

Parashat Eikev 5776, 2016:

Thoughts on Truly Serving Hashem

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Leah bat Shifra and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The expression, “And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d” appears twice in the Torah, the first instance in Parashat Vaetchanan (*Sefer Devarim* 6:5), and the second in our *parasha* (*Sefer Devarim* 11:1). While both *pasukim* (verses) begin with this phrase, they conclude quite differently from one another:

And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means. (6:5)

And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d; keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments, all the days. (11:1, these and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

In broad terms, the first verse focuses upon what one needs to dedicate to Hashem in order to demonstrate love for Him, namely, one’s heart, soul and means. Rashi (1040-1105) explains each term in the following manner:

With all your heart: Love Him with your two inclinations [the good and the evil]. (*Midrash Sifrei*; *Talmud Bavli Berachot* 54a) Another explanation; “with all your heart,” is that your heart should not be divided [i.e., at variance] with the Omnipresent (*Midrash Sifrei*).

And with all your soul: Even if He takes your soul (*Midrash Sifrei*; *Talmud Bavli, Berachot* 54a, 61a).

And with all your means: There are people whose possessions are more precious to them than their own bodies. Therefore, it says, “and with all your means.” (*Midrash*

Sifrei) Another explanation of this is: You shall love G-d with whatever measure He metes out to you, whether it be the measure of good or the measure of retribution.

In contrast, our *parasha's pasuk* teaches us what we need to do in practice to express our love of Hashem, namely, “keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments;” in sum, fulfill the Torah throughout our entire lives.

The Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) was very sensitive to every nuance of language that is found in *Tanach*. As such, he focuses upon our *pasuk's* phrase “keep His charge” (“*v'shamarta mishmarto*”), since this is the sole time it appears in the Five Books of the Torah. He offers two interpretations of this expression; the first is verse-specific, whereas the second is holistic in nature:

Keep His charge: To have awe and fear before Him in order that you will guard yourself from sinning before Him. [This wording is utilized at this juncture,] since after He will command you through love [“And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d,”] He will command you through awe, and instruct you regarding the statutes, ordinances and *mitzvot*.

This analysis of “*v'shamarta mishmarto*” bespeaks a deep sensitivity to human nature. According to the Ramban, the Master of the Universe knew quite well that He first needed to create a love-based relationship between Himself and the Jewish people prior to mandating the awe and fear of Him that are essential to avoid sin. Moreover, I believe a careful examination of the first of the *Aseret Hadibrot* (10 Utterances) wherein G-d introduced Himself as, “I am the L-rd your G-d” (“*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*,” *Sefer Shemot* 20:2) strongly supports Nachmanides' explication. *Hashem* (L-rd) represents the quality of love and mercy, and notably precedes “*Elokecha*,” the characteristic of strict and demanding judgment that, leads us, as human beings, to a sense of awe and fear. Thus, here, too, love comes before awe and fear.

The Ramban's second elucidation of "v'shamarta mishmarto," presents his well-known proclivity for revealing ethical-based meaning in the Torah text:

Keep His charge: [This means that] you must protect that which Hashem protects; for He protects the strangers ("hagareim"), shows favor to the poor and downtrodden, and seeks justice for the orphan and the widow. And we find a somewhat parallel text [to ours] in another location [in Tanach]: "And keep the charge of the L-rd your G-d to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do, and wherever you turn." (*Sefer Melachim* I: 2:3) [Moreover, our Sages] said: "Just as He shows favor and is merciful, so, too, should you show favor and be merciful." (*Talmud Bavli, Shabbat* 133b; all Ramban translations, parentheses and brackets my own)

This exposition of the Ramban is nothing less than an intellectual and spiritual triumph, for he has taken the seemingly legalistic words, "v'shamarta mishmarto," and discovered within them the language of the ultimate ethical gesture, namely, *imitatio Dei*, the emulation of Hashem's actions. This principle is given extended voice in a celebrated passage in *Talmud Bavli*:

Just as Hashem clothed the naked [in the case of Adam and Chava]... so, too, should you clothe the naked. Just as Hashem visited the sick [in the case of Avraham after his *brit milah*]... so, too, should you visit the sick. Just as the Holy One Blessed be He comforted the mourners [in the case of Yitzhak after Avraham's passing]... so, too, should you comfort the mourners. Just as the Holy One Blessed be He buried the dead [in the case of Moshe]... so, too, should you bury the dead. (*Sotah* 14a, translation and brackets my own)

With the Torah as our guide, may we learn to love the Almighty, hold Him in awe, and emulate His actions. May we, thereby, grow closer to understanding what it truly means to serve Him and guard His holy Torah. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to

have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

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*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik’s** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.