

Parashat Pekudei, 5779, 2019:

*Clouds of Glory*

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 Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains the final *pasuk* (verse) of *Sefer Shemot*: “For the cloud of the L-rd was upon the *Mishkan* by day, and there was fire within it at night, before the eyes of the entire house of Israel in all their journeys.” (*Sefer Shemot* 40:38, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The beginning of our *pasuk* highlights “the cloud of the L-rd [that] was upon the *Mishkan* by day.” This was not the first time we have encountered Hashem’s cloud of glory. Rather, in His overwhelming *chesed v’rachamim* (kindness and mercy), the Almighty had provided this miraculous wonder for us during the Exodus from Egypt:

And the L-rd went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to cause it to lead them on the way and at night in a pillar of fire to give them light, [they thus could] travel day and night. He did not move away the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire at night [from] before the people. (*Sefer Shemot* 13:21-22)

In his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verse, Rashi (1040-1105) notes that this pillar of cloud played a dual role as both Hashem’s messenger, and our fledgling nation’s guide during their travels in the Sinai Desert wasteland:

Now who was that messenger? [It was] the pillar of cloud, and the Holy One, blessed be He, in His glory, led it before them. In any case, it was the pillar of cloud that He prepared so that they could be led by it, for they would travel by the pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud was not [meant] to provide light but to direct them [on] the way.

At first glance, it would seem quite logical to equate the cloud of Hashem that was upon the *Mishkan* with the pillar of cloud of the Exodus. After all, they were both *nissim* (miracles) from

Hashem. The Vilna Gaon (“the Gra,” Rabbi Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, 1720-1797), however, carefully contrasts these two instances and urges us to focus upon their significant differences, rather than their apparent similarities:

Even though there was a Cloud of Glory that accompanied and went before them during the Exodus, it was short-lived and remained with them only until the Sea of Reeds (*Yam Suf*). Moreover, it was invisible to the vast majority of the Jewish people, since it was seen solely by the prophets that were among them. This was not the case in this instance [i.e. our *parasha*’s verse]: “For the cloud of the L-rd was upon the *Mishkan* by day...before the eyes of the entire house of Israel in all their journeys.” (*Sefer Chumash HaGra*, Parashat Ki Tisa 34:10, based upon *Sefer Aderet Eliyahu*, this and the following translations my own)

According to the Vilna Gaon, there were two essential differences between the original pillar of cloud that went before our people on their journey of redemption, and the one that rested upon the *Mishkan*: The Cloud of Glory of the Exodus was temporary in nature, whereas the cloud resting upon the *Mishkan* was permanent in nature. Moreover, the Cloud of Glory of the Exodus was invisible to the majority of our nation, while the cloud of Hashem that rested upon the *Mishkan* was manifestly present before the entire people. What might account for these notable differences? Here, too, we are fortunate, since we can once again rely upon the Vilna Gaon’s trenchant analysis:

These changes came about from the time of Moses’ prayer [following the Sin of the Golden Calf] and onward: “For how then will it be known that I have found favor in Your eyes, I and Your people? Is it not that You will go with us? Then I and Your people will be distinguished (*v’niflinu*) from every [other] nation on the face of the earth.” (*Sefer Shemot* 33:16) Then the Holy One answered Moses: “And He said: ‘Behold! I will form a covenant; in the presence of all your people, I will perform wonders such as have not been created upon all the earth and among all the nations...’” (*Sefer Shemot* 34:10) [What was this?] This is what is meant by the expressions, [in our verse, “before the eyes of the entire house of Israel in all their journeys,”] and “the eyes of the entire Jewish people.” (*Sefer Devarim* 31:7, 34:12) And it is for this that we wait once again.

Thus, according to the Vilna Gaon, Moses’ *tefilah* (prayer) for reconciliation with the Almighty following the Sin of the Golden Calf altered the very nature of the *ananei hakavode* (Clouds of Glory). For the first time, all the men, women and children of the Jewish people could apprehend

the vision of the Cloud of Glory resting upon the holy *Mishkan*. Suddenly, everyone could feel the Divine Presence of the Master of the Universe.

The Vilna Gaon's words, "And it is for this we wait once again," resonate through the ages, until our own time. With Hashem's boundless kindness, may we witness the Cloud of Glory in the soon to be rebuilt *Beit Hamikdash*. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.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:rdb718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: [\*\*http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd\*\*](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.