

Shiur L'Yom Shishi¹

[Friday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Vayishlach:*** **Genesis 35:1 -36:43**
 Haftarah: **Obadiah 19-21**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Matthew 26:42-50**

Purify yourselves and change your clothes; and come, let us go up to Beit-El

[Genesis 35:2-3]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 60:1-8;

This Week's Featured Amidah prayer is Petition # 5, *Rofei* [Healing]

The *Ya'akov Chronicles* unit of Torah is beginning to *wind down*. Beginning next week with parsha ***Vayashev*** the focus of the narratives will begin to shift from Ya'akov to his children – and especially to the ones called *Yosef* [Joseph] and *Y'hudah* [Judah]. But though the best years of Ya'akov's youth are well spent by the time we get to today's aliyah we will find out very quickly today that the prophetic story of the third generation Covenant Partner of the Holy One is by no means over. Even before this day is over Ya'akov will teach us one of the most stunning and wonderful principles of covenant life that we learn from any of the patriarchs.

It will be Yisrael, you see, who will teach and model for us the absolutely essential covenant principle of ***t'shuvah***. Thank Heaven Ya'akov lived. Thank Heaven his legacy of ***t'shuvah*** lives on today. Much more on that subject later in the study. But we have a lot of ground to cover before then.

All My Trials

As was pointed out in the introductory study this week parsha ***Vayishlach*** consists of the chronicles of eight separate trials endured by our ancestor Ya'akov. So far in these studies we have covered four of those trials:

1. at the River *Yabbok*, Ya'akov wrestled all night with an 'angel', and was as a result rendered lame;
2. Ya'akov then had a face-to-face confrontation with his archenemy Esav;
3. at Shechem Ya'akov suffered the abduction and violation of his only daughter, Dinah;

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4. also at Shechem, through the retributive actions of two of his sons, Ya'akov's name became a 'stench in the nostrils' of the peoples dwelling in the land.

In the rather long aliyah we will study today Ya'akov will endure *four more trials*. Here is a listing of those trials:

1. at *Beit-El*, his mother's nursemaid, D'vorah, will die;
2. near *Beit-Lechem* his beloved wife Rachel will also die, while giving birth to his youngest, Binyamin;
3. in the area of the tower of *Edar*, Ya'akov's eldest son Rueven will dishonor his father by cohabitating with Bilhah;
4. shortly after his return home to *Be'er-Sheva* he will suffer the loss of his father Yitzchak, who will die at the age of 180.

After the account of these trials concludes the parsha will wrap up with another genealogy – a lengthy recitation of the lineage of Esav and the many kingdoms that would come forth from his loins. Poor Ya'akov! *Eight* trials in one week's-worth of Torah text? What is with all this *testing*? Ah, Dear Reader, all this testing is part of the Divine Plan – for Ya'akov's life and destiny and for our own.

Understanding the Critical Role of Divine Testing in the Journey of Life

The Holy One will not impose Covenant lifestyle upon any person by force or sheer heredity; Covenant lifestyle absolutely must be *chosen* of a person's free will. For a human being to walk in Covenant with the Holy One in such a way that his walk changes the world for good, as the Holy One has planned, requires the human being in question to view the Covenant walk as an *amazing invitation* and a *wonderful opportunity*, instead of a *burdensome yoke* or an *oppressive obligation*.

The Way of *the With-ness of the Holy One* as I call it must be weighed against alternatives and esteemed as the superior way. And that requires testing. The value of the Covenant must be tested, tried, and found worthy. ***To have a credible testimony of the superiority of His Way to a world that has eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil we simply must have experienced something other than that Way in order to offer up a comparison.*** In other words, when dealing with a fallen world, for us to witness on behalf of the good [i.e. *His Way*] we must be able to contrast that good against the evil [i.e. any other way]. And to do that we simply must have walked – or at least looked – down both of those roads at least a few meters or miles.

Hence the Holy One programs into each of our journeys a series of tests. The tests of the Holy One are designed to reveal which sons and daughters of Avraham are – and which are not - willing to *look beyond what they in their limited understanding and frame of reference perceive as ‘justice’*. The tests of the Holy One are designed to reveal who will – and who will not - *forsake all personal glory and spoil, and walk humbly with Him*. The tests of the Holy One are designed to separate those who will *trust in Him* and give *immediate sh’ma-responses to His Word* – and those who will choose to live another way.

The Importance of the Choices We Make at the Pre-Ordained Cross-Roads Along Life’s Journey

The first component of the Holy One’s plan for the development of Redeemed prodigals like our ancestor Ya’akov into loyal, trustworthy sons and daughters of the Covenant who carry the weight of His glory is to *send such precious ones out on a long journey which will require them to navigate through a series of very important, potentially destiny-shaping crossroads*. At each of these crossroads He calls His Covenant Friends to make critical choices concerning not only *what pathways in life we will and will not follow* but also *what attitudes about the journey and wallpapers of life we will and will not entertain*.

How are you doing on *your* journey? Every crossroads experience you face is a test. What is a *crossroads experience*, you ask? A crossroads experience is any moment in life wherein you have to choose:

1. The way of your culture, your flesh, your friends, or your creed or religion vs. His Way;
2. The attitude of self-promotion and entitlement vs. the attitude of humility and gratitude;
3. The embracing of accusation, blame, and offense vs. the way of love, covering a multitude of sins, forgiveness, and seeking a resolution of any conflicts in line with the Holy One’s desire to *empower* rather than *scar* all people involved.

Every choice you make in connection with a crossroads experience has consequences – for you and every person and place within your appointed sphere of influence. The choices you make at the cross-roads of your life will determine how much glory you will carry. They will also determine the level of joy you will experience. And perhaps most importantly, the choice you make at the crossroads of life will determine the extent to which you leave the people and places you pass through better or worse for your presence– i.e. whether your presence will be for

them healthy or toxic, a blessing or a curse.

