

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Vayalech:** Deuteronomy 31:19-23
 Haftarah: Isaiah 56:1-5
 B'rit Chadasha: Romans 7:12

They Will Provoke Me and Break My Covenant.

[Deuteronomy 31:20b]

Today's Meditation is Ezekiel 33:14-16;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #6, *B'racha [The Blessing of the Year]*

Ve'atah kitvu lachem et-ha-shirah hazot – Now, write down this song for yourself ...
v'lamdah et-b'nei-Yisra'el – and teach it to B'nei Yisrael ... ***simah befihem l'ma'an*** –
establish it in their mouths ... ***tiheyeh-li ha-shirah hazot l'ed bivnei Yisra'el*** – and this
song will be for a witness/testimony in/of B'nei Yisrael. Deuteronomy 31:19.

Throughout the first thirty chapters of *Sefer Devarim*² Moshe has spoken to us in intimate and vulnerable first person narrative style. As *Vayalech* began, however, the narrative reverted to the more formal third person style that had marked Torah's first four *seferot*. Instead of writing 'Then I went out . . .' / 'I said' to begin the parsha that we have come to call *Vayalech*, Moshe framed it as 'Then Moshe went out' and 'he - meaning Moshe - said'. Why the sudden reversion to speaking of Moshe in the third person? Did someone else – Y'hoshua perhaps – act as the scribe for the last few chapters of this book? Or was it perhaps the subject matter that dictated the change?

The subtle message is this: There is transition in the air. There are new assignments being handed down. There are new leaders – and new challenges – arising. Moshe's great, soaring discourses on the Plain are now over. All his personal appeals to the sons and daughters of the Covenant to love the Holy One our God, to *sh'ma* His Voice at all times, to *sh'mar* His Covenant above all else, and to *asah* His *mitzvot* and *mishpatim* everywhere we go – and to *teach our children and childrens' children to do the same* – have now been delivered. The revelation stream portal that we have known and enjoyed for so long is about to close forever. All that is left in the text of Torah is *epilogue*, and *prophecy, anthem, blessing, and bittersweet farewell*. All of these are better handled through the transcendent medium of third person narrative.

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² The introductory opening lines of each discourse of this sefer were the notable exception.

Yesterday, therefore, Moshe put back on his old, familiar prophet's hat and went back to directly quoting the words of the Holy One. He reintroduced the old, familiar revelatory cue from Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers: ***And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying . . .***

What did Moshe declare in this format? He announced that the Holy One had warned him that after his death, despite his passionate call to them all to choose the Bridegroom's Pathway to the superlative and most excellent form of life – i.e. the lifestyle of Torah – at some time in the future *B'nei Yisrael* was going to the exact opposite. He told Moshe that, in a future day, Avraham's descendants would ***rise up and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land . . . forsake Me, and break My Covenant . . .*** As a result of Israel's dalliances with the gods of foreigners, the Holy One announced to Moshe, ***many personal calamities and troubling times will befall them, in order that they will say in that day, 'Have not these calamities come upon us because our God is not among us?'*** And finally, Moshe had announced that, in that day, for a season, the Holy One had said: ***I will surely hide My face . . .***

These things were all spoken of in the far, far future tense – and Moshe knew he would have no involvement in or affect upon them whatever. He knew he could not change them. He trusted that this too, would ultimately be worked by the Holy One into something good, because it had already been factored into the Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan. So Moshe just wrote them down, as he was told to do - in the far less personal prophetic voice tense and third-person style. Oh, Dear Reader – may all sons and daughters of the Covenant take note: Do not entertain the gods, adopt the priorities or values, embrace the fears, or follow the ways of the foreign nations and cultures you encounter. Your calling is to *be a people set apart, and as such to serve as a shining light* to them; you cannot do this if you get too close to, and absorb, their darkness.

