

*Shiur L'Yom Shenit*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: Torah Va'etchanan: Deuteronomy 3:23 - 4:8
Haftarah: Isaiah 40:1-5
B'rit Chadasha: Mark 12: 28

You are not to add to the word with which I enjoin you, nor take from it.

[Deuteronomy 4:2]

Today's Meditation is Ezekiel 8:1-6;

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

Va'etchanan el-Adonai ba'et hahi – And I went to the grace/favor of the Holy One
Deuteronomy 3:23a

The 45th week of the Torah cycle is one of the most inspirational and motivational seven-day periods of each year. *Va'etchanan* always coincides closely with *Tisha B'Av* - the lowest point on the Hebrew calendar. That is intentional. After all, in the traumatic aftermath of *Tisha B'Av* we are looking for – and the Holy One longs to provide – respite, refuge, comfort, and consolation. We speak of – and drink deep from the wells of - *chen/chanan*. We incline our ears - and turn our hearts – to *sh'ma* the Holy One's Voice. We now know why the manifest presence of the Holy One has gone into hiding. We understand both the part that our breaches of covenant played in the world's great loss and the role the arrogant rebellion of the nations played in it. We now know that this separation – and the rage of the nations - is not forever; it is only for a season. It will soon pass. The Holy One will make sure that even this works together for the greater good. We can see that what feels to us like an unmitigated catastrophe in the moment is really a necessary part of a vast, eternal plan that will ultimately lead to the redemption of mankind as a species and the restoration of all Creation to its intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and shalom. But knowing these things does not mean that what has happened does not break our hearts in *the meantime*. So like a good Father, He wants us also to know that, notwithstanding the absence of His Visual Glory in our world, He and the comfort He brings are still very near to and accessible by those who are meek and lowly. A proud, petulant, self-justifying, blame-casting people He will sternly turn away; but a broken heart and a contrite spirit? Ah, one – or ten thousand times ten thousand – like that He will never deny. And so, as we get back up after *Tisha B'Av*, with cheeks drenched with tears over the loss of the portal of *Kedusha* the Temple represented and heartbroken over the breaches of covenant on our/our covenant nation's part which made such a drastic step of Divine

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intervention altogether just, right, and necessary, Heaven's Shofar issues a ringing call – a call to rise up, shake off the dust and ashes, and start over. *Sh'ma Yisrael!*

ReCentering, ReFocusing, and ReCommitting

The Master famously taught: ***Blessed are those who mourn – for THEY WILL BE COMFORTED.*** Matthew 5:4. Now, thank Heaven, the ‘mourning’ is over, and the comforting has begun! The great season of reawakening, recovery, return, and restoration known historically as ‘the seven-weeks of consolation’ is finally upon us. Our focus is being directed toward the High Holy days to come - ‘*Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur, and Chag ha-Sukkot.*’ What we have sowed in tears we will reap in joy – if and to the extent we align with the four themes that the Holy One has ordained should dominate the season:

1. humbly calling upon the Holy One’s ‘grace’ and submitting to His discipline;
2. receiving and embracing Divine ‘comfort’ and ‘consolation’;
3. re-centering on the ‘End Game’ mission laid out in the prophetic messages of ‘*Deutero-Isaiah*’ [*i.e.* chapters 40-66 of Isaiah, especially as highlighted in the seven so-called ‘haftarot of consolation’]; and
4. returning wholeheartedly to the *mitzvot, mishpatim, and chukot of Torah, as energized by the devarim of the seven parshot unit of Torah beginning with Va’etchanan.*

Our task this week is to *embrace each of these aspects of our Covenant with the Creator.* Once we do that, we are to *learn the secret of their inseparability and interdependence;* then we are to embark passionately on our assignment to model them to our households and the world. There can be no revelation of the Holy One’s *grace, mercy, and goodness,* you see, without taking on the love language of *mitzvot;* and there can be no successful engagement with the love language of *mitzvot* unless one has the hope - indeed *confident, eager expectation* - of grace. And the truth that theologians so often completely miss is that no human being can ever know – or give - any real comfort in this world until that person has first received, embraced, and begun to flow consistently in both ‘the wisdom of the *mitzvot*’ and *the experience of ‘grace’.*

The Burning Question of the Season

I have an important question to ask you, Beloved. Here it is: How is your *prayer life?* Think about it for a minute before you answer. I know you are a student of Torah, or you would not be reading this shiur; but – especially in light of all that has happened and is happening around you - are you a person of prayer?

What I am talking about is a real, meaningful, vibrant, ‘personal prayer life’. Are you *a regular* in His Courts? Is your face and voice familiar there? Does your life

consist of recurring *one-on-ONE, face-to-FACE, conversations with the Creator of the Universe?*

I am not asking if you say a formulaic blessing over your food. I am not asking if you participate in public prayer meetings at some local synagogue or church or at gatherings of intercessors from time to time. I am not even asking if you attend organized *prayer breakfasts*, make appearances at *national or community-wide prayer events*, or offer formal invocations or benedictions at meetings held in a *synagogue, church, or home fellowship*. Alas, I have found that prayers uttered at the aforementioned types of meetings and in the aforementioned kinds of contexts all too often turn into merely a form of public address, aimed more at impressing other people, ‘pontificating’ in the name of prayer, rather than actually communing with the Divine Bridegroom Himself. Alas, all too often the meetings themselves turn into *protest-‘evil’ rallies* replete with soapbox rants, emotional manipulation, and fundraising appeals for the ministry organizations that put them on. In some such groups, much more focus winds up being put on, and more words wind up being addressed to, ‘the Devil’, this or that ‘foul demon’, and/or these or those ‘principalities and powers’ than on or to the Holy and Compassionate One, Blessed be He! Whatever such kinds of meetings may be about, it isn’t prayer.

