

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Re'eh:*** Deuteronomy 14:1-29
 Haftarah: Isaiah 54:16-17
 B'rit Chadasha: I John 4:3

The Holy One has chosen you to be his treasured possession.

[Deuteronomy 14:2]

Today's Meditation is Psalms 112:9-10;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #1, *Da'at* [The Prayer for Knowledge]

Banim atem l'Adonai Eloheichem – You are sons of/unto the Holy One your God ...
Deuteronomy 14:1a.

One of the most potent atmosphere-shifting, vision/perspective-altering downloads with which Moshe stuns us this week is the revelation that we are as '*CHILDREN*' (Hebrew, *banim*) *UNTO THE HOLY ONE OUR GOD*. Deuteronomy 14:1a. *Selah* – pause, and meditate quietly and reverently regarding the implications and ramifications of that!

This startling introduction of the 'FATHER-CHILD PARADIGM OF GOD/MAN RELATIONSHIP' provides the source material Yeshua's instruction to address our prayers/tefillah to '*Our Father* (Hebrew '*Avinu*') *Who is Heaven*'. Before Moshe revealed this, it was easy for man to fear Him, but hard for man to imagine 'fullness of joy' in His Presence or 'pleasures forevermore' delight in His company. Before the introduction of the Father Paradigm, men could write their Creator off as some aloof deity, living in a far-off, inaccessible realm, who treats inferior mortals like pieces on a chessboard to toss around. Moshe wants to see to it that we never surrender to the serpentine lie of thinking of 'God' like that! He wants us to see, relate to, and talk about the Holy One as He really is – a Father-figure! He wants us to understand that our Creator thinks of us as *beloved sons and daughters* – precious offspring bearing His image and life force for He has the responsibility to watch over, bless, nurture, provide for, protect, inspire, encourage, empower, and train up as we should go. He knows that what will drive the nations around us to look at us and say: *What great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Holy One our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?* Deuteronomy 4:7. It is all part of the *Fatherhood/Head-of-households factor!*

The Fatherhood/Head of Household Factor

The revelation that the Creator of the Universe is '*Our Father*', and that we sons

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and daughters in His eyes, is a radical leap forward in *da'at* – *i.e.* spiritual knowledge of mankind. This understanding throws open doors to levels of relationship and to dimensions of God-man interaction, conversation, co-laboring, and inspires levels of trust in and responsiveness to the Almighty that no other nation or people have ever imagined. It also helps us to understand why He cares about, and gives instructions to us, about a lot of subjects that an aloof deity would not care about – *e.g.* what we *eat*; how we *dress, adorn, and present ourselves to the world*; what we *talk about* as we sit in our homes, as we walk by the way, as we lie down, and as we rise up; what we teach our children; and *what we inscribe on the doorposts of our houses and our gates*. As the Holy One's children, we represent Him. We have no 'self-image' to project or protect – our sole purpose is to show the world HIS image. We have no 'brand' to display or peddle - we bear, wear, and share HIS brand. We have no 'label'. We have no 'style'. We have no 'schtick'. We have one job – to model the Attributes, Qualities, Ways, Focuses, and Priorities of His Household to the world on the stage framed for us by the *mitzvot, mishpatim, and chukim* of Torah. What strangers to the Household see in us – for good or otherwise - they will naturally project upon Him. They expect the old sayings to be true: “*Like father, like son!*” and “*The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.*”

Part of representing the Holy One as a *child* – *i.e.* a representative of His Royal Household – involves letting Him establish all our rules of engagement with the world. That includes not only our worldview, attitude, body language, and the subject matter of our conversations, but also our *entire template of personal appearance, apparel, adornment, accessorizing, grooming, and presentation*. He is our Father, and He invested passion and creative effort in making each of us look as we do. We are not to conform to fashion or 'body art' trends of the pagan world. We are to bear the image of our Father, as defined in Torah – and disfigure it with no self-imposed, self-willed, or human-designed marks, images, or statements. This is why, at the high point of the 'love chapter' of the Great *Kedusha Discourse* at Sinai, the Holy One told us we who love Him and our fellow man are never to disfigure ourselves through piercings or tattoos. See **Leviticus 19:18**. Such things are marks of 'another father'. They are marks of service to other gods - to fleshly appetites, to narcissism, to pseudo-intellectuality, to sentimentality, to institutions, to ideas and/or ideologies, or to other people. They declare that we are slaves – not sons and daughters. They declare us to be immature, whimsical, disrespectful, ungrateful, and rebellious; piercings, tattoos, and all other appearance-altering modalities are inconsistent with a lifestyle of worship of and service to our Father, who designed our bodies and considers us extensions of Himself. The same is true of cosmetic surgery, of sexually suggestive or politically/ideologically themed garments; of clothing that draws attention to the sexual/erotic areas of the body; of

adornments, especially items of jewelry, that glorify a pagan culture or identify one with a pagan religion, a humanistic philosophy, or an ideology, institution, or group; and of cheeky hairstyles that conform to the latest cultural fashion trend or fad. All of these things tell the world that we have a spiritual *Achilles Heel* – *i.e.* a conflict of interest of the worst kind - that they can exploit and manipulate to render us ineffective as ambassadors of the Kingdom. It is bad enough to have such a weakness; it is abject folly to advertise it to the world. The Holy One – our FATHER - has chosen us to be a people *set apart to Him*, and an *am segulah* – *i.e.* the spiritual equivalent of a ‘trophy wife/queen’. That calling carries some pretty serious ramifications. That privilege carries some significant corresponding responsibilities. The Torah of our Father leads to life, you see, but it does so along a *narrow way*, the entrance of which is the Covenant’s *strait gate*. Blessed is he or she who is not offended. Blessed is he or she who loves his or her Father, and longs to do His will and bring honor to Him and His Household.

Through the Father-Child Paradigm, you see, we cease to see the instructions of Torah as ‘law’, and see them for what they really are: the loving, nurturing teaching and life-coaching of our Father. We see the Torah scroll, and hear the Father’s Voice whisper to us:

*My son, do not forget My Torah,
but let your heart cherish/treasure/guard/keep My Mitzvot;
for length of days, long life, and shalom will they add to you!*

[Proverbs 3:1-2]

The Choices We Make – and What They Tell The World About What is Really Important to Us

Everyday life on planet earth presents us with a veritable obstacle course of choices. We must decide when to get up, and when to go to bed. We have to decide if, when, and what to eat. We must decide how formal – or casual – to dress. We must decide what we will allow ourselves to get excited about and pursue with passion – and what we will choose instead to be ambivalent about and/or back away from. We must decide when it is best to open our mouths and speak what is on our mind and heart, and when it would be better to bite our lip, hold our tongue, and just listen for a change. Once we decide to listen to someone else, we must decide how we will process what we have heard – intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. Before we make any move, we must decide where it is we want to go, when it is best to leave, what route it would be best to take, and what we are going to do, think about, talk about, dream about, and feel both along the way and when we get to wherever it is we have decided we are going. Whew! Are you overwhelmed yet? Don’t be. Choices are *the substance of life*, and the *primary determining factor* in both our –and our family’s – quality of life and

impact upon our generation. *Good choices mean good – and positively impactful - lives.* Alas, the opposite is also true: *bad choices mean bad – and negatively impactful – lives.* So, how does one make ‘good choices’ instead of ‘bad choices’?

