

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Ekev:** **Deuteronomy 8:1-20**
 Haftarah: **Isaiah 49:17-21**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 8:33-34**

Beware that you do not forget

[Deuteronomy 8:11]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 85:4-7;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the *Third Blessing, Kadosh [Holiness]*

Kol-ha-mitzvah² asher anochi metzaveicha hayom – All the proactive instructions for right/excellent living that I am calling you to engage in today ... *tish'merun la'asot* - you are to carefully guard and cause to take shape and function in real time ... **Deuteronomy 8:1a.**

Do you aspire to live a well-lived life? In this era of deception, corruption, and perversion do you even have a vision for what a well-lived, fruitful, Heaven-scented life looks like and consists of? Moshe does. He sees the secret of a well-lived, fruitful, societally enriching life lying in ... wait for it ... *sh'mar*-ing and *asah*-ing 'all the mitzvah' of Torah³. See **Deuteronomy 8:1.**

Stop the presses! Is 'following the instruction manual' of the Holy One really that important to our enjoyment of a 'well-lived' life? Is highly esteeming and interactively applying creative energy to engage with the Holy One's instructions for Covenant, for *kedusha*, for *kindness*, and for *kingdom building* really that mission-critical? Is learning, meditating upon and living out *the mitzvot of Torah in real ways in real time* really that essential to bearing 'fruit' and exercising 'dominion' the way the Creator intends?⁴ That can't be right, can it? Could a well-lived, abundant, positively impactful life, with copious Kingdom fruit, really be as simple as Moshe describes it *just walking in the Torah*? But ... what about 'me-time'? What about self-indulgence? What about all the things on our worldly

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² *Kol ha-mitzah* – i.e. all the proactive instructions of the Holy One regarding how human life is to be lived; that is what Moshe is calling us to embrace and implement. The *mitzvot* of our King come as a *package deal*. As our Covenant Partner in Heaven is *echad* – i.e. a *multi-faceted but unified inseparable whole* – so is His Torah. We can't just pick and choose the parts we like - or understand - and ignore the rest. It is *all for one* ... and one for all!

³ Note: Moshe is not talking about what one has to do to get to 'go to Heaven' when one dies. Nor is he discussing what it takes to be declared positionally righteous. He is just talking about the keys to long and influential life on earth – nothing more, nothing less. On that subject, however, he wants the secret of success to be clearly understood by all.

⁴ See Genesis 1:27-28, where after creating mankind the Holy One *blessed them*, and said to them, ***Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion***

‘bucket lists’? symbols, sacraments, and schedules of services? Is the presence of real people who live and love according to the life instructions of the Holy One in real ways and in real time – instead of just talking about them in church buildings and coffee shops – what Creation is groaning for? Could living out the *mitzvot* of Torah really be the reason we have been given the breath of life, redeemed from bondage, and stationed in earthly spheres of influence at such a time as this?

Are mitzvot really the key to us having a positive cross-generational impact on the world? Are Torah’s *mitzvot* really kingdom-of-Heaven advancing? Are they really health-promoting for us? Do they make us physically stronger? More wise and understanding? More patient and kind? More emotionally stable? More humble? More thankful? More peaceful? More nurturing? More focused? More productive?

Are the mitzvot really the key to unlocking the Holy One’s treasure houses of material provision? Are they really shalom-generating? Are they really joy-producing? Do they have Divine Impartations of life, health, and peace infused into them? Are they preprogrammed with power pods of potential for atmosphere-shifting, Kingdom-advancing impact?

Questions! Questions!

Why are most of the people you know – even those who say they are [a] Torah observant and/or [b] following Yeshua, not prospering in body, finance, or soul? Why are they not bearing good fruit? Why are they not having much influence on society? Why are they not blessing their spheres of interaction? Why are most people in our day always medicating something or other - instead of enjoying good health? Why are most not joyful? Why are most constantly stressed out instead of flowing in and living out of *shalom*? Why are people so easily outraged over challenges and so hard to engage in meaningful solutions? Why do most prefer to rant instead of praying, complain instead of giving thanks, and judge others instead of even trying to understand them, much less forgive, bless, or inspire them? Why are most of us – whatever we say we ‘believe’ - not influencing our world in positive ways? When nothing ‘goes right’ for an individual, a family, a community, or a nation, could a *mitzvot malfunction* really be the root cause? Why did we often have to do without even the basic conveniences most people enjoy? Why have leisure, long life, and luxury evaded us? Could the problem actually lie with us - and our often far-too-cavalier attitude toward the *mitzvot* of Torah? Could it possibly have less to do with politics and economic indicators, and more to do with prioritizing everything but the Holy One’s instructions as to how to live life and interact with people, situations, and the material things of Creation? Could Moshe be right? Could Torah – and I mean DOING IT IN REAL TIME, not TALKING ABOUT IT IN THEORY - really be that important? The influential

sage Hillel is reputed to have once said: *As a surplus of meat* causes an increase in worms; as a surplus of possessions causes an increase in worry; as a surplus of wives causes an increase in manipulation; as a surplus of maidservants causes an increase in promiscuity; and as a surplus of servants causes an increase in thievery, more Torah produces more life; *more meditation/study produces more wisdom*; *more counsel produces more understanding*; and *more tzedakah produces more shalom*. Pirkei Avot 2:8. *Hmmmmn. More Torah ...more shalom?* Could it really be?

What Does the Torah Say? How Do You Read It?

Are you ready for a lesson in humility? Our aliyah today is about to give us one. Moshe is going to explain why life on *this side of Egypt* has been so difficult. Are you curious? Let's listen in on what he has to say:

...the Holy One your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep [Hebrew sh'mar] His mitzvot or not.
[Deuteronomy 8:2]

The wilderness experiences of life are just *tests* designed for us by the Holy One? Who knew? They were just a diagnostic protocol designed by the Master Physician to reveal – to ourselves and to everyone around us – what is in our heart? Their purpose was to expose all the *tumah* - i.e. the uncleanness, conflicting loyalties, fragmentations of soul, toxicity, negativity - and the *tzara'at* - i.e. the narcissistic tendencies, the unforgiveness strongholds, and the deep oozing soul wounds of the soul that we have chosen to nurse rather than to let the Holy One heal – that we carried with us out of Egypt in order that we could be cleansed? Every hardship we endured over those forty years – every water shortage, every temptation, every flesh-out, every enemy attack, every rebellion in our ranks - was just another crucible designed by our King to bring forth the residual pockets of common/profane forth from us - so that we would let Him – indeed, *beg Him to* - skim those things off like dross from silver? And what was the goal of all this testing? It was not that we would go to Heaven. It was not that we would conquer the world. The goal was simply that we would learn to *keep* – Hebrew *sh'mar* – our King's mitzvot. Now *that* is radical!