So the question I am asking is about how you are doing in the realm of *real prayer* – what in Hebrew is called *tefillah* and in Yiddish is referred to as ‘*davening*’. It means personally engaging in humble, respectful communication with the Creator of the Universe as He sits enthroned in the Courts of Heaven. It is about getting in tune with what *He* thinks, feels, knows, speaks, and does more than it is about the words *you* speak or what requests, complaints, or even praises you bring. What you bring has its place, because the whole exercise has to be a two-way street; but you need to recognize that even the best you could possibly bring to His table is mere filthy rags - clouded by short-sightedness, tainted by self-interest, distorted by both implicit and explicit ethnic, cultural, national, gender, and generational biases, and thoroughly saturated with the uncleanness of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’.

The first step of Tefillah is about recognizing that we exist to serve the Creator of the Universe – not the other way around. We are here at – and for – His Pleasure; not our own. Our role is to do HIS will – not to convince Him to do ours. That is why we *daven*. To ‘*daven*’ literally means to appear before the Divine – to approach the enthroned King – and bow before Him as a lowly servant. This calls for humility, reverence, patience, and a heart willing to report for duty, take orders, embrace the King’s agenda, and faithfully serve as He directs. That is why when the Master taught His disciples to pray, He taught them to begin respectfully,

reverently, with courtship protocol:

Avinu [our Father] ...
shebashamayim [Who is in/of the Heavens] ...
yitkadesh shimcha [holy is your 'name']
tavo malchutchah [May Your kingdom come] ...
ye'aseh retzoncha b'aretz [May Your will be brought to bear on earth] ...
ka'asher na'asah ba'shamayim [in like manner as it is brought to bear in the Heavens]

Listen carefully not just to the words the Master taught us to speak in *tefillah*, but to the *tone*. Listen to the *humility*. Listen to the *reverence*. Listen to the *patient, self-less, submissive, willing servant's heart*. Is that what your prayer life looks and sounds like? Is that the message your means – and words – of approach convey to the Holy One? Or have you gotten ... well, shall we say a little 'sloppy'?

Davening requires the complete surrender of self-will and the submission of our minds, will, emotions, and energies to the wisdom – and the discipline – of our Beloved Sovereign. He does not need us to inform Him – much less school Him – about what is going on in 'our' world. It is about service far more than the words spoken.

Is your approach respectful? Is the interaction real? Are the channels of communication open? Is there give and take, back and forth? Are you there to vent – or be healed? Are you there to brief Him – or to let Him brief you? Are you there to demand your way – or to try to get some understanding of His? Do you just speak words - or project thoughts – into open space, like children sometimes do when they make a wish? Or do you follow royal courts protocol and humbly communicate with the Brilliant, Vibrant, Powerful, and Gracious King Who sits on the Throne of Heaven? Are your petitions just you and plead a case – for instance, *the way our ancestor Avraham did?* See **Genesis 18**.

What the Holy One is trying to cultivate in you – in us all – is the kind of prayer life the Master taught us to have when He said:

*... when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites.
For they love to pray standing in the synagogues
and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.
Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.
But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door,
pray to your Father who [is] in the secret [place];
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*
[Matthew 6:5-6]

So – *how is your_secret place prayer life?* I do not mean the *SOS* kind of prayer life, where after something you have done or some relationship you invested

yourself in falls apart you look up to Heaven in pitiful desperation and say: ‘*HELP! I’m dying down here!*’ I do not mean the *Genie-in-a-bottle* kind of prayer life, where when you want some material thing which you do not have and do not know how to get for yourself you whisper Heavenward: ‘*Please give me _____ [fill in the blank].*’ I do not mean the ‘*Those people are so evil, G-d-, so GET THEM – and BEAM ME UP!*’ kind of prayer life. I am talking about something real. I am talking about a level of interaction with the Most Holy that changes the atmosphere of whatever room you are in. I am talking about the kind of prayer life that makes Heaven tremble ... and then move powerfully in response – *if and to the extent* what is asked in such a time of prayer can be fit within the parameters of the Bridegroom-King’s Overall Plan.

In this season – when we remember the evil men can do – the burning question is *who will take the time and expend the energy, and take the risk, to truly daven*’? While most of Scripture is about the Creator of the Universe reaching out to man, the ultimate revelation stream also offers occasional accounts of human beings initiating conversations with Him. The best-known model of this sort of interaction is the Davidic model, portrayed in the book of *Tehillim – i.e. the Psalms*. Followers of Yeshua should also be intimately familiar with the Messiah model. In the opening aliyah of parsha *Va’etchanan*, however, we are introduced to the model from which both David and Yeshua drew their inspiration - the *Mosaic* model.

Rethinking The Protocols of Tefillah/Davening (Prayer) – The Moshe Model

The model of prayer Moshe was commissioned to teach us on the plains of Moav goes like this:

***And I went/transitioned to the grace of the Holy One at that time, saying:
O Holy One, Sovereign God [i.e. Adonai Elohim],
You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand,
for what god [is there] in heaven or on earth who can do [anything]
like Your works and Your mighty [deeds]?
I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan,
those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon.”***
[Deuteronomy 3:23-25]

Let’s look at this prayer model phrase by phrase.

Oh Holy One, Sovereign God

Strangely enough, even though Moshe has had hundreds of conversations with the Holy One over the course of the past four decades, he has seldom been the one to initiate those interactions. It is almost always the Holy One Who opens the line of communication by speaking to Moshe first. But when Moshe did initiate the

discourse, how did Moshe address his deity? He addressed Him as *Adonai*² *Elohim*³.

Moshe began by adopting a thoroughly submissive attitude. He continued walked through fields of glorious praise – praise from the depths of his heart - before actually presenting his plea. Every aspect of his request was polite and respectful.

You Have Begun to Show Your Greatness [gadleicha] ...

Moshe has seen some pretty amazing things in the course of his 120 years. He has seen that the ways of the Holy One are not only wonderful and awe-inspiring individually, but build upon one another cumulatively, increasing in intensity and impact as they go. He has learned enough to know that whatever he has seen, it is only the outer fringes of the greatness potential of the Creator of the Universe. So, in awe, he cries out: *You have begun to show your greatness* What comes next? How will the greatness of the Holy One manifest next? Moshe knows that his mind is not even able to conceive of what the Holy One amazing things He will do next. But he knows that nothing the Holy One does is spontaneous; all His great works and demonstrations of wisdom, goodness, mercy, and power were planned and choreographed from time immemorial, as part of a grand Plan of revelation, redemption, restoration, and reconciliation.

