

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Va'etchanan:*** **Deuteronomy 5:23 - 33²**
 Haftarah: **Isaiah 40:12-17**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Mark 12:31**

We have seen this day that God speaks with man – yet he still lives!

[Deuteronomy 5:24(b)]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 137;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the 2nd Blessing, Gevurot [The Prayer of His Powers]

Vayehi k'shom'achem et-ha-kol mitoch ha-choshech – *And it came to pass then that you all heard the voice/sound issuing forth out of the midst of the primeval darkness ...*

Deuteronomy 5:23a [Note: In Hebrew Bibles this part of Moshe's Discourse is found under the designation 'Deuteronomy 5:20a ff].

Moshe's long, tortuous season of turmoil within and warfare without is at an end at last. Now he can finally see beyond the raw emotions of fallen humanity's trademark '*it's-all-about-how-I-feel-in-this-moment*' pathology. At long last he is ready to start functioning as a *man of true wisdom* instead of just another slave of hormones, emotion, fight/flight reactivity, and half-baked opinions. He is ready to serve the Holy One as a statesman instead of a warrior; as a gentle man of grace and *shalom* instead of a raging vigilante confusing pseudo-intellectual idols of 'morality', 'truth', and 'social justice' with the patient goodness of the Holy One's ways. It has taken 120 years of life, and four decades of walking closely with the Holy One, for it to happen, but Moshe has finally laid down his sword and shield. His staff, sling, and bag of stones, along with his quick temper, his self-righteous indignation, and his lust for vengeful judgment, have finally been drowned in the Great Sea of the Creator's love. They have been washed away to a distant shore like the dangerous remnants of Egyptian armor such things are. No more will he send men off to war. These days the son of Amram spends his time captivating human beings with stories - stories that will be retold by, and will have immense impact on, all the bloodlines and generations of man that follow. Oh, you want stories? He's got a million of 'em! Stories; anecdotes; descriptions and accounts; chronicles; sagas – glowing narratives all the more delightful because they are 100% true ... these have become Moshe's *forte*!

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² Today's aliyah consists of a portion of Scripture where the Hebrew numbering of the verses differs from the traditional English/Christian numbering. If you are reading from a TaNaKh the verses we read today will be numbered 5:20-30, not 5:23-33 as stated above.

Though in another phase of life, long ago and far away, he saw himself as a man with a heavy hand, a ‘heavy tongue’, and a ‘heavy mouth’, of late the son of Amram has become the man of calm wisdom, perspective, and *devarim* – i.e. Heavenly-inspired words and actions – that the Holy One created him to be. Four decades of communing face-to-Face with the Ultimate Storyteller will do that to a man, you know! So right here, right now, on the plain of Moav overlooking the Jordan, we are finally seeing Moshe at his liberated best. The old prophet’s eyes are absolutely sparkling. His countenance is bursting with boyish delight. His face is shining with the radiance of a full moon. He is more energized now, it seems, that he was on the day he led B’nei Yisrael and the mixed multitude of slaves from every nation through the Sea of Reeds. Age has not slowed him down a bit. The shadow of impending death has not diminished his enthusiasm one iota. Look at him ... standing tall - yet exuding humility; grinning boyishly, yet radiating *gravitas*; laughing heartily, yet epitomizing reverence! These are undeniably *the best days of his life*. He finally has no anger – only shalom! He finally suffers from no *victim complex* – he feels only gratitude for a life well lived. He understands that he has received favor, mercy, grace, and love far beyond his wildest imagination! He holds no grudge. He casts no blame. He fears nothing and no one. He worries not one whit what any human being thinks of him. He has lived 120 years. He has seen more signs, wonders, and miracles in those years than any other human being that has ever lived. From the moment of his birth on, his life has consisted of one supernatural experience after another. From a life so full, what one memory – what single day – which single event – could possibly have captivated him so? Oh, Beloved – what has Moshe absolutely glowing is the delightful reminiscence of the day the Holy One’s Voice released the *Aseret HaDibrot* (i.e. 10 prophetic empowerments) over us, over our children, and over our childrens’ children *ad infinitum*! He is talking about the time he witnessed – indeed, got to actively participate in - the climactic event of world history - the glorious day of *Matan Ha-Torah*³. That day at Sinai, in the third month of our freedom – was the BEST DAY HUMANITY HAS SEEN SINCE GAN EDEN. On that day Heaven reached down and kissed earth. On that day the Creator of the Universe stepped out of His cloak of eternity, called ordinary men, women, and children to come up to him in full bridal procession, and betrothed the likes of us to Him forever. As wonderful as the day we were delivered from *Mitzrayim* was, *that day* at Sinai was better. As glorious as the day we walked dry-shod through the Sea of Reeds was, *that day* under the Chuppah was better. As memorable as the days we first saw the pillar of fire and cloud, tasted manna, and quenched our parched throats with living water from a supernatural rock were, *that day* of Divine

