

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: *Torah Ki Teitze:* Deuteronomy 23:21² - 24:15

Haftarah: Isaiah 54:6-8

B'rit Chadasha: I Corinthians 5:4-5

Whatever your lips utter you are to be sure to do.

[Deuteronomy 23:23]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 27:5-6;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the 3rd Petition, *S'lach* [The Prayer For Forgiveness]

Ki tidor neder l'Adonai Eloheicha – If/when you make a vow unto the Holy One your God ... *lo te'acher leshalmo* - you are not to delay in fulfilling it ... **Deuteronomy 23:21a**

We do not live in a societal vacuum. We are part of the ‘greater wallpaper’ of the Ecosystem. Every move we make, everything we do, every word we speak – even the way we choose to adorn and present ourselves at any given moment – sends out ripple effects that *impact people, altar the mood/‘vibe’* in whatever geographical location we find ourselves, and *change the status quo*. Knowing, as we do from reading Torah, that the law of sowing and reaping is in effect [**Genesis 8:22**], conducting a periodic ‘potential impact analysis’ before acting or speaking is something that responsible servants of the Holy One simply must become disciplined in doing. That discipline is exactly what Moshe is trying to teach us in parsha *Ki Tetze*. What he is laying out for us are not ‘laws’ – they are exercises in ‘environmental impact analysis’.

***We are Influencers – But Woe to us – and the to the world –
if we Exercise that Influence Foolishly***

The Holy One has sought us, seen potential in us, courted us, brought us out of bondage through a strait gate, called us near to His Heart, and cut eternal Covenant with us. He is now our Trusted Companion and Friend – as well as our holy and majestic Sovereign. He is faithfully escorting us down a very narrow road toward our intended destinies – much the way a shepherd leads a flock of sheep to water and pasture. His majesty, regal bearing, and pulsing kedusha are impelling us forward – out of ivory towers and cathedrals of philosophy, politics, and religion where everything is conceptual onto the killing fields of human misery – to bring Torah’s real, tangible, practical, forward-looking solutions to bear for real people in real time. Hearing His Voice and sensing His calm, joyful

¹ All rights with respect to this publication are reserved to the author, William G. Bullock Sr., also known as ‘*the Rabbi’s son*’. Reproduction of material from any *Rabbi’s son* lesson or communication without written permission from the author is prohibited. Copyright © 2024, William G. Bullock Sr.

² In the TaNaKh, the numbering of the verses is slightly different. Verse 21 in Western versions of the Bible verse 22 in the TaNaKh.

countenance smiling down on us, our spirits are beginning to soar. We see real people with real needs crying out for true and meaningful Divine encounter, intervention, and guidance – not masses, classes, races, ethnicities, generations, and ideologies blaming one another for all the world’s real and imaginary ills. Our physical bodies are suddenly brimming with strength. Our eyes are suddenly wide with wonder. Our love for our Bridegroom-King - and for all the human beings, things, species, and worlds that He has created - is exploding. As we walk with Him along great heights, the very air we breathe seems is rarified. The view ranges between spectacular, magnificent, and majestic. And the Company? Well, the company is to die for.

The Other Side of the Story

Ah ... but there is always *another side* to every story. What is the *other side* of the greatest love story ever told? The other side is that *the higher we go with our Bridegroom-King, the steeper the angle of ascent and the narrower the pathway becomes*. The odyssey to which we have been introduced is an exhilarating journey – but it is also a very, very serious pilgrimage. The higher we go, the more weightiness attaches to each choice we make along the way. The greater heights we ascend with the Master, the more critically important - and potentially treacherous - each step we take becomes. Below us now lies a very deep chasm. If we miss a step at this stage of the journey; if we *get distracted*; if we *take a wrong turn*; if we *hesitate when the Master hastens*, or if we *hasten when the Master hesitates*; if we stumble; well, if we do any of those things – if we *deviate from the course and the example and the pace of the Master in any way* - the consequences could be significant, not only for us and our families, but also for the people and nations of the world that we are called to serve. Moshe does not want us to be ‘ignorant brethren’. He wants us to know – and be prepared for – the challenges that await us on the *high road*. He doesn’t want our foot to slip. He wants us to know where the danger zones are, and to know how to navigate our way through them.

The Next Nine Crossroads Along the Bridegroom’s Pathway

Today, therefore, Moshe will open up the curtain of revelation and show us nine more negativity-triggering-opportunities that we may have to navigate at the higher elevations of our journey – actually, nine more hypotheticals representing scenarios where potentially destiny-altering choices have to be made. The nine negativity-triggering hypothetical situations covered by Moshe in today’s aliyah are:

[1] situations in which we might be tempted – or told - to open our mouths and *presumptuously misuse the precious gift of speech to make a*

*personal vow – and thus take on extra, unnecessary baggage for our journey*³;

[2] situations in which we might be tempted to *let material things come between us and our neighbor*⁴;

[3] situations in which we might be tempted to get self-absorbed, get distracted from our marriage covenant⁵, *and walk away from the commitment we once made to our spouse*;

[4] situations in which we might be tempted to *trivialize the marriage covenant and take our spouse for granted*⁶;

[5] situations in which we might be tempted to react to the problems of poor people with foolish pity instead of wise compassion, decide to just throw money at the problem, and thus *encourage people to remain in a state of dependence rather than rise above it*⁷;

[6] situations in which we might be tempted to *focus on what we can take and receive from others rather than on what we can give to or do for others*⁸ to empower them to better their lives on both the short and the long term;

[7] situations in which we might be tempted to *normalize critical, judgmental, accusatory, and/or slanderous speech and overlook its negative effects on the speaker, the hearer, and the world*⁹;

[8] situations in which we might be tempted to *value possessions and things more than people or the Creator's Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan*¹⁰;

[9] situations in which we might be tempted to *get selfish or lazy and delay paying the debts and obligations as, when, and to the extent we promised we would*¹¹.