Just A Song Before I Go

Armed with the confirmation of his deepest fears about the people he has led for these many years, Moshe is about to give voice to a *shir* [i.e. minstrel's ballad] - the Song of Moshe. Awash in the Spirit of the Holy One Moshe will testify on behalf of the Holy One in this Song and will call the Holy One's People of all generations to *teshuvah* [return to the Holy One's Covenant path].

A song? Yes, Dear One, a song. A song of *deliverance*. A song of *redemption*. A song of *hope*. A song of *love*. An *epic ballad*. An *eternal anthem*. Yes, the Creator of Heaven and Earth wants to say 'I love you' – in a song. The song is to be sung for eternity. [See Revelation 15:1-3 - “. . . ***And they sang the song of Moshe, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.***”]. We will have to wait for next week and parsha ***Ha'azinu*** to study the content

of the song of Moshe in depth. But by now, because of the revelation of the Holy One given to us thus far in our study of Torah, we know instinctively what the song of Moshe will contain, don't we Beloved? It will be a song of *the passionate and unquenchable love of our Divine Bridegroom*, and of *His relentless caring for – and endless dedication to - His people*. It will be a song where tragedy and disaster are turned to hope and joy, and where deep darkness is turned to glorious light. That is what it *must be*. That is *the eternal inheritance of the People of God*. This is the fruit of our covenant with the Holy One our God.

Songwriting 101

This approach should come as no surprise. The Holy One is not only the *Ultimate Lover*; He is the *Immaculate Songwriter*. He writes *the songs that make the whole world sing*. And he delights to choose as spokespersons those who will joyfully – and faithfully - sing His songs. Songs speak to and inspire a part of the human being that neither ordinary conversation nor oratory can reach. Songs give voice to messages that the spoken word cannot communicate. They unlock emotions oratory cannot penetrate. They *stir the heartstrings*. They *activate the 'phonological loop'* in the auditory cortex of the human brain, making the combination of melody and words 'lodge in your head'. Songs therefore promote *memorization and education – hence we teach children the alphabet song*. Songs *stimulate relationship building – hence young lovers select and cherish 'their song'*. Songs *speed up culturalization – hence every school has an 'alma mater'* and every nation has a *'national anthem'*. And in the process of all these things, songs are an essential element of every *transformative movement the earth has ever known*.

When the Holy One chooses spokesmen, therefore, He often chooses minstrels and balladeers. He chooses instrumentalists and singers. He chooses people like Moshe, Miryam, Ezra, David, Asaf, Heman, and the sons of Korach. He shines the spotlight of the age on people like Sh'lomo. Yeshayahu. Yechezkiel, Yirmayahu, and Yochanan the Revelator. And every time He wants to introduce a new phase or aspect of His Grand Redemptive Plan for Mankind and Creation, and/or effectuate a transformation, He just writes and releases to one of his prophetic minstrels a *new song*.

The account of the Seven Days of Creation reproduced in Genesis 1 – 2:3 is such a song. The account of what transpired in the Garden of Eden is such a song. The story of the Flood is a song. The ballad of Yosef and his brothers is such a song. The story of the Exodus is such a song. The narrative of the *Aseret HaDibrot* [i.e. the so-called 'Ten Commandments'] is such a song. The story of the collaboration of all Israel and the mixed multitude in the erection of the Tabernacle is such a song. The

‘blessings and curses’ of Leviticus 26 is such a song. And now, as we stand on the threshold of another phase of the Grand Redemptive Plan, the Holy One has written – and wants Moshe to transcribe and teach His People – yet another such song. When the time comes, and the orchestra of Davidic harps, lyres, flutes and drums begins to play, will you join Moshe in singing the Bridegroom-King’s song?

