

*Shiur L'Yom Shenit*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Mattot:** **Numbers 30:1-16**
 Haftarah: **Jeremiah 1:1-19**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Philippians 3:12-14**

Moshe spoke to the heads of the staves/tribes of B'nei Yisrael.

[Numbers 30:1]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 18:13 and 20:25;

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

Vayedaber Moshe el-rashei ha-mattot liv'nei Yisra'el - Then Moshe spoke to the heads of the staves (or tribes) of Israel Numbers 30:1.

The title the sages have given to the first section of Torah we study this week each year is “*Mattot*”. This title is taken from the first line of the text. English Bibles translate the Hebrew word *mattot* as *tribes*. A question is therefore presented: What if anything do *tribes* have to do with the theme[s] we will encounter in the body of this week's parsha? Well, let me ask you this – are you ‘*Tribal*’? Do you see yourself as having a *tribal identity*? Does your self-concept revolve around that - or an *ethnic or racial identity*? A *country and/or region of origin identity*? A *gender-obsessed identity*²? An *age group or generational identity*? An *organizational-association identity*? An *ideological identity*? A *religious affiliation identity*? Do you claim any labels other than as *a child of Heaven's King*? Do you see the world – and other people – through the false light of *ethnic or tribal lenses*? Are you *for the Kingdom* – or are you part of reason the human part of the Kingdom on earth presently looks like *a house divided against itself, which cannot stand*?

Moshe is not told to speak the opening words of the parsha – but he speaks them anyway. He speaks them to the *heads of the tribes*, but he speaks them about *the children of Yisrael*. The focus is clear – our common mission and calling comes first. All our tribal identities and identifications must yield to the superior allegiance of the Kingdom as a whole.

The Challenging Reality of ‘Tribes’ and ‘Tribalism’

Up to this point in Torah the primary focus of the narrative has been on the *common calling, mission and prophetic destiny* of the entire Witness Throng of

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²This would include seeing and classifying oneself as a ‘modern woman’, a ‘man's man’, a ‘renaissance man’ etc. as well every form of self-identification according to gender-preference [heterosexual, homosexual, trans-sexual, etc.].

Yisrael – *i.e.* of all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov. We have thus far faced the world as ‘*the Tribe*’ – not as ‘tribes’. It has, of course, been recognized at many places that the great nation forged in Egyptian bondage and called to its destiny at Mount Sinai consists of 13 tribes³, one named for each of the sons of Ya’akov except *Yosef*. But thus far it has been the singular, shared vision of the thirteen tribes, not anything unique to one tribe or another, which has been the Torah’s focus. All 13 tribes COLLECTIVELY suffered through the perils of hard bondage and forced labor in Egypt. All 13 tribes were COLLECTIVELY brought forth out of Egyptian bondage with a Mighty Hand and an Outstretched Arm and Great Miracles. We ALL COLLECTIVELY marched dry-shod through the Sea of Reeds. WE ALL COLLECTIVELY assembled at Mount Sinai and became betrothed to the Holy One under the Great Chuppah of Heaven. We are all COLLECTIVELY called to be the special treasure people of the Creator of the Universe. We have ALL COLLECTIVELY been set apart forever as a Holy Nation. We have ALL COLLECTIVELY been commissioned, empowered, and sent out to function as the Holy One’s kingdom of priests. We ALL COLLECTIVELY suffered the attack of Amalek, the insult of Edom, the raiding parties of the king of Arad, the full-bore frontal assaults of the Emori armies under Sichon and Og, and the attempts of Moav and Midyan first to curse us and then to destroy us with their perversions.

Thus far it has been all for one, and one for all. Tribal identities have existed, but have thus far been relevant only in relation to our geographical placement in the Camp and the order in which we march. In parsha *Mattot* however that will begin to change. In the course of parsha *Mattot* we are for the first time going to have to face some ‘TRIBAL TROUBLE’. It will not by any means be the last time this will happen. Indeed, TRIBAL TROUBLE is destined to be a major stumbling block for the Covenant nation for millennia – a stumbling block only a man like David – or the *Son of David* – will be able to overcome. *Tribalism* is destined to become one of the greatest tests of the Kingdom. The Holy One wants us to *work together* – not go all tribal on each other.