These nine potential off-ramps to negativity are presented as hypotheticals – and right now that is all they are. One day soon, however, they will be all-too real. Moshe knows that such potential areas of danger intersect the narrow road that leads to life fairly frequently. He knows that each of these ‘flesh-traps’/‘emotion-triggers’/pseudo-intellect teasers can function as an ‘off-ramp’, dumping the straying pilgrim off the narrow road that leads to life back onto the broad path that leads to destruction. Moshe knows that the issues and dangers these particular crossroads present are not *beginner/bunny-slope issues*, but are all *black- diamond rated, heavily mogul-ed, steep, and treacherous slopes* that

³ Deuteronomy 23:22-24 – “*When you make a pledge to Holy One your God ...*”

⁴ Deuteronomy 23:25-26 – “*When you come in to your neighbor's vineyard ...*”

⁵ Deuteronomy 24:1-4 – “*When a man marries a woman, if she is displeasing to him ...*”

⁶ Deuteronomy 24:4 – “*When a man takes a new bride ...*”

⁷ Deuteronomy 24:6 – “*No man shall take the lower or upper millstone in pledge ...*”

⁸ Deuteronomy 24:7 – “*If a man kidnaps a son of Israel, forces him to serve and then sells him ...*”

⁹ Deuteronomy 24:8-9 – “*Be careful with regard to tzara'at, and carefully keep watch ...*”

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 24:10-13 – “*When you lend your brother a thing, you are not to enter his house ...*”

¹¹ Deuteronomy 24:14-15 – “*Do not withhold the wages due to your poor or destitute hired hand ...*”

beckon to us to ‘try it just once’.

Treacherous Intersections Ahead! Please Watch Your Step!

Mitzvot have been pouring from our Covenant Partner’s Heart through Moshe’s lips at such a fast and furious pace. Though thematically diverse, all of the *mitzvot* Moshe is teaching are inter-connected. Each hypothetical is brilliantly designed to function as an essential cog in the wheel of the Kingdom-of-Heaven-Scented Society that we are being commissioned to build on earth. Each is necessary for our culture to follow if we are truly going to leave Messiah’s Footprint on the world. Our Bridegroom-King has promised to make us into, and establish us as, His *kingdom of priests – i.e. His royal emissaries to all the other peoples and nations of the world*. We are not here to use, abuse, or take from those people – much less are we here to diminish or deplete Creation; we are here to bless and inspire the people we encounter on our journey through life, and we are to leave every part of the earth and the universe in which our feet tread a little better and more fruitful place than it was when we found it. We are to be net contributors; not net takers.

It follows from the above that we are *not here to judge or condemn* the people of the world; we are here to *inspire them* with wisdom expressed in kindness and compassion. We are *not here to be disgusted by people’s folly* nor to be *outraged by their perversion*; we are here to *offer them good news about a more excellent way*, and, if they act like they are the least bit interested, to *love them and lead them in that way*. The *mitzvot* of Torah that Moshe is teaching us – lived out in the context of *close communion with the Holy One*, of course - is our key to success in this great Divine Adventure.

Torah is a precious – and essential – gift. Without it, we would just have to ‘wing it’ in our interactions with each other, with the people of the nations, and with Creation. But Torah provides us both a *wisdom fountain* [the ‘*living water*’ function] and a *constantly renewing energy source* [the ‘*lamp to our feet and light to our path*’ function]. We therefore need to approach the instructions of Torah as *princes and princesses in training*. We are not to approach it as theologians in a seminary, but as *novices in an inspiring art form*, and as *apprentices in a life-saving skill*. We are not called to process the Torah’s instructions intellectually; we are called to implement them in real ways in real life. We are not called to find ways around Torah’s *mitzvot*; we are called to find ways to apply them to help people – and if possible whole cultures - out of the messes they have created. We are not called to judge others by their terms; we are called to adjust our own thoughts, attitudes, conversations, actions and reactions to conform to them. That is why Moshe told us that we are to speak of

the words of Torah as we sit in our homes, and as we walk by the way, and when we lie down, and when we rise up. It is part of our ongoing task – and privilege – of investigation. The Holy One hides the glory of His Words in the most difficult challenges of life on earth – and then dares all who love Him to come and seek out what He has concealed. Each *mitzvah* Moshe speaks forth is therefore like an iceberg - all we see on the surface is the tip or fringe of it. Our job is to apply sonar-like *Re'eh* vision to explore how deep it goes both into the human psyche and the essence of the God-man relationship. And of course we are, by this point in the Torah cycle, expected to know how to find our Bridegroom-King's heart in every *mitzvah* and to seek out the deeper levels of meaning and application that are concealed in the folds of the *mitzvah* in cooperation with the *Ruach HaQodesh*. Let's get started in the search for pearls of great price.

