

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vezot:*** **Deuteronomy 33:6-11**
 Haftarah: **Joshua 1:6-9**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Matthew 24:9-14**

O, be his help against his foes!

[Deuteronomy 33:7]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 106:1-5;

Today's Prayer Focus is the *Aleinu* [Our Purpose in Life...]

Yechi Re'uvén v'al-yamot – May Reuven live, and not die ... *veyehi metav mispar* – May your story/account yet be written! **Deuteronomy 33:6.**

Moshe's feet are on the plain of Moav, and his smile is shining on the generation about to re-take possession of the land of the Patriarchs; his thoughts, however, are somewhere else. His mind is fast-forwarding to events decades, centuries, and millennia in the future. He has, for this event, been fitted with 'eternal vision' glasses. The Holy One is showing him - and he is about to reveal bits and pieces of - the tribe-centric destinies of B'nei Yisrael. The revelation flow starts with Ya'akov's firstborn through Leah. Thus far, the history of this son's bloodline is less than inspiring – but the story is far from over. With time, and Divine favor and guidance, bloodlines can be redeemed, and the negative impacts of past generations can be overcome and reversed. That is the *chen* – in English 'grace' – of the Holy One.

To Every Son and Tribe of Israel a Season Has Been Assigned for Redemption

What stories will be sung of Reuven's bloodline in the latter days? What will be the long-term impact of Ya'akov and Leah's firstborn son's DNA strands upon the planet? Despite an ignominious start, men and women from that bloodline are destined to leave a rich legacy of blessing upon all the families of the earth. That the Holy One promised Avraham in Genesis 12:3, Yitzchak in Genesis 26:4, and Ya'akov in Genesis 28:14. Reuven's descendants will not be 'lost' forever. Nor will the goyim's witches' brew of famine, pestilence, and sword rob the world of the inspiration of the Stunning *Reuven Rescue and Restoration Movement* that the Holy One has planned for the latter days.

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Reuven is not perfect, of course – as Moshe knows full well. Back at the time of Korach’s rebellion, the Reuveni were some of his most vocal opponents. But that was almost four decades ago. All is forgiven now. And Moshe wants nothing but the best for the Reuveni in the days to come. He knows it is the plan of the Holy One to bring about glorious miracles of *tikkun* – i.e. reparation, healing – both in and through that bloodline. So he starts his prophetic blessing with *Yechi Re’uven v’al yamot* – i.e. *May Reuven live, and not die!*

Selah and *amein!* May the descendants of Reuven be at the head of the ‘dry bones’ company the Holy One brings gloriously back to life, and restores to the stewardship of the Land, in the latter days!

A Vision for the Future – and the Ultimate Fulfillment of the Holy One’s Grand Plan of Redemption and Restoration

The voice of Moshe will fall silent. Though the powerful words of this prophet will be read in script by millions upon millions over the course of several millennia, they will no longer be heard emanating fresh from his own lips.

The Friend of the Bridegroom has downloaded from Heaven and sung over us the grand prophetic song of the ages. But there is yet one thing he must do. His last hours in the company of humans must be spent delivering a ‘final words’ to each tribe of redeemed souls he has been privileged to lead.

Moshe will not go out angry. He will not go out dejected. He will go out as he began – with *humility*, with *passion*, and with *grace*. His last words to the people the Holy One placed in his charge so long ago will not be *stern words of rebuke* – they will instead be *sweet words of blessing*. Those parting words will not be spoken from a deathbed. Though 120 years old, Moshe is still strong, mobile, and articulate. He still has yet another mountain to climb. He will therefore say his earthly goodbyes with a glorious ‘blessing tour’. He will proceed tribal-encampment-by-tribal encampment, all through the Plain of Moav. At each stop he will deliver a blessing to all the tens of thousands of men, women and children who dwell under that particular tribal banner.

In the verses we read today the 120 year old prophet-of-the-Exodus will pronounce his blessing over three tribes – the tribes descended from *Reuven*, *Y’hudah* [Judah], and *Levi*. Let’s listen in, shall we?

Moshe’s Blessing over the Tribe of Reuven

Deuteronomy 33:6

Moshe begins his final blessing on the south side of the camp, with the tribe

descended from Ya'akov's firstborn son², Reuven. Moshe's blessing over the four clans³ of this tribe is short but sweet. Though the Hebrew is ancient and subject to different interpretations, here is how I personally translate it:

Yechi Re'uven

Live on Reuven!

v'al-yamot

For you will not die

v'yehi metav mispar

and your story will yet be written!

There is something unwritten about Reuven's story. The full revelation is for a *future day*. The prophetic destiny of Reuven has not yet to be fulfilled. But it ***will*** be fulfilled! And *altogether glorious will be that day!*

Reuven's Glorious Destiny

The progenitor of the first tribe Moshe blessed was born in Paddan-Aram while Ya'akov and Leah were still living in the house of *Lavan* [i.e. ***Laban***]. The child's mother, Leah, named her firstborn Reuven⁴, which means ***behold***, or ***see the manifestation of a son***.