Please do not just fly through the crossroads of life like a bat of out of Hell, Dear Reader. Your destiny - and the destinies of many, many others – are at stake. The Holy One already knows exactly what choices we will make and why we will make them. But we don't. We cannot know – because we do not understand in any meaningful sense what the foundational priorities of our lives really are – until we are faced with choices, consider alternatives, and set out on the pathway of life in which we have determined of our own free will to place our trust and cast our lot.

Between the Cross-Roads – The Test of the Straight-a-Ways of Life

Even when we are between crossroads on our journey the Holy One continues to test and try us. His testing procedure when we are between cross-roads involves two primary challenges: first He tests us with *undeserved blessings*; then He turns around and tests us with *fiery trials* like *fatigue*, *delayed blessings*, and even *physical illness/disability* [like Ya'akov's limp and Shaul of Tarsus' thorn-in-the-flesh].

Even the straight-a-ways of Covenant life challenge us with quite an *obstacle course*, *don't they?*

Those who respond to the obstacle course of alternating blessings and fiery trials by running to Him and asking Him to teach them how to *accept* and *deal with* both kinds of tests in *wisdom* and humility are vessels He knows He can use to carry the torch of Covenant in their own generation and to hand off that torch to the next generation.

The Generation of the Thoroughly Un-loveable and Most Unlikely to Succeed

For a moment or two let us lift our eyes and shift our focus beyond Ya'akov and upon the next generation. Rapidly coming of age in Ya'akov's household is a generation of precious but often precocious sons and daughters - you know, guys like Reuven, Sh'mon, Y'hudah, Levi, and so on and so forth down to Yosef.

How effectively will these sons and daughters handle the hand-off of the torch of the Covenant from Ya'akov/Yisrael? Which of Ya'akov's children will the Holy One choose to be the bearer of Divine Light? We will see. *Crossroads by crossroads* and *straight-a-way by straight-a-way* we will see. These things will be decided by the patient, wise, and purposeful testing of the Holy One.

Thus far in the lives of Ya'akov's sons and daughters the choices they have made at the critical crossroads of life do not portend much in the way of promise for Covenant continuation. In light not only of what just happened at Shechem, but also *the rebellious and callous attitude that is developing in the oldest sons and the sons of the maidservants*, Ya'akov has every reason to be concerned about what the future holds for his family.

The generation of Ya'akov's sons and daughters is, at this point, properly dubbed as *the generation of the thoroughly un-loveable and most unlikely to succeed*. After all, when Ya'akov tried to establish for this family a peaceful *sh'tetl*-like co-existence with the residents of the city of Shechem the result was absolute *disaster*. As we learned in the verses we read yesterday the son of the local Kena'ani warlord seduced, abducted, and raped Ya'akov's daughter Dinah. In retaliation, without their father's knowledge or consent, Sh'mon and Levi planned, orchestrated, and carried out mercilessly a *vigilante*-style massacre of the entire male population of Shechem. And every one of Sh'mon and Levi's brothers [with the possible exception of Yosef who was almost certainly too young] followed behind the ringleaders with glee and as Torah describes it *yavozu ha-ir asher time'u ahotam* [they plundered the city that had defiled their sister]. **Genesis 34:27**. More specifically:

Et-tzonam v'et bekaram v'et chamoreyhem
And their sheep, and their cattle, and their donkeys,

v'et asher ba'ir v'et asher b'sadeh lakachu
and whatever else of theirs was in the city or in the field they took for themselves,

V'et-kol-cheylam v'et-kol-tapam v'et-nesheyhem shavu
They also took the women and all the children as captives.

vayavozu v'et kol-asher baBeit
And they plundered, taking everything from the houses.
[Genesis 34:28-29]

Thoroughly un-loveable, these boys. Most *unlikely* to succeed, these embarrassments to the House of Light.

When Ya'akov found out what his sons had done at Shechem he chastised them, of course. Ya'akov knew that his predecessors in the covenant, Avraham and Yitzchak, had always enjoyed a good reputation among – even in times of strained relations with - the Kena'ani. A good reputation with one's neighbors is important in all situations, of course, but it is *especially important* when a person or family finds itself outnumbered by potential enemies at a ration of thousands, or perhaps hundreds of thousands, to one as did Ya'akov.

I suspect in the course of his rebuke of Sh'mon and Levi Ya'akov may have mentioned the old adage my father and mother used to throw at me – and that I now throw at my sons – you know, that old '*two wrongs don't make a right*' thing. But Sh'mon and Levi would not receive Ya'akov's rebuke. They made no apologies whatever. Instead they veritably shouted back in their father's face:

ha-chezionah ya'aseh et-achoteinu

... he treated our sister like she was a prostitute!

[Genesis 34:31]

Ah yes – the dark, husky, brooding voice of the salesman of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is heard on earth once again! We know that self-righteous, hypocritical, whitewashed sepulcher of a voice very well by now, don't we?

It is going to take much, much more than a parental rebuke to soften the hearts and humble the selfish wills of Yosef's brothers now that they have bitten into that fruit and tasted its bloody flesh. They have, you see, enjoyed the spoil of one-sided "moral" judgment. And the taste of that spoil has seemed good to them. They have eaten of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as did Adam and Chava, but unlike that pair they feel no shame whatever. They feel young and strong and ready to take on the world. They are more than willing to shed someone else's blood for what they in their pitifully myopic and self-absorbed frame of reference consider what is 'right' and what is 'just' and what is 'moral' and what is 'fair'.

After all he has seen in his journey of life Ya'akov now knows that the question the Holy One will pose to these young men when He apprehends them – and He will - is not going to have anything to do with whether they are willing to either fight bravely or die nobly for what they deem a right position or a just cause. Ya'akov knows that in the Holy One's eyes there are always far too many young men willing to do that, especially if there is some personal glory or loot make the risk involved begin to look 'worth it'.

Much, much more on the spiritual, behavioral, and relational problems of Ya'akov's sons later. Right now we of the Covenant household have a major crisis to deal with!