More Mileposts on the Two Pathways

In *Re'eh* Moshe began a process of laying before us *two pathways*. He is still doing it. But he is going to ask us to choose, *very soon*, which of these two pathways we will follow. One of these pathways – the ‘*Bridegroom's pathway*’ - leads those who choose it to a life of *unfathomable blessing* and *ever-growing shalom*, and establishes their lives as *a fountain of blessing not only for their households and families, but for everyone they meet*. The other pathway – the ‘*path of the runaway bride*’ – leads to a life of *perpetually chasing after the wind*, of *miserable failure after miserable failure*, and of *ever-intensifying despair*. It relentlessly drags the lives of all who chose this path – and the lives of those they love – downward toward a pool of toxic spiritual waste.

For three parshot now Moshe has been using *devarim* – *i.e.* words of prophetic ‘buzz’, weight, and impact - to cause these two potential pathways in life to *diverge right in front of our eyes*. Because Moshe wants us to make an *informed choice* between the two pathways, he intends, prior to calling upon us to make our choice between the pathways, to prophetically empower us to *look a little way down each of the two pathways that he has set before us in order to get an idea what various aspects of life will be like depending on which of the pathways we choose*. In *Re'eh* Moshe prophetically assisted us to see/perceive/appreciate the significant distinction, depending upon which of the two pathways we choose, that will exist between:

[a] the way in which we will, in a prelude to the end times, deal with people and things that have fallen under our Bridegroom's fiercest judgments; and

[b] the way in which we will ‘worship’ the Holy One - and *what fruit the activities we call ‘worship’ will produce* in us and in our world.

Believe it or not, these were the beginner issues of our great journey. This was

‘milk’ for babes. Last week in *Shoftim* Moshe took us a little deeper, showing us a whole different set of mileposts on the two pathways. In particular Moshe showed us what *civil government* and *community life* would look/be like for us *if* we followed the Bridegroom’s pathway – and what it would look/be like for us if we chose instead the pathway of the runaway bride.

Moshe has continued in the same ‘look-down-the-road’ prophetic focus this week in *Ki Teitze*. He has been broadening his prophetic brush and showing us many, many more areas in relation to which our way and quality of life will diverge drastically depending upon whether we choose *the path of the Bridegroom* on the one hand, or *the path of the runaway bride* on the other. And now we are being called to a whole new level of responsiveness. At first glance the *mitzvot* Moshe sets out for the next nine crossroads through which we must learn to navigate may appear to be presented *randomly*, indeed *haphazardly*. But I assure you *that is not the case*. More on that in a moment.

Moreover as stated in yesterday’s shiur even though at first glance the *mitzvot* Moshe is downloading to us may seem archaic or inapplicable to our “modern” lives in the current century, the reality is that each one is not only still valid today, but still has layers and layers of meaning and revelation of truth. These are not simple do’s and don’ts of an ‘old’ covenant; they are critically important instructs for living and relating to our Covenant Partner in Heaven, to Creation, and to our neighbor, just waiting to be explored – if, that is, we will submit to the words not only as “commands” but as invitations to *find the Messiah*, and *His way*, *His truth*, and *His life*, in the ‘landscape’ the words draw for us. They are not superseded or done away with or made irrelevant by the coming of Messiah; they are what is being written on our heart by the Holy Spirit as a result of that coming.

Understanding the Method to Moshe’s Seeming Madness: The Order Underlying the Mitzvot

If you will but look carefully, with spiritual eyes, you will see that there is a method to Moshe’s seeming madness. He is not making things up as he goes. He is not flitting around from subject to subject in a fit of senility. He has an *outline* - given by the *Ruach HaQodesh*. And he is following it to the letter.

Keep in mind where all the *mitzvot* Moshe is now reciting in detail CAME FROM. They came from the voice of our Divine Bridegroom as revealed on Mt. Sinai. The Holy One spoke ten general ‘words’ in the hearing of all His redeemed people. Then, after the people asked Moshe to be their intermediary with regard to whatever else the Holy One might have to say, the Holy One took Moshe up on

the Mountain for two separate 40-day periods, and spoke to him the more specific *mitzvot* about which we are now reading.

What is the outline Moshe is using in our parsha? It is the same outline that the Holy One used on Mt. Sinai. Moshe, like the Holy One on Sinai, has *ten general 'topics'* – corresponding to the ten *words* our Divine Bridegroom spoke in the hearing of all the people. General topic by general topic, as the Holy One did with Moshe in private audience on Sinai, Moshe is teaching us through specific *mitzvot* what each of the ten general topics mean *in real life*.

Consider the 9 categories of *mitzvot* I have identified above as present in today's aliyah. Notice how the first category, *mitzvot* concerned with the *making of vows*, relates to the 'general topic' expressed in the Divine Instruction to '*lo tignov*' [*usually translated in archaic Old English as 'Thou shalt not steal'*]. In Exodus 20:13[c] our Covenant Partner simply said:

Lo tignov

[Literally: *You are not to take/appropriate for yourself ...*]

But, what *exactly* does '*you are not to take/appropriate to yourself*' mean? In its general form the pronouncement is so vague and ambiguous that anyone with half a brain can argue around it. *Lo tignov* has to be more than just nice, spiritual-sounding words. All the Creator's words are *prophetic, creative, and powerful*. They are living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. They do not return to Him 'void'. Every word of the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov has *deep and lasting practical effect*. The Holy One's words, you see, have '*hands*' and '*feet*'. They can be – are - '*fleshed out*' in real-life, real-time examples, through *specific case illustrations*.

