

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: *Torah Noach:* **Genesis 9:8 - 11:32**
 Haftarah: **Isaiah 55:1-4**
 B'rit Chadasha: **I Peter 3:22 – 4:19**

Blessed be the Holy One, the God of Shem.

[Genesis 9:26]

Today's Meditation is Ecclesiastes 12:1-14;

This Week's Amidah prayer is the *Gevurot*, the Prayer of His Powers.

An amazing opportunity now lies open before Noach and his family. The perfect storm of which the Beautiful Voice of the Creator had spoken has come . . . and gone. Hurricane force gusts have given way to gentle breezes. Fresh sprouts of every species of plant life are springing forth from the well-watered *eretz*. The world is now theirs, and theirs alone, to shape and form. Think of the possibilities!

The world now consisted only of four men, four women, and select pairs of each species of living creatures. Each human being and each animal had been chosen to replenish and reshape the world. Each was cherished by the Holy One. Each was jealously watched over, protected, and blessed by the Holy One. There were no more Nefilim. There were no more people with the mindset of Kayin. There were no more corrupted, oppressed cities. No more was '*every thought and intent of man only for evil*'. The Holy One has truly made all things new!

He Has Made All Things New!

The sun is shining upon our faces again by day and the moon and stars are performing dazzling light shows for us again each night. Birds are singing and bees are buzzing and butterflies are fluttering . . . and well, it seems as if the earth is once again *teeming with life*. Because, Dear Reader, *it is!* Creation has *survived* the Great Flood. And now it - and mankind - are much, much, *better for it*.

I do not know if it is true what they say, that 'time heals all things'; but these things I *do* know – the Creativity of the Eternal One makes all things beautiful in its time [Ecclesiastes 3:11] and the Eternal One works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose [Romans 8:28].

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A Time to Refrain from Embracing

In the aliyah of Torah we read yesterday Noach and his family broke their long huddle, stepped forth cautiously from the ark, and found their feet on dry land for the first time in over a year. The earth that their feet touched as they descended the ramp of the ark, however, was now very, very different than the earth with which Noach and his family were familiar.

Life on earth was not going to be like it had been before. Mankind – indeed all Creation - was being given a *second chance* by the Creator. By reason of the grace of the Holy One, descendants of Adam were being given a fresh new start. They were being given a *blank slate* upon which to write the next chapter of world history. Now each one of them had *a choice to make* as to how they would think and speak of the events they had experienced. A very real man named Noach had to make this choice. And so did his very real wife, his very real sons and their very real wives. They could declare themselves *traumatized victims*, consider the world they saw around them ‘ruined’, and sit down in sackcloth and ashes and die; or they could declare themselves *blessed survivors*, consider the world they saw around them ‘renewed’, and clothe themselves in garments of praise and set about the process of *starting over*.

We are all faced with a similar choice. We can limit and poison our future with wounded-ness, offense, and traumas that make up our past – or we can take a deep breath, praise the Holy One He has brought us alive to this season, reach out and take His Hand, tune our ears to His Voice and His alone, and get on with becoming who we were created to be and doing what we were created to do. Choose this day which approach you will take with your life.

A Fresh Revelation, A Fresh Empowerment!

As today’s aliyah begins the Holy One drives this point home by inaugurating the new world with a *fresh God-encounter*, a *renewed blessing/empowerment*, and something that will change the nature and dynamics of God-man relations forever – something He calls His *b’rit*. In English we call this transformational enterprise a ‘*covenant*’. More on that later. For now let’s eavesdrop on *the first post-Flood encounter between the Holy One and mankind*.

*The Holy One spoke to Noach, and to his sons with him, saying,
"As for me, behold, I establish my b’rit [covenant] with you,
and with your zerah [seed; offspring] after you,
and with every nefesh ha-chayah that is with you:
with the birds, the cattle, and every animal of the eretz with you.
Of all that go out of the teivah, even every animal of the eretz.*

*I will establish my brit [covenant] with you;
neither will all basar [flesh] be cut off any more by the waters of the flood;
neither will there any more be a flood to destroy the eretz."*

Ahem! Now would be a really good time to perk up your ears, Dear Reader. Please notice that this God/man encounter is different from the previous two we have read about this week. The other two God/man encounters we read about this week only involved the Holy One and Noah. This encounter also directly involves each of **Noach's sons**.

You may not have thought about it, but consider that up to this point Noach's sons have walked in *their father's revelation* and lived under the protection of *the grace their father found in the eyes of the Holy One*. They have been mere *third-party beneficiaries* of the interactions the Holy One has had with their father. It has been their father's revelation – not theirs – that has guided and shaped their lives and preserved them from the disaster that has just befallen their fellow men. But that is about to change. From this point forward Noach's sons, who after all are *the Holy One's chosen seed to redeem Creation and repopulate the world*, will no longer walk merely in their father's revelation or in their father's covenant. Each of them must now meet and come to know the Holy One and His Ways *for themselves*. **Shem, Cham** (Ham), and **Yafet** (Japheth) are about to come **al-p'nei** [face to Face] with the One their father has known for so long.

Of Fathers and Sons

Oh, do not misunderstand me. The father's revelation will still be totally valid, and will remain 100% in force and effect. It will never be *superseded*, nor will it be *replaced*. That is because the Holy One's words *do* not – *can* not – *will* not - pass away. The father's revelation will continue to supply a firm foundation upon which potentially even deeper levels of relationship with the Holy One can be built.

As the earth renews itself after the Flood it is now time, according to the Holy One's Divine Plan, for the Holy One *to reveal Himself to the sons as He once revealed Himself to their father*. All you **sons** out there **please take note**. The Holy One's will is that your father's revelation and covenant should be just the beginning – the foundation. What you learn from your father's revelation and covenant walk with the Holy One provides you – or at least *should* provide you, if the father is a Deuteronomy 6 father who **sh'ma's** the Holy One's voice, who loves the Holy One with all his heart, soul, and strength, and who sets the words of Torah upon his heart, and teaches the words of Torah faithfully to his children, and speaks of the words of Torah as he sits in his home and as he walks by the way – a *tremendous advantage* over your peers. But in order for that to happen, you must

receive, accept, and walk in your father's revelation and covenant, as Noah's sons did. Some sons handle this better than others.