Reuven was thus given a *grand and glorious prophetic destiny* – he and his descendants were to become *manifest sons of God*. The glorious destiny Leah saw for and prophesied over her firstborn and his progeny is illustrated in Romans 8:18-19, where Shaul declared: *“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For all the Creation waits in earnest expectation of the manifestation of the sons of God.”*

We learn from Reuven's life and his descendants' experience however that *having a glorious prophetic destiny declared over you does not mean that your life will always flow in a manner consistent with that prophetic destiny*. Prophetic destinies must be walked out by real people in real time. There are therefore inevitably going to be seasons of testing and trial. Numerous 'opt-in or opt-out' crossroads are always present along the way. And of course there are real enemies – some without, some within – to be overcome. Indeed every prophetic destiny comes packaged with a strategic assignment of the both the carnal nature of man and the realm of unclean spirits against it. Prophetic destinies are experienced in fullness only by *persevering overcomers*.

² The Biblical account of Reuven's birth is found at Genesis 29:32.

³ The clans of Reuven were named for his four sons, ***Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi***.

⁴ The Hebrew name which our English Bibles translate as *Reuben*, is made up of the Hebrew consonants *resh, alef, vav, beit, and nun sofit*, and is pronounced *reh-oo-vane'*.

Torah reveals to us how Reuven's life wandered off and on course. Torah reveals publicly both Reuven's *darkest sin*⁵ as well and his greatest act of kindness and devotion.

Reuven's Greatest Temptation and Sin

In Genesis 35:22 we are told that Reuven, far from behaving as the manifestation of a son of either Ya'akov or the Holy One, engaged in a shocking course of conduct that dishonored both his father and himself. In a season when his father was grieving the death of his beloved Rachel and was focusing his attention primarily upon nurturing the motherless newborn Binyamin to whom Rachel had died giving birth, Reuven committed a flagrant and disgusting act of rebellion against his bereaved father's leadership of the camp. Reuven declared himself to be the new leader of the camp by making a show of entering the tent of Bilhah and having his way with her carnally. Bilhah had been the handmaid of Rachel, Reuven's mother's sister and rival. She had been given by Rachel to Ya'akov as a concubine [Genesis 30:3], and was the mother of Reuven's stepbrothers Dan and Naftali [Genesis 30:4-8].

This was not by any means a matter of romance or even hormones gone wild – in the culture of the day this was a declaration of usurpation. By taking over another man's place in the bed of his wife or concubine a man declared he was taking over that man's place in every sphere of authority. See **II Samuel 16:21**. This is particularly unsavory when the person whose role of leadership is being usurped is *one's own father*. That means one is 'uncovering his father's skirt' - which is a Torah euphemism for behaving toward one's father with the same level of dishonor as Cham, son of Noach, did in Genesis 9:22.

While the sages of Israel go to great lengths to try to explain away and/or justify what Torah Reuven did, doing so is an impossible task. Reuven's action is clearly reprehensible. That does not mean that we are to wag the tongue or point the bony finger of self-righteous indignation at Reuven. All sin is reprehensible. Yours. Mine. Everyone's. Our sin is no less odious and disgraceful than Reuven's was. The point of Torah in revealing Reuven's sin to all generations is *not* so that we can look down our noses at Reuven and feel smug and self-righteous as his expense – it is so that we can recognize and deal with the '*Reuven syndrome*' in us all. You see, the chief assignment against Reuven – his greatest temptation – was the temptation to *promote himself and his 'ministry' prematurely no matter who got hurt in the process*. He wanted to *rush his prophetic destiny*. He wanted to *make it happen before the Holy One said it was time*. And he was so consumed by

⁵ See Genesis 35:22 and Genesis 49:3-4.

his own prophetic destiny that he was more than willing to inflict horrendous levels of misery on others – even his own father, stepmother, and brothers - if he thought doing so would cause other people to recognize and bow to his prophetic destiny and submit to his leadership.

Beware the *Reuven syndrome*, Dear Reader. Do not give in to the temptation to claim authority for yourself over those things or those people the Holy One has entrusted to someone else – particularly when that someone has functioned in any respect as a father to you. Your prophetic destiny is not something you can obtain through fraud, oppression, or usurpation.

Reuven's Greatest Act of Kindness and Devotion

Torah does not toss Reuven out on the curb just because of his sin. Torah takes care to show us the spark of 'good' in Reuven that remained there in spite of his great sin. After Reuven's sin of rebellion was revealed Ya'akov humbled Reuven by designating the youngest of the sons born to him in Charan, Yosef, as his heir apparent in Reuven's place. Of all those who had a reason to resent Yosef, Reuven had the greatest. But when the rest of the brothers wanted to murder Yosef, do you remember what Reuven did? Reuven intervened, urged the brothers to spare the young man's life, and convinced the others to throw him into a pit instead of killing him.

