

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: *Torah Va'etchanan:* Deuteronomy 4:41 - 5:22
Haftarah: Isaiah 40:9-11
B'rit Chadasha: Mark 12:30

The Holy One our God Cut a Covenant With Us

[Deuteronomy 5:2]

Today's Meditation is Ezekiel 9:1-6;

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

Az yavdil Moshe shalosh arim— Then Moshe separated out three cities ... *be'ever ha-Yarden mizrechah shamesh*.— across the Jordan, toward the sunrise Deuteronomy 4:41.

The first of Moshe's stunning *Devarim Discourses* [Deuteronomy 1:1 – 4:40] is now over. Our nation's prototypical rabbi/sage has taken us on an eye-opening journey of retrospection. In the course of this beautiful overture Moshe has both [a] caused us to revisit some critical moments the Wilderness from the vantage point of hindsight, and [b] explained the substance of our diplomatic mission on Earth. He knows that we have to understand where we came from, and how we got to the point we presently find ourselves, if we are to understand the significance of what we are called to do in this world. But now, Moshe's voice has trailed off. His countenance has changed. His eyes seem to be looking right through us, to another place, far beyond the boundaries of our camp. Is he reveling in meditations sourced in the Beauty Realm of the King again? Is he seeing something we cannot see? Is he hearing the Voice of the Holy One speaking to him again? We wait. We watch. And it does not surprise us at all when he girds up his loins, picks up his rod, and takes off walking. Before he launches into his next discourse on the plain – the longest of the three – he knows that we need to stretch our legs a little.

A Trail of Three Cities – Moshe Takes His Torah-Keeping Show on the Road

Why did Moshe interrupt his Masters' level lecture on '*How-to-Build-a-Kingdom-of-Heaven-Scented-Society-on-Earth*'? It seemed that he wanted to take a tour of the Trans-Jordan cities we took from Sichon and Og. It seemed he had something special he wanted to do in three of those cities - *Betzer, Ramot-Gilead, and Bashan*. So ... off we go! Keep in step now – you don't want to be left behind.

To begin our little intermission odyssey, Moshe led us east, around the escarpment

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of Nebo, to the eastern border of the land occupied by the Reuveni. He tarried awhile in the border city of *Betzer*. Then he led us away from *Betzer* in a Northeasterly direction. He took us all the way up to the village of Ramot-Gilead, near the northeast corner of the region the Emori had occupied. Moshe tarried awhile in that remote village as well, even saying a few words over it. Then he took up his rod and struck out again, heading northwest. Yehoshua matched him stride for stride all the way to a village in the *Golan* called Bashan, which had been Og's capital, and was now serving as headquarters for half of tribe of Menashe. Again, he tarried. Again he spoke words of consecration. The inspection having concluded, he turned southward, and made his way back to the camp on the plateau overlooking Yericho.

That was *quite a walkabout*. It took up vast chunks of precious time and energy that Moshe, at 120 years of age, did not have to appear to us to have to spare. What was it all about? What was the secret of Moshe's mysterious journey up the Trail of Three Cities? As always, Moshe was working pursuant to Divine Script. There had been enough talk for the time being; it was time to show the people who were focused on his every movement what going from LEARNING MODE to ACTION MODE. It was time that he modeled for us what actually walking and working according to Divine Direction in practical application looks and feels like. He wanted us to know that without actually doing the *mitzvot*, knowing the truth or believing the right stuff means nothing. He wanted us to understand that in the Holy One's eyes actually doing what the Holy One has instructed us to do – in this instance, *designating cities refuge* for persons who will, in the future, be pursued, harassed, and threatened by vengeance-minded mobs of vigilantes – always carries a higher Kingdom priority than even the most inspired or inspiring talk or other form of 'ministry'.

Establishing Cities of Refuge In the Transjordan Region

Torah therefore tells us that before starting his second speech *set apart three cities beyond the Yarden toward the sunrise; that the manslayer might flee there, who kills his neighbor unawares, and didn't hate him in time past; and that fleeing to one of these cities he might live: [the cities he appointed as cities of refuge were], Betzer in the wilderness, in the plain country, for the Re'uveni; and Ramot in Gil'ad, for the Gadi; and Galon in Bashan, for the Manashi. Deuteronomy 4:41-43²*

What, pray tell, is this all about? What does this have to do with what Moshe has been talking about? What does it have to do with what He is going to talk to us about next? How does this east-of-the-Jordan activity help us prepare to enter and possess the all-important land West of the Jordan? And why does this particular

² Deuteronomy 4:41-43 will consist of a transitional interlude of narrative. Unlike the speeches of Deuteronomy these three verses are written in the third-person voice instead of the first-person voice.

action of Moshe need to be RECORDED IN TORAH, for us to read every year – particularly at this point in the Final Great Prophetic Download of Moshe’s life?

Why This? Why Now?

Remember, Moshe has a rap sheet a mile long – and he knows first-hand what it is like to be a hated fugitive. He knows what it means to have to run for your life with every ounce of your strength. See Exodus 2:11-15. He knows how it feels like to be aggressively pursued by angry and powerful men seeking to inflict their rage upon you. See Exodus 14:9-10 & 23. And he wants to make sure that the fugitives of the world always have a safe place to run – and a place among the Covenant People where they can be protected from wagging tongues, vigilantes, and lynch mobs, and be afforded a fair trial – one that proceeds before honest, impartial magistrates according to the kind of process the One Who created justice has declared in His Torah to be ‘due’ to all men. As you may recall, that means no kangaroo courts in the heat of the moment. It also means that a minimum of two or three credible eyewitnesses must be able corroborate the complainant’s story and establish guilt or fault. It also means that, in rendering judgment, no reliance can be made upon slander, upon hearsay, upon uncorroborated press reports, upon racial prejudice, upon economic class bias, upon sympathy, disgust, or outrage, or even upon the strongest kinds of ‘circumstantial evidence’. Moshe knows that if the great new nation we are called to build does not provide a much *more excellent way* than the way of other nations – where men rush to judgment, resort to vigilantism, and inflict mob ‘justice’ on people they disfavor, there is simply no way such a nation can ever credibly claim to be the model nation of the Holy One