And if you will receive it, that is the essence of the purpose of the *mitzvot*. The *mitzvot* sections of Torah are not *independent* of the 'ten commandments' – they are *part and parcel* of them. The long lists of *mitzvot* in parsha *Ki Teitze* are not a new and different set of instructions – they are merely *the practical explanation of what the 'ten commandments' are all about*.

Today Moshe will give us some concrete examples [first given to him by the Holy One on Mt. Sinai] of what our Divine Bridegroom's '*lo tignov*' instruction means in practical terms.

Scenario #1: If you utter a vow ...

Today's aliyah begins with the following words of caution:

*If/when you vow¹² a vow to the Holy One your God, do not be slack to pay it:
for the Holy One your God will surely require it of you;
and it would be [a breach of covenant] in you.*

[Deuteronomy 23:21]

The first things we should ask ourselves, now that we have walked with the Holy One awhile, is ‘*does the Holy One instruct us to make vows?*’, and, if we feel the answer to that question may be ‘yes’, what specifically is it we are told to vow to do?

Vows/oaths can – and usually wind up being - self-serving. Vows are almost always presumptuous. Vows certainly tend to be a lot harder to live up to than to make. And, we should also ask ourselves, what does the making of vows have to do with *the lo tignov* [You will not take/appropriate for yourself] empowerment/commission our Bridegroom-King has spoken over us? Think about it. If we vow something the commitment becomes *ours*. The responsibility becomes *ours*. Our will – defined by the words we used in making the vow - supersedes the will of the Holy One in the area of the subject matter of the vow. We are taking and appropriating to/for ourselves something that belongs to our Divine Bridegroom, and rests in His providence and right to control alone.

Now do you see it? *Lo tignov* is aimed at empowering us to *recognize what is ours to control and . . . well, what is not*. The fleshing-out in Torah of all the deep things the Holy One meant by His proclamation of ‘*lo tignov*’ over us began earlier in Deuteronomy 23. Remember the instructions regarding *not withholding refuge to slaves/servants?*¹³ The Holy One was telling us [through Moshe], that human beings do not belong to other human beings, but to the Holy One alone; hence we must not interfere or involve ourselves in the relations – or even the disputes - between ‘masters’ and their ‘servants’; we are neither to aid slaves/servants to escape, nor are we to aid the master to capture the servant if he/she escapes¹⁴. We are to *keep our hands off* the situation – i.e. *lo tignov*.

¹² The verb our English Bibles translate as ‘vow’ is the Hebrew verb *nadar* [nun, dalet, resh, Strong’s Hebrew word #5087, pronounced *naw-dar*]. It’s first Biblical usage is in Genesis 28, where, after seeing a vision, in a dream, of angels ascending to and descending from Heaven on a staircase/ladder, we are told that our ancestor Ya’akov ‘vowed [*nadar*] a vow [*neder*] ...’ Genesis 28:20. The particular *neder* was a conditional one – if the Holy One would feed and clothe him, while away from home in Paddan Aram, and bring him back safely to Eretz Yisrael, Ya’akov would consider the spot the angels were ascending and descending [Har Moriyah, according to the sages], as the Holy One’s ‘house’, to which He would bring the Holy One a tithe of all the Holy One gave him.

¹³ See Deuteronomy 23:16-17.

¹⁴ The instructions regarding not making a slave return to his master prove that Torah regards slaves as something other than ‘property’. With property [for instance, cattle], we are to restore the straying animal to its owner; *not so* with slaves who stray.

This *lo tignov* section has also included instructions regarding *prostitution*¹⁵. Do you understand why? Because in our Divine Bridegroom's eyes, *every person's sexuality and intimacy are things that belong solely to the spouse He has ordained and destined for that person* – hence to take/appropriate [or buy or sell] a human being's sexual intimacy involves *gross misappropriation*. And just prior to the 'vows' section with which we began today's aliyah, Moshe continued explaining the implications of *lo tignov* in the context of commercial transactions. In Deuteronomy 23:20-21 he addressed the issue of what we know as *usury*, namely *charging interest* on advances of money or goods. With regard to a fellow Israeli, we are not to charge interest – *not even an amount less than the 'market' rate*. But on a loan to a 'foreigner' we may charge market rates of interest. Why? What does *this* have to do with *lo tignov*? Consider that our Covenant Partner in Heaven does not *require* us to – or even suggest that we should - loan money to gentiles. We are however *required by Torah to lend money to the poor among our own countrymen*. Hence any funds that we would/could loan to a poor countryman are *the Holy One's not ours, by operation of Torah*. We are *not* to profit from them. For us to profit from them would be to take/appropriate them for our own use, and would therefore violate the *lo tignov* directive.

Are you getting it? Do you now begin to understand how much deeper than surface level are the directives of the Holy One? *Every time you speak something with your mouth it becomes subject to lo tignov*. If you say you are going to do something, or give something, or act a certain way, and then do not do what you say, you have *violated lo tignov*, just as much as if you had broken into your neighbor's house and stolen the family china.

Do you now understand how Yeshua of Natzret could teach that *lo tirtzach* [usually translated as '*Thou shalt not kill*'], means much, much more than just you are not to take someone's life by physical attack with malice? Do you understand how He could teach that *lo tinaf* [usually translated as '*Thou shalt not commit adultery*'] means much, much more than you are not to sleep with your neighbor's wife or husband?