³ *Matan Ha-Torah* is a Hebrew phrase which means ‘entrustment of the Torah’. It refers to the day of the Great Theophany, when the Holy One called B’nei Yisrael and the mixed multitude of the nations, whom He had brought forth from slavery in Egypt,

Romance and Betrothal was more so - a *hundred thousand times over!* Oh, how the memory of *that day* stirs us. Oh, how it inspires us. Oh, how it regales us! Oh, how the Words we heard the Holy One speak over us that day affect us still! It started with ***Anochi Adonai Eloheicha*** [*I am the Holy One your God*]. **Exodus 20:1-2; Deuteronomy 5:6.** And what followed not only altered our individual and collective identities, redefined our collective mission, and refocused each of our individual journeys through life forever – it quite literally *changed the world.* *Selah!* Savor the memory indeed!

Truth-Telling; Life-Giving; Vision-Breathing; Destiny-Shaping

The memory of what happened that very special day at Sinai is indeed humanity's sweetest collective memory. Moshe knows this particular memory absolutely must be inscribed on our hearts, written on our souls, and branded on our psyches. He knows the memories of that day need to become the capstone of our *truth matrix* – the key elements of the frame of reference through which we approach, view, evaluate, speak to and about, and respond to every person, place, and challenge we encounter. Many things we will *believe, hope, assume, accept* or *think* over the course of our lives; but what happened at Sinai – that, and that alone, is what we **know**. That is our ***truth***. That is the *center of gravity* of our individual and collective identities. It frames our *raison d'être*, our calling, our mission, and our destiny. What the Bridegroom-King did in us and proclaimed over us at Sinai should constitute the foundation stones of our lives – the solid rock upon which we build households, families, heritages, bloodlines, communities, and nations. It should provide the motivation and inspiration for every single thought we think, every word we say, and every choice or decision we make in life. We should talk delight, many times a day, to call the events of this world-changing day to the forefront of our individual and collective consciousnesses. We should talk about the events of that day over and over and over again with our children, and with our childrens' children – until we see the precious memory of *Matan Torah* come alive in their minds, and the transformative energy of the Holy One's *beautiful love song over His Bride-People* pulsing in and out of their hearts, and surging through their souls too.

Moshe is teaching us how to retell this story – and implant this memory – deliciously. That is why he is beaming. That is why we feel like laughing and crying at the same time. But alas, our prophet-turned-rabbi's retelling of the story, replete with context descriptions and sound and visual effects, is drawing to a close. His face is still shining. His heart is still racing. His lips are trembling. Our eyes are still watering – and then Moshe sighs a deep sigh, and says:

Et-ha-d'varim ha-eleh [*These are the words*]
the Holy One spoke to all your assembly,

*in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness,
with a loud voice; then He added no more.*

And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

[Deuteronomy 5:22]

One final visual effect – the two stone tablets, written with the Finger of the Creator of the Universe. One last note of poignant finality – ‘*then He added no more*’. The tale has been told. The exquisite reminiscence is complete. The Memory of all Memories is awake and alive in us again. The powerful energy of Sinai is now pulsing as freely in us as in Moshe. That was the desired result. That is the way it should always be when the sweet story of our Betrothal at Sinai is told. Whether forty years or forty generations have passed since the event itself, remembering and savoring the Holy One’s words of Betrothal should still have exactly the same effect. They still make the hearts of any human being with an ‘*ear to hear*’ tremble. They still stir in us the hunger to become the holy-devoted ‘Bride-People’ our King deserves. We know we are not merely called to *hear* the words He spoke that day, or *read* them, or *teach them to our children*, or *post them on our walls*, and/or even obey them. We instinctively know that we are really called to do is far more radical than that – we are to actually **BECOME the beautiful people those words describe**. Those words are to become our MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION. We are to *inhale them deeply into our souls with every contraction of our lungs*. We are to *conform our personalities* to them. We are to *live them every day*. We are to *move in them every moment*. And we are to do so not out of fear of being punished – much less sent to Hell - if we do not, but solely out of an *ever-burgeoning flood of Bridal Passion*. The Ten Words spoken at Sinai, you see, are *what our Bridegroom-King is doing*. And if we want to be with Him, and learn to move with Him, and think like Him, and look like Him ... well, if that is what we want those Ten Words will become *what we are doing* as well.

Sh’ma! The Ten Prophetic Empowerments of Sinai are Absolutely Mission Critical!

