

Shiur L'Yom Sheni¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: Torah Ki Tavo: Deuteronomy 26:1-15
Haftarah: Isaiah 60:1-2
B'rit Chadasha: Luke 21:1

And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land

[Deuteronomy 26:10]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 27:11-12;

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

V'hayah ki-tavo el-ha-aretz – And when you have come into the land ... *asher Adonai Eloheicha noten lecha nachalah* – that the Holy One your God has assigned to you in stewardship Deuteronomy 26:1a.

It is the 50th week of the Torah cycle – so it should not surprise anyone that the words of the text have a strong scent and feel of 'Jubilee'. The 50th parsha, which is called *Ki Tavo*, is all about returning to the land, rejoicing, and carrying our sheaves. From its opening line of *Vehayah ki-tavo el-ha-aretz* [i.e. when you come into the land], this parsha prophesies to us about reconnecting with our homeland, our calling, our mission, and our real reason for being alive at such a time as this.

One day soon the Holy Temple will again be standing in the midst of the City of the Great King. Then we will once again join grateful folk of the Covenant from all nations, ethnicities, tribes, bloodlines, and tongues carrying bundles of firstfruits and tithes up to Jerusalem to celebrate the *Sh'losh Regalim*.

Catch *the Vision!* Embrace *the Simchah!* Lift your eyes above the mundane drama fixations that prevail in your respective places of exile. Lift your heart above the angst, outrage, fleshly obsessions, futile thinking, and vain imaginations that rule your respective cultures of captivity. You were made for - and the Holy One is bringing you into - something far, far greater! Now is time to go 'all in' on Holy One's Grand Plan of Redemption & Restoration.

If the First Fruits Are Holy ...

Moshe is spending the last few days of his mortal life releasing revelation from the Throne Room that will empower us to build a Kingdom-of-Heaven-Scented Society on earth. The plan he is presenting is shocking in its simplicity; yet stunning in its' potential impact on the world. The prophet's first grand discourse

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on this theme began in Deuteronomy 1:6 and continued through Deuteronomy 4:40. His primary purpose in that discourse was to give us Divine Perspective on our *lowly beginnings* - reminding us *from whence we came and by whose grace we got to the point where we find ourselves today*. After a brief interlude [Deuteronomy 4:41-43] in which the prophet sallied forth to establish cities of refuge in the trans-Jordan, he kicked off his present discourse in Deuteronomy 4:44. The primary purpose of this second discourse is *to give us Divine Vision for our future – so that we will know where we are going, and what kind of impact we are called to have there*. In this discourse Moshe has been showing us the stark differences between the *two pathways* we have the option to follow in life. One of these pathways, the prophet has assured us, leads to a life of *unfathomable blessing and ever-growing shalom*. This pathway – which I call the pilgrim’s pathway - promises to establish our lives as *a fountain of blessing not only for ourselves and our families but for everyone we meet*. But the other pathway – which I call the prodigal’s pathway – leads to a very different way and quality of life - a life of *perpetually chasing after the wind, of miserable failure after miserable failure, and of ever-intensifying despair*. Moshe has warned us that the prodigal pathway exposes us to a swirling vortex which will *relentlessly drag our lives – and the lives of everyone associated with us – into a pool of toxic spiritual waste*.

If we choose *the Pilgrim’s pathway* it will be *the Holy One’s will* that will determine our every step and *the Holy One’s glory* that will have to be the reason behind everything we do. That pathway is *well lit* and its boundaries are clearly defined; it is, however, a *pathway of sh’ma-ing and surrender*. The *way of the Prodigal*, on the other hand, is a pathway for self-willed souls who do not want anyone telling them *what to do, or how to think, or where to go, or how to live*. Dark and shadowy, this pathway has no boundaries. It seems to offer many things that look like exciting trails one could follow, but in reality none of those trails lead anywhere but to disappointment, destruction, and death.

Especially since parsha *Re’eh* these two pathways have been rapidly diverging right in front of our eyes. Moshe has been prophetically assisting us to see/perceive/appreciate the significant distinction between the two pathways in certain very important sandal-meets-the-sand particulars. He has been showing us what different aspects of life will be for us in the Promised Land either way - if we choose to follow the Pilgrim’s Pathway, or if we follow the Path of the Prodigal.

The choice of which of the two pathways we will pursue is going to be ours alone. Decision day is coming soon. So in this parsha Moshe is going to get as specific as possible regarding the consequences that will attend the choice we make. Before

the week is over he will lay out with specificity both the blessings we will reap if we follow the Pilgrim's Pathway/Pathway of the Bridegroom and the curses we will experience if we follow way of the Prodigal/Runaway Bride.

***The Central Theme of Ki Tavo – How Rededication of our Hearts
and Lives to our Bridegroom King Should Be Expressed
In the Renewal of our Betrothal Vows***

Moshe is about to lead all of us in a dramatic renewal of the vows. What vows? The *na'aseh v'nish'ma* [i.e. we will make/build according to your blueprint, and we will sh'ma Your Voice and Instructions] vows that our fathers blurted out at Sinai. **See Exodus 24:7.** We are about to be exposed to the concept of a 'new' covenant. But careful now - to a Hebrew mindset the term 'new covenant' does not mean anything close to what the Western mind of organized Christianity envisions. The terms of the 'new' covenant will, you see, be exactly the same as the terms of the 'old' covenant. That is because the stronger partner in the Covenant – the One Who has a right to define its terms and conditions - has not changed. As long as He does not change, His covenant terms do not – will never - change. So if the terms of the covenant have not changed, then what has changed?