***The Holy One is Giving Us Eyes to See Amazing Things –
Things the Rest of the World Cannot See or Appreciate***

The Holy One does not want us to make any choice along the pathway that leads to our destiny without spiritual perspective to see the latent/hidden things we will need to see to be able to fulfill our mission there. He does not want us to stumble around in – or on the way to - the bridal chamber He has prepared for us. So not only has He given us *ears that sh'ma* - He is now in the process of imparting to us *eyes that re'eh*. As we prepare to take our place on history's center stage our Divine Bridegroom wants to empower us to see what is really happening in the world – and the people - to which we are called. He wants our eyesight enhanced to the point we can get a taste for and a sense of the exquisite level of blessing, fruitfulness, and glory He desires to shower upon us – and the people we meet and places we go - as we go forth to tend His Garden. He wants us to see infinite possibilities that are waiting for us on the other side of every pothole we find in our path. He wants us to see what He is doing in every place the soles of our feet shall tread as well as in every situation and circumstance we will face. And He wants our vision to be enhanced to the point that we start to see the destructive forces that lurk in the shadows behind both the intimidating obstacles and the seductive pleasures that present themselves to us along the midway of mortal life.

What methodology will He use to enhance our vision so dramatically? That is the stunning part. Enhanced vision is an incidental benefit that flows from meditation on the narratives and *mitzvot* of Torah. As, when, and to the extent we engage our hearts, minds, and souls in the great enterprise of *sh'ma*-ing the *life-force* of Mashiach He has embedded in the Torah, the Holy One intends to *open our eyes* to see things few people can see.

***Mah Atah Ro'eh?* [What Do You See?]**

Whenever the Holy One showed Yirmayahu [Jeremiah] a vision, He would immediately follow up by asking the prophet: *Mah atah ro'eh - 'What do you see?'*² Yirmayahu would respond by describing whatever it was he saw. He and the Holy One would then have a discussion about whatever image he had seen really meant. Only then did the Holy One send Yirmayahu forth to share his Divinely enhanced vision regarding the matter.

² The Holy One also followed this sequence with Amos and Zechariah. For examples in the TaNaKh see Jeremiah 1:11,13 and 24:3; Amos 7:8 and 8:2; and Zechariah 4:2 and 5:2.

Consider also the fascinating story of II Kings 6:8-23. The leader of Syria was intent on destroying Israel. [Yes Beloved, it was then as it is now]. This powerful foreign leader sent war parties into the Beautiful Land to capture and kill the leader of Israel. But each time the Syrians took up positions from which they could make an assassination attempt against Israel's king, *Elishahu* [Elisha] would discern the plot and know where the attack was going to occur. He would warn Israel's king what was happening – and the plot of the Syrians would be foiled. This angered the Syrians to the extent that they changed their approach. They decided to focus their attention on hunting down and eliminating Elishahu. Hearing that Elishahu was staying in the village of Dotan in central Israel, the Syrian army came to the city by night and surrounded it. Large numbers of cavalry and charioteers salivated at the prospect of the imminent slaughter. When Elishahu's servant saw a great company of foreign troops surrounding the prophet and himself, he cried out '*what shall we do?*' Elishahu looked at the exact same physical situation, but his vision was not limited to what the servant saw. Assisted by Divinely enhanced vision he *saw something bigger going on*. From His perspective what was happening was that the Holy One was in the process of delivering the Syrian army's best soldiers into his hands. He told his servant '*Fear not – those that are with us are more than those that are with them.*' Elishahu then prayed that the Holy One would open the servant's eyes so that he could see the situation the way Elishahu saw it. The Holy One heard the prayer, and opened the young man's eyes. Then the servant then was able to *re'eh* – i.e. behold - the same thing Elishahu had seen - a mountain covered with myriads of Heavenly horsemen and chariots of fire at Elishahu's command.

In the great trials of life it all comes down to in how the Beloved Ones of the Great King look at the situation – whether they insist on viewing situations they encounter with the natural eyes of their flesh, or whether they instead learn to view every situation through spiritual eyes – i.e. eyes that focus only on the potential, possibilities, and Divine Opportunities presented by a situation and/or circumstance. The sequence of *re'eh* revelation seems to work like this:

1. The Holy One opens our eyes to see something bigger going on in our world than we can see with our natural eyes;
2. The Holy One asks us to first internally process and then verbalize what we see;
3. The Holy One enlarges our understanding of what we are seeing to incorporate how what we are seeing inter-relates with what He is doing and/or wanting to do in the circumstance; and
4. As we take appropriate action in response to what the Holy One has revealed to us He draws into our sphere of influence persons with which He wants us to share both the vision and the message of the vision.
5. The process repeats itself over and over.

Parsha *Re'eh* is strategically designed to cause our hearts to aspire to arise and take our role in this process. This is, you see, a basic training parsha. It is designed for those who are willing to let the Holy One expand their perceptive abilities regarding certain important facets of covenant life. But we need to break free of some misconceptions and shortsighted myopias first. The first area the Holy One wants to challenge us to look at through the lenses of Divinely Enhanced Vision this week is the distinction between that which leads to blessing and that which leads to toxic thoughts, bad attitudes, negative conversations and pathological behavior patterns.

Two Distinct Pathways Appear – And Quickly Begin to Diverge

Moshe opened the parsha by showing us a vision of two pathways diverging before our eyes. *Re'eh!* [*Behold!*], he said – and then he lifted our chins and opened our eyes. First he showed us a pathway of incredible blessing - ‘the Bridegroom’s Pathway’. But then he showed us a second pathway - ‘the Way of the Runaway Bride’.

On the first pathway the Bridegroom’s will determines and governs every step and the Bridegroom’s glory is the reason for everything we do. This pathway is well lit and its boundaries are clearly defined, but it is a pathway of surrender. And then there is the other pathway - the pathway for self-willed souls who do not want our Bridegroom, or anyone else for that matter, telling them how to live. Dark and shadowy, this route has no discernable boundaries. It offers instead a variety of trails one can follow, but none of which lead anywhere. On this pathway each man determines what is right and/or desirable in his own eyes.

The two pathways should, by now, be starting to diverge before our eyes. In order that we may make an informed choice as to which pathway we will follow Moshe is showing us what different aspects of life will be like depending upon whether we choose the Bridegroom’s Pathway or the Way of the Runaway Bride. In order that we may make an informed choice as to which of the pathways we will follow and which we will eschew, the prophet has invited us into *the realm of enhanced vision*. He has begun to show us what different aspects of life will be like in the Promised Land depending upon which of the two pathways we choose.

Area #1: Dealing with Things and People That Have Become So Toxic to the World that The Holy One Has Marked Them for Destruction

The first area Moshe allows us to preview is the area of how we will *respond to His Divine Judgment on the people groups that He has called us to dispossess*. As it was with Egypt in the days of the Exodus, so it will be with the disobedient peoples and nations of the latter days. Those on the Bridegroom’s Pathway – the ‘*Not My Will but Thine*’ pathway - will *not be offended* by what appear to be harsh dealings on the part of the Bridegroom. They will trust Him to know what is just

and right. They will join Him in the execution of His judgments – not out of racial prejudice, nor out of a spirit of vigilantism or cruelty, but according to Divine Wisdom, Divine Mandate, and Divine Order. Those on the other pathway however – those on the “whatever seems right or potentially pleasurable in one’s own eyes” pathway – will *lo sh’ma* the directives of the Holy One, will *substitute their human reasoning and their human sensitivities for those of the Divine Bridegroom*, and will, alas, as individuals and families and clans, *suffer greatly for it*.

