

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Devarim:*** **Deuteronomy 3:12-22**
 Haftarah: **Isaiah 1:21-27**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Timothy 3:8-13**

To the Reuveni and the Gadi I gave from Gil'ad as far as the River Arnon.
Deuteronomy 3:16

Today's Meditation is Lamentations 1:18-22;
This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the Avot [The Fathers/Patriarchs]

V'et-ha-aretz hazot – *And this land ... natati l'Re'uveni v'la-Gadi* - *I entrusted it in stewardship to the descendants of Reuven and Gad.* **Deuteronomy 3:12.**

Moshe's *devarim* download has awakened yet another humbling memory in us. After the Holy One gave us a series of great victories against the Emori and Midyani our camp experienced the test of sudden riches. Remember, we had left Egypt in haste - with about a week's worth of *matzah*, the clothes we were wearing, a sheep, goat, donkey, and/or ox or so per household, and whatever gold, silver, and garments our Egyptian neighbors saw fit to donate. Rich we were not – but what would we have done with riches in the desert anyway? There were no markets, bazaars, or stores where the Holy One was taking us. There were no coffee shops, cafes, pubs, hotels, concert halls, stadiums, or theaters at which to fritter away time and sustenance. Manna, rock-water and the clothes on our back were pretty much the sum total of materiality for us - for a few months short of forty years! But then ... then came *the spoils of war!*

The Wealth of the Wicked?

After the defeat of the Emori and the Midyani, we found ourselves in possession of a veritable treasure trove of 'stuff'. They left thousands of unattended marketplaces, inns, shrines, houses, barns, orchards, vineyards, gardens, fields, and forests full of game – not to mention vast flocks, and herds. They left cabinets full of herbs and spices for cooking; storehouses full of seeds for planting; and, of course, cellars full of wine and strong drink. They also left a suddenly masterless slave population made up of the helpless and completely dependent people from all ages, ethnicities, and cultures – some that the cruel Emori warlords had captured, beaten into submission, and forced into bondage; others that the crass Midyani had acquired through seduction, exploitation, grooming, and human trafficking. Someone had to take care of the penniless manservants and maidservants who

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were now reduced to begging in the streets of the Emori cities and wandering like sheep without a shepherd on the hillsides the nomadic Midyani had formerly occupied.

All we had ever ingested in our lives was manna. All we had ever worn were the garments and sandals with which our fathers wore the day we left Egypt. Now all of a sudden we found ourselves drinking the milk of the nations. It was like every one of us had won the lottery! We had access to material things of varieties and at levels that most of us had never even laid eyes on, much less owned. How would we handle this sudden influx of what the nations think of as ‘wealth’? How would we handle the sense of power and pride that comes with worldly possessions? How would we handle the stress/worry of suddenly being responsible for plowing and cultivating land, maintaining buildings, and the temptation to compare our balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement with that of our neighbors? Would we be able to stay focused on the greater mission of the Avrahamic covenant, and committed to the Holy One’s Grand Plan for the redemption of mankind as a species and for the restoration of every square centimeter of Creation to Edenic state? Would we see all the things we had received as spoils of war as belonging to the Holy One, of which we were merely stewards acting under orders from Heaven – or would we take on an air of entitlement, demand ‘our fair share’, and let greed, envy, lust, covetousness, worry, fleshly competitiveness, rivalry, and tribal territoriality corrupt our hearts, destroy our *bayit shalom*, and bring division into our nation? Would we stay humble, thankful, gentle, gracious, and generous – or would we get proud, start acting entitled, act gruff, become super-opinionated and hyper-judgmental, and generally take on the character of Ebenezer Scrooge to the 601,730th power? Careful now, *B’nei Yisrael*; **THIS, TOO, IS A TEST!**

The Final Test: Sudden Access to Material and Worldly Things

Becoming suddenly flush – even rich – can change people. It does not have to – as Avraham had proven during his days on earth – but it can. We quickly found out that we were not like Avraham in this regard – at least not yet. We let sudden wealth change us drastically. We let it dull our passion for the Holy One in general and for the role we are called to play in His Grand Plan of Redemption and Restoration in particular. We let the seduction of mammon distract us from the great covenant mission of *tikkun olam* for which we had been born. We let our priorities drift away from doing/living justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Holy One our God to indulging visions of material wealth, focusing on perceived conflicts of interest with the other ‘tribes’. We hardened our hearts toward the Holy One – and, of course, toward our own brothers in the Redeemed Community. Look at us – we have houses *with pantries!* We let wealth make us think we WERE SOMEBODY – and were not only capable of but entitled to

determine our own destiny. We let it make us feel that we had something important to steward and protect *beyond* – alas, all too often *in place of* - our high calling as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We let it make us feel independent. We ate too much – and too often. We grew fat. We went soft. We embraced a vision for the present and the future that ignored our areas of common calling, eschewed unity in purpose, and celebrated instead what the opportunistic spin-masters of our society deceptively labeled our *diversity* – *i.e.* the toxic arrogance that always comes with the vain imagination that one’s own ‘tribe’ is morally, intellectually, and culturally superior to, and has entitlements above and beyond, some other tribe or tribes.

Even in ignominious defeat, it seemed, the Midyani – *i.e.* the *division-causers* of the world - emerged victorious. Yes, we defeated their warriors on the field of battle – but in doing so we *became like them*. Suddenly, like the Edomi, the Aradi, the Emori, the Midyani, and all other ethnicities and cultures that have ever existed, we – or at least the men of Reuven and Gad - cared about was livestock and pastureland, eating and drinking, and marrying and giving in marriage. We lost our sense of Divine Mission. We lost our passion for serving the Holy One. We lost our spark of Divine fire. We lost our Kingdom vision. We lost our passion for the land of Promise – and our excitement about building the ‘Kingdom-of-Heaven-Scented Society’ there. We sat in ivory towers and pontificated to one another about abstract ideas. We devised plans and programs to promote the interest of our tribe but excluded others. We came up with, and bought into, tribal ‘special interest’ models.

The redeemed of the Holy One are not called to celebrate *diversity* – much less take pride in any race, ethnicity, or culture; our calling is instead to overcome *diversity*. We are to eschew all racial, ethnic, and cultural pride, and work joyfully with others to build the Kingdom-of-Heaven-Scented Society based on the blueprint of Torah. In the course of building that society we are to always model humility, honor, unity of purpose, mutuality of respect, cooperation, and co-laboring for the common good. The unfortunate truth that few grasp is that no person cannot celebrate his or her ‘diversity’ without simultaneously excluding from the celebration – and implicitly demeaning, mocking and hating – others who lack your badge of tribal separateness. And that is the true definition of *racism*.

From Whence Spring Toxic Forms/Exaggerations of Tribalism?

Torah is our instruction manual for life – and our guide for discerning, diagnosing, and overcoming that which is toxic to our Covenant identity and mission. From Torah’s inspired narratives we are enlightened not only about the problems from which all mankind suffers, but what causes those problems. So, from whence,

according to Torah, emanates the uncleanness of *tribalism*? The introduction of that dark energy phenomenon in Torah suggests that it comes from obsession with fleshly pleasures, sensual experiences, material possessions, and temporal conditions instead of diligently pursuing the Will, walking in the Ways, and *sh'ma*-ing, *sh'mar*-ing and *asah*-ing the Words of our King.