Perhaps we need to ask a few questions about this whole 'new covenant' concept to get some 'feel' for what it is all about. Why was a 'new' covenant necessary here, on the plains of Moav? Why does the Eternal One consider a 'new' covenant to be necessary now, as we stand poised to enter the very real estate that has been at the epicenter of every covenant the Holy One has made with man since Genesis 12?

Why on earth would anyone renew a covenant, you ask? Isn't a covenant forever? Of course it is. Think of couples you know who have decided they wanted to renew their vows of a marriage after a number of years. Wait a minute – why would they do that? What changed? The people changed. The circumstances of the people changed. The perspective of the people changed. The understanding of what they agreed to do back when they exchanged vows the first time totally changed. But what did not change? The terms of the covenant did not change. They just 'renewed' the Covenant they had made earlier. Welcome to an understanding of 'new covenant' from the Holy One's perspective. All that ever changes in regard to covenants between the Eternal One and His People are the circumstances and perspective of the weaker partners of the Covenant.

Before we go to war against the Kena'ani our Divine Bridegroom wants to invite us all to personally come under His *chuppah* again so that He can *seal us firmly in His love*. He does not want us to see ourselves as warriors fighting a *jihad* for Him. Instead, He wants us to see ourselves as His Beloved, the Bride *for whom He is preparing a place*. He wants us to realize that our identity is much greater – and our

relationship with Him based upon much, much more – than us serving as the revealed arm of the His vengeance and judgment against the Kena’ani [Canaanites]. He wants us to know that we are His “treasured possession”, and that we – every bit as much as Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov or our fathers and mothers who stood before Him at Sinai - have *stolen His heart with one glance of our eyes*.

The Holy One wants us, His treasured possession, to realize that to us He is much more than God in some abstract or existential sense. He is our *Ish* [Husband]; we are His Beloved. Hence His directives are not a burden or an obligation - they are *the garments He has given us to mark us as His People*. They are the wardrobe of a bride-people – a people whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. Each one is put on lovingly, and worn faithfully “*til death do us part*”.

The covenant vows the Holy One is calling us to renew this week are not “laws”; they are the natural expression of bridal passion, the appropriate and fitting response to the Bridegroom’s demonstrations of continuing love and grace. As Messiah once said: ***If you love me you will keep my commandments*** John 14:15.

As chapter 26 of Deuteronomy ends Moshe is going to say something very similar:

*The Holy One you have declared today to be for you God,
to walk in His ways and to keep His torot,
His mitzvot and His regulations and to sh’ma His voice.*

*And the Holy One has declared you today,
to be for Him a specially treasured people, as He promised you,
to sh’mar all His commandments,
and to set you most high above all the nations that He has made,
for praise, for fame, and for honor,
for you to be a people holy to the Holy One your God as He promised.
[Deuteronomy 26:17-19]*

So the next time someone gets on a soapbox and starts pontificating in your hearing on how vastly different and superior the ‘new’ covenant of God is in comparison to the ‘old’ covenant, well ... now hopefully you realize that the appropriate response is to politely excuse yourself and get a little fresh air. More on that later in the week. First let us pause and consider the drastic difference in tone between this week’s parsha and the one we studied last week.

Study War No More

Last week’s parsha included a lot of instructions about *wars we will have to fight*. The message of *Ki Tetze* was that the time of war is on our immediate horizon and that we neither can nor should seek to avoid it. *Ki Tetze* was the message the Holy One had Moshe speak to sooth our souls even as our hearts were hearing the hoof beat of horses of war and the ominous whistling of arrows escaping our fearsome

adversary's bow.

We learned last week that though we do not lust for it, and are never quite comfortable with it, we should not fear war, and must not shrink back from it, *because warfare – in total submission to the timing and instructions of our wise and merciful Bridegroom-King of course - is an inescapable part of our national destiny.* Warfare is indeed part of the reason for which the Holy One chose us. He is *a Man of War.* **Exodus 15:3; Isaiah 42:13; see also Revelation 17:14.** He is a defender of the weak, the oppressed, and the innocent. In righteousness He judges *and makes war.* **Revelation 19:11.**

But Moshe wants us all to know that the Divine Bridegroom's plans for us *do not end with war.* Indeed, before the wars begin in earnest, he wants to empower us prophetically to see *beyond even the imminent season of war.* This week's parsha therefore looks *far, far beyond* the battlegrounds. In this parsha Moshe prophetically enables us to visualize in the Spirit the abundant *harvest seasons* that await us in that day when we are able to beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks². *Ki Tavo* therefore prophesies of a *better day* that the Eternal One has purposed for us – and for His Creation.

The Fields are White Unto Harvest

This parsha is going to prove unique in all of Torah in that it is going to set forth a series of specific liturgies which are to become part of our lives as the Holy One's nation of *k'doshim* [holy ones]. Specifically, Moshe is going to spell out for us the specific words our Covenant Partner in Heaven – the Lord of the Harvest – wants us to meditate on, rehearse in our minds over and over, memorize, internalize and be prepared to testify to the world at three special times:

- [1] each time we present our first fruits at the Holy One's altar,
- [2] each time we sanctify tithes at the *Mish'kan* [or later at the Temple], and
- [3] each time we cross the Jordan River.