If, as, and to the extent we let uncleanness attach to our tribal identity, you see, unclean spirits will sniff it out and have a real heyday. Dark shadowy waves of attitude, sentimentality pride, and offense will pour toxic, paranoid nonsense on our tribal, ethnic, age and gender-related, organizational and cultural lenses. And as a result we will start being suspicious of, see ourselves as in competition with,

³ The thirteen tribes, in their original birth order, are *Rueven* [Reuben], *Sh’mom* [Simeon], *Levi*, *Y’hudah* [Judah], *Dan*, *Naftali*, *Gad*, *Asher*, *Yissakhar* [Issachar], *Zevulun* [Zebulun], *Binyamin* [Benjamin], *Menashe* [Manasseh], and *Efrayim* [Ephraim]. Of course, the latter two were born to *Yosef* in Egypt, and later adopted by Ya’akov and into the household of Yisrael.

discriminate against, and turn against each other instead of co-laboring with each other in the Bridegroom-King's Grand Redemptive Plan for mankind and Creation.

Tribal identification is *a test designed for us by the Holy One*. Will you pass or fail this test, Dear Reader? Will your primary identification be Kingdom Servant – or will it be tribal in nature, ethnicity-based, gender-based, organizational, or nation/region of origin focused?

Getting a Grasp on the Hebraic Meaning of Mattot

Mattot is the feminine plural form of the Hebrew noun *mattah*⁴. The verb root of both *mattah* and *mattot* is *natah*⁵. This ancient verb root constitutes a pictographic mural showing someone *stretching out*, or *extending his hand*, to *offer something* or to *reach for or toward something*. The *mattot liv'nei Yisrael* are the *extensions* from sons of Yisrael – that is, they are the tribes, who are “extensions” of Ya'akov's sons. Ya'akov himself could not occupy the land promised to Avraham; but now, with Ya'akov in his *extended state*, through the 12 tribes that descended from him, it could - and one day will - be accomplished.

But there is a catch to the ‘tribal’ nature of extension. There is an inherent problem with the idea of accomplishing an objective through a confederacy of tribes. What is the problem with tribes, you ask? I'll tell you. The problem with tribes is that they are ... well ... they are just so *TRIBAL*. Especially in seasons when the Holy One's glory, holiness, beauty, wisdom, will and ways cease to be the main focus of everything being thought, talked about, and done tribes gradually tend to start thinking and looking at and responding to things and circumstances and opportunities through *TRIBAL LENSES*. That means they do not see the world the same way. That means they do not *think the same way*. They do not *value the same things*. Even the things they do all value *they tend to value to significantly different degrees*. And when that starts to happen, if the Holy One's glory, holiness, beauty, wisdom, will and ways does not quickly become the main focus of everything being thought, talked about, and done once again, one-by-one or two-by-two tribes tend to start jumping ship and taking off in different directions.

It will all be foreshadowed in this parsha. In this parsha our corporate destiny will be seriously challenged for the first time. Our interests will for the first time actually *diverge along tribal lines*. Our potential for ugly, self-centered, divisiveness based on who one's mother was and was not will raise its head for the first time since the stunning conclusion of the *Yosef Narrative* of *Sefer B'reshit*. The dry bones of our dear ancestor Yosef will surely shudder. For it was he who

⁴ *Mattah* is spelled *mem, tet, hey*. It is pronounced *maw-taw'*.

⁵ *Natah* is spelled *nun, tet, hey*. It is pronounced *naw-taw'*.

many years ago passionately cautioned his brothers, once they had experienced a miraculous, prophetic season of reunification:

Al-tirgeizu badarech
Do not quarrel along the way.
[Genesis 45:24]

Oh Beloved sons of Yisrael, natural and engrafted - as we begin this week's studies in earnest please give heed to Yosef's words, and take them to heart.

The Manifold Wisdom of the Holy One

The Holy One, of course, is not sleeping. The budding tribalism of the Camp of the Redeemed is not taking Him by surprise. The thought of some serious division occurring among His Covenant Nation on tribal lines is not making Him wring His Hands in anxiety. He is not worrying His Head about whether or not somehow this tribalism thing is or is not going to turn out all right. He is, after all, the One Who deliberately chose for us to be a nation composed of Twelve Tribes. He knew exactly what He was doing. Our troublesome tribalism, you see, provides *an absolutely essential element to His redemptive plan*. If He can regather and unify and build His nation upon the foundation of the twelve contentious, jealous, and harshly judgmental sons of Ya'akov through four different mothers, and can regather and unify and build the Messianic kingdom upon the foundation of the twelve diverse, self-interested, independent-minded tribes of Israel scattered to the four winds, He can reconcile all men to Himself and demonstrate the power of His Love and Wisdom over all human weaknesses.

