

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Ekev:** Deuteronomy 11:1-25
 Haftarah: Isaiah 50:10 - 51:3
 B'rit Chadasha: Romans 8:37-39

I will give the rain ...

[Deuteronomy 11:14]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 147:5-11;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the 3rd Blessing, *Kadosh* [The Prayer of His Holiness]

V'ahavta et Adonai Eloheicha – And you are to love the Holy One your God ...
v'shamarta mish'marto v'chukotav umishpatav umitzvotav – and cherish, treasure,
prioritize, and diligently guard His charge/assignments, His directions, His situation-specific
redemption/restoration instructions, and His decrees of right and fruitful living Deuteronomy
11:1a.

There is a new song filling up the atmosphere. I am not talking about that little four-chord keyboard melody your local worship leader wrote for his or her latest studio project. What I am talking about is the fiery foundational message Moshe has been shouting in our ears and pounding into our souls. Have you heard the song I am talking about? I call it “The Friend of the Bridegroom’s Theme”. This is a love song for the ages. The Friend of the Bridegroom’s Theme is: “*V'ahavta ... v'shamarta*” ... *v'yidatem - i.e. Love ... and Cherish ... and Know*”

What Does Love Consist of and Look Like?

Loving the Holy One is not an idea, a concept, or a feeling. *Thinking* you love Him, or *feeling like* you love Him, or periodically *saying* you love Him, or *wanting* to love Him, is not loving Him. Loving the Holy One is like loving a parent, a spouse, a child, or a friend: it calls forth and produces specific behaviors that demonstrate and prove love. What kinds of behaviors? What forms of proof? Moshe has said it many times, in many ways: *The definition – and the only real evidence - of loving the Holy One our God is sh'ma-ing, sh'mar-ing, and asah-ing the instructions for living He gave us in the Torah.*

Whatever the verse of the old prophet's song may be, the chorus is always this: *To love is to sh'ma, sh'mar and asah – and to sh'ma, sh'mar, and asah is to love. Failure to sh'ma, sh'mar, and asah always equals love grown cold; and love grown cold always equals failure to sh'ma, sh'mar, and asah.*

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The fiery old Prophet of the Plain simply *will not relent*. He cannot. It is burning within him – and he only has a few days left to make absolutely sure we get this essential truth for Kingdom living: to *know* the Holy One is to *love* Him; and to *love* Him is to fear/revere/honor Him enough to abandon all ethnic and cultural identification, self-will, self-interest, and self-determination and begin to see one's self simply as 'His servant'; to sh'ma His Voice - whether it be booming from Heaven or still and small, spoken live or inscribed from ancient times on the scroll of Torah; to follow Him wherever He leads; to trust Him to always be with you, to always be wise, to always be right, and to always be working things together for good, in order to bring redemption and restoration to every bloodline that emanated from Noach; and to therefore always cherish, treasure, walk in, live by, and asah His *mitzvot*, His *mishpatim*, and His *chukim*; and to voluntarily invest all one's energy, resources, passion, and delight in doing His Will.

Moshe's last role in the great drama of redemptive history, you see, is not prophet, or deliverer, or even rabbi; it is *shadchan* - i.e. matchmaker. The Exodus is now a *fait accompli*. The wilderness wanderings are now complete. Y'hoshua has been appointed and installed as the new leader of the ascendant Hebrew nation. Y'hoshua must increase, and Moshe must decrease. Moshe's role in the Camp of the Redeemed at this point is now that of the *Most Honorable Friend of the Bridegroom*. Before he dies Moshe considers it his sacred duty – as well as an awesome privilege – to help the Bride-to-be of the One he has served build a vibrant, healthy, fulfilling relationship with her – i.e. our - Bridegroom-King. He wants to inspire anyone who will listen to or read his final words to love the King the way He is beginning to. He wants to awaken us all to Divine Romance. Knowing that love – at least the Exquisite Love of the Holy One and His Bride People – conquers all, Moshe wants to inoculate us against the corrupt values, twisted priorities, flawed belief systems, and perverse practices of the nations, ethnicities, and cultures of the world by giving us something, and connecting us with Someone, far more wonderful to live for than the nations, ethnicities, and cultures of this world could possibly know.

Sh'ma-ing is What Lovers Do

Moshe has come to know the Holy One very, very well. From a rather inauspicious start at the burning bush the relationship has grown immensely. For forty years now Moshe has been permitted to speak with the Bridegroom King privately and personally. He has become very accustomed to speaking to the Creator of the Universe face-to-Face as a man speaks to his friend. As a result Moshe now knows very well what the Bridegroom King *likes*, what the Bridegroom King *thinks*, and what causes the heart of the Bridegroom-King to *dance with delight*. And perhaps even more importantly he also now has come to know what the Bridegroom King

deserves.