And Reuven said to them, "Shed no blood, [but] cast him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him"!

Big deal, you say? Yes, it was a big deal. There was no stopping that lynch mob – Reuven knew all he could do was slow down the process and give Yosef a fighting chance. And that is what he did. Even though *Yosef was now his chief rival*. And Torah makes it clear that Reuven's motive in the matter was pure - to *rescue Yosef and restore him to his father* who doted upon him, if and when opportunity arose. **Genesis 37:22**. Reuven had no part in the plot of those who sold Yosef into slavery. And when he found out that Yosef was gone he alone out of all the brothers actually mourned for him. **Genesis 37:29**. Moreover Reuven later offered his own sons as surety for Benjamin's well-being on the second trip to Egypt. **Genesis 42:37**.

The Experiences of the Tribe Descended from Reuven

But of course Reuven himself died many generations ago, never fully experiencing the grand prophetic destiny his mother Leah declared over him. The blessing spoken by Moshe in the aliyah of Torah we read today is not actually for or about Reuven the patriarch but is instead pronounced over the multitudes descended from him. How, we may ask, did those descendants make *tikkun* [repair] for their father's sins. Or did they themselves demonstrate the 'Reuven syndrome'? Have they distinguished themselves as 'manifest sons' – or have they, like their progenitor,

jumped the gun on their great prophetic destiny by trying to usurp authority from one who served as a father figure to them?

Alas, Reuven's descendants are not depicted favorably in the rest of Torah and the TaNaKh. First of all, at the time of the *chet ha-meraglim* [i.e. the *sin of the spies*] the 'spy' from the tribe of Reuven [Shammua, son of Zaccur⁶] sided with the majority report and wanted to stone Kalev [i.e. Caleb] and Y'hoshua [i.e. Joshua], to choose a leader from among them, and to return to Egypt.

Secondly, it was members of the tribe of Reuven which were the most instrumental in promoting the 'rebellion of Korach' described in Numbers 16.

Thirdly, the tribe of Reuven chose to forego the inheritance the Holy One had promised in Eretz Yisrael and settle East of the Jordan in land the Holy One had sworn to give to the descendants of Moav, son of Lot⁷. Reuven thereby became one of the 'trans-Jordan' tribes, which would be the first to establish local worship altars in violation of Torah [see **Joshua 22⁸**], and, along with the other trans-Jordan tribes, would be the first to go into captivity. In I Chronicles it is said of Reuven that: "*Eastward they settled as far as the entrance of the wilderness this side of the River Euphrates, because their cattle had multiplied in the land of Gilead*", and "*they dwelt in their tents throughout the entire area east of Gilead.*" **I Chronicles 5:9-10.**

Moshe knew all of this. He knew that Ya'akov, in his deathbed blessing, had called Reuven '*turbulent as the waters*' and had declared he would '*no longer excel*'. **Genesis 49:4.** He knew that generations later it would be written of Reuven that:

'forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Yosef the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright'.

[I Chronicles 5:1]

But Moshe still felt that the Holy One was not through with Reuven just yet. And so do I.

The 'Lostness' Issue

Although there is much controversy over the '*lostness*' issue in relation to the ten tribes that eventually made up the Northern Kingdom of Israel it is no secret that a good number of commentators believe that the tribe descended from Reuven is

⁶ See Numbers 13:4.

⁷ See Numbers 32.

⁸ The Reuveni claimed they did not intend to offer sacrifices on these altars, and merely intended them as a 'testimony' or 'witness' to the rest of the tribes of their devotion to the Holy One.

presently ‘missing in action’, along with 9 others – dispersed throughout the world, intermixed and intermingled with the *goyim* [nations/people groups] of the world.

If this is true, then physical descendants of Reuven are even today sown like so much seed across the world. And yet with all that Torah and TaNaKh tells us about Reuven’s failings – not to mention its present dispersion and seeming disappearance from the face of the earth - we are told by Ezekiel that, in the rebuilt city of Jerusalem, in the time of Messiah’s reign, one of the city’s gates will bear Reuven’s name. **Ezekiel 48:31**. Moreover, in the Book of Revelation we are plainly told that of the tribe of Reuven 12,000 will be sealed among the 144,000 witnesses of The Holy One. **Revelation 7:5**.

The regathering of the “exiles of Israel” is declared in both Biblical and Rabbinic texts to be an end-time task of the Messiah.⁹ The *Yalkut Shimoni* [an early midrashic anthology] asserts that not only will all Israelites whose ancestors over the centuries experienced capture, being sold into slavery, and being forcibly converted to other religions¹⁰ return in the days of the Messiah, but at that time, Messiah will *tell them from which Tribe they originally stem*:

*... the gentile nations will bring their Jewish inhabitants
to the King Messiah as a present.*

*These Jews, because they will be skeptical about their Jewish origin,
will not want to appear before the Messiah,
and will prefer instead, to go their own ways.*

At that point the Messiah will identify them individually, saying:

“This one is a Yisrael [Israelite],

this one a Kohen [descendant of the priestly line], and this one a Levi [Levite]!”

