

Parashat Korach, 5776, 2016:

## *G-d of All Spirits*

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, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Leah bat Shifra and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha*, as well as *Parashat Pinchas*, contain an appellation of Hashem that is found only two times in Tanach:

They [Moshe and Aharon] fell on their faces and said, “O G-d, the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, if one man sins, shall You be angry with the whole congregation?” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 16:22)

“Let the L-rd, the G-d of spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 27:16, these, and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The Hebrew original for “the G-d of the spirits of all flesh” is “*Elokei haruchot l’kol basar.*” Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself upon *Midrash Tanchuma, Parashat Korach*, 7, explains this phrase as “He who knows the innermost thoughts of man” (“*yodayah machshavot*”):

...But You know the thoughts of man; You know who has committed a sin and who has not committed a sin. You know who has rebelled and who has not rebelled. You know the spirit [i.e. nature] of each and every one of them. Therefore the Torah utilizes the expression: “*Elokei haruchot l’kol basar*” (“the G-d of the spirits of all flesh,” translation my own).

It is fascinating to note that each time the expression “*Elokei haruchot l’kol basar*” is employed, it is preceded by two different names of G-d, namely, “*A-le,*” in our *parasha* and “*Hashem*” in *Parashat Pinchas*. What is the reason for this difference? In our *parasha*, Moshe was pleading with G-d to save the Jewish people and recognize that, while Korach and his henchmen rebelled against Him, the rest of the nation was not

culpable and should be preserved. Since G-d was ready to act with *middat hadin* (the attribute of strict and swift justice) and eradicate our people, Moshe quite properly addressed him with the name “*A-le*,” a name that references G-d’s unlimited power and ability. In stark contrast, the verse from *Parashat Pinchas* portrays Moshe pleading with G-d to provide the people with an appropriate leader to replace him upon his imminent demise. This would be an act of consummate kindness for *klal Yisrael* (the Jewish nation). Hence, Moshe used the name “*Hashem*,” since it connotes *middat harachamim* (the attribute of Divine mercy).

I believe that Rashi’s definition of “*Elokei haruchot l’kol basar*,” i.e. “He who knows the innermost thoughts of man,” is alluded to in *Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin* 40a in its examination of a verse from *Sefer Malachi*: “Then the G-d-fearing men spoke to one another, and the L-rd hearkened and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared the L-rd and for those who valued His name highly.” (3:16) The Talmud cites this verse and states that from here we may learn the principle that “a positive thought is combined with action” (“*machshavah tovah mitzarvah l’ma’aseh*). It then asks, what is the content of Malachi’s expression, “for those who valued His name highly?” Rav Assi responds in this manner: “Even if a person thinks about performing a *mitzvah*, and is prevented from doing so based upon factors beyond his control (*v’ne’enas*), the Torah accounts [his thoughts] as if he has actually performed the commandment.” (Translation, explication and brackets my own)

Rav Assi’s concept is quite powerful and far-reaching in scope. Given that G-d is “*Elokei haruchot l’kol basar*,” in the sense that Rashi explains, we are fortunate that as long as

we have the authentic desire and intention to fulfill a *mitzvah*, even if the exigencies of the situation do not allow us to do so, the Master of the Universe accounts such positive thoughts to our credit and thereby judges us favorably. Clearly, this is a prime example of G-d's *chane, v'chesed v'rachamim* (favor, kindness and mercy).

With Hashem's help, may we ever desire to serve *Elokei haruchot l'kol basar* through the performance of His *mitzvot*. Yet, as Rav Assi teaches us, even when our passionate yearnings to fulfill His commandments are thwarted, we can be comforted in knowing that we will nevertheless receive our Creator's ultimate favor, kindness and mercy.

*V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on [YUTorah.org](http://YUTorah.org) using the search criteria of 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* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* 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.