A Prototypical Mitzvah ‘Fashion Show’

To answer this question we need to look a little deeper at the “interlude” or “pause” between the speeches. Moshe is about to begin a passionate exhortation of the people concerning the *mitzvot* of Torah. Indeed, he is about to go on a stunning ‘*mitzvah roll*’. To introduce the *mitzvot* section of his *magnum opus*, he decides to employ a ‘visual aid’. He chooses to first perform a *mitzvot himself* –here, the *establishment of cities of refuge* - for everyone to see³. He thus models for us how we are to approach, and interact with, all the Holy One’s *mitzvot*. By performing the *mitzvot* of designating three Trans-Jordanian cities as cities of refuge at this critical time, he very effectively punctuated the words he had been speaking, which concerned the importance of doing what Torah says instead of just *believing it, studying it, and talking about it, and waiting for signs, wonders, and miracles.*

I call what Moshe is doing in regard to the Cities of Refuge mitzvot a “Kingdom

³ This was of course one of the very last *mitzvot* Moshe would have a chance to perform, since he was never to enter the Land.

fashion show”. Why? Because the *mitzvot* of the Holy One are supposed to function as the *garments* of the saints. They are even described in Scripture as ‘*garments of righteousness*’. As the book of Revelation reveals, the *mitzvot* of Torah are garments of ‘fine linen’ – the very garments with which the Ultimate Bride People will make themselves ready for the wedding supper of the Lamb [Revelation 19:8]⁴. So, here on the plains of Moav, Moshe puts on the linen wedding garment of Cities of Refuge – and he steps onto the red carpet, as it were, makes a few turns, and models that particular garment of Kingdom righteousness for all to see. This is his moment – and he wants to give us more than words. He wants to give us a “fashion show”.

Since Moshe was not going to enter the land [at least, in the foreseeable future], he knew he was limited as to the *mitzvot* he could model for us⁵. One thing he *could* do however – even here in the plain of Moav – would be to designate cities of refuge *in the area* in which we were presently camped. The Holy One had first delivered the ‘Cities of Refuge’ mandate in Numbers 35, saying:

*... When you pass over the Yarden into the land of Kana`an,
you are to appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you.
The manslayer who kills any person unwittingly may flee there.
The cities are to be to you for refuge from the avenger,
that the manslayer not die,
until he stands before the congregation for judgment.
The cities that you shall give are to be for you six cities of refuge.
You are to give three cities beyond the Yarden,
and three cities are you to give in the land of Kana`an;
they are to be cities of refuge for the children of Yisra`el
and for the stranger and for the foreigner living among them,
are these six cities to be for refuge;
that everyone who kills any person unwittingly may flee there.
[Numbers 35:9-15]*

For Moshe, as the representative of our people, it was both a *responsibility* and a *privilege* to participate in this *mandate*. It was also an excellent teaching example regarding how we are to interact with the Holy One’s *devarim*, because it involves what I respectfully and somewhat hesitatingly call *co-creation*. Are you curious?

⁴ The *mitzvot*, *mishpatim*, and *chukim* of Torah which will make up Moshe’s second speech are the “*good deeds*” referenced by Yeshua in Matthew 5:16, as well as the “*good works*” which God has prepared in advance for us to do” referenced by Shaul in Ephesians 2:10, and “*that which is good*” referenced by Shaul in Titus 2:14.

⁵ A large number of *mitzvot*, *mishpatim*, and *chukim* are dependent upon being in the Land of Israel - e.g. tithing, offering first fruits of the Land, leaving the corner of one’s field, and one’s gleanings, for the poor and the foreigner, observing the *Shemittah* [7th year Sabbath] and *Yovel* [50th year Jubilee], etc.

The Critical Life Skill of Interacting Responsibly with the Mitzvot of Torah – ‘Co-creating’ with the Holy One

What I mean by “co-creation” in this context is not meant to be in any way mystical. Much less is intended to be irreverent. Let us examine the context in which Moshe brings the issue up for discussion. The Holy One our King had, back in the 35th chapter of *Sefer Bamidbar* given some rather vague instructions about designating three cities of refuge in the area East of the *Yarden* [Jordan]⁶. But He had not said *which* of the cities East of the Yarden should be chosen. There were sixty cities just in the realm previously occupied by Og alone⁷.

The Holy One did not say *how, when, or by whom the cities of refuge were to be laid out*. He did not specify *how the cities were to be chosen, how far apart they were to be located, or even how they were to be marked so people would know that they were cities of refuge*. All the Holy One did was introduce *the general mandate* [Numbers 35:9-15]. He left it to *His people* to give material substance to the objective He had elucidated.

It is the same with all our Bridegroom-King’s *devarim*. He told us to ‘remember the Sabbath’ and to ‘keep it holy’, and not to do ordinary creative work - but He never told us specifically what that requires in real life and real time. He gives the general mandate; then leaves to us vast amounts of freedom to figure out how specific ways we can make the Sabbath meaningful for us and our households and maximize its holiness within our individual and collective spheres of influence. Similarly, He makes it clear that we are *love our neighbor, the foreigner, and even our enemy*; but each of us has to come up with a practical methodology – and a workable series of protocols - of implementation. The possibilities are endless. Not everyone’s implementation strategies are expected to be exactly alike.