According to the same midrash:

*...the Messiah will also identify as Jewish many of the individuals
who will bring the Jews back to him, thinking themselves as gentiles.*

*He will identify their origins as either Kohanim [Priests], Levites, or Yisraelites,
and will even accept them accordingly for service in the Holy Temple.*

Reuven will arise again. It is written. The Holy One is after all *the Ultimate Redeemer of the fallen*. So Moshe declared over the tribe of Reuven these simple words of prophecy, straight from the heart of the Compassionate One:

Yechi Re'uven v'al-yamot

May Reuven live and not die!

v'yehi metav mispar

May your story/account yet be written!

⁹ See in this regard Isaiah 11:1-13; 49:1-6; Jeremiah 23:5-8; and Micah 5:2-5, as well as *B'reshit Rabbah* 98:9; *Midrash Ha-gadol* on Genesis 49:11.

¹⁰ Most notably, Christianity and Islam.

That has always been – and remains to this day - the heart cry of the Holy One, God of Avraham, God of Yitzchak, and God of Ya’akov, over Ya’akov’s ‘turbulent’, underachieving firstborn son. Perhaps a part of Reuven lives in you, Dear Reader.

The Unexplained Omission of Sh’mon [Simeon]

One aspect of Moshe’s final *b’racha* [blessing] of the tribes is puzzling - he completely omits any reference to *Sh’mon* [Simeon]. *Sh’mon* was Reuven’s first full-brother, the second-born son of Ya’akov by Leah. His name has, over the centuries, been ‘Anglicized’ to *Simeon*. But the name by which he was really known was *Sh’mon* [*shin, mem, ayin, vav, nun sofit*¹¹]. This name derived from the important Hebrew verb *sh’mā*¹² and literally means *one who sh’mā’s*.

Sh’mon’s grand prophetic destiny is to *be known as a sh’mā-ing one* – i.e. one who *sh’mā’s* the Voice of the Holy One and will *lo sh’mā* the voice of any other.

What was the chief temptation and hindrance of *Sh’mon*? It was to *sh’mā* the voice of his brother Levi. This became obvious after the rape of Dinah by Shechem the Hivite prince. Sh’mon and Levi shattered the peace treaty Ya’akov had made with the Hivites after the event by taking up swords, attacking the unsuspecting city of Shechem, and killing every male inhabitant thereof while they were recovering from circumcision. See **Genesis 34**. Ya’akov chastised Sh’mon and Levi together for this, declaring to them:

*You have brought trouble on me
By making me a stench to the Kena’ani and the Perizzi, the people living in this land.”*
[**Genesis 34:30**]

It was Sh’mon whom Yosef ordered to be bound and required to stay behind in Egypt when the rest of the brothers returned to Israel with the grain they had purchased. See **Genesis 42**. It appears Sh’mon later fathered a child by a Kena’ani woman. **Genesis 46:10**.

According to Joshua 19:9, though Sh’mon’s descendants entered the land of Israel, the land they were given to possess was within the tribal allotment of Y’udah. It is thus believed that Sh’mon and Y’udah blended and intermarried, and that in that manner Sh’mon thereby may have for all intents and purposes ceased to function as a distinct tribe long before the Babylonian captivity. This may account

¹¹ This is Strong’s Hebrew word #8089. Gesenius considers *Sh’mon* to be a contraction of the word *sh’mā* [he hears] and the word *aman* [he accepts and responds accordingly], and renders its translation “*hearing with acceptance*”. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, page 837.

¹² The events surrounding *Sh’mon*’s birth are described in Genesis 29:33. When he was born his mother Leah said: “*Because the Holy One heard [sh’mā] that I am not loved, he has been given.*” **Genesis 29:33**.

for the fact that *Sh'mon* [Simeon] was a common name among the descendants of Y'hudah living at Messiah's first advent. Several persons known by that name are mentioned in the apostolic writings, including the aged prophet *Sh'mon* who prophesied over Yeshua at his presentation at the Temple in Jerusalem¹³, as well as *Sh'mon Kefa* [Simon Peter] brother of Andrew, and *Sh'mon* 'the zealot', not to mention *Sh'mon* the sorcerer¹⁴. Perhaps these persons were, though living in the land of Y'hudah, descended from Sh'mon, their namesake. We are not specifically told.

