

Parashat Ki Tavo 5782, 2022:

Standing at Har Sinai Once Again

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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 Yechiel, 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.

Our *parasha* contains a statement that poses a distinct exegetical challenge: “This day (*hayom hazeh*), Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you to fulfill these statutes (*chukim*) and ordinances (*mishpatim*)...” (*Sefer Devarim* 26:16, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Since countless *chukim* and *mishpatim* are found in preceding *parshiot* of the Torah, what does the phrase, *hayom hazeh*, signify?

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) maintains that our phrase teaches us: “each and every day they [the *mitzvot*] should be in your eyes as if they are new (*chadashim*) [to you], as if you were commanded [for the first time in their regard] today.” (Translation and brackets my own) This interpretation has powerful ramifications since, by actualizing its message, we can avoid the robotic fulfillment of *mitzvot* decried by Yeshayahu the prophet as *mitzvat anashim m'lumdah*. (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 29:13) His words find their clearest exposition in the commentary on *Sefer Yeshayahu* of 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, however, do not perform them in any way because Hashem commanded them to do so. Instead, they perform them because this is what they were dictated to do by their teachers and parents. They [the *mitzvot*] are performed without any understanding and

are mere mechanical actions reinforced by past rote behaviors... (29:13, translation and underlining my own).

Perhaps Rashi had this in mind when he focused on the notion of ensuring the daily newness of the *mitzvot*. The *Midrash Tanchuma* offers additional insights, emphasizing the beloved nature (*chavivut*) of the Torah: “And what does the phrase, ‘*hayom hazeh*,’ come to teach us? In truth, Moshe said to the Jewish people: ‘Each and every day the Torah should be *chavivah* to you, as if this very day you received it from *Har Sinai*...’” (Warsaw edition, Parashat Ki Tavo I, translation my own) Two additional approaches are presented by the *Midrash Tannaim*. The first addresses the way the Jewish people willingly and eagerly received the teachings of *Moshe Rabbeinu*:

“This day (*hayom hazeh*), Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you,” yet, is it not the case that the Jewish people already had the *mitzvot* for 40 years! Nonetheless, the Torah deploys the term, “*hayom hazeh!*” This is coming to teach you that since Moshe taught them the Torah and they accepted it with equanimity (*b’safer panim yaffot*), the Omnipresent One considered this as if it was the very same day they accepted the Torah from *Har Sinai*. (This and the following translation my own)

The next midrashic statement gives powerful voice to the direct relationship between Revelation and Torah study:

Whenever the Jewish people are actively engaged in Torah study, the Holy One blessed be He considers it as if they received the Torah from Sinai on that very day; therefore, the text states, “This day (*hayom hazeh*), Hashem, your G-d, is commanding you.”

May the insights provided by our sages guide us on our path of Torah observance. May Hashem’s *mitzvot* ever be new and beloved in our eyes, and may our Torah study enable us to reexperience the Revelation at *Har Sinai* anew, each and every day. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom v’*Kativah* v’*Chatimah* *Tovah*

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*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:
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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: [The Rav](#)