

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: *Torah Ki Tavo:* Deuteronomy 28:1-14
Haftarah: Isaiah 60:10-12
B'rit Chadasha: Luke 21:4

*All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you
im-shamoa tish'ma [if/as/when/to the extent you sh'ma]
[Deuteronomy 28:2]*

Today's Meditation is Psalm 32:6-7;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is the 4th Petition, *Ge'ulah* [*Kinsman Redemption*]

V'hayah im-shamoa tish'ma b'kol Adonai Eloheicha lish'mor la'asot – And it will come to pass, if, as, when, and to the extent you sh'ma of all the Holy One teaches you to be diligent to to/build ... et-kol-mitzvotav asher anochi metzaveicha hayom – all the mitzvot with which I am enjoining you today ... unetaneicha Adonai Eloheicha elyon al kol-goyei ha-aretz – and the Holy One your God will set you up high, far above all the nations/ethnicities/cultures of the earth. Deuteronomy 28:1.

For weeks Moshe has been assisting us to understand the drastic differences between the two pathways that are diverging before us. He has not been shy about confronting us with emotionally charged scenarios associated with choosing the Creator's designed way vs. choosing the way of our fallen mortal minds and appetites. He has pointed out numerous Points of 'High Road' vs. 'Low Road' Divergence. He knows our decision day – the day we will be called upon to choose which approaching path we will walk – is *drawing nigh*. We are entering the *valley of decision* - where the crucible of divergence must be navigated.

Yes, There are Two Paths You Can Go By ...

We should be seeing the options – and their consequences – more clearly than ever before. *On one hand* ... the Holy One has blazed a beautiful but narrow 'pilgrim's pathway' for us – a sanctified way of living that He promises will lead us to meaning, purpose, health, *shalom*, and Kingdom-of-Heaven-Scented impact on society. This is the pathway described in the *Torah* – the realm where human thought, speech, and activity align with the Divine Will; where the Holy One is the undisputed King and what He says goes; and where the *Kedusha* energy of His Courts and Holy things surround, delight, inspire, encourage, energize, and empower. This is the *Good-Shepherd's-Footstep Circuit* - the way of green pastures, still waters, paths of righteousness, shadowy valleys, comforting rod and staff, tables set in the presence of enemies, soothing baths of oil, overflowing cups,

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goodness and mercy following, and dwelling in the very Household of the Holy One forever. While this path is narrow, it runs deep in dimension - serving as the bedrock channel into which the nurturing waters of the river of life flow and out of which the nation-healing leaves of the tree of life grow.

But then, *on the other hand* The alternative spiritual course that presents itself to us at each crossroads of life is *the Route of the Runaway Bride*. This path appears quite broad – especially in contrast with the first one - but it is overrun by *hawkers and hustlers* who come to seduce; by *highwaymen and human-traffickers* who come to steal; by ‘*social justice*’ *crusaders and virtue-signaling demagogues* who come to kill; and by *narcissists and predators* who come to destroy. Unclean spirits hover over this broad path like vultures. Packs of opportunistic wolves stalk its wayfarers relentlessly; moreover, a roaring lion walks about on it, seeking whom he may devour.

With decision day drawing nearer and nearer, and the consequences of making the wrong pathway-choice becoming clearer and clearer, Moshe is now ready to get very, very blunt about the physical and spiritual consequences that will flow from whichever choice we make. In today’s aliyah therefore Moshe will lay out with specificity the substance *the blessings that will follow and overtake us if, as, when, and to the extent we choose and adhere to the Bridegroom’s Pathway*. In tomorrow’s aliyah, however, he will provide a stark contrast, describing in stunning detail the horrible wasteland we will find ourselves in if we turn our backs upon the Holy One and follow the Meandering Way of the Runaway Bride.

What Awaits Those Who Choose – and Consistently Follow – the Bridegroom’s Pathway?