***What Does a Son of the Covenant Do
When the Sin of His Household is Exposed?***

Ya'akov's sons have an anger and bloodlust problem, and their sin has now been exposed for all – except themselves - to see. They have shed innocent blood. They have plotted evil. They have used despicable deceptions, defiling the very sign of the Covenant to which they are called with innocent blood. They have murdered mercilessly. They have stolen unashamedly. And what is worse they are, as this aliyah of Torah begins at least, totally unrepentant. They arrogantly applied a harsh standard of moral judgment to the men, women and children of Shechem – but they apparently consider themselves exempt from that standard.

Ya'akov's sons have thereby made the name of Ya'akov – and since Ya'akov is the image-bearer of the Holy One, the name of the Holy One as well - odious in the land. Who in their right mind would want to live near or have dealings with a people who insist on judging you but will not judge themselves?

As a consequence of this debacle Ya'akov has to be considering running away once again – just as he ran away from Esav back in Genesis 28 and the way he ran away from Laban in Genesis 31. But *where is he to go?* He cannot not go back to Laban's house. And he knows better than to take Esav up on his offer to sojourn with him at Se'ir. Furthermore I doubt seriously he relishes the idea of showing up at his father's house in Be'er-sheva after over 20 years and having to start the family reunion by saying, "*Uh, Dad, I need to tell you something before we sit down to the great reunion feast we have both been looking forward to for so long. You remember that little village of Kena'ani at Shechem? You'll never guess what your grandsons just did there . . .*"

Oh, no, that will not do at all. So what exactly is a *son of the covenant* – the image-bearer of the Creator of Heaven and Earth in his generation - supposed to do in such a dire situation?

CROSS-ROADS TEST coming!

We can be pretty sure what the '*old*' Ya'akov would have done in such a situation. The man who spent 20 years in exile in Laban's world hiding out from his big brother's temper – would have simply *turned tail and run* as fast as he could go. He would have adopted the familiar role of *fugitive*.

But the old Ya'akov no longer exists. The man who bought a plot of ground and set up a *mizbe'ach* outside Shechem is a new man. He is now *Yisrael*. He is a man who, because he has now embraced the covenant with the Creator of the Universe, has realized he can wrestle with men and with angels and prevail. He is a man who has, because the God of his grandfather Avraham and his father

Yitzchak is with him, come face to face with his worst nightmares – and his own demons - and has *survived*.

We should not therefore expect the man that Ya’akov is now to respond to the pressure as he would have just a few months or years ago. The Holy One has been processing and maturing him, to prepare him to take his place as the covenant partner – vassal – in the Avrahamic covenant. The process has been *gradual*, of course, and has often been *quite painful*. But the Holy One has been faithful to apply just the right blend of intense pressure on the one hand and wonderful blessing on the other hand to bring Yisrael/Ya’akov through the crucible.

So before picking up stakes this time Yisrael/Ya’akov *pauses*. He does not this time move on fight or flight impulse. Neither does he seek - much less rely upon - advice from well-meaning friends, relatives, or clergymen. He does not weigh the options, engage in feasibility studies or cost-benefit analysis and then choose what seems *to his mind* a prudent course of conduct. He waits. And for what does he wait? He waits for *instructions from the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and now of Ya’akov*. He knows by now what he needs. He needs a *God-encounter*. He needs a *real-time* word from the Holy One. Perhaps, just perhaps, our ancestor will learn to embrace and live by the *sh’ma* lifestyle² after all. Perhaps all of us will. *Selah*.

Ya’akov’s Fourth God Encounter

The Holy One does not disappoint our ancestor. At this low point in the life of this new creation, Yisrael, the Holy One appears to him, and tells Yisrael it is time for him to make *t’shuvah*, and to return to *Beit-El* [Bethel]. It seems Ya’akov/Yisrael has some unfinished business at that location. Beit-El was of course the location where the *mizbeach* was supposed to have been set up in the first place. Ya’akov had set up a *mizbeach* at Shechem on his own volition, without asking the Holy One. That was a Ya’akov thing to do, an action of impulse.

The Holy One reminds Yisrael of the vow Ya’akov made the last time he was at that place. **Genesis 28:20-22**. It is now time for Ya’akov/Yisrael to perform what Ya’akov had promised - to build [Hebrew *asah*] a *mizbeach* at the location of the

² The *sh’ma* lifestyle involves intimate relationship with the Holy One with a *bridal* orientation. It means not acting out our desires and what we think is right and then expecting or asking the Holy One to bless it [remember, *there is a way that seems right to man - but it leads to destruction*], nor living according to doctrines taught by theologians, or by what some council dictates as ‘orthodoxy’, but living in response to *the Holy One’s words* – as given in the Torah, which is our *ketubah*, or *bridal covenant*, as those words are explained in the prophets, the writings, and the B’rit Chadasha, and as they are fine-tuned by direct words of revelation in the form of such God-encounters as each of us may experience in our lives.

rock that he set up as a pillar.

The *mizbe'ach* Yisrael would build at *Beit-El* [remember, this site is believed to be Temple Mount in Jerusalem], on the other hand, would be a *sh'ma* response. On that site, according to tradition, and only on that site³, would Yisrael's descendants make *korban* [what we in English mistakenly refer to as 'offerings'], bring first fruits and "tithes", and relive the experience of Yitzchak at the *akeida* – having a substitute provided from heaven – a Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world.

Here is how Torah describes Ya'akov/Yisrael's fourth God-encounter:

Vayomer Elohim el-Ya'akov kum aleh Veyt-El

The Holy One said to Ya'akov, 'Arise, and make the ascent to Beit-El.

v'shev-sham va'aseh-sham mizbeach

Remain there and make an altar to [Me],

L'El ha-nir'eh eleycha

the God who appeared to you

bevorchacha mipenei Esav achicha

when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.'

[Genesis 35:1]

Beit-El was just a few miles South of Shechem. If the *Beit-El* referenced here is modern-day Beit-El, the distance is 19 miles. If the Beit-El referenced here is, as the sages have long taught, Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the distance the family would have to travel would have been 32 miles. In either event, one traveling from Shechem to Beit-El must ascend all the way – a rise of approximately 1,000 feet in elevation. It is definitely an uphill climb. But we have to go. We're movin' on up.

Movin' On Up

Ya'akov called his family together and gave them the news. Please permit a paraphrase. It might have gone like this⁴:

Yes, Beloved, we are leaving Shechem [or what is left of it].