Moshe wants us to keep the *Ten Hebrew phrases* the Bridegroom of Heaven lovingly proclaimed over us at Sinai dancing in the forefront of our minds forever. He knows that allowing the Divine Bridegroom to inscribe these ten words, one by one, deeper and deeper in the tender flesh of our hearts is absolutely essential to us even understanding, much less fulfilling, our purpose on earth. The prophet-turned-rabbi knows that the ten identity declarations spoken by the Bridegroom-King over us in the course of the Great Theophany are absolutely **mission-critical**. He knows those ten words are our key to getting and staying on track toward our destiny as the Holy One’s Bride-People – no matter what ‘such a time as this’ we happen to live in. He knows that these ten Hebrew phrases are *so much more* than just ‘commandments’ as most view them. He knows that these words of the Holy One

are *prophetic empowerments* – words full of creative, reconstructive, will-reshaping power. He knows that those words are infused with Divine Creative Energy, and that innate within them is the potential to change absolutely everything about us, from our DNA to our thoughts, attitudes, speech, and behavior. He knows these words are the fundamental elements of our new spiritual genetic blueprint. He knows that these words do not just need to be *memorized* – they need to be *internalized* and *actualized*. Alive, powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, these very special words are strategically designed to pierce right through the serpent’s strongholds in our flesh. Like heat-seeking missiles the *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* need to penetrate each and every forest fortresses and fig leaf coverings⁴ our fallen human nature has thrown up to hide our nakedness. They need to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow with the precision of a surgical scalpel. They need to uncover, expose, debride, irrigate, then reconstruct all the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Will you let them to their job, Dear One?

Moshe’s Sermon on the Plain – Phase II⁵

Moshe is now well into Phase II of his Plains Dissertation. Day after day he stands on the sands of the Moavian plateau, overlooking the Jordan River, and pouring forth rivers of insight and vision direct from Heaven. The prophet of the burning bush, Heaven’s Ambassador to Pharaoh’s palace, and the veteran of so many other places and seasons of awesome Divine encounter is *spilling the beans*. He who has spent more time in the Presence of the Creator of the Universe conversing with Him face to Face as one converses with a friend than any human being who has ever lived is *revealing the secrets he has learned over his 120 years of life concerning how to – and not to – receive empowerment from on High to walk through life on earth as a Covenant Partner of the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven*.

A New Perspective on the Events That Occurred At the Great Betrothal Ceremony of Sinai

In today’s aliyah Moshe reminds us of the initial the reaction of B’nei Yisrael when these words of betrothal were spoken. Some of the conversations Moshe relates as having ensued - first *between the leaders of the people and Moshe*, and then *between Moshe and the Holy One* - are not a part of the original version of the

⁴ The reference is to Genesis 3:7-8, where the Divine Narrator of Torah tells us that after partaking of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Chava ‘*sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Holy One God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Holy One God among the trees of the garden.*’

⁵ Phase I, found in Deuteronomy 1:1 through 4:40, consists of a brief retrospective on Israel’s history as a nation since leaving Mount Sinai, concluded by a stunning prophecy regarding Israel’s future exile, redemption, regathering, and restoration to the land and to Torah submissiveness.

story as it was given to us in the Book of Exodus. But we will get to that in time. First, let's see how Moshe recounts the story 40 years after it happened. He says:

*And so it was that when you heard the voice
mitoch ha-choshech [out of the midst of the darkness],
while the mountain was burning with fire you came near to me,
even all the heads of your tribes, and your Zakenim; and you said,
“Behold, the Holy One our God has shown us **et-k'vodo v'et-god'lo**
[his glory and his greatness],
and we have heard his voice **mitoch ha-esh** [out of the midst of the fire]:
we have seen this day that **et-ha-adam v'chai** [a man can live] even if God speaks to him.”*
[Deuteronomy 5:23-24]

Note that Moshe has kindly “left something out” of this narrative. He has omitted any reference to the strange series of events that the Book of Exodus tells us happened between the giving of the *Aseret ha-Dibrot* and the conversation Moshe describes between himself and the elders. After the Holy One stepped out of Eternity into time, out of Invisibility into visibility, and out of Incorporeality into space; after He took up human language and made His thoughts and intentions obvious; after He bared His Heart; after He declared His truth; here is how parsha *Yitro* tells us that the first generation of B'nei Yisrael responded:

*All the people perceived the thunderings,
the lightnings, the sound of the shofar, and the mountain smoking.
And when the people saw it, they **trembled** [KJV, removed],
and **stayed at a distance** [KJV, stood afar off].*

The narrative of the events as provided in the Book of Exodus then tells us that Moshe pleaded with the people of that generation to respond to the Holy One's offer of intimate communion with enthusiasm rather than aloofness. Moshe, who had survived not only the burning bush but multiple face-to-Face encounters with the Holy One, knew that, for those who love the Holy One, there is nothing whatsoever to fear about His Presence. Moshe therefore said to the people, ***Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, that you won't depart from the path.***

The Exodus narrative indicates that, sadly, Moshe's plea was ignored. Though Moshe urged the people forward into more intimate communion with the Holy One, ... *the people **stayed** at a distance* [KJV, *afar off*], *and Moshe drew near to the thick darkness where God was.* Exodus 20:18-21.