When the Holy One deems the time right He will speak to *you* as well, and your father's revelation and covenant will become *your own* revelation and covenant. Some sons handle this better than others as well – as we will find out later in today's aliyah.

It Always Comes Back to Covenant

As explained in an earlier study this week, 'God-encounters' such as Noah and his sons are depicted in today's aliyah as experiencing *form the foundation of all spiritual revelation*. As was also pointed out earlier this week, the capstone of the entire structure of revelation – that upon which every aspect of it hinges, is something which in Hebrew is called the **b'rit**. We translate that into English as **covenant**.

When the Holy One initiates a God-encounter, you see, He does not just come into a man's life to converse with or to bless him. As stated earlier this week, the Holy One comes, when He comes, to do something much more lasting and meaningful - He comes to *cut covenant*.

Absolutely everything beautiful and lasting in God-Man relations is based upon and flows from covenant. That is why there is not – and never has been – any such thing as 'works justification'. Covenant commitment - and the trust relationship that emanates from covenant commitment – has always had to, and always must come first. When covenant commitment is absent, any works a person does are merely aimed at trying to impress and manipulate someone else – especially a 'god' – for personal advantage. The sole purpose of works outside covenant commitment is to get something one wants from someone who has the power to grant it.

When covenant commitment is present, however, it is the most natural thing in the world for amazing, intimate, passionate, joyful works in furtherance of the covenant relationship to come forth from willing hearts – works so selfless that they stun the world. The works of Torah are never the seed of relationship with the Creator; they are always the fruit of that relationship.

Failing to understand and appreciate that truth about the Holy One and His dealings with man and to lay hold of the awesome implications of that truth is perhaps the single greatest mistake of our world. A covenant [*b'rit*], you see, is not just a promise – it is *a spiritual union*, like a marriage. It is something eternal,

unchanging, and absolutely trustworthy. It is one hundred per cent certain and sure. It is binding in every conceivable way – not just legally, morally, or ethically - but SPIRITUALLY.

A b'rit with the Holy One changes everything about us and our lives. It is *attitude altering, perspective changing, behavior modifying, and purpose- and priority-reshaping*. It is that which gives *substance and predictability* to all our relationships - with God, with man, and with Creation. A brit with the Holy One is more valuable than anything else we could ever have this side of Heaven. So let's see with what terms the Holy One is going to build upon the covenant He previously made just with Noah.

The Covenant the Holy One Made With the Sons of Noah

We are all sons of Noah. Because the Flood wiped out every other bloodline, we can all – of whatever nationality, race, and ethnic group – share Noah's genetics . . . and are thus subject to the generational covenant the Holy One made with Noah's sons. It behooves us therefore to *know what the terms of that covenant are*. It starts with a covenant 'sign' [in Hebrew, an 'ot']. Here is how Torah describes it:

*The Holy One said, **Zot ot ha-B'rit** [This is the token of the covenant]
which I make between me and you
and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations:
I set qash'ti² [my bow] in the cloud,
and it will be for an ot [sign] of a covenant between me and the eretz.*

*It will come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the eretz,
Ha qashet [the bow] will be seen in the cloud,
and I will bring to the forefront of my mind, and focus intently upon,
the brit between Me, you, and every living creature of all flesh,
and the waters will no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.*

*Ha-qashet [the bow] will be in the cloud.
I will look at it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant
between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the eretz."*

*Elohim said to Noah, "**Zot ot ha-B'rit** [This is the token of the covenant]
which I have established between me and all flesh that is on the eretz."*

This provides the perfect opportunity to discuss the concept of the "covenant sign.

² The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as 'bow' or rainbow is *qeshet, quf, shin, tav*, Strong's Hebrew word #7198, pronounced *keh'-shet*. This noun is derived from the Hebrew verb root *qashah, qof, shin, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #7185, meaning to *bend back*. Its first usages in Torah deal with bending over in the pains of labor. **Genesis 35:16-17.**

We have all heard – since we were kids - that the rainbow³ is the “sign” of the covenant the Holy One made with man (and animals, by the way, as our text makes clear) that He would never again destroy all living creatures by flood.

Every covenant in which man participates has a “sign”. The “sign” of the marriage covenant is the *wedding ring*. The sign of the social covenant of peoples who voluntarily unite under a government is that nation’s *flag*. And so on. It is like *earnest money* on a real estate contract. It testifies that He who *began* a good work will be faithful to complete it. This follows the pattern set by the Holy One, that *every covenant made by the Holy One is accompanied by its “sign” or “token”*. The sign/token is *a down payment, as it were, on the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant*. If there is no sign/token, there is no *brit* [covenant] – only words. The sign/token is what SEALS the *b’rit*, and makes it legally binding.

