

DAY FOURTEEN

“SNARE AVOIDANCE”

PSALM 119:105-112

Sometimes the interconnectivity of the Internet, with e-mails and articles to read, has a profound influence on our thoughts. Approaching the Omer Count this morning, having thought through the selected verses last night, I already knew that “lighted paths” would be a thing to pursue. But then as I glanced at some morning communiqués that arrived since yesterday, and read some suggested articles, my focus shifted when I took the time to Count the Omer and meditate again upon the selected portion of Psalm 119. Even though I am wary of some of the obvious snares to avoid in the world, the fact remains that they come in so many delectable packages, served up for our flesh to consume. Still, when reminded in this meditation today that **His testimonies are to be the joy of my heart**, the duty to consider other testimonies before Him, can be a challenge. But before reading a few of my thoughts on worldly snares, please reflect on the following Psalms for your personal edification:

PSALM 67:1-7

For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. God be gracious to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

PSALM 119:105-112

Nun. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn and I will confirm it, that I will keep Your righteous ordinances. I am exceedingly afflicted; revive me, O LORD, according to Your word. O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your ordinances. My life is continually in my hand, yet I do not forget Your law. The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not gone astray from Your precepts. I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy of my heart. I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, *even* to the end.

COUNTING THE OMER

Let's face it: routines are just a part of life. Waking up in the morning, and following a basic pattern for preparing yourself for whatever you do with the balance of your day, is normal. Most people have a discipline that they follow in order to go through all of the necessary bodily functions, as they transition from slumber to interactivity with others.

Since the advent of the computer and the Information Age, immediate access to data is simply a click away. Many have replaced the thump of the newspaper on the driveway, with pushing the power button on a computer, as the coffee percolates and the juices begin to flow. Then in a habitual desire to know "what is happening" in the world—because we believe that instant knowledge of what is "going on" is critical to our "being informed"—the natural inclination *is to go find out*. So, whether through the 24/7 news outlets, or some of the other media venues to which you subscribe, you can have an e-mail box full of information from a multitude of perspectives. *Such is life today*. Can you imagine what people did before the Internet, cable access channels, the morning newspaper, or even the town crier?

Several millennia ago in Ancient Israel when the altar was operational, for the priesthood, **the morning sacrifices** and praise offered to God were the most important things to focus on after the sleep was removed from the eyes. At this time of year, in the period when the Counting of the Omer was observed, the priests would follow their routines and make the proper offerings. When they encountered a weekly *Shabbat* during the fifty-day count on the path to the Feast of Weeks, do you think the pattern was changed? Or did the offering continue as normal? This thought came to mind this morning as I arose and followed my daily pattern. Via my normal process for entering into the day, I began to read a number of articles that preceded my meditation on our selected passages. As a result of putting this information into my spirit and mind, when I finally turned to Psalm 119:105-112, my thoughts from the previous evening were altered by the additional input.

Thinking through this, I wondered if my Sabbath routine should be different. In fact, I wondered if my morning routine on any day might not be changed. After all, my personal time with the Holy One, involving the Omer Count during this season, is surely to be more important than the news of the day. I must confess that the influence of two e-mails and two articles I read this morning, definitely impacted my thoughts, and had me identify some of the different snares that had been placed along my path. Praise God that His Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path (Psalm 119:105)!

Briefly, without shrouding my morning influences from non-Biblical readings, let me tell you what I received. I was forwarded an article from a person who said, "Many recognize since 9-11 that we are in a long-term, life and death struggle between cultures...that involves all of us." I read this article, by a 20 year-old student, entitled "How to Fight Evil." I was impressed with his coining of the term "Islamofacism," and recalled some of his historical information. Secondly, I read an article written in the New York Times about presidential contender John Kerry's anti-Vietnam war activities. My mind flashed back to that era, and then forwarded ahead to the here and now.

In another significant reading, I read an impassioned e-mail from an acquaintance who has been *in*—and according to his letter—and *out* of the Messianic community of faith, which really turned my thoughts to how the word "snare" appears within today's verse selection (Psalm 119:105-112). I cannot help but think about the many ways that the enemy tries to divert us from God's truth, and wants us to disregard His Torah. Given the fact that the Messianic world is rather diverse and unestablished at the moment, it is easy for some

Believers to get discouraged and walk away. But in spite of some of our internal shortcomings,¹ we each have to persevere and be faithful to our convictions!