Yeshua was just acting as a prophet like unto Moshe – spelling out through specific *mitzvot* the practical *feet and hands* version of the 'ten commandments'. But alas, I digress. Let's get back to the issue at hand – vows. Moshe continues on the same theme:

*But if you forbear to vow,
it will not be sin in you.
That which is gone out of your lips you must observe [sh'mar] and do;
according as you have vowed to the Holy One your God,*

¹⁵ See Deuteronomy 23:18-19.

a freewill offering that you have promised with your mouth.
[Deuteronomy 23:21-22]

The specific passage we are studying does not directly address vows and promises made by one man *to another*, or *pledges of allegiance to nations or organizations*. Other passages of Torah speak to varying degrees on that subject matter, but they are beyond the scope of today's commentary. Those do not only involve the general principle of *lo tignov*, but also the sister identity-shaping principle of *lo-ta'aneh v're'eicha ed shaker* [you will not bear false witness in dealings with your neighbor].

Moshe is *sticking to the outline our Covenant Partner in Heaven gave him*. What he is concerned about right now is not so much vows in general, but the *lo tignov* implications of the vows we may be tempted to make. Hence his discussion of vows focuses specifically on vows made TO THE HOLY ONE. In context, since we are in a section dealing with *wartime*, consider the 'soldier's vow'. At a time of great stress and danger a soldier will often make a vow that if the Holy One will *give victory* - or will *preserve the soldier alive* - the soldier will *make a gift to the Holy One* or *do something* for Him. An example of this kind of 'soldier's vow' is found in *Sefer Shoftim* [the Book of Judges], in chapter 11. The *Ammoni* attacked us, and a man named Yiftach [our English Bibles call him Jephthah] was called upon to lead Israel's defense. Yiftach made a vow unto the Holy One, saying:

*If you give the Ammoni into my hands,
Whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me
When I return in triumph from the Ammoni will be the Holy One's,
And I will present myself with it as a korban olah [burnt offering].*
[Judges 11:32]

Why did Yiftach make such a vow? Did he really think the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov would be *impressed*, and would decide *on the basis of that vow* to give His people victory? We are not told. But if you remember the story, the Holy One did indeed 'give the Ammoni' into Yiftach's hands. And when Yiftach returned home, to Yiftach's chagrin, his only child, a daughter, is the one who came dancing out of his doorway to greet him. **Judges 11:34**. And we are told euphemistically that Yiftach did to her 'as he vowed'¹⁶.

The point of the story of Yiftach and of today's opening *mitzvah* is the same. Vows to our Covenant Partner in Heaven – other than the basic vow our ancestors made at Sinai, and which we reaffirm at our *bar/bat mitzvah*, 'to *asah*' and 'to *sh'ma*' everything the Divine Bridegroom has spoken¹⁷ - are not a part of the

¹⁶ The sages do not interpret this as meaning he engaged in human sacrifice but that he dedicated her to the Holy One, and she remained a virgin the rest of her life.

¹⁷ This commitment – the basic Bride's vow of Divine Betrothal – is found in Exodus 24:7.

covenant undertaking. Vows to the Holy One are inconsistent with the *sh'ma* lifestyle. They are not a *Bridal response to our Divine Bridegroom's will*, but an *attempt to manipulate Him by our words or conduct*. Vows to Holy One are a form of spiritual witchcraft – spirituality *the pagan way*.

A common vow to the Holy One is that a person will *fast* [abstain from food and/or water] for a certain period of time on behalf of a sick family member or friend. If our motive in making such a vow is *to better get to know our Covenant Partner's will in regard to that person*, and better see 'what the Father is doing' in that person's life and family situation, that is one thing. It is not *required by the covenant*, but it is probably at worst benign in effect on the relationship. If, however, we think that by our fasting we will be able to *induce the Holy One to heal the person*, we have stepped outside the bounds. The vow is no longer benign, but malignant. We have assumed the masculine role in the relationship, and relegated our Divine Bridegroom to the feminine role. This is *spiritual witchcraft*, like the Kena'ani practiced with their 'gods'. It is exalting our will over His, and declaring our limited understanding of the situation - and our fleshy human compassion - superior to His perfect perspective and His Divine Compassion. It is the opposite of the *sh'ma* lifestyle, which trusts our Divine Bridegroom to do what He knows to be *tzedek* – right and good and needed in the situation. It thereby creates a barrier between us and our Covenant Partner in Heaven.

Please remember that Torah does *not* encourage vows - to the Holy One or otherwise. As we see in today's aliyah:

... if you shall forbear to vow it shall be no sin in you.

[Deuteronomy 23:22]

The only kind of vow I can think of that Torah mentions in any favorable light at all [other than the Bridal vow of 'I will *asah* and I will *sh'ma* all My Covenant Partner in Heaven speaks'] is the *Nazir's* vow, about which we read in Numbers 6. And that vow is all about voluntarily *surrendering to the Holy One's will* – not about acting independently of the Holy One and trying to *manipulate Him to aid or support us in doing our will*.

***Scenario #2: When You Come into a Neighbor's Vineyard ...
Dealings With Material Possessions/Properties that the Holy One
Has in His Wisdom Entrusted to Someone Else***

The next series of *lo tignov* explaining *mitzvot* about which we read today deal with our inevitable interactions with property which the Holy One has entrusted to someone else. If you work in a factory, the machines and raw materials you work with probably belong to someone else. If you work in an office, the pens and staplers and computers and telephones probably belong to someone else. If you

walk through a store or shop, the merchandise belongs to someone else. And if you walk through a parking lot, the cars beside which you walk belong to someone else. It is inevitable that we will have contact with other people's *stuff*. But that inevitable contact can be *Godly* contact or *ungodly* contact.

