

Chol Hamoed Succot 5777, 2016:

*The Torah: Above and Beyond Time*

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 Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzhak, 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, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka and Leah bat Shifra, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The public *kriah* (reading) of King Solomon's *Megillat Kohelet* is one of the highlights of Shabbat Chol Hamoed Succot. According to many commentators, it is a précis of its author's philosophy of life. In particular, the first eight verses of the third chapter of this powerful work have become renowned throughout much of Western culture:

Everything has an appointed season (*l'kol zeman*), and there is a time for every matter (*v'ate l'kol chafetz*) under the heaven. A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot that which is planted. A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time of wailing and a time of dancing. A time to cast stones and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away. A time to rend and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace. (This, and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

A straightforward reading of the verse, "Everything has an appointed season (*l'kol zeman*), and there is a time for every matter (*v'ate l'kol chafetz*) under the heaven," would seem to indicate that it is a preface to the various times that are discussed in the succeeding *pasukim* (verses). Rashi (1040-1105), however, takes a different approach in his explication of its meaning: "Let not the gatherer of wealth from vanity rejoice, for even though it is in his hand now, the righteous will yet inherit it; only the time has not yet arrived, for everything has an appointed season when it will be." For Rashi, then, the phrase, "*l'kol zeman*," is a highly specific reference

to the ultimate transfer of wealth from vain and self-serving people to deservedly righteous individuals.

The Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Bezalel, d. 1609) did not follow Rashi's approach in viewing these *pasukim* as referring to the legitimate transfer of wealth. He did agree, however, that our *pasuk* has its own unique identity and is far more than an introduction to the rest of the *perek* (chapter). In addition, the Maharal suggests that "*l'kol zeman*" and "*v'ate l'kol chafetz*" refer to entirely different subjects, the former emphasizing physical objects and actions, and the latter focusing upon the intellect:

Those matters that are [discussed in *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* on our verse] are physical in nature, including Adam entering *Gan Eden* and his exit therefrom, the destruction of the world [at the time of Noah] and its repopulation, and Avraham's *brit milah*. [Incontrovertibly,] the body is subject to time. It is fitting, therefore, to use the expression, "*l'kol zeman*," when referring to these matters. In contrast, something that is purely intellectual in nature, namely, *Kabbalat HaTorah* (the Receiving of the Torah), which is divorced in its very essence from all physical matter, is not subject to time [and its multiple strictures]. As such, [when referring to *Kabbalat HaTorah*, *Megillat Kohelet*, therefore,] deploys the phrase, "*v'ate l'kol chafetz*" – because "the now" ("*atah*" with an *ayin*, that is etymologically similar to "*ate*" with an *ayin*) serves as the bridge between the past and future, yet, in and of itself, is not part of time. (*Sefer Tiferet Yisrael*, Chapter 25, this, and the following translation and textual notations my own)

The Maharal then builds upon this analysis and uses it as an opportunity to elaborate upon the unique nature of Torah:

This means that the matter [Torah] is completely of the intellect and, therefore, is not under the control of time. As such, it is permanently in the present (*b'atah*) – even in regards to when it was given [at Mount Sinai] at that particular time. The Torah was neither given prior to that exact moment or afterwards... for it would not have been proper to have given the prior to leaving Egypt [i.e. before acquiring our physical freedom]...

Thus, according to the Maharal, the Torah is permanently in the present (*b'atah*) and, therefore, above and beyond any concept of time. This idea is quite powerful, and helps us understand why the phrase, "*asher anochi metzavecha hayom*" ("that I am commanding you this day"), is

employed no less than 19 times in *Sefer Shemot* and *Sefer Devarim* in reference to the Torah and its *mitzvot*. As Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself upon the *Midrash Sifrei*, so beautifully explains, “They (the words of the Torah) should not appear to you as an antiquated edict which no one cares about, but as a new one, which everyone hastens to read.” (*Commentary on Sefer Devarim* 6:6)

We will soon be celebrating Simchat Torah. With Hashem’s help and our heartfelt dedication, may this joyous festival be one wherein we recognize that the Torah is truly above and beyond time, and is commanded to us anew each and every day. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Sameach!*

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

They may also be found on [YUTorah.org](http://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.