**Area #2: Dealing With Modalities and Focuses of Spirituality
that Are Common to the World**

The second matter that Moshe wants us to preview from both sides of the crossroads is how we are to express our spirituality – i.e. ‘worship’. Those committed to the Bridegroom’s Pathway will open their hearts and minds and souls to a radical way of worship totally different from that practiced by the nations, ethnicities, and cultures of the fallen world. The Holy One’s people are called to be like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov - embracing a way of worship that focuses on *meditating on, teaching, and living out the Torah in the home*. We are called to model *the Great Sh’ma Directive* of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. We are called to eschew reliance upon local shrines, temples, titled, salaried clergymen, institutions, and programs.

What lies down the ‘other lane’ of the worship crossroads, you ask? What kind of worship model always seems to be adopted/co-opted from pagan cultures by those who get distracted from *the Great Sh’ma Directive* of Deuteronomy 6:4-9? What does spirituality always wind up looking like for those who stray from the narrow road of Torah onto the vast outback way of the Runaway Bride’? The answer is shocking. Alas, the worship model to which those who wander from the Torah way adopt/co-opt will look remarkably similar to that of the Kena’ani. It will focus on local shrines and priestly cults, organizations, institutions, and programs. It will run on hype and superstition. It will foster hypocrisy and shallow sentimentality. Those who cannot, or who refuse to, keep their focus on the Holy One’s plan of *home-based Torah meditation and real-time training in righteousness* will find the local temple/local priesthood model utilized by their pagan neighbors simply too seductive, entertaining, and *addictive* to resist. They will have little time, much less passion or energy, for the home-based disciplines the Holy One has designed for us [see Psalm 1:1-3] - because their schedule will fill up with meetings and programs, organizational-thinking and institutional-promotion. They will adopt a cerebral, pseudo-intellectual approach not based on institutional loyalty, adherence to tradition, and fear of man instead of personal devotion to the Father. They will allow their energy and passion to be exhausted by fleshly activities that may honor the Holy One in name, but which are really just another pagan mode of chasing the

wind. They will exalt form over substance. They will obsess over *edifices and artifacts, rituals and sacraments, clergymen and clichés, pulpits, programs and budgets*. They will delegate the responsibility to teach their children and households the ways of their god-construct to hirelings. And they will thoroughly convince themselves that all this was the Holy One's plan all along. That brings us to today's aliyah.

Where the Sandal Really Hits the Sand

In today's aliyah, the divergence of pathways that Moshe shows us have little to do with what we "believe" about the Holy One or how or where we try to engage Him in worship. Today Moshe wants to talk to us about choices we deal with in connection with day-to-day mundane affairs of life. He wants us to consider:

[a] what we will – and will not - choose to do regarding issues of *personal appearance and grooming*; and

[b] what we – and will not - consider to be "*food*", and

[c] why – and for what purposes – we will choose to set apart a portion of the things (or *money*) with which we are blessed in the name of 'religion'.

Moshe wants us to understand that there will be significant differences in how we approach and navigate each of these areas depending upon whether we choose the Bridegroom's Pathway or the Way of the Runaway Bride.

Seeing Ordinary Things Our Divine Bridegroom's Way, and Joyfully Bearing in Our Flesh Our Bridegroom's Distinctive Mark

Over the course of his years of serving as Israel's prophet-in-residence Moshe has seen people who were sold out whole-heartedly to the Divine Bridegroom; but he has also seen far more people who, for whatever reason, refuse to surrender their will, their mind, their emotions, their appetites and/or the secret places of their heart to the Holy One's refinement protocols. Moshe knows the early warning signs of the diseases of self-absorption and lukewarmness. He also knows how powerful distractions like the pursuit of personal development/self-actualization, the craving for the affirmation of men, and the human appetite for physical pleasure and comfort can be. And he sees no choice but to address those early-warning signs head-on. He is now ready to proceed to address outward manifestations of inward condition. He wants us to look at such things with Divinely enhanced vision, instead of viewing them through eyes corrupted by fleshly appetites and pseudo-intellectual arrogance. He knows that if the Holy One is not Lord over a person's personal appearance, one's diet, and one's spending habits, well ... well, the truth is that He is not really the person's Lord at all.

The Issues At Stake For Us, Unlike the World, Are Issues of Identity, Mission, Destiny, and Loyalty – Not Mere Personal Pleasure, Taste, Self-Expression, Style, or Comfort

Moshe has made it clear all along that we have been set apart as a kingdom of priests. He now is going to show us that some sure signs of how deep our love of the Divine Bridegroom is include whether we will voluntarily limit possible personal appearance styles to those our Bridegroom desires and says are appropriate, whether we will accept the Bridegroom's definition of Bride-food, and whether we will or will not use of the material possessions He places in our stewardship in the ways He directs.

Appearance. Food. Attitudes about the generation of income and the use of Money. Moshe is really leading us into some sensitive areas now. Can we handle some pretty intense scrutiny in those areas? We will see. Many people have no problem agreeing that it is acceptable for the Torah to tell us to love the Divine Bridegroom and to love our neighbor. But far fewer are comfortable with Torah's "interference" in the areas covered by today's aliyah. The mitzvot reiterated today seem to many to be insultingly invasive of personal tastes and rights. Though they would never come right out and say: "How DARE the Holy One try to tell me how to adorn and present myself to the public, what to eat and not to eat, and/or what to do with my hard-earned money!", that is how they act when He addresses these issues. Why, they ask, should the Creator of the Universe have anything to say about whether I *wear my hair or pierce or tattoo my skin* like the rest of the world is doing? Why does it matter to the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov if I choose to eat a shrimp cocktail, order a side of bacon, put away a rack of baby-back pork ribs, or wolf down a slice of pepperoni pizza? And why, they argue, does the One Who split the Sea of Reeds care what I do with my hard-earned money? As long, such people say, as I claim Yeshua's suffering on the execution stake as the source of atonement for my sins, why *can't I look, eat, and spend money any way I want*? Well ... you can. Indeed, that is the pretty much the basic assumption underlying the 'two pathways' discussion. You can indeed *go your own way*. The problem is, if you choose the Runaway Bride's approach, it is not your individuality you will really be serving; you will be *conforming yourself to the Kena'ani* [Canaanite] *world around you*. If and to the extent you follow that path, ***to that extent you will fail to fulfill your Divinely ordained mission and destiny***, and will fail to become all that you were created by your Creator to be. Why can't we just *'have it our way'* with no consequences whatever? Well, do you remember the ***sh'ma***? It reminds us that the Holy One is not just *God in general* – but He is our ***FATHER***. *Ahem!* I do not think that means that *He belongs to and serves us*. I kind of think it means that ***we belong to and serve – and are to honor - Him***. He has an absolute right to decide and dictate the divine plan and purpose for our lives – even

when it is a purpose and plan *that requires us to look as well as be different from the rest of the world.*