The Holy One's Program For Developing Humility In the Human Representatives of His Kingdom

Do you know what the key to a vibrant relationship with both the Holy One and our fellow man is? Do you know what most clearly identifies a man, woman, or child as an ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven. Some declare it to be 'obedience'; others say it is 'random acts of kindness', or 'believing the right stuff', or 'being a good, moral person'. Some maintain it is *participating in campaigns of social justice*; others insist it is 'regular attendance at, membership in, and financial support of a local church or synagogue'. Still others argue that it is 'daily Bible study', or 'involvement in intercessory prayer ministries'. Some say the

secret is ‘*Expressive Worship*’; others say everything depends on ‘*just preaching the cross*’, or ‘*evangelism*’, ‘*using one’s spiritual gifts*’, especially ‘*prophesying*’ and ‘*speaking in tongues*’. Some even argue that the secret is just ‘*getting under the right covering*’. But the Holy One knows that the key to a vibrant relationship with Him and mankind is much more basic. He knows that the key is *humility*. He knows that the slightest bit of pride, arrogance, narcissism and self-promotion will derail us, and will quickly turn our ‘good works’, ‘good doctrine’, and ‘good disciplines’ into filthy rags. He knows thinking too highly of ourselves, too little of Him, and too critically of others, will always infect our Kingdom hard drive with the same devastating malware virus that Adam and Chava contracted from the Serpent.

Knowing this, the Holy One loved us too much to leave us the way we were. ***So He humbled you Deuteronomy 8:2.*** Wow! Our King is the Ultimate Humbler of man! And He humbles us not because He hates us – but because He loves us and knows what pride can – and will – do to us. He knows how destructive self-obsession is to our identity, our purpose, and our destiny. He knows how toxic arrogance is to all our interactions and relationships. He knows how inconsistent boasting in ourselves and insisting on our rights and our way is to our message and to our mission. He knows how narcissism turns absolutely everything we touch into uncleanness, and every human being in our sphere of influence into an inanimate object to use, accuse, abuse, judge, and throw away.

How does the Holy One humble those He loves? Moshe tells us He employs a two-step plan: **1.** [He] ***allowed you to hunger***, and **2.** He ***fed you with manna***.

Welcome to the Hunger Games

Hunger, it seems, is the Holy One’s motivator-of-choice – and it is *very effective*. Consider our father Avraham. What happened in his day that drove him to Egypt and into the household of Pharaoh? It was *a hunger-producing famine*. Consider Yitzchak. What drove him out of seclusion to Gerar and the household of Avimelech? Again, it was a hunger-producing famine. Consider Ya’akov and his sons. What drove them to leave their home, seek out Goshen, and reconnect with their brother Yosef? Again, it was a hunger-producing famine. The Holy One knows that the road to humility always leads through the gate of hunger. And He knows that hungry people will eat what He gives them to eat – while proud, self-absorbed people will always insist on stuffing themselves with unclean things, on considering themselves ‘connoisseurs’, and on feeling entitled to *royal dainties*.

Why does the Holy One humble us by making us hunger? Moshe tells us that as well. He does it:

in order that He might make you know that man is not to live by bread alone; but man is to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Holy One.

[Deuteronomy 8:2-3]

Oh my. Are all our wilderness experiences really just a Divinely designed obstacle course? Are the negative life experiences we encounter along the way from bondage to freedom really just crucibles designed by our Bridegroom-King to teach us critical lessons in humility? Is the Holy One really allowing these negative life experiences to *test us*? Is the One Who knows us best and loves us most really the choreographer of all these things? And is everything we have endured – and will ever endure – really all a necessary part of His Grand Redemptive Plan for the Redemption of Mankind and Creation?

As David, who knew a little about wilderness experiences from his days running from Shaul, sang to the Holy One: *You will save the humble people; but Your eyes are on the haughty, that You may bring them down.* **II Samuel 22:28.** That means we are in charge of how well this goes for us – and how much impact on the world the Holy One can bring about through our lives. We cannot control the attitudes, utterances, actions or reactions of others; but we CAN and MUST learn to take responsibility for and control over our own attitudes, utterances, actions and reactions. If we are going to be useful to the Bridegroom-King in His Grand Plan of Redemption, we must not emerge from our wilderness experiences wearing a T-shirt or carrying either a banner or an attitude that proclaims: “*I Beat the Wilderness*”. When we emerge we are supposed to come *forth leaning on and clinging tightly to the arm of our Beloved.* **Song of Solomon 8:5.** Like our ancestor Ya’akov, when we emerge from our wilderness experiences we are supposed to come forth with a *whole new attitude of meekness.* **Genesis 32:31; and see especially Genesis 33:1-3.**

Learning to Embrace Lessons In Humility

Lessons in humility are never pleasant. But if we are to be good stewards of the Heavenly favor shown and entrusted to us – and that is exactly what we are called to be – the Holy One knows we need lessons in humility at regular, recurring intervals. Pride is most definitely not becoming on the Bride-People of the Holy One. Our Bridegroom-King hates ‘a proud look’ more than anything else in the world – even open, flagrant, rebellious sin. **Proverbs 6:16[a].** Any hint of arrogance in us amounts to a gross misrepresentation of our Great King’s gracious and magnanimous Personality.

Our Beloved trusts His Mercy and Kindness to bring men to repentance [**Romans 2:4**] a whole lot more than He trusts our self-righteous attributions of judgment to accomplish His purposes in the earth. He knows our expressions of outrage and disgust - at sin or at sinners - is always counterproductive. As Ya’akov put it: *Let*

every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. James 1:19-20. And as Shaul taught: *Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as the Holy One in Messiah forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32.*

The Holy One wants us to know that He loves us passionately. He loves us both individually and corporately. But He does not want us think for a second that we have done – or could ever do - anything to *earn, deserve* or *merit* the love He so extravagantly lavishes upon us. He does not want us to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. He does not want the knowledge of His love to cause us to think of ourselves as some *elite race more worthy or deserving than any other people group on earth.* And He does not want us to act condescendingly, arrogantly, or haughtily toward the other peoples of the world.