Toxic tribalism did not just appear in Torah out of nowhere. It arose from our interactions with Midyan. Remember, Midyan means ‘*division-causers*’. We all know the causes of the war with Midyan, don’t we? Some of us would point the finger of blame at the conspiracy the leaders of Midyan and Moab hatched to hire Bila’am to pronounce curses over us; and that, of course, is partially correct. Others of our number would place the blame on the precocious daughters of Midyan, who seduced our young men with their exotic beauty and introduced them to the lascivious worship rituals of Peor; these would also be partially correct. But there was a deeper, far more dangerous *sine qua non*² than these. Neither the conspiracy of Midyan and Moab, nor the seduction plan of the daughters of Midyan, would have done any damage but for our young men’s lustful gullibility. If our young men had only walked closer with the Holy One, loved Him, feared Him, and held His will as their greatest passion, and thus had held their passions and emotions in check, no conspiracy, no curse, and no seduction could have affected them.

The natural brother of Yeshua, Ya’akov [called ‘James’ in the KJV] reiterated this Torah revelation plainly, saying: *From whence do wars and strivings among you come? Do they not come from your desires for [worldly, fleshly] pleasure that war in your members? You lust after that which you do not have. You murder [holding jealousy, envy, and malice in your heart – see Matthew 5:21-25] because you cannot obtain. You strive and attack – and yet you do not have, because you do not ask. And if you ask you ask amiss, that you may spend [what you ask for] indulging your [worldly, fleshly] pleasures. James 4:1-3* [translation/interlinear comments my own].

You see, Beloved, when sons of the Covenant begin to lust after the things this world has to offer – the way the Reuveni, the Gadi, and half the tribe of Menashe lusted after the pleasant pasturelands of Western Moab - it is a sure sign that their heart has grown lukewarm toward the Holy One. When leaders of the Covenant people promote the interest of one tribe or group over another, it is a sure sign that they have lost their passion for the Holy One, His Will, His Words, and His Ways. Part of the challenge of our mission is learn – and then model to the world - how to be faithful *members of tribes biologically*, on the one hand, and still be responsible,

² *Sine qua non* is a Latin phrase meaning ‘that without which’, or figuratively ‘but for this’. It refers to an *efficient, producing cause*.

citizens of and contributors to a *far, far-greater-than-tribes nation*, on the other hand. In the Kingdom and the Covenant, tribes are not supposed to *oppose* one another; they are supposed to *support and defend* one another – like brothers in the Spirit, not in the flesh. In the Kingdom and the Covenant, tribes are not supposed to *compete with* one another; they are supposed to *co-labor alongside, encourage, and bring out the best in* each other. In the Kingdom and the Covenant, tribes are not supposed to be envious of, suspicious of, or offended by one another; they are supposed to serve, invest expectations in, and unconditionally love one another. But there is that flesh thing. And when that ‘flesh thing’ infects a tribe, all its members can suddenly see – or choose to see – is that tribe’s interest. The rest of the nation? The other, competing ‘tribes’? As Marie Antoinette, Queen consort of French king Louis XVI reportedly said regarding the famine-starved peasants of her realm in the days preceding the French Revolution: *Qu'ils mangent de la brioche* – *i.e. let them eat cake!*

***The Curses That Flow into the World Off of Our Tongues and Swords
When We Disconnect from Mercy, Compassion, and a Vision of the
Holy One’s Grand Plan For Redemption And Restoration***

After the war with Midyan, two of our twelve tribes – Reuven and Gad – and half of the members of the tribe of Menashe – went tribal on everyone else. Flush with livestock and full to the brim with pride in diversity, they demanded the right to do their own thing. They choose to put their personal tribal interests ahead of not only the greater national interest, but also the Holy One’s Grand Plan for the Redemption of mankind as a species and for the Restoration of Creation to its originally intended state of beauty, fruitfulness, and shalom. What was Moshe to do. There was no way to fix this. The tribalism cat – a voracious, screaming panther of the most dangerous sort - was out of the bag ... and there was no way to put it back in. All he could do was damage control. So, he acceded to their tribalism-fueled demand – but attached some conditions to it. He negotiated a TAMBA – *i.e.* a ‘temporary alliance of mutual benefit agreement’. He allocated exclusive possession of the Moavian land acquired in the recent wars to two tribes before the rest of the tribes even crossed the Jordan. The members of those two tribes, and half the tribe of Menashe, were allowed to build private houses for their families on private property, move in, let their flocks and herds run and graze on real pastures, drink from their own wells, and plant real gardens – while the multitudes of the rest of the tribes huddled in tents, had to keep their animals cooped up in cramped community corrals, and wonder if or when the dream of having their own home and land, vine and fig tree, would ever really come true. Life is never perfect, is it. Human flesh – and hyper-tribalism – make absolutely sure of that.

Have you ever wondered how the folks of the tribes of Sh'mon, Yehudah, Dan, Naftali, Asher, Gad, Zevulun, Yissakhar, Efrayim, and Binyamin felt about Reuven, Gad and half of Menashe breaking off from them? Up to this point, the people of the Redeemed Nation – the 'mixed multitude', both of natural and engrafted Israel - had always done everything together. We came out of Egypt together. We faced the genocidal charge of Pharaoh's charioteers together. We learned to gather manna and fill our water jugs from a supernatural stream together. We walked dry-shod through the Sea of Reeds together. We all sang 'Ashira L'Adonai ki gaoh gaah' by the shore together. We all fought off the hordes of Amalek together. We went up to Sinai, heard the Voice of our Bridegroom, and pledged our troth to Him together. We marched through the desert together. We buried and mourned our parents together. We faced Edom's bluster together. We rescued our captives from Arad together. We beat back the attacks of Sichon and Og together. We faced down the curses of the nations together. We have all sinned together, and all made teshuvah together. We have all experience mercy, forgiveness, and grace beyond our wildest dreams together. Before it had always been all for one, one for all. But now? Oh, my – now we forget all that and decide to have 'tribal trouble'. Yehoshua, Judges, and Kings of Israel and Judah BEWARE – what started innocently on the Moavian plateau is going to take millennia to work its way out of our system!

You see, Beloved, any time we choose to look at situations and opportunities through the eyes of any 'tribe' or 'group', or any *majority or minority*, or for that matter any race, class, or ethnicity, or any ideology, or 'special interest', instead of through the lens of what is best for the collective whole, we flirt with disaster. We step out of the Kingdom of Heaven right into the Hellhole of 'tribal trouble'. Tribal trouble means, you see, that at the worst possible times – when we need to present a unified front the most - we tend instead to turn on, ridicule, blame, slander, and wreak havoc upon, not our mutual enemies – but *one another*. Consider Ya'akov and Esav. Consider Rachel and Leah. Consider Yosef and his brothers. Consider Aharon and Miryam's attack on their brother Moshe. Consider Korach's conspiracy against the members of his own Kahati tribesmen.

***Facing and Dealing Appropriately
With Toxically Exaggerated Levels of Tribalism***

Moshe does not want the generation that will enter into and possess the Land of Promise to forget - and have to relearn the hard way - the hard lessons the Holy One taught them in the desert. But neither does Moshe want the people under his charge to forget how wonderful the blessings of walking in covenant faithfulness have been to them. The prophet therefore chooses to conclude his 'walk down memory lane' narrative by reminding all those standing before him on the plains of

Moav of *the most recent events* of their history – namely, the division of the trans-Jordan land the Holy One took from Sichon and Og amongst the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and the half-tribe of Menashe.

