

Parashat Shemini 5780, 2020:

The Closeness of Hashem

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 Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, 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, 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 and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The eleventh chapter of *Sefer Vayikra*, the concluding section of our *parasha*, serves as a mini compendium of *Hilchot Kashrut* (The Laws of Kashrut). In particular, the latter verses of these *halachot* focus upon the prohibition of eating any “*sheretz* — creeping creature that crawls on the ground.” (44) Within this context, we find the following thought-provoking *pasuk* (verse): “For I am the L-rd *ha’ma’leh* — Who has brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your G-d. Thus, you shall be holy, because I am holy.” (45, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In his *Commentary on the Torah* on our *pasuk*, Rashi (1040-1105), in line with *Talmud Bavli, Bava Metziah* 61b, notes the unusual use of the word “*ha’ma’leh*.” Instead, “*hotzati* — and I took you out, is the far more frequently encountered term, as in: “I am the L-rd, your G-d, *asher hotzaiticha* — Who took you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” (*Sefer Shemot* 20:2) Why, then, does the Torah choose *ha’ma’leh* rather than *hotzati* in our *pasuk*?

Rashi suggests the following answer to our question:

...the school of Rabbi Ishmael taught: [G-d says,] “If I had brought up Israel from Egypt solely so they would not defile themselves with creeping creatures like the other nations,

it would have been sufficient for them, therefore, this is a *ma'alee'uta* — an exaltation for them [that is, this is one of the significant ways they are differentiated from the other nations of the world]. This, then, explains [the use of] the expression *ha'ma'leh*.

In sum, according to the school of Rabbi Yishmael, as cited by the Talmud and Rashi, our acceptance of the prohibition against eating *sheratzim* is so significant that for this, alone, we would have deserved *Yetziat Mitzrayim* — the Departure from Egypt, as this act is a *ma'alee'uta* that helps define our uniqueness as Hashem's holy people.

The Sforno (1475-1550) utilizes our *pasuk* to lead us to a deeper understanding of *kedushah* (holiness) and its role in helping forge our relationship with Hashem:

And it is proper and fitting for you to undertake these efforts to sanctify yourselves and to be holy — in order to fulfill My will. For, in truth, My intention when I took you out of the land of Egypt was to enable you to apprehend this crucial concept, and in so doing I will now be your G-d without any intermediary whatsoever. Moreover, you will be holy and an eternal nation as a result of your striving to emulate Me through [the development of] your ethical characteristics and your essential principles of thought — for I am holy. (Translation and brackets my own)

Herein, the Sforno underscores a central theological construct of Judaism that is a corollary of our pursuit of *kedushah*, namely: “I will now be your G-d without any intermediary whatsoever.” While it is true that the Master of the Universe is *l'ailah min kol birkata v'shirata* — above and beyond all blessings and praises, He nonetheless remains ever close and accessible to us. As the Torah attests: “For what great nation is there that has G-d *krovim aluv* — so near to it, as the L-rd our G-d is at all times that we call upon Him?” (*Sefer Devarim* 4:7)

We are indeed fortunate that we have this singular and intimate relationship with Hashem that is devoid of “any intermediary whatsoever.” This allows us to beseech Him from the depths of our hearts and call upon Him with the following *bracha* three times a day:

Hear our voice, Hashem our G-d, pity and be compassionate to us, and accept — with compassion and favor — our prayer, for G-d Who hears prayers and supplication are You. From before Yourself, our King, turn us not away empty-handed, for You hear the prayers of Your people Israel with compassion. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who hears prayer. (Translation, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*).

May we ever be Hashem's holy nation and reach out to Him in fervent prayer with the certainty that we will always be heard. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and the entire world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria 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* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: [**http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd**](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.