

*The Torah, the Holy One Blessed be He and the Jewish People Are One*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

As we grow older, we come to realize the significant personal relationships in our lives do not “just happen.” Rather, they require clear focus and ongoing attention. If this is true on the human level, it is even more so the case when it comes to the Torah and *mitzvot*. True, simply by our birthright, the Torah is *morashah kehillat Ya'akov* (the heritage of the Congregation of *Ya'akov*, *Sefer Devarim* 33:4). As crucial as this idea is, however, we must undertake a good deal more in order to achieve a vibrant and joyful relationship with the Torah and *mitzvot*. Perhaps most importantly, we must take a step back and think about this fundamental connection in our lives, so that we may encounter the Torah in an authentic fashion. With this goal in mind, let us turn to two *pasukim* in our *parasha* that can serve as guides on this never-ending journey:

And he [Moshe] said to them [the entire Jewish people], “Set your hearts (*simu l'avchem*) to all of the words which I bear witness for you this day, so that you may command your children to observe to do all the words of this Torah. For it is not an empty thing for you (*ki lo davar raik mekem*), for it is your life (*ki hu chayachem*), and through this thing, you will lengthen your days upon the land to which you are crossing over the Jordan, to possess it.” (*Sefer Devarim* 32:36-37, brackets my own, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

*Chazal* underscored the singular import of these verses in the *Ahavat Olam tefilah* that we say each evening: “Therefore Hashem, our G-d, upon our retiring and arising, we will discuss Your decrees and we will rejoice with the words of Your Torah and with Your commandments for all eternity. For they are our life and the length of our days and about them we will meditate day and night.”

(Translation, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*, page 259). As noted in the *Sefer Avudraham* (14<sup>th</sup> century), this formulation is reminiscent of a section of another *pasuk* in *Sefer Devarim*: “To love Hashem, your G-d, to listen to His voice, and to cleave to Him. For that is your life and the length of your days, to dwell on the land which Hashem swore to your forefathers to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya’akov to give to them.” (30:20)

As we have seen, our *parasha* uses a thought-provoking expression to describe the Torah and *mitzvot*: “*ki lo davar raik mekem* (for it is not an empty thing for you).” In *Talmud Yerushalmi, Peah* 1:1, Rabbi Mana suggests the following interpretation of this elusive phrase: “And if it is empty to you [that is you fail to understand], it is because of you.” In his *Commentary on the Torah* on our *pasuk*, Rabbeinu Behaye ben Asher ibn Halawa (1255-1340) analyzes Rabbi Mana’s aphoristic explanation: “That is to say, if you do not know the reason for a particular matter in the Torah, this deficiency stems from your lack of comprehension, and is the result of your failure to reach the requisite level of understanding.” (Translation my own)

Nearer to our own time, the Sefat Emet (Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter, 1847-1905), while not specifically citing Rabbeinu Behaye’s gloss, expands upon his elucidation:

This means that the Torah is explained according to the preparation of the minds of the Jewish people...For only if the Jewish people engage in intensive Torah study at all times will they be able to expand upon and reveal the [true essence of] Torah subjects. This is explicitly stated in the verse, “*ki lo davar raik mekem*,” whose exposition is, “there is nothing in the Torah that will be empty to you [that is, without meaning].” This, in turn, connotes the concept that the Jewish people have a portion in all Torah matters, as it is written (*Zohar* III, 93b): “*Orayta v’Kudsha Baruch Hu v’Yisrael kulahu chad*—the Torah, the Holy One blessed be He and the Jewish people are one.” (*Sefer Sefat Emet, Sefer Devarim, Parashat Ha’azinu*, 1883, translation and brackets my own)

This year, as we celebrate *Simchat Torah* and join together in true Torah joy, may we remember the clarion call of the holy *Zohar*: “*Orayta v’Kudsha Baruch Hu v’Yisrael kulahu chad*—the Torah, the Holy One blessed be He and the Jewish people are one.” *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>.

Please contact me at [rdb718@gmail.com](mailto:rdb718@gmail.com) to be added to my weekly email list.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* 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: [The Rav](#)