Even though the Jordan River has not yet been crossed, he points out, tremendous supernatural victories have been won, and two and a half tribes have already found the place they wanted to settle down with their families, herds, and flocks.

V'et ha-aretz hazot yarashnu ba'et hahi

Of the land that we captured, [the territory]

me'Aro'er asher-al nachal Arnon

between Aro'er on the Arnon Gorge

vachatzi har ha-Gil'ad

and the half of the Gilead highlands

v'aray natati la-Reuveni v'la-Gadi

along with the cities there I gave the Reubenites and Gadites

[Deuteronomy 3:12]

What the prophet is doing – and causing us to do – through taking us on this slow, painful stroll down memory lane is precisely what our annual remembrance of the catastrophes of *Tisha B'Av* causes us to do. We have to recognize, admit, and face up to our failures. We have to stare straight into the ‘virtual reality’ that accompanies willful *rebellion against our Bridegroom*. We have to *return to the commitments of both heart and energy that are inherent in our Betrothal Covenant*. And we have to embrace afresh *our collective purposes, our national mission, and our Kingdom destiny*.

So, yes, Moshe, we will remember. We will remember how after the great victories our Bridegroom won for us over our enemies, the heads of some tribes and clans came to Moshe and demanded ***al-ta'avireinu et ha-Yarden*** [*don't bring us over the Jordan*]. We will remember how two whole tribes and half of a third – over 1/6th of the people called to serve as the Holy One's redeemed community - chose to reject the inheritance in Eretz Yisrael which the Holy One had lovingly prepared for them, and decided instead to settle in, and claim as an inheritance for themselves and their whole bloodlines, the pasturelands on the East side of the *Yarden* [Jordan]. We will remember how so many of our number broke covenant with the rest of us, deciding amongst themselves that they knew better than the Holy One what should happen. We will remember how the lusts of our brothers' eyes distracted them, causing them to want *what they saw* instead of *what the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven had promised to prepare for them*, and to throw away the inheritance the Holy One had lovingly prepared for them in favor of the first piece of ground they saw that would sprout a little grass in the Springtime! We will indeed remember. It

is forever etched in our minds.

Moshe acceded to the demand of the Reuveni and the Gadi; but he did so with a bit of a sarcastic edge in his voice, I suspect, as he said: ***“For I know you have much livestock.”*** Well, the livestock are all gone now, of course. The pasturelands of Moav are now firmly under the control of a foreign people who hate and want to destroy us. But the divisions the ‘we have much livestock’ mindset live on. The rift caused by such a Midyani-influenced mindset are deeper now than ever. Our brothers are dead, and their descendants have long been scattered – sown like seed - among the nations, in every corner, nook, and cranny of the earth. Only the Holy One knows where they are – and how and when they can be reunited with us.

Moshe’s eyes are welling up with tears. His heart is breaking. It is weighing extremely heavily on him that he has to even bring up, much less teach hard lessons about, the next subject on the Kingdom’s agenda. But the appointed time has come. This is the hour in which we need to be reminded how easily innocent-looking little seeds of division can enter our camp. It is almost *Tisha B’Av*, and this is the final aliyah of parsha *Devarim*. It is now or never.

We have lost *so many* - and *so much*. We have forfeited *so much grace*. We have left so much of our collective destiny on the table. And we have done it all for the sake of our *egos*, our *opinions*, our *ideologies*, our *personal ambitions*, and our *tribal agendas*.

Getting to The Root of Sinat Chinam [i.e. Baseless Hatred]

Self-interest leads to ambition. Ambition leads to conflict and division. Conflict and division lead to classification by labels. Classification by labels leads to physical and emotional separation. Physical and emotional separation lead to alienation. Alienation leads to isolation. Isolation leads to victimization. Victimization leads to captivity. And captivity leads to exile. This is the cycle the sages call *sinat chinam*. The Hebrew phrase is usually translated into English as *baseless hatred*. But hatred is far too strong a word. *Sinat chinam* does not start with hatred. It starts with simple self-interest and ordinary ambition. All *Sinat chinam* means is *choosing to see situations, places, and things through the lenses of unmitigated self-interest instead of the pure lens of the common good*, and therefore *defining people with labels that cause us to see them as something other than fellow new creations and potential partners and co-laborers in the great enterprise of bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth*.

Alas, the serpent has sown seeds of *sinat chinam* everywhere in this fallen world. Those seeds have attached themselves to, and are alive and well in, all of us. We

inherited the infestation from Adam and Chava. The seeds now infect our minds, where they inject the serpent's poison into all our attempts at reasoning, planning, and conscious choosing. They are now like a virus on our lips, toxifying our conversations. They are implanted in our eyelids, where they impede our ability to see things and people as they really are. They have spouted roots in our ears, resulting in the twisting and corruption of the things we hear. They are even embedded in the soft tissue our hearts, where they cause us to indulge vain imaginations and produce unproductive feelings of animosity.

Sinat Chinam is the reason all our temples get polluted and have to be destroyed.

This Calls for the Patient Endurance of the Saints of the Most High

The seeds of *sinat chinam* can manifest at any time, in any thought, in any conversation, in any interaction, and in the context of any gathering. If each of us do not passionately pursue and dispense mercy, tremble at the Bridegroom-King's words, and keep walking humbly through every obstacle course of life with our Bridegroom, we can unwittingly find ourselves giving those seeds of division – the ultimate tares in the King's Garden - fertile ground in which to grow. If we are not careful, our hearts will grow so cold – and our eyes will get so focused on our own likes and dislikes, and our selfish and tribal desires for physical comfort and pleasure – that we allow the seeds of division in us to mature into a *crop of separation*, and then bring forth the bitter *harvest of alienation, isolation, and exile*.

Moshe broaches the subject of *sinat chinam* gently, with a case in point. He reminds us of the first elements of division between the tribes of the Camp of the Redeemed. It all started with the Reuveni, the Gadi, and the half tribe of Menashe allowing themselves to look at things through personal and tribal eyes, rather than Kingdom-centered eyes. In his retrospective account of the series of events that brought us to our present condition, therefore, Moshe makes it very clear that it was not the Holy One who decided that two and a half tribes would receive as their inheritance property East of the Jordan River. That was something that Moshe acknowledges was all *on them* and *on him*. Hence he uses the verb phrase *natati* – *i.e.* 'I gave'.

V'et-ha-aretz hazot yarashnu ba'et hahi me'Aro'er

This land, which we possessed at that time, from Aroer,

asher-al nachal Arnon

which is by the River Arnon,

vachatzi har-haGil'ad v'arav

and half the mountains of Gilead and its cities,

natati la-Reuveni vela-Gadi

I gave in stewardship to the Reuveni and the Gadi.

Veyeter haGil'ad v'chol-haBashan mamlechet Og

and the rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og,

natati lachatzi shevet haMenasheh

I gave in stewardship to half the tribe of Menashe.

[Deuteronomy 3:12-13 (a)]

Perhaps the most fascinating – and the most poignant – part of Moshe’s discussion of this prototypical event of division in our Camp is, in English, presented as just a parenthetical phrase. We read it as Moshe saying: *For I know that you have much livestock.* Deuteronomy 3:19. I feel in those added, seemingly superfluous words the intense pain of a prophet who *sees much more than he is permitted to say*. I see prophetic images from the Torah coming into his mind. Where has an abundance of livestock caused trouble before? It all started with Avram and Lot, and their herdsmen, after they returned to the land from Egypt.