Did the Holy One *goof, have a senior moment, and just ‘forget’ to tell us specifics – line by line, and precept upon precept, to the last detail?* Of course not. Our Creator never intended for us to act as automated drones, thinking, speaking, moving, and reacting in lockstep. He designed us have vast creative differences between us – and intentionally left a ton of room for those differences to operate. He knew that the many areas of difference between us could result in significant

⁶ In Numbers 35:6 the Holy One told Moshe: “*Among the cities which you will give to the Levites you are to appoint six cities of refuge, to which a manslayer may flee.*” Which exact cities would become cities of the Levi’im, however, was not specifically stated.

⁷ In Deuteronomy 3:4 Moshe told us, concerning the war initiated by Og of Bashan: “... *we took all his cities at that time; there was not a city which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argov, the kingdom of Og in Bashan*”. In I Kings 4:13 these cities of Og are described as ‘*sixty large cities with walls and bronze gate-bars ...*’

variances in *halakah* between us in regard to the specific methodologies employed in *asah*-ing His *devarim*. He intentionally left it up to us as His People to flesh out the specific applications and prioritizations in our lives. As every sunrise and sunset are exactly the same in objective yet totally unique in presentation, He knew each of our approaches to and applications of His *devarim* would be totally unique to us. He called for uniformity in objective, but diversity in practical application.

Do you find yourself giving your brothers and sisters far less co-creational leeway than the Holy One gives them? Does it bother you if someone ‘does Shabbat’, or makes *Pesach* or *Sukkot*, or honors their father and mother, or calculates the new moon, or counts the omer, or loves the Holy One, his neighbor, or his enemies, in a different way than you do? Does it offend you if someone does not wear tassels the way you do, or cover their head the way you do, give gifts of *tzedakah* the way you do, or pronounce the ineffable Name the way you do? Does it bother you if someone does not say prayers – or even recite the *sh’ma* - to the same rhythm you use, or uses different vocabulary than you, or assumes a different posture or position than you? Are you one who has come to *exalt form over substance*? Are you one who makes the instructions of the Holy One odious or meaningless to yourself and others by over-valuing traditions of men regarding how those instructions are to be implemented? Are you one who insists that others conform to your ways of doing the *mitzvot* of Torah or worshipping or addressing the Holy One?

Learning to Embrace With Humility The Wonderful Freedom of Asah-ing

It is one thing to be given a general objective and/or an assignment by a Great King. It is another thing altogether to develop and implement a workable step-by-step plan of action that will accomplish the objective and complete the assignment. That is where our wonderful freedom of co-creation comes in. The Hebrew verb I am calling ‘co-creation’ is *asah*. This is the verb root our English Bibles usually translate as ‘do’. This verb has been a major part of our Covenant relationship with the Holy One since Genesis 18:19, when the Bridegroom-King revealed that it was His Plan for the Redemption of the World that Avraham and his descendants would ‘do’ [Hebrew *asah*] *righteousness* and *justice*⁸. We are called apart from the world, and redeemed from its follies and bondages, to be *asah*-ers of both righteousness and justice. That is one of our *big three* objectives. See Micah 6:8. Doing ‘justly’ – in Hebrew, *asah-ing mishpat* - is an assignment all of us share. But the specifics of what that looks like are left for us to work out through

⁸ In Genesis 18:19 the Holy says regarding Avraham Avinu: *I have known him/made Myself known to and knowable by him in order that he may enjoin/teach his children and his household after him that they keep the way of the Holy One, to do [Hebrew *asah*] righteousness and justice, that the Holy One may bring to Avraham what He has spoken to him.*

collaboration, co-laboring, and ... you guessed it ... *co-creation*. Co-creating is an essential component of all *asah*-ing virtually all the *mitzvot* and *mishpatim* of Torah.

The Holy One gives us the assignment; we have to design and build the operational methodology. The Holy One gives us the *objective*, the *inspiration*, the *energy* and the *raw materials*; we have to figure out how to put all those things together in real time and make them functional. That is where *truth* meets *wisdom*. Truth by itself never helped anyone. It is *truth set in action, in real ways, by real people, under the inspiration and empowerment of the Ruach HaQodesh* – i.e. the wisdom that comes from above⁹ - that impacts the world.

In today's aliyah Moshe models for us what it looks like to fully embrace the privilege of “co-creating” with the Holy One. He did this by choosing the timing, the place, the method and the protocol for incorporating the *mitzvah* of cities of refuge into “real-life” application. Of course he did it in close interaction with the *Ruach Ha-Qodesh* that was upon him. But please note that he used *his own mind, his own organs of speech, his own words, and his own powers of influence* to bring the stated Heavenly objective into real time operation.

This is Your Wisdom – Messiah Is Waiting For Us In The Mitzvot!

For the multitudes of young men and women who were about to hear the Holy One's *mitzvot, mishpatim, and chukim* spoken over them, Moshe's modeling program provided the perfect picture of how the Holy One intended them to inter-relate with, and give flesh to, the things the Holy One would prophetically and creatively speak over them. They were not to regard the Holy One's instructions/assignments as “laws” or “commandments”. They were instead to look at them as *invitations for interaction with the Holy One and opportunities to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth in real ways in real time*. They were to look beyond the letter of the instructions, to their *spiritual essence, and purpose*. They were not to decide how to carry out the assignments of the Bridegroom-King by committee; nor were they to blindly accept anyone else's *halakah*. They were, instead, to lean into and *sh'ma the Voice of the Ruach HaQodesh*. Through the *Ruach's* expert guidance, they were to see *the outline and character* of the promised Messiah in each instruction. If they could see Messiah performing the *mitzvah*, you see, they would know how, when, and where, and according to what protocol and priority the Divine Bridegroom wanted *them* to do it.