Each of Our Lives Is To Be As A Sweet, Inspiring Song That Makes The World A Better Place

The Hebrew word that English Bibles translates as ‘song’ throughout this passage is *shir*. A *shir* is a particular kind of song - the kind of song one sings as he or she is taking a journey. It is a traveling song – a song such as a pilgrim or band of pilgrims, or a minstrel or band of minstrels, or perhaps an army, would sing as they walk or march along. Such a song is designed not only to *provide a cadence and rhythm for and a pace of movement*, but also to *keep the attention of both the singers and any spectators focused squarely on the purpose of the journey*. Think of the world’s most famous marching songs – songs like ‘*We Are Marching To Pretoria*’; the ‘*GarryOwen*’, ‘*Rocky Road to Dublin*’, ‘*When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again*’, ‘*Hurrah, Hurrah*’, ‘*Glory, Glory Hallelujah*’, ‘*Dixie*’, ‘*Over There*’, ‘*Halls of Montezuma*’, ‘*Bridge Over the River Kwai*’, etc. When the Holy One releases a *shir*, He intends for it to hit the auditory cortex of man like these songs *on steroids*. He intends for the songs He writes to get stuck permanently in your brain’s ‘phonological loop’. He intends for both the melody and the words to *haunt you*. He intends for them to become part of your natural rhythm and worldview. He intends for them to stir emotions – and cause chemical reactions - in you. He intends for them to change you.

What Are We To Do With This Song?

The Holy One makes it clear what Moshe is supposed to do with the prophetic *shir* that He is getting ready to release. He specifically tells Moshe to do three things: 1. ***kitvu lachem*** - i.e. *write it for yourselves*; 2. ***lamdah et-b'nei-Yisra'el*** – i.e. *teach it to the children of Israel*’ and 3. ***simah b'fihem*** - *put/plant it* [i.e. the *shir*] *in their mouths*’. Deuteronomy 31:19b.

1. Kitvu Lachem – Write it for Yourselfs

Every *shir chadash* [new song] of the Bridegroom-King is designed as a beautiful, extremely meaningful gift to mankind. It is intended to have every bit as deep and lasting an impact on the *singer* as it is on the hearer. The minstrel is not an author of a *shir chadash* – he is just the one the Holy One has chosen to receive, steward, and release it. He is not the revelation source – just the revelation processor. As soon as he hears the *shir* that Heaven is releasing He is to write it down. Word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, verse-by-verse, chorus-by-chorus, measure-by-measure, note-by-note, transition-by-transition, and movement-by-movement, He is to meditate on both

its message and its emotion. He is to laugh - or weep - with it, as appropriate. He is to embrace it. He is to tune his *heart, soul, and emotions* as well as his instrument and voice to it. It is to become revelation to him - not just a set of words set to a melody. The minstrel is to feel it, and live it, breathe it, and be changed by it long before he ever sings it.

2. Lamdah et-b'nei Yisrael – Teach it to the Children of Israel

The Hebrew verb *lamad*, which is translated in this instance as ‘teach’, actually means to strike, to beat, or to pound. The minstrel is to ‘pound’ the song into the hearers with emphasis and repetition. As Roberta Flack famously sang, the task of a minstrel is to ‘kill [the hearer] softly with his song’.

2. Simah B'fihem – Put/Plant it in their Mouths

The third thing that Moshe is told to do with the *shir chadash* that is being downloaded to him is to ‘put/plant it in their mouths’ The Hebrew verb used, *sum*, is the same word used to describe what the Holy One did to create the Garden of Eden. Our English Bibles say He ‘planted’ it. Genesis 2:8. To *sum* something means to do the hearers’ souls what a gardener does to a plot of ground to turn it into a garden. First the gardener pulls up the weeds, thorns, rocks, and roots. Then he breaks up the sod and makes furrows. Then he adds organic mix. Then he plants that which he wants to grow, waters it in, and tend it. The Holy One does not just want to activate the auditory cortex or engage the phonological loop of those who hear this song. He wants them to know it as THEIR SONG. He wants them to do more than just *hear it* – He wants them to *sing it*. He wants it to be their song of remembrance. He wants it to be their anthem. The Holy One puts it thusly:

*Let this song be a witness/testimony for Me
in relation to the children of Israel.*

*It will come to pass, when many evils and troubles have come upon them,
that this song will testify against them as a witness;
for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants.*

[Deuteronomy 31:19c, 21a]

Of what is this *shir chadash* to be a witness? It is a song of forgiveness, a song of covenant, and a song of love. The Holy One wants us to know that, even knowing we will turn away from Him, He chose us, and betrothed Himself to us, anyway. He wants us to know His Covenant with us – and His Promises to us - are not dependent upon us. They are not dependent upon our perfection – or even our fidelity. They are not dependent upon our obedience in any given situation. They transcend all that. They are based in His Eternal Plan, not our performance. As He puts it:

*For I know the inclination of their behavior today,
even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them.*

[Deuteronomy 31:21b]

Wow. Do you get it? Before He entrusts the Land to us – or puts *anything* of value under our stewardship, for that matter – He knows full well how undeserving we are, how unappreciative we will be, and how unfaithfully we will behave. He knows the majority of the people that he is preparing to lead in the next phase of the Grand Redemptive Plan will eventually ‘grow fat’, will ‘turn aside to other gods’, and will break away from the Holy One and the Glorious Covenant. He is going to do what He promised anyway. He is committed to us as the sons and daughters and spiritual offspring of Avraham *no matter what*. He is faithful to His Covenant with Avraham even if we are not. He has a plan to redeem mankind and Creation that does not depend upon our obedience. It does not depend upon our merit. In most instances, it does not even depend upon our cooperation. It is solely dependent upon His Character, His Greatness, the Purity of His Heart, and the Power of His Word.

The Holy One also knows that there will always be a remnant who remains faithful to Him. Are you part of that remnant? Sometimes it may seem that everyone else is turning aside from the Holy One, His Covenant, His Plan, and His ways. But what is that to *you*? Your assignment is to follow the Bridegroom-King anyway. Even if your father and your mother, your son and your daughter, succumb to a great falling away, your assignment is to *adhere to the covenant anyway*. You are here at such a time as this to provide a faithful example for the remnant who will love Him no matter what their peers – and even their family members - do.

The Substance of the Shir We Are to Co-Write With the Holy One

One thing remains for discussion today - the actual substance of the *shir chadash* the Holy One is about to release through Moshe. The precise words and sequence of movements will be revealed next week, in parsha *Ha'azinu*. But the Holy One gives us a ‘short outline’ in today’s aliyah. There are seven separate ‘movements’ of the shir that are introduced and previewed this week. How will the song end? What is the substance of the eighth movement? Ah, Dear One – that is a glorious surprise. There is no ‘preview’ of the final movement. We will have to discover the great song’s amazing *ending* next week, when we read it for ourselves.

The movements of the *shir* that are previewed by the Holy One this week are:

Movement #1: *The Land of Milk and Honey Is Given Just As Promised*

The message of this movement of the *shir* will be “*As I promised Avraham, I will bring the people descended from him into/give them possession of the land I promised to give them - a land flowing with milk and honey*.” The full script for this movement is found in Deuteronomy 32:1-14.

Movement #2: *Introducing Yeshurun – the ‘Fat’; the Complacent; the Lukewarm*

Once I give the people possession of the land, they will fail to be good stewards of it. They will eat of it selfishly, gorge themselves on its abundance, and grow ‘fat’, sluggish, dull of hearing/*sh’ma*-ing, and lax in both thankfulness and adherence to the Torah lifestyle. The full script for this movement the song is found in Deuteronomy 32:15a.

Movement #3: *The Covenant People Will Turn to and Worship Other Gods*

After growing ‘fat’, the people will turn away from Me and chase after other ‘gods’. They will start to value what the cultures around them value, want what the cultures around them want, love what the cultures around them love, hate what the cultures around them hate, and fear what the cultures around them fear. They will - temporarily, at least - forget what I have done for them. They will forget My Goodness. They will seek comfort and delight elsewhere. The full script of this movement of the song is found in Deuteronomy 32:15b-17.