We are, you see, the Holy One's witnesses. Each of these three liturgies contains an absolutely essential component of the testimony He has called us to give. Upon the testimony of two or three witnesses shall a thing be established.

It is All Part of the Ultimate Passion Play

Ki Tavo will provide a bridge into the final chapters of *D'varim*, wherein final preparations are going to be made for us to make our glorious entry into the land of

² The prophetic reference is to Isaiah 2:4 and Michah 4:3, both of which read: *“And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”*

the Patriarchs. That land is about to be transformed into a great stage – a stage upon which our Divine Bridegroom will *choreograph* and *direct* all the great Passion Plays He has designed to complete Redemptive History.

Our possession of the Promised Land is *an integral part of the Divine Drama which the Eternal One wrote before the foundation of the World as the medium through which He planned - and still plans - to reveal His goodness and glory to the human race*. We are actors in this Divine Drama. And it is altogether fitting that we have a script from which to work. Three acts of that Great Script are provided to us word-for-word in parsha *Ki Tavo*.

Certain parts of the Divine Drama allow those called by the Eternal One to serve as His ‘cast’ substantial freedom to *ad-lib*. Certain parts are loosely written so as to leave room for the human actors to engage in optional diversions and fillers. Some even are designed by the Great Playwright to accommodate substitution of personnel. But when it comes to the scenes of harvest time – which represent the Great Crescendos of the Passion Play – the Divine script is set, and no changes are permissible. Certain words absolutely must be said *verbatim*. *So let it be written; so let it be done!*

The Atmosphere-Shifting ‘Devarim’ Script of the Harvest Season

Moshe tells us that once we begin to live in the land that the Holy One is in the process of giving us, the first [Hebrew *m’reshit*] fruits produced by our land [Hebrew, *adamah*] are to be considered as something special – and neither lumped with all the rest of the ‘crop’ nor taken or used for our own pleasure. While everything produced in the Garden of the Holy One is the Holy One’s, the first fruits are His in a *unique and tangible way*. Hence Moshe tells us with passion: *“When you have not only entered and taken possession of Kena’an, but have also settled and become established there, with houses and fields and vineyards and pastures for your cattle, remember to set aside your first fruits, and dedicate them to the Holy One.”*

Each type of first fruit has an appointed time to come forth. Each has a ‘cue’ and a grand entry designed into the Divine Script. Each, you see, represents a different facet of the Covenant, and each is to be commemorated by us, celebrated by us, and publicized by us, as part of the Great Passion Play. What are the ‘types’ of first fruits I am talking about? Let’s consider them one at a time shall we?

1. *The Fruit of our Houses*

The *fruit of our houses* is – for most of us³ - our *children*. The first fruit is our firstborn. What is so significant about our firstborn? Our firstborn is the ‘down payment’ given by the Holy One on His promise to make of us a ‘people’. He is the ‘earnest deposit’ provided by the Holy One on the promise that generations will come from us – children’s children and children’s children’s’ children - that will bear the Name He has given us.

Our firstborn is *proof that the Holy One has enabled us to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth*. The firstborn is *evidence that the blessing spoken over man in Genesis 1:28 is still operative* and, what is more, is applicable to US. It is the *testimony given by the Holy One that, whatever has happened in our lives, however we think we have failed in our Divine Calling, He is yet faithful*.

This is why Torah – indeed all of Scripture – includes stories of *the barren* – women like Sarah, Rachel, and Chanah [Hannah], for instance. We are to understand that the Holy One is *sovereign*, and is *the moving force behind all reproduction*. He makes the barren fruitful. Sometimes a firstborn comes easily. Sometimes He provides a firstborn miraculously. Other times He does it through providing a child needing adoption. Other times, He provides a corresponding treasure through other means we cannot understand.

The primary appointed time for acknowledging the first fruit of our houses is *the Shabbat*. On that day, each week, remembering the seventh day of Creation, when the Holy One ceased creating, and paused to take pleasure in, and bless His Household, we gather in *our* houses, and bless the fruit thereof. Secondly, each year we acknowledge our firstborn as the gift of our Covenant Partner in Heaven on *Pesach*. It was after all the firstborn who was saved on the night of *Pesach*. The Holy One gave life to our firstborn that night, redeeming him through the blood of the lamb on our doorposts. It was on that night He took us – and our descendants forever - as *His* firstborn.

The ultimate goal, of course, is for the *primary fruit* of our houses to be Messiah. It is through Covenant-focused, loving, beautifully managed, and properly functioning homes - *i.e.* the kind of homes for which *Deuteronomy 6:5-9* and *Numbers 24:5* call us to establish - the Holy One has chosen to *make Messiah*

³ In His sovereignty the Holy One has ordained, or at least allowed, that some people will not find/take spouses, and that some that do find/take spouses will, nevertheless, be unable to produce or adopt children. The Holy One loves the single-for-life and the childless just as much as those who marry and who raise many children, and the Holy One blesses the single-for-life and the childless in other ways we have no time to address in this aliyah. Suffice it to say that each of us has some fruit of our houses that we can – and are obligated – to acknowledge as the Holy One’s gift.

manifest in the world. If we do not fulfill this Divine purpose the Holy One will cause Messiah to be made manifest in *other places*, and in *other ways*. But those other ways and other places are not the ‘perfect’ will of the Holy One. They testify of our failure to be who He called and created us to be. The Kingdom of Heaven can only come *in fullness* when the hearts of fathers are turned to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.

