

Parashat Ki Tavo 5784, 2024:

The Greatest Love the World Has Ever Known

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

Our *parasha* contains two expressions that are not found anywhere else in Tanach, “*he’e’marta*” and “*he’e’mircha*:”

Today you have *he’e’marta*—declared allegiance to G-d, making Him your G-d, [pledging to] walk in His paths, keep His decrees, commandments and laws, and to obey His voice. G-d has similarly *he’e’mircha*—declared allegiance to you today, making you His special nation as He promised you. If you keep all His commandments. (*Sefer Devarim* 26:17-18, translation, *The Living Torah*, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan *zatzal*)

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) notes the unique nature of these words and suggests this interpretation:

We do not find any equivalent expression in the Tanach [which might help us understand the meaning of these words]. It appears to me, however, that [the expression *he’e’mir*] denotes separation and distinction. [As such, this connotes:] From all the pagan deities, you have set apart Hashem for yourself, to be your G-d, and He separated you to Him from all the peoples on earth to be His treasured people. (Translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Onkelos suggests an intriguingly different understanding of *he’e’marta* and *he’e’mircha*. In his estimation, these terms suggest a declaration of love between the Almighty and the Jewish nation. Consequently, Onkelos translates *he’e’marta* as “*chatavta*,” and *he’e’mircha* as “*chatvach*.” Both of these terms have their basis in the Aramaic word, “*chativah*,” which may be defined as an object of love. Based on this interpretation, the relevant segments of our verses would read, “Today you have declared singular love to G-d... [And] G-d has similarly declared His singular love today to you...”

Talmud Bavli, Berachot 6a follows Onkelos’ approach in its exposition of these expressions:

“*Et Hashem he’e’marta hayom v’Hashem he’e’mircha hayom:*” The Holy One blessed be He said to the Jewish people: “You have made Me a singular beloved object in the world, and I will make you, as well, a uniquely cherished entity in the world.” [From where do we know that you,] the Jewish people, declared Hashem to be your most beloved object in the world? As the Torah states: “Know O’ Jewish nation, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is one.” (*Sefer Devarim* 6:4) [From where do we know that] I (Hashem) have declared the Jewish people to be My one precious nation in the world? As the text states: “And who is like Your people of Israel, a remarkable and unequalled nation in the world?” (*Sefer Shmuel* II, 7:23, translations my own)

We find many instances of the *mitzvah* of loving Hashem in *Sefer Devarim*. Here is a small sample:

And now, O’ Israel, what does Hashem, your G-d, demand of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, and to worship Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul (10:12); [Therefore] you shall love Hashem, your G-d... (11:1); And it will be, if you hearken to My commandments that I command you this day to love Hashem, your G-d... (11:13); For if you keep all these commandments which I command you to do them, to love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in all His ways, and to cleave to Him. (11:22, Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

While our obligation to love Hashem is quite clear, His love for us may appear elusive. If we sensitize ourselves to the words of the daily *tefilot*, however, we can readily hear His message of devotion to us. For example, the second *bracha* before the recitation of the morning *Shema* begins with the phrase, “*ahavah rabbah*”: “With an abundant love have You loved us, Hashem, our G-d...” It concludes with: “Blessed are You Hashem, Who chooses His people Israel with love.” (Translation, *Artscroll Siddur*) Significantly, the text does not state “Who chose His people Israel with love,” which would reference an ancient historical choice. Instead, *Chazal* formulated the prayer in the present tense, that is, Hashem continuously chooses us in love. This illustrates the ongoing extent of the care and concern our Creator has for us.

In addition, two explicit statements of Hashem’s deep connection to us are found in the *Shemoneh Esrei*. In the first *bracha*, we encounter the phrase, “*l’ma’an sh’mo b’ahavah*—for His Name’s sake, with love.” In addition, in *Re’zesh* we encounter the phrase: “*u’tefilatom b’ahavah tikabale b’ratzon*—and their prayer accept with love and favor.” In sum, if we carefully listen to our daily

tefilot, we will sense Hashem's loving presence enveloping us. Little wonder, then, that *Megillat Shir HaShirim* is the ultimate metaphor for the relationship that obtains between Hashem and the Jewish people. It proclaims to us that we are never alone; for no matter how difficult our daily struggles may be, Hashem is our beloved soulmate who continually reaches out to us *b'ahavah*. In a world that is so often frightening and alienating, this is a message we long to hear.

With Hashem's help, may we ever grow in our love and devotion to Him, and may we continue to be deserving of His everlasting love. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** 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.