The tribe descended from Sh'mon is not presently an identifiable entity. Like Reuven, Sh'mon is in exile, in dispersion, probably intermixed and intermingled to an extent that its members are completely unaware of their true identity as sons of Ya'akov's second-born son. But that too is temporary. We are told in Ezekiel that Sh'mon's descendants will have their own allotted portion in Eretz Yisrael again in the Millennial Kingdom, and will have their own gate through which to enter Restored Jerusalem. **Ezekiel 48:24, 33**. And in the Book of Revelation we are told that 12,000 descendants of Sh'mon will be numbered among the 144,000 sealed witnesses. **Revelation 7:7**. We do not know why Moshe did not include a blessing over the tribe of Sh'mon in *Vezot Ha-B'rachah*. Perhaps it is because Sh'mon's prophetic destiny is to *sh'ma* only the voice of the Holy One Himself – and to *lo sh'ma* the voice of another – even the beloved Moshe. But we do know Sh'mon lives – and that he will be heard from again.

Moshe's Blessing over the Tribe of Y'hudah [Judah]

Moshe's blessing over the tribe of *Y'hudah* [the people known today as "Jews"] is somewhat more detailed than that of Reuven, but is still 'short and sweet' as compared to the blessing spoken over Y'hudah by Ya'akov. Here is the blessing spoken by Moshe over the tribe that came to be known as 'the Jews':

Vezot li-Y'hudah vayomar

And regarding Y'hudah (Judah) [Moshe] said this:

Sh'ma Adonai kol Y'hudah v'el-amo

'May God hear and listen to Judah's voice and bring him to his people.

tevi'einu yadav rav lo

with his hands he contended for himself;

v'ezer mitzarav tiheyeh

But may You be his help against his enemies.'

[Deuteronomy 33:7]

The wording of this blessing raises several questions – many, many more questions

¹³ See Luke 2:25-32.

¹⁴ See Acts 8:9-24.

than it answers. It contains prophetic language – language with many facets, and many levels of meaning. Consider with me, first of all, what Moshe may be referring to when he speaks of *kol Y’hudah* – literally, the ‘voice of Y’hudah’? Perhaps, at one level, Moshe is making a play on the meaning of the Hebrew name *Y’hudah*, which is ‘thanksgiving’ and/or acknowledgment/confession [from the Hebrew verb *hod*¹⁵]? Perhaps he is acknowledging Y’hudah’s role as the lead *praisers* of God among the tribes. Or perhaps, at another level, the *kol Y’hudah* phrase is employed by Moshe as a reference to the recorded prayers of Y’hudah’s most illustrious descendants – Y’hoshua, David, Shlomo, and Yeshua of Natzret?

On another level, perhaps Moshe is making prophetic reference to prayers of the Jewish prayer book, such as the *Amidah/Sh’monah Esrei* [the central prayer of Judaism, prayed three times daily, while standing and facing Jerusalem], the *S’lichot* [liturgical prayers of repentance] of the Ten Awesome Days, and the *Hoshanot* of Sukkot [prayers for deliverance and salvation], etc.? Or perhaps is Moshe acknowledging that it will be Y’hudah, more than any of the other tribes, which will, throughout the course of history, ‘live by the Voice’ rather than the sword - after the manner of Ya’akov/Yisrael?

Secondly, consider with me what Moshe may mean by including in the blessing of Y’hudah the phrase ‘bring him in to his people’?

Who is the ‘him’ Moshe is praying/prophesying will be ‘brought in’ to his people? Is Moshe referring to Sh’mon, who Moshe has just ‘skipped’, and who will, to a great extent, be intermixed and intermarried with Y’hudah? Or could it be that it is, on another level, *the Messiah* that Moshe is speaking of? After all, Yosef of Natzret, the man chosen to serve as Yeshua’s father, was of the tribe of Y’hudah, and ‘adopted’ Yeshua into his family. And who are the ‘his people’ Moshe is referring to? Is it *Kol Yisrael* [all Israel]? Is it Y’hudah? Or is it both?

Thirdly, what is Moshe referring to when he says ‘with his hands he contended for himself’? Is he referring to an event that took place in the patriarch Y’hudah’s lifetime? Is he referring to some event in the history of the tribe? Or is it a reference to David, or perhaps to Messiah Yeshua?

The final phrase of the blessing, however, does not require much interpretation or analysis. Y’hudah was to have enemies. And Y’hudah was to need – and receive – the Holy One’s help in regard to those enemies. That has been the history of

¹⁵ Strong’s Hebrew word #1906, *hey, dalet*, meaning *shout for joy*, or ‘give thanks’, sometimes wrongly translated as ‘praise’. *Hod* is derived from the unused Hebrew verb root *hadad*, meaning to ‘break’, or to ‘break out’ [as in song, or dance, or music].

Y'hudah. That remains its lot today. And that will be its lot in days to come.

The Blessing of Levi

Levi was the tribe of Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam. Levi was Ya'akov's fourth son, by Leah¹⁶. Levi means '*joined*', from the Hebrew verb root *lavah*, to *join together*. Levi *joined* with his older brother Sh'mon to deceive, and then wreak a horrible vengeance upon, a whole city of innocent people for the rape of Dinah by one evildoer¹⁷. Ya'akov said, in his final blessing of Levi, that "*instruments of cruelty [are in] their habitations.*" Genesis 49:5.