... And your Mighty Hand [Yadeicha ha-chazakah]

Many times in Torah Moshe reminds us that the Holy One delivered us out of Egypt with a ‘mighty hand’. The poetic quality of the phrase is undeniable; but anthropomorphism is a bit troublesome. The Holy One is spiritual; is He also corporeal? Does He have body parts like we do? Or do references to His ‘hand’ refer to something a bit more metaphorical and mysterious? What is a hand, anyway? A hand is the instrumentality of creativity and skill - and the masterful

² *Adonai* is a traditional substitution for the four-letter shem spelled *yod, hey, vav, hey* in the Hebrew, the actual pronunciation no man alive today knows – no matter how arrogantly anyone insists he does.

³ The first time the relatively unusual designation *Adonai Elohim* [in Hebrew, אֲדֹנָי־יְהוָה] is found in Torah is in Genesis 2:4b, where we are told that *Adonai Elohim* ‘made’ [the Hebrew verb *us asah*] *the earth and the Heavens*. In the next verse the same designation is used to describe the One Who sends rain upon the earth. In the verses that follow *Adonai Elohim* is depicted as forming man from the dust of the earth, as breathing life into man’s nostrils, as planting a garden [Eden]; of making all kinds of trees grow in the garden including the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as well as the tree of life; of putting man in the garden to tend it [asah] and keep [shamar] it; of forming every creature of the earth out of the dust, then bringing each to the man to let the man ‘name’/describe/declare the essential purpose of it; of forming the woman out of the man’s ‘rib’; and of making the serpent more cunning than any other beast of the field. Interestingly, the serpent and Chava did not refer to the Holy One by this title; their entire conversation about the Holy One referred to the Creator simply as *Elohim* (Genesis 3:1, 3, 5). Torah’s inspired narrator, however, continues to use the combined title *Adonai Elohim* throughout his narration of the events of the Garden. See Genesis 3:8, 9, 13, 14, 21, 22, and 23.

works that flow out of each. A man's hand releases his creativity and displays his skill in practical ways. To have a strong or mighty hand, then, means to be capable of, and do, works of amazing creativity. With the hand a man builds a home, feeds a family, forges a blade, carves a design, draws a sketch, paints a masterpiece, writes a poem or song, and wields a sword. As *Kohelet* counseled: *Whatever you find to do with your hands, do it with all your might.* Ecclesiastes 9:10. Of the *ishet chayil* – i.e. the ‘woman of strength/virtue’ of Proverbs 31 - it is said: *Her hands take hold of the distaff and her hands grasp the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor and reaches out with her hands to the needy.* Proverbs 31:19-20. The Holy One does all things well - and makes everything beautiful in its time.

***... for what god [is there] in heaven or on earth
Who Can Do Anything Like Your Works and Mighty Deeds***

Let me ...

Moshe reported the Holy One's response to his well-structured prayer model as follows:

Vayit'aber Adonai bi l'ma'anchem

But the Holy One passed over me⁴ for your sakes

v'lo shama elay

and He did not allow Himself to be moved by me;

vayomer Adonai elay rav-lach

and the Holy One said to me, “This is sufficient for you⁵;

al-tosef daber elay od b'davar hazeh

speak no more to me of this matter.

Aleh rosh ha-Pisgah

Go up to the top of Pisgah,

vesa eynecha yamah v'tzafonah

and lift up your eyes westward, and northward,

v'temanah umiz'rachah

and southward, and eastward,

ur'eh v'eyneicha

and see with your eyes:

ki-lo ta'avov et ha-Yarden hazeh

⁴ Some English translations translate this phrase as ‘the Lord was angry with me for your sakes’. But the Hebrew verb root used in the original text to describe what the Holy One did in relation to Moshe is עבר *abar*, H5674, meaning to *pass over* or *pass by* or *transcend*.

See: <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H5674&t=NKJV>

⁵ That is, as the Holy One told Shaul of Tarsus [Paul]: “My chanan is sufficient for you.” See footnote 4 above and II Corinthians 12:9.

for you shall not go over this Yarden.
[Deuteronomy 3:27]

That response sounds a lot like “no”. If so, this is not the only heartfelt prayer in Scripture that is going to be answered in what appears to be a negative manner. David desired to be the one who would build a Temple for the Holy One; the answer was ‘No’. Would you rather have had it David’s way?

Shaul of Tarsus desired to have a troublesome thorn removed from his flesh; the answer from Heaven was ‘No’. Would the Holy One have been glorified more if Shaul had gotten his wish? Yeshua prayed on the night of his passion that the cup of suffering that was set before him might pass from him; the answer from Heaven, however, was ‘Not yet.’ Would you rather the Holy One had intervened and stopped the process in its tracks?

Why does the Holy One sometimes give a ‘no’ answer to a prayer? He does so because for Him to answer one person’s prayer – especially a selfish one – would often be to alter, or even obviate, another *person* or *community*, or *city*, or *nation*, or *generation*, or *bloodline*’s Kingdom destiny. His Will is not just His *casual whim* or *preference*, you see; it is His *Strategy for the Advancement of the Kingdom*. What mortal human beings do not seem to understand that far more people, many more generations, and infinitely more ripples of impact on humanity and Creation are involved in any one person asking for a personal favor can possibly fathom. So, *yes Tevye – it would spoil some vast eternal plan if you were a wealthy man*⁶. In the eternal and infinite vision of the Holy One, absolutely nothing can be ‘personal’. Everything must be consistent with the Grand Plan for the Redemption of Mankind and the Restoration of Creation to its intended Edenic state.