The Bride-to-be encamped before Moshe on the plain has been bestowed with great giftings and potential. But she is still very young, extremely inexperienced, and embarrassingly immature. She does not yet have the slightest clue even how blessed she is, much less how to love the Great King the way He deserves to be loved.

Moshe only has a little time left to try to remedy that situation. He is resolved, in the few days he has left on the planet, to at least make certain that the young, immature Bride-to-be understands that before and beyond anything else, what lovers absolutely must do is *sh'ma*. Before any bride tries to serve or please her beloved, and before any groom tries to delight and gladden his bride, they simply must learn to *sh'ma* each other. *Sh'ma*-ing is the way a covenant couple get in rhythm with each other and learn to *march to the same drumbeat* and *dance to the same song*. The Holy One understands fully how to *sh'ma* His People. The people, however, are very much in need being taught – and shown - how to *sh'ma* the Holy One.

What Does Sh'ma-ing the Bridegroom of Heaven Look Like?

“What does *sh'ma-ing* the Holy One look like?” you ask? *I'll tell you. Sh'ma-ing* the Holy One means *tuning out all other voices besides his*. It means focusing upon and doing solely only what He says, even if it means forsaking our *wills*, our *appetites*, our *likes and dislikes*, our *behavior patterns*, our *attitudes*, our *opinions about what is right and what is wrong, good and evil, foolish and wise, and fair and evil*. And *Sh'ma-ing the Holy One* also means *devoting ourselves totally to coming into agreement and alignment with His Thoughts and His Ways*.

Wow – this is serious stuff! That is why Moshe is spending so much time and energy *hitting this particular theme so hard in the next-to-last discourse of his life*. Moshe wants to burn *deep into our souls* the truth that one simply cannot love the Holy One the way He deserves to be loved unless and until we *can truly say – and mean with all our heart - “not my will, but Yours be done!”* We simply cannot truly love the Holy One our God and still say – or even think – *not YOUR WILL but mine*. We cannot love the Bridegroom of Heaven the way He deserves to be loved and still consider the things of this world - things from *food to security to material possessions to artistic expression to sexuality to entertainment to socialization to education of our children to religion to self-actualization to government to finances* – to be more important than what He has to say. We cannot love Him with bridal love and still think and live our lives as if we are better qualified to judge between right and wrong, good and evil, wise and foolish

than He is.

The prophet also knows – and wants us to know – that loving the Holy One our God does not mean ‘believing’ in Him in the way Westerners believe in things – i.e. with the intellect. To the contrary, Moshe wants us to know that *loving the Holy One our God means total surrender to the Words the Holy One has spoken over us and radically restructuring every facet of our lives to conform to the substance of those words.* The Biblical kind of *faith* - Hebrew *emunah* - is not a mind-game. It is a *Covenant Lifestyle* arising out of full-fledged surrender of one's heart, soul and strength to a Stronger Covenant Partner. It is trusting in the goodness, kindness, mercy, and majesty of a COVENANT PARTNER one knows well from real interactions, rather than settling for the seeming correctness of a belief system or creed one has learned at the feet of man. And it simply must involve excitedly, enthusiastically, consistently changing the way we do everything in life from our way to HIS WAY. This is the Friend of the Bridegroom's Theme. Are you getting it yet?

Five Times He Will Say It!

The *Friend of the Bridegroom's Theme* will be reiterated by Moshe five separate times in the aliyah of Torah we will read today. The process begins with opening verse of the aliyah, which reads:

V'ahavta et-Adonai Eloheicha

And you are to love the Holy One your God,

v'shamarta mish'marto v'chukotav umishpatav umitzvotav

and you are to cherish His watches, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments

kol-ha-yamim

all the days [at all times and seasons].

[Deuteronomy 11:1]

Note *the linkage* – Moshe insists that *loving the Holy One* cannot be separated from “*sh'mar-ing*” *His instructions for living*. If you do not *sh'mar* the Holy One's Words of instruction as to how life should be lived in *real time*, Moshe insists, you *do not really love Him*. You may think you do, but you do not. You see Beloved, one does not – cannot - *love* with one's *intellect*. Loving is not an intellectual exercise. Believing the Holy One exists and has provided a way of salvation for mankind is not love – else the demons, and Ha-Satan himself, could be said to love Him. See Ya'akov [James] 2:19-26.