Those who *regularly appear before the Holy One, who hear the majesty and beauty of His Voice, who experience the wonder of His Presence, and who have learned to tremble at His word,* find that submitting their personal appearance, diet, and pocketbook to His instruction is intensely *pleasurable*, not painful. To those who have known the joy of His Presence, “*But why can’t I?*” questions suddenly seem very petty, childish, and selfish. Such questions quickly fade into worship and adoration of Him who is worthy to receive all honor, glory, and praise. He before Whom we stand is after all far bigger and more important - and interaction with Him is far more fulfilling - than fashion, or appetite, or a little larger bank account. Those who are actively engaged in an intimate, on-going, ever-growing relationship with the Divine Bridegroom therefore know that He did not create us to *dress themselves up and deck themselves out like pagans, or to eat like pagans, or to spend money or use possessions like pagans.* Those who have begun the process of knowing Him at all know that He has far *better things* in store for us, both here and in the world to come. If we *trust Him* we will greatly *rejoice in* – and will not try to conceal - His distinctive mark. If we *love Him* we will *joyfully* build every aspect of our lives on His Instructions. If He is truly our God then His instructions will be *the air that we breathe.*

Torah is and has always been about taking an existing covenant relationship with the Divine Bridegroom which has its basis in *emunah* alone and then walking it out on earth over a series of years in a substantive way that reveals the height, and breadth, and depth of the love-bond between the Covenant partners. Torah is designed to *infuse the covenant relationship with texture and color and fragrance and beauty* on a day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month, year-by-year, decade-by-decade, and ultimately generation-by-generation basis. This infusing process is greatly aided – and dramatically accelerated – if one chooses *the Bridegroom’s Pathway.* It is, on the other hand, significantly [though not irretrievably] hindered - and at the very least placed on hold - if one chooses the *Way of the Runaway Bride.* The choice is *always yours to make.* You are not loved any less if you choose the Way of the Runaway Bride. His covenant commitment is forever. The question Moshe is placing on the table is simply how *close*, how *intimate*, how *fulfilling* a relationship you want to have with the Divine Bridegroom TODAY? And TOMORROW? And next week? And next year? And what level of relationship with Him do you want to pass on to the next generation? Those questions – not the relationship you will have with the Holy One in the World to Come - are what the Friend of the Bridegroom is trying to get you to think about in today’s aliyah. Moshe will leave it to the One Who will come after

him to deal with issues of Heaven, Hell, and eternal life. He is more than content to deal with issues he has been called to address – namely the issues of how life is to be lived by redeemed human beings while walking the earth at their appointed time for representing His Kingdom to friends, family and strangers in the world.

Our Creator and Redeemer Is Our Only Fashion Consultant

Now that you know what is and at stake, we can move on to the actual subjects of today's aliyah. As stated above, the first is what we do to *our body* and to *our hair* in the interest of vanity and 'style'. Moshe has kicked off this part of his challenge to us by stunning us with this announcement: ***Banim atem l'Adonai Eloheichem*** – i.e. *You are children of/ unto the Holy One your God Deuteronomy 14:1(a).*

We are *not just ransomed slaves*. Nor are we mere forgiven sinners. We are not just so many pawns, rooks, bishops, and knights on a great chessboard. We are *sons of light* [John 12:36]; we are *sons of the Most High God* [Luke 6:35, Romans 8:14-17 and 9:26, Galatians 4:6, Ephesians 1:5, I John 3:1-2, and Hebrews 12:7]. We are *sons of Avraham* [Galatians 3:7]. We are *sons of the prophets* [Acts 3:25]. That means the Holy One's Torah is our portion and that His Creation is our *schoolhouse*, our *sphere of influence*, and our *inheritance*. Do you understand now why we are called to think, look, act, and smell different than the rest of the nations? We are sons. All Creation is groaning in eager expectation for us to arise and be who we are created and empowered to be. **Romans 8:19**. It is our mission to *liberate fallen Creation from its bondage to decay* and to bring it into the glorious realm of Divine freedom. **Romans 8:21**. We are the *face of His Kingdom-to-come* in the eyes of the world. Moshe therefore immediately follows up this general announcement of identity and mission by saying:

Ki am kadosh atah l'Adonai Eloheicha

You as a people are set apart unto the Holy One your God

uveicha bachar Adonai lihyot lo

And the Holy One has chosen you

l'am segulah mikol ha-amim

to be His special nation out of all the people groups

asher al-penei ha-adamah

on the face of the earth.

Everything else Moshe is going to say in this chapter of Torah has to be understood through this sonship/special relationship paradigm. What does it mean that we are 'chosen to be His special nation'? It means we are passionately loved, cherished, and adored - and called to greatness. It means we cannot make Him love us more or cause Him to love us less by anything we do or do not do.

The fact that we are chosen to be the Holy One's special nation means we are the apple of our Bridegroom's eye. It means we have captured His heart forever with one glance of our eyes. That being the case, what is the appropriate response of the chosen human heart? How should we receive, internalize, and respond to this awesome a love, from so awesome a God? And how can we best represent Him and testify of His goodness to the world? Well, Moshe thinks we should do so by choosing and following the Pathway of the Bridegroom. Moshe thinks we should choose to accept and trust and willingly participate in the Divine Bridegroom's judgments, trusting Him to know best and always do what is right. Moshe thinks we should choose to worship and serve the Holy One in the ways and at the places and times He has said are right and fitting for us, rather than in the ways and at the kinds of places and meetings where pagans seek to worship and serve their gods. And yet that is by no means all. There are also some very practical and very physical aspects to the proper response as well. Moshe kicks off the discussion of those very practical and physical things by saying to all who would choose the Pathway of the Bridegroom over the Way of the Runaway Bride:

*You are not to **pierce yourself** [lo titgodeidu]
nor **remove hair from between your eyes** [v'lo-tasimu korchah beyn eyneichem]
unto death [l'met]
[Deuteronomy 14:1(b)]*

Those who choose the Bridegroom's Pathway will not pierce themselves - or pay others to do it for them. Those who choose the Pathway of 'Not My Will but Thine Be Done' will also not pluck or shave the hair *between their eyes*. Most translate this to also include *all the hair on our head*. 'What is that all about?' I hear some of you ask. And what on earth does that '*l'met*' phrase [which I have translated above as '*unto death*'] which Moshe tacks on at the end of his statement have to do with anything? Let's examine those things one at a time, shall we?

Lo titgodeidu: You are Not to Pierce Yourself

Our 21st Century secular-humanist culture suggests that little girls [and increasingly little boys] should have their ears [at least] pierced as early as possible so that we can fit them with earrings. [Hmmm. Did you ever wonder if it was perhaps a jeweler with a genius for marketing that came up with that idea?] Far beyond that a growing counterculture insists that it is 'cool' for its members to pierce just everything that possibly can be pierced and puts stud in and hangs rings and chains from the pierced areas. Many also actually pay other people to pierce their skin and inject dye into the pierced areas to form permanently disfiguring designs called tattoos. So ... what on earth, someone might say, does ear or body piercing - or tattooing for that matter - have to do with our relationship with the Holy One? *Quite a lot* is the answer, I would say. Please let the Holy One open your eyes, so you can *re'eh!* After all, the piercing of a human body is scheduled, at the proper time on the Holy

One's Divine timetable, to become a major, major factor in the Plan of Redemption for mankind and Creation of which we are to be the witnesses. I am, of course, speaking of the piercing of Messiah Yeshua's body by the Roman soldiers who crucified him³. By *his piercings* we are healed. **Isaiah 53:5**. It is *he whom we pierced* upon whom we are to look when the Holy One pours out on us a spirit of grace and supplication. **Zechariah 12:10**.