How a nation that has been blown apart from twelve tribes into six million pieces and dispersed to the ends of the earth can be *gloriously reunited* just as were Yosef and His brothers constitutes one of the major components of the Great Mystery that the Holy One intends to reveal to the stunned world at the appropriate time. As Shaul of Tarsus wrote:

*For I do not desire brethren that you should be ignorant of this mystery,
lest you should be wise in your own opinion,
that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:
"The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
For this [is] My covenant with them, When I take away their sins."
[Romans 11:25-27]*

Each of the tribes of Israel reflects a piece of the great puzzle. Every one of the tribes has been programmed to complete a journey unique to it. Each tribe has been empowered with a specific kind of energy that the Holy One intends for us to manifest in this world.

We are all Israel. We are all children and servants of the King. But we are also twelve distinct tribes. And this, too, is designed and destined to be a part of the blessing of all peoples which the Holy One promised to our ancestor Avraham in Genesis 12:1-3. The blessing comes when we model to the world how to overcome the differences and divisions that attach themselves to our tribal identities through uncleanness.

A New Formula for the Introduction of Mitzvot

Thus far in the Torah whenever our Divine Bridegroom has spoken Divine instructions for us as His betrothed Bride to live out the Inspired Writer has made it very clear when it is the Holy One's voice doing the speaking. He has done this by introducing the instruction in question with a particular formula. When the words He has written are direct quotes from the mouth of the Holy One the Inspired Writer has always prefixed those words with the phrase *Vayadaber Adonai* [i.e. "And the Holy One spoke ..."]. In other words, with regard to the *mitzvot* previously communicated we have been given the opportunity by Torah to 'eavesdrop' as it were on the actual God-encounters in the course of which Moshe received his instructions. We have been allowed through the medium of Torah to actually 'hear' the Holy One's words first-hand. Up to this point whatever Moshe has heard, therefore, we have heard. We who read Torah have not quite frankly had to take Moshe's word for much of anything. But *the times they are a-changin'*. With the beginning of parsha *Mattot* the now familiar, totally charming, and wonderfully comforting introductory phrase *Vayadaber Adonai al-Moshe, l'emor* [i.e. "And the Holy One spoke unto Moshe, saying ..."] will begin to gradually be phased out of the narrative of Torah. Only infrequently from this point in Torah forward are we going to be given the wonderful privilege of 'eavesdropping' on Moshe's God-encounters and overhearing the communication of life instructions by the Divine Voice. From this point forward all we will have in the place of *Vayadaber Adonai el-Moshe*" is usually going to be Moshe's personal word that '*Zeh ha-davar asher tzivah Adonai* [i.e. "This is the thing which the Holy One has enjoined ...].

What are we to make of this dramatic change in the form of presentation? We are being *weaned*, Beloved. We are being required to learn how to *test for ourselves whether the voice we hear speaking instructions to us about how we are to live and deal with real life situations is indeed the Bridegroom's voice – the One we heard at Sinai - or is instead the 'voice of another'*.

As first Moshe, then others, begin teaching us *mitzvot* in the Holy One's name but without the *Vayadaber Adonai al-Moshe, l'emor* 'seal' of authenticity we will have to learn to seriously consider whether the words we are hearing are truly *Divine Torah of the Holy One* as represented - or are instead merely opinion,

philosophy, creed, theory, theology or legislation emanating from the human, mind, will, and emotions of mortal men.

This is an important and timely lesson for us to learn, as it will be the '**Zeh ha-davar asher tzivah Adonai** [i.e. "This is the thing which the Holy One has enjoined ...] format, not the **Vayadaber Adonai al-Moshe, l'emor** [i.e. "And the Holy One spoke unto Moshe, saying ..."] format, which will characterize the entire final book of Torah – the Book of Deuteronomy.

The discipline of testing for ourselves whether words we hear are the words of our Bridegroom or the words of 'another' is not just a critical tool of Torah study or Biblical interpretation. It is perhaps the most important lesson we can learn in the course of becoming the *sh'ma* people and the light to the nations that we are called to be. We absolutely must, you see, learn to *know intuitively the voice of the Shepherd*, to distinguish His Voice and His Words from all other voices and all other words, and train ourselves and our children to *sh'ma* His Voice and Words while *lo sh'ma*-ing the voice and words of every other.