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as ‘sign’ or ‘token’ is *ot, alef, vav, tav*⁴. This word is a hieroglyphic, which in its purest form depicts the Holy One [*alef*] being “nailed” or otherwise attached [*vav*] to a tree or doorpost [*tav*]. In other words, it is a word picture, of the Holy One voluntarily restricting Himself, allowing His omnipotence to be limited. The Hebraic word picture drawn for us by the word ‘*ot*’ is thus similar to the picture shown by the ceremony Torah prescribes for a Hebrew free man, after seven years of indentured service, to voluntarily become a servant for life to his master. Deuteronomy 15 describes the procedure as follows:

*It will be, if he tell you, I will not go out from you;
because he loves you and your house, because he is well with you;
then you are to take an awl, and thrust it through his ear to the door,
and he will be your servant forever.*

The *ot* [sign, token] of such a covenant is two-fold – i.e. the hole in the ear of the voluntary bondservant, and the hole in the door of the master. The hole in the bondservant’s ear says “*I will always sh’ma [listen for, hear, and obey, so as to make meaningful] your words*”. The hole in the master’s door says “*My door is always open to you. My home is your home forever.*”

The *ot* [sign, token] of the covenant with Noach is likewise filled with beautiful imagery. The rainbow [Hebrew *qashet*] is the Holy One’s *bow*, the weapon of death. The Holy One extends the bow to mankind, as a man offers another a knife,

³ A rainbow, of course, results when rays of sunlight pass through water droplets suspended in the atmosphere of earth. The droplets of water refract the ray of light, revealing it not as a single ray of white light, but as 7 distinct bands of light displayed in a multidimensional arc across the sky.

⁴ The Hebrew word *ot* is Strong’s Hebrew word #226, and is pronounced almost like the English word *oat*.

dangerous end toward himself. What the Holy One was saying to mankind in connection with this action was, I believe something like the following [please forgive the suggestive paraphrase], ***“I will not destroy you, but I will place in your hand the means by which you can bring death to Me.”***

Keep in mind that even as the Holy One extended his weapon of death to Noach and his sons, He knew full well – because it was part of His eternal redemptive plan, designed before the foundation of the world – that Noach’s descendants would ultimately use that weapon of death against Him, when He physically assumed the form of Messiah in their midst.

The Mystery of Noach’s Vineyard

No longer being called to focus on shipbuilding and animal shepherding full-time, Noach decided to fulfill the Divine Instruction to ‘replenish’ the earth by trying his hand at horticulture. The soil of the earth was enriched with alluvial deposits and ready to cultivate again. Eager to try out the Holy One’s renewed Empowerment to “be fruitful’ Noach may have planted any number of species of plants and trees. The narrative of Torah, however, focuses on only one thing Noach planted - a vineyard⁵.

In due season Noach harvested the grapes that grew in the vineyard. Perhaps the fermentation process was new to him – something that had not occurred prior to the Flood. But whether knowingly or unknowingly, Noach drank a bit too much of the fermented juice. He wound up badly under the influence. He wisely retired to his tent, where he took off his clothes and passed out cold. As Torah puts it:

V’yesh’t min ha-yayin
He drank some of the wine,

V’yish’kar v’yit’gal b’toch aholoh
making himself drunk, and uncovered himself in the tent.
[Genesis 9:21]

No real harm done – yet. But then came Cham. Torah tells us:

Vayar Cham avi Chena’an et er’vat aviv . . .
Cham, the father of Kena’an, saw his father’s nakedness . . .
[Genesis 9:22(a)]

Cham was a full-grown man with a wife. Why did he enter Noach’s tent without an invitation? Why was he there?

⁵ The vine is the symbol of new life, new hope, and regeneration. The fruitful vineyard is both the wellspring of abundant joy and the evidence of abiding in peace.

We are not told what possessed Cham to make him invade his father's privacy. All we are told is that he entered Noach's tent and *saw his father's nakedness*. Perhaps it was a calculated act on Cham's part. Perhaps it was totally inadvertent. But Cham's seeing of Noach's nakedness was not the problem. The problem was Cham's reaction to seeing his father's nakedness. Some of the sages of Israel say that, upon finding his father passed out and naked, he physically castrated him, so he could be assured that Noach would produce no more heirs with which he had to compete for Noach's inheritance. Torah does not specifically say this. But even if Cham did not do the physical act of emasculation, he accomplished the same result *with words*, after leaving the tent. Torah tells us:

. . . vayaged l'sh'nei-echav bachutz
. . . and he told it to his two brothers outside.
[Genesis 9:22(b)]

What would have been a rare moment of private overindulgence (Noach was, after all, alone in his tent when he passed out), a lesson to be learned the hard way, when struck by hangover the next morning, was turned by Cham into a public joke at Noach's expense. Instead of honoring his father, Cham, at the very least, played Diane Sawyer, describing his father's nakedness to all who would listen, and laughing about his drunkenness, in detail, on *Prime Time*.

Shem and Yafet, on the other hand, take precautions to make sure they do not dishonor their father. They go to his tent for one purpose only – to cover him.

Vayikach Shem v'Yefet et-ha-sim'lah
Shem and Yafet took a cloak

vayasimu al-sh'chem shneyhem
and placed it on both their shoulders.

v'yel'chu achoranit v'yechasu et er'vat avihem
Walking backwards, they then covered their father's nakedness.

ufneyhem achoranit v'er'vat avihem lo ra'u
They faced away from him and did not see their father naked.
[Genesis 9:23]

Part of being in covenant with the Holy One is learning to *humbly cover* – rather than arrogantly expose, or mock, or make fun of, or exploit – the nakedness and the sin sequences of others. It is not a matter of *overlooking* or *condoning* sin – it is just a matter of refusing to allow one's mind – or one's eyes or speech – to freeze-frame any person in the worst or lowest moment or season of his or her life. It is a matter of valuing the God-given potential and beauty in a man or woman, even when it is not, at the time in question, evident in that man or woman's

behavior. So . . . how are you doing at covering others in their moments - or seasons – of weakness and prodigality, Dear Reader? Do you still see *value* in people who sin? Or do you, like Cham, delight in exposing and gossiping about them?

Who Is Blessed – and Who is Cursed

Noach finally awoke from his night of folly. He discovered what had occurred, and was moved to prophesy. He had walked with the Holy One for over 600 years. Prophecy was much more a part of his identity than drunkenness. And so, looking into the future of his family, he said:

Arur [Under limitations and restrictions] ***will be Kena'an***
[a son of Cham who had not even been born yet]

A servant of servants will he be to his brothers."