Because we are a Bride-elect, our bodies are no longer our own. Everything we do with ingest in, or put on our bodies is to be surrendered to His Will for us. Our skin is His every bit as much as our heart and our mind are His. Our hair and our stomach are also His. The pagan nations around us may pierce and cut themselves until they bleed. The only body piercing approved for any redeemed son or daughter of the Holy One, however, is the piercing of one earlobe by a Hebrew slave who desires to serve his/her master for life.

While getting a piercing or tattoo – or a hundred of them – will not send you to eternal damnation, that is not at all what this *mitzvah* of Torah is about. The *mitzvot* of Torah are not for determining who will go to Heaven when they die. The *mitzvot* of Torah are for passionate lovers of the One Whose instructions for living they see as being their inestimable honor and joy to know, *sh'ma*, and serve, instead of paranoid narcissists and epicureans whose primary spiritual motivation is to do the bare minimum necessary to avoid an afterlife in whatever their depraved mind perceives to constitute Hell.

The Friend of the Bridegroom has spoken. Let all with ears to *sh'ma*, ***sh'ma***, and let all with eyes to *re'eh*, *re'eh*.

A Post-Script Note to An Already Pierced and Tattoo-ed Generation

I know that in this age many reading this study have before experiencing the dramatic redemption of the Holy One, in ignorance, already received in their bodies indelible marks of the pagan religion that the narcissistic world calls *body art*. Let me assure you, beloved one, that the Holy One does not love or value you even the slightest bit less for this. Nor do I. What has been done in your skin in the past has been done; but it does not by any means place you beyond redemption. Now however you are a *new creation*. Now you are an ambassador *of the kingdom of Heaven*. From this day forward, therefore, please consider letting the very Words of the Living God – the life-instructions of the One Who both knows you best and loves you most – govern your choices as to such things as piercings and tattoos. It is one thing to bear a mark or scar we sustained prior to our redemption;

³ And for those with ears to hear and eyes to see I am speaking as well of the piercing and tattooing that will mark future generations as the devotees and servants of the Beast of the Book of Revelation.

we can trust in the 'skin covering' of the Messiah to gloriously supersede that shame, and make the mark/scar we suffered before redemption a visual aid for our testimony. It is another thing altogether, however, for us to choose to advertise our weakness of the flesh and pseudo-intellect on our skin, garments, or accessories after we have been so gloriously redeemed. Be assured that those who hate the Holy One will exploit that weakness to our - and the Kingdom's - detriment. As they say: 'Uh Oh! That is going to leave a MARK!'

***But What About the Way We Cut, Coif, and Wear Our Hair –
What Message Does That Send to the World About Our Priorities?***

Moshe quickly turns his focus from our skin to our hair. He does not reiterate everything the Holy One had to say regarding hair in the *Kedusha Discourse*. See **Leviticus 19:17**. Moshe expects us to remember that the Holy One has made it clear that, as part of our love commitment to Him, we are never to shave the sides of our head or disfigure the edges of our beard. So all Moshe says at this point is: ***V'lo-tasimu korchah beyn eyneichem lamut*** - and you are not to pluck hair from/make yourself hairless between your eyes for it is death. What? What could the plucking of eyebrows possibly have to do with the Kingdom of Heaven being manifested on the earth? Since Moshe said it, let's give it some thought. Is he being legalistic, and putting inordinate focus on externals? Or does he possibly know something we do not about the thin line between hygiene and vanity, and between behaviors that pertain to Covenant life, health, and *shalom* and that which lead to fleshly death, disease, worry, stress and anxiety? Can we talk?

Our secular and humanistic culture is fascinated with defining and marketing a concept of 'beauty' that calls for substantial alteration of our natural appearance. We obsess over it – and 'looking good' becomes an idol, for the worship and service of which each personal appearance protocol in which we participate in constitutes an altar. One of the most significant areas our society focuses on altering is our *hair*. We *coif*. We *trim*. We *shave*. We *curl*. We *dye*. We *style*. We *perm*. We *wax*. We *depile*. We *pluck*. We get surly on '*bad hair days*'. Women buy extensions. Men buy *Rogaine*. Literally millions of dollars [substitute rand, yen, shekels or other currency as appropriate to your location] - not to mention hours upon hours of preparation time and billions of BTUs of human and electrical energy, are spent on haircuts, styling, and hair care products and services EVERY SINGLE DAY. What a JOKE on us. What a *chasing of the wind*.

Moshe tells those who choose the Pathway of the Bridegroom only one thing about hair. He says that we are not to *suwm* [a Hebrew verb meaning to *set, establish or put in place*] a *korchah* [a Hebrew noun referring to a *bald area*] *beyn eyneichem* [a Hebrew phrase literally meaning *between or in the area of the eyes*]. The exact boundaries of the meaning of this are a little unclear. Obviously, at the very least it means that we are

not to pluck hair from the bridge of the eyebrows. If you've got a natural unibrow, I think that means at the very least you most definitely should leave it alone. All translators who have ever translated Hebrew into English, however, have interpreted Moshe's phraseology to mean much more than that. They have generally considered the phrase '*beyn eyneychem*' as used by Moshe to include all areas *of the head that are visible to view by the eyes of another person*. That means *all aspects of one's hairstyle*. For men, that means *sideburns, beard, mustache and body hair in all locations*.

Have you noticed that the deeper our society plunges into godlessness, the more it tends to **obsess** about hair? How we feel about, and what we do with, the hair the Holy One chose to give us says A TON about what our values are – and whether the Holy One's adornment of us is acceptable to us, or a source of personal embarrassment and shame. I find it interesting, in this regard, that one of the things we are told was going to be done to the Suffering Servant whom many associate with the Messiah is that the hair would be plucked from His body. See **Isaiah 50:6**. Kefa taught wives that a part of their dedication to their husbands would be to make sure that they did not let the focus of their adornment be on fixing their hair, the clothes they wear etc., but to be on cultivating and displaying a '*meek and quiet spirit*'. **I Peter 3:3**. Shaul taught that if a woman has long hair that hair is '*a glory*' to her. **I Corinthians 11:15**. Hmmm. Hair is glory. So ... well ... who exactly does YOUR hair glorify?

In Leviticus the Holy One spoke to Moshe concerning '*ha-kohanim*' – the sons of Aharon, who were to serve as 'friends of the bride' – saying: '*They are not make any bald place on their heads, nor are they to shave the edges of their beards, nor are they to make any cuttings/piercings in their flesh*'. **Leviticus 21:5**. And what are we, Beloved, but a kingdom of *kohanim*? As Kefa [Peter] said, "*you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart in every way, in order to show forth the praises to Him Who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*." **I Peter 2:9**.