Our Purpose And Mission Vis-à-vis the Nations

The Holy One’s word to Avram was that in his seed all the nations of the world would be *blessed*. Our purpose in regard to the nations, is very simple – it is to be a blessing to them. The nations do not exist *for us to fear, to emulate, to envy, to control, to oppress, to criticize, to demonize, to condemn, to hate, or judge;* they are there *to receive our blessing – i.e. their release from the self- and or culturally-imposed limitations under which they labor.* We are not to ever forget who we are and what we are called to do and start to see, think of, or relate to any human being in terms of his or her ‘race’, his or her ‘ethnicity’, his or her ‘philosophy’, ‘ideology’, or or ‘religion’, his or her self- and family-destructive lifestyle-pattern, or even his or her gender/‘gender-identity’; we are always to see every human being we encounter as just another badly wounded kinsmen-through-Noach who, whether he/she knows it or not, stands in dire need of a blessing, of a deep healing, and of a glorious redemption-journey with our King. No matter how other people may speak or about us, or treat us, they are never to be *scorned, marginalized, or humiliated.* All bloodlines are to be blessed by us – not *hated, avoided or viewed as inferiors.* Sometimes, for purposes of Radical Ecosystem Management and to serve the Greater Good, our King will call upon us to face off against other peoples in battle on the fields of war; but even then there will always be rules of engagement that *minimize collateral damage and injuries to non-combatants, and prevent dehumanization, bloodlust, cruel vengeance, or overkill.* We must never let ourselves sink to the level of the Serpent’s hissing, the Accuser’s baiting and taunting, or the Adversary’s ‘steal, kill, and destroy’ scorched-earth *modus operandi.* Even in the harsh throes of warfare, as we go about our assigned strategic tasks, in the course of keeping ourselves, our families, our brothers/sisters-in-arms as safe as possible, and the material goods and land the

Holy One has given us to tend and steward for Him, we are always to keep our focus on the ultimate goal of blessing the families of the earth. We are never to surrender to fear, overwhelm, or despair. Wrath is never to be embraced. Warfare is never to be ‘personal’; it is just a sometimes necessary, albeit unpleasant, part of being subjects of a Kingdom. Personal vengeance and ethnic/cultural disdain are always forbidden. No negative energy is ever to infect our motivation, our thoughts, our speech, or our behavior. Heaven help us if we veer off the path assigned to us and be found relating to the nations, ethnic groups, peoples, cultures and bloodlines of the world in any way other than that of *blessing*. Self-centeredness is not a Bride-like trait; neither is ethnic or cultural pride, skin-color preference, or any other form of arrogant hubris; neither are *sarcasm, cynicism, judgmentalism, conceit* or *condescension*; neither are attitudes of entitlement or demands concerning ‘rights’. Our mission is so much bigger than any of those things. It is to bring *blessing to all people whom the Holy One brings within our sphere of influence* – and to *model to all peoples what a glorious difference wisdom and love and the joy and peace that flows from intimate fellowship with the Creator makes in how a person lives and interacts with Creation in general and with others of his species in particular*.

The Searchlights with Which the Bridegroom Examines and Tries the Different Aspects of our Love

The Holy One has programmed into our Betrothal Covenant three primary barometers by which both the *purity* and the *maturity* of our love for Him can be revealed. He has given us three different kinds of instructions for life on planet earth in real-time, each kind of which tests a different spiritual organ of Divine Love – i.e. our ***heart*** [i.e. our emotions and passions] our ***soul*** [i.e. our wills and intellectual, decision-making, and behavior-determining faculties] and our ***might*** [i.e. our energies and efforts, talents and abilities, physical strength and material resources].

1. The Irrevocable, Essential Gift of Mitzvot

The first kind of instruction the Holy One has incorporated into our Betrothal Covenant is *mitzvot*. Often called ‘commandments’ in English translations, the Hebrew term *mitzvot* literally refers to acts through which the Divine Bridegroom calls us to *join ourselves to Him* and to *like an apprentice do whatever we see Him doing*.

The *mitzvot* of Torah are, pure and simple, what He is doing. *Mitzvot draw us close to Him*. They bring us under His close personal tutelage. And they *teach us how to co-create with Him*. The *mitzvot* of Torah thereby offer the perfect vehicle to test *the extent to which we love the Divine Bridegroom with all our hearts*.

2. The Eternal, Ever-Expanding Blessing of Mishpatim

The second kind of life-instruction our Covenant contains is *mishpatim*. Often called ‘judgments’ in our English Bibles, the Holy One’s *mishpatim* consist of responses to specific circumstances and controversies *based upon the Bridegroom’s perspective of right and wrong rather than our own*. Plain and simple, *mishpatim* are ‘*what Messiah would do.*’ *Mishpatim* are the tools by which the Bridegroom-King undertakes to teach us to *love what He loves*, to *hate what He hates*, and to *prioritize what He prioritizes*. Since this is so critical to our mission – and so essential to the Bridegroom-King’s Grand Plan of Redemption - Torah contains lengthy discourses dedicated solely to *mishpatim*⁵. These *mishpatim* discourses challenge us to truly *begin to understand and think the way our Divine Bridegroom thinks*. These discourses are designed to train us in the delicate process of applying His perfect blend of *wisdom* and *compassion* to people and situations – and to do so without getting offended at Him when what He instructs does not seem ‘fair’ or ‘just’ from our limited and imperfect human perspective.

The *mishpatim* sections of Torah thereby test the extent to which we love the Divine Bridegroom with all that part of our tripartite being which we call our soul. They cause our *wills* to line up with His. They shift the reasoning processes of our *minds* away from ‘tree of the knowledge of good and evil’ confusion to ‘tree of life’ clarity. And they bring our flesh-dominated emotions under His Kingly spiritual authority.

3. The Deep, Inspiring, Elevating Mystery of Chukim

The third kind of instructions for living the Holy One has given us in Torah are His *chukim*. Often called ‘ordinances’ or ‘statutes’, *chukim* are literally *engravings* – i.e. those things which *just are* instructed to do - whether they make sense to us or make us feel close to Him or not. The *chukim* of Torah test the extent to which we love the Divine Bridegroom with all our might/strength. So ... do you *really love* the Holy One with all your might/strength, Dear Reader? Or do you, like most people, have *lingering unresolved love-deficit issues* that prevent you from receiving and returning Divine Love and calling in an appropriate way? These things can be diagnosed and cured – if you will let me get more specific.

⁵ See for instance Exodus 21:1 – 24:3.

Getting More Specific – Test Number 1: The Tests of Sh'mar-ing and Asah-ing

With regard to each of these three kinds of Bridal lifestyle instructions there are two elements of application that the faithful and fervent Bride must learn to incorporate. True love both *sh'mar*'s and *asah*'s each of the three types of Bridal lifestyle instruction.

Yeshua said ***If you love me, you will keep*** [Hebrew *sh'mar*] ***my commandments***. He also likened the man who not only hears but also does [Hebrew *asah*] the life instructions he gives to a wise man who builds [also Hebrew *asah*'s] his house/household upon a rock. Take a lesson on love from the Messiah: The first test of covenant love and faithfulness is always whether one treasures/highly values the *words, worldview, and ways* of the covenant partner. That is the *sh'mar*-ing part. The second test of covenant love and faithfulness is whether one gives evidence of *sh'mar*-ing by actually adopting and incorporating into his or her daily life the covenant partners words, worldview, and ways. That is the *asah*-ing part. This is the message of the first verse of today's aliyah of Torah, which reads:

*You are to sh'mar to asah all the mitzvah with which I enjoin you today;
that you may live and multiply,
and go in and possess the land of which the Holy One swore to your fathers.*
[Deuteronomy 8:1]

Getting More Specific – Test Number Two: The Test of Following Where He Leads

Even beyond the life instructions of Torah however the Holy One has ways of testing our love - and diagnosing the nature of our lingering love deficits. Some of the most serious diagnostic tests He has programmed into the Betrothal covenant have to do with *the way we respond to His leading of us*.