***Then Avram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had,
and Lot with him, to the South.***

Avram was now very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold.

Lot also, who went with Avram, had flocks and herds and tents.

***Now the land was not able to support them, so that they might dwell together,
for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together.***

***And there was strife between the herdsmen of Avram’s livestock
and the herdsmen of Lot’s livestock.***

[Genesis 13:1-7]

Self-interest. Ambition. Conflict. Division. Identification by self-serving labels. Physical and emotional separation. Ah, but you know the phases very well, don’t you Beloved? There is no need for me to repeat them, is there? It did not end with Avram and Lot. Think of Ya’akov and his brothers-in-law of the house of Lavan. Genesis 31 tells us:

Ya’akov heard the words of Lavan’s sons, saying,

***“Ya’akov has taken away all that was our father’s,
and from what was our father’s he has acquired all this wealth.”***

Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him,

***“Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father’s house?
Are we not considered strangers by him?***

For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money.

***For all these riches which God has taken from our father
are really ours and our children’s; now then, whatever God has said to you, do it.”***

***Then Ya’akov rose and set his sons and his wives on camels,
And he carried away all his livestock and all his possessions that he had gained,
his acquired livestock that he had gained in Padan Aram,***

to go to his father Yitzchak in the land of Kena'an.

And Ya'akov stole away, unknown to Lavan the Syrian

[Genesis 31:1-20]

Much livestock, it seems, is just prophet-speak for *much trouble*. Whenever we *fixate on material things*, we invariably stagnate in relationship. Whenever we start looking at others as competitors for 'grazing land' and as obstacles standing in the way of our material prosperity or promotion, we invariably start separating ourselves from them. And we wind up on opposite sides of some issue or landmark, staring suspiciously at each other and thinking and speaking in terms of 'us' and 'ours' and 'them' and 'theirs'. And we make choices not on the basis of the common good, but on the basis of self-advancement and greed wearing a thin disguise of 'what is in *our family, clan, or tribe's* best interest'. 'Ah', the prophet would say poignantly, as if he were speaking with someone else, "*Ah yes - I know you have much livestock.*"

How do we maintain a proper balance between personal interests, personal property rights, and tribal/local group needs on the one hand and our collective Kingdom Mission on the other hand? This is very dangerous territory. This, too, requires us to *sh'ma* the Voice of our Bridegroom King. This too requires us to *sh'mar* His Covenant and *asah* His instructions for living. This too requires us to *love mercy*, to *make/do mishpat*, and to *walk humbly with our God*.

For better or for worse, the Holy One knows our decisions will not always line up with His perfect Will. But He is faithful to His Covenant, to His Righteousness [hence He allows consequences to flow from our choices though He does not judge us for them] and to us, still – even to the point that He will find a way to cause our less-than-ideal decisions and choices to somehow work out for the common good. **Romans 8:28**. That is because the Holy One is not a micro-manager or control-freak. He does not nit-pick and criticize and second-guess His Bride-to-be's every decision, choice, and course of action; He is instead a wise, patient, and loving Bridegroom-King Who is in this relationship for the long-term.

Introducing a Prophetic Type of the Overcoming Remnant - Ya'ir

In the context of the discussion of the distribution of the land among the Trans-Jordan tribes, Moshe takes an entire verse to introduce us by name to one particular descendant of Menashe. The man's name is *Ya'ir* [*yod, alef, yod, resh*, KJV, *Jair*]. At first glance, this introduction seems, in the context of the narrative of Deuteronomy, like unnecessary detail, superfluous verbiage. Moshe is, after all, no name-dropper. The only members of the Redeemed Community he has mentioned by name so far in his review of recent history are Kalev, Y'hoshua and Aharon. Moshe has not even mentioned his own sons, his wife, or his sister, Miryam. Why,

then, does he decide we need to know about a heretofore unknown man from the tribe of Menashe named *Ya'ir*? What does *Ya'ir* have to do with the story Moshe is telling? And what does he have to do with our Greater Destiny?

After telling us in Deuteronomy 3:13 what happened to the region of Argov, which had been the kingdom of Og of Bashan, saying: “... *the rest of Gil`ad, and all Bashan, kingdom of `Og, gave I to the half-tribe of Menashe; all the region of Argov, even all Bashan.*” For some reason Moshe then feels compelled to add that:

*Ya'ir the son of Menashe, took all the region of Argov,
to the border of the Geshuri and the Ma`akhati, and called them,
even Bashan, after his own name, Chavvot-Ya'ir, to this day.*

[Deuteronomy 3:14]

Why this seemingly unimportant historical footnote? Why this detailed reference to *Ya'ir*, son (descendant) of Menashe, and his activities in the Trans-Jordan region?

Looking Ahead

One reason for this unusual bit of name-dropping I believe is because Moshe knows prophetically that we will meet *Ya'ir* again later in the TaNaKh, the chronicle of the Holy One's interaction with His people. This man *Ya'ir* (or one of his namesake descendants) will re-surface years later in the narrative of the Book of Judges. In the tenth chapter of that book it will be written:

*... arose Ya'ir, the Gil`adite; and he judged Yisra'el twenty-two years.
He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkey colts,
and they had thirty cities, which are called Chavvot-Ya'ir to this day,
that are in the land of Gil`ad.*

[Judges 10:3-4]

When Moshe wrote *Devarim* [weighty, substantive, prophetic utterances, speeches, declarations] the Holy One knew that those who would read it would also know the story of *Ya'ir*, from the Book of Judges. He knew that each time His people read what would later be called Deuteronomy 3:14 it would bring to mind Judges 10. But why is this important? Why do we need to make this connection? Surely the key is found in Moshe's description of what he did in regard to the land East of the Yarden and what *Ya'ir* did in regard to that land.

Give And Take

As discussed in the opening lines of this shiur, in Deuteronomy 3:13 Moshe says “... *all Bashan, the kingdom of `Og, I gave [Hebrew, natati] to the half-tribe of Menashe.*” In verse 18 he says: “I instructed you at that time, saying: *The Holy One your God has given [Hebrew natan] you this land to possess it.* So, we see that this land was a *gift* – given by Moshe into the hands of the half-tribe of Menashe. Moshe tells us however that *Ya'ir*, descendant of Menashe, is the one who stepped forward to receive the land in question as a gift; he *took* it. The Hebrew word our

English Bibles translate as “took” is *laqach*³. This primitive Hebrew verb root can mean many actions, all related to *reaching out to receive, grasping firmly, and holding close, or clutching to one’s breast*, something one considers precious and valuable. The same verb root is used to describe a marriage - a man is said to “take” [*laquach* - grasp, hold close, as precious and valuable] a wife.

The land of Bashan in the region of Argov, East of the Yarden, was not the Holy One’s “best”. It was not His *intended* gift to the half-tribe of Menashe. It was given in response to the request of a group of people who were willing to “settle” for far less than the Holy One’s perfect will. Enter *Ya’ir*. His name means “*Yah* [the Holy One] *enlightens*”, or “*Yah* [the Holy One] *gives light*”. And he takes this inferior possession as a precious gift, and holds it close.

