing with the Words of His Mouth the boundaries He intends the Bridal Chamber He has prepared for us to have.

C. Assignment #3:
The Apportionment Plan – Appointing the Allocation Team

The Holy One will then appoint specific men – by tribe and by name - to be in charge of dividing up the lands lying within those boundaries for purposes of inheritance. Yes, Yehoshua and Kalev will be right at the top of this list.

D. Assignment #4:
Providing A National Infrastructure

The Holy One will then instruct us how to build a national infrastructure, designed to keep the tribes connected to Him, the *Mish'kan*, and each other. He will tell us to sprinkle 48 special *Levitical cities* throughout the land and then tell us to make 6 of them something He defines as *arei miqlat* – i.e. *cities of refuge*.

E. Assignment #5:
Approaching Every Life Decision From a Cross-Generational Perspective

Then, while the attention of everyone in the Camp is on inheritances in the Land of Promise, the Holy One will revisit the case of Tzelofechad's daughters. In order to assure that their father's inheritance remains in the tribe He will direct that they must *marry only someone from their own tribe*. As a result of this directive Torah will inform us that each of Tzelofechad's five daughters complied with that directive and took husbands from within their own tribe.

Thus will *Sefer B'midbar* conclude. Our prophetic call will temporarily change from '*Battle Stations*' to '*At Ease*' - at least until Moshe gets that fire in his eyes and starts to release over us those torrents of fiery revelation and inspiration we call *D'varim* [a/k/a '*Deuteronomy*']!

The Stages of the Great Odyssey – An Overview

Massei, the final parsha of Torah's *Chronicles of Wilderness Wandering*, will

begin with these simple words:

Eleh massei v'nei-Yisra'el

These are/were the journeys of the children of Israel

asher yatz'u me'erezt Mitzrayim

who went out of the land of Egypt

l'tziv'otam b'yad-Moshe v'Aharon

by their armies under the hand of Moshe and Aharon

[Numbers 33:1]

The Inspired Writer of Torah then informs us that during the 38 ½ years of wilderness adventure birthed by the *Exodus* Moshe kept a *journal* – a set of *memoirs* as it were, in which he recorded for posterity the name of each and every place the Redeemed Community pitched tents. The exact words the Divine Writer uses are:

Vayichtov Moshe et-motza'eyhem l'mas'eihem

Moshe wrote their goings out according to their journeys

al-pi Adonai

by the word/instruction of the Holy One

[Numbers 33:2(a)].

Moshe's diary, as I call it, offers us much, much more than a touching, nostalgic trip back down memory lane. What we find in that journal 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. Yes, I used the term *prototypical*. I guess I could not resist spilling the beans. You see, Dear Reader, *prototypical* means *not merely historical*, but also 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 ‘bookend’ date at the far end of the Holy One’s prophetic timetable*.

v'eleh mas'eihem l'motza'eyhem

and these are their journeys according to their goings out.

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

UMitzrayim mekabrim

*while the Mitzrim were burying all their firstborn,
et asher hikah Adonai bahem kol-bechor
The firstborn among them whom the Holy One had struck:*

*uveloheyhem asah Adonai sh'fatim
When the Holy One executed judgments upon their gods.*

*Vayis'u b'nei-Yisra'el meRamses v'yachanu b'Sukot
The children of Yisra'el traveled from Ramses, and encamped in Sukkot
[Numbers 33:3-5]*

For those with ears to *sh'ma* 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. The steps they trod will be trod by us – or our children – as well. There will soon be a great ingathering of all the lost Children of Israel, as it is written:

*...the days are coming, declares the Holy One, when men will no longer say.
'As surely as the Holy One lives who brought the Israelites up out of the land of Egypt',
but 'As surely as the Holy One lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of North
and out of the countries where He had banished them.*

[Jeremiah 16:14-15]

*Behold I am bringing them from the north country,
and I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child
and she who is in labor with child, together; a great company, they shall return here.*

[Jeremiah 31:8]

The main differences between the first Exodus and the 2nd Exodus will be that the routes we travel the next time will not be along a circuitous route, will not consist of 'wandering', and will not be through miles and miles of dusty desert but alongside *streams of water*. For the prophet says clearly:

*With weeping they will come, and by supplication I will lead them;
I will make them walk by streams of waters, on a straight path²
in which they will not stumble; for I am a father to Israel.*

[Jeremiah 31:9]

And it is further written by the prophet Yeshayahu [Isaiah]:

*It shall be on that day that a great shofar will be blown,
and those who are lost in the land of Ashur
and those who are cast away in the land of Mitzrayim will come,
and they will bow before the Compassionate One
on the holy mountain in Jerusalem."*

[Isaiah 27:13]

² Unlike the first Exodus the Second Exodus will not be along a circuitous route, and will not consist of 'wandering'. Likewise, our trek will not be through dusty desert, but alongside streams of water.

* * *

I will say to the north, "Give Them Up!" and to the south, "Do Not Hold Them Back" bring my sons and daughters from the ends of the earth.

[Isaiah 43:6]

The latter-days' journeys of the Holy One's people will probably not begin in the physical land known as Egypt. But they almost certainly will begin in lands much like Egypt in many ways. They will almost certainly begin in lands appropriately called *Mitzrayim* [straights, oppressions] in the Hebrew tongue. They will almost certainly begin in lands pre-occupied with death, ruled by men with hardened hearts full of fear and loathing of the Holy One's people.'

Look around yourself, Dear Reader. Do you live in such a land? If not, at the present rate what do you think the land in which you live in will be like in 5 years? In 10? In 25? In 50?

The Prophetic Secret of the 42 'Stations'

Eleh massei V'nei-Yisra'el – These are the way stations/points of departure of B'nei Yisrael Numbers 33:1a.

Altogether there are 42 places listed by Moshe where the *Radiant Cloud of the Holy One's* Presence rested and thus where the community of the Redeemed was called upon by the Holy One to set up tents and sojourn. I call those places our '42 stations'. What's so significant about that? Well, let's consider the number of stations. The sages consider the number 42 (six times the perfect number of 7) to be a very significant number. The number six [Hebrew *shesh*], of course, usually is considered the number of man – especially the human condition after the Fall. The other multiplier in the multiplication resulting in a factor of 42, the number seven [Hebrew *sheva*], on the other hand, is considered by many to be the "number of God". In Hebraic thought it represents *the Presence of the Holy One*.

Could it be that the 42 *massei'im* thus represent, to this way of thinking, 42 *developmental steps for a redeemed person to transition from a carnal state to a point of readiness to enter into the threshold of the fullness of the Holy One's Presence?*³ Does each of the 42 places represent both a separate *Divinely planned encounter between the Divine Bridegroom and His People*, and a separate *Divinely-planned revelation to His People of some unique aspect of the Holy One's nature and character?*

³ Lest upon reaching the 42nd station we think that we have fully attained, however, keep in mind that there yet remain 7 more steps - to reach 7x7, or 49 - on the *other side of this threshold*. After all, the 42 stations described by Moshe merely took B'nei Yisrael from Egypt to the plains of Moav. Beyond this were Gilgal, Yericho, the Valley of Achor, Ai, Mount Ebal, Mount Gerizim, and then to Gibeon, etc.

Some sages believe there are mystical clues in the Hebrew names of the 42 encampments mentioned in today's aliyah. Feel free to search that matter out for yourselves if you have the time. Whether or not there are mystical clues in the Hebrew names recorded by Moshe, however, one thing is clear - the decision of where to camp was not made by Moshe, nor by the priests, nor the Sanhedrin, nor the tribal elders, nor by vote of the people. The location and the duration of each encampment were determined by the Holy One of Israel alone – when He caused the pillar of fire and cloud representing His manifest Presence to stop and hover over a particular location rather than merely passing by.

Whenever the cloud moved, as you recall, the people of the Holy One moved. And whenever and wherever the cloud stopped, the people of the Holy One stopped. And then, however long the cloud remained, the people of the Holy One encamped. Do you now see? The 42 places the children of Israel camped were by no means the run-of-the-mill arbitrary ‘*this-looks-like-a-good-place*’-type campgrounds such as we have experienced in our lifetimes. They were, instead, strategically pre-planned ‘development stations’ in the desert, designed and prepared by the Holy One for Israel before the foundation of the world. The presence of the *Radiant Cloud of the Presence* and the encampment of the Beloved of the Holy One no doubt changed the atmosphere of those places forever. And those places, and the events that occurred there, likewise changed the spiritual DNA of the Beloved of the Holy One forever.