³ The revelation at Sinai made it clear that there was to be only one altar – any other altar constitutes idolatry – and only one place to make *korban*, bring first fruits and tithes. That would be the 'place where the Holy One your God chooses, from among all your tribes, to place His Name'. See Deuteronomy 12-14 – in the parsha called *Re'eh* - for more specific details.

⁴ The words I have written are simply a paraphrase of what the author imagines Ya'akov/Yisrael might have said to his family members, provided as an aid to interpretation of and perspective on the passage. The author does not in any way intend, by this paraphrase, to 'add to' the Scripture.

But the reason we are leaving is not because the massacre of the Shechemi has made us a ‘stench in the nostrils’ of the Kena’ani.

Nor is the reason we are living because they might ally themselves against us and avenge what we did to the Shechemi. No, that is not it at all.

*I have spent a good part of my life fleeing –
running away from one threat or another.*

But I am not fleeing any more.

We are leaving, but we are not running away. We are a family on a mission.

We have an appointment with the Creator of the Universe.

He has summoned us to meet with Him.

And we need to make ourselves ready.

Those words are not in the Torah. But something like them was surely in the heart of Ya’akov/Yisrael our father. For here is the way Torah records for us what Ya’akov/Yisrael told those who traveled with him:

Ha-nechar asher hasiru et-elohei b’tochechem

‘Get rid of the idolatrous artifacts that you have.

V’hitahoru v’hachalifu simloteychem

Purify yourselves and change your clothes.

V’nakumah v’na’aleh Beit-El

We are setting out and going up to Beth El.

v’e’eseh-sham mizbe’ach l’El

There I will build an altar to God

Ha-oneh oti b’yom tzarati

who answered me in my time of trouble,

vayehi imadi b’derech asher halachti

and who has been with me on the journey that I have taken.’

[Genesis 35:2-3]

Yisrael/Ya’akov now has a word from the Holy One – a Divine Instruction – to build a **mizbeach** at Beit-El. Interestingly, this is the first time the Holy One has told anyone to build an altar of any kind. In each previous case the building of an altar has been something the builder came up with on his own.

The **mizbeach** at Beit-El, like the brazen altar of the *Mish’kan* [Tabernacle] we will read about when we study Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, and like the corresponding altar of the *Beit HaMikdash* [Temple] which we will read about later in the TaNaKh, will be vastly different than other altars men have built.

Oh, did I mention that men *love to build altars*? Did I mention that building altars makes men *feel religious*. But if men build altars because the process makes them feel religious, whose altars are they that are built? They are man's altars, built for man's purposes. That is not the kind of altar Ya'akov, or Moshe, or Sh'lomo, are going to build. The altars they are going to build will be the Holy One's *mizbeach*, built according to Divine Instruction, for Divine purposes. As we shall see there is indeed a *world of difference*.

A New Pathway Opens To Us: The Pathway of T'shuvah

Each of the patriarchs teaches us certain invaluable lessons about the secrets of successful God-man interaction. Avraham taught us that men do not *earn* a relationship with the Creator of the Universe either by *doing great things* or by *seeking after God*. He taught us that it is the Holy One Who *chooses* us, *pursues* us, *draws* us, *calls* us - and even *empowers* us to respond appropriately.

The chronicles of Avraham's life have made it clear to us if we were paying attention that *the foundation for any meaningful interaction with the Creator has to be sh'ma-ing the voice of the Holy One*. If we will *sh'ma* His Voice, become familiar with it, and hunger for it, then He can proceed to train us in higher level aspects of covenant relationship - things like **YIELDING TO HIS HAND** and **SURRENDERING TO HIS WILL** and **TEACHING HIS WAYS TO OUR CHILDREN AND PASSING ON HIS BLESSING FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION**.

Avraham also taught us that there is nothing in a man that can merit this – that it is solely a *gift of the Holy One*.

Yitzchak in turn taught us that people who have entered into covenant relationship with God on HIS terms have, by virtue of that covenant relationship, a very special privilege – namely the privilege of FERVENT PRAYER. Yitzchak taught us to '*atar* – i.e., to cry out to the Holy One with *the helpless cry of a contrite and humble spirit*. He taught us the entreaty of *complete brokenness* - the kind of *desperate baring of one's soul before the Holy One in prayer* that David would later perfect for us, and which more than anything else would make the sweet Psalmist of Israel a '*man after the Holy One's own heart*'⁵.

What about Ya'akov. It is now his turn on Torah's stage to teach us important principles of how to walk out a covenant relationship with the Creator of the

⁵ See II Samuel 21:14, II Samuel 24:25.

Universe in real life.

What important lesson will Ya'akov teach us – if we have eyes to see and ears to hear? Hold onto your hats – this one will *blow your mind*. Ya'akov is about to let us know that *sinless perfection is not required* – or for that matter even *expected* – of us by the Holy One. Ya'akov is about to show us that whenever we have strayed from the Holy One's Words, His Will, His Ways, and His plan for our lives, and have instead *sh'ma*-ed the voice of another, or yielded to our own selfish desires . . . **THERE IS STILL HOPE FOR US!** Ya'akov is about to teach us, you see, that an essential part of covenant relationship with the Creator of the Universe is that He provides us with an opportunity to 'fix' our mistakes by making *t'shuvah*.

What Ya'akov is about to teach us is a **very important lesson** indeed – for all of us. So let us go slowly, and explore very carefully the circumstances under which we are being taught this critical spiritual principle.

Class Is Now In Session!

The Holy One has called Ya'akov/Yisrael to return to Beit-El, where The Holy One first apprehended him over twenty years previously. Ya'akov, I am certain, remembers the holiness of Beit-El - where, at least in his dream, angels were seen by him ascending and descending a stairway to heaven. At the time, Ya'akov exclaimed in awe:

"Surely the Holy One is in this place, and I didn't know it."

He was afraid, and said,

"Mah noreh [How dreadful] is ha-makom hazeh [this place]

This is none other than Beit-Elohim [God's house],

and this is Sha'ar Ha-shomayim [the gate of heaven]."