Movement #4: *The People Will Deride/Dishonor Their Creator-King*

Caught up in the confused worldview and value system of the cultures around them, the people will make a mockery of My Name. They will bring My Name into dishonor among the nations. They will cause Me to be scorned and blasphemed. This previews the message contained in Deuteronomy 32:18.

Movement #5: *The People Will Break Covenant*

Having desecrated My Name, the people will not treasure or value My Covenant. They will instead shred it into disconnected pieces, causing it to lose its influence in their lives, in the lives of their children, and in the nations. This is a preview of Deuteronomy 32:19-22.

Movement #6: *Calamities and Dire Straits Will Come In Waves*

As I warned the people, the Path of the Runaway Bride is a broad path that leads to destruction. They will, because of their own choices, and their abandonment of My Covenant, suffer many calamities and difficult straits. This is a preview of Deuteronomy 32:23-28.

Movement #7: *This Song Will Remain With The People Through All Generations, Ever Testifying To Them of the Holy One’s Faithfulness*

When calamities and narrow straits come upon the people, and they awaken, and cry out to Me, this song will come back to their minds, and back in their mouths, and will testify to them – and to all the nations wherein they are exiled - of My Love and My Faithfulness. My Name will be vindicated. And they will return to the Covenant, and bring people from every nation to which they are exiled with

them. This is a preview of Deuteronomy 32:29-42.

The eighth and final movement of the song, the one which is not previewed in this aliyah, is found in Deuteronomy 32:43, which reads: ***“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people”***.

Selah! This is indeed the song of Redemption. This is indeed the Song of Deliverance! This is indeed the song of the Bridegroom-King! This is indeed the Greatest Love Song ever written.

Questions To Consider Regarding Today’s Readings

1. If you were to write a song about the future of your family line, its generations, and its impact upon the world, what would you envision being the contents/movements of that song?

2. In today’s aliyah from the haftarah Yeshayahu speaks of a future day when there will be close relations between the Holy One and two groups that were not considered close to Him or part of the Covenant in the days of the Divided Kingdom. One group is ‘foreigners’ – i.e. persons not born of the lineage of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov. The other group is eunuchs.

[A] What does the Holy One [through the prophet], call upon all people of that future day, Jew or Gentile, to ‘keep’ [i.e. *sh’mar*]?

[B] What does the Holy One [through the prophet], call upon all people of that future day, Jew or Gentile, to ‘do’ [i.e. *asah*]?

[C] In our English translations of Isaiah 56:1 the Holy One says his ‘salvation’ is about to come. Look up the word our English Bibles translate as ‘salvation’ in this passage. Write the Hebrew word, with its English transliteration.

[D] What two actions by any ‘son of man’ does Isaiah 56:2 say will result in that person being blessed?

[E] What three things can a eunuch do, according to Isaiah 56:4, to be welcome in the Holy One’s household?

[F] In Isaiah 56:6, what two things does the Holy One promise to give to eunuchs who do the three things described in the previous verse?

3. In Romans 7:12 Shaul of Tarsus describes the law of the Holy One. What adjective does he use to describe it?

4. Also in Romans 7:12, Shaul of Tarsus describes the ‘commandment’ of the Holy One. What three adjectives does he use to describe the Holy One’s commandments/mitzvot?

*May the Holy One release a **shir chadash** – a new prophetic song –*

over you, your household, and your lineage today.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Ezekiel 33:14-16

***When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,'
if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right,
if the wicked restores the pledge, gives back what he has stolen,
and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity,
he will surely live; he will not die.***

***None of his sins which he has committed will be remembered against him;
he has done what is lawful and right; he will surely live.***