***He said, "Blessed be the Holy One, the God of Shem; let Kana'an be his servant.
God enlarge Yafet, Let him dwell in the tents of Shem; let Kana'an be his servant."***

From this prophecy of Noach the history of the peoples of the world developed. **Shem** (and his descendants, including Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, and all Hebrew people) was destined to become pre-eminent. **Yafet**⁶ was destined to be a co-laborer with Shem. **Cham**, his soon-to-be born son Kena'an, and the descendants of both – i.e. the Kena'ani (Canaanites) and the original Egyptians, Ethiopians, Libyans, and Babylonians - were to be in subjection to Shem and Yafet.

Please keep in mind that the idea behind this blessing and curse is going to come more and more into focus in coming parsha – particularly as we proceed from the Holy One's dealings with *Noach and his sons* to the dealings of the Holy One with *one of Shem's descendants – a man named Avram* (Abram). We will, when we examine the words the Holy One speaks to Avram, see how the 'blessing' and the 'curse' of Noach regarding his sons will play out in world history – and perhaps in end-times prophecy as well.

The Common Ancestry of All Men

Torah makes it clear that all men are brothers, descended from one man – a man who *walked with God* named Noach. Humans tend to think in terms of race and nationality and clan. Torah confronts those classifications with the essential truth that, whatever we look like, wherever we are born, whatever king or kingdom we serve, we are all part of the same family – and we all have the inherited potential to walk with God, and be blameless in our generation.

⁶ It is taught by the sages that Yafet's descendants settled in the area now known as Greece, and were the progenitors of the not only the Greeks but all Europeans.

The sons born to Yafet, Torah tells us *were* seven: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Yavan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. From these the coastland *peoples* of the Gentiles were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their nations. **Genesis 10:3-5.**

The sons born to Cham, Torah tells us, were four: Cush, Mitzrayim, Put, and Kena'an. **Genesis 10:6-20.**

The sons born to Shem, Torah tells us, were five: Elam, Asshur, Arfaxad, Lud, and Aram. **Genesis 10:21-31.**

It was through one or another of the sixteen grandsons of Noach that all *mishpachot* [i.e. families] of the earth devolved. **Genesis 10:32.** All human beings - whether their skin pigment is white, black, red, orange, tan, or yellow - are brothers. We all share as our progenitor, and hence share the DNA and genetic code of, a man who was an *ish tzadik* [a righteous man], who was *blameless in his generation*, and who *walked with God*. There is therefore neither basis in the Covenant Lifestyle nor room in the Kingdom of Heaven for any hint of racial hatred, prejudice, or the harboring of any theory or the indulgence of any rhetoric of racial, national, or cultural superiority.

The Holy One has ordained that people from all sixteen lineages will serve important roles in His Grand Redemptive Plan for Creation. Never forget the potential for the Eleazars, the Tamars, the Rachavs [Rahabs], the Ruths, the Na'amans, the Cyruses, the Samaritan woman, the Corneliuses, the Ethiopian eunuchs, and the Oscar Schindlers to arise from the nations and be used by the Holy One as vessels to bring good into the world. Never allow yourself to see - or speak of - any descendant of Noach as an 'ape' or a 'pig' or a 'dog'. Never allow yourself to see any descendant of Shem, Cham or Yafet as less than human - or as one whit less important or less valuable to yourself. Never allow yourself to envy - or hate - or speak evil against - any race of men, including your own or that of your current worst enemy. And never allow yourself to give up on any race or nationality - or for that matter any individual. You may, from time to time, have conflicts with - or even be spoken ill of or mistreated by - people of other races or nations. But the issue in such instances is always who can rise above the conflict and stay on course with the Holy One's plan. As much as it is within your power, live at shalom with all men.

The World's First Human King

The way events immediately following Noach's 'blessing' of Shem and Yafet and

his ‘curse’ of Cham unfolded however might have led many to consider Noach’s blessing and curse to have been more than the angry ramblings of an embarrassed old man. The lineage which proved, initially at least, to be the most influential in the new world was not that of Shem, nor even that of Yafet, as Noach’s prophetic declaration intimated – it was instead the lineage of the ‘cursed’ son, Cham. According to Torah one of the grandsons of Cham, a man named **Nimrod** [meaning *rebellion*], was the first person to function in the capacity of a *king*.

v’Cush yalad et-Nimrod

Cush was the father of Nimrod,

hu hechel lihyot gibor ba-aretz

who was the first to amass power in the world.

* * *

V’tehi reshit mam’lachto Bavel

The shaking out point of his kingdom was Babylon,

v’Erech v’Akad v’Chalneh b’eretz Shin’ar

along with Erekh, Akkad and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

[Genesis 11:8-10]

A ‘king’ crowned by men, such as Nimrod, is the worldly counterfeit of Messiah, the King of Heaven. Nimrod⁷ is, therefore, the prototype of the Anti-Messiah – he who will stand in direct opposition to the ‘king’ anointed by the Holy One – the Messiah. And, the kingdom of Nimrod – which began at Bavel [Babylon] - was (and is) the ‘kingdom of this world’, which stands in contradistinction and opposition to the kingdom of the Holy One, where Messiah reigns.

Rashi concluded that Torah’s reference to Nimrod as a ‘mighty hunter’ is far from a complement. To Rashi, this reference indicated that Torah was telling us Nimrod was a crafty *hunter of people* whose goal was to ensnare people’s minds with his mouth and deceive them into rebelling against the Holy One without even knowing it. Through ‘spinning’ the truth to suit his own purposes, he was able to lead people to rebel against the instruction and authority of the Holy One and establish himself as the sole ruler of mankind. Let us see if we can get a better understanding of the effect of Nimrod’s kingdom of this world. It is the subject of the next ‘story’ Torah tells us.