Moshe's Teaching Regarding Vows, Oaths, and Pledges

The new era of **Zeh ha-davar mitzvot**-communication begins with Moshe telling the *heads of the tribes of the children of Yisra'el*:

Zeh ha-davar asher tzivah Adonai

This is the thing that the Holy One has enjoined:

Ish ki-yidor neder l'Adonai

When a man vows a vow to the Holy One,

o-hishava shvu'ah lesor isar al-naf'sho

or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond,

lo yachel d'varo

he is not to desecrate/dishonor⁶ his word;

kechol-hayotze mipiv ya'aseh

he is to do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth."

[Numbers 30:2]

The 1st subject of the *zeh ha-davar* era of Divine communication is vows. Moshe wants to train the nation he is leaving behind to be very, very careful with *the utterances of her mouth*. The gift of intelligent speech is given only to the creature the Holy One made in His Own Image. This gift is to be used for the glorious

⁶ The Hebrew verb utilized here is a form of the verb root *chalal, chet, lamed, lamed*, Strong's Hebrew word #2490, meaning to *profane, dilute, defile, pollute, desecrate* and/or *dishonor*. The essence of the verb is the action of taking something set apart for a noble or holy purpose and employing it instead in a perverse or frivolous way.

purpose of revealing the many facets of the Creator's Goodness, Majesty, Wisdom, Kindness, Mercy, Longsuffering, Forgiveness, Joyfulness and other characteristics. It is not to be used for vows.

When the gift of speech is being used for its intended purposes, vows are not necessary. But out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

What the Mouth Speaks ...

As we have previously discussed the Holy One's Redeemed Community is called to live primarily by "*the Voice*" in contradistinction to the sword. What comes out of our mouths is therefore very, very important. Indeed, our mouths and other organs of speech have been *recreated by the Holy One*, in order that, through them as well as the other members of our bodies, we may bring honor and glory to the Holy One. The words that come out of our mouths *reveal what is inside of us*.

Vows and oaths are *forward-looking declarations*. They constitute a mortal human being declaring what he – or someone else – will do in the future. In other words, they are words that will either agree or disagree with the Holy One's Divine Plan. We need to tread very, very softly in regard to anything future.

There is, of course, a healthy dose of spiritual arrogance that goes along with every forward-looking declaration a human being might make. We live at the Holy One's pleasure. Every breath we breathe is by His permission – and completely subject to termination by Him at any moment. We are not guaranteed – and can do nothing to deserve – a single second of the 'future'. Anything we say about what we *will do* is meaningful to anyone, including ourselves, only if He graciously consents to let us live long enough to fulfill – or fail to fulfill - whatever it is we have sworn or taken an oath to do. Even assuming the Holy grants us enough time on earth to do what we vow or declare upon oath that we will do, what is the effect of making a vow or oath on our future? It places us under a severe limitation. A vow or oath restricts what we can do. Through a vow or oath we surrender our freedom to do either what the Holy One wants us to do or what we, if it were up to us, would want to do. A vow or oath *places the speaker in a box*, so to speak.

The Biblical 'Seed' of the Concept of 'Vows'

Nowhere in Torah does the Holy One instruct men to make vows to Him. The making of vows is therefore not a *sh'ma* response to Divine Will but is instead an unsolicited and potentially dangerous act emanating from human will, intellect, and passion.

The first and prototypical 'vow' recorded for us in is found in Genesis 28:20-22. The '*ish*' [*i.e. man*] who made the first was none other than our ancestor Ya'akov. In

the course of him fleeing for his life from his brother Esav, as he was contemplating a whole new life in a foreign land, the Holy One appeared to Ya'akov for the first time, and revealed to him His Divine destiny, saying:

*I am the Holy One - the God of Avraham your father, and the God of Yitzchak.
The land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed.
Your seed will be as the dust of the eretz,
and you will spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south.
In you and in your seed will all the families of the eretz be blessed.*

*Behold, I am with you, and will keep you, wherever you go,
and will bring you again into this land.
For I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken of to you."*

[Genesis 28:13-15]

Overwhelmed by this revelation Ya'akov responded in typically human fashion – he marked the spot of this his first God encounter by erecting a stone pillar, anointed the stone upon which he had laid his head in that place with oil, and proceeded to make an unsolicited ‘vow’. The vow Ya'akov made was as follows:

*If the Holy One Elohim will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go,
and will give me bread to eat, and clothing to put on,
so that I come again to my father's house in shalom,
and the Holy One will be my God, then this stone, which I have set up for a pillar,
will be the **bayit Elohim** [God's house]
And of all that you will give me I will surely give the tenth to you."*