To what level of love, nurture, support, and blessing is the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven willing to commit to His Beloved? What exactly is the Holy One’s plan for taking care of His Beloved Bride-to-be whom He redeemed from Egypt and betrothed unto Himself at Sinai? It is true of course that *eye has not seen nor ear heard nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him*. I Corinthians 2:9, quoting Isaiah 64:4. In today’s aliyah, however, Moshe offers us a glimpse into this mystery. Consider Moshe’s interpretation of the Bridegroom’s plan for His Beloved: *if/when/in that day we as a nation will sh’ma the voice of the Holy One our God and sh’mar and asah all his mitzvot*, here is what our Divine Bridegroom has in store for us:

*The Holy One your God will make you high above all the nations of the eretz:
and all these blessings will come on you and overtake you,
if [as, when, and to the extent] you sh’ma the voice of the Holy One your God.*
[Deuteronomy 28:1-2]

*The Holy One will make you **l'rosh** [as a head],
v'lo l'zanav [and not as a tail];
and you will be above only, and you will not be beneath.*

These words – and many others like them in our text for the day - describe *the kind and quality of life our Divine Bridegroom has planned for us*. What He wills for us – and promises to lead us into if we will *sh'ma* His Voice and *sh'mar* and *asah* His instructions for Bridal bliss – is a life overflowing with Divinely instilled *purpose and potential*. His plan for us is to experience – and to model for the world - *abundant life* - a life *without restrictions and without limitations*. He has prepared for us a life of *destiny fulfilled*.

This will not, however, happen automatically just because we ‘believe in God’, or study the Bible, or pray. Nor will it happen because we attend meetings in houses of worship, make confessions or professions of faith, or participate in sacraments. It will not happen because we give some minister or his organization ‘seed offerings’, tithes, or offerings. It will also not happen just because we try to be - or even if we succeed in becoming – “moral”, “ethical”, or empathetic people, because we recite creeds, or because we perform good deeds. The ‘abundant life’ will only happen for us under one condition. Here is how the prophet states it:

If [as, when, and to the extent] ***you sh'ma the mitzvot of the Holy One your God***
with which I enjoin you this day, to sh'mar and to asah,
and do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you this day
to the right hand, or to the left
to go after other gods to serve them.

[Deuteronomy 28:13-14]

Can I Make The Difference Between the Pathways More Clear for You?

Moshe is not content with generalities. He wants to get very, very specific in his description of what we can expect if we choose the Bridegroom’s Pathway and walk with Him in the riverbed of life. He wants us to make a fully informed choice of lifestyles. So let’s read a little more about what he says life along the Bridegroom’s Pathway – the Covenant high road - will entail:

Blessed [Hebrew, *baruch*] ***will you be ba'ir*** [in the city],
and blessed will you be b'sadeh [in the field].

Blessed will be pri-biteneicha [the fruit of your womb]
and pri admateicha [the fruit of your land],
and pri behemeicha [the fruit of your animals],
and shagar alefeicha [the increase of your cattle],

and asht'rot tzoneicha [and the young of your flock].

*Blessed will be **tan'acha** [your basket]
umish'arteicha [and your kneading-trough].*

*Blessed will you be **b'vo'eicha** [in transitioning/traveling between states and locations],
and blessed will you be **b'tzeteicha** [in branching out/extending into other phases and locations
from the essence of who you are called to be outward].*

The Holy One's Grand Plan involves richly blessing all our spheres of influence - all our interaction with [a] human beings and [b] the geographical elements of His Creation – if, as, when, and to the extent we sh'ma His mitzvot, asah His mishpatim, walk in His chukot, and sh'mar His covenant testimonies. The blessings do not follow *us*, you see; they follow His Words, His Will, His Wisdom, and His Ways. And not only do they not follow us, they are not *for* us. They are for the ecosystems – human and organic – that He calls us to steward and nurture. With that understanding, the Holy One has promised that if, as, when, and to the extent we choose to walk the Bridegroom's Pathway with Him – but only to that extent - we will be blessed in all our places of dwelling [thriving cities and villages, rich pastures and fruitful fields]; if, as, when, and to the extent we adopt the *sh'ma, sh'mar, asah* lifestyle described for us in Torah we will be blessed in productivity [fruit of body, of ground, and of livestock]; and if, as, when, and to the extent we make the thought, attitude, speech, behavior, and self-less lifestyle choices Moshe has taught us we will be blessed with abundant tasteful and nutritious food supplies [basket and kneading-trough].