In retelling the story on the plains of Moav to the sons and daughters of those who “trembled” [KJV, ‘removed’⁶] and “stayed at a distance” [KJV, ‘stood afar off’⁷] that

⁶ The Hebrew verb translated by the NIV as “trembled”, and by the KJV as “removed” is *nua'*, *nun*, *vav*, *ayin*, Strong's Hebrew word #5128, pronounced *noo'-ah*. It is first used in Genesis 4:12 to describe what

Shavuot, and who had since died in the desert, Moshe sees no need to dwell on this knee-jerk reaction. He softens the account a little. He doesn't even bring up the part about the part about the people of the Exodus generation choosing to react by "removing themselves" and "staying at a distance". Permit me to resume the quotation of Moshe's 'retrospective' account of the event as presented in Phase II of his "Plains Narrative".

[You said:] "*Now therefore why should we die?
for ha-esh ha-g'dolah hazot [this great fire] will consume us:
if we hear the voice of the Holy One our God any more we will die.
For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God
medaber mitoch-ha-esh [speaking out of the midst of the fire], as we have, and lived?"*
*K'rav atah [you go near], and sh'ma all that the Holy One our God shall say:
and speak you to us all that the Holy One our God shall speak to you;
v'shamanu v'asinu [and we will hear [sh'ma] it and do [asah] it].*

More on that last line – *v'shamanu v'asinu* – later. Right now let's focus on the commentary that preceded that declaration.

A Sudden Astounding Lapse of Curiosity?

Why suddenly did the people the Holy One had redeemed from Egypt with a Mighty Hand and an Outstretched Arm, and to whom He had shown His deliverance at the Sea of Reeds, His provision in the form of manna from Heaven and water from a Rock, and His protection in the form of miraculous victory over their enemies, suffer from such a *lapse of spiritual curiosity*? Were they content with the *status quo* of stale, formalized, man-centric religion they had been learned from Yitro the Midyani? Were they satisfied with '*old mercies*' and testimonies from days gone by? Were they as close to and intimate with the Creator of the Universe as they ever wanted to be? Were our ancestors really that shallow? Are *we*?

the Holy One sentenced Kayin to do after Kayin killed Hevel [Abel]. There, we are told, "*a fugitive [nua'] and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.*" The imagery is that of *running away* and *becoming a fugitive*.

⁷ The Hebrew phrase translated by the NIV as "stayed at a distance" and by the KJV as "stood afar off" is *y'amadu m'rachok*. The two Hebrew words that are at the root of this phrase are *amad* [to stand] and *rachok* [a long distance]. An illustrative example of the type of removal/aloofness this phrase implies are found in Genesis 21:16, where we are told that, after she was banished by Sarah, Hagar "... *went, and sat her down over away from [Yishmael] a good way off, as it were a bowshot: for she said, 'Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against [him] ...*" Also see Genesis 37:18, where Yosef's brothers are estranged from him, and we are told: "*And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him.*" The phrase *y'amadu m'rachok*, together with *nua'*, basically means that the people estranged themselves, separated themselves, and made themselves aloof from, the Holy One. This is like what Adam did in the Garden when he heard the Voice of the Holy One walking in the Garden and ran and hid.

Let us consider carefully the nature and implications of the strange request that was presented to Moshe by the elders of the people at the time of the Great Theophany.

You Will Not Surely Die

First, the elders' response to the Holy One's revelation of His Heart was to change the subject to *buy time*. "***If we hear [Hebrew sh'ma] the voice of the Holy One our God any more we will die***", they declared. They – of all people on the earth - could not seriously believe this, could they? It had to be just some kind of negotiating ploy, didn't it? One thing the Great Theophany they had all just witnessed had made absolutely certain was that hearing the Beautiful Voice of the Bridegroom will *not* cause a human being to die. Or *will it?*

Sh'ma-ing the Voice of the Creator of the Universe will absolutely not cause a human being to die physically in the way most people view death – but it *will* definitely bring about *another kind of death*. The kind of death it most certainly *will* bring about is a death *of the self-absorbed and emotion- and appetite-obsessed flesh*.

One cannot hear the Voice of the Holy One and continue to live like one did before the revelation came. One cannot receive a visitation from his Creator – complete with identity affirming, life-mission defining, and cross-generational destiny reshaping downloads of revelation – and walk away unchanged. Perhaps the issue was not a lapse of curiosity. Perhaps it was a fear of letting go. Perhaps that is *our problem* as well.

Someone Very Near and Dear to Us Has Indeed Heard the Voice of the living God Speaking Out of the Fire and Lived

The next thing the elders of the Redeemed Community say to Moshe is equally disingenuous. ***For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire as we have, and lived?*** Okay – this is *not rocket science*. There is an extremely obvious answer to this panicked inquiry of the elders. The obvious answer is '***Moshe***'. After all, he who stood right there in their midst talking to them – the very man they had followed out of Egypt and walked with day by day for weeks - was himself the veteran of the holiest of all fires. He had, long ago, been called by the Holy One's Voice out of ... yes, that is correct ... a *burning bush*. If Moshe had heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire – and lived – why couldn't they?