⁹ James 4:17-18 describes this wisdom from above: “... *the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*”

Under the inspiration of the *Ruach HaQodesh* Moshe selected “*Betzer in the wilderness, in the plain country, for the Re’uveni; and Ramot in Gil’ad, for the Gadi; and Galon in Bashan, for the Manashi.*” **Deuteronomy 4:43**. He had to make some decisions, after wrestling with the instruction, in order to do this. It was not a matter of blind ‘obedience’. It was a matter that required conversation with the Holy One, and seeking out His Will, and His Heart in the matter. Hence we see that Moshe selected *one city for each tribal territory* – in consideration for the distance one [Israeli or foreigner] might have to travel to find “refuge” from the Avenger.

No committee told Moshe to do that. He had to ‘*co-create*’. He had to employ the ‘mind of Messiah’ to give the instruction life, and make it meaningful to the world around him. That is how we are to interact with the instructions of Torah. Messiah taught us what Moshe tried to teach us in the “interlude” portion of today’s aliyah – that *the essence of Torah is not in its letter, but in the way in which it draws us to interaction with Him*. The letter is not by any means unimportant - *it will indeed be fulfilled, you see*. It will be fulfilled however *not* by us acting independently in a misguided effort to earn the Holy One’s favor, but by us responding to it as a dearly Beloved Bride already assured of her Bridegroom’s favor. It will be fulfilled not according to our human abilities but per the Ruach’s supernatural empowerment. It will be fulfilled on *the Spirit’s timetable*, in response to *the Spirit’s prompting, and in a way that will serve mankind* and further the purposes of the Covenant. It will thereby *bring glory to the Holy One, and not to us*.

It is our wonderful, awesome privilege to “co-create” with the Holy One. We do this each time we wrestle with one of the Divine Bridegroom’s instructions for living, and wind up asking the Holy One to reveal to us how He wants us to make it real in our life and meaningful in our world in ways that will honor Him. So whether the *mitzvah* you are dealing with today is *wearing tzit-tzit* [tassels/fringes¹⁰ - he never tells us how to make them, what exactly they should look like, or how much of the day they are to be worn – He leaves that to us!], *loving your neighbor*¹¹, or any of the others mentioned in Torah, keep these three nuggets of wisdom in mind as you approach the great enterprise:

Nugget #1

Do not look upon the mitzvah as a “law” that you are expected to perform. Look upon it as a gateway to interaction and communication with the Divine

¹⁰ *Tzit-tzit* is a Hebrew word usually translated into English as “tassels”, or “fringes”. The instruction to wear these on the ‘corners’ of our garments is found in Numbers 15:37-41.

¹¹The instruction to “love our neighbor” is found in Leviticus 19:18, where we are told, after being instructed to “*rebuke your neighbor frankly*” but not to “*hate*” a neighbor, or “*bear a grudge against one of our people*”, that we are to “*love your neighbor as yourself.*”

Bridegroom – a chance to develop the intimacy of relationship that He calls us to, and which our hearts passionately crave.

Nugget #2

Ask the Holy One to *prioritize* the *mitzvot* for you, and ask Him to show You Messiah performing them. Ask Him when, and how, you can best build upon that foundation.

Nugget #3

Expect the Divine Bridegroom to tell you, if you will but *sh'ma*, how He wants you to *asah* [build, sculpt, form and fashion as a potter forms and fashions a vessel on his wheel] the *mitzvot* with which He confronts you in a way that both *serves mankind* and *brings honor and glory to the Holy One*. That kind of approach will make every *mitzvah* a part of your *Bridal trousseau*. And it will make each of us a model in the great fashion show of life.

And Now, At Last, Moshe's Second Discourse on the Moavian Plain Can Begin!

As we have discussed previously in these studies, the fifth and final *sefer* of Torah is a transcript of Moshe's final wisdom downloads, or *Devarim*. In the course of the last 36 days of his life, on the plains of Moav, Moshe commissioned and empowered the Covenant Nation with *three world-changing discourses*. It is now almost time for our focus to transition from the first of Moshe's *Moavian Plains Discourses* to the second¹². The purpose of Moshe's second discourse will be to lay out the specifics of the *mitzvot*, *mishpatim*, and *chukim* by which the Holy One has called us to order our lives and impact His world. He will begin the speech with the injunction: ***Sh'ma Yisra'el et-ha-chukim v'et-ha-mishpatim asher anochi dover b'ozneychem hayom*** – *i.e. Incline your ear and heart, O Israel, to the statutes and judgments that I speak in your hearing today!* ***Ul'madetem otam ush'martem la'asotam*** – *you are to learn them so you can sh'mar and asah them.* **Deuteronomy 5:1**. Moshe will then step back in time and remind us of the wondrous, world-changing God/man encounter that happened at Mount Sinai. Oh, what a sweet season of romance and transformation that was! That is when the reason for our deliverance from bondage in Egypt became manifest. That is when we were introduced to the wonderful world of *DEVARIM*. Not doctrines to believe. Not sacraments to perform. Not moral or social welfare principles to follow. *DEVARIM* – covenantal instructions about real life; timeless 'how-to-set-yourself-apart-from-the-nations-in-a-way-that-will-honor-your-King' secrets. English speakers call them 'commandments'; but they don't know the half of it!

¹² Moshe's Second Discourse on the Moavian Plain is reproduced in Torah beginning with Deuteronomy 4:44 and continuing through the end of Deuteronomy 28.

A Substantive Introduction to Moshe’s Second Speech – “And This is the Torah ...”

The second speech of Moshe on the plains of Moav is by far the longest of Moshe’s three “farewell” speeches. This glorious speech begins in chapter 4, verse 44. It continues through chapter 26, verse 19.

Moshe’s second speech will have a very different feel than his first speech. In his second speech what Moshe will do is *declare the essence of our Betrothal Covenant*. The Friend of the Bridegroom will recite in the ears of a generation either unborn or too young to understand the *devarim* that the Holy One released over His Beloved *am segulah* on Mount Sinai. In light of the history of the nation of Israel as he has been describing it, and in light of its future as he has just prophetically announced it, Moshe will again pour out over us the prophetic and creative words the Holy One so lovingly spoke over His Betrothed under the *Chuppah* at the place of the thorn bush¹³.