We are descendants of Ya'akov. We tend to approach spiritual things much as he did. We tend to react to situations of great emotional upheaval – and to revelations of the Holy One's power, wisdom, glory, holiness, and goodness – by blurting out vows of service and dedication. Let me give you an example of this you might not have thought about. Think about the words that make up the titles to the songs you have sung and the liturgical prayers you have prayed in your life. If you have sung songs of praise – psalms, hymns, or worship choruses - or have read or recited liturgical prayers, the words of those songs and prayers almost always contain *vows to the Holy One*. Now pause for a moment to think of the songs you have sung – and the prayers (liturgical and spontaneous) which you have prayed - to the Holy One. What vows have you made – without even thinking about it?

You and I are indeed descendants of Ya'akov, Dear One. In situations of crisis and in moments of overwhelming revelation I have vowed much more to Him than I could deliver in a thousand lifetimes. I am perhaps His most bankrupt debtor. What about you? What have you vowed to Him in moments of crisis or in response to revelations of His power, glory, wisdom, holiness, and goodness? And what are you going to do about it?

What Was it Yeshua Had to Say About Vows and Oaths?

This brings up an interesting point for all who cling to both the commandments of the Holy One and the testimony of Yeshua. In the message most theologians have come to call the ‘sermon on the mount’ Yeshua taught:

*“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oath you have made to the Holy One.’
But I tell you, do not swear [an oath, or vow] at all*

*Simply let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no” be “no”;
Anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”*

[Matthew 5:34, 37]

Alas, many have interpreted this portion of the Sermon on the Mount as *a renunciation by Yeshua of the Torah*. But let us look closely, and see if there is any renunciation of the Torah to be found. The first question we have to ask is “*Does the Torah ever instruct us to make vows or swear oaths?*” No, it does not do anything of the sort. It only *tells us that if we choose*, as an act of free will, to make a vow or declare an oath then whatever we say we are going to do we simply must do. We should not take it upon ourselves to put ourselves in a box – but if we insist on doing so, for the sake of the Kingdom we represent we should prove that *our word is true even if our mind is weak*.

If Yeshua had really been renouncing Torah’s teaching on vows His message have been “*do not worry about fulfilling oaths or vows you have made – God doesn’t care*”? That would have been the exact opposite of what Torah tells us. But that is not what Yeshua said at all. Yeshua did not change anything – He merely clarified the intention of the Holy One – that no man *swear falsely*, and thereby *profane the Name of the Holy One*. **Leviticus 19:12**. All Messiah did was reiterate how important it is that we *should never make promises we cannot keep*.

Why? Why is it important we not say publicly we are going to do something, and then not do it? Because we are emissaries of the Holy One – and if we as His emissaries do not do what we say we will do, His Name will be profaned.

What Yeshua did was to remind us that *Heaven is God’s throne*, that *the Earth is God’s footstool*, that *Jerusalem is the City of the Great King*, and that we cannot by shouting or swearing it make anything happen - even on top of our own heads! [*you cannot make even one hair white or black – Matthew 5:36*]. Yeshua was merely pointing out that the Holy One – not us - is in control of all aspects of our world, hence *we are in no position to make vows or oaths*. We are to seek His Will and perform His Words - *not go around foolishly proclaiming our own ideas about what ought to happen or what we pretend to be able to make happen*. The “voice” by which the

Redeemed of the Holy One are to live is *His Voice* - not our own.

The Annulment of A Woman's Vows

One aspect of today's aliyah is particularly controversial in today's gender-sensitive world. Moshe tells the leaders of the tribes that a father can annul vows made by a daughter living under his roof and that a husband can annul the vows of his wife. Specifically Moshe declares:

*Also when **ishah** [a woman] makes a **neder** [vow] to the Holy One,
and binds herself by a bond,
being in her father's house, in her youth, and her father hears her vow,
and her bond with which she has bound her soul,
and her father holds his shalom at her; then all her vows shall stand,
and every bond with which she has bound her soul shall stand.*

*But if her father disallows her in the day that he hears,
none of her vows, or of her bonds with which she has bound her soul,
will stand: and the Holy One will forgive her, because her father disallowed her.*

[Numbers 30:3-6]

The sages of modern Israel try to limit the applicability of this provision of Torah to a girl between the ages of 11 to 12-1/2. *Yad, Nedarim* 11:7. Before age 11, the sages say, a girl's vows are not to be regarded as binding by anyone; and after age 12 1/2, they say, a girl's vows are so binding that her father can no longer annul them. Please take note however that the reference in the passage of Torah under study is not to a 'girl' [Hebrew *yaldah* or *almah*], but is instead to an *ishah* [*i.e.* a woman of marrying and childbearing age].