Understand, however, that if the Holy One does this for us – and He will - other people will not be happy about it. They will misunderstand. The reality that our blessing will ultimately redound to their benefit seems insane to them. The fact that our success opens doors for their prosperity infuriates them. They see our blessedness, assume all the Holy One has given us as the ill-gotten gains derived from a vast conspiracy against them, and hate us for it. They may judge us as 'privileged'. They dehumanize us – even demonize us. They become covetous, envious, jealous, culturally offended, and ethnically resentful. They label us *dogs, pigs, deplorables, clingers, and enemies of the human race*. They rise up against us, and attack us! Yes, Beloved - that is often the way it works. In all generations, it seems, virulent enemies will rise up against us for this very reason. That, too, is *an integral part of the long-term redemptive plan of the Holy One*. The prophets make this very, very clear. So what, you may wonder, does our Divine Bridegroom plan to do about *protecting us* from those who hate us? Here is Moshe's answer:

*The Holy One will **cause your enemies who rise up against you
to be struck before you:***

they will come out against you one way, and will flee before you seven ways.

Okay, that sounds pretty good too, you might say. But *how are we supposed to relate to the other nations and peoples of the world.* What is to be our ‘foreign policy’? Moshe tells us that as well:

*The Holy One will establish you for an **am k’dosh** [a holy people] to himself, as he has sworn to you; if, as, when and to the extent you keep [Hebrew, **sh’mar**] the mitzvot of the Holy One your God, and walk in his ways.*

All the peoples of the eretz will see that you are called by the name of the Holy One; and they will be afraid of you.

The Holy One is not only a *Faithful Lover and Friend*; He is also a *fierce Warrior*. He will fiercely defend all who **sh’mar** His *mitzvot*. He will wage psychological and spiritual war with the minds and emotions of those who rise up against us. He will *strike fear in their hearts*. That is not our job – it is His.

It should be pointed out at this juncture that the promise of supernatural protection Moshe is giving is not something that applies on a personal level to individuals. The promise of supernatural protection about which Moshe is speaking is specifically stated to be the Holy One’s promise to an ‘*am k’dosh*’ – *i.e.* a holy people/nation. If we as a people/nation back off from *sh’mar*-ing the *mitzvot* of the Holy One, alas, *the righteous among us will suffer a loss of this protection right along with the flagrantly sinful*.

That is one reason why the call to Torah must be broadcast, spread, and modeled, rather than kept silent or considered a private, ‘individual’ matter. That is why we are called to continually speak of Torah as we lie down and as we rise up, and as we sit to eat, and as we walk along the way. That is why Torah is designed as a *radically different way of life* rather than a religious belief system. That is why we are to be diligent in teaching Torah to our children and our households as ‘*the way of the Holy One*’, and in making *tzedek* and *mishpat* come alive in real ways and in real time for widows, the orphans, the poor, and the stranger, and the disenfranchised in our spheres of influence. That is why we are to write the *mitzvot* of Torah on the doorposts of our houses and on the gates of our cities. That is why we are to bind them as signs upon our hands, and as frontlets before our eyes. The pathways of Torah are *life, health* and *peace*. Our participation in those ways is designed to change the atmosphere of our surroundings in a positive way. As we allow the Ruach to lead us in the *mitzvot, mishpatim, and chukim* of Torah, Torah becomes flesh again. And every time Torah becomes flesh, the light of the goodness of YHVH shines into the darkness, the world is given a glimpse of what happens when wisdom and compassion co-labor in perfect harmony, and the hope of redemption comes alive again in the broken,

battered elements of Creation that have been languishing in whatever geographical region to which the Holy One has dispatched us.

Exploring the Vast Treasure Rooms of the Kingdom of Heaven

Some have been convinced by the Serpent that if they choose the Bridegroom's Pathway as laid out in Torah they will 'miss out' on something exciting and wonderful that this world has to offer. They think - because they have been manipulated into believing the same old lie that the Adversary has been broadcasting since Genesis 3:5 – that the physical world over which the adversary exercises control can delight and fulfill them better than the Bridegroom-King's Will can. Some do not want to miss out on *fortune*. Others crave men's *favor* or *fame*. Some are drawn to the *thrill of illicit pleasure*. Others succumb to the intoxication of worldly knowledge - some because they see knowledge as their ticket to socio-economic and political power; others because they see it as affording them intellectual and/or moral superiority over others. People who buy into any of these common lies have allowed the voice of the serpent and the frenzied buzz of their cultural milieu to convince them that the Holy One is a Cosmic Kill-joy - a selfish if not Sadistic Deity who simply cannot be trusted to know how the human beings He knit together cell-by-cell, organ-by-organ, and synapse-by-synapse can achieve their highest potential and find the greatest meaning in life. Moshe knows better. And he wants to make sure we know better too. So, lest there be any confusion in our minds about the extent to which the Divine Bridegroom is willing to go to make life joyful, meaningful, and purposeful for those who choose to walk on His Bridal Pathway, Moshe decides to spell it out for us one more time, in slightly different words. He says:

*The Holy One will make you plenteous for good,
in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground,
in the land which the Holy One swore to your fathers to give you.*

*The Holy One will open to you **et-otzaro ha-tov** [his treasury of good things]
in the sky,*

*to give **metar-ar'tzecha** [the rain of your land] in its season,
and to bless **kol-ma'aseh yadeicha** [all the work of your hand]:
and you will lend to many nations, and you will not borrow.*

Wow! Such a life as Moshe is describing is *the stuff dreams are made of*. And can you believe it – such a life is *precisely the kind of life our Covenant Partner in Heaven offers His Betrothed Bride*. Perhaps, just perhaps, that is at least a part of what Yeshua of Natzret was talking about when he said: *I have come in order that they might have life, and that they might have [it] more abundantly.* **John 10:10(b)**

As we pause on the plains of Moav, looking across the Yarden [Jordan] toward the Garden of Delight the Holy One has promised to us as our dwelling place, Moshe

delivers us this amazing message from our Divine Bridegroom. He offers *b'rachot* [blessings]² beyond comprehension, *in every area of life*: spiritual, relational, and material. If, that is ... If we really do adopt the *sh'ma* lifestyle that opens the doors of Heaven to ordinary men. If... *As ... When ... to the extent ...* Never, never, never forget the '*if*' of Deuteronomy 28. What a huge word if can be.

The B'racha [Blessing]

The Hebrew verb *b'rach* dominates today's aliyah like the sun dominates the summer sky. Here a *b'racha*, there a *b'racha*, everywhere a *b'racha*. So what does this word mean? *B'racha* refers to words spoken tenderly and lovingly and encouragingly over one who kneels or adopts a submissive posture before the speaker. For example, on Shabbat, according to a familiar tradition among observant families, children come to their father [their *abba*], and kneel or stand before him in submission. Lovingly, their *abba* *lays his hands upon the children*, one by one, *caresses their heads*, and *speaks tender words of love and encouragement* over them. '*Be as Efrayim and Menashe*', he says over his sons. '*Be as Sarah, and Rivkah, and Rachel, and Leah*', he whispers over his precious daughters. The intent of the father engaging in this act is to set *his children free from all restrictions and limitations of their carnal natures*, in order that they might *become the spiritual princes and princesses they were created and purposed in the mind of the Holy One to be*. As he pours out his blessing the father is calling his sons and daughters forth to reach their spiritual potential, and fulfill their destiny, as *children of the Most High God*.

Is not this 'upward call' and releasing of potential the true essence of *b'racha*? Let's let Scripture decide. The first usage of the word *barak* [the verb root of *b'racha*] is found in the Creation account. On the fifth day of Creation the Holy One spoke the living creatures of the waters and of the canopy of the heavens into existence. Then the Holy One did something He had not done before. Previously, after speaking things [first the Light, then the firmaments, then the trees, vines, bushes, shrubs, and plants, and then the sun, moon, stars, planets, and galaxies] into existence He just declared them to be *tov* – 'good' [the meaning of this word is, of course, a study for another day], and moved on. Now, with the creation of the first living creatures – the first creatures in which is the breath of life – He does something different. He reaches out toward these first living creatures He has created, like an *abba* reaching out for

² The word our English Bibles translate as 'blessings' is the Hebrew word *b'rachot* [*beit, resh, chet, vav, tav*]. This word is the plural form of Strong's Hebrew word #1293, *b'racha*, pronounced *ber-aw-khaw*'. The first usage of this word in Torah is in Genesis 12:2, where the Holy One promises to make Avram and his seed a *b'racha* [blessing]. The verb root [*shoresh*] of *b'rachot* is *barak* [*beit, resh, kaf sofit*], Strong's Hebrew word #1288, pronounced *baw-rakh*'. The first instance of usage of this verb root is in Genesis 1:22.

his children on Shabbat, and does something very important. Torah describes this event as follows:

*The Holy One blessed [Hebrew, **barak**] them, and said:
Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the water in the seas,
and the air canopy above the earth.*

[Genesis 1:22]

What did the Holy One do for the living creatures that He did not do with regard to inanimate objects such as planets, vegetation, etc.? It is important because - as you know - He did the same thing for mankind. In Genesis 1:28 Torah tells us that in connection with His creation of Adam and Chava [Eve]:

*The Holy One blessed [Hebrew **barak**] them, and said to them:
Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.
Take dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air,
And over every living creature that moves on the ground.*

[Genesis 1:28]

From these examples we can see the heart of the concept of **b'racha**. Do not just *exist*, the Holy One says. *Become!* Be fruitful and multiply – i.e. make use of the wonder of My creative ability. Take dominion - i.e. look for something that needs to be done to maximize the potential you see before you, and work with me to bring that maximum potential into real time. It is as if He said: “I have drawn you a picture; now color it in. Be all that you were created to be. No restrictions. No limitations. Man – woman – *be free to be all you were created to be!* Learn to recognize and ignore the counsel of the ungodly! Stay off the pathway of sinners! And never let yourself sit for even a moment in the seat of the scornful! Release the pure, transformative positive energy of Torah’s *b'rachot* into all your assigned spheres of influence!

Loosed To A Life of Action, Adventure, and Impact!

The life our Covenant Partner in Heaven has planned for us – and empowered us to walk in by the awesome power of the Words that He has planted in us like seeds - is *not by any means a passive, contemplative, life of isolation*. It is instead a *full, living, vibrant, moment-by-moment interaction with Him* on the “playing field” of His *mitzvot*. It is a life of *extreme relevance* – and *serious Kingdom impact*. Remember that the Hebrew language, in which the revelation Moshe is transmitting was communicated, is a **verb-oriented** language. That means that it is based upon/built around ACTION. In contrast, Greek and English are IDEA-oriented languages, based upon and built around IDEOLOGY, OPINION, CREED, and ABSTRACT PHILOSOPHY.

Greek and English say, “I *think*, therefore I am”; Hebrew says, “I *am*, therefore I do.” There is a *major difference*. It is what Ya’akov [James] was talking about

in James 2:14-17:

*What good is it, my brothers,
if a man says he has faith [Hebrew, emunah] but has no works [Hebrew, mitzvot]
Can that faith save him?*

And if a brother or sister is naked and in lack of daily food, and one of you tells them,

*"Go in shalom, be warmed and filled;"
and yet you didn't give them the things the body needs, what good is it?
Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself.*

Yes, a man will say, "You have faith, and I have works."

Show me your faith from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

*You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe, and shudder.
But do you want to know, vain man, that faith apart from works is dead?*

[James 2:14-20]

Understanding the Three Basic Steps Of the Lover's Dance

In earlier lessons we have discussed in general form how our Divine Bridegroom has planned out our life as a “lovers’ dance” – with Him being *the stronger covenant partner who leads us*, and we being *the willing partner who follows His lead*, and learns, step-by-step, to anticipate and flow with His movements.

What our Divine Bridegroom has ordained for us is a life of ACTION, not mere *belief, meditation* and *philosophy*. He has assigned us to walk out the Torah in the context of real relationships, real family life, real neighborhood interactions, real marketplace transactions, and real city squares rather than just talk about it in study halls and meeting rooms. That is why when our Covenant Partner in Heaven declares the essential conditions for entering into the blessedness of full relationship with Him, the language He uses is language of ACTION – not mere ‘belief’. What specific action words does our Divine Bridegroom employ to describe the essence of our part of the lovers’ dance? Our English translations say the verbs that are to characterize and form the basis for our lives and interaction with our Divine Bridegroom are: ***listen diligently, observe, and do***. These are to be the primary *steps in our lover's dance*. In Hebrew, the language in which the instruction was given, the verbs are: ***sh'ma***³, ***sh'mar***⁴, and ***asah***⁵.