***Whose Body – and Skin, and Hair - is It?
Whose Glory are These Things To Manifest?***

At the very least Moshe wants us to know that full dedication/consecration to the Holy One means much more than that a person agrees intellectually with this or that theological premise. Full dedication and consecration of a person to the Divine Bridegroom means that a person surrenders his body – and his hair – to the Divine Bridegroom as well as His heart and mind. Full dedication/consecration to the Holy One means we submit every aspect of our appearance to Him as well as our praise. And it means we will take extreme caution not to do things to the bodies the

Holy One has given us for His glory - or with our hair that He has given us for His honor - that would make us look like the pagans around us instead of the kingdom of *kohanim* which He created and redeemed and prophetically empowered us to be.

If we pierce the bodies He gave us like the pagans around us do, what are we saying? And if we shave patterns in the hair he gave us – on top of our heads, between our eyes, or on our faces, for ‘style’ or ‘personal expression’, to whom are we saying we belong - to Him ... or to the culture in which we live?

L'met [i.e. Unto death/the pathway that leads to death]

Moshe appends to the end of his statements about piercing the body and depiling the head the phrase *L'met* [i.e. unto death]. Many interpret this vague phrase to mean ‘for the dead’ and thereby seek to limit the application of the *do not pierce* and *do not depile* instructions to expressions of grief upon learning a loved one has died. It is clear that in many cultures cutting or piercing oneself, and/or plucking out the hair or shaving part or all of the head is a sign of grief over one who has died. This is self-destructive behavior, of course, usually in a time of uncontrolled emotion. Sometimes it is even tinged with guilt. At the very time one should not, due to a fragile emotional state, many people do indeed tend to make irrational decisions that have long-term consequences. They shave off this or that. They cut themselves. They starve themselves – or overindulge themselves in ‘comfort foods’. They run out and get themselves tattoo-ed with some silly little tribute to the deceased that the deceased will of course never see or care one whit about.

While all this is included in Moshe’s statements about hair, what is not at all clear is that in Moshe’s speech on the plains of Moav which we are studying the phrase ‘*L'met*’ however, was actually intended to mean ‘for the dead’. More literally, the phrase *L'met* means not ‘for the dead’, but *unto death*⁴. This means [a] throughout natural life, and [b] pertaining to the pathway that leads to death as opposed to life, health and peace.

How are we to get on board with Moshe? How are we to submit all issues of personal appearance out of the realm of self-will and put them in submission to the Holy One’s priorities and purposes? How about simply asking the Holy One questions like ‘*what do you want me to do – and not do – with my skin? With my hair? How can I best employ those parts of my body in glorifying you? What uses of my skin and hair are pleasing to you? What things I could do with my skin and hair would mark me off as set apart unto You?*’ I suspect those are *precisely the kind of questions the Friend of the Bridegroom – and indeed the Bridegroom*

⁴ For one thing, there is no definite article *ha* [the Hebrew letter *hey* at the beginning of a noun which is the rough equivalent of the English ‘the’, or the Spanish *el* [masculine] or *la* [feminine]].

Himself – wants the beloved Bride-to-be to ask.

**The Next Critical Test of a Set Apart People:
*Who – and What Criteria - Will Determine
What Is and Is Not ‘Food’ For Us?***

The next subject of Kingdom representation covered by Moshe in today’s aliyah is the area of how we look at, define, and relate to what we will and will not ingest/introduce into the bodies the Holy One has set apart to serve as His Temples. The Holy One wants us to look at ingestible things very differently than the other people of the world do. He wants us to ingest only things that maximize our health, strength, and vitality, testify of our commitment to His Kingdom agenda, and further His distinct purposes for us. The ingestible materials we choose to put in our bodies/temples should be what He chooses for us – and nothing else. After all, it is *His* body – the body He has redeemed to be a new creation – that we are feeding. It is not about what our physical, fleshly taste buds crave. It is not about what everyone else is eating or raving about. It is about agreeing to be set apart in the ways He instructs. It is about being loyal representatives of His Heavenly Kingdom. It is about walking in, and modeling, the superiority of His Ways.

If we balk at eating what He says is food for us and lust instead after things He tells us are not food for us, how can it possibly be said that we are His Children, His sheep, His army, or His Bride? If we insist on eating things that He has said are not food for us, have we not let our stomachs and appetites replace Him as our god?

We are about to enter *the Divine Bridegroom’s garden – Eretz Yisrael*. As the Holy One gave Adam and Chava instructions when they were in His garden about what they were and were not to eat, so the Holy One has given us detailed instructions on this subject. The subject was first covered by Moshe, as it was received by him from the Holy One, in chapter 11 of Sefer *Vayikra* [the Book of Leviticus]⁵. Now, on the plains of Moav, as Moshe is reminding us again that one of our marks of distinction as the Holy One’s people is to be that *we will not eat like other people eat*. Our eating will not, he tells us, be guided solely by our appetites as the eating of the rest of the world is. We will submit our appetites, as well as everything else, to the Holy One. We will eat what – and only what - He tells us is “food” for us. We will make *a conscious and irrevocable commitment* NOT to eat whatever He tells us is not food. That is because we are a people who live by the *sh’ma* principle. We trust Him to know what is best for us – and how to make us into what, and who, He created and redeemed us to be.

⁵ Please refer to Thursday’s Study from Parsha *Shemini* [the *Rabbi’s son’s* commentary on Leviticus 11] for further details.

Certain things are ‘Bride food’; other things are not. I think Daniel had a pretty good grasp of the idea. See **Daniel 1:8-17**. Similarly, Moshe tells us in today’s aliyah:

*You are an **am k’dosh** [a nation set apart] to the Holy One Eloheicha [your God].
The Holy One has chosen you from all nations on the face of the earth
to be His **am segulah** [peculiar treasure nation].
Therefore, do not eat any **to’evah**⁶ [abomination].*

Certain animals and creatures that the Holy One made He made for specific purposes of *waste disposal*. For us to eat things He has created to be waste disposal devices, He knows, is not just unwise – it is an ABOMINATION. Eating what the Holy One has said is not to be food, you see, is failing the test of corrupted appetite the exact same way Chava and Adam did back in the Garden of Eden.

The Test of Our ‘Old Man’s’ Corrupted Lusts, Tastes, and Appetite

The Holy One designed our bodies. He knows what items our bodies need to ingest – and avoid – if they are to run properly and if we are to live our allotted days on the earth in maximal health. Hence the Holy One said in His own words in Leviticus 11, and now reiterates through Moshe in Deuteronomy 14, what is and is not to be food for us:

*These are the mammals that you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat,
the gazelle, the deer, the antelope, the ibex, the chamois, the bison, and the giraffe.
You may thus eat every animal that has a true hoof
that is cloven into two parts, and which brings up its cud⁷.

the pig⁸ has a true hoof, but does not have a cud, and is therefore **tamei** [unclean] to you.
Do not eat the flesh of these [animals]; do not even touch their carcasses.*

[Deuteronomy 14:2 -8]

With regard to creatures of the Holy One that dwell in the waters Moshe tells us:

*Among that which is in the water, you may eat anything that has fins and scales⁹.
But those which have no fins and scales, you may not eat, since they are tamei [unclean] to you.*

[Deuteronomy 14:9-10]

Moshe also tells us which winged creatures the Holy One has instructed us are – and are not – ‘food’ for us. In the interest of time and printer ink, I will not reproduce those instructions here. You will find them in Deuteronomy 14:11-20.

⁶ To’evah is tav, vav, ayin, beit, hey, Strong’s Hebrew word # 8441, pronounced *to-ay-baw’*. It means any thing that is *repulsive* or *disgusting*.