From the perspective of the nice, cushioned chairs in which we sit in our study halls as we do our meditations on Torah, we the reader, of course, know full well that the King of Heaven was 100% right in all these decisions, and that there were very good reasons why the answer to the prayers in question was - had to be – something that at least sounded like ‘No’. But the ones who prayed those prayers did not pray them in study halls. They, like Moshe, prayed these prayers in *real-time*. They prayed them without the benefit of hindsight or foresight. They prayed them in the heat of the day, in the midst of the challenges of life. From the limited, self-important perspectives of the people who prayed these prayers, the petitions seemed fair, reasonable, and 100% appropriate. They weren’t thinking ‘*vast*

⁶ The reference is to the popular musical ‘Fiddler on the Roof’, wherein Tevye, a poor Jewish milkman in the Russian Ghetto of Anatevka, in the days immediately preceding the bloody Bolshevik Revolution, whimsically concludes the song ‘*If I Were a Rich Man*’ by looking up at Heaven as if to ask the Holy One of Israel: *Would it spoil some vast eternal plan ... if I were a wealthy man?*

eternal plan'. They weren't thinking 'love the Holy One your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength/substance. They weren't thinking 'seek first the Kingdom and its kind of righteousness.' They weren't thinking 'Not my will, but yours be done.' They were, instead, thinking like mortal men. They were just thinking about the *cravings of their flesh*, about the *yearnings of their hearts*, and about the *narcissistic aspirations of their egos*. So, for the sake of the Kingdom, and the Greater Plan and Strategy, the answer to the prayers they prayed out of self-interest had to be negative in tone? The question therefore quickly became 'how would these Moshe – or David, etc. - respond to the Divine 'no, child', or 'not now', or 'not quite like you have in mind'? And more importantly, the question on the table is how are *you and I* going to respond when something similar happens to us?

Who Knows Best?

In making the decision who would lead the covenant people into the Promised Land, the Holy One had known all along that He would 'pass over' Moshe. You see, from the foundation of the world the Holy One had had *another man* in mind for this critical and world-shaking task⁷. Do you know why the Holy One chose Y'hoshua over Moshe in this regard? The text of Torah is very informative, if we will but look at it. It says plainly that the Holy One did this *l'ma'anchem* – i.e. for [our] sakes. He did not pass Moshe by to *punish Moshe* – but because there was someone else whose elevation to fulfill that critical function was - in both the short and long term - far better for US. The Holy One determined in His omniscience that the one who led us into the Promised Land should be Y'hoshua – the prototype of the Messiah who would bear the same Hebrew verb root – i.e. *yod, shin, ayin*, pronounced *yasha* - in his name.

Here - for Moshe and for us - lies a critical challenge of *emunah*. Can we – will we – accept what appears to be a "No, child" – or 'Not Now' – or 'Not the Way you are Thinking' answer to some of our prayers without becoming bitter? We ask for 'grace' from Him all the time; do we extend grace to Him? Or do we get offended and sulk when we do not get our way – even if we realize, deep down, that He always has a better, wiser, more long-term solution in mind? Can Moshe – and can we - accept that the Holy One knows better than us what is good, and right, and best for us, for others, and for the world? Do we really trust the Holy One? Do we really accept the Holy One as *God*? Or does our 'faith walk' really consist of wanting the Creator of the Universe to be for us a Santa Claus or our private genie

⁷ The same was true in David's case – the Holy One had another man in mind for the task of building a Temple for His Glory. And Shaul of Tarsus? Unbeknownst to him the Holy One had something far, far better in store for Shaul – and for the world – than the removal of his thorn in the flesh would have ever accomplished.

in a bottle character whose sole purpose is to grant our selfish wishes?

Ask ‘In Emunah’

Some out there in religious circles today would probably say the reason Moshe’s petition was denied was that he *lacked faith*. I do not believe that for an instant. I believe Moshe had the same faith that day, and as he spoke those words, as he did the day he stood before Pharaoh and announced, “*Yet one more plague*”. I believe Moshe had the same faith that day that he had when he stood at the banks of the Sea of Reeds, held forth his rod, and declared “*Stand, and see the Yeshua of the Holy One your God!*” And I believe, as well, that what the Holy One gave Moshe, in response to his prayer, was much more than meets the eye of the modern reader. Moshe was told to *aleh rosh ha-Pisgah* – ascend to the top of *Pisgah*. What is *Pisgah*⁸? The verb root of this place name is *pasag*, *peh*, *samech*, *gimel*, meaning ‘*to pass between*’ or ‘*to pass through*’⁹. With the *hey* suffix this verb becomes a noun, meaning a ‘mountain pass’ [something like *El Paso* in Spanish].

Note first the similarity of the verb root *pasag* [*peh*, *samech*, *gimel*] – to *pass through or between* - to *pasach* [*peh*, *samech*, *chet*] – to *pass over*. Note also the context of the first – and only – Biblical use of the verb root *pasag*. It is found only in Psalm 48, the beautiful and prophetic ‘*Ode to Tzion*’. That psalm starts out:

***Great is the Holy One, and greatly to be praised,
In the city of our God, in his holy mountain.
Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole eretz, is Mount Tziyon,
on the north sides, the city of the great King.
God has shown himself in her citadels as a refuge.***

Beginning in verse 12 the psalm sets forth a *mitzvah* for people of all generations regarding Y’rushalayim. Each of us is instructed to:

***Walk about Tziyon, and go around her.
Number its towers; mark well her bulwarks.
Pasag [pass through or between] her elevations, that you may tell it to the next generation.
For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even to death.***
[Psalm 48:12-14]

What does this say to us? I believe it tells us that Moshe’s experience on *Har Pisgah* was much more than we might have thought. The episode reminds me of Deuteronomy 34, where we are told:

***Moshe rose up early in the morning, and went up to Mount Sinai,
as the Holy One had instructed him, and took in his hand two stone tablets.
The Holy One descended in the cloud, and abided with him there,***

⁸ *Pisgah* is *peh*, *samech*, *gimel*, *hey*. It is Strong’s Hebrew word #6449.

⁹ Brown, Driver & Briggs, “*A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*”, Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1951, at page 819-820.