Let's make sure the ultimate issue raised by this mitzvah of Moshe is clear. Everyone who is the Bride under the Sinaitic Betrothal Covenant is like unto the 'daughter'. The father who must review and either approve of or disavow the words of our mouths is the Holy One. Does that make the concept Moshe is talking about easier to absorb? Now let's carry the principle one step further.

The Husband's Responsibility

As mentioned above Moshe declares that a similar 'right of first refusal' rests in every husband vis-à-vis the vows of his wife. As Moshe declares it:

V'im-hayo tihyeh l'ish

If she be [married] to a husband,

unedareyha aleyha o mivta sfateyha

while her vows are on her, or the rash utterance of her lips,

asher asrah al-nafshah

with which she has bound her soul,

V'shama ishah b'yom shom'o
and her husband hear it, in the day that he hears it;

v'hecherish lah vekamu nedareyha
and hold his shalom at her then her vows shall stand,

v'esareha asher-asrah al-nafshah yakumu
and her bonds with which she has bound her soul shall stand.

There is however another possibility. The husband may exercise his discretion to disavow. This does not mean the vow never happened; it just makes it legally unenforceable against the wife. The wife may or may not fulfill the vow after that; but in no wise will she be held responsible for not fulfilling it.

V'im b'yom sh'moa ishah yani otah
But if in the day that he hears it her husband disallow her

V'hefer et-nidrah asher aleyha
then he shall make void her vow that is on her,

v'et mivta sfateyha asher asrah al-nafshah
and the utterance of her lips with which she has bound her soul:

v'Adonai yislach-lah
and the Holy One will forgive her.
[Numbers 30:3-8]

What a responsibility the Holy One has entrusted to fathers and to husbands⁷! How can mere mortal men be entrusted with this kind of authority? What could he possibly have been thinking? Almost any selfish jerk can father *make a baby*, right? How does the basic biological empowerment to do that qualify someone to make important decisions that affect someone else's life? What is so special about *fatherhood* anyway?

The Real "Father's Day"

I have a news flash for you: "*Fatherhood*" is not a human convention. The Holy One created it. It was *His idea*. Fatherhood is therefore a spiritual as well as a biological phenomenon. The identity of one's father significantly impacts not only one's genetic traits and appearance, but also goes a long way toward determining the scope of one's spiritual inheritance. Hence not only did the Holy One *create* fatherhood, He has MODELED IT for the world. He has lived out fatherhood, right before our eyes, for thousands of years. He is the ultimate 'Father'. Thus whether we had an earthly "father" in our homes or actively in our lives or not we have no excuse whatever for either questioning the value of or misunderstanding the purpose and function of a father. Our flesh may not like "the fatherhood principle"

⁷ This commentary will address only fathers. Much the same analysis however can be applied to husbands.

of Torah ... but the Holy One wants us to get over our hang-ups and get used to it.

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “father” is *av*⁸. The hieroglyphic word picture is that of *the Holy One [alef] in the household [veit/beit]*. The ‘fatherhood principle’ of Torah is that the father of a household is supposed to be to that household *what the Holy One is to Creation*. The father of a household is thus supposed to be to that household its *creator*, its *sustainer*, its *provider*, its *teacher*, its *direction-determiner*, its *policy maker*, its *decision maker*, and, when necessary, its *redeemer*. The father of a household is supposed to *love* the members of that household and *be fully devoted to* them. The father is truly supposed to “know best” on all issues affecting the family.

Please understand that the Holy One does not ‘molly-coddle’ men. He does not expect men to have to “*get in touch with our masculinity*”, or to “*sort out their masculine identities*”. He expects men to *imitate Him*. And He expects all the rest of creation to *trust Him – the ultimate ‘Father’ - to “fix it” when we [as we inevitably will] fail in that endeavor*. End of story. And therefore the Holy One’s Torah injects the father into *every equation* involving an unmarried woman. The Holy One puts the world on notice, you do not deal with a young woman – you ultimately must deal with her *abba*.

