

Parashat Eikev 5779, 2019:

To Walk in All His Ways

Rabbi David Etengoff

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 Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

At the end of our *parasha*, we find a verse that contains some of the most important theological concepts of Judaism: “For if you keep all these commandments which I command you to do them, to love the L-rd, your G-d, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave to Him.” (*Sefer Devarim* 11:22, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Herein we find the obligations to fulfill Hashem’s *mitzvot*, love Him, draw close to Him, and “walk in all His ways” — “*lalechect bechol d’rachov.*”

The commandment *lalechect bechol d’rachov* is found in various textual formulations no less than eight times throughout *Sefer Devarim*. This repetition is very significant, since it is an accepted principle of Torah exegesis that multiple instances of a phrase or a word demonstrate its singular import. If this is true regarding a word or a phrase, it is certainly the case regarding a *mitzvah*.

The *Sifrei* on *Sefer Devarim* helps define the parameters of this *mitzvah*. In so doing, it helps us understand the classic Jewish emphasis upon sensitivity to others, and our

people's desire to help the vulnerable among us:

It is surely the case that just as the Omnipresent One is called, "merciful" so, too, should you be merciful. [Just as] the Holy One blessed be He is called, "gracious" so, too, should you act graciously [toward others]. As the text states: "The L-rd is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and of great kindness." (*Sefer Tehillim* 145:8) ... The Omnipresent One is called "the Righteous One, as the text states: "For the L-rd is righteous; He loves [workers of] righteousness, whose faces approve of the straight [way]. (Ibid., 11:7), so, too, should you be righteous. The Omnipresent One is called, "the Kind One," as the text states: "...I will not let My anger rest upon you, for I am kind, says the L-rd; I will not bear a grudge forever." (*Sefer Yirmiyahu* 3:12, with my emendation) So, too, should you be kind [to others]. (*Piska* 49, translation and brackets my own)

Herein, the *Sifrei* presents a number of Hashem's attributes of action that are found throughout the Tanach, and urges us to behave in exactly the same manner. This idea is classically known as *imitatio Dei* (the emulation of the Almighty), and receives its most celebrated presentation in the following Talmudic passage:

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. (*Talmud Bavli, Sotah* 14a, translation my own)

This statement is the basis for a famous halachic ruling of the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) that defines many of the essentials of Jewish communal life:

It is a positive commandment of Rabbinic origin to visit the sick, comfort mourners, to prepare for a funeral, prepare a bride, accompany guests, attend to all the needs of a burial, carry a corpse on one's shoulders, walk before the bier, mourn, dig a grave, and bury the dead, and also to bring joy to a bride and groom and help them in all their needs. These are deeds of kindness that one carries out with his person that have no limit." (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avel* 14:1, translation, Rabbi Elyahu Touger)

Closer to our own time, my *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-

1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, adds an entirely new dimension to our understanding of this commandment:

We have an obligation to imitate G-d, and by offering Him appropriate praise, we learn about and appreciate His attributes. The desire to be like Him, to fashion our deeds after a Divine design, is understandable if seen against the background of a relationship based on a passionate love. This emotion expresses itself in an overpowering longing for the complete identification of the lover with the beloved. (*Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition*, pages 197-198, underlining my own)

The Rav teaches us that we are not merely required to “fashion our deeds after a Divine design.” Far more profoundly, we yearn to do so, because of our overwhelming love of the Master of the Universe, Who is our *Yedid Nefesh* — the Beloved of our Soul.

With Hashem’s eternal kindness as our guide, may we ever strive to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *lalechech bechol d’rachov*, and thereby demonstrate our deep and enduring love for Him.
V’chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria 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>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** 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.