With all of the different “snares” floating in my mind, when I read our Psalm selection for today, and coming to v. 110, I got stuck:

“The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I have not gone astray from Your precepts” (Psalm 119:110).

It is obvious to me that the wicked are laying snares, and it is only by our willingness to choose the Lord’s righteous precepts *that we will ever have a chance* to avoid them. No matter how much light we might have illuminating our paths, if we do not pursue His ways—whether it is radical Islamism, slippery politicians, or ignorant ministries—it will not matter. The snares of the Devil will entrap us and we will be caged from further pursuing the Messiah.

I did a cursory search on the word “snare” (Heb. *pach*, פַּח),² and found some things that did not terribly surprise me. The Prophet Hosea said that the Northern Kingdom of Israel had a “snare” present in everything it tried to do:

“What will you do on the day of the appointed festival and on the day of the feast of the LORD? For behold, they will go because of destruction; Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them. Weeds will take over their treasures of silver; thorns *will be* in their tents. The days of punishment have come, the days of retribution have come; let Israel know *this!* The prophet is a fool, the inspired man is demented, because of the grossness of your iniquity, and *because* your hostility is *so* great. Ephraim *was* a watchman with my God, a prophet; **yet the snare of a bird catcher³ is in all his ways**, and there is *only* hostility in the house of his God. They have gone deep in depravity as in the days of Gibeah; He will remember their iniquity, He will punish their sins” (Hosea 9:5-9).

Did you notice how this admonishment begins?

“What will you do about feast days, about the festivals of the LORD?” (Hosea 9:5, NJPS).

One of the things that God is doing today is bringing required clarity back to His people, many of whom have forgotten the significance of the *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים) or appointed times.⁴ Instead of being confused, perhaps we should seek the same joy that David sought when he cried out for forgiveness in Psalm 51:

“Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. **Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.** Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You” (Psalm 51:8-13).

The word used here for “joy,” *sason* (שִׂשׂוֹן),⁵ is encountered in today’s Psalm selection for Counting the Omer:

¹ For a review, consult the book *Confronting Critical Issues* by J.K. McKee.

² “bird-trap” (BDB, 809).

³ Heb. *pach yaqosh* (פַּח יָקוֹשׁ).

⁴ Consult the article “Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?” by J.K. McKee, examining passages like Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17; Romans 14:5-6, appearing in *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*.

⁵ “exultation, rejoicing” (BDB, 965).

COUNTING THE OMER

“I have inherited Your testimonies forever, for they are the joy [*sason*] of my heart” (Psalm 119:111).

This is the type of joy or gladness we should have as we obey the Instruction of our Heavenly Father! As we prepare to come together at *Shavuot*, one of the feasts that in some respects is dedicated to making a proclamation before Him (cf. Acts 2:14-41), we can enter into His joy because we are indeed obeying His command to gather at this time. The Prophet Isaiah says that Yeshua came,

“To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn *in* Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of **gladness** [*sason*] instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:2-3).

Seeing this, I hope you can appreciate a joyful thing that Proverbs blessed me with, as I rethought my slumber and morning routine. When we keep the commandments of our Father, and when we sleep and even when we wake up—they are to actually “talk” to us:

“My son, observe the commandment of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother; bind them continually on your heart; tie them around your neck. When you walk about, they will guide you; **when you sleep, they will watch over you; and when you awake, they will talk to you.** For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching is light⁶; and reproofs for discipline are the way of life” (Proverbs 6:20-23).

Is it not inspiring to have a lamp like God’s Law for our feet, leading us down paths of righteousness? When we do count, we count in the light of His Word and we expect Him to lead us into His marvelous purpose. I pray that you will be led into His marvelous purposes for your life as we continue pressing ahead toward *Shavuot*!

⁶ Heb. *ner mitzvah v'Torah* or (נֵר, מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֵינֶה); “a commandment is a lamp and the Torah is light” (ATS).