*and proclaimed the name of the Holy One.
The Holy One passed by before him, and proclaimed, "The Holy One!
The Holy One, a merciful and gracious God,
slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth*
[Exodus 34:4-6]

Concerning this time of visitation we are told that Moshe *was there with the Holy One forty days and forty nights; and he neither ate bread, nor drank water.* Exodus 34:28.

According to Deuteronomy 33 the Holy One did not only proclaim His Name and characteristics to Moshe while He was on the mountain, but He illustrated this revelation of His nature with special effects by *actually causing all His goodness to pass by Moshe.* He hid Moshe in the ‘cleft of a rock’, covered him with His Hand, and totally blew his circuits. We are thus told that:

*... when he came down from the mountain,
Moshe didn't know that the skin of his face shone by reason of His speaking with him.*
[Exodus 34:29]

Was the experience the Holy One provided to Moshe on *Har Pisgah* [the place of *passing through*] comparable to the above-described experience on *Har Sineh* [the place of *passing by*]? Did it, as well, consist of hour after hour, day after day, week after week, of awesome and unspeakable prophetic vision and revelation? Torah does not specifically tell us. But let’s look at what Torah does say.

*Moshe went up from the plains of Mo'av to Mount Nevo, to the top of Pisgah,
that is over against Yericho.
The Holy One showed him all the land of Gil'ad, to Dan,
and all Naftali [near the Mediterranean], and the land of Efrayim and Menashe,
and all the land of Y'hudah, to the hinder sea, and the South,
and the Plain of the valley of Yericho the city of palm trees, to Tzo`ar.
The Holy One said to him,
This is the land which I swore to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya`akov,
saying, I will give it to your seed: I have caused you to see it with your eyes*
[Deuteronomy 34:1-4]

I don’t know if you caught all that. But *there is no way a human eye could see from Mount Pisgah even a tenth of the things the Holy One showed Moshe that day.* Not only are there *too many miles*, but there are also far *too many mountains* in the way.

What happened on Pisgah was indeed like what happened on *Sineh*. The Holy One did not just take Moshe up on a mountain. He *hid Him in the cleft of a rock*, and *caused His goodness* – the goodness He had promised to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya’akov, and to their descendants forever – *to pass by Moshe.* He gave Moshe ‘eyes to see’. And it was indeed enough. The Holy One’s *grace*, that is.

True Emunah Transcends Circumstances, Prayers Answered ‘No’, and Even Death!

Moshe could not have known exactly how the Holy One would do it before ascending Pisgah. But because Moshe *knew the Holy One*, he knew the Holy One would not leave him without comfort. And while the Torah account in Deuteronomy 34, where the supernatural vision is detailed, standing by itself, proves Moshe’s trust more than warranted, the apostolic writings go even further. In the apostolic account of *Mattityahu* [known to English speakers as ‘Matthew’], chapter 17 describes how, though Moshe may have never touched the land of Israel during his life, after his death, by his eternal spirit he not only got *to walk on that soil and breathe that air*, but actually was given the privileged to *converse with Mashiach in his resplendent glory as he did so*. For Mattityahu advises that on the day of Yeshua’s transfiguration, on *Mount Tabor* [in Eretz Yisrael, between Y’rushalayim and Natzret], two men stood face to face with Mashiach. Eliyahu was one of these men. Do you remember the name of the other? The apostolic writer tells us:

Behold, Moshe and Eliyahu appeared to them [i.e. Yochanan, Kefa, and Ya’akov]
talking with Him [i.e. Messiah Yeshua].

Hmmmmn. Some teach that because of his sin at Merivah Moshe never got to enter the Promised Land. Thanks to Mattityahu, *we know better*, don’t we Beloved. We know that Moshe has been seen by faithful witnesses walking the hillsides, conversing with the Messiah!

Never question the Holy One’s faithfulness! Perhaps the Holy One’s *answers* really are better than anything we could think to *pray* after all. *Baruch HaShem!*

Back to the Assigned Task of the Friend of the Bridegroom

Moshe *did not sulk about being passed over*. He apparently accepted the Holy One’s decision to pass over him and choose Y’hoshua to lead the prophetic procession of the Bride-in-waiting into the Bridal Chamber graciously. He did not *envy* or *turn against* or *speak evil* of Yehoshua. He trusted the Divine Bridegroom to know what was best for His Bride. So he *moved on*, putting all his energy and passion into fulfilling that which he had been called, authorized, and empowered to do to close out his life – namely to become the voice of one crying out in the wilderness ‘*prepare the way of the Holy One!*’ And in this phase of his ministry Moshe’s most passionate cry will not be ‘*Let my people go!*’ as it was in Egypt, nor *Arise, O Holy One; scatter your enemies and make your foes flee before You!* as it was in the years of Wilderness wanderings, but will instead become ‘*Sh’ma Yisrael!*’

In verse 1 of chapter 4 of Deuteronomy therefore, as Moshe lays aside his personal heartbreak and gets back to the business of the Great Bridegroom-King on Whose behalf he had been called to speak, he begins by saying:

V'atah Yisra'el sh'ma

And now, Israel listen to/heed/be changed by/conform to

el-ha-chukim v'el-ha-mishpatim

the rules and judgments

asher anochi melamed etchem la'asot

that I am teaching you to use as the building blocks of life,

l'ma'an tichyu uvatem v'rishtem et-ha-aretz

so that you will remain alive and come to occupy the land

asher Adonai Elohei avoteichem noten lachem

that the Holy One, the God of your fathers, is giving you.

This *sh'ma Yisrael* call to faithfulness to the Covenant of Divine Betrothal will be the first of several *such* calls in this final Book of Torah. If we are wise, we will learn to look at this and every other *sh'ma Yisrael* call Moshe makes as an important cue that he is about to teach us an essential ingredient of the recipe through which the Divine Bridegroom has ordained that we receive empowerment to succeed in fulfilling our mission on earth.

