

Parashat Ki Tavo, 5778, 2018:

## *History's Greatest Relationship*

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 Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, and HaRav Raphael ben HaRav Ephraim, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha, Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Eliezer ben Sarah, Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina, Anshul ben Chaya and Tzvi Yoel ben Yocheved and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains two terms that are not found any other place in Tanach, namely,

“*he’e’marta*” and “*he’e’mircha*:”

Today you have declared allegiance (*he’e’marta*) to G-d, making Him your G-d, [pledging to] walk in His paths, keep His decrees, commandments and laws, and to obey His voice. G-d has similarly declared allegiance to you (*he’e’mircha*) today, making you His special nation as He promised you. If you keep all His commandments. (*Sefer Devarim* 26:17-18, translation, *The Living Torah*, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan *zatzal*)

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) first notes the unique character of these two words, and then proceeds to suggest his own explication:

We do not find any equivalent expression in the Scriptures [which might give us a clue to the meaning of these words]. However, it appears to me that [the expression *he’e’mir*] denotes separation and distinction. [Thus, here, the meaning is as follows:] From all the pagan deities, you have set apart the L-rd for yourself, to be your G-d, and He separated you to Him from all the peoples on earth to be His treasured people. (Translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Onkelos, the first century translator of the Torah into Aramaic, suggests an intriguingly different understanding of *he’e’marta* and *he’e’mircha*. In his view, these terms connote the Jewish nation’s and the Almighty’s declaration of love for one another. Therefore, he translates *he’e’marta* as “*chatavta*” and *he’e’mircha* as “*chatvach*,” both of which have their basis in the Aramaic word, “*chativah*,” which may be defined as an object of love.

Based on this interpretative translation, the relevant segments of our verses would read,

“Today you have declared singular love (*he’e’marta*) to G-d... [And] G-d has similarly declared His singular love today to you (*he’e’mircha*)...” Fascinatingly, *Talmud Bavli*,

*Berachot* 6a follows Onkelos’ approach in its exposition of our terms:

“*Et Hashem he’e’marta hayom* (today) *v’Hashem he’e’mircha hayom*.” The Holy One blessed be He said to the Jewish people: “You have made Me a singular beloved object in the world, and I will make you, as well, a uniquely cherished entity in the world.” [From where do we know that you], the Jewish people declared Hashem to be your most beloved object in the world? As the Torah states: “Listen O’ Jewish nation, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one.” (*Sefer Devarim* 6:4) [From where do we know that,] I (Hashem) have declared the Jewish people to be My one precious nation in the world? As the text states: “And who is like Your people of Israel, a remarkable and unequaled nation in the world?” (*Sefer Shmuel* II, 7:23, all translations my own)

We find many instances of the *mitzvah* of loving Hashem *Sefer Devarim*. Here are a few illustrations:

And now, O Israel, what does the L-rd, your G-d, demand of you? Only to fear the L-rd, your G-d, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, and to worship the L-rd, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul (10:12) [Therefore] you shall love the L-rd, your G-d... (11:1) And it will be, if you hearken to My commandments that I command you this day to love the L-rd, your G-d... (11:13) 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 (11:22, Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

While our obligation to love Hashem is quite clear, His love for us initially appears to be elusive. Yet, if we sensitize ourselves to the words of the daily *tefilot*, we can readily hear His message of devotion to us. For example, the second *bracha* (blessing) before the recitation of the morning *Shema* begins with the phrase, “*ahavah rabbah*,” and states: “With an abundant love have You loved us, Hashem, our G-d...” It concludes with: “Blessed are You Hashem, Who chooses His people Israel with love.” (Translation, *Artscroll Siddur*) Significantly, the text does not state “Who chose His people Israel with love,” which would reference an ancient historical choice, all-but lost in the distant sands of time. Instead, our Sages formulated the prayer in the present tense, i.e., Hashem

continuously chooses us in love. This illustrates the ongoing extent of the care and concern our Creator has for us.

Moreover, two explicit statements of Hashem's deep connection to us are found in the *Amidah (Shmoneh Esrei)*. In the very first *bracha*, we encounter the phrase, "*l'ma'an sh'mo b'ahavah*" ("for His Name's sake, with love"). In addition, in the blessing known as "*Re'tzeh*," we find the phrase: "*u'tefilatom b'ahavah tikabale b'ratzon*" ("and their prayer accept with love and favor"). In sum, if we but listen to what we are saying in our daily *tefilot*, we will sense Hashem's loving presence enveloping us. Little wonder, then, that *Megillat Shir HaShirim* is the ultimate metaphor for the relationship that obtains between Hashem and the Jewish people. In many ways, it teaches us that we are never alone, for no matter how difficult our daily struggles may be, Hashem is our beloved soulmate who continually searches for us in love. In a world that is so often frightening and alienating, this is a powerful and much needed message.

With Hashem's help, may we grow in our love and devotion to Him, and may we continue to be deserving of His everlasting love. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and *Kativah v'Chatimah Tovah*

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 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>.

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

\*\*\* 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.