If therefore a young man thinks he can – or should be able to – cut a covenant with, or get your commitment from, an unmarried woman, is he not fighting against the Holy One, and rebelling against His teaching? For Moshe says that a father should review each and every “vow” or promise his daughter makes, and make the final decision. And *abba* has to do it in “the day he hears of it” - Biblically that is “Father’s Day’.

We Gave Each Other a Pledge!

In the musical “*Fiddler on the Roof*”, Motel the tailor and Tzeitel the eldest daughter ‘grow up’ together. At some point, without asking the permission of Tzeitel’s ‘papa’ [i.e. Tevye, the milkman, the lead character in the story], Motel and Tzeitel grew fond of each other and gave each other a “pledge” that they would one day marry each other. Fearing that Tevye would arrange a traditional “arranged” marriage for Tzeitel, Motel reluctantly agreed to approach Tevye to ask for Tzeitel’s hand. In so doing however he let it slip that he and Tzeitel had already given each other “a pledge”. This provided a very tense moment for everyone. Tevye then bellowed out: “*You gave each other a pledge? Unthinkable! Unheard*”

⁸ Av is – *alef, veit*. It is Strong’s Hebrew word #1. The first Biblical usage of the Hebrew word *av* is in Genesis 2:24, when the Holy One instituted *marriage*. In that verse, the Holy One told Adam and Chava: *a man will leave his father [av] and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh.*

of! Tevye then spent a few musical moments considering the pledge his daughter had made very carefully, and rendered his decision regarding that pledge quickly – taking care to do so *before the sun went down*. It was great drama. It was a very entertaining story. It was however, much more than mere literature or screenplay. It was also far more than mere “tradition”. What it was, Beloved, was *Torah*. According to our aliyah every ‘papa’ has the authority – and responsibility - to either affirm or annul a vow/pledge/promise/commitment⁹ made by his unmarried daughter. And, like Tevye, according to Moshe he *must do so* “*in the day he hears of it*”.

No Offense Intended ... I don't think!

Does all this talk of a father's right to annul vows *offend you*? Do you feel this is an unwarranted *intrusion upon the daughter's will*, or perhaps even an *insult to her intelligence*? Do you feel this kind of paternalism is the product of sexual stereotyping, and/or a symptom of *male-domination* in society? Do you see Tevye as a chauvinist and Motel as Tzeitel's enlightened liberator? If you answered “yes” to any of the above questions then may I politely suggest that you have a crisis of TRUST. You may say that you do not trust Tevye – or your father – or some body else's ‘*dead-beat dad*’. But *look deeper*. Is not what you are really saying that you do not trust the Holy One. Is not what you are really saying that you do not trust the Holy One to “fix” any problem that might result from a father's intrusion [or lack thereof]. Is not what is really at issue whether or not you trust “Father” [*i.e.* the Heavenly Father] to know best – whether ‘*father*’ [*i.e.* the earthly father] is a “good actor” or a “bad actor”.

Let's face it. Human fathers are ... well, *human*. They *make mistakes*. Most are *self-centered* to one degree or another. Some are *temperamental*. Some have a knack for coming off as *insensitive*. Some even have *streaks of cruelty*. But so for that matter are and do a lot of mothers, a lot of daughters, and a lot of sons. So are and do a lot of “friends” and “leaders” in the Redeemed community. There is no escaping our humanity.

There is no perfect human father – any more than there is any perfect human mother, daughter, or son. Therefore getting out from under “father” [*i.e.* the earthly dad] - which always seems like the quick fix, somehow very seldom turns out to be the answer. Usually, you see, whatever problems a person had when dealing with their father tend to magically recur when dealing with other authority figures in life – bosses, and boyfriends, and husbands, and community leaders, etc. Maybe the

⁹ The Hebrew nouns in question in Numbers 30:3-5, which we are discussing, are *neder* [*nun, dalet, resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #5088, pronounced *neh'-der*], and ‘*ecar*’ [*alef, samech, resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #632, pronounced *es-sawr*']. The former means a “vow”, and could be interpreted narrowly to apply only to *religious commitments*, but the latter word clearly refers to any promise or undertaking.

root of the problem did not reside in the father after all. Maybe the answer does not lie in blaming him for everything that goes wrong in your life. Maybe the answer lies instead in a combination of [a] learning to see the earthly father in question *through the Holy One's eyes*, and [b] submitting to the Holy One, and abandoning all one's hopes, fears, and dreams to His tender loving care in childlike faith that He will eventually bring to pass what is best for those who call upon His Name.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Let's get started with some questions:

[A] In your English dictionary look up the words "vow", "pledge" and "oath"; write the definitions of those words and explain the difference.

