

Parashat Va'etchanan 5780, 2020:

Rabbi David Etengoff

Ain Od: There is None Other

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, 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, Dovid Shmuel ben Chasiyah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains one of the most often recited *pasukim* in the Torah, as it is found at the end of the first paragraph of the *Aleinu*: “*V’yadata hayom v’hashavota el l’vavecha —* And you shall know this day and consider it in your heart [that is, your mind], that the L-rd He is G-d in heaven above, and upon the earth below; *ain od —*there is none other than He.” (*Sefer Devarim* 4:39, this and all Torah translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The expression “and you shall know — *v’yadata*” is difficult to interpret, since it can either be a narrative statement describing what will be, or a *tzivui* — an imperative statement — prescribing what we must do.

In his *Commentary on the Torah* on our verse, Rabbeinu Bahya ben Asher (1255-1340) adopts the position that our *pasuk* is, indeed, a straightforward *tzivui*:

“and consider it in your heart:” This is a positive commandment from the Torah to know Hashem may He be blessed. For we are commanded to know Him and to [actively] analyze His unity and not rely solely upon accepted tradition in this matter. And this knowledge [is acquired through a recognition] of His works and His awe-filled actions, as well as [a cognizance] of all His creations, be they heavenly or terrestrial in nature. (This and the following translations my own)

In sum, Rabbeinu Bahya asserts that there is a positive Torah commandment to know

Hashem that is experience-based, since knowledge of Him may be obtained through an appreciation and recognition of His creatures and the majesty of His Creation. Moreover, we must do our own due diligence to try to comprehend His unity, rather than accept this aspect of His Divine Being merely based upon *Massorah* (Tradition). As such, in Rabbeinu Bahya's view, "v'yadata" requires our active engagement in order that we may achieve a vibrant and dynamic relationship with the Almighty.

At this juncture, Rabbeinu Bahya focuses upon the phrase "v'hashavota el l'vavecha — and consider it in your heart [mind]," and notes, like the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) before him, that experiential knowledge of Hashem is not the same as acquiring actual knowledge of His essence and being, for that will ever elude our understanding. As *Shlomo HaMelech* teaches us in *Sefer Mishle*: The honor of G-d is to conceal a matter..." (25:2) Since the Almighty conceals far more than he reveals to humankind, Rabbeinu Bahya maintains we must implement "v'hashavota el l'vavecha" in our daily lives "like a man who thinks deeply regarding a particular matter and must return and think about it [time and time again]." For then, and then only, may we as finite beings perceive the faintest glimmers of the *Ein Sof* — the Infinite.

Rabbeinu Bahya further elaborates on this concept of *hashavat halev* — focusing your mind upon the existence and reality of Hashem — by combining it with the concluding words of our verse, "that the L-rd He is G-d in heaven above, and upon the earth below; there is no One else:"

A person's mind must ever focus on the notion that Hashem is Elokim in the sense that He is the One Who guides the Universe: in the Heavens — the planets, and Above — the Angels, and upon the earth — the terrestrial plane, and below — the very depths of the deep... Ain od — there is none other than He in all of these worlds.

May these insights into Hashem as *Elokim* — the One Who Guides the Universe — enhance our understanding of the celebrated expression “*ain od milvado* — there is none other besides Him” (*Sefer Devarim* 4:35), and thereby help us forge a more meaningful and vital relationship with the Almighty. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His great mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

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/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.