***The Building A City and A Tower
From Which to Make War Against the Holy One
and Thwart the Advance of the Kingdom of Heaven***

Chapter 11 of Genesis begins with the story of the infamous ‘*Tower of Bavel*’ - the

⁷ **Nimrod** is spelled *nun, mem, resh, dalet*.

place upon which all the focus of Nimrod's kingdom was centered. This is a very, very important story. I cannot emphasize that statement enough. The seeds of – and the secrets to overcoming - both the 'abomination of desolation' mentioned by Daniel and Y'shua of Natzret and of the kingdom and mark of 'the beast' mentioned in Revelation, are present in and revealed by this story.

As it happened to our fathers, so it will happen to us and to our children, in every generation until Messiah comes in power to rule the earth. He that has an ear to hear, let him hear. So let's look more closely, shall we?

After the death of Noach Torah tells us that Noach's descendants migrated en masse to the 'plain of Shinar'. **Shinar** is *shin, nun, ayin, resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #8152, pronounced *shin-awr'*. This means '**place of two rivers**', and refers to the so-called *Fertile Crescent*, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The area came to be known as Chaldea. It was in this area where 'Ur of the Chaldees' from whence Terach [Avram's father] migrated. It is the region where Nimrod became the world's first 'king'. It is the physical area occupied by present-day Iraq. Here is how Torah describes the population of Shinar:

Vayehi chol ha-aretz safah echat udevarim achadim

The entire earth had one language with uniform words

Vayehi benos'am mikedem

When [the people] migrated from the east

V'yimtze'u vik'ah b'erezt Shinar v'yeshvu sham

they found a valley in the land of Shinar, and they settled there.

You should recall that the Holy One gave the explicit instruction and empowerment to Noach and his descendants to "***Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish*** [fill up] ***the earth.***" **Genesis 9:1**. Well they were *fruitful*. And they indeed *multiplied*. But the Divine instruction to *replenish the earth* – fill it back up with human beings – was another story. That instruction was not only ignored in the generations that followed Noach's death – it actually became the focal point of the most destructive rebellion sequence in the history of man.

Vayomeru ish el-re'ehu

They said to one another,

havah nilbenah levenim v'nisrefah lisrefah

'Come, let us mold bricks and fire them.'

vatehi lahem ha-l'venah l'aven

They then had bricks to use as stone,

V'hachemar hayah lahem l'chomer
and asphalt for mortar.

Vayomeru havah nivneh-lanu ir
They said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city,

umigdal v'rosho b'shamayim
and a tower whose top shall reach the sky.

To our modern ears these words seem harmless. In fact the idealists inside us want to believe that the city these people were building was a unified and peaceful society, a great center of commerce, scholarship, and developing technology. And the same idealists within us want to believe that the tall tower the people were building was merely designed to serve as a unifying symbol for the society [like Paris' Eiffel Tower, Rome's Arch de Triumph, New York City's statue of liberty or 'World Trade Center', St. Louis' Gateway Arch, Seattle's 'Space Needle' or Washington D.C.'s Washington monument], perhaps.

But the idealist in us is quickly silenced by the realism of Torah. Why did these people want to build a city – and a tower? The Holy One's instruction had been not to build a city or a tower, but to *replenish the earth*⁸. To replenish is *to fill*. And to fill means to *be scattered, like seed*, for a later harvest. Building a city and a tower are the exact opposite of 'replenishing the earth'. So Torah looks behind whatever propaganda and 'spin' was being put out about the building of the city and the tower by its proponents⁹, and reveals the cold, ugly truth about it.

What was really motivating the building both the city and the tower was all out rebellion against the Creator, His Plan of Redemption for Mankind and Creation, and His explicit instructions. In their hearts these people said:

V'na'aseh-lanu shem pen-nafutz al-penei kol ha-aretz
*Let us make ourselves a name*¹⁰, *so that we will not be scattered all over the earth.'*

⁸ Hebrew, ***milu et ha-aretz***.

⁹ Yosef HaLevi quotes 'The Juggler and the King' to explain the reason why a tower was built as follows: "The leaders of the Dispersed Generation wanted their citizenry to assist them in the realization of their goals (amassing power, possession, and glory). But if the people's major interests were eating and drinking, then they would be both unwilling and unable to lend their aid. The government therefore understood that if they wanted to succeed, they would have to wean the populace away from their physical drives: citizens would have to be prepared to sacrifice their personal comfort for the advancement of the goals of the state. The awesome "tower that reaches to the sky" was meant to strike fear into any who would oppose their regime."

¹⁰ In other words, the sages say, the people wanted to demonstrate their own power and glory. The goal was "to make a name for themselves" – engage in self-worship. The Talmud thus teaches that the statement "***Let us make a name for ourselves***" refers to idolatry! **Sanhedrin 109a.**

The people of that day, like the vast majority of people in all generations since the flood [including today], *did not want to 'replenish the earth', because they did not want to be 'scattered'*. They did not 'go gentle into that good night'. They did not like the *name* [meaning 'purpose, prophetic destiny'] the Holy One had decreed for them. They wanted, instead, to make *their own name* [meaning, to *define their own purpose, and establish their own destiny*].¹¹ So, they said to themselves: "***v'na'aseh-lanu shem pen-nafutz*** [*Let us make ourselves a name, so that we will not be scattered*].

People who want to be independent from the Holy One have some easily identifiable characteristics. First of all, they like to give themselves and their little like-minded group of associates' *names*. Secondly, they like to build *buildings* in which to meet. Thirdly, they like to build *towers* to stick up above the skyline formed by the tops of their buildings. And, finally, their chief identifiable characteristic is that they resist the Divine instruction to scatter and concentrate on living the Torah-based family life that the Holy One calls us to live.

People who want to be independent from the Holy One will not be scattered. Instead, they do the exact opposite - they form groups and elect leaders. They are compulsive about it. They have to be. You see, if there is no 'group' and no 'leader', people actually have to deal with . . . *God*. If there is no program, and no meeting schedule, people actually have to . . . *teach their own children* [and themselves] *the truth of the Holy One's Torah*.

