

To Know Hashem

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, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Shoshana Elka bat Etiel Dina and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

This week's *haftarah* portion contains two of the most celebrated *pasukim* (verses) of

Sefer Hosea:

And I will betroth (*v'arastich*) you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy. And I will betroth you to Me with faith, and you shall know the L-rd. (II:21-22, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The three-fold repetition of the Hebrew term "*v'arastich*" ("and I will betroth") in our verses metaphorically teaches us that Hashem will create a new covenant with *klal Yisrael*. As such, these verses foretell the time when the intimacy characterized by a loving husband – wife relationship will be completely and permanently restored between the Almighty and our people.

The Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, 1512-1609) was one of the great thinkers who underscored the everlasting nature of the bond that will exist between G-d and our nation:

The connection that will exist in the future between the Holy One blessed be He and the Jewish people will be eternal (*yi'yeh l'netzach*), [that is,] this link will never cease or be severed. This matter is explained in the comforting words to the Jewish people [that were revealed to them] through His prophets. It is in this sense that the prophet Hosea said: "And I will betroth (*v'arastich*) you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy." Behold, the

prophet explicitly stated that this connection, i.e. “the betrothal,” will be everlasting in nature, unlike the original one. (This and the following quotations, *Sefer Netzach Yisrael*, chapter 47, translations and brackets my own.)

At this juncture, the Maharal analyzes the essence of the union that will be established between Hashem and the Jewish people. In his opinion, the central features of this relationship are symbolized by the repetition of the phrase “And I will betroth (*v’arastich*)”:

And in this passage, we find the word, “*v’arastich*” repeated three times... [A person must] realize that this future connection entails three different aspects. Firstly, it will be permanent in nature. Secondly, the Jewish people will cleave to all of the behavioral characteristics (*middot*) of the Holy One. Lastly, this bond will be all-inclusive (*chibur gamur*). Even were this relationship to incorporate all of [G-d’s] *middot*, it is nonetheless possible that the Jewish people would not cleave to Hashem in a holistic manner. This is the case, since [without Hashem’s promise of precisely this type of relationship, there is a likelihood that] our people would not cleave to Him in great mercy or great kindness – and so, too, with the rest of [Hashem’s] ethical characteristics.

The Maharal now explicates the manner whereby each reiteration of *v’arastich* supports the central ideas of the new relationship that will obtain between Hashem and His people:

“And I will betroth (*v’arastich*) you to Me forever” proves that the connection will be eternal. In addition, the text states, “And I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy.” Each of these qualities is mentioned, since they...encapsulate the *middot* of Hashem [that the Jewish people will develop and master]...Afterwards the text states, “And I will betroth you to Me with faith (*b’emunah*), and you shall know the L-rd,” This proves that the new relationship will be all-inclusive.

Based upon a careful reading of our two verses, one may question why Hosea needed to state the third instance of *v’arastich*, “And I will betroth you to Me with faith,” which focuses upon the *chibur gamur* motif. After all, would not the second phrase of *v’arastich* have led one to this conclusion? Apparently the Maharal wrestled with this problem, as well, as he continues with the following keen analysis:

The notion of the new relationship being one of *chibur gamur* (all-inclusive) is an idea that stands on its own (*ma'a'lah bifnei atzmo*), since when the text states, "And I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy," this only teaches us that the Jewish nation will cleave to the Blessed One with all of these *middot*. It does not mention, however, that the future relationship between Hashem and our people will be an all-encompassing one. This is the case, since, even if the connection is based upon each of these *middot*, it is possible that we would not experience it through total mercy. Therefore, the prophet proclaims, "And I will betroth you to Me with faith," since this phrase suggests the concept of a complete and total connection [to Hashem]. As such, the relationship will be infused with total mercy and kindness, for that is the true meaning of *emunah* (faith) in regards to an [authentically] total union (*chibur gamur*) [with the Almighty].

Chazal (our Sages of blessed memory) established the yearly calendar in such a manner as to ensure that the public reading of our *haftarah* frequently precedes the Festival of Shavuot. In their divinely inspired wisdom, they understood that there is a close association between this portion from the Prophets and the giving of the Torah on Shavuot. Based upon the Maharal's illuminating insights, I believe we are in a better position to understand the nature of this connection.

As noted, the Maharal emphasizes that our mastery of Hashem's ethical characteristics leads to *chibur gamur* - our close union with Him. This is congruent with Rabbi Meir's analysis in *Mesechet Avot d'Rabbi Natan* that discusses the final words of our *pasukim*:

Rabbi Meir said: "Why does the prophet [mention righteousness (*tzedek*), justice (*mishpat*), loving-kindness (*chesed*) and mercy (*rachamim*)] and immediately follow this with the phrase, 'and you shall know the L-rd?'" Surely this is coming to teach us that everyone who has mastered these *middot* will have close knowledge of the Omnipresent one [i.e. a strong personal relationship will exist between such individuals and the Master of the Universe]. (*Mesechtot Katanot, Mesechet Avot d'Rabbi Natan, Nuscha I, Chapter 37, translation my own*)

If we integrate the approaches of Rabbi Meir and the Maharal, we discover that the link between Hosea's prophecy and Shavuot becomes quite clear: Both Hashem and the Jewish people long for a strong and intimate relationship that will abide for evermore. Since this is the case, we must do everything in our power to forge this bond by

demonstrating our worthiness to be a full partner in this union. As such, just as Hashem practices *tzedek, mishpat, chesed* and *rachamim*, so, too, must we; for, in truth, the Torah was given to us to enable us to “know the L-rd.” May this time come soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: 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 the topics of *Tefilah* and *Megillat Esther* 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.