The Holy One did not select the camping grounds by chance, or merely according to convenience. The Holy One carefully, lovingly, and wisely planned each one – and even choreographed the challenges we encountered in connection with each one – well in advance of our departure from Egypt. Likewise the Holy One plans the “camping places” of your life and mine. The Holy One knows where we *have* camped, and where we *will* camp – *if we learn to sense, and follow, the Cloud*. Let us never settle, as did the Gadi and Reuveni, for taking up permanent residence in what the Holy One intended as merely a campground. Campgrounds can be nice – but they are not HOME.

One Last Look Back – At What We Have Faced, Overcome and Left Behind

Some of the *massei* [encampments] Moshe lists in his prophetic journal we remember well from our reading of the Torah. We associate the names of those places with specific events that happened while the people of God camped there – specific *mercies that the Holy One showered upon His people*, specific *sins committed by the people*, specific *actions [or failures to act] of Moshe, Aharon, etc.*,

specific *plagues*.

Ramses, the opulent store city that our forefathers built for Pharaoh with precious sweat and tears and blood, we remember. **Sukkot**, the plain and simple place of open-air booths where we first paused to enjoy our first meal as free men, eating the **matzah** we threw together in haste the morning after the Passover, we remember.

The **Sea of Reeds**, where we stood and saw the salvation of the Holy One, we remember. **Marah**, where the Holy One turned bitter waters sweet for us, and where He taught us the first **chukim** [ordinances] and **mishpatim** [judgments] of Torah⁴, we remember.

Refidim, where water began to pour forth from a rock for us, and where we first experienced war with Amalek, we remember. **Sinai**, where we heard the Voice of the Bridegroom of Heaven, received the Torah as a **Ketuvah**, sinned with the golden calf, and built the **Mish'kan** [Tabernacle] we remember.

Kadesh, where we cowered in fear at the report of the 10 spies, and lost our focus and our nerve, we remember. **Mount Hor**, where we buried Aharon, we remember.

In such cases the mere mention of the name by Moshe conjures up memories and emotions in us – much like the mention of Plymouth Rock, or Valley Forge, or Gettysburg, or the Little Big Horn, or Woodstock today conjure up memories and emotions in most Americans. The point is that *human beings have been given the unique ability to associate places with events*. Can you think of Pearl Harbor, Auschwitz, Normandy, Waterloo, Iwo Jima, My Lai, Entebbe, Mogadishu or the World Trade Center, to name a few, without thinking of what happened there, and what the events that happened there reveal about our frail humanity - and about our need for a covenant with God? Do you not likewise always remember the place you were born, the places you went to school, etc., the places you felt closest to God, and the places you “messed up” your lives the worst?

I wonder if you could count 42 of those divinely ordained “stations”? If not, you [and I] probably still have a few more to go! And so as you review Moshe’s diary of the places we encamped **b’midbar** [in the desert] I hope the reading of the entries will not seem boring. I hope the names will not seem meaningless or foreign to

⁴ See Exodus 15:25.

you. The sages teach us, you see, that each of us is to consider ourselves to have *personally* come forth with Moshe out of slavery in Egypt. That means that each of us is to personally experience the 42 “stations” of the wilderness, and the progressive revelation of the Holy One - and of our need of Him due to our own limitations - represented by each of the *massei*.

***No Reason For Complaints; No Place for Offenses;
No Time for Regrets***

Several weeks ago in our studies, when our examination of *Sefer Bamidbar* began, this author introduced the adventure we were about to undertake as follows:

This *Sefer Torah* is going to be about how ordinary people, as well as honored leaders in the camp, respond to an extremely challenging obstacle course our Divine Bridegroom has designed for us all, to show who will - and will not - continue to love Him and *sh'ma* His Voice in the face of real life, real pain, real fear, and real sandal-meets-the-sand situations.