A Tale of Two Cities

I like to think of all of Scripture, in its simplest essence, as a 'tale of two [spiritual] cities'. There is a city built with human hands, and human ideas, philosophies and religious notions, and which is human through and through. It is called Bavel [Babylon]. There is, however, another city. It is a city not built with human hands, not built upon human ideas, and which is God's through and through. It is called ***Y'rushalayim*** [Jerusalem].

In which of these cities do you spend most of your time? The answer matters. It matters because, if you will receive it, what the descendants of Noach built in the plain of Shinar is the very same thing that the 'beast' of Revelation will build. Bavel is a city that is the polar opposite of the Y'rushalayim of God. Bavel is a city built by and for men – instead of a city built by and for God. Bavel is a city built

¹¹ The ancients understood that a name contains within it the essence of the thing itself. Among the peoples of the east, the name of a person was believed to contain his secret, to enshrine the essence of his character and personality. When it is said therefore that men aimed to make a name for themselves, what is meant is that they conceived the notion of deciding for themselves what their own essential nature and character should be. They said, in other words, "***Let us be, not what God created us to be, but what we choose ourselves to be.***"

upon alternating currents of flattery and guilt, emphasizing false forms of self-denial and ‘community’. Bavel is a city that seduces and deceives man, invoking the name of God, and declaring itself to be ‘of God’, but which all the while is subtly separating him from God by filling his mind and heart and time on earth with man-centered philosophies, man-focused activities, and man-dominated religious services that *sap his spiritual energy* and *numb his spiritual hunger*. Bavel is a city with increasing hostility for people whose lives are based upon *sh’ma*-ing the Holy One, and who thereby refuse to take the ‘mark’ of the other city. It is a city that first seeks first to discredit, then to exclude, and eventually to destroy, those who do not take ‘the mark’.

How did [will] the Holy One respond to the city on the plain?

V’yered Adonai lir’ot et-ha-ir

And the Holy One descended to see the city

v’et ha-migdal asher banu b’nei ha-adam

and the tower that the sons of man had built.

Vayomer Adonai hen am echad

And the Holy One said, 'They are a single people,

vesafah achat l’chulam

all having one mouth-

v’zeh ha-chilam la’asot

and this is the first thing they do!

v’atah lo-yibatzer mehem kol asher yazmu la’asot

Now nothing they plan to do will be unattainable for them!

***The Seductiveness of Shinar and Bavel, Cities and Towers,
Fortresses, Shrines, Cathedrals, Spires,
Steeple, Statues, and Monuments***

Had a prophet arisen and shouted at the top of his lungs: “*Wake up, People!! Congregating at Shinar and building Bavel for Nimrod is not what the Holy One told us to do!*”- he would have been laughed to scorn. Even though *Shinar* was not the Holy One’s will for man – and was in fact established in direct contravention of His Divine instructions – you see, the Holy One did not stop man from congregating there. He did not strike the people who congregated there dead, or send another flood. In fact, He did the opposite - He provided food there for those who congregated. He made the rains fall on the fields and orchards there. He blessed individual people –and mankind in general – abundantly there. He undoubtedly touched many people in many wonderful ways there.

So had a prophet stood and declared the truth to those who congregated he would indeed have been laughed to scorn. Because the people received blessings there, they assumed they were right where they belonged. But the blessing the Holy One released over Shinar was not released because Shinar was the Holy One's plan for mankind. It wasn't. The Holy One released blessings there solely because He is a good God, who loves people, and who will always care for and find ways to bless people – even when they are missing – or rejecting – His will for them.

But note that the Holy One did not let it go on forever. At an appropriate time, He intervened. He did not send a prophet. He personally put an end to it. Let us eavesdrop on the Holy One's thought process concerning about the congregants of Shinar. The Holy One said in Genesis 11:7:

Havah nerdah v'nav'lah sham sefatam

Come, let us descend and confuse their speech,

asher lo yishme'u ish sfat re'ehu

so that one person will not understand another's speech.'

Ah, speech. Communication - the most visible thing that separates man from animals¹². It is that upon which congregation-minded people – Shinar/Bavel people - most depend. If people cannot understand each other, they cannot congregate. So, because congregations of people were not the Holy One's will, He took away their ability to communicate.

People who understood each other stayed together. People who did not understand each other separated. As Torah goes on to tell us in Genesis 11:8:

V'yafetz Adonai otam misham al-penei chol ha-aretz

From that place, the Holy One scattered them all over the face of the earth,

V'yachdelu livnot ha-ir

and they stopped building the city.

As strange as it seems, the 'language barrier' that seems so bothersome to us is nothing short of a marvelous work of the Holy One. The Holy One introduced it, and utilized it - then and now - to cause people to stop congregating and get about the business of 'replenishing the earth' and fulfilling the Holy One's divine purposes. And of course the Holy One can reverse the 'language barrier' anytime

¹² Onkelos [c.35-120 AD] - a Talmudic commentator believed to have been a nephew of the Roman emperor Titus who converted to Judaism - translates "*nefesh haya*" as "*ruach memallela*", the spirit of language. Rashi comments, "*Though beast and animal alike were called "living soul", the soul of man is more alive than them all for he was granted, in addition, knowledge and speech.*"

He wishes. Hence what happened on *Shavuot* [Pentecost] in the year of Messiah's atoning death, resurrection, and Ascension.

He Named it Bavel!

Torah tells us the source of the name of the infamous city that has come to be known as 'Babylon'¹³. The Holy One named it.