2. The Fruit of our fields

The *fruit of our fields* is the grain – primarily barley and wheat. These are the staples of life. They feed us, they feed our livestock, and they provide the means of barter. They even provide the means to imitate the Holy One in giving to the poor. Hence we have learned that if we follow the Bridegroom’s pathway, the ‘corner’ of every field, as well as its gleanings, are to be left for the poor, for the widow, for the fatherless, and for the foreigner.

Both barley and wheat are usually planted late in autumn [in the time frame we in the Northern Hemisphere know as November/December]. Since barley matures faster than wheat, its harvest season comes sooner. There are thus two appointed times of the Holy One for commemoration of the first fruit of our fields. The first is sometimes called *Ha-Bikkurim*⁴ - the Shabbat after *Pesach* - for the first fruits of the barley harvest. The second is *Shavuot*⁵ – 50 days after *Pesach* - for the first fruits of the wheat harvest.

Note how closely both of these are related to, and how much both of these are dependent upon, *Pesach*. Without *Pesach* there is neither *Ha-Bikkurim* nor *Shavuot*. No time to study this now – but I encourage you to meditate and study out this connection when you can.

3. The Fruit of our Vineyards

The fruit of our vineyards is the grape – in Hebrew, *ha-gafen*. The grape is not a *staple* – it is uniquely designed as a luxury – a symbol of joy, celebration, and abundance. We could not live – or feed our livestock – without grain. But we could easily drink water instead of juice or wine, and we could without any problem live without grapes or raisins in our diet.

The grape harvest begins early in the summer season, and continues all the way up to *Chag Sukkot* [Tabernacles] in the Fall. The celebration of the grape harvest comes at the end of the growing season, at the crowning of the year. It represents the ‘fat’ of the land – the absolute blessing of the Holy One. It could be considered the ‘bonus’ the Holy One gives for a productive year.

⁴ This is sometimes called ‘the day of First fruits’.

⁵ This is sometimes called “Pentecost”, or the “Feast of Weeks”.

The joyous time to present to the Holy One the first fruits of our vineyards is at *Sukkot* – the 8-day festival of Tabernacles/Booths.

4. The Fruit of our Orchards

If, as, when, and to the extent we follow the Pilgrim's pathway, the Holy One has promised to make Eretz Yisrael produce abundant harvests of four different kinds of fruits: *figs, dates, pomegranates, and olives* for us each year.

Figs begin to appear sporadically in Spring, during the period of counting the Omer. The early figs are usually of poor quality. The larger and better harvests of figs occur in mid-summer [June] and in late summer [in what we know as early September]. The harvesting of dates and pomegranates occurs between the primary two fig harvests. All these harvests culminate in the sixth month [the month commonly called *Elul*]. This harvest of fruit is thus always the major one in progress at the time we study parsha *Ki Tavo*.

The olive harvest begins shortly after *Chag Sukkot* [the Feast of Tabernacles] and continues into early Winter.

5. The Fruit of our Pastures

The fruit of our pastures is *tahor* livestock - sheep, goats, and cattle/oxen. From these, the Holy One provides for us nourishing milk and material for clothing, and with these, remembering the sin in the Garden that caused us to recognize our nakedness, such that we hid from God, we make *korban chata't* [approach to the Holy One for remission of sins].

Remember that animals such as these and man were all created on the same day – Day 6 of Creation. Mankind is forever linked with animals of the field and forest. It is thus in these particular living creatures that we find the prototype of the Messiah's atoning death. As *tahor* animals served as a surrogate for us, taking the punishment mankind deserved as a result of sin, so Messiah has served.

The Divine Appointment at which we commemorate the first fruit of our pastures is *Yom Kippur* – the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. By refraining from food and drink on that day, we join ourselves to Messiah – our High Priest - in 'death'. When the Temple stood in Jerusalem the *Kohen G'dol* [high priest] would on *Yom Kippur* slaughter a bull as a *korban chata't* [sin offering] and a ram for a *korban olah* [burnt offering]. He then would take two male goats. On one he would lay his hands, and confess all the sins of our people. That goat would be taken out to 'a solitary place' [outside the Holy One's 'Garden'], bearing all the sins. The other would be submitted on the altar as a *korban chata't* [drawing near for the forgiveness and

remediation of our breaches of covenant] for the people.

The Divinely Inspired Devarim Script for Presentation of First Fruits

In today's aliyah Moshe reveals the Eternal Playwright's prescribed 'first fruits' presentation script. Here are the specific words we are all instructed to say when presenting our first fruits to the kohen on duty at the *Mish'kan*:

Higadeti ha-yom l'Adonai Eloheicha

'Today I am affirming to the Holy one your God

ki-vati el-ha-aretz

that I have come to the land

asher nishba Adonai l'avoteinu latet lanu

that the Holy One swore to our fathers to give us.'

Arami oved avi

My father was a wandering Aramean

v'yered Mitzraymah vayagar sham bimtei me'at

He went to Egypt with a small number of men and lived there as an immigrant,

vayehi-sham l'goy gadol atzum varav

and it was there that he became a great, powerful, and populous nation.

Vayare'u otanu ha-Mitzrim

The Egyptians were cruel to us,

vaye'anunu vayitnu aleinu avodah kashah

making us suffer and imposing harsh slavery on us.