Renaming Our Places of Exile

Note what Yair did with the real estate he took as a gift. He *renamed it*. Previously the area, as controlled by Og the Emori, was called *Bashan Argov*, which in Hebrew means *fruitful pile of clods*. When Yair took over, he changed this region’s name to *Chavvot-Ya’ir*, meaning *Small Clusters of Houses*⁴ *that Yah has enlightened*. I like that. *Small clusters of houses that Yah has enlightened*. May all our clusters of houses [some would call them *sh’tets*], in all of our places of exile, become exactly that - *dwellings that Yah has enlightened*. Then it could truly be said of our villages: *How lovely are your tents, O Ya’akov; your tabernacles, Yisrael!*

Fast Forward to the Time of the Judges

Judges 10 shows the fruit of *Ya’ir*’s emunah. *Ya’ir*, the *light of Yah* was raised up by the Holy One to judge Israel (including the land West of the Yarden) for 22 years. And let’s look carefully at what transpired during that 22-year period. During this period, unlike most in the book of Judges, *there was no war*. The people of all Israel experienced firsthand the *shalom* of God. No enemy harassed or threatened the security of the Holy One’s people. Likewise there is no mention while *Ya’ir* was *shofet* [Judge] that anyone in Israel committed idolatry. The light of the Holy One shone. Moreover *Ya’ir* himself brought forth thirty-fold. *Ya’ir*, we are told, had 30 sons – each one of which *rode the colt of a donkey* (a clear Messianic reference), and *ruled over a city* of Israel. And hence this obscure reference to a descendant of Yosef, through his eldest son Menashe, contains all the elements of and references to Messiah.

Want more? In Judges 10:5 we are told that *Ya’ir* died and was buried in a place

³ Strong’s Hebrew word #3947, *lamed, kuf, chet*, pronounced *law-kakh’*.

⁴ *Chavot, chet, vav, tav* in Hebrew means *small clusters of houses*.

called *Kamon*⁵. It may surprise you that the name of this place means “raising”, or “arising”. Its verb root is the same word Messiah Yeshua used when He told the daughter of *Yairus* [Jairus], who had died, to “arise”. We might call the place “*resurrection*”.

You will note that in the years following Ya’ir’s death, things did not go well for Israel. The book of Judges tells us:

*The children of Yisra'el again did that which was evil in the sight of the Holy One,
and served the Ba`alim, and the `Ashtarot,
and the gods of Aram, and the gods of Tzidon,
and the gods of Mo'av, and the gods of the children of `Ammon, and the gods of the Pelishtim;
and they forsook the Holy One, and didn't serve him.*

*The anger of the Holy One was kindled against Yisra'el,
and he sold them into the hand of the Pelishtim and into the hand of the children of `Ammon.*

*They vexed and oppressed the children of Yisra'el that year:
eighteen years [oppressed they] all the children of Yisra'el
that were beyond the Yarden in the land of the Emori, which is in Gil`ad.*

*The children of `Ammon passed over the Yarden
to fight also against Y`hudah and against Binyamin, and against the house of Efrayim;
so that Yisra'el was sore distressed.*

*The people, the princes of Gil`ad, said one to another,
What man is he who will begin to fight against the children of `Ammon?
he shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gil`ad.*

[Judges 10:6-9, 18]

The princes of Gil’ad will ultimately respond to this threat by choosing their own hero – a ‘tough guy’ named *Yiftach* [Jephthah]. And the Holy One accepted their choice, and gave them a measure of relief. But it was oh *so temporary*. And it culminated in a bloody and senseless civil war. See Judges 12. How much better it would have been had the leaders of Yiftach’s day, instead of hiring a big, bad ‘tough guy’ to lead them into battle, had chosen instead to *sh’ma* Moshe’s words to Y’hoshua, concluding parsha *Devarim*:

*You have seen with your own eyes
all that Adonai Elohim has done to these two kings [i.e. Og and Sichon].
Adonai will do the same to all the kingdoms over there where you are going.
Do not be afraid of them; Adonai Elohim Himself will fight for you.*

⁵ *Kamon* is *kuf, mem, vav, nun sofit*. Strong’s Hebrew word #7056, it is pronounced *kaw-mone’*.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Today most of us, like *Ya'ir*, because of the choices of our ancestors, find ourselves outside the boundaries of *Eretz Yisrael*. Some of us, due to choices made by our ancestors, are not presently permitted by law to make aliyah. Until Messiah returns, or the Holy One enables us, or the Knesset changes the laws of return, wherever we are, we are.

The Holy One is able to bring about a change in the 'law of return'. He will indeed cause it to come to pass. In the meantime however what shall we do? We remain in exile. May we make the best of it. We should, therefore, I propose, do as Yair of Menashe did – *take the fruitful piles of clods to which we are exiled, and turn them into chavaat-Yair – i.e. “clusters of houses enlightened by Yah.”* This is our mission, should we choose to accept it. And in the course of so doing, may we, as *Ya'ir*, by the Light of the Holy One [His Torah] raise up sons conformed to the image of Messiah ben Yosef, each *riding the colt of a donkey in the image of Messiah*, and *each one ruling over a city of Israel*. And may our death and burial, in its proper time, likewise be in *Kamon* – the place of the first fruits of the resurrection.

Speaking of Chavaat-Yair: A Message From The Haftarah

By tradition the Shabbat about to dawn upon us - the Shabbat preceding the ninth of Av - is called *Shabbat Chazon*. It is named for the haftarah of the week, which begins with the words “*Chazon Yeshayahu ...*” [*The vision of Isaiah*].⁶ Today's final installment of the haftarah for Parsha *Devarim* concludes Yeshayahu 'tough talk' message of Divine discipline with a promise of restoration for the repentant.

Eichah ha-yetah l'zonah kiryah n'emanah

How like a prostitute has the faithful city become!

mele'ati mishpat

She was full of justice,

tzedek yalin bah v'atah m'ratzchim

righteousness lodged in her ... but now murderers.

Kaspech hayah l'sigim

Your silver has become dross,

sove'ech mahul b'mayim

your wine diluted with water.

Sarayich sorerim v'chavrei ganavim

Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves.

⁶ Hebrew legend says that on this Shabbat the Holy One grants all who truly mourn over the loss of the Beit Ha-Mikdash a vision [*chazon*] of the Temple which will be built by Messiah.

kulo ohev shochad v'rodef shalmonim yatom

Everyone loves bribes and chases after rewards.

lo yishpotu veriv

They do not give justice to the fatherless

almanah lo-yavo aleyhem

nor does the widow's cause come to them.

Lachen neum ha-Adon Adonai Tzva'ot avir Yisra'el

Therefore says the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel:

hoi enachem mitzarai

Ah, I will relieve Myself of My adversaries,

v'inakmah me'oyvay

and comfort Myself in relation to My enemies.

V'ashivah yadi alayich

For I will turn My hand against you,

v'etz'rof kabor sigayich

and will smelt away your dross as with lye

v'asirah kol-bedilayich

and I will remove all your alloy.

[Isaiah 1:21-25]

What the Holy One said He will do with Israel in verses 24 and 25 corresponds directly to His invitation in verse 18 [which we read in conjunction with yesterday's shiur]. His invitation is translated into English poetically as an invitation to “*come, let us “reason” together*”. But do not let the poetry of that English translation fool you. The Holy One did not merely mean “*Let's do lunch*”, “*let's talk!*” or “*Let Me feel your pain*”. In today's vernacular What the Holy One was saying would more appropriately be translated: “*grab a switch, and assume the position!*”

The “reasoning” the Holy One promised to do would be not with words of gentle wisdom, but with the fatherly *rod of discipline*. After all, it was the Holy One who authored the phrase “*He who spares the rod spoils the child*”. And Our father does not spoil His children. If you want to be felt sorry for, pampered, humored, and spoiled, *do not seek the Holy One*. If on the other hand you want to be groomed for greatness, prepared for impact, enabled to reach your potential, and made ready to fulfill the purpose for which you were created, discipline is part of the process. It is evidence of His covenant love and His faithfulness.

