

Parashat Ki Tavo 5780, 2020:

*Greatness and Honor*

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 Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, 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, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, Dovid Shmuel ben Chasiyah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

One of the better-known sections of our *parasha* consists of the *brachot v'k'lallot* — the blessings for keeping the *mitzvot* of the Torah, and the curses for failing to fulfill its commandments. During his presentation of the *k'lallot*, Moshe Rabbeinu states an overarching rationale, a *klal gadol*, as to why these curses will come upon the Jewish people: “*Tachat asher lo avadata Hashem Elokecha* — Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, *b'simcha u'vtuv l'vov meirov kol* — in joy and from the goodness of your heart, when you had everything [that you required, Rashi].” (*Sefer Devarim* 28:47)

According to *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory), *avodat Hashem*, service of Hashem, is comprised of offering the *korbanot*, the act of praying, and the general performance of the *mitzvot*. As such, “*tachat asher lo avadata Hashem Elokecha b'simcha u'vtuv l'vov meirov kol*” is teaching us that even if we brought the mandated *korbanot*, prayed the obligatory *tefilot* and fulfilled the *mitzvot*, we did not do these acts in joy and with a heartfelt desire. I believe that the prophet, Yeshayahu, shed a bright light on our *pasuk* and its underlying meaning when he declared: “And the L-rd said: ‘Because this people has come near; with their mouth and with their lips they honor Me, but their heart they draw

far away from Me, and their fear of Me has become *mitzvat anashim melumdah* — a command of people, which has been taught.” (29:13, translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

One of the clearest expositions of Yeshayahu’s elusive phrase, “*mitzvat anashim melumdah*,” was offered by the Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, 1809-1879):

There are those who perform the *mitzvot* solely because this is what they have become accustomed to do since their youth and they are used to performing them. They perform them without any cognitive gesture (*kavanah*) and without thought, even though they may know that they are commandments from G-d...They [the *mitzvot*] are performed without any understanding and are mere mechanical actions reinforced by past rote behaviors. (*Commentary to Sefer Yeshiyahu 29:13*)

Basing ourselves on this trenchant comment of the Malbim, we can readily say that if one performs the *mitzvot* devoid of thought and in a robotic fashion, it will be impossible to serve Hashem *b’simcha u’vtuv l’vov*, as authentic *simcha* requires total engagement of our entire being. Little wonder, then, that *Dovid HaMelech* declared: “*Ivdu et Hashem b’simcha* — Serve Hashem with joy” (*Sefer Tehillim* 100:2), which the Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi 1160-1235) interprets as, “Your service should not be perceived as a burden, but rather, as an act of pure delight and from the goodness of your heart and mind.” He further underscores this analysis by citing the famous words of Rabbi Ibo in *Midrash Shocher Tov* 100: “When you pray to the Holy One blessed be He, your heart and mind should be joyous in the knowledge that you are praying to the Holy One blessed be He, and there is none other like Him in comparison to other so-called gods.” (Translation my own)

The Rambam gave halachic voice to these concepts in his *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shofar, v'Succah v'Lulav VIII:15*, citing our *parasha's* verse as one his proof texts:

The *simcha* with which a person should rejoice during the performance of the *mitzvot*, and the love of G-d who commanded them, *avodah gedolah he* — is a great service. Whoever holds himself back from this rejoicing is worthy of retribution, as the Torah states: “Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, *b'simcha u'vtuv l'vov* — in joy and from the goodness of your heart.” ...because there is no greatness or honor other than celebrating before G-d... (Translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, with my emendations and underlining)

With Hashem's help and our passionate desire, may we grow to understand that “there is no greatness or honor other than celebrating before G-d.” In that way, may we be counted among those who serve the Almighty *b'simcha u'vtuv lebanu* — in joy and from the goodness of our hearts. May this time come soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world.

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* 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.