Ya'akov knows he cannot take his sons to that holy place with innocent *blood on their hands*, with *Kena'an'i clothing and jewelry* adorning them, and with *foreign gods (from the household of Laban, as well as from the plundered city of Shechem)* in their hearts. Therefore, in the first detailed account of a community-wide *t'shuvah*, Ya'akov/Yisrael calls upon all of his children to leave the dominion of death, where bloodshed and false gods and the jewelry of the Kena'an'i had defiled them, to undergo *mikveh* (our Bibles explain this euphemistically, stating that he told them *v'hitahoru* - i.e. *purify yourselves*), to *put on clean garments*, and to *arise and walk in the newness of life*.

What did this first instance of *t'shuvah* look like? Read it for yourselves:

Vayitnu el-Ya'akov et kol-elohei ha-nechar asher b'yadam

They gave to Ya`akov all the foreign gods which were in their hands,

v'et-ha-nezamim asher b'ozneyhem

and the rings that were in their ears;

v'yitmon otam Ya'akov tachat ha-elah asher im-Shechem

and Ya`akov buried them under the oak which was by Shechem.

[Genesis 35:4]

There are, you understand, certain things we *cannot take with us to Beit-El*. You have many such things in your home, your life, and your heart. And alas so do I. The sooner we let go of them the better. They belong along with the heap of wood, hay and stubble of presumptuous religious stuff, and with the foul-smelling corpses, we leave behind at our personal Shechems of life.

So now learn from our ancestor Ya'akov. Examine your *home*. Examine your *bookshelves* and *desk drawers*. Examine your *closets*. Inventory your *refrigerator* and your *pantry*.

Examine *the artwork* on your walls and mantles. Examine the books and magazines by your nightstand and on your coffee table. Examine your *computer's hard-drive*. Examine your internet browser's 'history' log. Examine your *check register* and your *credit card billing statement*.

Examine *the works of your hands*. Consider *the words of your mouth*. Carefully scrutinize the *ideologies* and *philosophies* and *attitudes* that define your thought life.

Most of all, examine your *heart*. Take inventory of whatever *offenses*, and *grudges*, and *prejudices*, and *resentment* and *bitterness* and *judgmental attitudes* you have allowed to take up residence there.

Once the inventory is complete, and the Holy One stirs in you a desire to return to Him, just *follow the roadmap established by Ya'akov avinu*. As Ya'akov/Yisrael said to his family:

V'hitahoru

*Make yourselves **tahor** [to shine with spiritual purity]*

v'hachalifu simloteychem

and slip on garments

Let us pause for a moment and look at these two 'road map' instructions one at a

time. The first of our father Ya'akov's instructions, *v'hitahoru*, literally means 'and make yourselves **tahor**.' Hmmmmn. *What meaneth this?*

Tahor⁶ is a Hebrew word often translated into English imperfectly as 'clean' or 'pure'. That is a *good start*, of course. The English concepts of 'cleanliness' and 'purity' are, however, only a *very small part* of what the Hebrew word **tahor** entails. The word picture presented by the word **tahor** is that of a *covenant sign/symbol* [tav], serving as a *source of inspiration, illumination and life-enhancing respiration* [hey], of the *King who steps off of his throne to interact with his subjects in the real world* [resh].

The **tahor** state is not a matter of *aesthetics*; it is, instead, a matter of *functionality*. The focus is not on mere cleanliness, or purity, but upon *fitness for intended purpose* - in other words, **Divine usability**. Hebraically, you see, *cleanliness* and *purity* are merely *means to an end* – not by any means an end to themselves.

The state of **tahor** is perfectly reflected by Y'shua in the Garden of *Gat-Shemaneh*, stepping into the darkness of the night alone, falling on his face in the darkness, emptying himself of his own desires and self-will his desire to please himself or men, and declaring ' . . . **nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done**'. **Matthew 26:39**. It is that state where our soul cries out such things as:

'I will drink whatever cup you give me to drink, and no other cup', and

'I will eat whatever you give me to eat, and no other substance', and

'I will work when you say work and I will rest when you say rest', and

'I will speak what you give me to speak, I will fall silent the moment you so much as hint that I should shush', and

'I will walk where you say to walk, and I will run where you say to run, and if I become too weary or too old to walk or run along the way I will crawl if I have to in order to get to where you want me to go'.

The book of Leviticus will teach us much, much more about the specifics of what '**make yourselves tahor**' means in the context of corporate covenant relations with the Holy One. For now, however, all we really need to know about the calling of our ancestor Ya'akov to "**make [our]selves tahor**" are the following two things.

⁶ *Tahor* is *tav, hey, resh*, Strong's Hebrew word #2891. Strong's suggests that this should be/written as **taher**, but it is generally pronounced *tah-hohr*.

First, we should recognize that when we have sinned, and have strayed from the will and ways of the Holy One, the state of *tahor* is *the state to which we are Divinely programmed to aspire*.

Would you like to stop and *meditate on* that statement for a little while? I hope so. It is indeed a *radical statement* – and a potentially *life-transforming truth*. You see, Dear Reader, this means that the Divine-programming the Holy One has done on the hard-drives of all who embrace a covenant relationship with Him means that we *need not ever despair* because of our sin. As long as there is breath within us, we can never *sin too grievously*, we can never *mess up too badly*, and we can never *stray too far from our Divine Calling* to be restored to intimate relationship the Holy One.

The Holy One does not expect us to be *sinless examples*; he expects us, instead, to be *redeemable, restorable, reusable vessels*. And so, just as the Holy One has pre-programmed our physical hearts to repetitively beat and our lungs to repetitively breathe, so has He programmed the spirits of all those who embrace covenant relationship with Him to aspire to return to and renew the *tahor* state over and over and over again.

Secondly, we should recognize that responding to this pre-programmed aspiration to the *tahor* state of restored functionality and usefulness to the Holy One is one of our most important covenantal privileges. What an awesome thing is the Divine Invitation of the Creator of the Universe to take the first step toward being made new, being made whole, and being made usable again to the Divine Plan.