A Promise of a Chavaat-Yair To Come

And look what the result of such discipline is, according to *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah]:

V'ashivah shoftayich k'varishonah

I will restore your judges as at first,

v'yo'atzayich k'vatechilah
and your counselors as at the beginning.

Now do you see why Moshe took the time to reference Ya'ir of Menashe – a judge 'as at first' [see Judges 10:3] - in his opening speech to those who would possess the Land? Do you now see the prophetic thrust of Moshe's remarks concerning Ya'ir?

Want more? Let's continue reading what the Holy One will do after His discipline is complete. *Chazon Yeshayahu* tells us:

acharei-chen yikare lach Ir Ha-tzedek Kiryah Ne'emanah
In the aftertime, you will be called 'City of Righteousness', the Faithful City.

Tziyon b'mishpat tipadeh
Zion will be redeemed by justice,

v'shaveyha b'tzakah
and her converts by righteousness.
[Isaiah 1:26-27]

Right now it may seem like we who are returning to Torah as a lifestyle are *chavaat* – clusters of houses – *shtetls*. We are small in number and influence. We cut a much smaller circle than our secular society. But do not lose heart. *A fire has been kindled* by the Ruach HaQodesh, and is burning in our hearts. It is the fire of the Holy One of Israel. It is the fire with which He wrote the Torah. It casts forth *Ya'ir* – the *light of Yah*. And we know that even the smallest of fires lit by the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov will spread.

Do not sit back and wait for or expect this fire to ignite in, spread from, or even pass through today's religious organizations⁷. The movement of which I am speaking will spread instead from and through *chavaat* – clusters of houses like ours. From house to house, building momentum as it goes, the fire of the Holy One will in the Holy One's time, transform the *chavaat-Yair* of today into a *city of righteousness*, and a *city of faithfulness*. In the *chazon* [vision] of Yochanan on the Isle of Patmos it looked like this:

*I saw the holy city, New Y'rushalayim, coming down out of heaven from God,
made ready like a kallah [bride] adorned for her husband.*

*I heard a loud voice out of heaven saying, "Behold, the Holy One's dwelling is with people,
and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people,
He will wipe away from them every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more; neither will there be mourning,*

⁷ Religious organizations, churches, synagogues, denominations, movements, and mega ministries invariably build 'firewalls' around themselves, because their leaders have a vested interest in things remaining as they are – for the system they have devised provides them with a livelihood, with power and prestige, and with a following who will do their bidding.

nor crying, nor pain, anymore. The first things have passed away."

He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

He said, "Write, for these words of the Holy One are faithful and true."

He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alef and the Tav, the Beginning and the End.

I will give freely to him who is thirsty from the spring of the water of life.

He who overcomes I will give him these things. I will be his God and he will be My son."

[Revelation 21:2-7]

Sh'ma these words. Let them penetrate your heart and soul and spirit. And on this 9th of Av – or perhaps the next - may Messiah turn our mourning into dancing!

He Has Pledged His Troth Once and For All – And His Commitment is Unshakable

The Creator designed the kind of relationship He would have with us - Avraham's prodigy - before He ever appeared to Avram and called him out of Charan. He knew exactly what He was getting into – not just with Avram, but with every one of his descendants and converts. And our Wonderful Bridegroom chose to commit the fate of His Grand Redemptive Plan into our fallible hands anyway. He was 100% confident in His ability to clean up all the messes we would make. He did not need perfection from us – just participation. He therefore designed His relationship with us for *the long term*. And though the Holy One does not change with time or circumstance He knows that *we do*. It is understood by Him – and totally acceptable to Him - that there will be high points and low points in our relationship. He is okay with the fact that on our side of the relationship there will be good days and not-so-good-days.

Programmed into Our Covenant with the Holy One, therefore, are a wide variety of *appointed times and seasons* designed to cover all the cycles of *human emotion, mood swing, and biorhythm*. The calendar the Holy One has given us in the Torah is beautifully designed and programmed to take into consideration our human issues of *high and low, ebb and flow*. Our Covenant provides us many, many times to *laugh* and to *dance*, to *rejoice* with our Maker and *revel* in His Harvest. But it also provides us times like the present one - seasons *to weep, to mourn, and to lament*. This is our appointed *season of Lamentations* – our annual time to pause and remember that:

Yehudah [Judah] has gone into captivity under affliction and hard servitude;

The roads to Tziyon mourn because no one comes to the set feasts.

All her gates are desolate; Her priests sigh; her virgins are afflicted; and she [is] in bitterness.

[Lamentations 1:3-4]

And we are called specifically in this season to remember exactly *why* this calamity has befallen us:

Her adversaries have become the master and her enemies prosper because the Holy One has afflicted her; it is because of the multitude of her transgressions, that her children have gone into captivity before the enemy.

[Lamentations 1:5]

By looking carefully at some of the worst moments of our collective past – and the specific deviances from Covenantal identity, calling, and passion we committed that started each of those ‘worst moment’ scenarios in motion – we learn how critically important it is to *guard our hearts*; to *purify our souls of arrogance, idolatry, and compromise*; to *hold our tongues until we have submitted all our attitudes, opinions, and worldviews to the scrutiny and counsel of the Holy One*; and to *incline our ears to sh’ma every precious Word our Divine Bridegroom has to say*.

The Day of Devastation

Hebrew legend says that it was on the ninth day of the fifth Hebrew month [i.e. the month the Babylonians taught us to call *Av*] that Moshe descended Mount Sinai to find B’nei Yisrael fully engaged in worshipping the golden calf. An ancient *midrash* establishes the same day - the ninth of Av exactly one year later - as the day on which our ancestors accepted the evil report of the 10 spies concerning the land of Israel, chose to go back to Egypt rather than go up and take possession of the land, and took up stones against Kalev and Y’hoshua. From this a tradition has developed that the Holy One has chosen, as a result, to allow judgments to be imposed upon His people on that day. While this is of course mere midrash and therefore not Torah per se, history seems to have borne it out to an amazing degree. The ninth day of Av has become famous as the ultimate day of *churban* [a Hebrew word meaning destruction or devastation], on which the Hebrew people seem most vulnerable to attack by their enemies. Why is this so? It is so, the sages opine, because at this time of the year more than any other we always seem to be a *house divided*. When the harvests are coming in, and the bins are full of both spring grain and summer fruit, we get distracted from our collective calling in the Covenant. We develop *sinat chinam* – often called ‘baseless hatred, but really meaning ‘rejection of grace’ for others. We become judgmental. We turn on each other. We spew *lashon hara*. We go tribal – and that always makes us loveless, lawless, and merciless. Having left the Way of the Holy One, we find ourselves helpless against either the propaganda strategies or the physical attacks of our enemies. As the Master taught, *a house divided against itself simply cannot stand*. **Matthew 12:25b**.

