

Parashat Vayera, 5781, 2020:

Avraham Ohavi

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, 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 health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Avraham's relationship with Hashem was unique among the *Avot*. He was the only one whom the Almighty called both *Avdi*, My servant (*Sefer Bereishit* 26:24), and *Ohavi*, My beloved friend (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 41:8). Avraham's *avdi* status is readily seen in a *pasuk* in our *parasha*: "For I [Hashem] have known him [Avraham] because he commands his sons and his household after him, that they should keep the way of the L-rd to perform righteousness and justice... (*Sefer Bereishit* 18:19, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) Avraham kept "the way of the L-rd" in the sense that, like a servant, he served Him in righteousness and justice, and tasked his household to do the same. What is less apparent, however, is why Avraham acquired the appellation, "*ohavi*."

One of the earliest sources to address this question is the *Midrash Sifrei* on *Sefer Devarim*, section 32, that analyzes the degree of love for Hashem that is necessary to fulfill the commandment of *Ahavat Hashem* — Love of Hashem — on its highest level:

Rabbi Meir said: "the text [of the *Shema*] states: 'and you should love Hashem, your G-d *b'chol l'vavacha*.' This would be like Avraham, your father, about whom the text states: 'you, Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, who is my beloved friend.'" (Translation my own)

In this *midrash*, Avraham emerges as the archetype of one who truly loves the Almighty with a complete. This is how he become Hashem's beloved friend.

The Rambam (1135-1204) also discusses how Avraham demonstrated his abiding love for the Almighty, and describes the process whereby he attained the title of *Ohavi*:

...when you love a person, for example, you praise him and call out to others to draw close to him. So too, if you truly love G-d — through your understanding and realization of His true existence — you will certainly spread this true knowledge that you know... [As the *Midrash Sifrei* states:] “You shall love G-d,” that is, make Him beloved among humankind as your father Avraham did, as it is written, “the souls that he made in Charan.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 12:5) Since Avraham loved Hashem, as the text attests: “Avraham, My beloved friend, (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 41:8)... his powerful love caused him to call out to all mankind to believe in G-d. So too, you shall love Him to the extent that you draw others to Him. (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, Positive Commandment Three, translation, based upon Sefaria.com with my underlining and extensive emendations)

Avraham was the world's first exponent of monotheism and an authentic religious revolutionary. He repudiated the cultural and religious values of his time. This heroic gesture took consummate belief, as well as endless courage and determination. Truly, as the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) once declared, *Avraham Avinu* was the ultimate “Knight of Faith.”

Avraham's entrance onto the grand stage of world history was a great comfort to Hashem. He was the first person after the Flood to acknowledge, love, worship, and serve the Master of the Universe in wholehearted devotion. In my estimation, this is the underlying basis for Rashi's (1040-1105) gloss on the word “*ohavi*” in his *Commentary On Sefer Yeshayahu*: “He [Avraham] did not recognize Me as a result of rebuke (*tochacha*), nor as a result of having been educated by his forebears to do so. Instead, he did this purely out of love.” (Translation my own) Expanding upon Rashi's comment, I

would suggest that not only did Avraham undertake his actions “purely out of love,” but perhaps even more fundamentally, his love for the Almighty was completely pure.

On measure, *Avraham Avinu* will always be our inspiration for developing and expanding our role as the Jewish people. As the Lubavitcher *rebbe* (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson *zatzal*, 1902-1994) said:

Avraham Avinu gave us as a nation, and as individuals, the ability to bring light to the world and to begin everything anew. Because of *Avraham*, we have nothing whatsoever to fear as we go forth into the world with our torch [Torah and truth]. Beyond a doubt, [our task] is to enlighten the world and to bestir the hearts [and minds of all humankind]. (Summary of *Sichot* for the first night of Succot, Rabbi Shmuel Riskin, translation and brackets my own)

With Hashem’s help and our sincerest desire, may each of us strive to emulate *Avraham Avinu* and demonstrate our love for the Almighty by bringing the light of His Torah to the world. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the 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>

*** 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.