

Parashat Pekudei 5776, 2016:

Torah: The Source of Life

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 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, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains the sole instance in the *Tanach* of the expression, “He took and placed (וַיִּקַּח וַיִּתֵּן) the testimony into the ark ...” (*Sefer Shemot* 40:20, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Rashi (1040-1105) explained “the testimony” as “the tablets (*luchot*) [of the testimony].” Therefore, it is only in the case of the tablets of the *Aseret Hadibrot* (the 10 Statements) that we find the never-to-be repeated phrase, “He took and placed (וַיִּקַּח וַיִּתֵּן).”

In his commentary on our *pasuk* (verse), the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) suggested that Moshe had a temporary wooden ark within his tent in which he stored the *luchot*. As such, he first had to take (וַיִּקַּח) them and bring them to the *Mishkan* (the Portable Desert Sanctuary), and then place (וַיִּתֵּן) the tablets of “testimony into the ark.” Therefore, according to the Ramban, our phrase represents Moshe’s personal efforts to ensure the proper placement of the *luchot* in their permanent and holy resting place.

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, 1817-1893), in his classic work of Torah analysis, *Ha’amek Davar*, also noted the unusual formulation of “He took and placed

(וַיִּקַּח וַיִּתֵּן),” and emphasized the “up close and personal” approach that Moshe took regarding the *luchot* and the *Aron Kodesh*, something that he did in no other instance of setting up the *Mishkan*:

In every case of constructing the *Mishkan*, even though it is written, “And Moshe set up,” this does not refer to Moshe himself. Instead, this means that the act was performed according to his dictates and with his clearly recognizable help [i.e. encouragement,] as we find in *Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 92* regarding the phrase, “and he [Moshe] covered the entire Tent of Meeting.” [Even though the Torah states that Moshe performed the action alone,] the *Levi'im* were with him [and performed the actual task at hand.] This was not the case, however, regarding the placement of the *luchot* into the *Aron Kodesh* – for in this case, he actually took the *luchot* in his own hands and placed (*lakach b'yadav mammash v'natan*) [them into the *Aron Kodesh*]. (Translation and brackets my own)

In sum, both the Ramban and the Netziv maintained that Moshe performed the physical act of taking and placing (וַיִּקַּח וַיִּתֵּן) the *luchot* into the *Aron Kodesh*. The question, of course is, “Why?” Why did this act uniquely demand Moshe’s “hands on” involvement, in contrast to the other activities associated with constructing the *Mishkan* that were performed by his delegates?

The *Midrash Pesikta Zutarta* on our *pasuk* noted an etymological similarity between the words, “He took” (“וַיִּקַּח”) and the well-known expression of *Shlomo Hamelech* (King Solomon) in *Sefer Mishle* (4:2), “For I gave you good teaching (literally, ‘an object or possession’) ...” wherein the original Hebrew of the word “teaching” is “לִקְחָה.” Our Sages, may they be remembered for a blessing, consistently associated the phrase “good teaching” with the Torah. This midrashically-conceived idea provides us with a powerful insight for understanding Moshe’s unprecedented behavior regarding the *luchot* and the *Aron Kodesh*. It seems that in Moshe’s view, the tablets of testimony symbolically represented the entire Torah. He, therefore, realized that, as guide and teacher of Hashem’s chosen nation, it was his unique role and obligation to place the *luchot* into the

Aron Kodesh. As the Torah teaches us, “The Torah that Moses commanded us is a legacy for the congregation of Jacob.” (*Sefer Devarim*, 33:4).

There is another phrase in the Torah wherein we find a variation of the word, “לִקְחָה” that serves as a metaphoric reference to the Torah and its life-sustaining force: “My lesson (לִקְחָה) will drip like rain.” (*Sefer Devarim* 32:2) Rashi, quoting the *Sifrei*, the halachic Midrash to *Sefer Devarim*, noted the following:

My lesson will drip like rain: This is the testimony that you shall testify, that in your presence, I declare, “The Torah (לִקְחָה), which I gave to Israel, which provides life to the world, is just like this rain, which provides life to the world, [i.e.,] when the heavens drip down dew and rain.”

Returning to the *Midrash Pesikta Zutarta*, we find an extensive presentation of the symbolic nexus between Torah and water to which Rashi alludes:

לִקְחָה – there is no instance of לִקְחָה in the *Tanach* that does not refer to Torah. As the verse states: “For I gave you good teaching (לִקְחָה).” Just as rain brings life to the world, so, too does Torah bring life to the world. Just as water falls from above to below, so, too, did the Torah come down from above [Heaven] to below [the earth]. Just like the world cannot exist without water, so, too, the world cannot exist without Torah... Just like water spreads out to every place [i.e. water seeks its own level,] so, too does Torah [have the possibility] of spreading to every place. Just as water brings purity to the world, so, too does Torah bring purity to the world. Just like water may be stored in the smallest of all containers, so, too, will the Torah be guarded [i.e. kept] by a humble person [who recognizes Hashem’s hegemony over the world]. Just as in the case of water, an older person is never embarrassed to ask a younger person for water to drink, so, too, is it the case regarding words of Torah wherein a teacher will willingly learn from his student and an adult will listen to the astute reasoning of a young person – without embarrassment of any kind... (*Midrash Pesikta Zutarta Sefer Devarim*, Parashat Ha’azinu, s.v. *ya’arof kamatar likchi*, translation and brackets my own)

With Hashem’s blessing and kindness, may we, too, be *zocheh* (merit) to understand the ultimate role that Torah plays in our lives, so that we may truly embrace these stirring words from *Sefer Mishle*, “It is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and those who draw near it are fortunate. Its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace.” (3:18,17) *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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

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.