We will be called upon to test our newfound commitment to the Bridegroom in the heat and trials of the desert. Gird up your loins – Torah is about to get very, very real. And we and the world are about to find out exactly what we - and all those who have been sitting around in peace and comfort engaging in 'God-talk' - are really made of. It will not always be pretty. Indeed, what will come out of us will sometimes be so horrendously ugly that we will want to divert our eyes, tuck our tails between our legs and run as fast as we can back to Sinai – or even ... dare we say it ... *return to bondage in Egypt*.

Many of our present number will not complete the journey from Sinai to Nebo. And even for those who make it all the way to the plains of Moav the pathway we trod to get there will prove to be a very, very long and winding road. But rest assured of this Beloved - it will be *worth it*. Every step. Every wound. Every scar. Every hard lesson of the wilderness. It will be worth it. When we stand upon the plains of Moav a generation from now and stare across the Jordan River at the Bridal Chamber our Bridegroom has prepared for us it will be worth it all.

Well, here we are, nearing the end of the great journey. Walking with the Holy One through everything from lush green pastures to still waters to the barren wasteland of the valley of the shadow of death we have faced – and overcome – challenges that would have destroyed any other people. We have faced attacks from without, from within our own ranks, and from within our own fleshly hearts,

minds and tongues. One by one the other people groups of the earth – occasionally in concert with one another - have stepped up to take their turn to try to intimidate us, annihilate us, confuse us, distract us, bully us, curse us, and seduce us. They have had partial success. But we have moved on rejoicing – and they have been left behind. Our Bridegroom-King has been with us every step of the way, leading us, loving us, protecting us, defending us, advising us, encouraging us, comforting us, teaching us, and even disciplining us – so we have met every challenge, and have transcended.

We are becoming more and more like Him. We are not victims any longer. Nor are we just survivors. We are *overcomers* and *transcenders*. We are no longer artful dodgers reacting on the fly to whatever circumstances we encounter – we are a force that shifts atmospheres and causes reactions everywhere we go. We are enthusiastically embracing the new identity the Holy One has forged for us. We are excitedly embarking on the new mission He has ordained for us. And we are passionately pressing forward into the new destiny to which He has called us forth at such a time as this.

As we look back on the great adventure of our lives, how can we possibly indulge any regrets? The Creator of the Universe is our constant companion. He is to us a constant source of delight. He is our joy, our hope, our peace, and our ever-watchful guide. Of course there have been setbacks. Sure there have been failures. Most definitely there have been sorrows. But seeing how far we have come, and how much we have overcome, in Him, through Him, and with Him, the reality is that there is no way we would change a single thing. It has been *worth it* indeed, and a hundred times over – for **HE** is worth it all ... and so much more.

Our new King and our new lives beckon us to leave the past behind, and move forward. There is simply no room in our new lives for complaints. There is now no place in our lives for wounds, grudges and offenses. Our new lives are ahead of us, and the possibilities are limitless. There is absolutely no time or place in those new lives for unforgiveness or regret.

It Takes More Than One Generation to Tell A World-Changing Story

Some truly stunning things have occurred during the forty-year epoch that is about to conclude. There have been horrible low points as well as soaring high points along the way. An entire generation – *sans* Moshe, Kalev, and Y'hoshua – has died and been buried. But truly great stories are not – and cannot be – limited to one generation. Great stories – stories that have the power to change the world in a meaningful way – have to be able to survive the passing of the torch of testimony

to our children. World changing stories must even have the capacity to regale and inspire our children's children. The Avraham-through-Y'hoshua Odyssey is that kind of story. Some of the most memorable events of human history have occurred along the journey between *Sukkot* and *Pisgah*. And that is why in every generation you find greybeards, young princes and princesses in training, and pre-pubescent children alike sitting awestruck, sometimes laughing, and occasionally weeping as we all re-read and ponder the marvelous things that transpired in the lives of our ancestors while the Glorious Covenant under which we are privileged to live was being forged in real time.

The adventures we have been reading and discussing is not just obscure elements of ancient history; they are the essence of – and explain the meaning and purpose of – our lives. The purpose for which we are here on earth at such a time as this is to re-enact the phases, stages, and transformations of the timeless wilderness odyssey on the stage of modernity, in real life, and in real time. The journey - and its testimonies - constitute an integral part of the Eternal Covenant. Those who do not embrace and participate in the journey have a very difficult time understanding the impact that the Covenant is designed to have upon [a] us individually, [b] upon our bloodlines; [c] upon mankind as a species, [d] upon each of our individual homes, neighborhoods, and marketplaces as ecosystems in microcosm, or [e] upon Creation as an ecosystem in macrocosm.

