

Parashat Tzav – Shabbat Hagadol 5778, 2018:

Pesach and the Future Redemption

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, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha and Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

This Shabbat is popularly known as “*Shabbat Hagadol*” – the Great Shabbat. In many ways, this appellation urges us to focus upon the meaning of *geulah* (redemption), since it is juxtaposed to Pesach – the preeminent Festival of Redemption. The Mishnaic sage, Rabbi Yehoshua, teaches us a profound lesson concerning the inextricable relationship that obtains between Pesach and the future redemption of the Jewish people: “Rabbi Yehoshua said: ‘In Nissan [the month of the Exodus] the world was created, the Patriarchs, including Isaac, were born and passed away...and in Nissan we were redeemed and will be redeemed in the future.’” (*Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah* 11a, translation and brackets my own)

The connection between the historical Exodus and the future *geulah* provides a compelling rationale for *Chazal*’s (our Sages of blessed memory) choice of the last chapter in *Sefer Malachi* as the *haftarah* (reading from the Prophets) for this Shabbat. The following famous passage is contained therein:

Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers... (*Sefer Malachi* 3:23-24, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The Mishnaic sage, Rabbi Yehuda, as quoted in the Aggadic work, *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer*, underscores the singular role that Elijah the prophet will play in enabling the fulfillment of Judaism's messianic vision. He notes that the ultimate redemption of our people will take place if, and only if, the Jewish people undertake the *teshuvah* (repentance) process:

Rabbi Yehudah said: “If the Jewish people do not do *teshuvah*, then they will not be redeemed... In addition, the Jewish people will never perform *teshuvah gedolah* (great repentance) until the arrival of Eliyahu, may he be remembered for good. As it states in the text: ‘Lo, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers...’ Blessed are You Hashem Who desires [the Jewish people] to do *teshuvah*.” (Chapter 43, translation and brackets my own)

Rabbi Yehudah differentiates between the terms *teshuvah* and *teshuvah gedolah*. The first is within the grasp of the Jewish people if we have the desire to do so, whereas the second is unattainable “until the arrival of Eliyahu, may he be remembered for good.”

In my view, *Sefer Hoshea* provides us with an approach to understanding the content of these two terms, and the reason as to why Eliyahu’s intervention is vital for the attainment of *teshuvah gedolah*:

Return (*shuva*) O’ Israel unto (*od*) the L-rd your G-d for you have stumbled in your sin. Take words with yourselves and return to (*el*) the L-rd. Say, “You shall forgive all iniquity and teach us [the] good [way], and let us render [for] bulls [the offering of] our lips.” (14:2-3).

A careful reading reveals that the first *pasuk* employs the preposition “*od*,” whereas the second utilizes “*el*” in reference to the *teshuvah* process. The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Jehiel Michel Weiser, 1809-1878) notes that the word “*od*” in 14:2 signifies a sense of *richuk* (distance) between two objects or entities, in this instance, between G-d and the Jewish people:

The word “*od*” connotes the idea that Hashem stood far away from them [i.e. the Jewish people], and that they needed to walk toward Him until they came near to Him, unto the place wherein He was to be found. This means that they had to reject their earlier sins, feel remorseful for what they had done in the past, namely, they had erred in multiple ways, both inadvertently and through reasons beyond their control, and that they now must seek out the proper path to return unto Hashem. (Translation, brackets and underlining my own)

According to the Malbim, when Hoshea states, “Return O’ Israel unto (*od*) the L-rd your G-d,” he is teaching us that Hashem was distant from our ancestors, and that it was necessary to make every conceivable effort to close the gaping chasm that separated us from Him. This, then, was the absolute mandate of that particular historical moment that continues to inspire us until our own time.

The second verse, wherein the idea of returning to Hashem is referenced by the term “*el*,” is an entirely different matter. For the Malbim, “*el*” refers to returning to Hashem out of love and devotion – *teshuvah m’ahavah*, rather than as a result of fear of punishment:

The second reference of “return to (*el*) the L-rd,” encapsulates the notion of *teshuvah* based upon love. In this case, our purposive sins will not only be thought of as being inadvertent in nature; rather, they will be thought of as being meritorious acts. Thus, the forgiveness that our forefathers obtained from Hashem was on account of their sins being viewed as acts beyond their control, i.e. accidental acts, or errors – therefore, the forgiveness that they received was a result of their merits and righteousness being added to the divine equation (*sh’yikachu emahem l’dvar zechut alyehem*) ... As a result, Hashem saw that after our ancestors grievously sinned, they returned to His service in order to love Him – with their complete minds and hearts – and no longer from fear of punishment... (Underlining my own)

Thus, according to the Malbim, Hoshea provides us with a roadmap for returning to Hashem. that is comprised of two different possible routes. In my estimation, these approaches correspond to the expressions “*teshuvah*” and “*teshuvah gedolah*” that are found in the previously referenced words of Rabbi Yehuda. *Teshuvah*, based on our essential human need to positively reset our relationship with Hashem, is something that we are capable of attaining on our own. This is the case, since most of us can recognize that we have sinned and that this has driven a wedge between ourselves and our Creator. In contrast, *teshuvah gedolah*, when viewed through the prism of *teshuvah m’ahavah*, is an entirely different matter, as its goal is to advance our connection with the Almighty based upon our love and devotion for Him. As we have seen, Malachi, in this week’s *haftorah*, teaches us that *teshuvah m’ahavah* requires a spiritual mentor to help us grasp its

overwhelming import so that we may actualize it in our lives. Clearly, this guide is none other than the prophet Eliyahu: “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-rd, that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers.”

May the time come soon, and in our days, when the words we recite in the *Harachaman* section of *Birkat Hamazon* will be fully realized, heralding the ultimate redemption of our people: “The compassionate One! May He send us Elijah, the Prophet – he is remembered for good – to proclaim to us good tidings, salvations, and consolations.” (Translation, *The Complete ArtScroll Siddur*).
V'chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Kasher v'Sameach!*

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/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.