

Parashat Vaera, 5773, 2013:

“... *In order that you know that the land is the L-rd's*”

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, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Shifra bat Chaim Alter, and Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, the *refuah shlaimah* of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam and Moshe Reuven ben Chaya, and in honor of the upcoming wedding of my nephew, Menachem Etengoff, to Estie Rindner – may they build a *bait ne'eman b'Yisrael*.

Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, there was no hail. So Pharaoh sent and summoned Moses and Aaron and said to them, “I have sinned this time. The L-rd is the righteous One, and I and my people are the guilty ones. Entreat the L-rd, and let it be enough of G-d's thunder and hail, and I will let you go, and you shall not continue to stand.” And Moses said to him, “When I leave the city, I will spread my hands to the L-rd. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, in order that you know that the land is the L-rd's.” (*Sefer Shemot* 9:26-29, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, underlining my own)

The phrase, “in order that you know” (*l'ma'an taidah*) appears three times in the Five Books of the Torah, and each instance is found in our *parasha* (Torah portion). The first occurrence appears in reference to the Plague of Frogs: “... in order that you [Pharaoh] will know that there is none like the L-rd our G-d” (*Sefer Shemot* 9:6). Twelve verses later (9:18), we encounter this statement in reference to the Plague of the Wild Beasts: “... in order that you [Pharaoh] will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the earth.” The final instance of our expression is found in 9:29 regarding the Plague of Hail: “... in order that you know that the land is the L-rd's.”

When we focus on these plagues that share *l'ma'an taidah* in common, we immediately notice that Hashem is referenced quite differently in each of the three verses. The Plague of Frogs was initiated by the Al-mighty to teach Pharaoh and his people about the

existence and uniqueness of G-d, i.e. “there is none like the L-rd our G-d”. The rationale inherent in the Plague of Wild Beasts is that it was a vehicle to teach the Egyptians that Hashem’s presence is well-nigh palpable and that He is to be found “...in the midst of the earth.” Finally, the Plague of Hail was none other than a heuristic device to declare to Pharaoh and his ilk “... that the land is the L-rd’s.”

I believe there is a fascinating progression that obtains in these *pasukim* (verses), wherein the Torah first concerns itself with establishing the existence and uniqueness of G-d, then proclaims His immanence, and concludes with the theological precept that G-d is the Master and Proprietor of the entire world. These were crucial lessons, indeed, for both the Egyptians and our emerging nation.

The pinnacle of this progression, the idea “... that the land is the L-rd’s,” is powerfully reiterated in King David’s oft-recited 24 Psalm:

Of David, a song. The land and the fullness thereof are the L-rd’s; the world and those who dwell therein. For He founded it upon seas and established it upon rivers... This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your presence-Jacob, forever. [You] gates, lift your heads and be uplifted, [you] everlasting portals, so that the King of Glory may enter. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, Who is strong and mighty, the Lord Who is a mighty warrior... Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts - He is the King of Glory forever. (1-2, 6-8, 10, underlining my own)

Beyond a doubt, the Psalmist is proclaiming G-d’s ownership of the world and all beings that dwell therein. He is, in a word, *Adon Olam*:

The L-rd of the Universe who reigned before anything was created. When all was made by his will He was acknowledged as King. And when all shall end He still all alone shall reign. He was, He is, and He shall be in glory. And He is one, and there's no other, to compare or join Him. Without beginning, without end and to Him belongs dominion and power. And He is my G-d, my living G-d. To Him I flee in time of grief, and He is my miracle and my refuge, who answers the day I shall call. To Him I commit my spirit, in the time of sleep and wakening, even if my spirit leaves, G-d is with me, I shall not fear. (Translation, <http://www.hebrewsongs.com/song-adonolam.htm>)

Given the certainty of Hashem's *adnut* (mastery) of the world, the question immediately arises: "How can we, His beloved and Chosen People, demonstrate our recognition of this essential theological precept?" I believe the answer is clear: We need to serve Hashem out of authentic love and devotion, and from the depth of our spiritual being. In this way, we can be *mekadash shame Hashem* (sanctify Hashem's Name) through, and within, the daily ongoing rhythm of our lives. In my view, the most powerful exponent of this notion was the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204), in a beautiful passage found in his *Mishneh Torah, Sefer Hamada, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 5:10*:

Whoever consciously transgresses one of the mitzvot related in the Torah, without being forced to, in a spirit of derision, to arouse [Divine] anger, desecrates [G-d's] name. Therefore, [Leviticus 19:12] states, regarding [taking] an oath in vain: "[for] you are desecrating the name of your L-rd; I am G-d." If he transgresses amidst ten Jews, he desecrates [G-d's] name in public.

Conversely, anyone who refrains from committing a sin or performs a mitzvah for no ulterior motive, neither out of fear or dread, nor to seek honor, but for the sake of the Creator, blessed be He - as Joseph held himself back from his master's wife - sanctifies G-d's name (*harei zeh mekadash et haShame*). (Translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, underlining my own)

With Hashem's help and guidance, may each of us be *zocheh* (merit) to understand the great truth that He taught the Egyptians and our forebears so long ago: "the land is the L-rd's," and may we bear witness to this idea by sanctifying His great and holy name each and every day of our lives. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

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 rdb718@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. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

**Follow new postings on my Twitter accounts: @theRavZatzal and @Torahtech613.

*** Interested in 21st Century Jewish Education? See my blog: <http://21stcenturyjewisheducation.org>