Would you like more examples? It was on the ninth day of Av in 3338 [i.e. 586 BCE] that the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem, burned the First Temple, and carried the Hebrew people away into captivity. It was on the ninth day of Av in 3828 [70 CE] the Romans destroyed the Second Temple - which has, of course yet to be rebuilt - burned the Holy City, and took captive those whom they did not

slaughter in the streets. The next year on the very same day – the ninth day of Av - the Romans plowed under the remains of the Temple and began building on the site the pagan city of *Aelia Capitolina*, which Jews would be forbidden to enter. In 1095 CE on the ninth day of Av Pope Urban II decreed the beginning of the First Crusade in the course of which hundreds of thousands of Jewish people were murdered.

On Tisha B'Av in 1290 CE an official decree was signed by King Edward I of England expelling all Jews from his country – and of course confiscating all theretofore Jewish-owned property. On July 22, 1306, CE - which happened to be the Tenth of Av - all Jews living in France were ordered to leave that country. The French king at the time, Phillip the Fair, planned the expulsion secretly so as to allow no opportunity for the Jews to flee with their assets. As had Edward of England, Phillip of France saw plundering the properties the Jews had managed to accumulate in his country through hard work as a good way to replenish his government's empty coffers. Approximately 100,000 Jews were forced to wander in search of new homes. The Philippian expulsion set a precedent for other mass expulsions that would continue to plague the divided Hebrew peoples wherever they went throughout Europe in the Middle Ages. Then in 1492 CE King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain issued a decree expelling all Jews. The decree established – you guessed it - the ninth day of Av as the final date by which all Jews had to be off of Spanish soil. It was, interestingly enough, the very next day, the 10th of Av that very year, when Christopher Columbus set sail on the voyage through which he discovered America. This voyage was financed in substantial part with the confiscated wealth of the expelled Spanish Jewish community.

Tisha B'Av in 1555 CE marked the first time that Jews [in this case, the Jews of Rome] were forcibly relocated in a Ghetto. In 1648 the ninth day of Av marked the beginning of the infamous *Chielminicki Massacre*, in the course of which the Cossacks murdered a quarter of a million Jews, drenching the Ukraine and Poland with Jewish blood. In 1914 England and Russia declared war on Germany on 9 Av, setting in motion World War I, and laying the groundwork for the Holocaust. On the ninth day of Av in 1942 the Nazis began the slaughter of Jews from the “Warsaw Ghetto” at the infamous Treblinka death camp. On 9 Av in 1994 terrorists detonated a bomb at the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killing 86 and wounding 300 more.

Tisha B'Av This Year

The enemies of the Bridegroom-King always pick this time of year to whip the people of the nations into an emotional frenzy of disdain for the Hebrew people and the ways of the Holy One this time of year. They relish the opportunity to

impose as much death, destruction, and misery as possible upon Jews and their allies on 9 Av 5782. Let us therefore, in this season as always, be wise as serpents, harmless as doves. Let us take extra time to pray for our enemies, to bless them in every way we have been called by Torah to bless them, and to do everything within our power and ability to live peaceably with them. If they still insist on attacking us, well, that is their choice, and it will never turn out well for them. So let us pray that the Holy One will intervene, and stop them before they cross a red line in His Eyes from which there is no possibility of return. Let us pray that our Bridegroom-King will arise, and that His enemies will be scattered – before they do serious damage to us or to themselves and their own children. Let us pray that our Glorious King will confound and frustrate the schemes of the nations, and will turn away from us – and from them - whatever evil they may plot and unleash. Let us be at shalom, knowing that whatever may befall us in this season, our Covenant Partner in Heaven will be faithful to make all things work together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His Purpose. Let us pray, in this season, that our sighing will soon be turned into laughter, that our mourning will soon be turned into dancing, and that our dirges of lamentation will soon give way to ecstatic songs of celebration, as we dance like calves released from the stall. Let it be said of us what is written in Psalm 126:

*When the Holy One brought back the captivity of Tziyon
we were like those who dream.*

*Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with singing.*

Then they said among the nations,

“The Holy One has done great things for them.”

The Holy One has done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

Those who sow in tears will reap in joy.

*He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing,
will doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing with him his sheaves.*

***The Rebbe of Tarsus Prophecies
Of the Holy One’s Sending For Us ‘Judges as at First’,
And “Counselors As At the Beginning”***

In today’s concluding reading chosen for Shabbat *Chazon* from the writings of *Shaul of Tarsus*, Shaul continues to prophesy to his young charge Timothy of the coming of what Yeshayahu saw as *shoftayich kevarishonah* [judges as at first], *v’yo’atzayich kevatechilah* [and counselors as at the beginning]. In today’s reading Shaul will turn his attention from *pequddim* [Gk. episkopos], which have been his subject in the previous readings this week, to *shamash'im* [Gk. diakonos]. Those of you who have participated in the celebration of *Chanukah* by lighting candles will

recognize the singular form of the word *shamash'im*⁸ this word as the name by which the middle, or “*servant candle*” with which all other Chanukah candles are lit is called. A ‘*shamash*’ is thus an ordinary vessel, but one which the Holy One uses over and above the vessel’s natural talents, abilities, understanding, and strength, for some purpose related to His [the Holy One’s] honor and glory.

The Greek word *diakonos*, used in the Greek text of I Timothy 3, had no English equivalent when in the 16th or 17th Century – hence, it was merely *transliterated* into English instead of translated, and became “deacons”. Please understand, however, that there is no comparison at all between what is being discussed by Shaul of Tarsus in these verses and the “*deacons*” one sees in Christian religious organizations today. What do I mean? Let me explain. Because we look at Scripture from our contemporary perspective [i.e. for us, our 21st Century ‘glasses’], and because our minds subconsciously impose our frame of reference upon what we read in Scripture, most who read I Timothy 3:8-13 think immediately that Shaul was describing, and prescribing qualifications for, positions of leadership in the “local church” or “synagogue”. That is because we think in terms of what we know – of that with which we are most familiar. We know what a ‘*deacon*’ is, we incorrectly believe, because we have seen or heard about people who have been given the title of *deacon* so-and-so in 21st Century local churches. But that is nonsense. Remember that when I Timothy was written there was no “local church” and there were no “leadership positions” to appoint people to. There were only small loosely-structured home fellowships – extended families, really - who lived quiet lives, and if they “met” at all, met secretly and irregularly to avoid arrest and persecution. There was no “organization”, and no “leadership structure”. There was no “king” or governing counsel other than the Holy One.

In light of that reality I want to challenge you as you read I Timothy 3 this year, to look for a more real and Biblical understanding of what Shaul was talking about than the office of *deacon* as we see it in the local churches of our century – or, for that matter, any century other than Shaul’s. When reading this passage, therefore, try to block out of your mind everything you know about ‘*deacons*’ in the 21st Century ‘church’, the way it is administered, and the way it conducts its meetings. Look at the passage instead through the glasses of Shaul’s Hebraic roots.

The Hebraic concept of *shamash'im* [which Shaul, the self-proclaimed ‘Hebrew of Hebrews’, certainly had in mind when he wrote the words we will be studying today] is best pictured in Daniel 7, where we read:

*I saw [ahead into time] until thrones were placed,
and One who was Ancient of Days sat:*

⁸ *Shamash*, *shin*, *mem*, *shin*, pronounced *shaw-mawsh*, is the verb root for Strong’s Hebrew word #8121.