Contrary to Western theology, one does not – cannot in any meaningful sense - *love* through a *belief system*. Loving God is not a theological enterprise. Things like doctrine, creed, and religious affiliation have nothing whatever to do with love. Knowing - or at least professing to believe – a list of things about God is not

even close to knowing HIM. To know Him is to *love Him*. And to love Him requires *absorption in His Beauty, trust in his uncompromising Goodness and Wisdom, and unconditional surrender to His Thoughts and His Ways*.

Second Verse, Same as the First

Moshe hits this 'Friend of the Bridegroom's Theme' hard again in verse 8, exhorting us:

*Keep/cherish [Hebrew **sh'mar**] all the mitzvah with which I enjoin you this day,
that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land ...
[Deuteronomy 11:8]*

Then in verse 13 Moshe restates the theme again:

*... if/when/to the extent you will diligently sh'ma my mitzvot
with which I enjoin you this day, and love the Holy One your God,
and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,
I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain,
and you will gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil.*

The fiery prophet is not through. He does not appear at all convinced that we 'get it'. Hence in verses 18-20 Moshe stresses the theme yet again:

*Lay up these devarim in your heart and in your soul;_
and bind them for a sign on your hand,
and let them be as symbols between your eyes.
Teach them to your children.
Speak about them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way,
and when you lie down, and when you rise up.
write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates*

And finally [for this parsha, at least], in verses 22-23 Moshe will say:

*if you shall diligently keep /cherish [Heb. **sh'mar**] all this mitzvah with which I enjoin you,
and do it, and love the Holy One your God,
and walk in all his ways, and cleave to him;
then the Holy One will drive out all these nations from before you,
and you will dispossess nations greater and mightier than yourselves.*

Are you beginning to see it? The Holy One actually *defines loving Him as total absorption in the mitzvot, mish'patim, chukot, and devarim of Torah*. The Holy One thinks it is essential to the nourishing of our relationship and the development of the kind of bridal maturity He deserves from us that we aggressively pursue and cultivate throughout our lives what basically amounts to *a holy obsession with the Life-Instructions He gave us at Sinai*.

Our calling is to be a *people of holy obsession*. We are to be obsessed about *Him*, and about *His Torah*. *How are you coming along on those two quests?*

Who Is Wooing Who?

There is a very important secret that many people do not know about the holy obsession calling which most people have missed throughout the centuries: our delving deep into Torah is not designed to make Him love us more. Oh no, it has always been the other way around – what our passionate obsession with Torah is designed to do is to make us love Him more! *Sh'ma*-ing, *sh'mar*-ing and *asah*-ing the Divine instructions and directions of Torah is not designed to make us look more beautiful and Bride-like to Him; it is instead designed to make Him look more beautiful and Bridegroom-like to us.

Think about it. Every relationship involves – and is dependent upon - give and take. One party has to give something - and the other party has to take what the other gives, embrace it, cherish it - and then give something back. A relationship only grows as long as this flow of give and take remains active and enthusiastic. Our Covenant relationship with the Holy One is the same. We cannot just take from our King. Without a vibrant and engaging 'give' component on our part we quickly get self-absorbed, petulant, demanding, and ... well, downright mean and shrew-like. The Holy One knows this. So He tells us what we need to give Him - not for His sake, but for ours.

Torah is designed to empower and enable and train us to love Him more – more passionately, more unselfishly, and more efficiently. It is not about us earning or deserving anything; it is about broadening our spiritual horizons so that we can truly begin to see and experience and testify to the world of more and more of the hidden facets of His Infinite Beauty, of His Inexhaustible Wisdom, and of His Indescribable Worth. Our Bridegroom-King does not give us the life-instructions of Torah to treasure and study and *asah* [do, build] in order that we can make ourselves more desirable to Him; He gives us the life-instructions of Torah to treasure and study and *asah so that He can be seen for Who He is, and thereby become more desirable to us*. To cut ourselves off from His Torah is to *lock or freeze our experience of His love at the foundational, earliest stages of courtship level*. At this stage, we are able to acknowledge, as were the mixed multitude that walked out of Egypt the morning after the plague of the firstborn, that the Holy One is good, has done great wonders, and can deliver us from bondage.

Good stuff, right? Oh, but there are *so many more* levels and layers and strata of His love for us than that! Our Divine Bridegroom's love for us is *vast as an ocean*. And the portals through which we are taught to explore and marvel at and appropriate and bask in the vastness of His Love are the *mitzvot, mish'patim* and *chukot* of Torah.