⁷ The phrase our English Bibles render as “part the hoof and chew the cud” is *mafreset parsah veshosa’at shesa shtei frasot ma’alat gerah*.

⁸ In Hebrew, *chazir, chet, zayin, yod, resh*, Strong’s Heb. word #2386.

⁹ The phrase our English Bibles translate as “having fins and scales” is *s’napir v’kaskeset*. *S’napir* [fins] is Strong’s Hebrew word #5579, *samech, nun, peh, yod, resh*. *Kaskaset* [scales] is Strong’s Hebrew word #7193, *kuf, shin, kuf, shin, tav*.

Moshe concludes the section on what the Holy One does and does not consider “food” for us as follows:

*Since you are a holy nation to the Holy One Eloheicha [your God],
do not eat any [mammal or bird] that dies of itself.
You may give it to the resident alien in your settlements
so that he can eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner.*

Do not cook¹⁰ a kid in its mother’s milk.

Some persons believe that the provisions of Torah as to what is and is not to be eaten no longer apply to people who believe in Yeshua because now all food is “sanctified by giving thanks”, or because Shaul of Tarsus said, “all things are permissible” (Oh really? Murder? Adultery? Idolatry? Blasphemy? Genocide?). It perhaps would be well to consider that “the Apostle Paul” was a Jewish Rabbi, not an American television evangelist or a Greek philosopher. From his birth he had learned, and considered, that the term “food” and the term “meat” had definitions that excluded certain substances.

We can appreciate this. Human hair, for instance, is not food or meat - even to contemporary America. Air, of course, is not food or meat, nor is wool or asphalt or asbestos. Soil, likewise, is neither food nor meat - even if some people may choose to eat it (and, believe it or not, they do). Similarly, to Shaul or any other man raised in Hebrew culture pork, shellfish, fish without fins and scales (such as shark and catfish), ostriches and birds of prey, and blood, were not “unclean *food*” or “unclean *meat*” - they simply were not food or meat at all! Since the terms “meat” and “food” both imply things that may be eaten, and since the things I have described (from today’s aliyah and from Leviticus 11) were not to be eaten, they were never included in the terms “food” or “meat” when Shaul thought, spoke, or wrote his letters. If you were today to mention “food”, some people might think you were including soil in your definition, because they consider soil as food. But that would be a gross misinterpretation of what you were saying. Likewise, for anyone today to read something Shaul wrote about “food” or “meat”, and to consider such terms to include pork, shellfish, or the like, simply because those substances are eaten by you or your family is *a gross misinterpretation of what Shaul was saying*.

¹⁰ The verb our English Bibles translate as “cook” is *bashal, beit, shin, lamed*, Strong’s Hebrew word #1310, pronounced *baw-shal*!. It can variably be translated “to boil, to cook, to bake, to roast, to ripen, or to grow ripe.” Its first Biblical usage has nothing to do with cooking – it is in Genesis 40:10, where the cupbearer is describing to Yosef his prophetic dream. The cupbearer saw a fast-growing vine. *Bashar* is the verb employed to describe the process by which the vine brought forth mature clusters of grapes. It thus means ‘to ripen’ [or, in context, to *marinate*]. This verb also has a connection with *Pesach* [Passover]. In Exodus 12:9, when the Holy One was instructing His people how to eat the Passover Lamb He told them neither to eat it raw nor *bashar* it [marinate] it –they were, instead, to *roast* it.

If the concept that your Divine Bridegroom would place limits on what you eat bothers you - and sounds like “legalism” - consider that the Holy One has always placed limits on what people with whom He was in close relationship eat. In the Garden of Eden, before the Fall, before “legalism”, the Holy One said to Adam and Chava: ***You are free to eat from any tree in the garden. but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will surely die.*** Genesis 2:16. Of course, what was eaten then became *the subject matter of the first sin, and the external cause of the Fall and the banishment of man from the Garden.* Then, after Noah and his family had been preserved from the Great Flood, which had destroyed (temporarily) all plant life (which had previously been man’s only food), the Holy One instructed Noah:

***Everything that lives and moves will be food for you.
Just as I gave you the green plants, now I give you everything.
But you must not eat flesh that has its lifeblood in it!***
[Genesis 9:3-4]

The Holy One created us and He has reserved the absolute right to define what is and is not food for us. We are called to be a special people. And that means, among other things, that we have a special diet. It is part of being who we are. It is a matter of *identity* and of *identification with our Beloved.* What about this is so hard to understand? Alas, the adversary of our souls is constantly showing us *other things* – things that the Holy One created for other purposes than our consumption – and is telling us we would really, really like the taste of those things if we would just give them a try.

When Yeshua cooked breakfast for His disciples in John 20 did He cook them pork? Did He serve them shellfish? No - He would never have served any of those things. Neither He nor they would ever have eaten them, either. This is not because they were ‘Jewish’ – it is because the Holy One, in His Word, clearly declared that *eating such things constitutes an ABOMINATION.* A Bride delights to eat what her Bridegroom provides for her, and only that - never letting the corrupted appetites of her life prior to Betrothal separate her from Her Bridegroom.

Yeshua’s lips never once touched the flesh of the pig or any other thing the Holy One called an ABOMINATION. And they never will. Neither did – or will - Kefa’s [Peter’s] lips. Neither did – or will - Yochanan’s [John’s], or Ya’akov’s [James’], or Shaul’s [Paul’s]. They all knew that if the Holy One cared enough to tell us what should and should not be eaten by people who claimed He was their Lord and GOD, the only appropriate response was and would always be to *sh’ma, sh’mar,* and *asah* those instructions.

The Torah makes it clear and Messiah quoted as life-giving truth the principle that

man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God. Deuteronomy 8:3; Luke 4:4. As a reminder of this principle the Holy One has given us restrictions on how our appetites are to be satiated. He - who created us - knows much better than do we what we should and should not eat. If we eat whatever tastes good or is pleasing to the eye no matter what the Holy One says (as Chava did, and caused Adam to do), we deny the Holy One as the source of our life and our nourishment - and *make our stomachs and our taste buds our god instead.* That is *not the way to glorify the Holy One.* That is not a *sh'ma* lifestyle. That is gross idolatry. That is life *like the pagans.* That is a *declaration of independence from God* - like that of Chava. Likewise, when we teach others, or accept a teaching, that “food” or “meat” includes pork, shellfish, catfish, shark, etc., or bloody steak, etc., to those who are “in Messiah”, we “subtract from” the Torah of God, or “add to” the Torah of God, as we have been told not to do. And Yeshua said that makes us the smallest, least significant, least trustworthy members of the kingdom of Heaven. **Matthew 5:19.** He who has an ear, let him hear. And He who has eyes, let him see.

