

Parashat Ki Tavo, 5770, 2010:

Rabbi David Etengoff

The Glory of the Torah

Dedicated to the sacred memory of my sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra, the *refuah shlaimah* of Sarah bat Rachel, Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, and Sheva bat Sarah Rivka.

Moses and the Levitic priests spoke to all Israel, saying, “Pay attention and listen, O Israel! This day, you have become a people to the L-rd, your G-d. You shall therefore obey the L-rd, your G-d, and fulfill His commandments and His statutes, which I command you this day.” (*Sefer Devarim* 27: 9-10, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

This passage from our *parasha* is quite difficult to understand. In particular, the phrase, “This day, you have become a people to the L-rd, your G-d,” offers us a unique exegetical challenge. After all, *Sefer Devarim* in its entirety was written at the end of the 40-year period during which our ancestors wandered in the desert – long after we had undergone the transformative process from being slaves to Pharaoh to being “a people to the L-rd, your G-d” at Mount Sinai! What then, is the Torah adding by this seemingly superfluous phrase and passage?

This question seems to have first been asked by Rabbi Yehudah in *Talmud Bavli*, *Berachot* 63b:

R. Judah spoke further in honor of the Torah, expounding the text, “Attend [*hasket*] and hear, O Israel: this day you have become a people unto the L-rd your G-d.” Now was it on that day that the Torah was given to Israel? Was not that day the end of the forty years [of the wandering]?

Rabbi Yehudah’s answer is composed of relatively few words that none-the-less convey volumes of meaning: “It is, however, to teach you that the Torah is as beloved every day to those that study it as on the day when it was given from Mount Sinai.” (Translation,

The Soncino Talmud with my emendations to enhance readability) To a certain extent, Rashi (1040-1105) bases himself upon Rabbi Yehudah's answer in his comment on our verse: **"This day, you have become a people [to the L-rd, your G-d]:** Every single day, it should seem to you as though you are today entering into a covenant with Him."

While, as noted, Rabbi Yehudah serves in this instance as Rashi's intellectual forebear, in truth their statements differ from one another in a significant manner. Rabbi Yehudah focuses upon *ahavat Torah* (the love we should have for the Torah) whereas Rashi focuses upon *hitchadshut haTorah* (the newness of the Torah), wherein we are urged to view the Torah as if it was given anew to us each and every day. I believe that it is precisely this substantive difference that led Rabbeinu Eliyahu Mizrachi (1450-1526), in his glosses on Rashi's commentary, to declare: *"Lo yada'ati me'ayin hotzi zeh"* ("I have no idea as to Rashi's source for his comment"). Rabbeinu Mizrachi further notes that in the instance of a different and somewhat similar verse, *Sefer Devarim* 26:16, Rashi's comment would appear to be quite apropos, though it is not the case with our *pasuk* (verse):

It is proper, fitting, and logically persuasive in the instance of the verse: "This day, the L-rd, your G-d, is commanding you to fulfill these statutes and ordinances, and you will observe and fulfill them with all your heart and with all your soul," [*Sefer Devarim* 26:16] for our Sages to interpret this as meaning that the words and commandments of the Torah should be new to you each day, as if you were actually commanded to observe them today. If this were not the case, why would the Torah have written, *"Hayom hazeh"* ("This day"), after all, they were already commanded to observe the *mitzvot* many years prior to this time. In our verse, however, what would logically force someone to interpret it as metaphorically referring to today, rather than being reminiscent of the past?

Rabbeinu Mizrachi now addresses his two concerns concerning Rashi's interpretation of our verse:

1. "*Lo yada'ati me'ayin hotzi zeh*"
2. "In our verse, however, what would logically lead someone to interpret it as metaphorically referring to today, rather than being reminiscent of the past":

Perhaps "*hazeh*" ("this" in the verse, "This day, you have become a people to the L-rd, your G-d") is to be taken in an absolutely literal fashion. This is the case since on that very day the Jewish people received the blessings and curses that were stated on Mount Grizim and Mount Eival. Alternatively, it is possible to say that since the Torah states, "You have become (*niyatah*) a people to the L-rd your G-d," instead of writing "*Tihiyeh*" ("You will be") it is logical to interpret the entire verse as referring to the covenant enacted earlier at Mount Sinai. Moreover, since the verse also states "*Hayom hazeh*," we can learn from this that the Torah suggested to the Jewish people that each and every day should be in their eyes as if they entered into the covenant with Hashem for the first time. (Translation my own)

Allow me to clarify Rabbeinu Mizrachi's two reasons as to why Rashi explained our verse in reference to the proper spiritual attitude we should cultivate when thinking about the grand covenant between man and G-d that is called the Torah:

1. "*Hazeh*" in the phrase, "This day, you have become a people to the L-rd, your G-d") is to be taken in an absolutely literal fashion. In that sense, it directly parallels Rashi's interpretation of the same word in *Sefer Devarim* 26:16.
2. Based upon an exact reading of our *pasuk*, we find that the past-tense word "*Niyatah*" ("You have become") rather than the future-tense "*Tihiyeh*" ("You will be") is employed in reference to our becoming Hashem's people. "Therefore, it is logical to interpret the entire verse as referring to the covenant enacted earlier at Mount Sinai."

In my estimation, Rabbeinu Mizrachi's explanation of Rashi's comment helps us

understand that Rashi sought to complement Rabbi Yehudah's explanation with his own. As such, both *ahavat Torah* and *hitchadshut haTorah* should be given equal weight in our minds when we think about our relationship with Hashem and His holy Torah. As *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) so beautifully stated in the *siddur*: “*Ashreinu, mah tov chelkeinu, u'mah nayim goraleinu, u'mah yafah yerushateinu*” (“We are joyous, how goodly is our portion, and how pleasant is our lot, and how beautiful is our inheritance – the Torah”).

With Hashem's help, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to imbue the final weeks of Elul with a profound sense of both *ahavat Torah* and *hitchadshut haTorah*. Then, G-d willing, may He find us worthy to live long and healthy lives, and receive all of the blessings He has promised us in His holy Torah. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past drashot may be found at my website:

http://home.mindspring.com/~rdbe/parashat_hashavuah/index.html.

Do you have questions, comments, ideas, or thoughts about this drasha? Would you like to share them? My blog, and this *drasha*, are located at: tefilahandtorah.blogspot.com.

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.