

Parashat Ki Tavo, 5781, 2021:

Hayom Hazeh

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, 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, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, 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, Chana bat Sarah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The concluding section of our *parasha* begins with an appeal for national reminiscence:

“And Moshe called all of Israel and said to them, ‘You have seen all that the L-rd did before your very eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, to all his servants, and to all his land; the great trials which your very eyes beheld and those great signs and wonders.’” (*Sefer Devarim* 29:1-2, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Significantly, the following *pasuk* indicates a break with the continuity of the past: “Yet until this day (*od hayom hazeh*), the L-rd has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see and ears to hear.” (29:3) The phrase, “*od hayom hazeh*,” appears 12 times in four of the five books of the Torah, the exception being *Sefer Vayikra*. In some instances it may be understood at face value, that is, this day, and in other cases, it connotes for all time. Our *pasuk* follows the first approach, suggesting a sense of immediacy. In other words, on this very day, and not before, Hashem gave our forebears knowing hearts, seeing eyes and hearing ears. Since we had born witness to Hashem’s wonders and miracles against Pharaoh and his people in Egypt with our “very eyes,” how is it possible that, *od hayom hazeh*, we did not have hearts, eyes, and ears capable of perceiving Hashem’s manifold miracles?

In my view, Rashi (1040-1105) focuses upon this question when he brings an unsourced *midrash*, introduced by the term, “*sha ’mati*” (“I have heard”), to explain *od hayom hazeh* in our verse:

I have heard that on the very day that Moshe gave the Torah scroll to the sons of Levi, as the verse says, “And he gave it to the *kohanim*, the sons of Levi,” (31:9) all Israel came before Moshe and said to him: “Moshe, our Teacher! We also stood at [Mount] Sinai and accepted the Torah, and it was [also] given to us! Why, then, are you giving the members of your tribe control over it, so that someday in the future they may claim, ‘It was not given to you, it was given only to us!’” Moshe rejoiced over this matter, and it was on account of this, that he said to them, “This day (*hayom hazeh*), you have become a people [to the L-rd your G-d]” (27:9). [This means:] “It is today (*hayom hazeh*) that I understand that you cleave to the Omnipresent and desire Him.”

I believe that this *midrash* is a “game changer” for understanding the relationship of the Jewish people to the Torah and Hashem. Herein, the entire nascent nation demands incontrovertible recognition of their inalienable claim to the Torah, and completely eschews the notion that the Torah should ever be the sole province of the *kohanim*. Moshe’s reaction is equally telling. With the realization that the entire people long for and seek to cleave to the Almighty, he rejoices in their words and recognizes that they are, *hayom hazeh*, truly Hashem’s people.

Approximately 200 years after Rashi, we find a somewhat parallel *midrash* in *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*:

“Moshe and the Levitic priests spoke to all Israel, saying,” [27:9] What words were spoken there? This comes to teach you that the Jewish people came and said to Moshe: “You have taken the Torah and given it to the *kohanim*, as the text states: ‘Then Moses wrote this Torah, and gave it to the priests, the descendants of Levi...’” [31:9] Then Moshe said to them: “Do you want me to establish a covenant (*brit*) that anyone who desires to learn Torah will never be prevented from doing so?” They said to him: “Yes!” They [Moshe and the Levitic priests] stood and took an oath that no one would ever be prevented from reading the Torah, as the text states: “to all Israel, saying.” Then Moshe said to them: “*hayom hazeh* you have become a people to the L-rd, your G-d [27:9].” (Parashat Ki Tavo, beginning of section 247, translation and brackets my own)

The message in both Rashi's gloss and the *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni* is clear: Each of us has the right and privilege to study Torah, and to thereby come closer to our Creator. It is truly *morasha kehilat Ya'akov* (the eternal legacy of the entire Jewish people, 33:4).

We are now on the cusp of encountering the Master of the Universe, during the *Yamim Noraim*. Let us hope and pray that, once again, He will judge us favorably, and we will be granted the opportunity to continue to demonstrate our commitment to His Torah as His holy people, forevermore. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic from *klal Yisrael* and all the nations of the world.

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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: [The Rav zatzal](#)