[B] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the Hebrew words translated "vow" and "oath" in Numbers 30:2; write both Hebrew words and describe, then compare, the word pictures associated with each. Explain the difference between these two Hebraic concepts.

[C] Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, Jeremiah 44:15-28, and the two passages from Proverbs listed above as your meditation. Then read Rebbe Yeshua's teaching on this Torah passage, recorded at Matthew 5:33-37. Now, imagine your best friend writes you a letter telling you he has been asked [i] to make a "pledge" to the building fund of the church he attends, to [ii] sign a "covenant" of loyalty to the pastor and the leadership of that church, and [iii] to commit to fast for three days with other members of the church. Pray, then write your friend a letter stating your counsel, and explaining your position. Make sure you address each of the things he has been asked to do.

2. Memorize Numbers 30:2 [advanced students please memorize this verse both in Hebrew and in English]. Write the three times on your paper - in both languages, if you can. Be prepared to recite it at the Shabbat table on Friday night.

3. Beginning in verse 3 the Holy One provides exceptions to the general rule that vows and oaths must be fulfilled.

[A] List the situations in which a man had the right to annul a vow made by a woman.

[B] In those cases where a man had the right to annul a vow made by a woman, when was the only time he could do so?

[C] Imagine you are a man about to marry. Considering today's Torah teaching, before you marry, what do you think a young man should you ask his fiancé'?

[D] What should the young man do if his fiancé' had previously been engaged to someone else?

4. In today's haftarah Yirmayahu [Jeremiah] is commissioned as a "prophet to the peoples/nations". The first encounter between The Holy One and Yirmayahu is recorded as follows:

*Now the word of the Holy One came to me, saying,
"Before I formed you in the belly I knew you,
and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

*Then said I, "Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I don't know how to speak; for I am a child."
But the Holy One said to me, "Don't say, I am a child; for to whoever I send you, you are to go,
and whatever I teach and instruct you, you are to speak.*

Don't be afraid because of them; for I am with you to deliver you", says the Holy One.

[Jeremiah 1:4-8]

[A] What does the Hebrew name *Yirmayahu* mean in English?

[B] What was Yirmayahu's tribe?

[C] The Holy One says He "ordained" Yirmayahu as a "prophet to the nations". Look up the words "ordained", "prophet" and "nations", as used in verse 5, and write the Hebraic word picture you see developing with regard to each of those words.

[D] When Yirmayahu protests that he is "only a child", how does the Holy One respond?

[E] In verse 10 what does the Holy One tell Yirmayahu his purpose and destiny is?

[F] How do you think this calling affected Yirmayahu's relationships with the leadership of the priestly community at Anatot?

[G] How do you think this calling affected Yirmayahu's relationships with his peers?

[H] What does the Holy One tell Yirmayahu He is about to do?

[I] What promises does the Holy One make to Yirmayahu?

5. In today's assigned reading from the B'rit Chadasha *Shaul of Tarsus* speaks to the followers of Messiah in Philippi about "pressing on", "taking hold" and "straining toward".

*Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect;
but I press on, if it is so that I may take hold
of that for which also I was taken hold of by Messiah Yeshua.*

[Philippians 3:12]

[A] In your encyclopedia, and in any other resource material to which you have access, look up the city of Philippi. Write a brief essay describing [i] where that city is located, [ii] what people founded and populated it, and when, and [iii] who it was named for, [iv] what was it famous for, [v] what was the religious situation there in Shaul's time, and [vi] what significant events of the book of Acts

occurred there¹⁰.

[B] What was Shaul's overall purpose in writing the letter to his friends at Philippi? [What prompted the letter?]

[C] Toward what does Shaul say he is "pressing on"?

[D] Of what does Shaul say he is "taking hold"?

*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.
Blessed is He who walks not in the counsel of the "un-God".*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 18:13 and 20:25

*He who gives answer before he sh'ma-s,
that is folly and shame to him.*

*It is a snare to a man make a rash dedication
and later reconsider his vows.*

¹⁰ The narrative of Shaul's activities in Philippi begins with Acts 16:9 – Shaul's "Macedonian vision". The first village in Macedonia Shaul visited was Neopolis, but we are given no details of what occurred there. Philippi, however, forms a goodly part of the narrative. Shaul arrives in Acts 16:12 and does not leave until 16:40