

Parashat Eikev 5780, 2020:

*But Your Heart May Grow Haughty*

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, 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, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, Dovid Shmuel ben Chasiyah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The Torah is an incredibly rich work of interwoven thoughts and ideas. While this is true in general, I believe it is a particularly the case regarding *Sefer Devarim*. Our *parasha* contains a telling example of this interconnectedness in the four *pasukim* juxtaposed to the *mitzvah* of *Birkat Hamazon*:

*Heshamer lecha pen tishkach et Hashem Elokecha* — Be careful that you do not forget G-d your L-rd — not keeping His commandments, decrees, and laws, which I am prescribing to you today. You may then eat and be satisfied, building fine houses, and living in them. Your herds and flocks may increase, and you may amass much silver and gold — everything you own may increase. *V'rahm l'vavecha v'shachachta et Hashem Elokecha* — But your heart may then grow haughty, and you may forget G-d your L-rd — the One who brought you out of the slave house that was Egypt. (*Sefer Devarim* 8:11-14, translation, *The Living Torah*, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan *zatzal*)

This passage presents us with a key exegetical question, namely, what is the nature of the phrase, “*v'rahm l'vavecha v'shachachta et Hashem Elokecha*?” Is it a straightforward description of a possible, or even probable, result of Hashem bestowing His largesse upon us, or is it something more? We are fortunate that the Babylonian sage, Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak, addresses this question in *Talmud Bavli*, *Sotah* 5a:

From where [in the Torah] do we find the *azhara* — warning against arrogant behavior?... Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said, “From here: ‘*v'rahm l'vavecha v'shachachta*.’” Moreover, it is written [before *v'rahm l'vavecha*]: “*Heshamer lecha pen tishkach et Hashem Elokecha* — Be careful that you do not forget G-d your L-rd.” [We must interpret

this expression] in accordance with Rabbi Elai, for Rabbi Abin said in the name of Rabbi Elai: “Every instance wherein the Torah states ‘*heshamer*, *pen* and *al*’ must always be interpreted as a negative Torah prohibition.” (Translation and brackets my own)

A careful reading of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak’s statement in conjunction with his advocacy of Rav Elai’s position yields the following conclusion: Since *v’rahm l’vavecha v’shachachta et Hashem Elokecha* is preceded by *heshamer lecha pen tishkach et Hashem Elokecha*, the phrase, “but your heart may then grow haughty,” is, in reality, a *mitzvat lo ta’aseh* — a negative prohibition of the Torah. As such, *v’rahm l’vavecha* is far more than a narration of the potential outcome of our becoming wealthy; rather, it is a *lav* — an action forbidden by the Torah.

We are now in a strong position to understand *Chazal*’s powerful denunciation of this negative behavioral attribute:

R. Johanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: “Every man in whom there is haughtiness of spirit is as though *ovede avodat kokavim* — he worships idols...” R. Johanan himself said: “He is as though *kafar b’ikar* — he has denied the fundamental principle [of Hashem’s very existence]...” R. Hama b. Hanina said: “He is as though he has broken all the laws of forbidden intimacy...” ‘Ulla said: “He is as though he has erected an idolatrous altar.” (*Talmud Bavli Sotah* 4b, translation with my emendations, *The Soncino Talmud*)

In his *Mishneh Torah*, the Rambam *zatzal* (Maimonides, 1135-1204) follows Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak’s view in his discussion of behavioral and halachic issues surrounding *v’rahm l’vavecha*:

There are behavioral traits regarding which a man is forbidden to follow the middle path. He should move away from one extreme and adopt the other. Among these is arrogance.... Our Sages directed: “Hold oneself very, very lowly.” Also, they declared: “Whoever is arrogant is as if he denied G-d’s presence, as it states in the Torah: “And your heart will be haughty and you will forget G-d, your L-rd.” Furthermore, they said: “Whoever is arrogant should be placed under a ban of ostracism. This applies even if he is only somewhat arrogant.” (*Hilchot De’ot*, II, 3, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger with my emendations)

Beyond a doubt, we should reject the behaviors associated with the prohibition of *v’rahm*

*l'vevecha* and, as the Rambam says, “move away from one extreme and adopt the other,” that is, *anavah* — humility. We are fortunate that the Ramban *zatzal* (Nachmanides, 1194-1270), in his celebrated *Iggeret HaRamban*, gives us ready guidance as to how to undertake this process:

Therefore, I will now explain to you how to always behave humbly. Speak gently at all times... with your heart focusing on Hashem... In all your actions, words and thoughts, always regard yourself as standing before Hashem, with His *Schechinah* [Divine Presence] above you, for His glory fills the whole world. Speak with fear and awe, as a servant standing before his master. Act with restraint in front of everyone. When someone calls you, don't answer loudly, but gently and softly, as one who stands before his master. (Translation, with my emendations, <http://www.pirchei.com/specials/ramban/ramban.htm>, brackets and italics my own)

Two salient points emerge in this section of the *Iggeret HaRamban* that can guide us in our efforts to acquire *anavah*: Our encounters with others should reflect respect, and our minds and hearts should be focused upon Hashem with the conscious recognition that we ever stand before His Divine Presence.

With the Almighty's help and our fervent desire, as we follow the Ramban's guidance and act with *anavah*, may we simultaneously fulfill the verse, “And you shall do what is proper and good in the eyes of the L-rd” (*Sefer Devarim* 6:18). *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>  
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria 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* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:  
<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

\*\*\* 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.