Part 2 of the Kryat Sh'ma

In today's final aliyah of *Ekev* we discover another part of the daily affirmation of faith that the sages incorporated in the *Kryat Sh'ma*²:

Vehayah im-shamoa tishmei'u el-mitzvotai

It will be, if/as/when/to the extent you diligently sh'ma My mitzvot

asher anochi metzaveh etchem hayom

with which I enjoin you this day,

l'ahavah et-Adonai Eloheichem

to love the Holy One your God,

ul'ov'do b'chol-levavchem uv'chol-nafsheichem

and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,

V'natati metar-artzechem be'ito

that I will give the rain³ of your land in its season,

yoreh umal'kosh

the former rain⁴ and the latter rain⁵,

v'asafta deganeicha v'tiroshcha v'yitzhareicha

that you may gather in your grain, and your new wine, and your oil⁶.

V'natati esev b'sad'cha

I will give grass in your fields

livhemeicha v'achalta v'savata

for your cattle, and you will eat and be full.

[Deuteronomy 11:13-14]

There it is: *sh'ma*-ing the life instructions of the Holy One is the great gateway that leads to the wonder of loving Him for Who He is. Loving the Bridegroom King is

² The *kryat sh'ma* consists of the recitation of Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Deuteronomy 11:13-17, and Numbers 15:37-41. Recited twice daily, this affirmation is the center of gravity of Hebraic thought life.

³ The word our English Bibles translate as "rain" in this passage is *matar*, mem, tet, resh, Strong's Hebrew word #4306, pronounced *maw-tawr'*. *Matar* does not, however, mean only 'rain' in the sense of precipitation. Rather, it refers Hebraically to *anything that falls or is dispatched from heaven to earth*.

⁴ The word which is here translated "former rain" is *yoreh*, yod, vav, resh, hey, Strong's Hebrew word #3138, pronounced *yo-reh'*. It is the name by which the rain which falls in Eretz Yisrael from late October until early December is called. The same word is used in Jeremiah 5:24, where we are told that, despite what Moshe told our fathers in parsha *Ekev*, "*Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Holy One our God, that gives rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he reserves unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest.*"

⁵ The word which is here translated "latter rain" is *mal'kosh*, mem, lamed, kuf, vav, shin, Strong's Hebrew word #4456, pronounced *mal-eh-koshe'*. It is the name by which the rain which falls in Eretz in March and April, just before the harvest, to provide the final growth that yields produce.

⁶ The word which is here translated "oil" is *yitzar*, yod, tzade, hey, resh, Strong's Hebrew word #3323, pronounced *yitz-hawr'*. The verb root of this word is *tzahar*, tzade, hey, resh, Strong's Hebrew word #6671, pronounced *tzaw-har'*. It means he *glistens, glows, or shines [or he causes to glisten, glow, or shine]*.

the great portal that leads to serving Him with all one's heart and soul as He deserves and is our inestimable joy, honor and privilege. Serving Him with all one's heart and soul, in turn, leads to *rain in season*. And rain in season leads to three bountiful harvests – the harvest of *standing grain*, the harvest of *new wine*, and the harvest of *precious oil*.

What's Love Got to Do With It?

Between Moshe's repetitive refrain that we are to "*love the Holy One*" [see e.g. Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:12, 15, and 11:1, 22, 19:9, 30:16.20] and the beautiful passage we have been reading this week from the apostolic writings [*Who shall separate us from the love of Messiah ...?*] it is appropriate that we should pause and re-examine and re-evaluate the meaning of the phrase "*the love of God*" and to reflect upon its impact in and upon our lives. What exactly does this all-important phrase really mean?

The "love of God" has to be more than just a "feel-good" phrase (the kind of phrase preachers throw into their sermons as "amen" triggers, to hype the crowd). So let us look *beyond the hype*. What is Moshe talking about when he repeatedly charges us to "love the Holy One our God"? What is Shaul really talking about when he speaks to the Romans [and to us] of "the love of God"? How can "the love of God" become really meaningful in our lives? Looking at the phrase in the Greek [the language in which we find the oldest reprinted texts of Romans⁷] does not help much. In Greek, the phrase is "*agapes tou Theos*". Both Greek and English leave us "directionally confused". The Greek word "*tou*" and the English word "*of*" are both non-directional – in other words, the phrase the "love of God" can mean God's love toward us, or it can mean our love toward God. So which is it? Is Shaul saying the 10 "bad things" of life cannot stop *the Holy One from loving us*? Or is he saying that the 10 things cannot stop *us from loving Him*? Hmmmmn.

