

Parashat Pinchas 5776, 2016:

The Message of the Festivals

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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, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Leah bat Shifra and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The final *pasuk* (verse) of our *parasha* is somewhat difficult to understand: “Moses spoke to the children of Israel in accordance with all that the L-rd had commanded Moses.” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 30:1, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) We know from numerous verses in the Torah that Moses told the Jewish people solely “that [which] the L-rd had commanded.” Without a doubt, he always acted as Hashem’s loyal servant. Therefore, the Torah states, “... he is faithful throughout My house. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 12:7, underlining my own) To what, then, does the phrase, “in accordance with all,” actually refer? Based upon *Midrash Sifrei, Pinchas* 57, Rashi (1040-1105) suggests the following interpretation of our *pasuk*, and by extension, our expression:

Moses spoke to the children of Israel: [This verse is written] to make a pause; [these are] the words of R. Ishmael. Since up to this point the words of the Omnipresent [were stated], and the [following] chapter dealing with vows begins with the words of Moses, it was necessary to make a break first and say that Moses repeated this chapter [of offerings and the Festivals] to the Jewish people, for if not so, it would imply that he did not tell this to them, but began his address with the chapter discussing vows. (Underlining and emendations to the translation my own)

In sum, Rashi is teaching us that Moses repeated to the Jewish people, both the laws pertaining to the Festival *musafim* (additional offerings) and the Festivals themselves.

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (1816-1893), known to posterity as “the Netziv,” builds upon Rashi’s gloss and notes, “Our teacher, Moses, explained the laws of the Festivals to the Jewish people more so than all the other *parshiot* in the Torah.” (*Ha’amek Davar, Parashat Pinchas, 30:1*) At first glance, this is a very surprising statement, as it seems there should be many other contenders for the crown of “most explicated section of the Torah.” As such, why did the Netziv single out the Festivals in this fashion? His answer is both incisive and far-reaching in scope:

The [passages concerning the] *musafim* [and Festivals] are replete with amazing differences [in terminology], as each *musaf* utilizes a different linguistic formulation. [This is highly substantive, for] without a doubt, these variations do not lack meaning. Instead, they represent the [hidden] secrets of the Torah, and provide a basis for the statutes and laws [that form the essential basis of] practical Halacha. Indeed, all of this may be derived from the very expression of “speaking” (“*amirah*”) [as we find in our verse, “*va’yomer Moshe el b’nai Yisrael*] ... Our *pasuk*, therefore, has but one purpose, to teach the inner meaning of the *Mo’adim* to the Jewish people. This is the case, since they are a great and fundamental principle (*haymah ikar gadol*) regarding both ethical values and proper behavior. (Translations, brackets, bolding and underlining my own)

The Netziv’s response raises yet another question, “How are the *Mo’adim* ‘a great and fundamental principle regarding both ethical values and proper behavior?’” The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) provides us with one of the most famous answers to this question in his presentation of the following *halacha*:

When a person eats and drinks [in celebration of a holiday], he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is [not indulging in] rejoicing associated with a *mitzvah*, but rather the rejoicing of his gut. And with regard to such a person [the verse, *Sefer Hoshea 9:4*] is applied: “Their sacrifices will be like the bread of mourners, all that partake thereof shall become impure, for they [kept] their bread for themselves alone.” This happiness is a disgrace for them ... (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yom Tov 6:18*, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger)

While in the *halacha* that precedes this passage, the Rambam emphasizes these words of the verse, “And you shall rejoice in your Festival - you, and your son, and your daughter,

and your manservant, and your maidservant...” (*Sefer Devarim* 16:14), in our law he adjures us to be equally zealous regarding the latter half of this *pasuk* that concerns itself with “... the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow, who are among you.” Their Festival needs, he opines, are no less crucial than our own. Indeed, for Maimonides, if we fail to provide the fundamental necessities to those less fortunate than us, our rejoicing is not “rejoicing associated with a *mitzvah*, but rather the rejoicing of one’s gut.” In short, if we ignore our basic responsibilities toward our fellow Jews, our would-be celebration of the Festivals is transformed into a “disgrace.”

May we ever be solicitous of the needs of the entire Jewish people, so that all may stand before the Almighty with dignity and respect. So, too, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to celebrate the Festivals as “*ish echad b’lav echad*” (“as one individual dedicated to the same purpose”) in the newly rebuilt *Beit HaMikdash*, soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on 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 “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” 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.