I do not know of any other place on earth the Holy One named. We are not even told He named the garden 'Eden', the land of promise 'Yisrael' [Israel], or the holy city 'Y'rushalayim' [Jerusalem]. That makes the naming of Bavel by the Holy One even the more significant. Here is how Torah reports it:

Al-ken qara shemah Bavel

He named it Bavel,

ki-sham balal Adonai s'fat kol ha-aretz

because this was the place where God confused the world's language.

umisham hefitzam Adonai al-penei kol ha-aretz

It was from there that God dispersed [humanity] over all the face of the earth.

[Genesis 11:9]

If the Holy One names a city, there is a reason. The name means something. And the name is not just descriptive – it is **prophetic**. So, let us look a little more closely at the name the Holy One chose for the city where man first attempted to build a *migdal* to heaven.

The name **Bavel** is *beit, veit, lamed*¹⁴. This is a derivative form of the Hebrew verb root *balal*¹⁵. It is defined by Strong's as *to mix, mingle, confuse, confound or anoint*. In Exodus 29 it is twice used to describe the process of blending oil into wheat flour to make leavened bread in connection with the service of the *table of showbread*¹⁶. In Hosea 7:8 it is used to describe how the exiles from the Northern Kingdom of Israel 'mixed' into the nations¹⁷. In Psalm 92:10 it is translated 'anoint' in the phrase '***I will be anointed with fresh oil***'.

The Hebraic word picture or mural that is presented by the name Bavel is

¹³ According to Babylonian religion Babylon was built by the gods and was the dwelling of Marduk. From there people could meet the gods. This is reflected in the authentic Akkadian name for Babylon. Derived from the Babylonian phrase *bab-ilu*, it literally means "gate of the gods."

¹⁴ Babel is Strong's Hebrew word #894. It is pronounced *baw-bel*'.

¹⁵ Balal is *beit, lamed, lamed*. Strong's Hebrew word #1101, it is pronounced *baw-lawl*'.

¹⁶ See Exodus 29:2,40.

¹⁷ The verse in question reads: "***Efrayim, he has mixed himself among the people; Efrayim is a cake not turned.***"

house/home [*beit*] of a family or household [*beit/veit*] of discipline [*lamed*]. Here is a message we cringe to hear. The Holy One is declaring Babylon to be *the location from which He will send forth a people who will discipline His chosen people*. This, of course, was first proven prophetic in the sixth century BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was raised up by the Holy One to bring judgment upon Y'hudah [Judah, the Southern Kingdom], destroy its Temple, and carry its people into captivity.

The captivity that resulted from Nebuchadnezzar's subjugation of Y'hudah is commonly known as the '*Babylonian Captivity*'. And in connection with that captivity, the Holy One did to His chosen witness much the same thing He did to the descendants of Noach at Bavel. Before the captivity, the Holy One's people were centered in one geographical area, and spoke one language – Hebrew. Afterwards, they were dispersed across the face of the earth [only a very small percentage ever returned to Eretz Yisrael], and took up the languages of the peoples with whom they commingled. Hebrew became, for all intents and purposes, a 'dead language', preserved only in the sacred texts, and used – for centuries – only by rabbis and sages.

To what location were the treasures of the Temple taken? To Bavel [Babylon]¹⁸. See II Kings 25:13-16 where we are told:

*The pillars of brass that were in the house of the Holy One,
and the bases and the brazen sea that were in the house of the Holy One,
did the Kasdim [Babylonians] break in pieces, and carried the brass of them to Bavel.*

*The pots, and the shovels, and the snuffers, and the spoons,
and all the vessels of brass with which they ministered, took they away.*

*The fire pans, and the basins, that which was of gold,
in gold, and that which was of silver, in silver, the captain of the guard took away.*

*The two pillars, the one sea, and the bases that Shlomo had made for the house of the Holy One,
the brass of all these vessels was without weight.*

Babylon eventually became the leading center of Jewish learning and scholarship. The most influential texts of 'oral law' are called the '*Babylonian Talmud*'. The '*Jerusalem Talmud*' – the work of scholars who returned to Eretz Yisrael over the centuries, though highly revered as well, is considered of lesser weight, and of lesser scholarship.

¹⁸ Ancient Bavel is in modern-day Iraq, about 50 miles south of Baghdad. Saddam Hussein, former Dictator of Iraq, spent enormous sums of money in restoring many historical sites of ancient Bavel, such as the Southern Palace of Nebuchadnezzar, the ancient 'Processional Way', and the notorious '*Ishtar Gate*'. Hussein made no secret of his desire to restore Babylon as a symbol of the greatness of the people of Mesopotamia, making it a prime attraction of the Middle East. Hussein, you see, considered himself a modern Nebuchadnezzar.

He Who Does Not Learn From the Mistakes of the Past Is Doomed To Repeat those Mistakes In the Future

Lest we consider Bavel merely an interesting historical footnote, the writer of Revelation prophesies that she will figure prominently in the ‘last days’. The message of Genesis 11 is very real for the end of times as well as for the beginning of times, Beloved. Just as men congregated in Shinar at the beginning of the Post-Flood era, so will men at the end of times congregate in something very, very similar – something the Book of Revelation calls ‘Mystery Babylon’.

Chapter 17 of that book describes Bavel [some say allegorically, as a metaphor for Rome] as the great city of the Beast – *mother of prostitutes and of the abominations of the eretz*. In the next chapter, Bavel is described in a fallen state, as *the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird*. **Revelation 18:2**. The final casting down of Bavel is described in the rest of the Book of Revelation as one of the greatest triumphs of the Holy One in His end-time deliverance of His People. **Revelation 18:10, 21**. This is very consistent with the prophecy of Micah, in the TaNaKh:

*But you, Beit-Lechem Efratah, though you are small among the clans of Y'hudah,
Out of you one will come forth to me that is to be ruler in Yisra'el;
Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.
Therefore he will abandon them until the time that she who is in labor gives birth.
Then the rest of his brothers will return to the children of Yisra'el.*

*He will stand and shall shepherd in the strength of the Holy One,
In the majesty of the name of the Holy One his God:
And they will live, for then he will be great to the ends of the eretz.
He will be our shalom when Ashshur invades our land and marches through our fortresses,
Then we will raise against him seven shepherds, and eight leaders of men.
They will rule the land of Ashshur with the sword,
and the land of Nimrod in its gates. He will deliver us from the Ashshur,
When he invades our land, and when he marches within our border.*

[Micah 5:2-6]

Some say the ‘New Babylon’ that will ultimately take shape in Iraq [where Babylon is physically located] in the wake of the fall of Saddam Hussein is destined to become the Babylon of Revelation. Some insist the Babylon of Revelation is Rome – perhaps even the Vatican. Some say it is a coming ‘one-world religion’. Some say it is organized religion in all - and each – of its forms.