Moreover, our problem with the phrase as rendered in English or in Greek is not just directional. We must also question what the phrase "the love of God" [*agapes tou Theos*] means *substantively*. In other words, what exactly is "love" in this context? Is it a *warm, tingly feeling like infatuation*? Is it a *general sense of affection or desire*? Is it *tangible* or *intangible*? Is it *spiritual only*, or does it have *physical implications*? What does it have to do with our lives? As Tina Turner put it: "*What's love got to do with it?*"

Looking At Love Through A Hebrew's Eyes

When the 'love of God' phrase is considered Hebraically, both the directional and substantive conundrums of the English and Greek renderings disappear. The phrase

⁷ The original letter has not been found, and there is no way to know if the original was penned in Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic. The oldest copy – or actually a fragment - from this letter that has been found located is written in late classical Greek.

“love of God” in Hebrew would be *ahavat Adonai*. *Ahavat Adonai* is a *picture* - not an abstract concept like “*agapes tou Theos*” or “*the love of God*”. *Ahavat Adonai* is a *never-ending series of actions flowing back and forth, out of and back toward the Master of the Universe*. It is *responding to the Divine Bridegroom in a way fitting for His Bride*.

Ahav [the Hebrew word we translate as love] is the sound made by two people breathing in and breathing out. It is thus a word picture describing an intimate relationship, in which both partners – the human and the Divine – fill their days seeking after each other, performing reciprocal acts of kindness toward each other, communicating affectionately yet frankly with each other, learning to intuitively sense each other’s desires and respond to them appropriately ... all while “breathing each other’s air”. *Ahavat Adonai* is thus *breathing whatever “air” the Divine Bridegroom exhales* – and not seeking one’s own “atmosphere” independent of the Holy One. It is a picture of two becoming one, and living as one, and walking in the Garden as one, and of working in the field as one. With this understanding, let us return to the opening verse of today’s aliyah.

Ahavat Adonai [love the Holy One] ***your God,***
and sh’mar [cherish, cling to, consider precious and guard with your life] ***His charge,***
and his statutes, and his ordinances, and his mitzvot, always.
[Deuteronomy 11:1]

Is it *possible* that the “love of God” of which Shaul is speaking in Romans 8 is not a “New Testament” doctrine - but the very lifestyle of Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya’akov, Yosef, Moshe ... and the list goes on? Is it possible that’s what Yeshua of Natzret meant when He said: ***If you love Me keep My Commandments?***⁸

The Former and Latter Rains

To finish out parsha *Ekev* Moshe has some interesting things to say about the connection between *sh'ma*-ing the Voice of the Holy One, the release of the *former and latter rains*, and the harvest seasons the Holy One has designed for us. Moshe speaks on behalf of the Divine Bridegroom, saying:

I will give **matar** [i.e. rain] ***for your land in its season,***
the **yoreh** [i.e. early rain] ***and the **malkosh***** [i.e. latter rain],
that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil.
[Deuteronomy 11:14]

The Holy One has designed three distinct seasons of harvest for us. Each is intrinsically connected with *rain* – i.e. *tal shamayim* [the ‘dew of Heaven’]. This all

⁸ This statement was made twice by Y’shua in the course of His *Upper Room Discourse* during the First seder of Pesach, the evening before He submitted to execution. **John 14:15, 23.**

relates back to Genesis 27⁹, when Yitzchak drew Ya'akov near to him and blessed him, saying:

*Surely, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Holy One has blessed.
Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven,
Of the fatness [or oil] of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine.*

[Genesis 27:27-28]

The earliest harvest season each year is the season of grain. In Hebrew the term use is *dagan*, literally meaning *ground cover*. In Israel the harvesting of standing grain usually starts in March or April, coinciding with *mo'edim* of *Pesach* and *Chag-ha-Matzah*. The first natural grain to mature is barley. After that, in May and June comes the harvest of wheat [in Hebrew, *chittah*], coinciding with the *mo'ed* of *Shavuot*, and in June and July comes the harvest of flax [in Hebrew, *pishteh*], coinciding with the season of our deepest tribulation, sorrow, and mourning.

The harvest of grapes [in Hebrew *anavim*, the fruit from which new wine is extracted] begins in approximately May/June and continues through September/October, coinciding with the *mo'edim* of the High Holy Days. Last of all comes the harvest of the *olive* [Hebrew *zayit*, the fruit from which oil is extracted], which begins in mid-to late September and continues into if not through November.