*His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool;
His throne was fiery flames, [and] the wheels of it burning fire.*

*A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him:
thousands of thousands ministered [Hebrew, shamash] to Him,
and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him:
the Judgment was set, and the Books were opened.*

[Daniel 7:9-10]

The *shamash'im* in this vision of Daniel numbered “thousands of thousands”. Those who stood before the Holy One’s Throne [Hebrew idiomatic language for ‘prayed’⁹] numbered “ten thousand times ten thousand”. There was approximately one *shamash* for every ten of those who “stood”/prayed before the Holy One. Both groups [*i.e.* the *shamashim* and the multitude who “stand”/pray] appear to have been a *necessary* part of the Throne Room scene. The *shamashim* performed a very important function, which was related to the function of the multitude who stood/prayed. Let us, therefore, look a little deeper into the characteristics by which we can recognize the *shamash'im* among us.

The Hebrew word *shamash* is an ancient verb root. It is, like all regular Hebrew verb roots, composed of three consonants. The consonants that make up this verb root are *shin* [“sh” sound], *mem* [“m” sound], and *shin* [“sh” sound]. As we have discussed in previous lessons, Hebrew is a language with a pictorial base. Each consonant is a picture of something. The *shin* is a picture of flames/tongues of fire. The *mem* is a picture of a wave, such as one might see on the ocean, rushing to shore. Every verb root consisting of three consonants is a *mural*, combining the three consonant-pictures into a message. What is the message of the verb root *shamash*? *Shin* – flames/tongues of fire, *Mem* – moving as a wave, to [and from] *Shin* – flames/tongues of fire. The flames/tongues of fire usually represent *the manifest Presence of the Holy One* [*i.e.* “Our God is a consuming fire” – Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29]. The manifestation of the Holy One’s Presence [*shin*] flows out from His Throne like a wave [*mem*]. When it reaches its destination, and is received, it transforms whatever receives it into its Image [*shin*]¹⁰. What does this mural/picture have to do with anything? Think about it.

Catch the Fire!

The *shamash* represents the person who receives in himself/herself the fire of the

⁹ The connection between standing and praying in Hebrew thought is typified by the *Amidah* or *Sh'monei Esrei* prayer – the ancient all-encompassing prayer spoken, since the time of Daniel, 3 times a day by observant Jews, and after which the “Lord’s Prayer” taught by Yeshua seems to have been modeled. *Amidah* means “standing”. This name was given to the prayer because it is always prayed from a *standing position*, facing Jerusalem.

¹⁰ This, of course, is what fire does. When a fire is burning, anything it touches which is not fireproof catches on fire, and becomes indistinguishable from the fire.

Holy One – the manifestation of The Holy One’s Presence – and “catches” fire himself/herself. The person thus becomes merely *fuel* – all the power is supplied by the Holy One. And what is the result? The result is that the Holy One’s manifest Presence is *spread* in ever-widening circles. In the case of a true Biblical *shamash/diakonos*, an ordinary person has been immersed in a wave of the Holy One’s Divine Manifestation, and has thereby begun to “burn” – to shine, to illumine his sphere of influence, and spread the Divine Fire. He [or she] merely yields to the Divine Fire, and becomes a tongue or flame of fire himself/herself. It is not *his/her* fire [or is not supposed to be] – the fire is merely a manifestation of the Presence of *the Holy One*.

Then, like a *shamash* candle is used by the head of the household to cause all other candles on the *chanukiah* [the eight-branched candlestick used to commemorate the miracle of *Chanukah*] to burst into flame, the man or woman who yields to the Holy One’s “fire” is used by the Holy One to cause all around him/her, and who will receive the fire, to ‘burst into flame’ as well.¹¹ This has nothing to do with an “office” in a local congregation or assembly. It has everything to do with the ordinary affairs of life – in the home, in the marketplace, and in whatever other places ordinary people do what ordinary people do.

In those places true *pequddim/episkopos* shine like ‘judges as at the first’, and true *shamash'im/diakonos* enlighten their cities like ‘counselors as at the beginning’. Let your light so shine before men, Dear Reader. Neither a *shtetl* [a cluster of houses], nor a city set up on a hill – especially if it is ‘*enlightened by Yah*’ – is meant to remain hidden.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Why were Yehoshua [Joshua] and *B’nei Yisrael* [the Israelites] not to fear the enemies who stood between them and the Promised Land?

2. Today’s final installment of the haftarah for parsha *Devarim* concludes the stinging rebuke of Yeshayahu with a promise of discipline and of restoration for the repentant.

[A] How did Yeshayahu describe Jerusalem in verse 21?

[B] Who did Yeshayahu say was dwelling in Jerusalem in the place which should have housed those who were just and righteous?

[C] What did Yeshayahu say had happened to Israel’s “silver”?

[D] What does silver symbolize?

[E] What did Yeshayahu say had happened to Israel’s wine?

¹¹ Hence the declaration of Psalms 104:4 “***He makes his messengers winds/Breath; His servants flames of fire.***”

[F] What does wine symbolize?

[G] What did Yeshayahu describe, in verse 23, the “princes” of the Israelites?

[H] What things does Yeshayahu say the princes of Israel had failed to do?

[I] Write the Hebrew words Isaiah translates as “avenge” and “vengeance”, and write the definitions of those Hebrew words.

[J] In Isaiah 1:27, the prophet mentions “redeemed” and “penitents”. Define “redeem” and “penitent”. Use the dictionary, Strong’s Concordance [See Hebrew word #s 6561. ” *paraq*”. and 7725 “*shuwb*”] and Gesenius. Who could the “redeemed” and “penitents” be?

3. In today’s reading from the apostles, Shaul turns his attention from *episkopos* to *diakonos* [Hebrew *shamash'im*]. Here is what Shaul’s says regarding such persons:

*Shamashim ... must be reverent, not double-tongued,
not addicted to much wine, not greedy for money;
holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.*

Let them also first be tested; then let them serve as shamashim, if they are blameless.

*Their wives in the same way must be reverent, not slanderers,
temperate, faithful in all things.*

*Let shamashim be husbands of one wife,
ruling their children and their own houses well.*

*For those who have served well as shamashim gain to themselves a good standing,
and great boldness in the faith that is in Messiah Yeshua.*

[A] What is the Greek word translated as “deacon”?

[B] What is the Hebrew root word from which that word is derived, and what does the root word mean?

[C] List the things that Shaul says a “deacon” is to do/be.

[D] List the things that Shaul says a “deacon” is not to do/be.

[E] Do you think Ya’ir was more of an *episkopos* or a *shamash*?

[F] What purpose does the *shamash* serve in Chanukah observance? What do you think that tells us about what a “deacon” truly is supposed to be?

*May you be among the Remnant of His People who is restored to the Righteousness of Torah
and who sees the coming of Maschiach in glory - The Light of Yah! Shabbat Shalom!*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Lamentations 1:18-22

The Holy One is righteous; for I have rebelled against his mitzvah:

Please hear all you peoples, and see my sorrow:

My virgins and my young men are gone into captivity.

I called for my lovers, [but] they deceived me:

*My Kohanim and my Zakenim gave up the spirit in the city,
While they sought them food to refresh their souls.*

*See, O Holy One; for I am in distress; my heart is troubled;
My heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled:*

Abroad the sword bereaves, at home there is as death.

They have heard that I sigh; there is none to comfort me;

All my enemies have heard of my trouble;

they are glad that you have done it:

You will bring the day that you have proclaimed, and they shall be like me.

Let all their wickedness come before you;

Do to them as you have done to me for all my transgressions:

For my sighs are many, and my heart is faint.