What is the Divine Recipe for success, you ask? What does 'success' mean in this context anyway, you wonder? The Holy One first formally introduced the *Divine Recipe for success* into our consciousness at the pre-Sinai wilderness stopover called *Marah*. There, after showing Moshe how to make bitter waters sweet for us He said: ***If/when/to the extent you diligently sh'ma the voice of the Holy One your God and build/make/form what is right in His sight, give ear to His mitzvot and treasure and jealously guard all His chukim, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I [am] the Holy One who heals you.*** Exodus 15:26.

The Holy One enlarged upon this at Mount Sinai, right before the Great Betrothal ceremony, by explaining: ***if/when/to the extent you truly sh'ma My voice and treasure and jealously guard My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth [is] Mine, and you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*** Exodus 19:5-6a.

Then after the formal ceremony of *Matan Torah*, but while we were still encamped under the Bridegroom's shade at Sinai a-swoon with love, the Holy One connected the Divine Recipe to even more betrothal-like promises. There He said: ***"If [when and to the extent] you walk in My chukim and treasure and jealously guard My***

Mitzvot, and build your lives upon them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land will yield its produce, and the trees of the field will yield their fruit. Your threshing will last till the time of vintage, and the vintage will last till the time of sowing; you will eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. I will give peace in the land, and you will lie down, and none will make [you] afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land. You will chase your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you.”¹⁰

The recipe for navigating the obstacle course in life successfully is found in *sh'ma*-ing the Voice of the Divine Bridegroom, in walking in His *chukim*, in treasuring and jealously guarding *His Covenant* and its *mitzvot*, and building/making out of our lives what is ‘right in His eyes. And success is defined as *being set free from the diseases of the Egyptians*, becoming a people set apart to and specially treasured by the Holy One, a priestly order of Earthly Diplomats of the Bridegroom’s Heavenly Kingdom, and a nation characterized by and drawing others to holiness.

The material side of success was not overlooked either, as every material blessing from productivity to provision to protection to peace was promised as well. Is it any wonder the psalmist prayed so passionately:

*Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things from Your Torah!
I [am] a stranger in the earth; Do not hide Your Mitzvot from me.
My soul bursts with longing For Your Mishpatim at all times.
[Psalm 119:18-20]*

Oh that this would again become the heart cry of the people of the Holy One!

Beware the Leaven of Spiritual Mathematicians!

In Deuteronomy 4:2 Moshe warns us of one of the most sinister traps of deception that we will face on the road to full Bride-hood. I call this trap of deception the *leaven of spiritual mathematics*. Moshe says:

*You must not add to the word that I command you,
nor are you to subtract from it;
but treasure and jealously guard the mitzvot of the Holy One your God
with which I enjoin you.*

What does it mean to ‘add to’ that which Moshe taught us? The Hebrew verb translated as ‘add’ in this passage is *yasaf* [*yod, samech, feh soft*]. This verb implies adding to something in such a way as to *dilute* or *water down* or *corrupt the*

¹⁰ Contrast this with Leviticus 26:14 ff, where the Holy One made it clear that if once we accept His Covenant, then later decide to act as a ‘runaway Bride’ and choose not to *sh'ma* Him, choose not to treasure and jealously guard all His Mitzvot, and choose to despise His *chukim*, then instead of the blessing and fruitfulness and success and fulfillment he has built into the Divine Recipe for life we will bring upon ourselves the exact opposite of each of those things.

essence of. This appears to be the kind of thing Yeshua was speaking about when he condemned rejecting the *mitzvot* of the Holy One, and robbing them of their intended world-changing effect, by replacing or overshadowing them with traditions. See **Matthew 15:6** and **Mark 7:9**.

Rabbinical Judaism has done a lot of this, of course, and the areas where this has occurred have been highlighted very clearly in the teachings of Yeshua. But whatever legalistic hearts in Judaism did, legalistic minds in institutional Christianity have taken the process to a whole new level of perversion. Institutional Christianity has added to the Torah such abominations as *compulsory conversion, church membership rolls and confirmation requirements, church 'service' attendance requirements, tithing/giving requirements, establishment and promotion of ecclesiastical hierarchies full of hirelings, building programs and pledge drives, and, of course, secular organizational structures and marketing approaches.*

In modern forms of institutionalized Christianity these additions to Torah have virtually displaced the Words and Instructions that actually came from the Throne. No wonder 21st Century Christianity wants nothing to do with Torah. Torah exposes 21st Century Christianity for the patent fraud that it is. But there is more. It is not merely *adding to* the *mitzvot* of Torah about which Moshe warned. Moshe, the Friend of the Bridegroom, also vehemently warned us not to *subtract from* the instructions of Torah either. What meaneth this, you ask? The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as subtract or diminish in this passage is *gara, gimel, resh ayin*. This Hebrew verb connotes *skimming off* or *carving out a part as opposed to embracing and maintaining the whole intact and at full strength.*

Hmmm. Is not this subtraction by skimming and carving out *exactly what institutionalized Christianity has done – and taught its adherents to do – for centuries?* The first things skimmed off and carved out of Torah by the gentile dominated generations of institutionalized Christianity were *the Sabbath and the Mo'edim [Festivals]*. Next eliminated by the *lawless voices of organized religion* were the Holy One's instructions regarding the *Bridal diet*. Soon absolutely all that remained of the Torah were its more nebulous instructions like *'love the Lord Your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind'* and *'love your neighbor as yourself'* and along with these instructions - and, of course, a totally perverted set of rules the gentile-mindset clergy latched onto as a self-perpetuating funding mechanism and decided to call *'the law of the tithe'*.

Moshe was so right. All this adding and subtracting is not only *sabotaging our mission* – it is *killing us* - just as he warned us it would. Why is adding and

subtracting from Torah so lethal to our purpose and destiny in the world, you ask? Because the Holy One is all wise, and we are not. Because the *recipe for life* which the Holy One developed for us is perfect. Because Torah is perfectly engineered for our spiritual DNA. Man cannot make the Holy One's recipe better. He cannot do it by adding things he personally likes to the recipe, nor by skimming off or carving out whatever ingredients he finds distasteful or considers unnecessary. Both forms of spiritual mathematics lead us inexorably into traps of potentially lethal deception. And the revised, watered-down recipe of life such spiritual mathematics produce is a toxic soup of false religion that saps all who sip it of the strength, vitality, and focus needed to effectively fulfill our Bridal mission on earth at such a time as this. So let us step back, and remind ourselves once again exactly what that mission is - and why watering down the recipe the Holy One gave us is so toxic for us and so completely counterproductive to that mission.