In *Eretz Yisrael* there are two rainy seasons – one in the early spring and one in the early fall. The quality of all the harvests of the land *depends upon the timing and quantity of the rain that falls from Heaven in these two seasons*. If the former rain¹⁰ [the *yoreh*] does not fall in October through December our land will be too dry in the spring season of new growth. If the latter rain [the *malkosh*] does not fall in March and April [i.e. between *Purim* and *Pesach/Matzah*], our crops will wither on the vine and stalk and yield no harvest. *We must have the rains. We must trust our Divine Bridegroom for the rains.* And Torah tells us that the rains will only come in their seasons if, as, when, and to the extent we *sh'ma* the Holy One's instructions for living. In verses 10 - 14 of chapter 11 Moshe explains. He tells us clearly:

Ki ha-aretz asher atah va-shamah

The land that you are about to occupy

l'rishtah lo che'erezt Mitzrayim hi asher yetzatem misham

is not like Egypt, the place you left

asher tizra et-zar'acha

where you could plant your seed

⁹ It actually goes back even further, to Genesis 1:11, where we are told the Creator said, "*Let the earth bring forth deshe* [grass], *eseh* [green plants] *that yields seed, and etz p'ri* [fruit trees] *that yield fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth.*"

¹⁰ The former rain begins to fall immediately after *Sukkot* and continues intermittently through *Chanukah*.

v'hish'kita v'ragleicha k'gan ha-yarak
and irrigate it by yourself, just like a vegetable garden

V'ha-aretz asher atem overim shamah l'rishtah
But the land which you are crossing to occupy

eretz harim uveka'ot
is a land of mountains and valleys

lim'tar ha-shamayim tishteh-mayim
which can be irrigated only by the rain.

Israel is a land whose inhabitants are *totally dependent upon rain*. If it rains in Israel in the spring and the Autumn there will be a lush carpet of grass for our livestock and crops will be abundant. But there is no annual alluvial flood in Israel such as occurs in Egypt. So if there is a period of drought in either the Spring or in Autumn, what in wet years are grassy, green, fertile hillsides and lush, tropical, valleys quickly become a veritable desert-scape. In such a land as Israel there is a dependence upon the Holy One unmatched anywhere in Egypt¹¹.

Modern Israelis have introduced man-made irrigation systems. These irrigation systems have made the desert spring forth with abundant life - *however*, this abundance cannot be sustained without the favor of the Holy One manifested by appropriate quantities of rain in season. The topography of Israel is such that it does get run-off from any of its neighboring countries. Rain therefore must fall *on Israel itself* – not just on adjoining areas - for there to be a harvest. Moshe tells us:

Eretz asher-Adonai Eloheicha doresh otah tamid
It is land which the Holy One your God watches over constantly.

eynei Adonai Eloheicha bah
the eyes of the Holy One your God are on it,

m'reshit ha-shanah v'ad acharit shanah
from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.

V'hayah im-shamoa tish'mei'u
If/When you are careful to pay heed

el-mitzvotai asher anochi Metzaveh etchem hayom
to my mitzvot, which I am setting out for you today

l'ahavah et-Adonai Eloheichem
to love the Holy One your God

¹¹ In Egypt the water supply from the Nile is basically constant; the water supply in Israel, by way of contrast, is sporadic, and hence more clearly a vehicle of God's will. Although Israel does have a river – the Yarden [Jordan] - on its Eastern boundary, that river is not only much smaller than the Nile, but is 300 meters below sea level, at the lowest point of the land and thus not very helpful for watering fields at higher elevations, absent mechanical pumps [which, of course, our ancestors did not have].

ul'ovdo b'chol-levavchem uv'chol-naf'sheichem,
with all your heart and all your soul,

V'natati metar-ar'tzeichem
I will give fall and spring rains in your land

b'ito yoreh umalkosh v'asafta deganeicha
at their proper time, so that you will have an ample harvest

v'tirosh'cha v'yitzhareicha
of grain, oil and wine.

Whether or not we receive the life-giving rain the land needs – and we need to prosper – will depend upon whether we are careful/diligent to **sh'ma** the *mitzvot* of the Holy One's Covenant, as part of on-going intimate relationship of love with the Divine Bridegroom. *Mitzvot* birthed out of passionate love equals *rain in season*.

Who'll Stop the Rain?