Perhaps these statements and questions of the elders of the Redeemed Community on the day of the Great Theophany can be viewed as just part of an ancient bargaining protocol. Perhaps they were following the example set by Avraham in

attempting to respond to an appearance of the Holy One in their world with a series of negotiations. See e.g. **Genesis 15:1-3 and 18:17-33**. Perhaps the elders just wanted to negotiate the best deal on behalf of the Bride People they represented that they could envision. Perhaps that ‘best deal’, in their minds, involved [1] POSTPONEMENT OF INTIMATE COMMUNION WITH THE HOLY ONE and [2] ESTABLISHMENT OF A PROTOCOL OF INTERMEDIATION. This was, after all, *standard betrothal covenant protocol* for human beings in patriarchal cultures.

Moshe describes the response of the Divine Bridegroom to this proposal of postponed intimacy and intermediation as follow

... the Holy One said to me,

I have heard the sound/tone of the words of this people that they have spoken to you.

heytivu kol-asher diberu

they have well said all that they have spoken.

Mi-yiten v'hayah levavam zeh lahem leyir'ah oti

Oh that there were such a heart in them that they would fear me,

v'lish'mor et-kol-mitzvotai

and heed [sh'mar] all my mitzvot always,

kol-ha-yamim l'ma'an yitav lahem v'livneihem l'olam

that it might be well with them and with their children forever!

Lech emor lahem shuvu lachem l'aholechem

Go tell them, Return you to your tents.

V'atah poh amod imadi

But as for you, stand you here by me,

v'adabrah eleicha et kol-ha-mitzvah

and I will speak to you all the mitzvot,

v'ha-chukim v'ha-mish'patim asher telamdem

and the statutes, and the ordinances, which you are to teach them,

v'asu b'aretz asher anochi noten lahem l'rishtah

that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess it.”

[Deuteronomy 5:25-31]

Why did Moshe leave out the part about the people *removing* from the mountain and *staying afar off*? Why did he – at least as we read his commentary in English - make it sound like the Community’s running away from the Holy One – when He was calling us to come closer - was somehow a “good idea”?

Digging a Little Deeper

Let's dig into this passage carefully to see if we can find some clues. It seems after reviewing both Deuteronomy 5 and Exodus 20 that after the Holy One proclaimed the "10 words" in a loud voice to the whole assembly He paused (verse 22) to *let those words sink in* and to *allow the people to react*. When the Voice from the fire and the thick darkness fell silent for a moment the people began to get uneasy - children cried, teenagers complained, women elbowed their husbands, the men looked at each other like 'somebody do something'! *Oy Veh!* So the text tells us the leaders [*roshim*] of the tribes and the elders [*zakenim*] responded to this uneasiness in the camp. They came to Moshe and said some things that are very interesting if looked at closely. The two things they said upon which I would like us to focus are found in verses 24 and 25 respectively.

I call the contents of those two verses "*the revelation*" [which was very good] and "*the voice of the Serpent*" [which was ... well, you decide for yourself!]

The Stunning Revelation – When We Die to His Word, We Arise to New Life

First, in Deuteronomy 5:24 the leaders of Israel are reported as saying concerning the Ten Words experience:

Today we have learned that God [i.e. Elohim] speaks to man, and man lives."

This is a *wonderful* revelation. It means that, while the Holy One is awesome in power and majesty, *He is not inherently angry - nor is He out to do His People mischief*. He is *good*, and, what is more *He wants to communicate with His People*. His Word *kills the flesh* – but it *enlivens the Spirit*. This revelation means that *we are always welcome at His Throne*. It means that - like King Ahasuerus in the book of Esther - He has extended His royal scepter to humanity. As long as we stay where we are told to be, in an attitude of reverent worship, we are in *no danger* from the Holy One's voice. Despite how powerful His Words are, if we but *sh'ma* them, neither we nor our children will either be struck down by a plague or come to any harm whatsoever. As long as we *sh'ma*, and follow the Holy One's protocol of approach, we are 100% *safe* in His Presence.

If you will receive it, this revelation establishes a down payment, or 'earnest' deposit, on the Holy One's promise of a return to the status of man in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall. Remember the ease with which man received the Holy One's verbal communications in the Garden before the banishment? Even after the Fall, prior to banishment from the Garden, there was direct communication, and the Holy One's word brought only *life*. This is truly a great revelation. But wait! What comes out of our elders' mouths next?

Is That the Voice of the Serpent?

The next words out of our elders' mouths are totally inconsistent with what they said just previously! After specifically acknowledging that the Holy One's Voice was NOT lethal, they turned right around and said:

*But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us,
and we will die if we hear the Voice of the Holy One Eloheinu any longer!*

What are they saying? Hmmm. Who told them they would die? What other voices had they been listening to? Where were their *heads*? Where were their *hearts*? All this talk of death, and all this distrust of the Holy One, sounds suspiciously reminiscent of *Chava's conversation with the Serpent in the Garden*!⁸ Think about it - if the Holy One wanted to kill the people He had just had ample opportunity! He had them in the palm of His Hand, so to speak [where, of course, He had had them all along!].