The events of Massah as recorded in Exodus 17 were the first 'test' of Levi's descendants. Levi had demonstrated a vengeful attitude, and a cruel disposition. When the Holy One shut off the water supply, and murmuring and complaining was directed toward Moshe, Aharon, and Miryam, the most visible leaders of the tribe of Levi – how would they respond? Would they respond to provocation like their forefather Levi had responded? Would they bring out the swords and wreak havoc? Or would they wait upon the Holy One, and do what He told them, realizing the answer to the problem lay not in the use of force, but in *sh'ma*-ing the Voice of the Holy One?

As you think back on this event remember that the Holy One has *never lacked water*. His kingdom has never suffered – and will never suffer - from a water shortage. After all, He created water. He can create it, and cause it to flow, at will – *as the wilderness experience wonderfully proves*. He supernaturally provided water for the Redeemed Community in the desert for 40 years. He brought it forth from a Rock, which Shaul of Tarsus identified as a pre-incarnation manifestation of Messiah. If the Holy One's people experienced thirst, or an inability to find water at one place – and only one place – in all their wilderness wanderings, it was because the Holy One *willed* it – indeed *orchestrated* it.

Now, looking back, on the last day of his life, Moshe can see this clearly. Back in the midst of the grumbling, the chaos, and the perceived urgency of the circumstances, Moshe *reacted* rather than *responded* to the situation. Now he realizes the issue was never really about water. It was a TEST! The Holy One was testing *him* – and *his entire tribe*!

Water is a physical reality, of course. But it is also *a metaphor for Torah*. The portion and purpose of the tribe of Levi – starting with Moshe – was *to teach the people Torah*. Levi was – the Levi'im were – to give '*mayim hayim*' to a people

¹⁶ See Genesis 29:34.

¹⁷ See Genesis 34:25-30.

fresh out of Egypt who were still unable to find it for themselves. Hence later in the blessing Moshe says of his own tribe:

They shall teach Ya'akov Your mishpatim, Yisra'el Your torah

At the time of the events of Exodus 17 Moshe *sh'ma*'d pretty well. The Holy One said 'strike the rock'; Moshe struck the rock¹⁸. Piece of cake. No blood was shed¹⁹. This was important, because the next test of Levi was to come in conjunction with the *chet ha-egel*, i.e. the sin of the golden calf. As you recall, at that time, as the debauchery incident to the worship of Aharon's calf-god marched on, Levi had to make a choice – serve the Holy One, or serve Aharon's calf-god. We are told in Exodus 32:26 that 'all the sons of Levi' gathered themselves together [*joining* again] with Moshe, in response to his call "*Who is on the Holy One's side?*". They then did according to the word of Moshe [Torah does not say *the Holy One* ordered this], took up swords, and '*from gate to gate throughout the camp*' slew 'every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor', 3,000 men. Exodus 32:27-28.

There are many troubling aspects of this event. It is true, of course, that the Holy One had expressed to Moshe the fact that He was [rightfully] angry at the people for so soon abandoning Him and the betrothal covenant He had made with them. He had even told Moshe "*Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.* Exodus 32:10.

But had the Holy One authorized Moshe – or his tribe - to take vengeance on His behalf? Usually in Torah we are told very clearly when the Holy One gives an instruction. The formula is indeed repeated over and over and over. It is: "*And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying: ...*" Nowhere in Torah however are we told that the Holy One instructed Moshe to have his tribe take up swords and start slaughtering brothers, companions, and neighbors. Swordplay and slaughter appear, from the text, to have been *Moshe's idea*, not the Holy One's. The pattern of taking vengeance into one's own hands fits the pattern set by Levi and Sh'mon back at Shechem.

¹⁸ As you will recall Moshe had a little more trouble with '*speak to the Rock*' [the instruction given by Moshe the second time the Community experienced a lack of water, as recorded in Numbers 20]. Those 'instruments of cruelty' about which Ya'akov spoke in Genesis 49:5 seem to still reside in the habitations of Levi!

¹⁹ Exodus 17 tells us: "*The Holy One said to Moshe, "Walk on before the people, and take the Zakenim of Yisra'el with you, and take the rod in your hand with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horev. You shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink."* Moshe did so in the sight of the Zakenim of Yisra'el. He called the name of the place Massah, and Merivah, because the children of Yisra'el quarreled, and because they tested the Holy One, saying, "Is the Holy One among us, or not?"

