

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayalech:*** **Deuteronomy 31:9-13**
 Haftarah: **Isaiah 55:8-11**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 7:8**

Read This Torah Before All Israel.

[Deuteronomy 31:11]

Today's Meditation is Ezekiel 33:12;

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

We have known for some time now that, unlike 99% of the men who lived in his time, Moshe was literate. He could *read*. He could *write*. Being raised in the household of a Pharaoh instead of in slave's quarters had assured that. There is a *Romans 8:28 road* of opportunity running through every traumatic season any human being will ever face, and it was very evident with regard to the life of Moshe. The Holy One very clearly worked the traumatic events and circumstances of his early life together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. You know He will do the same for you, Beloved.

We first learned of Moshe's writing skills back at Refidim. After the first great battle in the war with Amalek was won, we were told: ***The Holy One said to Moshe, "Write this for a memorial in the book Hmmmmn.*** Not only is Moshe a writer – it appears that He has specifically been chosen to be *the authorized biographer of the Creator of the Universe*. We should have realized at that time that we were in for something very, very special with Moshe. Then, at Mount Sinai, after *Matan ha-Torah* we read: ***And Moshe wrote all the words of the Holy One.*** Exodus 24:4a. Talk about an *instant classic of literature*!

In *Sefer Bamidbar* we learned that not only did Moshe write down everything the Holy One instructed him to for posterity, he also kept a journal of every place we camped in the course of our journey to freedom. **Numbers 33:2.** Later this week we will learn that Moshe is a writer of songs as well as sacred literature. The psalter indicates Moshe wrote at least one psalm. **Psalms 90.** And today we learn that, in addition to all that: ***Moshe wrote this Torah, and he delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Holy One, and to all the elders of Israel.*** Deuteronomy 31:9.

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What *exactly* did Moshe write on the plains of Moav? What did he deliver to the *kohanim and the zakenim*? The Hebrew text calls what he wrote on the last day of his earthly life *et-ha-torah hazot*. Was it entire Torah – i.e. the Pentateuch, consisting of the scrolls of B'reshit, Sh'mot, Vayikra, Bamidbar, and D'varim? Was it just the scroll of *D'varim*, detailing all the speeches he gave in the year of his death? Was it just the last five parshot, namely *Ki Tavo*, *Nitzavim*, *Vayalech*, *Ha'azinu*, and *Vezot HaBerachah*, which are all thematically connected with the end of his life? We do not know for certain. But what we do know is that was one very, very precious and valuable scroll. May it be found, whole, intact, and legible, in our day, for all the world to see! And in the meantime, let us consider the substance of what Moshe has to say in today's aliyah that we have never read in any other part of Torah.

Moshe's Final Mitzvah – HaKhel

As part of his final charge to the Priests and the Elders, Moshe outlines the final *mitzvah* of Torah. This *mitzvah*, which in Hebrew tradition is called *Hakhel* [*i.e. the called gathering, or called assembly*], is connected to – and connects - the *mitzvah* of *making pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles* [see especially Exodus 34:22, Leviticus 23:34 ff, Deuteronomy 16:13-16] and the *mitzvah* of *sh'mittah*, the *year of release* [see especially Exodus 23:10-11 and Deuteronomy 15:1-2]. When you consider that in the latter days of the Holy One's Grand Redemptive Plan for Creation it is ordained that *everyone who is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Holy One of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles*, one can see how important not to the nations, as well as the Hebrew people, this *mitzvah* is destined to be. Something very, very special is supposed to happen at the Feast of Tabernacles every seventh year – continuing all the way into the Messiah's glorious millennial reign.