³ The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “listen’ is *sh'ma* – *shin, mem, ayin*, Strong’s Hebrew word # 8085, sometimes translated “he listens”, sometimes “he hears”, and sometimes “he obeys”. The first usage is in Genesis 3:8, where we are told of Adam and Chava, after the Fall: ***And they heard [sh'ma] the voice of the Holy One God walking in the garden [in the cool of the day]: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Holy One God amongst the trees of the garden.***

⁴ The word our English Bibles translate as “observe” or “keep” in most instances is Strong’s Hebrew word #8104, *shin, mem, resh, sh'mar*, pronounced *shaw-mar'*. This verb root means to diligently defend, to guard, to keep watch over, to protect, to cherish, to treasure, and to save. The first usage is found in Genesis 2:15: ***And the Holy One God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep [i.e. sh'mar] it.***

These three Hebrew verbs are some of the most often-repeated words in the Bible. They represent nothing less than *the paving stones of a Biblical walk with the Creator of the Universe*. An understanding of these verbs is *essential* for anyone who seeks to walk with the Holy One.

These three verbs do not call forth cold or legalistic “works” to pacify a cruel taskmaster. They call forth instead *passionate pursuit, intimate communion, and an ever-deepening and ever-maturing covenant-based relationship*. It is these three verbs that call us forth out of self-centered lives to experience the precise type of relationship with our Creator that is described in Psalms 1, 5, 8, 16, 17, 23, 27, 34, 35, 37, 45, 51, 101, 103, 112, 119, 121, 122, and so on.

I have discussed the word pictures these three Hebrew words portray many times in other lessons and teachings. Because they are so critically important I hesitate to “spoon-feed” them again at this point, lest the repetition somehow make them seem less vibrant and alive. I would rather have you find these nuggets of truth for yourselves, so the revelation will be *yours*, and not *mine*. Just to get you going in the right direction, however, keep in mind that the focus of the word *sh'ma* is on vital relationship – valuing the words of the speaker above all else in life; the focus of the word *sh'mar* is on treasuring, and guarding, and cherishing (not legalistically performing), something entrusted to you by the one whose words you treasure.

To *sh'mar* is virtually impossible unless one has first committed his or her life to *sh'ma*. The focus of the word *asah* is on building – making something that is *said* [invisible energy] into something that is real and concrete and meaningful in everyday life, for all to *see* [visible motion in response to the invisible energy of the words which were said]. For further information please feel free to look at footnotes 3, 4, and 5 on the preceding page. Seek the Holy One’s instruction and teaching on *what the action of these verbs would look like in your life*. And consider carefully what it would look like for you to “turn” from these verbs to the *right* [to legalism] or to the *left* [to lawlessness].

Never Forget the Huge “If” With Which Our Aliyah Begins!

⁵ The word our English Bibles translate as ‘do’ is *asah* [*ayin, shin, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #6213]. This verb paints a Hebraic picture of *a potter fashioning something recognizable and useful from a lump of clay*. It involves application of creative energy to build – to take something from a raw state to an improved and vastly more functional or artistic state. It means to bring out the potential in raw materials – to make them conform to the image in the mind of the creator like the clay conforms to the image in the mind of the potter.

For a discussion of how the *sh'ma* and *asah* responses to the Holy One’s Torah work together to form the lifestyle of the Holy One’s covenant community, see *Friday’s Study* of parsha *Mish’patim* [the *Rabbi’s son* commentary to Exodus 24:1-18].

“If” - the largest word in the English language. In Hebrew the word can be either “*Ki*” - meaning “when”, or “*Ekev*” - meaning “on the heels of, in consequence of, and following”. In today’s aliyah, it is *ki*. The operative phrase is ‘*Ki sh’ma*’ – *if/when you sh’ma* (live a lifestyle of listening for, hearkening unto, treasuring, internalizing, and walking out the words of the Holy One), we are told, what will happen [by reason of the covenant the Holy One made with your forefathers (natural or spiritual)], *a wonderful, unexplainable, supernatural favor will attach itself to your life*.

“*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me*”, said the Psalmist. Psalm 23, Psalm 1, Psalm 91, all express this same thought. The precise nature of the ‘goodness and mercy’ [Hebrew *tov v’chesed*] of which the Psalmist was speaking is *quantified*—described in detail - in today’s aliyah. The Psalmist was not speaking the words *tov v’chesed* in a vacuum. *Tov v’chesed*, to a Hebrew, are not vague, warm-and-fuzzy-feeling words. They are instead well-understood *covenant terms*, defined by the covenant itself.