***‘Make Disciples of All Nations, Teaching All Nations Whatsoever
That I Have Commanded You’ – Course 101***

Today's aliyah contains a description of what I like to call the ultimate Divine Plan of spreading the glad tidings of the Kingdom of Heaven. The Holy One's Grand Redemptive Plan – then and now – is simple and straightforward. It has not changed. His plan is to call forth a people whom He has *forgiven so much*, and whom He has *redeemed from so much*, to model His Brand of Righteousness, and testify of His Goodness, as they joyfully *love Him* and demonstrate absolute trust in His Wisdom and Promises by *living out the Torah lifestyle in front of the world* in real time.

In Deuteronomy 4:5-8 the Holy One [through Moshe] describes His eternal plan for the redemption of the world in more detail:

*Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances,
even as the Holy One my God enjoined me,
that you should do so in the midst of the land where you go in to possess it.
Therefore, you are to both keep them¹¹ and do them¹²;*

¹¹ The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as “keep” is *sh'mar* [*shin, mem, resh*], meaning to treasure, to cherish, to guard as a precious possession, to be protective of, and/or to be a watchman concerning, something extremely valuable.

¹² The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “do” is *asah* [Strong's Hebrew word # 6213, *ayin, shin, hey*]. This verb paints the picture of a potter fashioning something recognizable and useful from a lump of clay. To *asah* the *mitzvot* and *mishpatim* of Torah means to apply creative energy toward them, to “build” something useful with them – to take them out of the realm of the theoretical and into the world of the practical. It means to conform one's human thoughts, priorities, values, words, and conduct to the shape of the Torah the way a potter conforms the clay with which he works to the blueprint he has in his mind or on his drafting table. To *asah* the *mitzvot* [teachings/instructions] and *mishpatim* [what He would do/decreed if personally present] of the Holy One requires one to work with his thoughts, his priorities, his values, his words, and his conduct like a potter works with the clay to make it into the shape on the blueprint. If the potter wants to make a water pitcher, he must know what a water pitcher looks like, and must keep

*for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples,
who shall hear all these statutes, and say,
“Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.”
For what great nation is there that has a God so near to them,
as the Holy One our God is whenever we call on him?
What great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous
as all this Torah that I set before you this day?
[Deuteronomy 4:5-8]*

This is entirely consistent with the Holy One’s original spoken commitment to us at Mount Sinai, where He told us:

*... you will be My **am segulah** [literally meaning *cherished treasure-people*]
from among all peoples;
*for all the eretz is mine; and you will be to me a **mamlakah Kohanim***
[literally meaning *a kingdom serving as an intermediary between the Holy One and the rest of mankind*],
*and a **goy k’dosh** [literally meaning a nation set apart unto the Holy One].*
[Exodus 19:5-6]*

You see, Dear Reader, the Holy One actually thinks He can draw all men to Himself *through us*. And He thinks the way He can do that is *through giving us Torah*, and *prophetically empowering us to live it by His Spirit*. We are, you see, in His eyes, *brilliant lights shining in the darkness*, a city set upon a hill, drawing people of all nations to the Holy One. We have the technology. We have the impartation. We have more than enough prophetic empowerment. Isn’t it *time* we became who we were created to be, and do what we have been called and commissioned to do? Isn’t it time for ACTIVATION?

Perhaps we should trust Him. Perhaps we should do it His Way. Perhaps it is time to *go back to the foundations*. Perhaps the *sh’ma, sh’mar, asah* lifestyle Torah teaches is the ultimate key to the Holy One’s plan for *the redemption of mankind as a species and the restoration of Creation to its intended Edenic state of fruitfulness, beauty, and habitability*. Perhaps a life lived in submission to the Torah is the ultimate ‘evangelistic tract’. Perhaps when Yeshua told us to teach all nations “*whatsoever I have commanded you?*¹³” He was talking about Torah that He lived by and loved so much. Perhaps – just perhaps - the Holy One knows better than all the seminaries in the world how to draw men to Himself.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Let’s begin our study with some very basic questions:

working with the clay until it conforms to that shape and image. He will only be successful, however, if he is inspired and gifted with the ability to make the clay become a water pitcher. The *dibrot, mitzvot* and *mishpatim* of Torah are thus not just things to “do”; they are the righteousness of the Holy One, to which we are - with the inspiration and empowering of the Holy One - to conform every aspect of our lives.

¹³ Matthew 28:20 [the “*Great Commission*”]. See also John 15:16, and John 17:18-19.

- [A] For what did Moshe plead (pray) in verses 24-25 of Deuteronomy 3?
 [B] What was the Holy One's response to Moshe's prayer?
 [C] What did the Holy One tell Moshe He wanted him to do?

2. Write an essay of what the Holy One had designed the impact of a people who would keep and do His Torah. In that essay, discuss:

[A] The two things Israel was instructed to do with the Torah instructions [i.e. "keep" (Hebrew, *sh'mar*) them and "do" (Hebrew, *asah*) them];

[B] What effect was the doing of these two things by the Holy One's Redeemed Community intended to have on people of other nations who saw the Israelites do these two things; and

[C] What does Deuteronomy 4:7 mean to you.

3. In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the Hebrew words our English Bibles translate in Deuteronomy 4:6 as "wisdom" and "understanding" [Hint: the Hebrew words are Strong's Hebrew word numbers 995 and 2451. Find the verb roots of these two nouns, and describe the Hebraic word pictures you see developing around them.]