We have already learned that *the land of Israel is to lie fallow* and that *debts owed by one Hebrew to another to be released* every seventh year, or *sh'mittah*. But Moshe wants to know there is one more thing that is to characterize that year. Debts will be released, and indentured servants will be let sent out with provisions for the future, and that will bring great joy. But the Holy One wants us to know that there is a far greater freedom available through Covenant with Him than either freedom from debt or freedom from indentured servanthood. The ultimate freedom a man can experience *is the freedom to learn and become who His creator designed him to be.*

So Moshe enjoins us that in the *sh'mittah* year, at the most joyful season, when men from all nations come up to worship the Holy One at the Feast of Tabernacles,

the Torah is to be read aloud. Every man, woman, and child who comes is to hear the joyful sound of the love letter of the Creator of the Universe has written to mankind read aloud.. Some will be Hebrews. Some will be Gentiles. Deuteronomy **Isaiah 56:6-8; Isaiah 60:3-14; Isaiah 66:23; Zechariah 8:20-13; and Zechariah 14:16-17**. All will stand together in awe, in the city of Jerusalem, on Temple Mount, and feast on the most beautiful and empowering words that have ever been spoken. In a year when the land lies fallow and grain is not harvested, we will hear the truth that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Holy One.

Keep in mind also that Solomon's dedication of the Temple took place in this time frame, so it is to be expected that the third or millennial temple will be dedicated and inaugurated during the Feast of Tabernacles as well.

Appearing Before the Holy One Your God

In the first six years only the men of Israel are required to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. But in the seventh year – the year of release – the women and children of Israel are required to travel to Jerusalem as well. Why? Because when they get to Jerusalem for the Feast in that special year, something very, very important is to happen. Let's let Moshe explain:

Miketz sheva shanim [i.e. at the end of seven years],
at the appointed time in the year of release [Hebrew, sh'mittah], at the Feast of Tabernacles,
when all Israel comes to appear before the Holy One your God
in the place which He chooses
[Deuteronomy 31:10-11]

What does it mean to 'appear before the Holy One your God'? The first reference to such a thing is in Exodus 23:17. There the Holy One Himself told us: ***Three times in the year all your males are to appear before*** [Hebrew ***y'ra'eh el-p'nei***] ***the Lord, the Holy One***². In English, of course, to 'appear before the Holy One your God' could be interpreted simply to mean to go up to Jerusalem, to Temple Mount, where the Holy One has consented to abide. But ***y'ra'eh el-p'nei*** is a Hebrew phrase, not an English one. And ***el-p'nei*** means before the Face. ***Y'ra'eh*** means to be seen. What the Hebrew phrase is talking about is coming before the Holy One the way a sheep comes to its shepherd's extended rod, and passes under it for an intimate inspection. It means to bow in humble submission, and yield your most tender areas to His inspection, touch, and decree. How long has it been since you

² The three appointed times for all men to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem, of course, are 1. ***Pesach*** [Passover] in the Spring, 2. ***Shavuot*** [the Feast of Weeks, often called Pentecost] in the early Summer, and 3. ***Sukkot*** [Tabernacles] in the Fall.

did that, Dear One? How long has it been since you appeared before the Holy One your God?

Why Jerusalem?

Moshe does not mention Jerusalem by name – at least not in so many words. That should not be too surprising, since Moshe was born and lived his entire life in exile. He has never seen Jerusalem. Indeed, when he lived, there was no city called ‘Jerusalem’. There was Salem, the dwelling of Melki-Tzedek, but the name Jerusalem was not yet given. What Moshe does tell us is regarding the location of *HaKhel* is that it is to take place *in only one place - the place which the Holy One chooses*. What does that mean? The concept of the Holy One choosing a place [Hebrew *makom*] of national assembly – i.e. a capital for His earthly Kingdom - is introduced in Deuteronomy 12. There the *makom* is specified as the only authorized location for the altar at which the *korbanot* of the Covenant are to be presented. See Deuteronomy 12:5-6, 11, and 21. A little later in *Sefer D’varim* the *makom* is identified as also being [a] *the exclusive place to which the tithe of the land is to be taken and delivered to the kohen* in the first and second years of each tithing cycle [See Deuteronomy 14:23-24], [b] *the exclusive place where the Paschal lamb is to be slain* [see Deuteronomy 16:2 and 6], [c] *the place where the celebration of Shavuot is to occur* [see Deuteronomy 16:11], and [d] *the place to which first fruits are to be taken* [see Deuteronomy 26:2].