Vanitz'ak el-Adonai Elohei avoteinu

We cried out to the Holy One, God of our ancestors,

Vayish'ma Adonai et-koleinu vayar et-onieinu

and the Holy One heard our voice, seeing our suffering,

v'et-amaleinu v'et-l'chatzeinu

our harsh labor, and our distress.

Vayotzi'enu Adonai miMitzrayim

'And the Holy One then brought us out of Egypt

b'yad chazakah uvizroa netuyah

with a strong hand and an outstretched arm

uv'morah gadol uve'otot uv'moftim

with great visions and with signs and miracles.

Vayevi'einu el-ha-makom hazeh

And He brought us to this area,

vayiten-lanu et-ha-aretz hazot
and He gave us this land to steward -

eretz zavav chalav ud'vash
a land flowing with milk and honey.

V'atah hineh heveiti et-reshit pri ha-adamah
I am now bringing the first fruit of the land

asher natatah li Adonai
that the Holy One has given me.

May we all stand before the *Kohen Gadol* soon and make this declaration, Beloved. First with the fruit of the Spirit - *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self control*. Then (in the Holy One's good time) with the fruit of the physical land. On earth as it is in Heaven.

The First Fruits of the Soil

The phrase we translate as 'first fruits of the soil' is *m'reshit p'ri ha-adamah*⁶. In Genesis 1:11 the Eternal One blessed the soil, speaking His creative power into the granules of lifeless dirt. At that time, speaking out of eternity and for all time, He said: "***Let the land produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with their seed in it, according to their various kinds.***" Then, after this prophetic empowerment was bestowed upon the 'soil', the Eternal One made *man* out of the very substance He had just blessed with fruitfulness. Man - a product of the land - is *the first fruit of its productivity*. I will let you sort out the implications of that.

Right after the Holy One formed Adam out of the *adamah* [earth] and breathed life into him, He placed Adam in a "garden". We know that garden by the name *Eden*. That garden was the perfect environment for man. Why did the Holy One put Adam in that garden? Genesis 2:15 tells us it was for two purposes: *to dress it* and *to keep it*. *Dress ... and Keep*. Remember these verbs, Beloved! They hold the key to *the reason you were created* Let's meditate for a few moments therefore on what each of those functions entail.

The Two Primary Divine Callings Of the Eternal One's Sh'ma-People

The two purposes for man's placement in the Eternal One's Garden are rendered in English as to [a] dress the Garden and to [b] keep it. The verb our English Bibles

⁶ The word we translate as "first" is *m'reshit* [*mem, resh, shin, yod, tav*]. This is an animated form of the word we translate as 'the beginning' in the phrase 'in the beginning' in Genesis 1:1. The word we translate as "fruit" is *p'ri*, [*peh, resh, yod*], Strong's Hebrew word #6529, pronounced *per-ee'*. It is first used in Genesis 1:11. The word we translate as "land" is *adamah*, [*alef, dalet, mem, hey*] Strong's Hebrew word #127, pronounced *ad-aw-maw'*. It is the word our Bibles translate as 'earth' in Genesis 1:25.

translate as ‘dress’ is ‘abad’⁷. This verb is usually translated ‘work’, or ‘serve’. It implies doing something on behalf of someone else – acting as someone else’s designated representative. We sometimes express this in English by using the term ‘stewarding’ – *i.e.* taking care of someone else’s possessions as if they were our own. It means *making them as fruitful as possible – bringing out their potential* for their owner.

The Eternal One made Adam and Chava *stewards* of His garden. When we enter the land of promise, we will be stewards of it in the same sense Adam and Chava were stewards of the Garden.

The other verb used by the Eternal One to describe Adam and Chava’s function with regard to the Garden was *keep*. Adam and Chava were not just to *abad* the Garden for the Eternal One – they were also to *keep* it for Him. The Hebrew word is *sh’mar*⁸. The Hebraic word picture the verb *sh’mar* projects is that of a *watchman*, or *trusted guardian*, diligently watching over and protecting with passion and such force as necessary something precious that has been placed in his care.

Adam and Chava were to steward - and protect the Garden from harm or from invasion by the ‘evil one’. I will leave it to you to determine exactly who the ‘evil one’ was and is.

The Two Accountings the Holy One’s Sh’ma-People Must Give

In Genesis 2:15 the Holy One prescribed two Divine functions for man in the Garden of Eden - *i.e.* man was both to DRESS/TEND THAT GARDEN and was to KEEP WATCH OVER/GUARD IT. As it was with man in the Garden of Eden so it be with Israel in the land of promise. Moshe will, in today’s aliyah, tell us of two separate ‘accountings’ which all the Holy One’s *sh’ma*-people are going to be called upon to make in connection with their stewardship of the land.

Each of these accountings corresponds closely to one of the two Divine functions the Holy One assigned to man in the Garden of Eden. The first prescribed accounting of the people of the Holy One in relation to the land comes in connection with the ceremony of *m’reshit p’ri adamah* [the first fruits of the land]. This is a stewardship accounting. The procedure ordained by the Holy One, described in verses 1-11 of our aliyah for today, describes how the men to whom the Garden of the Holy One known as Eretz Yisrael is entrusted are called upon to account to the Holy One regarding the Divine directive to dress/tend that garden.

⁷ *Abad* is Strong’s Hebrew word #5647. Spelled *ayin, beit, dalet*, it is pronounced *aw-bawd’*.