The word our English Bibles translate as “rain” in this passage is *matar* – *i.e. mem, tet, resh*¹². *Matar* is the same word with which the Holy One described the waters that descended from the Heavens in connection with *ha-mabuwl* [the flood]. See Genesis 7:4. The Hebrew word *matar* however does not mean only 'rain' in the sense of precipitation. Rather it refers Hebraically to *anything that falls or is dispatched from heaven to earth*. It can be anything that the Holy One sends forth across the “gap” that separates heaven and earth. Think about that for a moment. What gifts of the Holy One bridge the gap between Heaven and earth? Rain as we know it is the classic example, of course, of what bridges the gap between Heaven and earth. But consider that even 'bread' or 'fire', when they fall from heaven, are described by Torah as "*matar*". Torah tells us the Holy One “rained” [*h'matar* – caused to rain] fire on S'dom. Torah also tells us the Holy One “rained” [the root word is again *matar*] manna down from Heaven on the Redeemed Community. **Exodus 16:4**.

Thus, "*matar*" in Torah means much more than just precipitation; it is symbolic of any and every connection between the heavens and earth – and, hence, of every interaction' between God and man originating from 'heaven'. This takes us back to the earlier discussion regarding *ahavat Adonai* – the love of God. As we stated in that discussion, *ahavat Adonai is a never-ending series of actions flowing back and forth, out of and back toward the Master of the Universe*. He gives the *yoreh* [former rains] and waits for us to respond. Then He gives the *malkosh* [latter rains], and we bring forth fruit – like the dust from which we came.¹³

The Holy One's people, not unlike Eretz Yisrael, are dependent upon a seasonal

¹² *Matar* is Strong's Hebrew word #4306, pronounced *maw-tawr*'.

¹³ Genesis 2:7: “*And the Holy One God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*”

outpouring of life-giving “rain” for our sustenance and survival. If we do not receive “rain” in season - and I am speaking now of the outpouring of the *Ruach HaQodesh* - the source of our eternal spring of life - we *dry up* and *produce nothing but thistles, thorns, and scorpions*. What do we do if/when that happens? Some of us give up and die. Some borrow just enough *water* from their neighbor’s cistern to stay alive. Others try to “pump” water from somewhere else where the rain is falling. But none of these approaches are what the Holy One intended - because not one of them involves *loving* and *seeking* the Holy One, *trusting* Him, and *waiting upon* Him.

Water from a neighbor’s cistern, or from a spring in another geographic location, will not solve your problem for long. The kind of water our souls need must fall *on us* – just as it must fall on Eretz Yisrael - if it is going to have any lasting effect. So in this dry season of mid-summer we pause to meditate on the rain – the *matar* of Heaven. And this is our prayer:

*Master of the World, Who loves us, and Whom we love:
we look to the heavens, and we fix our eyes on you.*

*There is nothing we can do to make it rain.
There is nothing we can buy or borrow that will substitute for rain.*

*Have mercy on us, O Compassionate One! Forgive our transgressions of Your Torah!
And remember your covenant with our fathers.
And send the rain in its season.*

Questions For Today’s Study

1. In Deuteronomy 11:2-6 Moshe lists at least 9 separate things that the Holy One had shown to the Redeemed Community which should convince them to *value* and *cherish* and *cling to* and *walk out* His teachings. What were the things listed by Moshe that the Redeemed of Israel had seen?

2. In today’s aliyah the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya’akov tells us that the land of Israel is drastically different from the land of Egypt.

[A] What “natural” thing did the Holy One say would be the key to fruitfulness in the land of Israel?

[B] Review the following passages:

Leviticus 26:3-5;
Ps. 104:13-14;
Joel 2:22-23;
Hosea 6:3; and
Zech. 10:1.

And read also the section labeled “Hydrology” in THE MOODY ATLAS OF BIBLE LANDS (pages 46-51 for persons over 13; pp. 46-48 for children under 13). Then write a **short essay** describing [i] the significance of rain on the

productivity of our land, and [ii] the prophetic symbolism of rain as you see it.

[C] Is the place where you live more like Israel or more like Egypt? Explain your answer.

3. In today's final haftarah aliyah for parsha *Ekev Ha-navi Yeshayahu* [the prophet Isaiah] continues to speak words of comfort and consolation¹⁴ to exiled Israel. In this passage Yeshayahu prophesies of a day to come when Israel's exiled sons and daughters will be re-established in the land. He then passionately exhorts all captive and exiled sons and daughters of the Covenant to trust in the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov [instead of their own efforts to bring about social change by "kindling a fire" of their own making].

Mi vachem yerei Adonai shomea b'kol aveido

Who among you fears the Holy One? He who sh'ma's the voice of his Servant -

asher halach chashechim v'eyn nogah

i.e. he who walks in darkness and has no light!

lo yivtach b'shem Adonai v'yisha'en b'Elohav

He who trusts in the name of the Holy One and relies on his God.