***Bring the Tithes ... Of What? And Into What Storehouse,
for What Purpose?***

The final subject of today's aliyah is the “*tithe*”. I will warn you in advance, the verses of Torah we read today do not line up with the prevalent teachings in vogue today. For instance, the Bible does not say – anywhere - that anyone is to tithe to a local church or synagogue. Two years out of every three we are told to use the tithe of our increase *to finance our pilgrimage to Jerusalem*, in order to enhance the celebration of the *mo'edim* [appointed times of the Holy One] there. Here is what Torah tells us:

*Set aside a tithe of all the increase of your seed
that which comes forth from the field year by year.
Eat the tithed portion of your grain, of your new wine, and of your oil,
and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock;
before the Holy One your God, in the place which he shall choose
to cause his name to dwell there, that you may learn to fear the Holy One your God always.*

*If the way be too long for you, so that you are not able to carry it,
because the place is too far from you which the Holy One your God shall choose,
to set his name there, when the Holy One your God shall bless you;
then turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand,
and go to the place which the Holy One your God shall choose:
and spend the money on whatever your soul desires,
for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink,
or for whatever your soul asks of you;
and eat there before the Holy One your God,
and rejoice, you and your household.*

[Deuteronomy 14:22-26]

The first time I read this passage I did a *double take*. *Spend the money on whatever your soul desires?* Why on earth did nobody ever tell me this? Why on earth did I never take the time to read it for myself instead of listening to preachers with a financial stake in the issue tell me what the tithe was for and what I was supposed to do with it? Now I understood how people of Temple times could afford to go to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts - they *knew the Torah*, and the wisdom of the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven!

What Torah tells about the ‘tithe’ is vastly different than what organized churches and tele-evangelistic ministries are teaching in our day. Torah tell us that two out of every three years we are to store up one tenth of what our land produces, take it (or the proceeds of its sale) to Jerusalem, and celebrate the Feasts there by eating, dancing, even drinking in moderation if we so choose, and rejoicing with our families. In the third year we are to store up the tithe of our land’s produce “in our gates” [that is, discipline ourselves not to consume or spend it] and *personally* [not through some local church or synagogue] distribute it to *the poor, the widow, the fatherless, and the foreigner* [and, of course, to the impoverished Levi, if any reside in our town] *as they have need*.

***No Need to Get Angry About the Hyped-Up Deception
That Has Been Spread By False Prophets/Teachers About the Tithe;
That Too is Just a Test!***

As you read what the Bible really says about the tithe, some of you may be tempted to become angry at having been misled by religious ministries seeking to pay their bills and salaries with your “tithe” money. Don’t “go there”. Don’t let anger or feelings of betrayal distract you. Being angry or feeling betrayed will not change anything – and will only prolong the agony of the deception. After all, the “tithe-seekers” of the religious world generally are just repeating what they have heard and actually, though un-Scripturally, believe. Or at least they *want to believe*. Let’s go beyond the absurd falsehood of what is taught about the tithe from the pulpits of modern religious institutions and focus instead on *the glorious truth of what the Holy One is saying here in the Torah*. What the Holy One is saying in today’s aliyah of Torah is absolutely wonderful! He is saying that we, as His holy people, dedicated and consecrated to Him as a *kingdom of priests*, are called – and Divinely commissioned and empowered - to handle money and possessions very, very differently from the way the world handles money. A holy people, dedicated and consecrated unto the Holy One, who *sh’ma* His Word, will set aside moneys and goods to be able to participate in the Holy One’s Divine dramas [the *Moed’im*] with their families and friends, and to be a blessing to the poor, the sojourner, the widow, the fatherless, and those without a permanent home in their community. This is not *philanthropy* (giving sums of money to soothe one’s conscience, or obtain

acceptance or favor with men). This is not maximizing an income tax deduction. This is, purely and simply, *imitating your Father in Heaven*, and *fulfilling your Divine destiny*. This is acknowledging all you have (not just 10%) is His. This is acknowledging that what you do with whatever money and goods you receive *reflects who you are*. You are “*children of God*” [Deuteronomy 14:1]. You are “*a people holy to the Holy One*”, and you are His “*treasured possession*” [Deuteronomy 14:2].

Questions For Today's Study

1. Write two lists. On the first list, write the things today's verses say are “kosher” to eat. On the other list, write all the things today's verses say are not Biblically “kosher” to eat.

2. With regard what the Torah says about the produce tithe:

[A] List the things for which Moshe said the produce tithe was to be used in the first and second year of the three-year tithing cycle?

[B] What did Moshe say was to be done with the produce tithe every third year?

[C] What four groups or classes of people were to benefit from this “third year produce tithe”?

[D] Who was to be in charge of dispensing this “third year produce tithe”?

[E] Write a plan detailing how your family could carry out the *mitzvot* of the produce tithe as it is set forth in Deuteronomy 14.

3. In today's reading from the third haftarah of consolation the Holy One continues His words of comfort to Jerusalem and to her inhabitants.

*Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals,
and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.
No weapon that is formed against you will prosper;
and every tongue that will rise against you in judgment you will condemn.
This is the heritage of the servants of the Holy One,
and their righteousness that is of me, says the Holy One.*

[Isaiah 54:16-17]

The oft-quoted verse “*no weapon formed against you shall prosper*” is presented here *in context*. The Holy One is explaining why no “terror” will grip the heart of those who return to Jerusalem in the Messianic period when Israel is restored – [the preceding verses make it clear the return from exile under Messiah's kingship is the time period of which the Holy One is speaking] because they will *know Him*, and know that *He created the Evil One*, and will know that *the Evil One can do only what He allows Him to do!*

[A] What does that verse indicate is the “heritage” of the Holy One's servants?

[B] Look up the word our English Bibles translate as “heritage” in Strong’s and Gesenius [Hebrew word #5159]. Write the word in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings, if you can. Then, search out the verb root of this word, and describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing.

[C] While you have your Strong’s and Gesenius out, look up the word our English Bibles translate as “prosper”, in verse 16. Write the word in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings, if you can. Then search out the verb root of this word and describe the Hebraic word picture you see developing.

4. In Isaiah 54:16 the Holy One says that He “created *the devastator* to destroy”. What do you think He means?

5. In the single B’rit Chadasha verse for today Yochanan mentions the Anti-Messiah (*against or instead of, or imitating* Messiah).

*... every spirit who doesn't confess
that Yeshua the Messiah has come in the flesh is not of the Holy One,
and this is the spirit of the anti-messiah, of whom you have heard that it comes.
Now it is in the world already.*

[A] What does Yochanan say is the “spirit of Anti-Messiah”?

[B] Shaul [Paul] speaks of AntiMessiah as a “Man of Lawlessness” in his writings. Since, to a Jew (which Shaul, of course, was), “Law” is not Roman law, or American Law, or international law, but “*Torah*”-*law*, what does Shaul indicate will be the attitude of the spirit of anti-Messiah to the Torah?

[C] Read II Peter 3:15-17. Kefa [Peter] warns the Redeemed of all ages that there are [always will be] teachers/leaders who distort the writings of Paul. He calls these men “lawless” men. Since Kefa calls them “lawless”, what error do you think such men teach about the Torah?

6. Write an essay on what and who an anti-Messiah is, does, and will do. Include in your essay an explanation of what you think today’s Torah aliyah has to do with the Anti-Messiah.

*May you know the eternal truth, and live in its fountain of living water,
That you may fulfill the Divine Destiny for which you were created
And have been brought called forth at this place and time.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalms 112:9-10

*He has dispersed, he has given to the poor.
His righteousness endures forever.
His horn will be exalted with honor.*

*The wicked [i.e. the rasha, self-obsessed one] will see it,
and he will be grieved.*

*He [i.e. the rasha, self-obsessed one] will gnash with his teeth;
then he will melt away.
The desire of the wicked will perish.*