Does the Torah of the Holy One Consist of “Commandments” – or Prophetic Empowerments?

The words Moshe will speak in this second speech are usually described in English as “commandments” and “ordinances” and “laws”. But those terms do **not** describe them accurately at all. Alas the translation of the Holy One’s declaration at Sinai into English and other Western language as ‘commandments’, ‘ordinances’ and ‘laws’ lies at the root of the most critical errors into which both Christianity and Judaism have wandered.

By and large organized Christianity has erred in rejecting Torah’s “commandments, ordinances, and laws” as “unspiritual” – indeed considered to border on being demonic. Most of Christianity has thus over the centuries devolved into a King-less, Constitution-less, Kingdom-less, Love-less, Law-less blob of prudish, angry religious people who try to process glorious spiritual mysteries through the filter of fleshly, carnal minds, who spread hate-filled opinions instead of truth, who expose people to dull, repetitive sermons instead of flowing in vibrant words of life, who pass off cute marquee one-liners as revelation, and who promote models of church growth and bean-counting instead of any real, substantive message that could lead to freedom, destiny, and purpose. Organized Christianity today thus has virtually nothing of value to offer either the world or its own adherents, and both groups are rejecting it in droves.

¹³ For a more thorough discussion of the essence of the Sinaitic Covenant, its character and its purpose, see the Rabbi’s Son’s commentary to parsha *Yitro*.

Many modern forms of organized Judaism on the other hand have committed the exact *opposite error*, focusing almost all their attention on the *letter* of Torah's instructions, drawing all the wrong lessons from the Holocaust and therefore instilling in upcoming generations the paranoia that everyone who is not Jewish is anti-Semitic, dangerous, and inferior. Indeed since the Holocaust the mantra of organized Judaism seems to have unofficially changed from *Sh'ma Yisrael!* to '*Never Again!*' As a result mind-numbing sets of extra-Biblical rules designed to keep people away have been promoted in the guise of 'building a fence around the Torah'. There is indeed now a fence around the Torah in many forms of Judaism – and that fence is so high, is laced with so much razor wire, and is strewn with so many IEDs that the beauty of Torah – if not of the Holy One Himself - has become hidden behind the carnage. Father Avraham would weep. Moshe would be appalled. David would hang his harp in the willows. Sh'lomo would scratch his head in bewilderment. Eliyahu would rend his mantle in twain and start thrashing.

Fragments of the Messianic Judaism are alas falling into the same traps as organized Christianity and Judaism. Labels such as 'Sacred Namers', 'Two-Housers', 'Lunar Sabbatarians', and 'Sabbatical Year Followers' have become modern 'Shibboleths'. Swords are drawn and waving, ready to strike off the ear, cut out the tongue, or lop of the head, of anyone and everyone who fails to adopt the specific phraseology the ears of those bearing one's chosen label itch to hear.

Brethren, these things should not be so. What in Heaven's Name are we doing? How can we continue to misrepresent the Holy One's character so horribly? The Sinaitic covenant is *not* "law" - at least in any sense that term is used today. Nor are the *mitzvot*, *mishpatim*, and *chukim* "commandments" or "ordinances". They are *Divine Energy*. They are a *sweet fountain of life, health and peace*. They are *substantive words of Divine empowerment and activation*. They are *loving instructions*, given in the context of an abiding covenant relationship, prophetically and *creatively reshaping the soul and spirit of the recipient*, transforming her from a redeemed slave into the Betrothed Bride-to-be of the Holy One.

***So Much More Intimate, Personal, Covenant-oriented,
Relational, Representational, and Precious Than 'Laws'***

Contrary to popular myth, you see, Moshe is not a "*lawgiver*" – He is the Trusted Friend the Bridegroom has commissioned to declare words of encouragement, purpose, and destiny over His Bride. Therefore the words Moshe speaks are not "law" – they are tender words of love, commitment, and passionate dedication, designed to help us become everything we – individually and as a nation – were created, redeemed, and are being re-created, to be.

Ask yourself these questions: *When the Holy One spoke 'let there be light' why did light come into existence? Was it because the Holy One commanded it to come into existence – or was it because the Holy One prophetically empowered it to burst forth out of darkness, chaos, and disorder?* Was the Holy One establishing a Law when He spoke ***'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb [that] yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth'*** – or was He using the power of His prophetic words to create and put in motion something that would reflect His glory, creativity and goodness?

So it is with Moshe's restatement of the Holy One's declarations at Sinai. This second speech of Moshe on the plains of Moav is the keystone of our Divine calling to holiness – to *Bridal Maturity*.

May we in this generation approach Moshe's second speech with open ears, hungry hearts, and appropriate humility. And may we receive and respond to the *mitzvot, mishpatim, and chukim* of the Holy One as the Divine *prophetic empowerments* they were intended to be.

Remember Sinai?

Remember the Day the Creator's Dream for Mankind Was Revealed?

Ah, *Matan Torah* – the day of our Betrothal! Just thinking about it should make our hearts leap within our breasts. That day forms the epicenter of - and the measuring rod for - all revelation. It was after all, on that glorious day at Mount Sinai that the Holy One revealed for the first time the depth, breadth, and height of His Beautiful Dream regarding mankind's '*b'tzelem Elohim* – i.e. in the shadow of the Creator - mission¹⁴. Moshe speaks of the Sinaitic Season of *Matan Torah* with tenderness, like a lover reminiscing about the sweetest of all days of romance.

The Holy One our God made a covenant with us at Chorev [i.e. 'Horeb']

Lo et-avoteinu – He did not make this covenant with our fathers,

ki itanu - but with us – those who are here today; all of us who are alive.