⁸ *Sh’mar* is Strong’s Hebrew word #8104. Spelled *shin, mem, resh*, it is pronounced *shaw-mar’*.

The focus of *m'reshit p'ri adamah* accounting is on acknowledging the Holy One's ownership of the garden, and that we possess it only because He has chosen us as to act as His stewards - in other words, acknowledging that the garden – and all its produce – is forever His, to distribute as He wills. But there is also a second accounting. I call it the *watchman's accounting*. It is an accounting to the Holy One regarding man's second Divine calling – the calling to *keep watch over/guard* the garden, and to protect and defend it against invasion of and pollution by evil. This accounting occurs in connection with the second prescribed ceremony – the ceremony of *t'kalah l'asar at-kol ma'aser* - *i.e.* the 'completion of tithing all the tithes'.

There is, you see, something about the handling of the tithe that fulfills our destiny. Why, you ask? Because, you see, the handling of the tithe of our land constitutes *a witness on our behalf that we have not allowed the land to be infiltrated, invaded, or polluted, by evil*. Let me explain.

Remember that in *Gan Eden* [the Garden of Eden] Adam and Chava did not *sh'mar* the Garden. They did not protect it from infiltration and pollution. They not only let the evil one – the serpent – in [*i.e. infiltration*], they let him run amuck, and even permitted him to speak *l'shon ha ra* [denigrating speech] against the Eternal One – *i.e. pollution*. As a result, though the Garden was certainly fruitful, they knew they could not make the 'watchman's accounting' with regard to it at the *appointed time*. So at the time appointed for the watchman's accounting they were ashamed. They ran and hid from the Eternal One instead of running to Him. **Genesis 3:8**.

Like Adam, we stand at the threshold of a Garden prepared for us by the Holy One. This time, the name of the garden is not Eden; it is *Eretz Yisrael*. This time before allowing us to enter His Garden, the Holy One makes it clear that there will be *prescribed times of accounting* – *i.e.* for *passing under the Holy One's rod*. Each year we will account as stewards/husbandmen, with our first fruits. Once every three years we will account as *guardians/watchmen* - with *t'kalah l'asar et-kol ma'aser* – the ceremony of the completion of the tithing of the tithes.

The Scripted Devarim We are To Speak Upon Completion of Each Three-Year Tithe Cycle

The last four verses of today's aliyah [verses 12-15 of Deuteronomy 26] contain the 'other liturgy' – the liturgy we are to recite when we complete the three-year tithe cycle. We first discovered the three-year tithe cycle in Deuteronomy 14:22-29. There we learned that when we get to the land of promise we are to live by *the years*. In the first two years of every three-year cycle we are to take a tenth of all that our fields produce with us to Jerusalem [referred to euphemistically as the 'place He will choose as a dwelling for His Name' – **Deuteronomy 14:23**] and eat, drink, and spend it on 'whatever our

soul shall desire'. This effectively constitutes the tithe as the funding mechanism for our participation in the *Sh'losh Regalim* [three pilgrimage festivals – *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkot*]. In the third agricultural year of the cycle however we are to do something different with the tithe of the produce of our fields. In the third year of the cycle we are to store the tithe of that year's produce in 'our gates' for distribution as needed to the *Levites* (our brethren who own no land and hence can produce no food for themselves), to *the foreigners* who are sojourning in our midst, and to *the fatherless* and *the widow* among us.

This three-year cycle is not complete until we have [a] made our pilgrimages, rejoicing and expending the tithe in Jerusalem as directed, and [b] distributed the third-year's tithe in our gates to the Levi, and to the needy foreigner, orphan and widow living in our midst. At the completion of this three-year cycle as aforesaid we are to make a declaration to our Covenant Partner in Heaven. This is the second prescribed liturgy of Torah. When we present our tithe to the kohen we are to say:

*I have put away the holy things out of my house,
and also have given them to the Levi,
and to the foreigner, to the fatherless, and to the widow,
according to all your mitzvah that you have commanded me.
I have not transgressed any of your mitzvot, neither have I forgotten them.*

*I have not eaten of it in my mourning,
neither have I put away of it, being tamei, nor given of it for the dead.*

*I have sh'ma-d the voice of the Holy One my God;
I have done according to all that you have commanded me.*

*Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven,
and bless your people Yisra'el and the ground that you have given us,
as you swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.*

[Deuteronomy 26:12-15]

What does this declaration mean? How can anyone make it? It basically says “*I am sinless! I have sh'ma-d perfectly the Holy One's Torah!*” What does this have to do with our responsibility to guard/protect the Garden from infiltration and pollution by *ra*?

The Watchman's Accounting

Do you remember the primary 'theme' of the last two parshot – *Shoftim* and *Ki Tetze*? It was “*put away the evil* [Hebrew *ra*] *from your midst*”. That statement was repeated over and over again in those two parshot – *ten times in all!*⁹

⁹ The ten times are as follows: *Deuteronomy 17:7* (those who engage in idolatry should be put to death by the whole community); *17:12* (any man showing contempt for the judge or priest doing his duty must be put to death); *17:13* (those found guilty of murder are to be handed over to the avenger of blood to die); *19:19* (anyone who gives false testimony concerning a brother is to have done to him whatever he was trying to do to his brother); *21:9* (the land where a man is found slain must be cleansed by the blood