How we interact with other people's property is a good test – a measuring rod - of our closeness to, and our trust of, the Holy One. Do you take pens or paper or tools from work, thinking 'they won't be missed'? *Lo tignov*. Do you treat other people's property as if it were yours [subconsciously wishing it were]? *Lo tignov*. Do you *respect* or *bemoan* the fact that the Divine Bridegroom, in His wisdom, has decided that some other person – not you – is the proper custodian of the house, car, business, clothes, growing crop, etc. that look so good to you? *Lo tignov*.

Our aliyah today contains some instructions regarding interacting with property that the Holy One has entrusted to someone else:

When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat of grapes your fill at your pleasure; but you are not to put any in your vessel.

When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the ears with your hand; but you are not to thrust a sickle into your neighbor's standing grain.

[Deuteronomy 23:24-25]

Lo tignov, Beloved. Deep and wide is the meaning.

Remember too the context of the instructions we are reading. From opening lines to closing lines of *Ki Teitze*, Moshe has been talking about how we are to behave in *wartime*. Like soldiers at war, we will get hungry. Like soldier on a mission, we will often be uncertain of our future. We will feel insecure. But our Covenant Partner in Heaven wants us to remember that whatever field in which we encamp is *a field* that he has ordained for someone else – not us - to reap. It is not ours. And we need to keep in mind that we are by no means the only people who are important in the Holy One's eyes. All people are important – as is Creation. We must not take more than we have to have to survive. We must be good stewards of the land – even in wartime. There will be widows, and orphans, and poor people, and foreigners in the land whose needs must be considered.

The Holy One is our Provider. He is capable of providing everything we need – without us taking someone else's provision in quantities that will constitute a redistribution of wealth. There is to be no *Sherman march*¹⁸ by the Holy One's

¹⁸ The reference is to the 'scorched earth' policy of General *George Tecumseh Sherman* of the Union [Northern] army, who marched through the states of Georgia and Virginia at the end of the War Between the American States in a murderous, vengeful, rage. He ordered his armies to burn all the fields and

army. Yes, we have our Covenant Partner's permission take a few clusters of grapes for a snack, or pluck a few grains to munch on to sustain us for the day. The grapes and grain and other stuff of life are all HIS, and He can give them away to whom He pleases. The landowner must understand that. Our presence is a test of his spirituality as well.

As we receive our daily bread however we should marvel at the Holy One's goodness, and give thanks that He spoke a blessing over the *eretz* [earth] on the third day of Creation, in order that it produce plants bearing seeds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed. **Genesis 1:11-13**. And the one whose grapes or grain we eat is credited with the *mitzvah* of hospitality.

But we are not to re-distribute wealth according to *what we think is right and just and fair*. We are not to *play Robin Hood* with other people's property. We are not to expect to live off of someone else's property – *we are to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Holy One*. He gives to us such as we have need. He gives to us the ability to produce wealth. We are not to treat property the Holy One has entrusted to others as if it were our own. We are not to consider that because our Covenant Partner in Heaven has richly blessed another person we have a *right* to take part of that blessing. This does not mean that the poor are unprotected. There are, as we have talked about previously, many protections in Torah for the poor, the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, and the 'down on luck' in our society.

The corner of our field, the tithe we do not spend on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the loan without interest, etc., are ways Torah wants us, as individuals, living the *sh'ma* lifestyle, in response to His direction, to provide for those in need.

***Scenario #3: When a Man Takes a Wife ...
When Marriage Vows Are Disregarded:
The Unmitigated Disaster the World Knows as 'Divorce'***

Chapter 24 of Deuteronomy begins with instructions concerning the emotionally charged issue of divorce. We may rightly ask whether the topic under discussion is still *lo tignov* [you are not to *take/appropriate to yourself* . . .], or has shifted to *lo tinaf* [you are not to *adulterate*].

I think you will see from the opening lines that Moshe is still talking *lo tignov*. He is still talking about *taking/appropriating*.

orchards behind them, so that the women, children, aged and infirm of the South would either die by the sword, starve to death, or suffer pestilence and extreme poverty that would continue for generations to come, if not permanently.

*If/when a man **takes** a wife, and marries her,
then it shall be, if she finds no favor in his eyes,
because he has found some unseemly thing in her, he is to write her a **get** [a bill of divorce],
and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.*

*If/when she has departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's woman.
If the latter husband hates her, and write her a bill of divorce,
and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house;
or if the latter husband die, who took her to be his wife;
her former husband, who sent her away,
may not take her again to be his woman, after she is defiled;
for that is abomination before the Holy One: and you are not, by your actions,
to cause the land, the Holy One your God gives you for an inheritance to miss the mark.*

[Deuteronomy 24:1-5]

These *mitzvot* are not instructing – nor encouraging - anyone to get a divorce or to ‘put away’ a wife. Moshe is not encouraging or sanctioning divorce. Read in proper context these verses deal specifically with the situation where a man returns from combat and finds his wife doing ‘something unseemly’ [see verse 1]. I will let you use your imagination on what that might mean, but keep in mind as you meditate on this *mitzvah* Yeshua’s teaching that, in accordance with Torah as our Covenant Partner in Heaven intended it, *anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery. Matthew 19:9, and anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress. Matthew 5:31-32.*

Yeshua did not change Torah’s instruction. He did correct a common error of interpretation – an error created and perpetuated by the religious mainstream, for purposes of perpetuation of its influence. If, you see, the institutions and appointed heads of the religious mainstream are deemed to have the power to grant or deny divorces, they have one more area of power over people’s lives. Some of Israel’s sages applied the *mitzvah* of divorce to situations outside the one mentioned by Moshe – interpreting the ‘get’ *mitzvah* we to allow a man to divorce his wife even *in peacetime*, and *for no offense more serious than burning a meal*. Yeshua returned the focus to what the *mitzvah* was intended to mean, and the true, limited context in which it was designed to be applicable for redemption’s sake. He pointed out that the loose interpretations accepted by some liberal sages had been blatantly incorrect.