When the *Mish’kan* [Tabernacle of the Wilderness] stood, wherever it was located – at the entrance to the structure – served as the *makom*. That is where all assemblies of the people were convened. See e.g. Exodus 29:11.42; Leviticus 4:4;8:3-4 14,11.23; and 16:7. It was not until the possession of the full extent of the Land was at long last finalized under David and Solomon that a fixed place for the *avodah* of the Holy One could be established. First David caused the ark of the Covenant to be brought to Jerusalem; then Solomon had the Temple of the Holy One constructed there. From that time forward Jerusalem – and specifically Temple Mount - became the *makom*. In II Chronicles 6:6 the Holy One says specifically: ***I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there.*** Moreover, in Zechariah 3:2 the Holy One tells ha-Satan: ***YHVH who has chosen Jerusalem rebukes you!***

A king needs a capital from which to reign; Jerusalem is unquestionably the chosen capital of the Bridegroom-King.

The Final Mitzvah of Torah – the Mitzvah of HaKhel

According to the mitzvah of *HaKhel*, when the people stand assembled at the Feast, the priests and elders were:

*. . . to read et-torah hazot [i.e. this Torah] before all Israel in their hearing.
Gather the people together, men and women and little ones,
and the stranger who is within your gates,
that they may sh'ma
and that they may learn to fear the Holy One your God
and sh'mar and asah all the words of this Torah,
and that their children, who have not known it,
may sh'ma and learn to fear the Holy One your God
as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.*

Reading Torah aloud? In the hearing of men, women, children, and even foreigners? In order that people of all nations and generations will be moved to *sh'ma* the Voice of the Holy One, revere Him, and learn to live and build a Torah lifestyle?

Is that really supposed to be a ‘thing’? You bet it is! That is an essential ingredient – if not the main ingredient – of the Holy One’s Grand Plan for the Redemption of Humankind and the Restoration of Creation to its intended state of Edenic beauty and fruitfulness. The Torah must be read aloud. Its words are the energy that fuels the Plan; its narratives and mitzvot combine to provide the true tone chord to which human heart is designed to vibrate in resonance.

What Does the Mitzvah of HaKhel Have to Do with the Themes of Sukkot?

The Feast of Tabernacles is first introduced to the world in Exodus 34:22. There it is called ‘the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year’. The timing of the Feast on the agricultural calendar is thus *after the final ingathering* of one agricultural year and *before preparation for planting the first grain crops for the next agricultural year*. The primary theme of the Feast is the absolute goodness of the Creator to all His Creation – and to men of all nations, whether they recognize it or not. It is He Who has blessed the earth – on every continent - with fruitfulness. He and He alone has caused *the earth to bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself*. Genesis 1:11. It is He, and he alone, Who causes rain to fall in its season – both the autumn and spring rains, in order that we may gather in our grain, our new wine, and our oil. It is He Who especially blesses the land of Israel by causing it to produce a harvest of seven species – barley, wheat, figs, pomegranates, grapes, dates, and olives - in abundance for us to share with the

world. It is in honor and recognition of these things that We gather branches and fruit from four species and wave those branches and fruit joyfully throughout the Festival. It is as a testimony to the world of the goodness and watchful care of the Holy One our God that we move out of our paneled houses and dwell in temporary, flimsy shelters – so that all people in all generations will remember the awesome story of how the Holy One enabled men, women, and children in Covenant with Him to both dwell safely and dine bountifully in booths for forty years when He brought us out of the land of Egypt. **Leviticus 23:43**. Oh what a glorious and awe-inspiring tale of redemption the Feast of Tabernacles tells!

What is HaKhel's Purpose in the Holy One's Grand Redemptive Plan for Mankind and Creation?

