

Parashat Terumah 5780, 2020:

To Partner with 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 focus of our *parasha* is the construction of the *Mishkan* (Portable Desert Sanctuary) and its *kalim* — the holy vessels contained therein. As the Torah declares: “And they [the Jewish people] shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst.” (*Sefer Shemot* 25:8, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, brackets my own) Over time, the *menorah* has emerged as the best-known of the *kalim*, perhaps because of the Chanukah story and the small amount of oil that miraculously burned for eight days, a nearly universal symbol of light that can dispel even the deepest darkness and offer hope to a suffering world.

The Torah introduces the construction of the *menorah* in the following words: “And you shall make a *menorah* of pure gold. *Mikshah tei’aseh hamenorah* — The *menorah* shall be made of hammered work; its base and its stem, its goblets, its knobs, and its flowers shall [all] be [one piece] with it.” (25:31) In his *Commentary on the Torah* on our *pasuk*, the Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) notes that the word “*tei’aseh*” can be spelled with or without the letter *yud*, and that “if it does have a *yud* it is a *milah zarah* — a highly unusual word.” This observation is preceded by the following fascinating observation:

I have seen Torah scrolls that were meticulously checked by the Sages of Tiberius. 15 of their sages have sworn they have carefully reviewed every word and every vowel as well as every full and incomplete spelling within them. They attest that there is a *yud* in the word, “*tei’aseh*.” I have never found this before in the scrolls of Spain and France and in those from *ma’avare hayam* — over the sea. (Translation and brackets my own)

Clearly, at this point in the middle of the 12th century, there were spelling variations of the word *tei’aseh* in the Torah scrolls in different geographically based communities as to whether it was spelled *maleh* — with a *yud*, or *chaser* — without a *yud*. The eighth or ninth century work, *Midrash Tanchuma*, Parashat Beha’alotecha III, however, deploys the *maleh* form and presents the following fascinating *drasha* based upon this spelling:

When [Hashem] recognized that the *menorah* was too difficult [for Moshe] to construct, the Holy One blessed be He said to Moshe: “Take a talent [sixty four pounds] of gold and toss it into the fire and bring it out therefrom — and it [the *menorah*] will be created by itself...” [Once Moshe removed it from the fire, Hashem said to him:] “And now, you are to strike it with a hammer, and it will be created by itself.” This is the reason why the Torah states: “*Mikshah tei’aseh hamenorah*,” with a *yud* so that the spelling of *tei’aseh* is *maleh*, rather than *chaser* without a *yud*... This teaches us that the total *menorah* [with all of its parts] was created by itself. (Translation and brackets my own)

Rashi (1040-1105) apparently knew our midrashic passage and synopsized it in his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verse in the following manner:

the menorah shall be made: By itself. Since Moses found difficulty with it [that is, how to form the *menorah*], the Holy One, blessed is He, said to him, “Cast the talent [of gold] into the fire, and it will be made by itself.” Therefore, it is not written *ta’aseh* [without a *yud*], but *tei’aseh* [with a *yud*]. (Underlining and emendations my own)

In my view, Rashi’s summation of our midrash leaves out a crucial part of its text, namely, “And now [said Hashem], you are to strike it [that is, the talent of gold] with a hammer, and it will be created by itself.” This leads us to ask a classic exegetical question: “If Hashem was going to perform a great miracle with the talent of gold so that the *menorah* would be created by itself, why did Moshe need to do anything at all — let alone strike the gold with a hammer?”

I believe that Moshe striking the gold and its subsequent transformation into the *menorah* is similar in kind to what transpired at *Kriyat Yam Suf* — the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds: “The L-rd said to Moses, Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them travel. And you raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and split it, and the children of Israel shall come in the midst of the sea on dry land.” (*Sefer Shemot* 14:15-16) It certainly seems that Hashem, and Hashem alone, was to split the *Yam Suf*. Yet, as the midrashic tradition repeatedly attests, this wondrous event did not transpire until Nachshon ben Aminadav courageously jumped into the roiling waters: “And Nachshon was the first to jump up and go into the Sea. In so doing, he sanctified His great Name in the eyes of all. [As a result,] under the Tribe of Yehudah’s leadership [that was led by Nachshon], the entire Jewish people followed their lead and entered the Sea.” (*Midrash Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, Chapter 22, translation my own) Clearly, Nachshon’s courageous act of *kiddush Hashem* was the “trigger” for *Kriyat Yam Suf*.

In my estimation, we can learn a crucial lesson from Nachshon’s literal leap of faith and Moshe’s seemingly minor act of striking the talent of gold: While in both instances a Nature-defying deed was planned and executed by the Almighty, He nonetheless waited patiently for a spiritually-infused individual to join Him in the performance of the miracle. In sum, the Master of the Universe split the *Yam Suf* and created the *Menorah* — but not before Nachshon and Moshe became His beloved partners in His holy task.

We are not on the level of Nachshon and Moshe; nonetheless, each of us, in our own unique manner, can become partners with Hashem. While this requires great effort and unceasing dedication on our part, we must always remember the stirring words of Ben Hei Hei in

Pirkei Avot, “*l’fum tza’ara agra* — According to the effort is the reward.” (V:21) May we ever strive to partner with the Almighty to be *metakane ha’olam b’malchut Sha-dai* — improve and perfect the world under His sovereignty . With Hashem’s help and our fervent desire, may this be so. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

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 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>

*** 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.