The essence of Torah’s instruction concerning divorce is that the man – even if he finds her committing adultery - must *give* the wife something. That something is, in Hebrew, called a ‘get’. It is often translated into English as ‘bill of divorcement’. It is something like a ‘release of lien’ the bank gives you when the debt you owed is paid in full. It means ‘you do not owe me anything else’.

If you will receive it, it means “I forgive you.”

Forgiveness Is Not Equal To Forgetfulness

Wait a minute, you say. If he forgave her, why didn't he take her back? Why didn't they reconcile? I don't know. But that is between the two of them and the Holy One – not for me or you to judge. And if we understand our Covenant Partner's ways, to forgive is not necessarily to forget. The Holy One forgave the Ammoni and the Moavi and the Edomi for what they each did to His people as they came forth out of Egypt – but He did not *forget*, and vowed that He never would. In fact, He gave specific instructions in Torah that would cause what they did to be remembered forever – not for vengeance, but for *wisdom*.

One can forgive a leopard for attacking one's livestock. But one cannot trust the leopard not to strike one's livestock again the next time it gets hungry.

If we are to be wise as serpents, harmless as doves, as the Master taught us we need *to know whom we can trust and whom we cannot*. Therefore to forgive is not to say ‘everything is now as it was before’, or is ‘as if nothing had ever happened’. Instead to forgive is to say: “Okay – this has happened between us. Our relationship will never be the same. But I demand no ‘pound of flesh’ from you, and will inflict no vengeance on you. We will never be as close as we were before, and we may never see each other again – but rest assured, *you have nothing to fear from me*. I wish you no harm. And *you owe me nothing*. You are *free to move on with your life*.”

What Would Our Divine Bridegroom Do?

Torah's *mitzvot* and *mishpatim* are, of course, about *what the Holy One would do* in a given situation if He was a human being and faced human circumstances. The Divine Bridegroom does not – will not - divorce His Betrothed. Even if she commits adultery – with foreign political or religious systems, for instance – He remains faithful. His covenant commitment is forever. He allows a separation – and when she pulls away He does not go and drag her out of her ‘lover's bed’. He lets her discover for herself what she has lost. Then He calls to her, and waits for her to return.

This, Dear Reader, is *the appointed season* for return. The sixth Biblical month, called *Elul*, is upon us. The King is in the field, visiting His beloved subjects where they live. *Ani l'dodi, v'dodi li* [I am my Beloved's, and My Beloved is mine] is the song of the season. Though His Beloved has in many cases been doing her own thing, forsaking her Bridal vows ‘to *asah* and *sh'ma*’ His betrothal covenant [Torah] in favor of foreign ways taught her by pagans, the *shofar* sounds throughout the sixth month, and He calls her – that is, *us* - lovingly to return. He

woos her [that is, *us*], and *draws* her [that is, *us*] with *cords of lovingkindness*. And what He offers her – that is, *us* - is much better than a ‘*get*’. He commits Himself to treat us as newlyweds, and make us *joyful*! **Deuteronomy 24:5; see also Isaiah 54:6 - 56:8.**

The Voice of our Bridegroom is calling to us. He whispers to us that it is time to leave our inferior pleasures and illicit lovers and come home to Him where we belong – and to walk with Him down the ancient paths of Torah where communion is sweet and each step is holy. There are some who hesitate to return, saying to themselves: "I have been lost for so long, and I have involved myself with unholy endeavors. How can I therefore approach the pure and holy Torah, when I myself have been immersed in impurity?" An answer to these individuals can be found in *Tanna Devei Eliyahu*¹⁹ - an ancient midrashic work which contains teachings from *Eliyahu Hanavi* - Elijah the Prophet - which were revealed to Rabbi Anan:

"Come and see how great is the power of Torah, for she purifies the transgressors of Israel when they do *t'shuvah* - repentance and return – even from idolatry, as it states, '***I will sprinkle pure water upon you, that you may become cleansed; I will cleanse you from all your contamination and from all your idols***' [Ezekiel 36:25].

And 'water', in the above verse, refers to *Torah*, as it states, '***All who are thirsty, go to the water***' [Isaiah 55:1].

In addition, 'purity', in the above verse, refers to the words of Torah, as it states, '***The words of the Compassionate One are pure words***' [Psalm 12:7]. "

Questions For Today's Study

1. Today's verses contain many more miscellaneous *mitzvot* to perform *ki Teitze* ["when/as you go forth/branch out .."].

[A] Make a list of each specific *mitzvah* contained in today's verses;

[B] Now, organize the *mitzvot* of this chapter by categories - [1] *mitzvot* dealing with one's relationship to the Holy One, [2] *mitzvot* dealing with one's relationship to his fellow man [other than immediate family], [3] *mitzvot* dealing with one's relationship to creation; [4] *mitzvot* dealing with inter-family relationships; and [5] *mitzvot* dealing with expressions of human sexuality.