The Holy One has strategically planned out every aspect of His Redeemed Nation's calendar to correspond to a component of His Redemptive Plan of Redemption for Mankind and Creation. *HaKhel* is no exception. *HaKhel*, in fact, is perhaps the most blatantly obvious part of the great passion play. First of all, it is to involve every member of the Redeemed Community – every man, every woman, and every child. Secondly, since it is a part of the Feast of Tabernacles, it is specifically intended to reach foreigners. Thirdly, there is no hiddenness or subtlety to *HaKhel*; it is 100% up front and direct. All it consists of, after the assembling together, is the reading the inspired Words that the Creator knows that men desperately need to hear. There is no commentary. There is no room for man's difference of opinion. So what you have is *maximum attendance* [consisting of pilgrims with awestruck hearts, no less], at the *optimal time*, with *minimal diversion or distraction*. That is a recipe for life-changing - indeed world-changing – impact.

Questions for Today's Study

1. What is the Hebrew verb that our English Bibles translate as 'wrote' in Deuteronomy 31:9? Write the Hebrew verb with its vowel points. According to Gesenius' Lexicon, what does this verb mean?
2. List all the things the Bible specifically tells us that Moshe wrote. Provide each book, chapter and verse reference from the Bible that supports your answer.
3. During which of the annual festivals on the Divine Calendar did Moshe say there to be a public reading from the Torah?
 - [A] Where was this reading to take place?
 - [B] In what year on the Holy One's calendar of year was this to take place?
 - [C] Who was to be present at this public reading of the Torah?
 - [D] Which groups of leadership were directed to conduct/supervise the reading?

[E] What exactly – i.e. what exact parts of the Torah - do you think Moshe meant to be read on that occasion?

[F] What did Moshe say was the purpose of the public reading of the Torah?

4. In today's aliyah from the haftarah Yeshayahu prophesies to us of the difference between the kinds of thoughts the Holy and Eternal One thinks and the kinds of thoughts of which our fallen, uninformed, short-sighted, flesh-obsessed human minds are capable of thinking. On behalf of the Holy One, Yeshayahu says:

*My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the Holy One.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways,
and My thoughts than your thoughts.
For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there,
but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud,
that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
So will My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It will not return to Me void, but it will accomplish what I please,
And it will prosper in the purposes for which I sent it.
[Isaiah 55:8-11]*

[A] In Gesenius' Lexicon, look up the Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as 'thoughts' [Hint: the word is *machashabah* – Strong's Hebrew word #4284]. What does Gesenius' Lexicon say this word means? The first usage of this word in Torah is at Genesis 6:5. Read that verse. Does that help you understand what Yeshayahu is saying?

[B] How would you explain or describe the major differences between the thoughts of the Holy One and the thoughts of fallen human being i. in subject matter? ii. In perspective? and iii. In purpose/objective?

[B] To what two meteorological phenomenon does the Holy One, through His Prophet, liken the Words He speaks?

5. Our reading from the Apostolic Scriptures today consists of only one verse: Romans 7:8. According to our English Bibles, Shaul of Tarsus says to us: "***Sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead***".

[A] How does the Bible itself define 'sin'. [Hint: See Proverbs 24:9, I John 3:4 and 5:17, and James 4:17].

[B] Does the Torah in any way encourage facilitate sin? What does encourage and facilitate sin?

[C] What do you think Shaul means by saying something in Greek that is translated into English in our Bibles as '*apart from the law sin was dead*.'

[D] How do we co-labor with the Holy One *keep ourselves* from sin? [Hint: see Psalm 51:5-10; Psalm 119:1, 9, 11].

*May your feet stand in Jerusalem on the Feast of Tabernacles;
and may your ears sh'ma the joyful sound of the reading of the Torah on the next day of HaKhel!*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Ezekiel 33:12

Therefore you, O son of man, say to the children of your people:

*'The righteousness of the righteous man
shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression;
as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall because of it
in the day that he turns from his wickedness;
nor shall the righteous be able to live
because of his righteousness in the day that he sins.'*