Let's review history. The Holy One didn't kill our ancestors with the plagues He rained down on Egypt. He didn't kill our firstborn when He could have. He didn't let Pharaoh's army harm us at the Sea of Reeds. He didn't drown us with the walls of water He caused us to pass through. He didn't leave us without food [instead He showered manna on us every morning!]. And He has just spoken the *Aseret HaDibrot* over us without harming a single hair on a single head! Hmmm. So what's with all this '*we will die*' talk?

Listening to the Beautiful Voice of the Creator does not cause a human being to die. What causes death is *listening to the voice of the Serpent and eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*. The "we will die" argument of our elders to Moshe doesn't hold water any more than the Serpent's "*you will not surely die*" argument to Chava had any validity. This is just another incident of someone repeating the Serpent's old refrain about the Holy One. This is our elders' parroting of the Serpent's words, by accusing the Holy One of taking us out in the desert to kill us⁹ rather than to bless us. After all the Holy One has done for us, *why do we still not trust Him?* Why do we still not *love* Him?

Instead of the cry "*Please, speak to us again! We want to know You More!*", what do we do? We *run away, make ourselves fugitives*¹⁰, and stand aloof. We ask Moshe to go to class for us and take notes! We give in to the urge to run away from the Holy One – the same urge that caused Adam and Chava to hide from the Holy One among the trees of the Garden. But for some reason Moshe doesn't mention this when he tells the story in Deuteronomy. He skips over all the running and

⁸ See especially Genesis 3:4-5, where the Serpent debates the "ye shall surely die" issue with Chava, and concludes by convincing her the Holy One means her harm, not good.

⁹ See for instance Exodus 14:10-11, 16:3, as well as Numbers 14:3, and 16:12.

¹⁰ See footnotes 5 and 6, supra.

hiding stuff he told us about in Exodus. And what is more, he telescopes two events together, and describes the request of the elders that he mediate for them in these words:

*You go near, and hear all that the Holy One our God will say;
then tell us everything the Holy One our God speaks to you;
and we will hear [sh'ma] it and do [asah] it¹¹.*

In Exodus the original request [Exodus 20:19] mentioned only that Israel would *sh'ma* the words of the Divine Bridegroom once Moshe told them what they were. It took three chapters [until Exodus 24:3] for Moshe to coax from them the promise to *asah* as well as *sh'ma*.

It appears that Israel was the first recorded ‘runaway bride’ in all of history. But 40 years later, considering what has happened since – the golden calf, the *chet ha-meraglim*, the rebellion of Korach, *etc.* – that’s apparently “water under the bridge”. Why?

The Holy One’s Response to His ‘Runaway Bride’

One would think that when His Bride-to-be walked out on the betrothal ceremony, fleeing His Chuppah like a frightened rabbit, the Holy One would have been angry, or hurt, or disappointed. It is not as though the Holy One had nothing else to say to His Beloved. It is not as though He was through speaking to her. Indeed, He was just getting to the good part of His betrothal declaration! He had, after all, merely announced His ‘talking points’. The *Aseret ha-Dibrot* was [*is*], after all, just the preamble to the Betrothal Covenant.

Suffice it to say that if my chosen bride were to run away and leave the “best man” in her place just as the recitation of betrothal vows was beginning [as it was at Sinai] I probably would not take it too well. I would be *angry, hurt, disappointed*, and much more. But then again I am not the Holy One.

The Holy One is truly amazing, Dear Reader, and He is *unbelievably patient*. He is simply *not offended or put off by immature responses of immature people*. The Holy One heard something else in the elders’ response to the Great Theophany and baring of His Heart. He heard them utter the simple promise, on behalf of the Redeemed Community, regarding the words He spoke and would in the future speak: *v’shamanu v’asinu* – *i.e. and we will hear [sh'ma] it and do [asah] it*. **Deuteronomy 5:24(b)**. That phrase meant the same thing to Him as the bride’s ‘***I Do***’ means to her human bridegroom. In fact it meant even more. It was all He needed to hear. It was, for Him, what the Great Theophany had been all about. Despite the seeming

¹¹ Moshe here compresses two separate events into one for the sake of the narrative. First the people said they would *sh'ma* [Exodus 20:19]. Only later did the people agree to *asah* as well [Exodus 24:3].

insult of the first part of the elders' response to His pouring out of His Heart, He walked away smiling and singing because, in the long run, "*she said 'Yes'!*" He had known all along it will take some time for this immature Bride He has chosen to develop sincere trust and deep commitment [after all, He knows she will commit adultery with a 'golden calf god' *under His Chuppah* a little over a month into the Betrothal!]. But time was one thing He most definitely had plenty of. So He heard *v'shamanu v'asinu* and ignored the rest of the elders' silly words. He saw through the immediate situation – and His Beloved's immaturity - down the long tunnel of "time" to the "end" of the story. He even saw past the beautiful wedding mentioned in the Book of Revelation, when His *Kallah* [Bride] will desire nothing more than to be in His Presence forever, to the One Thousand Years of Messianic Rule, when His Beloved will serve as His Co-Regent, ruling with Him upon the earth.

