

Parashat Ki Tavo 5783, 2023:

*Ani l'Dodi v'Dodi Li—I am My Beloved's and My Beloved is Mine*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yeziel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, 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 two terms that are found nowhere else in Tanach, namely, “*he’e’marta*” and “*he’e’mircha*.”

Today you have declared allegiance (*he’e’marta*) to Hashem, making Him your G-d, [pledging to] walk in His paths, keep His decrees, commandments, and laws, and to obey His voice. Hashem 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*, with my emendations)

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) 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 Hashem 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 a different understanding of *he’e’marta* and *he’e’mircha*. In his view, these terms connote the Almighty’s declaration of love for us, and our love for Him. As such, 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

*pasukim* would read, “Today you have declared your singular love (*he’e’marta*) to Hashem... [And] Hashem has similarly declared His unique love (*he’e’mircha*) to you today...”

Fascinatingly, *Talmud Bavli, Berachot* 6a follows Onkelos’ approach in its exposition of our terms:

“*Et Hashem he’e’marta hayom 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 unequalled nation in the world?” (*Sefer Shmuel* II, 7:23, all translations my own)

While our obligation to love Hashem is clearly found in the words, “*v’ahavata ate Hashem Elokecha,*” (*Sefer Devarim* 6:5), explicit statements of His love for us are far more elusive. If we sensitize ourselves to the words of the *tefilot*, however, we can readily find His message of devotion to us. For example, the second *bracha* 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 act lost in the sands of time. Instead, our Sages formulated the prayer in the present tense, that is, Hashem continuously chooses us in love.

Additionally, two explicit statements of Hashem’s abiding love for us are found in the *Shmoneh Esrei*. In the first *bracha*, we encounter the phrase, “*l’ma’an sh’mo b’ahavah*—for His Name’s sake, with love” and, in *Birkat 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 feel Hashem’s loving presence surrounding us. Little wonder,

then, that *Megillat Shir HaShirim* is the ultimate metaphor for the relationship that obtains between Hashem and our people, for the Holy One blessed be He is our beloved soulmate who unceasingly searches for us in love and devotion. In a world that is so often frightening and alienating, this is a powerful message indeed.

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

Shabbat Shalom

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Please contact me at [rdbe718@gmail.com](mailto:rdbe718@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/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* 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](#)