Why do human beings choose any other life? Why do we toy with – or even give a second thought to - any way besides our Divine Bridegroom’s way? Why do we, “*all like sheep*”, go astray, turning each one unto “his own way”? *At this time, on this day*, as the High Holy Days of our Covenant Partner in Heaven draw near, stop and *meditate on these questions*. Read today’s aliyah and Haftarah *slowly and carefully*. Our God is a very good God, as faithful to His covenant now as He has always been. Our covenant with Him is *a very good covenant*, bringing purpose and meaning to life, and joy unspeakable in His Presence - now and forever more. Blessing beyond comprehension and defying description awaits any man or woman or son or daughter who lives the *sh’ma* lifestyle.

Prodigal ... Come Home!!!!

Now do you understand that this is what the prodigal son of Yeshua of Natzret’s most famous parable [Luke 15] realized when he - in the midst of poverty and trouble - thought back on his Father’s house: *... my Father’s servants have food to spare Luke 15:17*. When you see things as the prodigal saw them *there is really only one direction to go*. It is time to make *teshuvah* [Hebrew word meaning literally “return”]. While there is still time, *Come, let us return unto the Holy One*. Follow *the pattern set by the prodigal son* - he *planned his return, he returned in humility, he confessed his sin to his father, and then he submissively re-entered the household of faith, where Torah was the way of life*.

It is for the prodigal, Beloved – for the prodigal *in the world*, and the prodigal *in us all* - that we blow the *shofar* throughout Elul. It was for the prodigal that the Immerser [*i.e.* ‘John the Baptist’] made himself a human *shofar*, calling people to

come into the Jordan to immerse themselves in its waters and embark on the Bridegroom's Pathway and the Lover's Dance anew.

Awake, sleepers! Consider the wealth of our father's house! Come, let us return unto our Divine Bridegroom - to the Holy One our God!

Questions For Today's Study

1. In verses 1, 2, and 13-14 of D'varim 28 the essential conditions for the Holy One's people to receive the blessings He has stored up for them as part of the covenant of Torah are stated.

[A] What two things does the Holy One say His people are to do in order to be set high above all the nations' [i.e. strategically placed as a light to reflect the Holy One's goodness and draw the gentile nations to the Holy One]?

[B] Write the Hebrew word that is translated as 'listen' or 'obey' in verses 1 and 2. Describe the Hebraic word picture this word presents.

[C] Write the Hebrew word that is translated as 'follow' or 'observe' in verse 1. Describe the Hebraic word picture this word presents.

[D] Write the Hebrew word that is translated as 'do' in verse 1. Describe the Hebraic word picture this word presents.

[E] Write the Hebrew word that is translated as 'commands' in verse 1. Describe the Hebraic word picture this word presents.

2. In verses 3-6 there are at least nine specific things that the Holy One says will be "blessed" after [Hebrew *ekev* - "on the heels of"] the conditions referred to in answer to question 1 are fulfilled.

[A] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word translated "blessed" in these passages, write the Hebrew word, and describe the Hebraic word picture it presents for us.

[B] Make two columns on your paper; on the left, write the words "Blessed will be"; on the right, write the nine (or more) things which the Holy One says in verses 3-6 will be "blessed" in connection with *sh'ma*-ing the covenant of Torah.

3. In verses 7-14 our Covenant Partner in Heaven makes even more promises to those among His people who commit to follow the *sh'ma*, *sh'mar*, and *asah* lifestyle, as responders to Him instead of initiators of religion. What specific promises does this passage contain, conditional on *sh'ma*-ing the covenant of Torah, with regard to each of the following areas:

[A] His people's safety and security from external enemies?

[B] His people's "daily bread" and provision?

[C] His people's economic well-being?

[D] His people's relationship with Him?

[E] His people's relationship with other nations?

4. In today's reading from Haftarah *Ki Tavo* our Covenant Partner promises that, in connection with the end-times restoration of Israel as His *sh'ma*-people, the relationship between Israel and the rest of the nations and people groups of the world will change dramatically. He promises that Israel will in the end-times become the 'burning and shining light' to the nations which it was Divinely created, formed, forged in adversity, and Divinely empowered through the *mitzvot* of Torah, to be. In other words, in the end-times the Holy One promised that the *b'rachot* [blessings] spoken in today's aliyah of Torah will be experienced *in their fullness*. May the Holy One *hasten it!*

Uvanu vnei-nechar chomotayich

Foreigners will build up your walls,

umalcheihem yeshartuneich

and their kings will minister to/administrate for you:

ki v'kitzpi hikitich

for in my wrath I struck you,

uvirtzoni richamtich

but in my favor have I had mercy on you.