Accepting Us In Our Weakness and Immaturity

With all that in mind let us look again at what the Holy One says when His Bride seeks permission to leave Him standing at the altar talking to her designated "Friend of the Bride".

***Oh that there were such a heart in them,
that they would fear me, and keep all my mitzvot always,
that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!***

[Deuteronomy 5:28(b) - 30(a)]

Why was the Holy One willing to *accept* the insult of our ancestors along with the *v'shamanu v'asinu*? Why was He willing to *accept* their immature reaction to His Presence? Remember the eternal principle of Romans 8:28: *God works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His Purpose.*"

The Cry of the Bridegroom

What the Holy One saw and proclaimed as "*yatab*" – a source of delight, of pleasure, of hope, of joy, and of shalom - was the *v'shamanu v'asinu* He heard at the end of the elders' conversation with Moshe. He knew that *in the fullness of what we mortals call "time", Messiah would be sent, and would walk in the midst of this people, and would thereafter release the Ruach HaQodesh upon all flesh, to return these people, and multitudes of believing goyim as well, to the point of revelation we experienced at Sinai.* And sometime in the future, the Divine Bridegroom knew, *His Beloved would run to Him instead of running away.* And she would do it with such passion, and such love, that the world and all its principalities and powers would stand aghast.

May the Holy One hasten the coming of that day! Even now, however, one can - if he really listens - hear the longing heart of a loving suitor calling out over the din

of all the crying children and the frenzied activities of all the impatient men and women trying to look and feel important and to appear ‘in control’:

*Oh that there were such a heart in them,
that they would fear me,
and keep* [Hebrew *sh'mar*, meaning to *treasure*, to *guard*, to *protect*] *all my mitzvot always,
that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!*

Dear Reader, the cry of the Divine Suitor continues to echo over the hills and through the valleys today – to wherever you are: *Oh, that there were such a heart ...* Is there such a heart *in you*? If there is, stop what you are doing and whisper the words He longs to hear to Him now, Dear Reader, right where you sit - *v'shamanu v'asinu*.

Join your voices in harmony with the song of the Redeemed. Knit your heart with His. Respond to His outpouring of love with enthusiastic surrender. *V'shamanu v'asinu*.

If You Build It ...

Today's aliyah concludes with a very interesting passage in which Moshe quotes the Holy One as saying, regarding His covenant community:

Ush'martem la'asot
And you [plural] are to be watchful to make/build/shape/mold
ka'asher tzivah Adonai Eloheichem etchem
what the Holy One your [plural] God has enjoined;
lo tasuru yamin usmol
not turning to the right or left.
B'chol-ha-derech
[You are to walk] entirely in the way
asher tzivah Adonai Eloheichem etchem telechu
in which the Holy One their God has enjoined you [plural] to walk,
l'ma'an tichyun v'tov lachem
so that you [plural] may live and do well,
v'ha-arachtem yamim b'aretz asher tirashun
enduring for a long time on the land that you [plural] over which you going to take stewardship.

In speaking these words at this time the Holy One is not merely talking to hear Himself talk. He is not angry. He is not pontificating. What He is doing is releasing some very, very important prophetic empowerments over His people. What empowerments, you ask? The foundational empowerment is the empowerment to *asah* – i.e. to *make, build, shape, mold*. By beginning with the phrase “*Ush'martem la'asot*” the Holy One prophetically declares that our mission in life is to be

builders. And we are not sloppy builders who just throw things together *willy-nilly*. We are to be careful, watchful builders of structures that will endure for generations.

What are we to build? Pharaoh saw the creativity in us. He put us to work as builders. He had us *asah*-ing everything from bricks to store cities in the service of his kingdom in Egypt. At Mount Sinai Moshe watched us release this *asah*-ing anointing at far greater levels as he oversaw our building of the Tabernacle. The Holy One's ultimate plan for employing our building talents is even more ambitious than that however. He wants us to *build even more glorious things, as each one brings his or her own unique style of individual creativity to the artisan's table and shapes living testimonies and tabernacles by weaving the raw materials of Torah* into all the relationships, circumstances, cycles and seasons of human life.

He wants us to build Torah-based lives, reflecting Torah-based *attitudes* about our purpose and mission in life. He wants us to build Torah-based *conversations*, and Torah-based *lifestyles*, and Torah-based *relationships*. He wants us to build Torah-based *marriages*. He wants us to build Torah-based *families*. He wants us to build Torah-based *businesses in Torah-based marketplaces*. He wants us to build *Torah-based communities*. He wants us to build *a network of human lighthouses* through which He can light the way to redemption for all the peoples of the earth. He wants us to build *a Torah-based Kingdom on earth, as it is in Heaven*.

