

Parashat Ki Tavo, 5771, 2011:

Dwelling with Hashem

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

One of the final *pasukim* (verses) in our *parasha* is truly difficult to understand: “And Hashem has not given you a heart [mind] to understand, and eyes to see, and ears to hear until today.” (*Devarim* 29:3) This verse, at the very least, appears to be counter-intuitive to everything the Torah has taught us until this point. What about the experience of the Exodus, with its endless wonders and miracles? What about the splitting of the Sea of Reeds, when our Sages teach us that the common maidservant saw that which was withheld from the visions of *Yeshiyahu* and *Yechezkal*? (Rabbi Eliezer in *Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael, Mesechta d’Shira, Beshalach, Parsaha* 3) What about the Revelation at *Har Sinai* (Mount Sinai)? Surely, in all of these instances, our wilderness forebears had understanding hearts (minds), seeing eyes, and ears that heard! The Rashbam (Rabbeinu Shmuel ben Meir, 1080-1158) underscores these questions when he states: “Even though you [*B’nai Yisrael*] saw His great actions [Hashem did not give you a heart to understand etc. until today].” The Seforno (Rabbi Ovadiah ben Yaakov, 1470-1550) follows this approach, as well, when he opines: “Even though He tried [through] His teachings and wonders to give you [*B’nai Yisrael*] a heart to understand... you did not comprehend this...” We are left, it appears, in a real quandary: How is it possible that we simply “did not get it?” How could we have failed so palpably to understand Hashem’s majestic message?

The Siftei Chachamim, (Rabbi Shabbetai Bass, 1641-1718), suggests that Rashi, (1040-1105), focused precisely upon this question. In Rashi's view, it simply wasn't logical that we failed to have understanding hearts (minds), seeing eyes, and ears that heard until that point in time. In contrast, he maintains, that until then we **failed to demonstrate** these abilities and deep-felt desires:

I have heard that on that day, Moshe gave a Sefer Torah to the *Leviim*. As it states "And he gave it to the *Kohanim* the sons of Levi." [*Devarim* 31:19] [At that point] all of the Jewish people came before Moshe and said to him: "Moshe *Rabbeinu*, we, too, stood at *Har Sinai* and received the Torah and it was given to us. Why, then, have you given control of it to your tribe? They [the *Kohanim* and *Leviim*] will say to us someday in the future that it [the Torah] was never given to you! It was given to us!" Moshe rejoiced over these words. [Moreover,] this is why he said to them: "Today you have become a nation. [*Devarim* 27:9] Today, I [finally] understand that you are cleaving unto Hashem and that you desire Him."

I believe that Rashi's explanation, while focused upon the *Leviim*, teaches us something very fundamental about each and every one of us. His deep insights into the Jewish psyche are as relevant to the 21st century Jew as they were to the Jew of the 13th century BCE, who miraculously escaped the physical and spiritual misery of Egyptian servitude.

In simplest terms, I believe Rashi is teaching us that we often take our relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for granted, and thereby fail to maintain a consciousness of Him throughout our daily lives. More often than not, it seems that we simply do not act as if we wish to "cleave unto Hashem and that we desire Him," above all else. Fortunately, *Dovid Hamelech* (King David) provided us with a powerful antidote to this problem: "One thing I request from Hashem, it is this [to the exclusion of all other things] that I desire, to dwell in the House of the L-rd all of the days of my life." (*Sefer Tehillim* 27:4) It must be noted that *Dovid Hamelech* is not advocating literally dwelling in the

synagogue or study hall to the exclusion of an active life engaged in worldly affairs. After all, he was the King of Israel! Rather, he is teaching us that whether we are in the boardroom, walking in the street, enjoying time with our families, or alone with ourselves, our point of focus must ever be Hashem. In other words, it is our job as Jews to bring Hashem and His holy Torah into every corner of our lives and into the innermost recesses of our souls. In that way, we will always be in “the House of the L-rd.”

We are now in Elul; the month that is preeminently set aside for *cheshbon hanefesh* (self-judgment) and *tikkun hanefesh* (addressing our failings and improving ourselves), in preparation for standing before Hashem on Rosh Hashanah. It is no less a time for us to realize that everyone, on occasion, feels alienated, lonely, alone, and like a “*ger b’eretz nochriah*” (“a stranger in a strange land,” *Sefer Shemot* 2:22). Therefore, just as we need to redouble our efforts in improving our relationship with the Master of the Universe, we need to improve our relationships with our fellow man and reach out to them in *chane, v’chesed, v’rachamim* (kindness, sensitivity, and mercy). We need to strengthen our relationships with our family, friends, and acquaintances, and let them know that they are important to us and that they are never alone. This is the heartfelt reassurance that we all really need – to know that we are significant to others and that we truly matter in their lives. If we can substantively improve ourselves in both these areas of the human experience – our relationships with G-d and with our fellow human beings - we will go a long way toward becoming better people and to actualizing our spiritual potential.

G-d willing, when we stand before Hashem this Rosh Hashanah, may we all merit a *shanah tovah* (a good year), a *shanah metukah* (a sweet year), a *shanah shel chaim tovim*

(a year of good life), and a year of Shalom for ourselves and for all of the Jewish people.

V'chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

Past drashot may be found at my website:

<http://reparashathashavuah.weebly.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 at rdbe718@gmail.com.