Yield to the desire planted deep within you to be made *tahor*. Take a first step in that direction, however small. You will be awed and amazed at what happens next.

The other ‘road map’ instruction given to us by our ancestor Ya’akov is *v’hachalifu simloteychem* – usually translated into English as ‘*and change your garments*’ [KJV, NASB], or ‘*and change your clothes*’ [NIV]. What are we to make of this instruction? Are we to shed whatever clothes we were wearing when we sinned the way a garden snake sheds last year’s skin? Are we to don a new set of clothes each time we present ourselves for inspection by or communion with the Holy One? What kind of ‘*garments*’ is our ancestor Ya’akov talking about?

Again, the common English translations fail to convey the deepest levels of meaning hidden in plain view in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew phrase ‘*simloteychem*’ does not mean ‘*your garments*’ in the generic sense of whatever

outfit of clothes a person may choose to wear at a given moment. Let us dig deeper, and find out what is really involved.

The underlying Hebrew noun in this phrase is *simplah*⁷. This word literally means ‘outer image’ or ‘surface likeness’. It refers to *what other human beings see when they look at you*. It refers to *the person we appear to be* to others.

The first usage of the underlying noun, *simplah*, is found in Genesis 9:23, where it is used to describe the garment with which Noah’s sons Shem and Yafet discreetly covered Noah’s nakedness after he had been exposed and dishonored by Cham. What does this obscure reference have to do with what Ya’akov is telling us to do in connection with the making of *t’shuvah*, you ask?

Think about it. Cham had found Noah passed out from too much wine and uncovered, and had gone out presenting to the world and posterity the image of his father as a man who was ‘washed up’ - a useless old drunkard to be *used for one’s selfish purposes, scorned, mocked, abused* [or pitied depending upon one’s predisposition], and virtually *discarded as human waste*. And, but for the intervention of Shem and Yafet, that is exactly the image of Noah that would have remained for the world to see. Shem and Yafet however refused to let the story end with the world looking upon Noah *that way*. To them, you see, despite being *temporarily sidetracked from his great calling in life* by reason of a one-time overindulgence in wine, Noah *was still, and would ever remain, the trusted friend and covenant partner of the Holy One*. To them, Noah was a ‘*just man, blameless in his generation*’, who not only ‘*found grace*’ in the Holy One’s eyes long ago, but actually *walked with Him* year after year, through good times and bad.

The *outer image* that Shem and Yafet desired for the world to have of Noah was not the image of an *old fool*, but was instead the image of an *honored father* – not merely of them personally, but of many nations. Shem and Yafet apparently actually believed that notwithstanding this embarrassing episode, Noah could and would *wake up*, could and would *overcome the deleterious effects of the wine he had drunk*, and could and would *resume his appointed role as a primary guiding force* in the new world the Holy One was establishing on the earth. And so Shem and Yafet discreetly went to their father’s tent and placed over Noah a *simplah* – an *outer image or likeness which presented to the world a true picture of what lay at the essence of the man Noah was created and prophetically empowered by the Holy One to be*.

⁷ *Simplah* is *sin, mem, lamed, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #8071.

When Ya'akov tells us “*v'hachalifu simloteychem*”, therefore, he is not merely telling us that when we make *t'shuvah* we should put on a new suit of clothes. He is, instead, telling us to put off our old image or likeness, and to *let the image or likeness in which the world sees us be made fresh and new*. Ya'akov is telling us to let the Holy One slip a *simlah* over us - one that *covers* our sin and our nakedness. Do not therefore ever receive or accept for yourself, for your future, or for posterity any negative image or likeness that the world - or any individual in it - may have of you. Put on a *new simlah* – the image of you that appears in the loving eyes of your Covenant Partner in Heaven – the One who knows your *true potential and value*.

It is time, Beloved. It is time to arise, and go up to Beit-El, in *t'shuvah* – the way our ancestor Ya'akov taught us.

Ya'akov's Fifth God-Encounter – At Beit-El

Once Ya'akov and family reached *Beit-El* in response to the Divine instruction, the Holy One ‘appeared’ to Ya'akov, and re-affirmed him in his new identity as Yisrael.

Vayomer-lo Elohim shimcha Ya'akov

And God said to him, 'Your name is Ya'akov

lo-yikare shimcha od Ya'akov ki im-Yisra'el yihyeh shmecha

But your name will not be only Ya'akov; you will also have Israel as a name.'

vayikra et-shmo Yisra'el

[God thus] named him Israel.

[Genesis 35:10]

The Holy One *did not stop there*. He made the long climb up the dusty mountain roads well worth the trip. Because next, He pulled back the curtains of Heaven a little more, and revealed to Ya'akov/Yisrael another aspect of His own Divine Essence – His identity as “***El Shaddai***” – the *All Powerful, All Sufficient, All Nourishing One*. The Holy One said to him:

Ani El-Shaddai⁸

I am God Almighty.

[Genesis 35:11(a)]

Then as He had done for Adam and Chava and for Noach at the institution of a

⁸ The Holy One identified Himself to Avraham by this name to in Genesis 17:1. In the course of the ‘stairway’ dream of Genesis 28, the Holy One used this name, rather than the covenant name *yod, hey, vav, hey*, to introduce Himself to the youthful Ya'akov for the first time.

new era, the Holy One spoke creatively and prophetically the Divine instruction to *p'ru* ["be fruitful"] and to *u'r'vu* ["multiply"]. He thus empowered Yisrael/Ya'akov to sire *Benyamin*, and to found a *nation* [Yisrael] and a community of nations [those nations who will align themselves with Yisrael – known in Biblical terms as 'sheep' nations]. Here is the precise wording of the creative, prophetic pronouncement the Holy One released over Yisrael/Ya'akov at Beit-El:

p'reh ur'veh

Be fruitful and increase.

goy ukehal goyim yihyeh mimeka

A nation and a community of nations will come into existence from you.

umelachim mechalatzeycha yetze'u

Kings will be born from your loins.