A Look At The Haftarat For the Central Section of the Three Weeks **Jeremiah 1:1 – 2:13 & Jeremiah 3:4 – 4:1-2**

Divrei Yirmayahu ben-Chilkiyahu – *The words/downloads of Yirmayahu, son of Chilkiyahu Jeremiah 1:1a.*

Both of this week's haftarot come from the early chapters of *Sefer Yirmayahu*. The theme of *'Battle Stations, Everyone!* will definitely continue in effect. In the week's first haftarah a young *kohen-in-waiting* named ***Yirmayahu*** will be dramatically *apprehended, called, commissioned and sent out* to his Divinely ordained *battle station* by the Holy One. During some of the most turbulent times in history this man will be sent forth by the Holy One as His ***navi l'goyim*** [i.e. *prophet/spokesperson unto nations*]. Yirmayahu hailed from a small village called ***Anatot***, just a few miles north of Jerusalem. This quiet city of *kohanim* was situated within the tribal allotment of Binyamin.

What does the life of a young priest-in-waiting from the village of Anatot have to do with the nations of the world, you ask? In Yirmayahu's day the world powers of the era were *Assyria, Babylon and Egypt*. As each of these world powers in turn sought to expand its kingdom the Promised Land naturally fell squarely within its

sights. The Holy One put a hook in their jaw and drew the nations to the lands where He had established His Covenant People.

Any time the world comes knocking at your door *you have a choice to make*. Will you *stand strong in the Holy One's covenant, be who you were created to be, and function as the light to the nations you were established as?* Or will you *dally and flirt with the nations, lusting after their wealth while trembling before their petty kings and cruel armies?* Will you stir them to piety with your *purity of lifestyle* and your *passion for life* - or will you stain your garments with their perverse alternative lifestyles and adopt their macabre fascination with death? If you do the former the Holy One's Name will be praised in all the earth. But if you do the latter the Holy One's Name will be profaned in all the earth – and purging must take place else the Holy One's redemptive plan for mankind and Creation will be compromised. That is why in 722 BCE the Northern Kingdom of Israel – the nation of Northern Tribes founded by Jeroboam after the death of Solomon - was given over by the Holy One to the armies of Assyria. And that is why in Yirmayahu's day the Southern Kingdom of *Y'hudah* [Judah], the holy city of Jerusalem, and the sleepy village of *Anatot* looked to be the next set of squares on the chessboard for one of the player nations of the world to occupy and fortify.

The people living in Y'hudah during the centuries which will culminate in Yirmayahu's time have you see for the most part *not been faithful* to the Covenant the Holy One made with their ancestors. Over the centuries they have ceased to love the Holy One their God with all their hearts, with all their souls, and with all their minds. Over time they have come to see the Holy One less and less as a *beloved and gloriously worthy Bridegroom* and more and more as *an annoying former flame*. Instead of making the Bridegroom-King their most cherished intimate companion our ancestors indulged in illicit liaisons with - and engaged in affairs of the heart with – the foolish things of the *goyim*. They have not *sh'ma*-ed the Voice of the Holy One and *sh'mar*-ed and *asah*-ed His Torah, nor have they been the 'light to the nations' after the pattern of Avraham and Sarah that they were called, miraculously birthed, and carefully trained to be. They have gradually acquiesced first to the *worldview* – and more and more to the *cultures* and *mindsets* and *customs* and *false religions* - of the pagan nations that surround them.

Oh there is of course a *remnant of faithful covenant people* scattered among the populace. And occasional brief spurts of revival have burst forth, shining a few months or years, but have then, alas, disappeared from whence they came. And so the *ranks of the faithful remnant* are shrinking with each new generation. The trend is definitely not good.

Enter the Holy One, Stage Right.