The instruction to ‘*put away the ra*’ is analogous to the instruction to *sh’mar* the Garden of the Holy One. – the second aspect of our Divine Purpose. We cannot keep the Serpent out of the Garden. He is subtle, and crafty, and works under cover of darkness. But we can put away the *ra* he brings with him. We can *clean up his pollution* through *teshuvah* [the process of making repentance, receiving forgiveness, ridding our lives of everything that hinders love for our Divine Bridegroom, and rededicating ourselves to live the *Torah lifestyle* He has ordained for us]. The *teshuvah* process involves *running to our Divine Bridegroom’s Presence, not away from it*. When the Holy One came at the ‘appointed time’ for synchronized breathing, what did Adam and Chava do? They ran away and hid themselves among the trees of the Garden. This was the worst response they could have made. Our Covenant Partner wants us to run to His Presence instead of away. He therefore calls us *to His Presence* three times a year – to His *City*, to His *altar*, into His *chambers*, and into His *embrace*. But just running to our Covenant Partner is not all we are told to do. The *teshuvah* process also involves taking with us *the tenth of our produce* as a witness that we have put away the *ra* from our midst. Let me explain what I mean.

What Do Torah’s Tithe Instructions Have to Do With Teshuvah?

Consider that the tenth, unlike the first fruits, is designed to be a *random sample*. If there is *ra* in our crop it will show up in this sample. We will see it - and so will everyone else. When we try to spend it we will discover if it is *good* [tov] or bad [*ra*]. A little leaven, Shaul would later say, leavens the whole lump. But how does *ra* ‘show up’ in our crop sample? How can we – or anyone else – see it? Ah, that is the part that requires keeping the whole tithe instruction in context. Let’s think this through, shall we? Do you remember what the Holy One told us would happen if we did – or, alternatively, did not - *sh’ma* His *mitzvot*? He told us if we faithfully *sh’ma*-d He would:

*...send rain on your land in its season, the former and the latter rains,
so that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil.
I will provide grass in your fields for your cattle,
and you will eat and be satisfied.*

[Deuteronomy 11:13-15]

However, He also told us that if we did not *sh’mar* the *mitzvot* He would *shut up the sky so there will be no rains, and the earth will not yield its produce*. Deuteronomy 11:16-17. Do you now see it? The process of separating out the tithe of all our produce from the land works is designed to function sort of like a ‘*mid-term test*. If the Holy One’s

of a heifer); 21:21 (a stubborn and rebellious son is to be stoned at the city gate);22:21(a young woman who does not preserve her virginity for marriage is to be stoned at the door of her father’s house); 22:22 (when a man is found having sexual relations with another man’s wife, both must die);22:24 (when a man is found having consensual sexual relations with a betrothed girl, both are to be stoned to death); and 24:7 (one who kidnaps a fellow Hebrew and sells him as a slave, for profit, must die).

words are true - and of course they are - the more we *sh'ma, sh'mar, and live, breathe and move* in His covenant instructions, the more we will receive *the blessing of rain*. The more we receive the blessing of rain, the more abundant will be our harvest, and *ipso facto* the larger and higher quality will be the tithe of that harvest. On the other hand, if we do not *sh'ma, sh'mar, and live, breathe and move* in His covenant instructions, we will receive *less rain*, our harvest will suffer, and *our tithe will be proportionately reduced in size and quality*.

By setting aside the tithe year after year, and comparing one year's tithe to the next, we are given an easy-to-read *spiritual barometer*. We should ask ourselves: "Is either the *quantity* or the *quality* of the tithe we set aside from our harvest *diminished* this year as compared to previous years? If so, we need to look very closely at our lifestyle. Are we still *sh'ma*-ing the Holy One with all our heart and soul? Are we still *sh'mar*-ing His *mitzvot* with all our strength? Are forms of *ra* in our lives that we are failing to detect or are neglecting to put away from our midst?

If we will consider these things, the process of separating the tithe can become one of the primary means through which we *remain accountable* to our Covenant Partner - a barometer according to which we can gauge our *sh'ma*-responsiveness - and make appropriate corrections [through *teshuvah*] - before it is too late.

But What About the Third Year of the Tithe Cycle?

The third year of the cycle is actually the most important of all. It is the catalyst for determining if the mundane task of making distributions to the foreigner, the fatherless, the Levi'im, and the widow in our villages is as important to us as the exciting process of going up to Jerusalem and rejoicing before the Holy One. The third-year tithe is how we can determine if we are as diligent in making sure we *sh'ma* instructions concerning the foreigner, the widow, the fatherless, et al, as we are in *sh'ma*-ing the instructions to worship and rejoice in the Courts of the Bridegroom-King. Or perhaps we have the opposite problem – perhaps we thrive on the *ego boost* we get from seeing the immediate results of assisting the widow, orphan, et al – but do not set the same priority on worshipping and rejoicing in the Holy One at His appointed times. Perhaps our problem is that we would rather be looked upon as – and consider ourselves 'philanthropists' – than lose ourselves in pure worship. Perhaps we sometimes let our 'ministry' determine our identity in the Holy One. Perhaps we secretly desire to claim credit, or honor, or glory, for being a 'giving person'.