The Holy One tested Levi at the *chet ha-egel*. Most commentators assume the Levi'im passed the test. I personally tend to believe they did *not*. I realize this is not the popular or majority viewpoint. I do not in any way insist that I am right. But I believe the fact that Levi was denied an inheritance in Eretz Yisrael tends to support the position that Levi failed, rather than passed, the test. And Moshe's 'blessing' points out that Levi wielded the sword indiscriminately. Moshe says of Levi:

*... said of his father, and of his mother, 'I have not seen him';
He neither acknowledged his brothers nor knew his own children.*

What, we may fairly ask, happened to the Holy One's directives to '***honor your father and mother***', to '***love your neighbor as yourself***', and to allow vengeance to be the Holy One's?²⁰ Were those 'temporarily suspended' in Moshe's mind? Don't get defensive. Don't take up an offense for Moshe or for the Levi'im - I am not condemning them. I am *just asking*. Let's be willing to think this thing through, not just blindly accept what other people say. Let's take seriously the challenge to 'rightly divide the word of truth'.

It is often said, "*but Moshe honored Levi for its actions at the chet ha-egel, making the Levi'im His ministers*". Perhaps. Or, perhaps something else – something besides honor - was behind the selection of Levi to minister in the *mish'kan* [Tabernacle] and *mik'dash* [Temple]. As a wise man once said, "keep your friends close – ***and your enemies closer!***" If I have a son who misbehaves I tend to do two things: [1] I *pull them close to me*, because they are less likely to misbehave if I am standing right beside them; and [2] I give them menial tasks to perform to keep their hands busy, and to keep them out of trouble.

It is no shame to perform manual labor, of course. But as Tevye once said in *Fiddler on the Roof* [about being poor], "*It's no great honor either*". So let's look afresh at what the Holy One assigned the Levi'im [and *kohanim*, who came from the same tribe] to do. They were to carry furniture, draperies, clean the ashes from the altar, slaughter and dissect animals, mix incense, and be on duty at all times. They were to have no inheritance in Eretz Yisrael. They were to be totally dependent upon the Torah observance of their fellow man for their provision. Hmm. Is *this* an honor? Don't get defensive - I am *just asking*.

It could also be said "but Moshe described at least one of the Levi'im as the Holy One's 'holy one'". In Hebrew, the word is *chasideicha* [the second person possessive form of *chasid*], not *k'dasheicha* [the second person possessive form of *k'dash*, or *holy one*].

²⁰ Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30.

While the noun *chasid* is generally used in a superlative light – even being applied to the Holy One in certain circumstances – the verb root, *chasad*²¹, can mean ‘put to shame’, or ‘reproach’. See e.g. Proverbs 25:10.

Moshe’s blessing of his own tribe is recorded as follows:

Ul’Levi amar

And regarding Levi, he said:

tumeicha e'ureicha l'ish chasideicha

Your Urim and Tummim belong to Your chassid [pious one].

asher nisito b'Masah

Whom you did prove at Massah,

teriveihu al-mei Merivah

With whom you did strive at the waters of Merivah;

Ha-omer l'aviv ul'imo lo re'itiv

He was the one who said of his father and mother, “I do not see them”,

v'et-echav lo hikir v'et-b'nav lo yada

not recognizing brother or child.

ki sham'ru imrateicha uvritcha yintzoru

They thus kept Your word and kept safe your covenant.

Yoru mishpateicha l'Ya'akov

They will teach your judgments to Jacob,

V'torat'cha l'Yisra'el

and your Torah to Israel.

yasimu k'torah b'apeicha

They will place incense in Your Presence

V'chalil al-mizbecheicha

and consume sacrifices on Your altar.

Barech Adonai cheylo ufo'al yadav

May the Holy One bless his effort and favor the work of his hands.

tirtzeh mechatz motnayim kamav

Smite through the loins of those who rise up against him,

umesan'av min-yekumun

So that his enemies run no more.

[Deuteronomy 33:8-11]

Levi has not been – and will never be - perfect. But thank heaven perfection is not what our Covenant Partner in Heaven requires. Our Divine Bridegroom seeks only

²¹ *Chet, samech, dalet*, Strong’s Hebrew word #2616, pronounced *khaw-sawd'*.

a repentant heart and a contrite spirit.

The Holy One blesses those who know their limitations and their weaknesses, acknowledge their sins, and prefer even a word of rebuke from His lips to rivers of praise from men. Such persons – not the proud, haughty, and self-righteous – are the ones who bring forth true living water – *mayim hayim* - for the thirsty.

Put away your swords, Beloved. Speak to the Rock. And let the water pour forth.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Here are some questions about today's aliyah:

[A] Which three tribes does Moshe bless in these verses.

[B] Read the blessing given to these tribes by Ya'akov [Jacob], the father of the men for whom these tribes are named - Genesis 49:1-12. Who is left out in Moshe's blessing?

[C] Give a summary, in your own words, of each of these three tribe's blessings as spoken by Moshe.

[D] Compare, with regard to each of the three tribes covered by today's verses, the blessing of Moshe with the blessing spoken over that tribe's patriarch by Ya'akov.

2. In verse 8 Moshe refers back to events that happened at Massah and at Meribah.

[A] In your Bible Dictionary or concordance, look up those locations and write a summary of what "testing" took place there.

[B] How did the events at these two places especially "test" the tribe that Moshe is blessing in verse 8?