The Holy One knows *what is happening*. And He knows *why it is happening*. And He knows very well *how, absent Divine Intervention, it is all going to turn out*. He wants to give the nations of the world *another option*. And He wants to give His covenant people in Y'hudah *another chance*. He knows that what the people need in 'such a time as this' is *not just another kohen, doing the same thing kohanim have done with decreasing passion and decreasing impact for the past several generations*.

The Holy and Compassionate One is keeping a close eye on the sleepy village of Anatot, and an unsuspecting young son of a *kohen* named Hilkiyah. And one day - as angels look on in wonder - the Holy One intervenes. Most of the world will have no idea that a Divine Intervention is going on. The powerful men of the world - the rulers of earthly kingdoms and the talking heads of established religion were totally oblivious. The rich and the famous men of the earth never had a clue that *Heaven was about to invade earth*. The Holy One will not send an earthquake, a fire, or a strong wind. All He will do is appear to a young *kohen-in-waiting* named Yirmayahu and totally rock his world. All that will happen will be that the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov declares to the *kohen-in-training* that from before his conception he had been Divinely chosen not to serve in the storied chambers of the Holy Temple but instead to fulfill a very special and extremely challenging mission in the streets of cities and the courts of kings. For the Voice that rocked Yirmayahu's world that day will declare to him: ***Navi⁵ l'goyim netaticha*** – i.e. *As a prophet/spokesperson unto nations have I appointed you. Jeremiah 1:4*. Wow! But ... “*what exactly IS a 'navi l'goyim'?*” young Yirmayahu must have wondered. And ... “*what exactly does a navi l'goyim DO?*” the son of Hilkiyah must have asked. Up to this point in life Yirmayahu and his family had quite naturally expected that he was being prepared to serve the Holy One and His covenant people as a *kohen* – following in the footsteps of his father and his *father's father* and his *father's father's father* all the way back to Aharon. But the Holy One has had *other plans* all along. Instead of seeing young Yirmayahu as a *kohen-in-training* the Holy One sees him as a *navi l'goyim*. And the Holy One sees this happening not when he reaches some magical age and maturity level, or completes some special training at the feet of sages and rabbis – but ***RIGHT NOW!!!***

⁵ The Hebrew noun *navi* [*nun, veit, yod, alef*, Strong's Hebrew word #5030, pronounced ***nah-vee***] is first found in Torah in Genesis 20:7. In that verse the Divine Voice speaks to Avimelech, King of Gerar, in a dream, saying concerning Avraham: ... ***restore to the man his wife; for he is a navi, and he will mediate/judge/intervene/intercede for you***. The verb root from which this noun is derived is ***naba*** [*nun, beit, alef*, Strong's Hebrew word #5012], which means to *bubble up* or *pour forth abundantly* as water pours from a spring that has been tapped.

Keep in mind that the difference between a *kohen*-in-training and a *navi l'goyim* is ... well ... it is sort of like *the difference between night and day*. A *kohen* functions as an encouraging friend of the Bride; a *navi l'goyim* functions as an inspector and enforcer for the Bridegroom. A *kohen* speaks gentle and diplomatic words of edification, encouragement, and exhortation; a *navi l'goyim* roars like a lion about to devour its prey. A *kohen* serves quietly and ministers peace; a *navi l'goyim* *commands rapt attention* and *demands radical transformation*. A *kohen* artfully guides a scalpel with which he separates that which is *tamei* from that which is *tahor* and that which is *chol* from that which is *kadosh*; a *navi l'goyim* wields a mighty two-edged sword that he aims at the hearts of those who rebel against the Holy One and serve other gods. A *kohen* teaches the Torah to children; a *navi l'goyim* proclaims impending judgment to world leaders.

The Holy One leaves no doubt about which path in life He wants Yirmayahu to take. The Voice of the Bridegroom declares in the ears of the young man:

al-kol-asher eshlachacha telech

to whoever I send you, go

...

v'et kol-asher atzavcha tedaber

and whatever I instruct you, speak.

To add emphasis the Holy One then stretched forth His Holy Essence to Yirmayahu in the form of a Divine Hand and actually did something very special which Scripture records as *touching the young man's mouth*. In connection with this *Immaculate Touch* the Holy One is recorded as saying to Yirmayahu:

hineh natati devarei beficha

Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

Re'eh hifkadeticha hayom hazeh al-ha-goyim v'al-ha-mamlachot

Behold, I have set you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms

lintosh v'lintotz uleha'avid

to root out and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down

v'laharos livnot velintoa

and to build and to plant.