He led us to the frightening banks of the Sea of Reeds every bit as much as He led us to the glorious chuppah of Sinai. He led us to the bitter waters of Marah every bit as much as He led us to the lush tropical paradise Elim. He let us get hot and thirsty and frightened – and He did it all *on purpose*. For Torah says:

*So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger,
and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know,
that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone;
but man lives by all that proceeds from the mouth of the Holy One.*
[Deuteronomy 8:3]

The Good Shepherd tests us when He leads us to feed in green pastures and drink from still waters. And He tests us as well when He leads us through the valley of the Shadow of Death and into the presence of our enemies. So ...how comfortable are you feeling right about now with His leadership? How safe do you presently

feel in His Hands? Do you think you could do a better job in designing a life for yourself than He has? How secure do you perceive your future as being with Him as your Shepherd? How much do you trust Him to know – and provide with perfect timing – what is good for you, needed in your of influence, and necessary for the survival and development of each member of your family?

A Bride in love goes whithersoever her Bridegroom goes - and does not second-guess His decisions. A Bride in love is content to eat whatever her Bridegroom provides – and murmuring or complaining is far from even her thoughts, much less her lips. A Bride in love gladly lodges wherever her Bridegroom lodges – and for the sheer joy of being with Him never thinks to feel in any way deprived, unloved, or mistreated whatever conditions the two of them may encounter. But a shrew with unresolved love-deficit issues? Well, I am afraid a shrew with unresolved love-deficit issues tends to respond *quite a bit differently* than a Bride.

Getting More Specific – Test Number Three: The Blessedness-Factor

Perhaps the most serious level of testing the quality and reality of our love, however, is encountered when the Bridegroom pours out upon blessings upon us. I am talking about not only *material blessings* but also *ministry blessings*. The more we have, you see – whether in finances or houses or vehicles or influence or ministry - the more our natural minds tell us we have to protect and defend. The same is true of *relationship blessings* and *revelation blessings* and every other kind of blessings.

Moshe has prophesied over us “***You will be blessed above all peoples***” [Deuteronomy 7:14(a)]. Much to our surprise this ‘blessedness factor’ will turn out to be His greatest test of our character – and our devotion to Him. What am I talking about, you ask? They say the toughest challenge you can give to anyone is to give them what they think they want - because then they have to make critical decisions related to how they will steward what they have received. So ...how are you handling the blessings in your life? Moshe tells us:

***When you have eaten and are full,
then you are to bless the Holy One your God for the good land that He has given you.
Beware that you do not forget the Holy One your God by not keeping [Heb. sh'mar-ing]
His commandments [mitzvot] His judgments [mish'patim],
and His statutes [chukot] with which I enjoin you today,
lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them;
and when your herds and your flocks multiply,
and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied;
when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Holy One you're God
who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage***

[Deuteronomy 8:10-14]

Have you ever wondered why our Bridegroom blesses us so richly? Some would say ‘Because he loves us!’ – and to some extent, of course, that is true. But it is more than that. He blesses us not only because He loves us but because *He wants to see how we will respond to the blessings we receive*. If we truly love Him, you see, we will accept the blessings graciously, humbly, and responsibly as the gifts of love they are. We will praise Him and honor Him before men for everything He has done, seeking no honor, glory or recognition on our own, and will use all the things with which He has blessed us in ways that advance His Kingdom and promote His Name. Ah, but if we still have *unresolved love deficits* – *i.e.* lingering spiritual issues which prevent us from receiving and returning Divine Love and calling in an appropriate way - we may come to think of the blessings as what the Bridegroom ‘owes’ to us for our service ... and may become arrogant, prideful, and downright surly if we do not get what we want when we want it. How are you doing on the test of blessedness?

The Precious Gift/Blessing of Memory

And while we are on the subject of loving the Holy One, I have another question: How good is your *memory*, Dear Reader? Last week in parsha *Va’etchanan* Moshe charged us: ***Rak hishamer lecha*** – *Only take heed to yourself ...* ***ush’mor nafsheicha me’od*** - *and diligently guard your soul, self – mind, will, and emotions ...* ***pen-tishkach et-ha-d’varim asher-ra’u eyneicha*** - *lest you forget all that your eyes have seen* **Deuteronomy 4:9a.**

Apparently a functioning memory and a focused matrix of remembrances is critically important to covenant life. Proper employment of our mind’s capacity for strategically-focused recall keeps us motivated, energized, and engaged in the Holy One and His Plan; laxity, disuse, and improper utilization of the same capacity allow all kinds of corruption, distraction, and seduction to creep into our lives. The kind of footprint we leave on our spheres of influence, depends in the first instance, upon *what we choose to remember* – and upon *what we choose to forget*. Memory is, after all, *the foundation stone of our testimony*. So Moshe wants to know exactly how good our memory is. He thinks it is *very, very important*. And he is right. Remembering Who the Holy One is and what He has done, Has promised to do, and has called us to do and not do is the first essential key to having a positive societal impact.

So ... how well do you remember the things that the Holy One says are really important – for instance, what is *holy* vs. what is *common*; what is *tahor* [whole, and/or leading towards wholeness] vs. what is *tamei* [fragmented and/or fragmenting]; and what is *sourced in the tree of life* vs. what *emanates from the tree of the knowledge of ‘good’ and ‘evil’*? How often do you allow your mind to call to mind the blessings and callings, the promises and warnings, the faithfulness and the mercies

of the Holy One? How often do you bring the devarim of Moshe to the forefront of your consciousness, meditate upon them, and act upon them? How much do you allow [a] your national and [b] your personal history with the Holy One your reaction to life's trials and challenges? We are witnesses; but the quality of our testimony depends upon not just our vantage point, but what we choose to remember and report about what we have observed or experienced.

Living In Covenant With the Holy One Requires Developing and Cultivating a Past-Present-Future Orientation to Life

Human beings choose to relate to the world around them primarily with one of three focuses: [1] a focus on the *fleshly aspects of life* (i.e. amoeba-like response to animalistic urges, appetites, drives, desires, and instincts, resulting in a fixation on sensuality, sexuality, sentimentality, and raw emotion); [2] a focus on the *pseudo-intellectual aspects of life* (i.e. abstract thought, theory, opinion, principle, conceptualization, ideology, socio-political argumentation, and the fixation on 'good' and 'evil', 'right' and 'wrong', 'justice' and 'injustice', and 'morality' and 'immorality' as abstract concepts); or [3] a focus on the *eternal spirit* aspects of life (i.e. the majesty of the Holy One, His Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan, the promises, terms, and conditions of the Covenant, and the assignments and briefings we have received or expect to receive regarding sparks of human potential, creativity, and/or ecosystem-enhancing capacity that we are called to seek out, uncover, and activate).

