

Parashat Sh'lach Lecha 5778, 2018:

The Power of Prayer

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, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, and HaRav Raphael ben HaRav Ephraim, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha, Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Tzvi Yoel ben Yocheved, Eliezer ben Levi and Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains a *pasuk* (verse) with a very puzzling phrase: “These are the names of the men Moses sent to scout the Land, and Moses called (*vayikra Moshe*) Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua (*Yehoshua*).” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 13:16, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) At first glance, the concluding part of this verse seems to indicate that something new has taken place, namely, Moses has now renamed Hoshea, “Joshua (*Yehoshua*).” Yet, this name is hardly new, as it appears a total of eight times before in both *Sefer Shemot* and *Sefer Bamidbar*. Moreover, the name Hoshea is not supplanted by the appellation Joshua, since it appears, once again, in *Sefer Devarim* 32:44: “And Moses came and spoke all the words of this song into the ears of the people, he and Hoshea the son of Nun.” What, then, is the Torah teaching us when it states in our *parasha*, “and Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua (*Yehoshua*)?”

The classic answer to our question is found both in *Talmud Bavli*, *Sotah* 34b and Rashi’s (1040-1105) *Commentary on the Torah*. According to these sources, Moses was afraid the *meraglim* (scouts) could have a negative influence on Hoshea, and therefore sought to protect him by renaming him *Yehoshua*: “May the L-rd save you from the counsel of the Scouts.” This is the case, since the Hebrew etymology of this name is a contraction of “*Y-ah*” (represented by the letter *yud*) and “*Hoshea*,” and denotes the idea that “Hashem should save you.” My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi

Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, expanded upon the underlying meaning of the addition of the *yud* to Hoshea’s name in the following midrashically-infused analysis:

Prior to sending the spies to scout the land, Moses changed Hoshea’s name to Joshua, signifying that G-d should save him from the evil designs of the other spies (Rashi). The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 47:1) indicates that Moses effected this change by transferring the letter *yud* from Sarah’s former name (*Sarai*) to Joshua’s. (*Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Bamidbar: With Commentary Based upon the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, this and the following quotes, page 100, brackets my own*)

At this point, the Rav examines the meaning of the letter *yud* and explains that it represents privacy and separation. Thus, when Sarah was initially *Sarai* (i.e. her name ended in a *yud*), she was “the matriarch of her family alone.” Building upon this concept, the Rav notes that Hoshea needed to be keenly aware that he was completely different from the negatively predisposed scouts, so that he could remain steadfast in his commitment to the Promised Land:

Moses added the letter *yud* so Joshua would attain the sense of separation and withdrawal that was taken from Sarah [when she became “the matriarch of a family of nations”]... Moses changed Joshua’s name so that he would have the strength to separate himself from...[the] collective entity [of the spies], enabling him to take a principled stand against the prevailing sentiment.

Based upon our new-found understanding of the letter *yud* added to Hoshea’s name, we are in a better position to understand Rashi’s explication of the name *Yehoshua*, and how this differs from the above-cited Talmudic statement. Crucially, Rashi’s commentary adds the word, “prayed:” “He [Moses] *prayed* (*hitpalel*) concerning him [Joshua] that Hashem should protect him from the counsel of the scouts.” In other words, *vayikra Moshe* (and Moses called) connotes much more than the idea of renaming, instead, it actually means, “and Moses prayed.” This notion is expanded upon in the thought of Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi (1455-1525), author of one of the most celebrated supercommentaries on Rashi’s *Commentary on the Torah*:

The explanation of the term “vayikra” in our *pasuk* is that of prayer (*tefilah*), as we find in the verse, “and Abram called there in the name of the L-rd.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 13:4) Therefore, the explanation of the name, “Yehoshua,” is: “Hashem should save you” ... as if it actually said, “And he [Moses] prayed regarding Hoshea that Hashem should save you, that Hashem, may He be blessed, should save you from the advice of the spies.” Moreover, it is essential to explain “vayikra Moshe” in this fashion, rather than in the normative sense [of “he called”], since there is no [other] reason for literally changing Hoshea’s name at this juncture. (*Sefer Mizrahi, Sefer Bamidbar* 13:16, translation, brackets and underlining my own)

I believe a potentially life-changing message emerges from Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi’s profound analysis of Rashi’s comment, namely, the nearly unlimited power of *tefilah*. Moses’ prayer consisted of but one letter added to Hoshea’s name, yet, in this instance, it changed Jewish history for evermore, for now Joshua would become the one to lead the Jewish people to their life and destiny in *Eretz Yisrael*. If the letter *yud*, alone, had this awesome ability, imagine what we can do, as individuals and as a nation, if we encounter the Almighty in heartfelt and considered prayer.

Shabbat Shalom

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 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 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.