Ufitchu she'arayich tamid

Your gates also will be open continually;

yomam v'laylah lo yisageiru

they will not be shut day nor night;

lehavi elayich cheyl goyim

that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations,

umalcheihem nehugim

and their kings led captive.

Ki-ha-goy v'ha-mamlachah asher lo-ya'avducha yoveidu

For that nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish;

V'ha-goyim charov yecheravu

yes, those nations will be utterly wasted.

[Isaiah 60:10-12]

[A] Who does Yeshayahu say will rebuild Jerusalem for Israel?

[B] Why will the gates of Jerusalem remain open night and day?

[C] What will happen to any nation or ethnic group that does not serve Israel in the Last Days?

5. In today's reading from the Apostolic Scriptures⁶ Yeshua continues his discussion of the difference – in the Holy One's perspective – between the *matanot* [voluntary donations] made to the treasury of Herod's Temple by the rich men of Luke 21:1, and the two mites donated by the poor widow of Luke 21:2. Yesterday Yeshua told His talmidim that the donation of the poor widow was greater. In today's aliyah, He explains why that is so. Yeshua says to His talmidim:

... for all these [the rich men described in Luke 21:1]
put in gifts to the Holy One from their abundance,
but she, out of her poverty, put in all that she had to live on.
[Luke 21:4]

We have to ask ourselves, of course, what was Yeshua saying? First of all, He was NOT encouraging His *talmidim* – or anyone – to donate money to the Temple treasury. He knew full well that money put into the Temple treasury would soon be of no benefit at all, for the Temple would be destroyed in 70 C.E. Yeshua also knew - and wanted His *talmidim* to know - that the Holy One does not need the money of the practitioners of organized religion who '*devour widow's houses*' and '*for a show make lengthy prayers*' [Luke 20:47 – the subject of the discussion He was having with His *talmidim* just previously], any more than He needs the money of the poor widow.

What Yeshua WAS doing was pointing out that the rich men of Luke 21:1 [possibly the same people He described as '*devouring widow's houses*' in Luke 20:47] were NOT *SH'MA*-ing. They were making a big religious deal out of donating money to the Temple treasury [something *not called for* by Torah], but all the while they were *ignoring the needs of a destitute widow* right in their midst. While they may have thought they were doing something 'good', what they were really doing was playing religious games with their money, while the widow – one of the five 'specially protected classes' of Torah⁷ - walked right through their midst and received neither farthing nor blessing. The widow – Yeshua's primary focus as a truly Torah-submissive man - walked away more destitute than she was when she came. And not one of the religious folk present even noticed - except Yeshua.

What Yeshua is teaching His *talmidim* is not to be impressed by people who put on a religious show⁸. He is teaching us as well *not to be impressed by people who give money to support a building and a religious system polluted by Greco-Roman influence and destined to perish*. He is, you see, about to let His talmidim

⁶ The *Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha* renders this verse as follows: "For all these put in *matanot* (gifts) out of their abundance, but this *almanah* (widow), out of her need, put in her *michyah* (subsistence)."

⁷ Along with the poor, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the Levi.

⁸ This is a recurrent theme of Yeshua's teaching. It is the primary subject of the Sermon on the Mount and of Yeshua's many interactions with the Scribes and Pharisees.

in on a little secret - that the religious people who smilingly receive such impressive gifts so willingly today *will be the very ones who will 'lay hands on you and persecute you'* in days to come. See Luke 21:12.

[A] What explanation does Yeshua make for His declaration that the widow's two-mite contribution to the Temple Treasury was more significant than the large donations of the rich men?

[B] Who do you think was in charge of deciding what was to be done with coins put in the Temple treasury?

[C] Of what value to anyone were the widow's mites? Explain your answer.

*May you receive all the b'rachot of the Holy One,
as you sh'ma, sh'mar, and asah, His Torah,
And resist the temptation to turn aside, whether to the right or to the left.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 32:6-7

*For this [the forgiveness of the iniquity of one's sin]
let everyone who is godly pray to you in a time when you may be found.
Surely when the great waters overflow they will not reach to him.*

*“You are seter li [my hiding place].
You will preserve me from trouble.
You will surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah!*