Living in the bondage of the flesh for extended periods of time produces a decidedly 'present-centric' orientation to life. For *servants of the flesh*, life quickly is always all about the 'now' – and especially about how what one is seeing, hearing, or feeling in the present tense is triggering them emotionally. Such people are easily distracted, easily seduced, easily manipulated, easily panicked, easily offended, easily outraged, easily deceived, and easily discouraged. They live for and in the *elusive moment*; they are thus like the flower that fades, the grass that withers, and the chaff that the wind drives away. They are fickle. They are restless. They will turn on anyone in an instant for daring to stand in the way of their pursuit of the sensation of physical or emotional pleasure.

Living in the ivory tower prison of *pseudo-intellect* for prolonged seasons, on the other hand, tends to result in a fixation on either *the distant past* or *the distant future* – and often a jumbled, agenda-motivated rewriting of the narrative of the past resulting in a paranoid panic about the future. Prisoners of the pseudo-intellect allow their thoughts and imagination to run wild in all directions – sometimes conjuring up or jumping on the bandwagon of dystopian 'worst-case scenario' conspiracy theories, while simultaneously subscribing to and swooning over

utopian/idealistic fantasies. Those who live out of the pseudo-intellect opt out of real life. They choose to live in a realm of abstract thought, conceptualization, ideology, philosophy, creed, and/or religion. They obsess over *social trends*. They fixate on *statistics*. They are drawn to fake news, pseudo-science, newspeak narratives, and useless tidbits of disinformation thinly disguised as ‘education’ like a moth is drawn to flame. They idolize argumentation. They delight in division. They feed off of controversy. They hang out in and get their briefings from media outlets that serve as echo-chambers for their chosen belief matrix – and instead of engaging in meaningful conversations with real people about real issues of life, they tend to be content to promote the agendas, shout the incendiary slogans, repeat the weaponized phrases, repost the sarcastic memes, and regurgitate on cue the over-simplistic *clichés*, shallow truisms, and misleading bullet points they hear in their ‘echo-chamber’ media outlets. They rush to judgment. They label everything and everyone with broad-brush labels – fixating on false dichotomies like who is ‘woke’ and who is a ‘Karen’; on who is ‘conservative’ and who is ‘liberal’, who is a ‘capitalist’ and who is a ‘socialist’; what kinds of lives do and don’t ‘matter’; and on who is and who is not a ‘racist’, a ‘sexist’, a ‘misogynist’, a ‘fascist’, a ‘patriot’, a ‘phobe’, a ‘conspiracy theorist’, a ‘deplorable’, etc., etc., etc. They don’t see human beings with faces, names, potential, uniqueness, and needs – they just see races, ethnicities, age groups, socio-economic classes, ideologies, philosophies, party affiliations, genders, religious orientations, and geographical regions of origin. They cannot focus for more than a moment on any actual human being’s pain or need; their mind fixates instead on finding someone – usually an institution or one or more of its representatives - to blame, to condemn, to oppose, to claim moral superiority over, to express utter disdain for, and to demand boycott, prosecution, defunding, public shaming, and cancellation of and/or reparation from. And, worst of all, slaves of pseudo-intellectualism actually think they are the smartest people in the room, and look on anyone who doesn’t subscribe to their narrative as not only inferior but vile.

And then there are the people who live out of, and by, the Covenant. These are people who meditate on the Torah day and night. These are people who constantly stir up their emunah by rehearsing the memories they have relative to the will, the ways, the words, and the works of the Holy One. They remember – and experience afresh - the magnificent downloads of Creation Week every Sabbath. They remember and relive the stories of the Patriarchs every Fall. They personally recall the horrors of bondage in Egypt and being gloriously delivered it every Pesach. They pause to reflect on all that took place on the road to and at Sinai between Firstfruits and Shavuot. They remember, and draw wisdom and understanding from, the Wilderness in the time leading up to and during the Three Weeks Between the Straits. They remember and revel in the devarim of Moshe during the

seven weeks of consolation. They learn how to live in a time-continuum of harmony and balance, applying all the lessons of our collective past to the situations, challenges, needs, and opportunities of present, while keeping a spiritually-illuminated ‘good’ eye firmly focused on the end-game/future Kingdom glory.

Proper and Improper Uses of Memory

One of the most wonderful and amazing gifts/blessings the Holy One has given to man, you see, is the ability to *remember*. The word our English Bibles translate as “remember” is *zakar*⁶. Strong’s lexicon renders this verb to mean “*to remember, recall, call to mind, focus on, and relive*’. It is first used in Genesis 8:1 to describe what the Holy One did in regard to Noah and his family, and the animals in the ark, that led Him to send a wind to hasten the drying up the floodwaters from the earth. It is what the Holy One promised Noah He would do in order that man and creation would never again be destroyed by a flood [the sign of which covenant was the rainbow].

Zakar means not *passive recall* but *active commemoration*. It is to periodically *celebrate* something – like one’s marriage vows [on an anniversary] or one’s birth [on a birthday]. It can even mean to *re-enact*. It means to bring the event being remembered to the forefront of your mind, to focus intently upon it, and to see it clearly and appreciate its significance appropriately through the enlightened perspective of time.

Those of you who have ever known anyone who had Alzheimer’s disease, or senile dementia, or even temporary amnesia from a concussion, can appreciate how precious the capability to accurately store and retrieve the data of one’s life experiences and learning truly is. The Holy One did not create us just to respond to stimuli like giant amoebae; He wanted us to be able to analyze and process and meditate on the sights, sounds, sensations and experiences we encounter in life, to learn from them, and to interact with Him – and with our fellow man—on the basis of those things stored in our memory banks. Without *memory* it is impossible to have *faith*. Without *memory* it is impossible to give - or receive - *love*. Without *memory* it is impossible to overcome *fear*. Without *memory* what good is a *covenant*? Without memory, a covenant would be meaningless – a fleeting illusion, seemingly here one moment, but gone and irretrievable the next.