[Jeremiah 1:9-10]

Wow! Heaven is indeed about to invade earth. And the innocent-looking portal through which the invasion is to come is going to be the mouth of young Yirmayahu, of the sleepy village of Anatot. The Holy One's calling to be a 'prophet to the nations' is, as one might expect, destined to drastically change Yirmayahu's life. It will also change the world.

The kings and priests of the nations of earth – including Yirmayahu’s own nation – think they have authority over their spheres of influence. The Holy One knows better. And we will soon know better too. This will become clear in the second *haftarah ha-shavua*. In that section of *Sefer Yirmayahu* we will examine some of Yirmayahu’s earliest oracles. In those oracles we will see some themes developing which will reappear over and over again in the course of Yirmayahu’s long ministry.

The first theme upon which the Holy One will have His Prophet to the nations touch upon will be the height and depth, and width and breadth of His deep, abiding, eternal covenant love for Israel. This overwhelming, unshakable, unstoppable love of an all Wise, all Powerful, all Good Creator, Bridegroom, Husband/King, and Covenant Partner is a central theme of all revelation. It is, indeed, the essential pebble in which every ripple of His Glorious Redemptive Plan for His Creation and for mankind finds its source. If He did not love Israel the way He loves her – with the tender but powerful, jealous but patient, never-ending kind of love He has chosen to indulge for her, there would be platform upon which to build a redemptive plan.

The second theme the Holy One will have Yirmayahu address will grow out of the first. The second theme of Yirmayahu’s prophetic messages will be that the Bridegroom-King’s amazing, all-surpassing love is offered to people who do not – and could never - deserve or earn it. Both before encountering His incredible love and afterward the human beneficiaries of His kindnesses and compassions always eventually wind up waning in wonder, getting distracted, offended, self-righteous, complacent, and/or downright rebellious.

Human vessels cannot ever get completely comfortable with the Holy One’s Divine Love. Their flesh and their deceived minds always want to kick against the goads. Undone by His Great Love for them, fallen humans occasionally agree to make a covenant with the Holy One in the heat of passion – but then they immediately begin a process of pulling away from it. At first they just pull away with their eyes, their hearts, their meditations, their passion, and their delights. And then they get verbal, complaining, murmuring, accusing, blaming, assailing. But eventually they get very physical – embracing other inferior lovers, and chasing unashamedly after inferior pleasures. But the Holy One loves such fragile and easily distracted human beings still. He gives up on them never. And His watchful care over them never slumbers or sleeps. Hence the third major theme of Yirmayahu’s prophetic download kicks in – the Great Lover’s prophetic *‘call to*

return'. This *call to return* consists, firstly, of *an alarm of awakening*. The Holy One offends the minds of men to reveal the heart of men. In Yirmayahu's case He will be told to compare His Beloved's attitude and conduct to everything from a *pagan nation* [Jeremiah 2:10-13, 15-18] to a *harlot* [Jeremiah 2:20] to a *rogue grapevine* [Jeremiah 2:21] to a *wandering camel* [Jeremiah 2:23] to a *female donkey in heat* [Jeremiah 2:24] to a *gang of thieves* [Jeremiah 2:26-27] to a *bride who forgot her wedding gown* [Jeremiah 2:32] to a voyeuristic wife who has given herself to a series of other lovers instead of to Her husband [Jeremiah 3:1-5].

The call then shifts emphasis, to the heart of the message – i.e. the actual call to lift our eyes and meet with the Holy One Himself as a Persona. He has to awaken us to the ugly details of the mess we are in order to coax us out from behind the makeshift garments of fig leaves and the lies with which we have covered ourselves and talk with Him face-to-Face. Once He gets us to respond to the 'come to Me' part of the call however, the Holy One is completely confident in the ultimate result. He has complete faith in His irresistible winsomeness. He is absolutely sure of His power of attraction. He knows that if we will just once fix our eyes upon Him – instead of talking about Him like He is not in the room the way adulterers do - we will once again be overcome with love. He knows that no human being He has ever redeemed from bondage – no matter how long ago or far away that redemption took place - can ever actually look at Him in His Majesty – much less hear His Beautiful Voice, smell His Intoxicating Fragrance, or feel His tender, life-giving Touch - and not melt before Him. He knows that deep down we whose lives He has once touched with His Love will, when awakened from their distraction and slumber, realize that we have always loved Him, have always needed Him, have always wanted Him, and will never be satisfied with anything but Him.