I do not know, nor do I think anyone else does. If we cling to Messiah instead of governments and ideologies, organizations and doctrines, programs and religious leaders, and if we *sh'ma* the Voice of the Holy One, heeding every word from His mouth, and if we build our lives on His Torah, it really will not matter what the

‘New Babylon’ mentioned in Scripture turns out to be. Bavel, after all, means ‘confusion’. Torah, on the other hand, is the ultimate confusion-*antidote*.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Here are some questions concerning today’s aliyah:

[A] Which direction from Ararat did generations subsequent to Noach and his family begin to spread out?

[B] What was the name of the region where Noach’s descendants chose to settle?

[C] Go back to chapter 9, verse 1. What was the Holy One’s instruction to post-flood mankind concerning where he was to go? How did the actions of those settling east of Ararat constitute disobedience to this instruction?

[D] What two things did the descendants of Noach decide to build?

[E] What were the elements out of which they determined to build these two things?

[F] What, according to verse 4, were the two motives of the people for the building of these two things?

[G] In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up the word translated “name” in verse 4. Write the Hebrew word, in Hebrew letters with vowel markings, and in English. Then describe the Hebraic word picture that word – in its purest pa’al/qal form – paints for us.

[H] Why was what the people proposed to do sinful?

[I] In verse 7 to whom is the Holy One speaking?

[J] Why is the place where the people sought to build a city and a tower called Bavel [Babel]? What does that word mean?

[K] On your paper, trace out the genealogy of Avram [Abram] from Shem. How many generations was Avram removed from Shem?

[L] Was Shem still alive when Avram was born? When Avram’s father left Ur? When Avram left Haran and went to the land of Kena’an?

2. In today’s haftarah Yeshayahu [Isaiah] presents the healing, restorative words of the Holy One to the generation of Jews who returned to Kena’an, and particularly to Jerusalem, after the Babylonian captivity.

*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters,
and he who has no money; come, buy, and eat;
yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

*Why do you spend money for that which is not bread?
and your labor for that which doesn't satisfy?
Listen [sh'ma] diligently to me,
and eat you that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.
Turn your ear, and come to me; hear [sh'ma] and your soul shall live:*

*and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.
Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples.*

[A] Through Yeshayahu the Holy One calls out to the remnant of His covenant people. What does He say will result if they *sh'ma* [hear, listen, give full attention to, and obey] His words?

[B] The Holy One describes the covenant He promises to make (or renew) with the remnant, and He describes His love [above, it is translated as “mercies”] for them. What kind of covenant does He promise? What kind of love does He say He has for them?

[C] In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up the word used in verse 3 of this passage as “love”, or “mercies”. Write the Hebrew word and its meaning.

[D] What “promise to David” is the Holy One speaking of?

[E] Who is the Holy One saying He has given to the remnant of Israel as a “witness”, a leader, and a commander?

[F] In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up the words translated as “witness”, “leader”, and “commander”. Write the Hebrew words, and describe the word pictures they portray.

3. In today’s reading from I Peter we read a description of the “son of David”, Messiah Y’shua, after his resurrection and ascension:

*. . . Who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven,
angels and authorities and powers being made subject to him*¹⁹.

[A] Who are “angels” and “authorities” made subject to?

[B] In Strong’s, look up the Greek words translated as “angels”, “authorities”, and “powers”. Write each of those Greek words and what you think are appropriate definitions. See if you can find the Hebrew words, and Hebraic concepts, which Kefa, the Hebrew, was thinking when he wrote this letter.

[C] What is the difference between “angels”, “authorities”, and “powers”?

May you see the covenant sign [ot], and know the Holy One’s door is always open to you.

The Rabbi’s son

¹⁹ In the **Orthodox Jewish Brit Chadasha** this verse is interpreted as follows: “. . . *Who is at the right hand of the Holy One, having gone into Shomayim, with malachim and rashuyot (authorities) and gevurot under his feet.*”

Meditation for Today's Study

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

*Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the evil days come, and the years draw near,
When you will say, "I have no pleasure in them;"
Before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are darkened,
and the clouds return after the rain;
In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,
And the strong men will bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few,
And those who look out of the windows are darkened, and the doors will be shut in the street;
When the sound of the grinding is low, and one shall rise up at the voice of a bird,
And all the daughters of music shall be brought low;*

*Yes, they shall be afraid of heights, and terrors will be in the way;
And the almond tree shall blossom, and the khagav shall be a burden,
And desire shall fail; because man goes to his everlasting home,
And the mourners go about the streets:
Before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken,
Or the pitcher is broken at the spring, or the wheel broken at the cistern,
And the dust returns to the eretz as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*

Vanity of vanities, says Kohelet; All is vanity!
*Further, because Kohelet was wise, he still taught the people knowledge.
Yes, he pondered, sought out, and set in order many proverbs.
Kohelet sought to find out acceptable words,
and that which was written blamelessly, words of truth.*

*The words of the wise are like goads; and like nails well fastened
are words from the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.
Furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end;
and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*

*This is the end of the matter. All has been heard.
Fear God, and sh'mar his mitzvot; for this is the whole duty of man.
For God will bring every work into judgment,
with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.*