The Holy One talked with you ***Panim b'fanim*** - i.e. Face to face
on the mountain, ***mitoch ha-aish*** – i.e. from the midpoint of the fire.

He said: Ani Adonai Eloheicha

*I am the Holy One your God, Who brought you out
of the land of Mitzrayim [i.e. straits, restrictions, limitations],
out of **Beit Avadim** - the house of bondage - i.e. slavery, subjugation,
manipulation, abuse, and/or oppression.*

¹⁴ See/compare Genesis 1:26-28, where as part of His Beautiful Creation Song, the Creator sung over us and the Universe His general announcement of intent for mankind's intended interaction with Grand Eco-system He had designed for the 'Great Drama of the Realm of Time' to play out.

Moshe will then remind us what the Holy One said about our calling to whole-hearted, undistracted devotion. For His Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind as a Species and for the Restoration of Creation to its Intended State of Beauty, Fruitfulness, and Shalom, He is going to need our constant attention. He wants our ear – without the ‘voice of another’ crowding His messages out. He wants our imagination – without the vanity of pseudo-intelligence. He wants our fascination – without dilution. He wants our reverent awe – without competition from men or objects of ‘nature’. He wants our hearts – without competing loyalties. As He declared it at Horeb:

Lo yiyeh-lach elohim

You will not have for yourself ‘elohim’ [authorities, decision-makers, priority shapers, thought, opinion-and-directive sources, role models, behavior choreographers]

acharim panei

coming behind, distracting you from My Face/Presence]

Moshe will then remind us that the Holy One also spoke to us about how, as His People, we would and would not use our creative talents, energies, imaginations, and artistic abilities. We are not to use these things to exalt anyone but Him. We are not to use them for ‘self-expression’. We are not to consider them ours. They are part of a Kingdom toolkit – to be used according to His Will, and for His Redemptive Purposes alone. To emphasize this, He said:

Lo ta’aseh lach [You will not asah for yourself] a pecel –

i.e. a carved, sculpted, or molded image – or any temunah – i.e. a likeness, effigy, or artistic reproduction – of anything that is in the Heavens above or that is on the earth below, or that is in the water on/under the earth.

Lo-tishtachaveh lahem v’lo ta’ovdem

You will not bow down to/bend your knee or will or admiration to them, or serve, cater to, perform avodah to them

Moshe will remind us that the Holy One was just getting started. He followed up the preceding prophetic empowerments by talking about how we, as the appointed ambassadors of His Kingdom, are to represent Him in the world. He wants us to remember that how we carry ourselves – and how we express, talk about, and display our attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and Covenant benefits – reflects on Him. In His words:

Lo tisa et-shem-Adonai Eloheich l’shav –

You will not take/carry the name of the Holy One your God ‘in vain’/falsely, -i.e. in such a way as to misrepresent His Holiness, Majesty and Goodness ...

Moshe will then remind us of the marvelous words of Kingdom identity and mission the Holy One spoke over us next. The subject matter: our calling to

treasure, delight in, and preserve the sanctity of that which He has described as ‘holy’ – starting with the seventh day Sabbath. What we heard at Horeb was:

Shamor et-yom ha-shabat l'kadsho

You will remember/commemorate the Sabbath day for its/His holiness

Sheshet yamim ta'avod

six days you will work

V'yom ha-shvi'i shabat l'Adonai Eloheicha lo ta'aseh

but the seventh day is the Sabbath for/unto the Holy One – you will not build/create ...

v'zacharta ki-eved hayita b'ereztz Mitzrayim

You will remember that you were a slave in the land of Mitzrayim ...

Lest we forget, Moshe reminded us that there was still much, much more. The Voice of the Bridegroom-King rang out, and we all heard:

Kabed et-avicha v'et-imeicha

You will honor/bring glory/esteem and weighty respect to your father and your mother

L'ma'an ya'arichun yameicha ul'ma'an yitav lach

[you will do this] in order that you can live many days and experience good for yourselves ...

Lo tirtzach

You will not tear to pieces, wreak havoc, destroy, or be destructive.

V'lo tin'af

You will not adulterate, intermix, mingle, or associate with others improperly ...

V'lo tignov

And you will not take things not yours [from or of others]

V'lo-ta'aneh v'rei'acha ed shav

*And you will not answer, report, testify, or 'sing' falsely –
i.e. make false judgments, false accusations, or apply incorrect labels –
concerning your 'neighbor' [those who 'graze' in the same 'pasture' you are in]*

And finally, the Most Beautiful Voice we had ever heard said.

V'lo tachmod

And you will not covet/desire anything of your neighbors.

Then, to help us remember this momentous download, Moshe is going to give us a series of ‘visual aids’ that he seeks to forever imprint on our minds, hearts, and souls:

God spoke these words [Heb. devarim] to your entire assembly

from the mountain, out of the fire, cloud and mist ...

and out of the midst of the darkness ... [cf. Gen 1:1-3]

[Deuteronomy 5:22]

Wow. Sinai happened. It changed everything about us – and about the world. And even today it’s powerful message rings out as loudly and clearly – and the creative energy of our Creator’s spoken words pulses as strongly - as it in the great year of the Exodus, in the third month of the Biblical year.

The Second Speech on the Plain Begins

Moshe’ second speech begins with Deuteronomy 4:44, as follows:

Uzot ha-torah asher sam Moshe lifnei b’nei Yisrael ...

Now this is the Torah that Moshe set before the children of Israel ...