So we have seen that the capacity to remember one’s experiences is a very, very *precious gift* of the Divine Bridegroom indeed. However with each gift of the Holy One comes responsibility. Memory, you see, is not the only precious gift made

⁶ *Zakar* is spelled *zayin, kaf, resh*, and pronounced *zaw-kar*’. It is Strong’s Hebrew word #2142.

available by the Holy One to the human mind. Another precious gift – *free will* – has been given. In light of this latter gift, the precious gift of memory can either be used *correctly*, to the honor of the Holy One – or, alas, it can be *misused* – and even *manipulated* - for selfish purposes. Some call this phenomenon ‘selective memory’. It means exercising free will to remember only what one wants to remember – and to conveniently *forget* inconvenient matters that one does not want to remember.

When the ‘selective memory’ phenomenon occurs, even a person called to new life by the Holy One can, over time, begin to *tolerate* – and ultimately even *adopt* – the mindset of the Serpent. The Serpent, you see, always directs his first line attack upon our memory. Remember his approach to Chava? He started it all by asking: *Did God truly say ...* Genesis 3:1. What was he doing? He was *testing Chava’s memory*. He was testing whether she could recall not only the Holy One’s *actual instructions*, but also their *context* and their *essential meaning*. Chava failed this critical test. Her error of memory was slight ...but *deadly*.

I have a news flash for you: the Serpent still uses the same methodology today. So how is your memory, Dear Reader?

Special Mitzvot of Remembering and Commemorating

Today’s aliyah contains what I call the *mitzvah of memory*. In the verses we read today, The Holy One calls upon us to *harness* and *employ* the precious gift of memory He has given us in specific ways - ways that will *lead to life for us* and will *bring honor and glory to Him*. One of the things which is to characterize the *am segulah* [the Holy One’s set-apart people], you see, is the exercise of the ability to remember, and keep in the forefront of our minds – at every ‘fork in the road’ or place of decision, the following things:

- [a] *the covenant* the Holy One has made with our forefathers and with us;
- [b] *the wonders* He has heretofore wrought on our behalf;
- [c] the fact that *He, and not ourselves, has produced whatever good things we have*; and
- [d] the fact that *He has allowed whatever bad things are in our lives* in order that He may, through them, teach and train us in the fear of heaven⁷.

The Essentiality of the Mitzvot of Commemoration To Developing Divine Perspective on Life

The Torah contains numerous *mitzvot* of memory. As part of our new creation

⁷ There are of course other things Torah tells us we are to remember. We are for instance to remember what Amalek did to us as we were being brought forth from Egypt to Mount Sinai. We are also to remember what the Holy One did to Miryam after she spoke evil of Moshe.

identities and destinies we are called upon to aggressively *remember* – and actively commemorate – certain very important events, occurrences, experiences and revelations.

Let us look at some of the things the Holy One told us to “remember”. He told us to ‘remember’ *the day in Egypt when we sprinkled the blood of the lamb on our doorposts, and the death angel passed over us. Exodus 13:3.* He told us to ‘remember’ *the Shabbat [Sabbath], and to cherish, treasure and carefully guard its holiness. Exodus 20:8.* He told us to remember *all the instructions of Torah* every time we look at *tzit-tzit [fringes/tassels]. Numbers 15:29-40.* He told us to ‘remember’ *that we were once slaves in Egypt, but have been brought forth from bondage by His mighty Hand and His outstretched Arm. Deuteronomy 5:15.* He told us to ‘remember’ *the deliverance He wrought for us, and how He crushed our enemies, at the Sea of Reeds. Deuteronomy 7:18.* And in today’s aliyah He tells us to ‘remember’ *how He led us through the wilderness, testing us and teaching us what it means to follow Him [Deuteronomy 8:2] and that it is the Holy One Who has given us the land, and the ability to produce wealth. Deuteronomy 8:18.*

Why does our Bridegroom insist on all this remembering and commemorating? It is a *way to empower – and strengthen - our love.* He knows that a Bride in love will remember the special moments she has shared with her Bridegroom – especially the ones the Bridegroom spends precious time and passion recounting in her ears. A shrew with unresolved entitlement issues makes for an unhappy, unloving, unpleasant, and toxic bride.

The *mitzvot* of commemoration empower us to put everything that happens in our lives into proper *perspective.* They enable us to step outside the mind-numbing din of current events and crises and see things from an eternal viewpoint. They allow us to step outside of time [to where the Holy One resides] and see events and crises taking place on earth as He sees them. Walking out the *mitzvah* of *zakar* thus allows us to keep our trajectory heavenward, to maintain stability and trustworthiness and covenant-faithfulness, and to therefore *make God-honoring choices at every fork-in-the-road.*

Divinely Enhanced Memory is Mission Critical

In today’s aliyah Moshe tells the generation who would enter the Land of Promise - and us as well – that there are certain things that we absolutely must REMEMBER. A good memory may mean the difference between fulfilling one’s Divinely ordained purpose in this life and settling for *something else.* Moshe says:

V’zacharta et-kol-ha-derech asher holichecha Adonai Eloheicha
Remember all the way which the Holy One your God has led you

zeh arba'im shanah b'midbar
these forty years in the wilderness,

l'ma'an anoteicha l'nasotcha
He sent hardships to test you [i.e. see what would come to the surface]

l'da'at et-asher b'lvaveicha
to determine what is in your heart,

ha-tish'mor mitzvotav im-lo
whether you will carefully keep watch over and treasure His life-instructions or not.

Hishamer lecha pen-tishkach et-Adonai Eloheicha
Beware lest you forget the Holy One your God,

levilti sh'mor mitzvotav
in not carefully guarding and treasuring his life-instructions

umishpatav v'chukotav
and his judgments/declarations as to what is right and just, and his statutes,

asher anochi metzaveicha hayom
with which I instruct you this day:

Pen-tochal v'savata
lest, when you have eaten and are full,

uvatim tovim tivneh v'yashavta
and have built goodly houses, and lived therein;

v'chol asher-lecha yirbeh
and all that you have is multiplied;

V'ram levaveicha v'shachachta et-Adonai Eloheicha
then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Holy One your God,

V'amarta b'lvaveicha kochi v'otzem yadi
and [lest] you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand

asah li et-ha-chayil hazeh
has gotten me this wealth.'

V'zacharta et-Adonai Eloheicha
But remember the Holy One your God,

ki hu ha-noten lecha koach l'asot chayil
for it is he who gives you power to get wealth;

l'ma'an hakim et-b'rityo asher-nishba l'avoteicha kayom hazeh
that he may establish his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as at this day.

Even just a little bit of forgetfulness, it seems, can be *absolutely deadly*. As Moshe puts it, if we forget the Holy One our God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them:

ki avod toveidun

then you will surely stray/wander off aimlessly

Kagoyim asher Adonai ma'avid mipneichem

as did the nations that the Holy One makes to stray/wander off aimlessly before you,

ken toveidun ekev lo tishmei'un b'kol Adonai Eloheichem

yes, you will stray/wander off because you wouldn't sh'ma the voice of the Holy One your God.