V'et-ha-eretz asher natati l'Avraham ul'Yitzchak lecha etnenah

I will give you the land I gave to Avraham and unto Yitzchak

Ul'zar'acha achareycha eten et-ha-aretz

And will give it unto your seed which comes after you."

These declarations of the Holy One over Ya'akov/Yisrael are like the words "***Let there be light***". They have creative and prophetic effect. Not one of the words will return to the Holy One 'void', without accomplishing the purposes of the Holy One in the earth. Ya'akov will *never be the same again*.

Esav and Edom

The writer of Torah concludes the section of Torah we know and study as parsha *V'yishlach* concludes with a lengthy discussion of the *toldot*⁹ of Esav. ***Here is how the genealogical section begins:***

V'eleh toldot Esav hu Edom

⁹ According to Strong's concordance this word can mean such varied things as *descendants, results, proceedings, generations, genealogies, begettings, account, and/or history*. The sages offer two definitions of the word *toldot*. Some say that the noun *toldot* refers to one's **progeny**. By this they mean that a person lives on, trans-generationally, primarily through the lives and *mitzvot* of his or her *biological children* and *spiritual children* - i.e. the individuals whom he has taught the ways of the Torah, and who thus perpetuate the person's influence.

Others say that the term *toldot* should also be deemed to refer to **the chronicles of one's life and experiences**. When a person's life is full of inner meaning, these sages say, even if he or she leaves no children [biological and spiritual] the mere accounts and chronicles of his life, and the long-lasting effects of his or her interactions with the Holy One and with the world, are so powerful that they yield inspiration and revelation for all who come after him or her.

What the sages are suggesting is that there is in a very real Hebraic sense an eternal life prepared for us in the *present physical world* as well. We live on in this world, say the sages, through our *toldot*.

And these are the generations of Esau, also known as Edom.

Esav lakach et-nashav mibenot Kena'an

Esau took wives from the daughters of Canaan . . .

[Genesis 36:1-2(a)]

Perhaps the most striking thing we glean from the lengthy listing of Esav's wives and descendants that follows is the knowledge that from Esav will devolve exactly 12 tribes – an exact parallel to the number of tribes we previously learned devolved from Yish'mael¹⁰ and to the number of tribes we know are going to devolve from Ya'akov.

We now know that since the call of Avraham in Genesis 12, a number of nations, all descended from Shem - the son of Noach who was prophetically declared to be pre-eminent over Kena'an in Genesis 9:26-27 - have been created. Three of these nations evolved as a result of Avraham's marriage to Sarah. First of all, from Yitzchak devolved the 12-tribe confederacy of **Yisrael**. Secondly, from **Yish'mael** devolved a corresponding 12-tribe confederacy to which Torah does not give a specific name. Now we learn that from Esav devolved another corresponding 12-tribe confederacy known as **Edom**.

In addition to these 36 'new' Semitic tribes are the 'older' groups of Semitic peoples - [a] the family of Laban, [b] the Ammoni and Moavi [descendants of Lot, Avraham's nephew], and [c] the six tribes descended from Avraham's marriage to K'turah¹¹, of whom Midyan is the most influential.

The descendants of Shem's brothers were of course **Cham** (i.e. Ham) and **Yafet** (i.e. Japheth)¹². Torah made a point to tell us: *“These three were Noach's sons, and from them, the whole world was repopulated.”* **Genesis 9:19**. **Kena'an** was the son of Cham. Because Cham dishonored his father Noach declared: *“Cursed is Kena'an! He shall be a slave's slave to his brothers!”* **Genesis 9:25**. The plan of the Holy One for the descendants of Shem and Yafet to take pre-eminence over Kena'an, as announced through the prophecy of Noach in Genesis 9:26-27, is proceeding apace. The land of Kena'an is being surrounded by potential enemies from the

¹⁰ The *toldot* of Yishma'el are listed for us in Genesis 25:11 ff. The twelve sons of Yish'mael were: **Nebayoth** (Ishmael's first-born), **Kedar**, **Adbiel**, **Mibsam**, **Mishma**, **Duma**, **Masa**, **Chadad**, **Tema**, **Yetur**, **Nafish** and **Kedmah**.

¹¹ The *toldot* of Avraham through his marriage to Keturah are listed for us in Genesis 25:1-4. Keturah bore Avraham six sons: **Zimran** (whose descendants populated the area around Mecca in present day Saudi Arabia), **Yakshan**, **Medan** (believed to be associated with the city of Medina, in present day Saudi Arabia), **Midyan** (i.e., Midian, the nation of Yitro, with whom Moshe would sojourn, and from whom he would take a wife), **Yishbak**, and **Shuach** (whose descendants populated the Western areas of what is now Saudi Arabia).

¹² The prophecy over Yafet was that he would expand, but would dwell in the tents of Shem. **Genesis 9:27**.

house of Shem. The strongest nation descended from Cham, however, was not Kena'an – it was Egypt. Before Kena'an can be completely subjugated the stronger cousins of the Kena'ani living in the land of the pyramids are going to have to be brought low. And that, Dear Reader, is going to take awhile. So stay tuned – the process of bringing the Chamites of Egypt low will begin next week.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In the midst of community-wide *t'shuvah* the Holy One showed Himself mighty. He caused the Fear of the Holy One to set in like a fog all across the area, on even the totally pagan population. No one pursued them. No one challenged them. No one accosted them. No blood-avenger appeared. The Holy One allows no one to interfere with His children at such times. He is very jealous over us when we are casting off our sin and seeking Him.

[A] According to verse 1 of chapter 35 what two things did the Holy One instruct Ya'akov to do at Beit-El, and in what order?

[B] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the words translated as "go [up]", "make" and "dwell" [KJV] in verse 1. Write the Hebrew words and their definitions.

[C] Get out your Bible Atlas and trace the route between Shechem and Beit-El. What is the terrain like between those two locations?

[D] Ya'akov took the Holy One's message of *t'shuvah* [i.e. repentance and return to righteousness through entering into or restoring covenant with the Holy One] to two groups of people. Of what two groups did Ya'akov demand *t'shuvah*?

[E] In Strong's concordance and Gesenius' lexicon look up the word translated in verse 2 as "**household**". Write the Hebrew word and its meaning.