As his first speech was winding to a close Moshe took off his “historian’s hat”, and put on instead his ‘*prophet’s hat*’. He told us in no uncertain terms that in days to come that, *despite the warnings he had given*, we would, as our fathers had done, take the Holy One’s precious calling for granted, and actually start *to emulate and blend in with the heathen peoples living around us*. Like *salt that has lost its savor*, he prophesied to us, we would therefore be *cast out*, dispersed among the nations:

V’hefitz Adonai etchem [*then the Holy One will scatter you*] *among the peoples,*
and you shall be left few in number among the nations,
where the Holy One shall lead you away.

There you shall serve gods, the work of men's hands,
wood and stone, which neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.

But from there you shall seek the Holy One your God,
and you shall find him, when you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.

When you are in oppression, and all these things are come on you,
in the latter days v’shavta [*you will return*] *to the Holy One your God,*

v’sh’mata b’kolo [*and will sh’mah his voice*]:

for the Holy One your God is El Rachum [*a merciful God*];

he will not fail you, neither destroy you,

nor forget et-brit avoteicha [*the covenant of your fathers*] *that he swore to them.*

[Deuteronomy 4:27-31]

The Hebraic Mystery of the Relationship Between History and Prophecy

Some question how Moshe can move so fluidly from a *rabbi and teacher of Hebrew History* to a *prophet* and oracle of ultimate redemption and restoration. The reason is simple: to the Holy One, *prophecy and history are simply two sides of the same coin*. For people of the Holy One, therefore, understanding history correctly is essential to understanding even current trends, much less prophecy, correctly. After all, the Holy One sits *outside of time*. He is unshackled by its bonds. To Him therefore history and prophecy meld into one vision. To see history and *understand its impact on both the present and the future* is to see *through the Holy One’s eyes*. And that is the way it should be for all of us *who dare to perceive*

the world the way He does.

Moshe wanted us to know we would prove not be much – if any - better at being a ‘*kingdom of priests*’ than our fathers had been. And he wanted us to know that, however badly we messed up in that regard, it was still ultimately going to be ‘okay’ – because He sees beyond present behavior to future potential. He wanted us to learn to do the same. He therefore made it clear to us that our covenant relationship with the Holy One will remain strong, generation by generation by generation, all the way until the end of what we human beings know as ‘time’. Moshe wanted us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that, *however unfaithful we might be to our part of the covenant, or what consequences we experienced, that the Holy One would never break faith with us, or be unfaithful to, repent of, or retreat from, His Covenant*¹⁵ *toward our forefathers* – no, not in the slightest particular. The Holy One knew long before He took Israel into the Land that every Temple it built to Him would be polluted and would have to be destroyed. He understood full well that what He was planting in Israel He *would have to uproot*. He really, really, *really* understood. He was not surprised or shocked, or put off, when it happened. He *had it covered* all along. He knew when – and how - He would call Israel back to Him. He knew when He would bring us – *and the Redeemed from all the Nations into which we have been dispersed* - back into the Land He promised to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov forever.

Moshe’s prophetic message would later be seized upon by a man from the tribe of *Benjamin*, a Hebrew of Hebrews, the namesake of the first King of Israel [Shaul], from Tarsus, who would say:

*I don't desire, brothers, to have you ignorant of this mystery,
so that you won't be wise in your own conceits,
that a partial hardening has happened to Yisra'el until the fullness of the Goyim has come in,
and so all Yisra'el will be saved.*

*Even as it is written, "There will come out of Tziyon the Deliverer,
And he will turn away ungodliness from Ya'akov.
This is my covenant to them, when I will take away their sins."*

[Romans 11:25-27]

The Life is in the Seed

Moshe wanted it to be clear that the Holy One would even *use our unfaithfulness* to His glory – because each time He *scattered us among the nations in order to discipline and turn us back to the Covenant*, wherever we were scattered we would carry the creative and prophetic energy of His Words with us. It is all part of what I

¹⁵ Hence Shaul of Tarsus teaches the Romans: “*Did the Holy One reject his people? May it never be! For I also am an Yisra'elite, a descendant of Avraham, of the tribe of Binyamin. The Holy One did not reject his people, which he foreknew.*” **Romans 11:1-2.**

call the ‘*seed principle*.’ *The seed principle* is the natural law/process that was set in motion on the third day of Creation week. See **Genesis 1:11-12**. This was reiterated, and reactivated that process, in the aftermath of the Great Flood. See **Genesis 8:22**. Here is the principle: every seed carries the essence of the life of the species from which the seed came. Wherever the seed is scattered, that essence of life will, in time, spring forth. So it goes with Avraham’s seed.

On Sinai, when the Divine Bridegroom spoke His Words over us, we were all *impregnated with a divine life force*. We are now *seedpods*, carrying that life force within us wherever we go. The seed we carry may lie dormant for long periods of time, while the Holy One is preparing the field in which He wishes to sow us. We are sometimes scattered purposefully by the Holy One’s Divine Hand, in accordance with the Holy One’s times and seasons. Other times we are, seemingly at least, caught up by the wind, or by the fowl of the air or the creatures of the night, and scattered willy-nilly, according to forces beyond our control. Wherever we find ourselves, however, in season the divine life-force in us germinates, matures, and brings forth fruit in which is the same divine life-force as is in us. It is so with *us*, with *our children*, and with *our children’s children* forever.

Seed Pods, carrying seeds waiting to *burst forth with life* - that is what we have been since Mt. Sinai. And that is what we continue to be today. That is, after all, what we are *designed to be*. And Moshe wanted us to know that the Holy One would ultimately, at His pre-ordained ‘*harvest time*’, awaken in us a craving for Him that would bring us back into the Land – and the Divine Destiny – which the Holy One willed for us.

What was it Yeshua of Natzret taught?

I tell you the truth: Except a kernel of grain falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies ... it produces many seeds.