[C] Summarize what message(s) you think, in light of these *mitzvot* the Holy One is sending in regard to each of the five broad categories mentioned in subpart [b].

2. The opening verses of today's aliyah deal with the subject of making "vows" to the Holy One.

¹⁹ See *Tanna Devei Eliyahu* 18:78.

[A] What do you think is a “vow” within the meaning of these verses?

[B] Which of the Ten Words [Exodus 20:2-17] do you think these *mitzvot* relate to?

[C] Messiah Yeshua gave us a drash or teaching on this aspect of Torah, in Matthew 5:33-37. Did He teach anything contrary to the teaching of Deuteronomy 23:21-23?

[D] Did Messiah Yeshua reveal anything deeper than the surface of Deuteronomy 23:21-23? If so, what?

[E] Now that you have examined Deuteronomy 23:21-23 more closely, can *you* see anything deeper than what is on the surface? If so, explain.

3. The second subject of today’s aliyah is the difference between acceptable and unacceptable invasions of the property rights of others. Realize, as you begin to look at these verses, that every material thing in the world belongs to the Holy One - but that He has decided, in His wisdom, who should be entrusted with custody of it. We may disagree with His selection of a steward, but, let’s face it - He’s right and we are wrong! He knows a lot more about the things He created, and what material possessions we need (and don’t need, no matter how much we may want them), than we do.

For a person to see something that someone else has, and covet it, *or* claim it as his own, *or* treat it as if it were his own, is therefore not only a sin against the one to whom God entrusted it, but is also a sin against God.

[A] According to Deuteronomy 23:24-25, what is a permissible invasion of the right of personal property?

[B] What is an impermissible invasion of another’s property rights?

[C] Why do you think the Holy One made a distinction between these invasions?

4. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 deals with the conduct and condition of divorced persons.

[A] Do these verses ever say it is acceptable to divorce one’s spouse?

[B] What is the “main point” of today’s verses - what does the Holy One say is not to be done or it will bring sin [Hebrew *chatah*] upon the land?

[C] Review Messiah Yeshua’s teaching on divorce in Matthew 19:1-12. In verse 7, were the Pharisees with whom Yeshua had this discussion quoting from the written torah or the “oral torah” of tradition?

[D] Did Messiah Yeshua’s teaching contradict Deuteronomy 24:1-4 in any way? Explain.

[E] Did Messiah Yeshua uncover any deeper level of revelation contained within Deuteronomy 24:1-4? Explain.

5. According to Deuteronomy 24:5 the primary responsibility of a man who is

newly married is *to make his bride joyful*.

[A] What things is the newly married man exempt from - and, therefore, is not to do?

[B] What do you think this says about the things our Divine Bridegroom values?

[C] How do you think a newly married man is to be provided for/supported?

[D] Do you think it is significant that the Holy One's instructions concerning the sanctity of the first year of marriage follow immediately after discussions of the conduct and condition of divorced persons? Explain.

6. Verses 10-15 of Deuteronomy 24 deal with business transactions with the poor.

[A] Why does Torah say that a poor person who does a job for you must be paid his wages before sundown?

[B] Why are you not to go inside a poor man's house to get the item he has pledged to secure a loan you make him?

[C] What is "righteous" about returning a poor man's pledge before sundown?

[D] What should be our attitude toward those who do not have enough to eat or clothe themselves?

[E] How would you describe the Holy One's attitude toward the poor - remembering that He ultimately decides to whom material possessions are given?

7. In the Haftarah the remnant of Israel is likened to a wife who has separated herself from her husband, and run after lovers, and been caught.

*For the Holy One has called you as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, says your God.*

*For a small moment have I forsaken you;
but with great mercies will I gather you.*

*In overflowing wrath I hid my face from you for a moment;
but with everlasting lovingkindness will I have mercy on you,
says the Holy One your Redeemer.*

[Isaiah 54:6-8]

[A] Why can this wife who ran away, and acted unfaithfully, be taken back again?

[B] Look up the words "everlasting" and "kindness" as used in verse 8. Write the Hebrew words and their meanings.

8. In the B'rit Chadasha reading for today Shaul of Tarsus begins to outline for those within his sphere of influence in the Greek city of Corinth what he feels

Torah requires them to do with the man in their midst who has violated the Torah proscription against ‘uncovered one’s father’s skirt’ and refuses to make *t’shuvah*:

*In the name of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah,
You who are being gathered together, and my spirit,
with the power of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah,
are to deliver such a one to Ha-satan for the destruction of the flesh,
that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Holy One Yeshua.*

[I Corinthians 5:4-5]

[A] Shaul continues his sentence about the judgment he has made concerning the one who has uncovered his father’s skirt. In whose name [by whose authority] does He make this judgment?

[B] What is to be the “event”, or “circumstance” that releases judgment upon the man in question?

[C] List the things Shaul says he wants to happen.

[D] What kind of a “meeting” do you think Shaul has in mind?

May our hearts be melted by our Divine Bridegroom’s lovingkindness.

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 27:5-6

*For in the day of trouble He will keep me secretly in his Sukkah.
In the covert of his ohel [tent/dwelling] he will hide me.
He will lift me up on a rock.
Now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me.
I will offer sacrifices of t’ruah in his tent.
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Holy One.*