4. This week's Shabbat is known as *Shabbat Nacham* (the Shabbat of Comfort), and the haftarah is the first of the seven "messages of comfort" we will be studying in the aftermath of the ninth of Av. Our haftarah reading for today is taken from the prophecy of HaNavi Yeshayahu [Isaiah], chapter 40. In today's haftarah aliyah the consolation process following the 9th of Av [when the First and Second Temples fell, among many other disasters] is kicked off with 10 short messages given to "comfort" the Holy One's people.

Nachamu nachamu ami yomar Elohechem
Comfort you, comfort you my people, says your God.

Dabeiru al-lev Y'rushalayim
Speak comfortingly to Y'rushalayim;

vekir'u eleyha ki mal'ah tzeva'ah
and cry to her that her warfare is accomplished,

ki nirtzah avonah
that her iniquity is pardoned,

ki lakchah miyad Adonai kiflayim b'chol-chatoteiha
that she has received of the Holy One's hand double for all her sins.

Kol korei bamidbar
The voice of one who cries, in the wilderness

panu derech Adonai
Prepare you the way of the Holy One;

yashru b'aravah mesilah l'Eloheinu
make level in the desert a highway for our God."

Kol-gey yinase
Every valley shall be exalted,

v'chol-har vegiv'ah yishpalu
and every mountain and hill shall be made low;

v'hayah he'akov l'mishor
and the uneven shall be made level,

v'ha-rechasim levik'ah
and the rough places a plain:

v'niglah k'vod Adonai vera'u
and the glory of the Holy One shall be revealed,

chol-basar yachdav ki pi Adonai diber
and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Holy One has spoken.

[Isaiah 40:1-5]

List all 10 messages of “comfort” contained in this passage; then look up, write and define the Hebrew word translated “*comfort*”.

5. In Mark 12:27-28 the story is told of a “scribe” asking Yeshua a question.

*One of the Sofrim came and heard them questioning together.
Knowing that he had answered them well,
he [the scribe] asked him [Yeshua], "Which mitzvah is the greatest¹⁴ of all?"*

[A] Look up, write and define the Greek word translated as “*scribe*”;

[B] The Hebrew word for this person would be *samech*, *peh/feh*, *resh*, Strong’s Hebrew word #5608, transliterated as *sofer*, and pronounced *soh-far*]. In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up that Hebrew word, and:

- i. write it in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings,
- ii. find the verb root in its *pa'al* form, and write it;
- iii. describe the word picture you see developing as you study this word, and its verb root, in Gesenius.

[C] The *sofrim* [masculine plural of *sofer*] are persons recognized by Torah, who are expected to be part of every Torah-based community. What does Torah have to say about these people, and why do you think a Torah-based community needs them?

[D] Who were some of the best known [Biblically speaking] “*sofrim*” during the

¹⁴ The Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha renders the question asked by the Scribe as follows: “*Which mitzvah is rishonah of all the mitzvot?*” *Rishonah* is the “*head*”, or “*beginning point*”. If this rendering is correct, the issue is not whether one instruction of the Holy One is better, or more important, than another [as the English word “*greatest*” in its modern usage implies] but which instruction is *the beginning point* for an observant lifestyle.

TaNaKh [“Old” Testament] period? [Hint: Ezra is one – see Ezra 7:6].

[E] Look at Yeshua’s statement concerning *sofrim* in Matthew 13:52:

He said to them,

Therefore, every Sofer who has been made a talmid in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who is a householder who brings out of his treasure new and old things.

And in Matthew 23:1-12:

Then Yeshua spoke to the multitudes and to his talmidim, saying, "The Sofrim and the Perushim sat on Moshe’s seat"¹⁵. All things therefore whatever they tell you to observe, sh’mar and asah, but don't do their works; for they say [amar], and don't do [asah].

For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them.

All their works they do to be seen by men.

They make their tefillin broad, enlarge the tzitziyot of their garments, and love the place of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called 'Rabbi, Rabbi' by men."

But don't you be called 'Rabbi,'

for one is your teacher, the Messiah, and all of you are brothers.

And call no man on the eretz your father,

for one is your Father, he who is in heaven.

Neither be called masters, for one is your master, the Messiah.

But he who is greatest among you will be your servant.

Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Do you think Yeshua sees a *sofer* as being a *bad* thing or a *good* thing? Explain your answer.

[F] What do you think was the motivation for the question asked Yeshua by this *sofer*?

May you learn to trust Him with all your dreams, and accept His Will in all areas of your life, and thereby experience His chanan.

The Rabbi’s son

¹⁵ “Moshe’s seat” [Hebrew, *al kiseh Moshe*, in rabbinic tradition, with which Yeshua was, of course, familiar, means the “seat” of judgment regarding Torah – to be filled, according to Deuteronomy 17:18-20, by people who will ‘pursue justice’, will *judge the people fairly, refuse to pervert justice, and refuse bribes*. By saying the Scribes and P’rushim sit in Moshe’s seat did not mean Yeshua was acknowledging that they met these Torah qualifications, but merely that they took upon themselves the right and responsibility to judge Torah matters [as Moshe once had – see Exodus 18:13].

Meditation for Today's Study

Ezekiel 8:1-6

*It happened in the sixth year, in the sixth [month],
in the fifth [day] of the month, as I sat in my house,
and the Zakenim of Y'hudah sat before me,
that the hand of the Holy One GOD fell there on me.*

*Then I saw, and, behold, a likeness as the appearance of fire;
from the appearance of his loins and downward, fire;
and from his loins and upward, as the appearance of brightness,
as it were glowing metal.*

*He put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head;
and the Spirit lifted me up between eretz and the sky,
and brought me in the visions of God to Y'rushalayim,
to the door of the gate of the inner [court] that looks toward the north;
and what I saw there was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy.*

*Behold, the glory of the God of Yisra'el was there,
according to the appearance that I saw in the plain.
Then said he to me, **"Son of man, lift up your eyes now the way toward the north"**.
So I lifted up my eyes the way toward the north, and see,
northward of the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry.*

*He said to me, **"Son of man, do you see what they do?
Even the great abominations that the house of Yisra'el commit here,
that I should go far off from my sanctuary?
But you shall again see yet other great abominations."***