

Parashat Va'era 5782, 2022:

To Be Hashem's People

Rabbi David Etengoff

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 Yecheiel, 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, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains four terms that presage *yetziat mitzrayim*:

Therefore, say to the children of Israel, “I am the L-rd, and I will take you out (*v'hotzati*) from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you (*v'hitzalti*) from their labor, and I will redeem you (*v'ga'alti*) with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you (*v'lakachti*) to Me as a people, and I will be G-d to you, and you will know that I am the L-rd your G-d, Who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (*Sefer Shemot*, 6:6-7, translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Rashi (1040-1105), Rashbam (1085-1158), and the *Ba'alei Tosafot* (12-14th centuries), among others, labeled *v'hotzati*, *v'hitzalti*, *v'ga'alti*, and *v'lakachti* the “four expressions of redemption” (“*arba'ah leshonei geulah*,” *Talmud Bavli, Pesachim* 99b). The first three are relatively easy to understand, as they speak directly to Hashem's impending actions to redeem our ancestors from 210 years of Egyptian servitude. *V'lakachti*, however, is more problematic regarding its relationship to the Exodus, and, hence, raises exegetical challenges.

According to Rabbeinu Ibn Ezra (1092-11670), the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) and Rabbeinu Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340), *v'lakachti* does not speak to the physical salvation from Egyptian slavery; rather, it references spiritual redemption through *Kabbalat haTorah* (receiving the Torah). As such, in his *Commentary on the Torah* on our *pasuk*, the Ramban interprets “I will take you to Me as a people” as: “When you will come to Mount Sinai and you will receive the

Torah [then you will become My people.]” (Translation and brackets my own). A contrasting approach is offered by Rabbi Yosef ben Yitzchak (12th century) in his classic Torah commentary, *Bechor Shor*, wherein he emphasizes the practical sense of what it means to be Hashem’s people:

“I will take you to Me as a people:” And you will be My servants, as it is better for you to be My servants than to be Pharaoh’s slaves. “And I will be G-d to you:” I will be your master, and not Pharaoh. “And you will know that I am the L-rd your G-d, Who has brought you out:” And you will volitionally serve me, for you will say: “It is better to serve the great King, than to serve this commoner Pharaoh.” (Translation my own)

In Rav Yosef ben Yitzchak’s view, “I will take you to Me as a people” portrays our essential obligation toward the Almighty, namely, to recognize Him as our sole master, whom we willingly serve.

In his exegetical work *Be’er Mayim Chaim*, the Chasidic *rebbe*, Rabbi Chaim of Czernowitz (1760-1816), takes a different tack that focuses, instead, on Hashem’s role in the covenantal relationship:

“I will take you to Me as a people and I will be G-d to you:” That is to say, I [Hashem] will do two things for you [the Jewish people]: Firstly, the indescribable good that I will do for you is the very act of My taking you to be my people, a people [that henceforth] will be beloved and pleasant to Me, for whom I will bring forth all manner of good and worthy things. Secondly, I will be unto you *Elokim*, that is, the Judge and Master of Judgment Who will remove from before you all that is necessary [for your well-being], punish your enemies, and do unto those that hate you according to your will. (Translations and brackets my own)

According to Rav Chaim, being Hashem’s people is the greatest good we can acquire, as this status confers His love upon us. Moreover, in His role as *Elokim*, He will forever be our *Shomer Yisrael*, our eternal protector. In Rav Chaim’s estimation, Hashem’s love and protection enable us to apprehend His presence in our lives, as the continuation of our *pasuk* states:

And in so doing [all of the aforementioned], “you will know that I am the L-rd your G-d,” for it will no longer be necessary to acquire a [theological] expert’s knowledge level of *emunah* (belief) to believe in Me, rather, you [the Jewish people] will know with complete understanding that I am the L-rd your G-d and will thereby comprehend My sense of perfect and total unity. As such, I am complete (*shalame*) in every regard and there is none other besides Me... [We see, therefore,] two opposites [regarding our relationship with Hashem and the way He encounters us:] *chesed*

(kindness) and *din* (judgment). *Chesed* for the Jewish people, and *din* for the nations of the world [who seek to do us harm]. In sum, I am Hashem, and it is I [alone] who does all this.

May the time come soon, and in our days, when we will recognize and feel Hashem's *chesed* for us, and witness His *din* against all those who desire to destroy us. As the *navi* Ovadiah so famously said: "And saviors shall ascend Mt. Zion to judge the mountain of Eisav, and the kingdom shall be Hashem's. (1:21) *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 rdbe718@gmail.com.

*** 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 zatzal](#)