3. In today's Haftarah reading from the first chapter of Y'hoshua [Joshua] we read:

Chazak v'ematz

Be strong and of good courage;

ki atah tanchil et-ha-am hazeh et-ha-aretz

for you shall cause this people to inherit the land

asher nishbati l'avotam latet lahem

which I swore to their fathers to give them.

Rak chazak v'ematz me'od

Only be strong and very courageous,

lish'mor la'asot kechol-ha-torah

to observe to do according to all the torah,

asher tzivcha Moshe avdi

with which Moshe my servant enjoined you:

al-tasur mimeinu yamin us'mol
don't turn from it to the right hand or to the left,

l'ma'an taskil b'chol asher telech
that you may have good success wherever you go.

Lo-yamush sefer ha-torah hazeh mipicha
This book of the torah is not to depart out of your mouth,

v'hagita bo yomam v'laylah
but you are to meditate thereon day and night,

l'ma'an tishmor la'asot kechol-ha-katuv bo
that you may observe to do according to all that is written therein:

ki-az tatzliach et-deracheicha v'az taskil
for then you shall make your way prosperous, and have good success.

Halo tziviticha chazak v'ematz
Haven't I enjoined you? Be strong and of good courage;

al-ta'arotz v'al-techat
don't be afraid, neither be dismayed:

ki imcha Adonai Eloheicha b'chol asher telech
for the Holy One your God is with you wherever you go.

[Joshua 1:6-9]

[A] How many times does the Holy One tell Y'hoshua to be “strong and courageous” in the three verses selected for today’s study?

[B] Look up the words “strong” and “courageous” as used in this passage; write the Hebrew words and the Hebrew word pictures each such word presents.

[C] In verse 6, how does the Holy One describe to Y'hoshua the purpose for which Y'hoshua was created?

[D] List the instructions given by the Holy One in verses 7-8 which Y'hoshua is to follow in order to fulfill the purpose for which he was created.

[E] You were also created by the Holy One *for a purpose* and *with an inheritance*. Pause for a moment and ask the Holy One to reveal something of that purpose and inheritance. Write what you think that *purpose* is, what you think that *inheritance* is, and how you think the instructions the Holy One gave Y'hoshua relate to you, your purpose, and your inheritance.

4. Today’s assigned reading from the Master’s “*Olivet Discourse*” – *i.e.* His premier teaching on the subject of what we should expect in the Latter Days - we read:

Then they will deliver you up to oppression, and will kill you.
You will be hated by all of the nations for my name's sake.
Then many will stumble, and will deliver up one another, and will hate one another.
Many false prophets will arise, and will lead many astray.

*Because iniquity will be multiplied, the love of many will grow cold.
But he who endures to the end, the same will be saved.
This Good News of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world
for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.*

[A] After the ‘beginning of birth pains’ [alternately translated as the ‘beginnings of the pains of one who is in the throes of death’], what things does Yeshua prophesy will happen to His talmidim [all of whom were descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov]?

[B] Think about each of these things [there are four specific things in verse 9]. Imagine all of these things happen to you. Write a letter to a fellow believer in Yeshua describing what happened to you and how you felt about it.

[C] In verses 10-12 Yeshua prophesies that there will be three responses in the fellowship of believers to the happenings of verse 9. List the three responses that will occur in people who have made a profession of faith in Yeshua.

[D] Who is to be ‘saved’, according to verse 13?

[E] Look up the word that is translated ‘*saved*’ in verse 13. Write the Greek word and its definition. Then in a Word study reference such as Richards’ or Vines’ find the Hebrew word which is most often translated as ‘saved’ [or ‘salvation’]. Then look up this word in Gesenius. Write the Hebrew word and describe the word picture it presents in its *pa’al* verb form.

[F] In the context of the horrible events of verses 8-12, what good thing does verse 13 tell us will happen?

[G] The two root words of the Greek word that is translated in our English Bibles as “gospel” are *eu* and *angelos* [Strong’s Greek words 2095 and 32]. Look up these root words and write a literal translation of the word we have translated as “gospel”.

[H] Now take the term *euangelos* (gospel) back to Hebrew, and describe what the “gospel” Yeshua is talking about is from a Hebraic perspective. How does this “gospel of the kingdom” relate to Deuteronomy 33:3-5?

*May you receive the blessing, fulfill the purpose,
and possess the inheritance the Holy One has prepared for you.*

The Rabbi’s son

Meditation for Today’s Study

Psalm 106:1-5

*Praise the Holy One! Give thanks to the Holy One, for he is good,
For his lovingkindness endures forever.
Who can utter the mighty acts of the Holy One, or fully declare all his praise?
Blessed are those who keep justice. Blessed is one who does what is right at all times.
Remember me, Holy One, with the favor that you show to your people.
Visit me with your **Yeshuah**, that I may see the prosperity of your chosen,
That I may rejoice in the gladness of your nation,
that I may glory with your inheritance.*