[F] Who do you think made up the "other group" of which Ya'akov demanded *t'shuvah*? [**Hint**: Read verse 29 of chapter 34 and verse 8 of chapter 35].

[G] List the things Ya'akov instructed the people to do in preparation for making *t'shuvah*.

[H] In verse 3 Ya'akov describes the Holy One to those in his family and his acquaintance. This may be the first instance of anyone "witnessing" recorded in Torah. How did Ya'akov describe the Holy One?

[I] As the people made *t'shuvah*, denounced their idols, put off the clothing of the pagan society in which they lived, and began to walk in obedience to the Holy One's directives, what was the response of the surrounding people?

2. In verses 9-12 of Genesis chapter 35 the Holy One *appears* to Ya'akov/Yisrael - not just a dream or a voice this time, but a *visible* manifestation.

[A] In Strong's and Gesenius look up the word translated as "appeared" in

verse 9. Write the Hebrew word and its meaning.

[B] The first thing the Holy One did was to reaffirm what Ya'akov had been told at *Peniel* - that his name had been changed in Heaven. What was the new name and what did it mean?

[C] In verse 10 the Holy One finally answers the inquiry Ya'akov/Yisrael posed in chapter 32 verse 29 - "*tell me, I pray of You, Your name*". Why do you think the Holy One waited until after the events of chapters 33, 34, and the first part of chapter 35 to reveal His name?

[D] The first time the Holy One appeared to Ya'akov at Beit-El [chapter 28, verse 13] He introduced Himself as "*The Holy One, the God of Avraham, and of your father Yitzchak*". How does He name Himself in today's passage, and how (and why) is that name different, though we know the Holy One never changes?

[E] What instructions and promises does the Holy One give to Ya'akov/Yisrael in connection with this encounter? How do the promises differ from [and how are they like] the promises the Holy One made in chapter 28, verses 13-15?

[F] What is the name of the only son born to Ya'akov/Yisrael in the land of Kana'an? What does that name mean?

[G] Where did Rachel die, and when?

[H] Where was Ya'akov/Yisrael reunited with his father, Yitzchak?

3. In chapter 36, with which parsha *Vayishlach* concludes, Torah tells us the lineage of Esav and the early history of the nation of Edom.

[A] How many sons did Esav have, and what were their names?

[B] Where (geographically, in relation to Hevron) did Esav settle and begin to build the nation of Edom?

[C] Which of Esav's sons fathered Amalek?

[D] In verses 20-29 Torah gives us a look into the ancient people group descended from Seir the Horite. Look up Seir in Smith's Bible Dictionary and describe who/what Seir had/has to do with Israel.

4. In today's haftarah Ovadiyah states how the Holy One will divide the land in *the Day of the Holy One*.

*Those of the South will possess the mountain of Esav,
and those of the lowland, the Ph'lishtim.*

*They will possess the field of Efrayim, and the field of Shomron.
Binyamin will possess Gil'ad. The captives of this host of the children of Yisra'el,
who are among the Kana'anim, will possess even to Tzarfat;
and the captives of Y'rushalayim, who are in Sefarad [Spain],
will possess the cities of the Negev.*

*Saviors will go up on Mount Tziyon to judge the mountains of Esav,
and the kingdom will be the Holy One's.*

[A] Who, according to the prophet, will possess what areas?

[B] Who are [i] “those of the South”, [ii] “those of the lowland”, [iii] “the captives of this host of the children of Yisra’el, who are among the Kena’anim”, and [iv] “the captives in Y'rushalayim, who are in *Sefarad*”?

[C] Where are [i] the “*field of Efrayim*”, [ii] the “*field of Shomron*”, [iii] Tzarfat, [iv] Sefarad, and [v] the “*cities of the Negev*”?

[D] What, according to the prophet, will occur on Mt. Zion?

5. In today’s concluding B’rit Chadasha reading for parsha **Vayishlach** we are back again with Messiah in the dark night of *Gat-shemani* [the olive presses]. He has called us to be His **shomer** [guard, watch-keeper], and to **daven** [pray] with Him. But alas, our eyes are heavy.

*Again, a second time he went away, and prayed, saying,
"My Father, if this cup can't pass away from me unless I drink it,
your desire be done."*

*He came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.
He left them again, went away,
and prayed a third time, saying the same words. Then he came to his talmidim,
and said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest. Behold, the hour is at hand,
and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.
Arise, let's be going. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand."*

[A] How if at all does Y’shua’s second prayer (verse 42) differ from his first (verse 39)?

[B] In what state does Y’shua find His talmidim in when He returns from His second shift of prayer?

[C] After returning from his third “watch” of prayer Y’shua awakens His sleeping talmidim. Before He awakens them, however, He tells them, according to our text, to “*sleep on now, and take your rest*”. What do you think it means that He says, in one breath “sleep on”, and “*take your rest*”, and in the same breath says “*Arise*”, and “*let's be going*”. How can one “sleep on”, yet “arise”, and “take one’s rest”, yet “be going”?

[D] When Messiah tells his *talmidim* to arise, what is the reason? [What does He tell them is about to occur?]

*May the entire community of the Holy One make t'shuvah in our day,
as in the day of Ya'akov/Yisrael.
And May He appear to us as He appeared to Ya'akov/Yisrael at Beit-El.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 60:1-8

*O Holy One, you have rejected us.
You have broken us down. You have been angry.
Restore us, again.
You have made the land tremble. You have torn it.
Mend its fractures, for it quakes.*

*You have shown your people hard things.
You have made us drink the wine that makes us stagger.
You have given a banner to those who fear you,
That it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah.*

*So that your Beloved may be delivered,
Save with your right hand, and answer us.*

The Holy One has spoken from his sanctuary:

"I will triumph.

***I will divide Shechem, and measure out the valley of Sukkot.
Gil`ad is mine, and Menasheh is mine.
Efrayim also is the defense of my head. Y'hudah is my scepter.
Mo'av is my wash basin. I will throw my shoe on Edom.
I shout in triumph over Peleshet."***