Finally, the fourth element of the prophetic 'call to return' is caused to shine forth. This is the part where the Holy One makes glorious promises of restoration to the ones who have heeded His call to return and repent. We never really 'give up' anything of value to reconcile and reunify with the Holy One. The joy of knowing Him and the pleasure of walking with Him, and the things He has planned for us, are vastly superior to anything – or any relationship – that He calls us to leave behind along the journey.

A Quick Look at Some Related Apostolic Scriptures

Philippians 3:12-16 & James 4:1 –12

1. Not that I have already attained, or am already made perfect; but I press on ...

In the first passage we will read this week from the B'rit Chadasha the 'battle

stations' theme will take a slightly different twist. We will hear on more subtle issues of spiritual warfare from *Shaul of Tarsus*. Shaul will speak to followers of Messiah in the Greek city of Philippi about “*pressing on*”, “*taking hold*” and “*straining toward*”. Even though according to Shaul’s theology

*... I **press on** ... in order that I may take hold of
that for which also I was taken hold of by Messiah Yeshua.*

*Forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forward to the things that are before,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of the Holy One in Messiah Yeshua.*

[Philippians 3:12-14]

2. Where do wars and fightings among you come from?

In the latter portions of the week Ya’akov [called James] will speak to us plainly about the root causes of all dissension within the Redeemed Community. He will then exhort us with eight very specific Torah-based directives – *i.e.* the *eight mitzvot of Ya’akov*:

Therefore ...

1. *submit yourselves humbly to the Holy One’s direction, discipline and authority.*
2. *As you do this, resist [face up to; counter, oppose,] the adversary, and he will flee from you.*
3. *Draw near to the Holy One, and He will draw near to you.*
4. *Cleanse your hands, you sinners;*
5. *and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*
6. *Lament, mourn, and weep.*
- Let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to gloom.*
7. *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Holy One, and he will exalt you.*
8. *Don't speak against one another, brothers.*

He who speaks against a brother and judges his brother speaks against the Torah and judges the Torah.

[James 4:6-11]

Shaul and Ya’akov want us to understand that the good fight of faith we are called to wage hand in Hand with the Holy One is by no means over. Indeed, our assigned mission in the campaign starts with becoming part of *the Great Resistance movement*. We must subject ourselves daily to the Holy One – and resist the adversary at every turn. The five most important areas of resistance are identified as the *hands* [*i.e.* our activities and pursuits], the *heart* [*i.e.* our attitudes, opinions, affections, desires, and delights], the *emotions* [*i.e.* what we allow to make us sad, happy, anxious, afraid, at ease, etc.], the *tongue* [*i.e.* what we choose to talk about and the level of blessing and hope – or toxicity – we release into the world], and *the Torah* [*i.e.* His revelation regarding the way in which man in Covenant with Him should think, speak, and interact with Him, with Creation, and with fellow man]. We not only each have our assigned battles to fight, we each also have our own individual *battle stations* to

man. So ... why are you just standing there, Dear Reader? The cry is resounding.

May the Voice by which you live be the Holy One's, not your own or that of any mere political, social, or religious leader.

For blessed is He who walks not in the counsel of the "un-Godly".

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

Petition #14: V'al Neeseicha [And for the Miracles]

V'al neeseicha shev' kol yom imonu

We encounter Your miracles every day

V'al n'flitocha v'tovoteicha

And your wonders and favors

shev'kol et erev v'boker, v'tzaharayim

in every season –evening, and morning, and afternoon.

Hatov ki lo kalu rachameicha,

You are the Ultimate Good; Your compassions never max-out

v'ham'rachem ki lo tamu chasodeicha

and You are the Compassionate One, Whose lovingkindness knows no bounds.

Me'olam kivinu lach

Ever will we trust in You.