

Parashat Vaera 5779, 2018:

## *Redemption*

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 Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains four celebrated words spoken by the Almighty that refer to our nation's imminent salvation from the inhuman servitude of Egypt: *V'hotzati* (and I will take you out), *v'hitzalti* (and I will save you), *v'ga'alti* (and I will redeem you), and *v'lakachti* (and I will take you, see *Sefer Shemot* 6:6-7) Based upon *Talmud Bavli, Pesachim* 99b, Rashi, Rashbam and Tosafot, among many others, describe these words as the “**four expressions** of redemption.” The earliest examination of our terms that I was able to discover, however, is the *Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim* (10:1):

What is the derivation of the obligation to drink the four cups of wine at the *Seder* on the night of Passover? Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Banayah said: “They correspond to the **four redemptions**: “Therefore, say to the children of Israel, ‘I am the L-rd, and I will take you out (*v'hotzati*)... And I will take you (*v'lakachti*) to Me as a people... *v'hotzati, v'hitzalti, v'ga'alti, v'lakachti.*” (Translation and emphasis my own)

Fascinatingly, instead of describing four expressions of redemption (*arba'ah leshonot geulah*), as found in the above-mentioned commentators, we find that the *Talmud Yerushalmi* utilizes the nomenclature of “four redemptions” (*arba'ah geulot*) to describe our four well-known Torah terms. This represents far more than a mere difference in language.

Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein (1860-1941), in his Torah commentary entitled, *Torah Temimah*, drew attention to the *Talmud Yerushalmi*'s text of "four redemptions" and championed its authenticity over that of the phrase "four expressions of redemption:"

...And in all the halachic decisors (*poskim*), commentators, and homiletically based works that bring this homily, [we find] that it is stated as "corresponding to the four expressions of redemption." You must see, [ however,] that the *Yerushalmi* that we have quoted is missing the word "*leshonot*" ("expressions"), and instead reads, "corresponding to four redemptions." According to my opinion, this text is exceedingly correct. (This, and all following translations of the *Torah Temimah*, my own)

Rav Epstein supports the textual authenticity of the *Talmud Yerushalmi* in the following manner:

If one were to explain the phrase "four expressions of redemption" in its clear and simple meaning, there would be no reason whatsoever to establish four corresponding cups of thanks [at the *Seder*]. This is the case, since the concept of the Redemption is but one [concept] and not four. Therefore, it does not matter whether one employs four or 14 expressions [of redemption since they all reference the exact same idea.]

In other words, in Rav Epstein's perception, *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) would never have had reason to establish four cups of wine at the *Seder* if there is only one concept of Redemption. One cup, i.e. *Kiddush*, would have sufficed.

As Rav Epstein explicates the *Talmud Yerushalmi*'s phrase of "four redemptions" (*arba'ah geulot*), he infuses our understanding of *geulat Mitzraim* (the Redemption from Egypt) in an entirely new way. Instead of there having been one *geulah* (Redemption) comprised of four different descriptions (*arba'ah leshonot geulah*), there were four separate and distinct acts of redemption whose sum total we call *geulat Mitzraim*:

But if we utilize [the *Talmud Yerushalmi*'s phrase of] "corresponding to the four redemptions" ("*k'neged arba'ah geulot*"), the entire matter [of the Four Cups of Wine] is explained very well. This is the case, since if you examine the [passage under discussion] very carefully, you will find that there are four separate and distinct topics in these four words [i.e. *v'hotzati*, *v'hitzalti*, *v'gaalti*, *v'lakachti*]. Each word, when examined in detail, is revealed as a complete entity unto itself and, thereby, worthy of thanks in its own right.

Rav Epstein continues his explanation and suggests the following:

...each subsequent verse adds to the prior one, that is to say: 'I, Hashem will not only do this for you, but rather I will do this as well. Moreover, not only the aforementioned, but this as well.' Since this is the case, it is manifestly evident that each and every word [of these four words] contains a different level of Redemption that obligates us to thank our Creator. As a result, [our Sages] instituted the Four Cups of Wine.

Rav Epstein's analysis of each word, in the order spoken by the Almighty, provides valuable additional insights into the Redemption process: "The first level, *v'hotzati* (I will take you out), means that Hashem took the Jews out from under their burdens, by lessening their work. This does not mean, however, that everyone was now free from their servile labor, or that they were free from all work." Rav Epstein goes on to explain that in order for this to be the case, Hashem needed to raise them to the second level of the four Redemptions, namely, *v'hitzalti* (I will save you): "Therefore [Hashem] added the next level of Redemption and said: 'and I will save you from your labor.' This means that they did no more work [for Pharaoh] at all." Nonetheless, after the first two levels of Redemption had been achieved, they were still slaves to Pharaoh – even if they no longer worked for him. Therefore, Rav Epstein states, the third level of Redemption, *v'ga'alti* (I will redeem you) became a necessity: "Even after all of the lessening of their burdens, they were still Pharaoh's slaves and their Redemption was incomplete. Therefore, [a new level of redemption] was added and Hashem said: 'I will redeem you.'"

Why, then, was a fourth and final level of Redemption necessary? After all, our ancestors were now free from slavery. They finally controlled their own time and affairs. What was added by the phrase: "*v'lakachti li l'am*?" ("And I will take you to Me as a people")? According to Rav Epstein: "Even with the first three levels of Redemption, they [our forebears] were still not a defined nation and the unique portion of *Hakodesh Baruch Hu*. Therefore, Hashem added the fourth and final level of Redemption: "And I will take you

to Me as a people, and I will be a G-d to you.” Thus, with the fourth level of Redemption, we became Hashem’s unique nation, as expressed in the words we spoke at our finest hour, “*Na’aseh v’nishmah*,” (“We will do and we will then understand”), when we received the holy Torah at Mount Sinai.

Once again, just as we have always done, we beseech Hashem to perform wonders and miracles, and bring *Mashiach* soon and in our time. Then may we witness the complete fulfillment of the ultimate Redemption: “And the L-rd shall become King over all the earth; on that day shall the L-rd be one, and His name one.” (*Sefer Zechariah* 14:9) *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.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 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.