Tie a string around your little finger if you have to. Write yourself a sticky-note and put it on your refrigerator door if that helps. But do not ever let yourself forget how the Divine Bridegroom led you out of Egypt and from place to place by a pillar of fire and cloud! *Do not let yourself forget* how the Holy One gave you water from the rock when you were thirsty! *Do not let yourself forget* how the Holy One rained bread down on you from heaven when you were hungry! *Do not let yourself forget* how your clothes did not wear out, nor your feet swell! *Do not let yourself forget* how the Holy One gave you His words, His *mitzvot*, His instructions, to sustain you, to direct you, to define your righteousness in the eyes of the nations, and to cause you to remember Him. *Do not let yourself forget* how even when you yourself choose which way you will go, and when you draw water from your own wells, and harvest your own grain, and pick out new clothes and shoes, and eat your fill from the abundance of the Land, that the Holy One brought you here and gave you this land, and called you as a kingdom and priests to Him. *Do not let yourself forget* that you were chosen to talk, dress, eat, and live a lifestyle so different from the Egyptians and Canaanites that they would marvel at your God, and desire to know Him. *Do not let yourself forget.* Your destiny – and that of your children and children's children – could depend on it!!!

An Epidemic of Spiritual Alzheimer's

Alas, Spiritual Alzheimer's Disease is a plague upon the Holy One's people! Forgetfulness is absolutely killing us! We no longer talk, dress, eat, or live a lifestyle distinguishable from the pagans to whom we are supposed to be a burning and shining light! We have *forgotten* the Holy One our God! As a result of our memory/commemoration lapses, all creation is groaning! The sons of God are nowhere to be found! It is time to *arise*, Dear Reader! Let us return to the ancient paths, and remember the tender mercies and disciplines of our God. And let us be who He created us to be, and live as He created us to live. *Never, never, never forget!* In the words of the 'September Song'⁸: *Try to remember – and if you remember ... then follow.*

Accepting – and Benefiting From – The Discipline of Heaven

One of the things we are to remember is that the Holy One is not just a Bridegroom

⁸ The melody of this classic 1930s song was composed by Kurt Weill and the lyrics by Maxwell Anderson. It was featured in a 1938 Broadway show called *Knickerbocker Holiday*.

but a *Father* to us. Those whom the Holy One loves He disciplines - as a father disciplines his sons. For Moshe says:

V'zacharta et-kol-ha-derech asher holicheicha Adonai Eloheicha

Remember the entire path along which the Holy One your God led you

zeh arba'im shanah b'midbar

these forty years in the desert.

l'ma'an anoteicha l'nasotcha l'da'at et-asher b'lvaveicha

He sent hardships to test you, to determine what is in your heart,

Ha-tish'mor mitzvotav im-lo

whether you would treasure and be watchful to keep His mitzvot or not.

Vayaneicha vayar'iveicha

He made life difficult for you, letting you go hungry,

v'ya'achilcha et-ha-man

and then He fed you the Manna,

asher lo-yadata v'lo yadei'un avoteicha

which neither you nor your ancestors had ever experienced.

L'ma'an hodi'acha

This was to teach you

ki lo al-ha-lechem levado yichyeh ha-adam

that it is not by bread alone that man lives,

ki al-kol-motza fi-Adonai yichyeh ha-dam

but by all that comes out of the Holy One's mouth.

V'yadata im-levaveicha ki ka'asher yeyaser ish et-beno

You are thus to meditate on the fact that just as a man might chastise his child,

Adonai Eloheicha meyasreika

so the Holy One your God is chastising you.

*You are not a victim of circumstances. You are instead a beneficiary of Divine discipline and training, all of which has been designed – or at least is being used - for your good. This revelation can transform your life, Dear Reader. It will cause you to **sh'mar** the words of the Holy One – to treasure and carefully guard and keep diligent watch over to continue walking in them forever.*

The End Result of Zachar-ing – More and More Effective Sh'mar-ing

The Holy One wants us to understand that, if we 'remember', it will not just renew our mind and change our perspective – it will affect our *behavior* – indeed, our lifestyle - drastically.

V'shamarta et-mitzvot Adonai Eloheicha

And as you safeguard the instructions of the Holy One your God,

L'leicht b'drachav ul'yir'ah oto

you will walk in His ways and will maintain an appropriate sense of reverence toward Him.

Birkat Ha-Matzon – Speaking a Blessing after Enjoying Food and Bread

One of the things Moshe tells us to remember has to do with the food we eat. The Holy One has created man with both a need and a physical appetite for food. From the very beginning, in the Garden, the Holy One provided food for man to eat. In the Garden the Holy One made all kinds of food available to us in abundance. Of the fruit of every tree in the garden – save only one – we were invited to freely eat. We didn't have to work for it. The Holy One took care of all that. We just had to choose what we wanted, and reach up and take it. After the Fall however it ceased to be so. Banished from the Garden we had to till the ground - and toil with our hands, and sweat from our brow. That is, until we left Egypt - and suddenly the manna started to fall. As we looked at the sky and marveled, it was as if we were, in some small degree at least, back on the same footing with the Holy One we were on in the Garden. But alas the time for manna *is rapidly drawing to a close*. The moment we enter the land of promise the manna will cease to fall for us. And that means we will have some choices to make as to how we will think about 'food'. Will we begin to see food as *the product of our labors*? Or will we recognize *its true source* – our Divine Bridegroom. Moshe has a plan, to assure it is the *latter* instead of the *former*. He says:

V'achalta v'savata uverachta et-Adonai Eloheicha

When you eat and are satisfied, you are to bless the Holy One your God

al-ha-aretz ha-tovah asher natan-lach

for the good land that He has given you.

[Deuteronomy 8:10]

Radical! We are not to bless *the food* – we are to bless *the Lord!* We are not instructed to pause while still hungry to 'say grace' before eating, asking the Holy One to bless the human hands that prepared the food. We are instead instructed to *pause after eating our fill, and say a few words of thanks to the Holy One for the good Land He has given us*. We are not supposed to bless food in order to eat it; we are called to eat food in order that we may bless it.

The Good Land

I know most who are reading this study are in the *galut* [exile]. I know very few of us eat produce grown in the holy soil of *Eretz Yisrael* on a regular basis. But the land of the patriarchs is - has always been and always will be - an essential part of the Covenant the Holy One made with our forefathers.