What the revelation at Sinai was all about, you see, was not the Holy One laying down 'commandments' for His new subjects. It was, instead, about Him prophetically empowering His chosen people – whom He loves - to construct *the greatest building project ever conceived*.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Let's continue our study with a few questions and exercises.

[A] Make believe you have interviewed a "*survivor*" of the meeting of the Holy One and Israel on Mount Sinai [Y'hoshua, Kalev, or Elazar, perhaps], and write a make-believe 'newspaper article' on your imaginary meeting with that person, describing their thoughts regarding being present to witness the stunning events that Torah describes in Deuteronomy 5:4-33 and Exodus 19:2 - 20:22.

[B] Why do you think Moshe did not include the 'running and hiding' episode of Exodus 19 in his recounting of the Sinai experience to the younger generation?

[C] According to verse 29 of our aliyah ["*Oh that there were such a heart in them ...*"], what two things does the Holy One want us to do in order that "it might be well with [us], and with [our] children forever"?

[D] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the Hebrew verb translated as "fear" in verse 29. Write that word in Hebrew letters, with appropriate vowel indicators, and in English transliteration. Describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing as you look at the Hebrew letters, as you read the notes of Strong's and Gesenius, and as you consider other passages in which this verb is used.

[E] According to verse 32 of our aliyah we are not to "turn aside [from the Holy One's mitzvot] *"to the right or to the left"*.

- i. What do you think it means to turn aside from a *mitzvah* 'to the right'?
- ii. What do you think it means to turn aside from a *mitzvah* 'to the left'?

[F] According to verse 33 of our aliyah [the concluding verse], the Holy One wants us to "walk in all the way" He has instructed us (through *the mitzvot, mishpatim, and chukim* of Torah).

- i. What do you think it means to *walk in all the way* of Torah?
- ii. What three things does the Holy One say will happen if we "walk in all the way" of Torah?

2. In today's reading from Haftarah *Va'etchanan* Yeshayahu sings us a beautiful song of praise to the Holy One:

*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
and meted out the sky with the span,
and comprehended the dust of the eretz in a measure,
and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?*

*Who has directed the Spirit of the Holy One,
or being his counselor has taught him?
With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him,
and taught him in the path of justice, and taught him knowledge,
and shown to him the way of understanding?*

*Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket,
and are accounted as the small dust of the balance:
Behold, he takes up the isles as a very little thing.*

*Levanon is not sufficient to burn,
nor the animals of it sufficient for a burnt offering.
All the nations are as nothing before him;
they are accounted by him as less than nothing, and vanity.*

[Isaiah 40:12-17]

[A] What specific acts of Creation does Yeshayahu attribute to the Holy One?

[B] What do verses 13-14 of this song of praise tell us about the ability of man to come up with a “better plan” than the Holy One - for our lives or for the salvation of our world?

3. In Mark 12:31 Y’shua continues His one-on-one teaching of Torah to a young scribe. In yesterday’s aliyah Messiah taught that the “greatest” mitzvah of the Torah is one with which we are very familiar, namely that contained in the opening lines of the **Sh’ma** we recite twice daily. Today *Y’shua Rabbeinu* [Y’shua Our Rabbi] takes the teaching one step beyond what even the young scribe had asked, making it clear that His Torah teaching does not **end** with the “greatest” mitzvah but instead includes *all the mitzvot* of the Torah of Moshe. Y’shua taught:

*The second [foundational mitzvah] is like this, 'You are to love your neighbor as yourself.'
There is no other mitzvah greater than these."*

[A] What does Y’shua say is the **second** foundational *mitzvah* of the Torah?

[B] Where in the torah is that *mitzvah* found?

4. Go to the book and passage of the Torah where the *second greatest mitzvah*, as referenced by Messiah, is found. Read verses 9 through 18 of the chapter where that commandment is found. Then give at least five practical examples of what Torah tells us it means to “obey” [Hebrew, *sh’ma*] and “do” [Hebrew *asah*] this *mitzvah*.

*May we never tire of hearing the Holy One’s Voice,
And never stand afar off from Him.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 137 [A song of Captivity]

*By the rivers of Bavel, there we sat down.
Yes, we wept, when we remembered **Tziyon** [KJV ‘Zion’].
On the willows in the midst of it we hung up our harps.
For there, those who led us captive asked us for songs.
Those who tormented us demanded songs of joy:
"Sing us one of the songs of Tziyon!"
How can we sing the Holy One's song in a foreign land?
If I forget you, Y'rushalayim [KJV ‘Jerusalem’],
let my right hand forget its skill.
Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth
if I don't remember you;
If I don't prefer Y'rushalayim above my chief joy.
Remember, O Holy One, against the children of Edom,
The day of Y'rushalayim; Who said, "**Raze it! Raze it even to its foundation!**"
Daughter of Bavel, doomed to destruction,*

*He will be happy who rewards you as you have served us.
Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock.*