In other words the three-year tithe system operates as a system of *checks and balances*. We put our tithe on the scale each year. What the scale reveals lets us know *the overall health of our hearts*. It tells us in what areas we are strong [those in

which we *sh'ma*], and in what areas we are weak [those in which we *lo sh'ma*]. Each time we come to the conclusion of the three-year cycle, we are to stand before the Holy One and make our declaration of faithful *sh'ma*-ing. We can only say the words Moshe tells us to say [as set forth in verses 13-15] if we have previously made *teshuvah*, received His forgiveness, and speak solely from faith/trust in Messiah to do for us what we clearly see we have not done and could not do. The tithe system as designed by the Bridegroom-King is designed to *point out our deficiencies*, and to thereby *cause us to trust not in our own righteousness but in the Messiah – the great Lord of the Harvest - Whom He has promised to provide*.

Whose Produce Is It, Anyway?

When the Holy One's *sh'ma*-people enter the land we are to participate with our Covenant Partner in *the miracle of creation* - planting fields of grain and vineyards and cultivating pastures. Then we will receive the fruit of the land instead of the manna we who stood before Moshe on the plains of Moav had known all our lives.

After we settle in the land our Divine Bridegroom has set apart for us we will year after year invest great quantities sweat and labor and time and seeds into that land. But the produce of the land will never be anything for we can claim credit. It will merely be that which the Holy One created and spoke into existence. The fruit of the land is not, you see, and is never going to be, “the fruit of our labors”; it instead is and will always remain the *fruit of the soil* the Holy One blessed on the third day of Creation. Our ancestors were told that it was *a part of their Betrothal covenant and never to forget that fact*. Nor are we to forget.

Whether we plant a garden or practice medicine or law; whether we design airplanes or punch a time clock at a factory or buy and sell stocks. Whatever activity we may engage in from which we reap the sustenance of daily life, the truth is this: all that we have, all that flows into our hands and bank accounts, as well as every morsel that finds its way onto our dinner tables, is from the Holy One, our King and our God, the Creator and Master of the World. The ability to produce wealth (if that term bothers you, substitute *provision*) is *a gift from our Divine Bridegroom*.

Let us not take ourselves or our jobs too seriously. Let us not talk any more about our “hard-earned money”, or credit or blame our employer or clientele [or the government] for our economic situation. All the wealth of the earth belongs to the Holy One. He distributes it as He wills. To complain about *who has what* is to rebel against His plan of distribution, and declare that we think He made a mistake in not giving it to us instead.

It is easy to get caught up in the thoughts that prevail in our society. Let us instead walk in Torah's way, and give Him praise in accordance with His Word for every good thing.

Questions For Today's Study

1. The first subject of this week's parsha is the bringing of the offering of first fruits by those who possess and inhabit *Eretz Yisrael*.

[A] Of what types of crops/produce were the first fruits to be offered?

[B] How were the first fruits to be accumulated?

[C] Where were the first fruits to be taken/offered up?

[D] Who was to perform the ritual connected with the offering of first fruits?

[E] List the persons who were to eat of the first fruits.

[F] On a sheet of paper write out the words of the ritual of first fruits.

Memorize these words by week's end, and recite them at your home Shabbat celebration.

2. Do you think references in the Torah or of prophets to giving fruits (or animals, or profits, or any other produce) of the land of Israel can legitimately be used as Biblical support for the collection of 'tithes and offerings' in modern churches or synagogues in America? Explain why or why not?

3. In today's Haftarah reading we have the wonderful prophetic call to the Redeemed sons and daughters of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov as they return to the land set as a stage for the Divine Passion play for the final time to "***arise, and shine:***

***Arise, shine; for your light is come,
and the glory of the Holy One is risen on you.***

***For behold, darkness shall cover the eretz, and gross darkness the peoples;
but the Holy One will arise on you, and His glory will be visible upon you.***

[A] To whom is the Holy One speaking in this passage?

[B] Look up in Strong's and Gesenius the words translated "*arise*", "*shine*", "*light*" and "*glory*" in verse 1. Write the Hebrew words and their definitions.

[C] What "light" is the Holy One referring to? Explain why you think this.

4. Look up "*darkness*" and "*light*" in a Hebrew word study resource like Richard's "*Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*" or Vines' "*Complete Dictionary*" or whatever reference material you have available. What things do you think "light" and "darkness" symbolize?

5. In preparation for this week's B'rit Chadasha reading, and to put the passage we will be reading in proper context, read Luke 20:45-47:

*In the hearing of all the people, he said to his talmidim,
"Beware of the Sofrim, who like to walk in long robes,
and love greetings in the marketplaces,
the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,
who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers:
these will receive greater condemnation."*

[A] What six characteristics did Yeshua attribute to the *sofrim* [scribes]?

[B] What does Yeshua say awaits these religious leaders?

[C] Look up in Strong's the Greek word translated "damnation" in our 21st Century translations of Luke 20:47. Write the Greek word and its definition. By using Strong's, Richard's, or any other source, can you find – and contrast with the Greek word - the Hebrew word that Yeshua would have used instead of "damnation"?

[D] Note the reference of Yeshua to 'feasts' on the one hand [the Sofrim are accused of loving the best seats at them] and the care of widows [the Sofrim are accused of 'devouring widow's houses'] on the other hand. In the case of the Sofrim Yeshua was discussing, do you think the third-year tithes were bigger or smaller than their first- and second-year tithes? Explain your answer.

*May the eyes of our understanding be opened
to see that our Covenant Partner in Heaven
is indeed the source of all good things in our lives,
And may the words of our mouth change in response to this truth.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 27:11-12

*Teach me your way, O Holy One.
Lead me in a straight path because of my enemies.
Don't deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries,
For false witnesses have risen up against me,
Such as breathe out cruelty.*