You may or may not like the governmental officials or the policies of the modern Israeli State. That is your business. But a true child of the covenant has a hole in

his or her heart and soul the size and shape of the land. Whether you live there or not – whether you ever go there or not – the land of *Eretz Yisrael* is a part of who you are, is where you belong, and is where you will one day reside with Messiah. I recall writing a song about it when I was 17 – long before I had ever seen it. The words of the song’s first verse go like this:

*I know a place where rivers run slowly
...still waters ...green pastures ...mountains so high.
His feet tread there...each step is holy.
I’m gonna go there someday ‘ere I die.*⁹

What kind of land has He given us? The verses preceding the instruction to bless the Holy One for the good land describe that land’s innate goodness in detail. It is *el-eretz tovah* - a land flowing with goodness; it is a land *nachalei mayim ayanot* - with flowing streams, *utehomot yotze'im babak'ah uvahar* - and underground springs gushing out in valley and mountain. It is a land *chitah use'orah v'gefen ute'enah v'rimon, eretz-zevt shemen udvash* - of wheat, barley, grapes, figs and pomegranates, a land of oil-olives and honey-[dates]. It is a land *lo v'miskenut tochal-bah lechem lo-techsar kol bah* - where we will not eat rationed bread, or lack for anything. It is a land *avaneiha varzel* - whose stones are iron, *umeharareiha tachtzov nechoshet* - and from whose mountains you will quarry copper.

Develop – and diligently cultivate - the innate love for Israel the Holy One has placed in your heart, Dear Reader. It is a major part of your destiny.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. In Deuteronomy 8:2-3 Moshe tells us why the Holy One led us around the desert for 40 years. What were four of His purposes?
2. In Deuteronomy 8:7-9 Moshe lists the good things that we will find and enjoy in the Land of Promise. What were seven of those good things?
3. In Deuteronomy 8:10 Moshe tells us what to do each time we have “*eaten our fill*”. What are we to do, and how are we to do it?
4. In Deuteronomy 8:11 and 17 Moshe tells us to “beware” of two things. What are those two things?
5. What does Moshe prophesy will happen to us if we “forget the Holy One [our] God?” [Deuteronomy 8:19-20]
6. What does it mean to you to “forget the Holy One [our] God?”
7. In today’s haftarah aliyah *Yesha'yahu* [Isaiah] continues to comfort and console

⁹ Copyright William G. Bullock, Sr. 1972.

Tzion [Zion] over the disappearance/Diaspora of her “sons”, B’nei Yisrael.

*Your children will make haste;
your destroyers and those who made you waste shall go forth from you.
Lift up your eyes round about, and see:
all these gather themselves together, and come to you. As I live, says the Holy One
you will surely clothe you with them all as with an ornament,
and gird yourself with them, like a bride.
For, as for your waste and your desolate places, and your land that has been destroyed,
surely now will you be too small for the inhabitants,
and those who swallowed you up will be far away.
The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears,
‘The place is too small for me; give place to me that I may dwell’.
Then will you say in your heart, ‘Who has conceived these for me,
seeing I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile,
and wandering back and forth? And who has brought up these?
Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?’*

[Isaiah 49:17-21]

[A] Who does Yesha’yahu say prophetically is coming to Jerusalem?

[B] Who does Yesha’yahu say prophetically is leaving Jerusalem?

[C] Who does Yesha’yahu say prophetically will be adorned as a bride?

[D] Of what will the bride’s “bridal garments” consist?

[E] Read Revelation 21:2. How do you think that verse relates to today’s haftarah?

8. In today’s reading from B’rit Chadasha Shaul of Tarsus continues his description of the wonderful state of a person who has been declared positionally righteous on the basis of a rich, abiding, ever-expanding walk with Messiah. Shaul poses two rhetorical questions that are not as straightforward as one might think.

Who could bring a charge¹⁰ against God's elect¹¹? It is God who justifies¹².

¹⁰ In the Greek text the word our English Bibles translate as “charge” is *egkaleo*, Strong’s Greek word #1458, pronounced *eg-kal-eh'-o*. This word means “to come forward as accuser against” someone. Shaul used this word in his defense to King Agrippa to describe what the leaders of the Jewish counter-missionary movement did to get him arrested.

¹¹ In the Greek text the word our English Bibles translates as “elect” is *eklectos*, Strong’s Greek word #1588, pronounced *ek-lek-tos'*. The first usage of this Greek word is in Matthew 20:16, where Messiah taught “Many are called [Greek, *kletos*], but few are chosen [Greek, *eklectos*].” See also Matthew 24:22, 24, and 31: “*Unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved. But for the elect's [eklectos] sake, those days will be shortened. * * * For there will arise false messiahs, and false prophets, and they will show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect [eklectos]. * * * He will send out his angels with a great sound of a shofar, and they will gather together His elect [eklectos] from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.*”

¹² In the Greek text the word our English Bibles translate as “justifies” is *dikaioo*, Strong’s Greek word #1344 *dikaioo*, pronounced *dik-ah-yo'-o*. This Greek verb means “to declare, pronounce, one to be just, righteous, or such as he ought to be.” Messiah used this verb to describe how people who condemn others avoid applying the same standard of condemnation to themselves: “...*Wisdom is justified [dikaioo] of her children.*” Matthew 11:19, Luke 7:35; see also Luke 16:15: “*And he said to them, ‘You are they which*

*Who is he who condemns¹³? It is Messiah who died,
yes rather who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God,
who also makes intercession for us.*

[Romans 8:33-34]

[A] What is the first question Shaul asks in today's aliyah?

[B] The work of accusation is the *work of the Serpent* [see Genesis 3:5, where the Serpent accuses the Holy One of improper motives, and see Revelation 12:9-10, where the Serpent, also called *ha-satan*, is clearly identified as "the accuser"]. According to Torah, when is a *human being* authorized to "accuse" another?

[C] What is the difference between *accusing* someone [Romans 8:33] of something and *condemning* someone on the basis of that accusation [Romans 8:34]?

[D] According to Torah when can a human being rightfully "*condemn*" another?

[E] Write a "letter" to the Apostle Paul answering the questions Shaul asks in Romans 8:33-34. Be sure to explain your answer in terms that you could explain to your peers.

May your memory of the Holy One's wonderful love and of His mitzvot, never falter.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 85:4-7

*Turn us, God of our salvation,
and cause your indignation [Heb. ka'as – from a root verb meaning to displease or be displeased]
toward us to cease. Will you be angry with us forever?*

*Will you draw out your 'anger' [Hebrew af – from a verb meaning to expel air forcibly
through the nostrils – i.e. to issue a 'warning snort' like a bull] to all generations?*

*Won't you revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?
Show us your lovingkindness O Holy One.*

Grant us your salvation [Hebrew, yeshuateicha – i.e. your Yeshua].

justify [dikaioo] yourselves before men; but God knows your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

¹³ The Greek word is *katakrino*, Strong's Greek word #2632, pronounced *kat-ak-ree'-no*. Strong's renders it alternatively "to give judgment against, to judge worthy of punishment" and/or to "by one's good example render another's wickedness the more evident and censurable". Note the Master's use of this verb: ***The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn [katakrino] it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas [is] here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn [katakrino] it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon [is] here. Matthew 12:41-42.***