[John 12:24]

Understanding of this concept is pivotal to understanding the significance not only of the *galut* [exile], but also to understanding the importance of the *mo’edim* [often called ‘feasts’] described in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28-29. As *Kohelet* [the one called the “preacher” in the book we know as *Ecclesiastes*] taught us, to everything there is *a season* – *i.e.* a *Divinely-appointed time*. See **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**. By inextricably tying the ‘feasts’ to the agricultural cycle the Holy One reminded us that we are *carriers of His precious seed*. He wanted us to see prophetically into the *times* and the *seasons* – and to thereby understand what He is doing – in *us* [His scattered seed] and in the world [His field] – at each change of the calendar, as well as at each stage of [a] our lives, and [b] world history. At each *moed* [feast] something of the

essence of Sinai is *awakened in us*, His seed, and prepared for germination. So ... whose calendar are you living by? And whose seed are you carrying?

Questions For Today's Study

1. Moshe begins today's aliyah with an "interlude" in which he describes his selection of three 'cities of refuge' in the area East of the Jordan River.

[A] What was a "city of refuge"?

[B] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as "refuge" in this passage. Write the Hebrew word in Hebrew consonants, with appropriate vowel sounds. Search out the verb root and write it as well. Then, describe the Hebraic word picture these words are drawing for us.

[C] In what passage of Torah had the Holy One instructed Moshe concerning the setting up of "cities of refuge"?

[D] Which three cities East of the Jordan were set up as "cities of refuge"?

[E] In your Bible Dictionary, or in Strong's, look up the name of each of these three cities. Write the name in Hebrew letters, and explain what that name means in Hebrew.

2. In Deuteronomy 5:2-3 Moses says that the Holy One made a covenant at Horev [Sinai] with "us, who are all of us alive this day". He says:

*The Holy One our God made a **brit** [covenant] with **us** in Horev.
The Holy One didn't make this covenant with our fathers, but with **us**,
even us, who are all of us here alive this day.*

[A] How can this be - as all those who were adults at Horev except Moses, Y'hoshua and Kalev were now dead?

[B] Does Exodus 34:27-28 help? Explain.

3. In your own words, list the *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* [usually referred to as the ten "commandments"], as Moshe recited them in his second speech on the plains of Moav,

[A] Memorize these "10 words" in order for recitation at the family Shabbat table this *Erev Shabbat*.

[B] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word our English Bibles translate as "commandments" in verse 22 of chapter 5. Write the Hebrew word and describe the Hebraic word picture it presents.

4. Moshe says the Holy One spoke the 10 "commandments" before He wrote them on tablets. How does Moshe describe the way the Holy One spoke? [See 5: 22]

5. In the Haftarah reading chosen for today Yeshayahu [Isaiah] continues to

announce “comfort” for Israel in the time of restoration.

*You who tell m'vaseret¹⁶ [good news] to Tziyon, go up on a high mountain;
you who tell m'vaseret [good news] to Y'rushalayim, lift up your voice with strength;
lift it up, don't be afraid; say to the cities of Y'hudah,*

Hineh Eloheichem! [Behold, your God!]

*Behold, the Holy One GOD will come as a mighty one, and his arm will rule for him:
Behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.*

*He will feed his flock k'ro'eh [like a shepherd],
he will gather the lambs in his arm and carry them in his bosom,
[and] will gently lead those who have their young.*

[Isaiah 40:9-11]

In the context of describing what the prophet says will happen when the Holy One comes to His people:

[A] Describe *the Holy One's 'coming'*, as you visualize it.

[B] List the things He will *bring* when He comes.

[C] List the things He will *do* when He comes.

[D] Explain what you think this has to do with the Amidah petition we are focusing on this week - the Petition for the Restoration of Justice.

6. In today's reading from the apostolic writings Yeshua of Natzret recites the first great “commandment” in Mark 12:30.

***Love the Holy One your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'***
This is the first [i.e. foundational, primary] mitzvah.

As Moshe taught B'nei Yisrael and as Yeshua reiterated to His Talmidim we are called to “love the Holy One our God” with all of 4 distinct parts of us.

[A] With what 4 parts of us are we to love the Holy One?

[B] What do you think each of these four parts of us represents (give a separate answer for each part, explaining what it means to you).

[C] What does it mean, in your opinion, to “love the Holy One”? What, in other words, do you think the *mitzvah* of “loving the Holy One” should *look like* in someone's life? [Hint: you may wish to go back to the commentary, to the section entitled “*Interacting With the Mitzvot – Co-Creating with the Holy One*”, and employ the process Moshe modeled for us in the desert regarding how to interact with a mitzvah of Torah.]

*May we who are God's people be responsible co-creators,
accurately demonstrating the concepts of Torah for the world to see.*

¹⁶ The word *m'vaseret* is a noun form of the verb root *beit, sin, resh*, transliterated *basar*, and pronounced *baw-sawr'*. This verb is Strong's Hebrew word #1319, meaning [according to Strong's Concordance] to *bear news, bear tidings, publish, preach, or show forth*.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Ezekiel 9:1-6

*Then He cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying,
"Cause you them that have charge over the city to draw near,
every man with his slaughter weapon in his hand."*

*Behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate, which lies toward the north,
every man with his slaughter weapon in his hand;
and one man in the midst of them clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side.*

They went in, and stood beside the brazen altar.

*The glory of the God of Yisra'el was gone up from the Keruv, whereupon it was,
to the threshold of the house: and He called to the man clothed in linen,
who had the writer's inkhorn by his side. The Holy One said to him,*

*"Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Y'rushalayim,
and set a mark on the foreheads of the men that sigh
and that cry over all the abominations that are done in the midst of it.*

To the others he said in my hearing,

*"Go you through the city after him, and strike: don't let your eye spare, neither have you pity;
kill utterly the old man, the young man and the virgin, and little children and women;
but don't come near any man on whom is the mark: and begin at my sanctuary."*

Then they began at the old men that were before the house.

He said to them, "Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain: go forth."