Hen kuleichem kodeichei esh

Behold, all you who kindle a fire,

me'azrei zikot

who gird yourselves about with firebrands;

lechu b'ur eishchem

you walk in the flame of your own fire,

uvezikot bi'artem

and among the brands you have kindled.

miyadi hayetah-zot lachem

This will you have of my hand;

l'ma'atzevah tishkavun

you will lie down in sorrow.

Shimei'u elay rodfei tzedek

Sh'ma, you who follow after righteousness,

mevakshei Adonai

you who seek the Holy One:

habitu el-tzur chutzavtem

look to the rock whence you were hewn,

¹⁴ This is the second of seven *haftarot of consolation* which we read following *Tisha B'Av*, when we mourn over the destruction of the Temple.

v'el-makevet bor nukartem
and to the hold of the pit you were dug.

Habitu el-Avraham avichem
Look to Avraham your father,

v'el-Sarah techoleichem
and to Sarah who bore you;

ki-echad kerativ v'avarcheihu v'arbeiuhu
for when he was but one I called him and blessed him and made him many.

Ki-nicham Adonai Tziyon nicham
For the Holy One has comforted Tziyon;

kol-chorvotaiha vayasem midbarah ke'Eden
he has comforted all her waste places and has made her wilderness like `Eden,

v'arvatah kegan-Adonai sason
and her desert like the Holy One's garden

v'simchah yimatzei vah
joy and gladness shall be found therein,

todah v'kol zimrah
thanksgiving, and the sound of melody.

[A] What 3 groups of people does *Yeshayahu* address in this prophecy?

[B] What do you think *Yeshayahu* is talking about when he refers to “*all you who kindle a fire, who gird yourselves about with firebrands*”?

[C] What does *Yeshayahu* mean when he says these people who *kindle a fire, and gird themselves with firebrands* will “*walk you in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that you have kindle*”? Give an example of how this might happen in your life.

[D] Explain how the Holy One's “rain” [as promised in today's Torah aliyah should the Redeemed Community continue to love the Holy One and cherish, cling to, and walk out His instructions for living [Torah] as He created and empowered us to do] fits into the promises of Isaiah 51:3?

4. Today's reading from the apostolic writings is from Romans 8:37-39. In these familiar verses Shaul responds to the question he posed yesterday [8:36] about whether persecutions or deprivations or even death can separate us from “the love of God”. His response constitutes the crescendo of the chapter, ending it with a bold exclamation point.

***No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.
For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing,
will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Messiah Yeshua our Lord.***

[A] In Romans 8:37 Shaul says that “*in all these things*” [KJV] or “*amid*”¹⁵ all these things” [Ampl.] we are “more than conquerors”¹⁶. What are the “these things” to which Shaul is referring?

[B] Through whom do we become more than conquerors/overcomers?

[C] How can we be conquerors/overcomers yet still be “amid” or “in” all those bad things?

[D] What 10 specific things does Shaul say he is convinced/persuaded cannot separate us from the love of God?

[E] Read II Corinthians 1:3-9; 4:6-11; and Ephesians 6:11-12. How many of the ten things Shaul mentioned in Romans 8 had Shaul *personally endured* yet continued in *ahavat Adonai* [the love of God]?

*May He open the windows of Heaven and send His rain upon you in its season.
And may nothing separate you from Ahavat Adonai.
Shabbat Shalom to all.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 147:5-11

*Great is the Holy One, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite.
The Holy One upholds the humble. He brings the wicked down to the ground.*

Sing to the Holy One with thanksgiving.

*Sing praises on the harp to our God, Who covers the sky with clouds,
Who prepares rain for the eretz,*

Who makes grass grow on the mountains.

He provides food for the cattle, and for the young ravens when they call.

He doesn't delight in the strength of the horse. He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man.

*The Holy One takes pleasure in those who fear Him,
in those who hope in His lovingkindness.*

¹⁵ The Greek preposition is en, Strong's Greek word # 1722. *En* is a *primary preposition* denoting (fixed) position (in place, time or state). It implies a *state of rest*, an *intermission* between, or in the middle of, a series of events or trials [Hebrew writers would insert the word 'shabbat'].

¹⁶ The Greek word our English Bibles translate as “*more than conquerors*” is hypernikao, Strong's Greek word #5245. This is a compound word, consisting of *hyper* [Strong's Greek word #5228], a Greek preposition meaning *beyond*, or *over and above*, and *nikao* [Strong's Greek word #3528], meaning to overcome, or to prevail in combat or contest.