

Parshiot Matot - Masei 5777, 2017:

The Eternality of Torat Moshe

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, Shoshana Elka bat Etiel Dina and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The phrase, “*aleh hamitzvot*” (“these are the commandments”), appears twice in the Torah, namely, in the concluding *pasukim* (verses) of *Sefer Vayikra*, and in our *parasha* in *Sefer Bamidbar*:

These are the commandments (*mitzvot*) that the L-rd commanded Moses to [tell] the children of Israel on Mount Sinai. (*Sefer Vayikra* 27:34)

These are the commandments (*mitzvot*) and the ordinances (*v'hamishpatim*) that the L-rd commanded the children of Israel through Moses in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan at Jericho. (*Sefer Bamidbar* 36:13, these and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The *pasukim* are dissimilar in that the geographic location mentioned in the first *pasuk* is Mount Sinai, whereas the second refers to “the plains of Moab, by the Jordan at Jericho.” Additionally, the first verse only mentions *mitzvot*, while the second includes *mishpatim*. In both cases, however, Moses is charged with the obligation to teach the commandments to the entire Jewish people. This concept is alluded to, as well, in the well-known verse, “*Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morasha kehillat Ya'akov*” (“The Torah that Moses commanded us is a legacy for the congregation of Jacob,” *Sefer Devarim* 33:4)

While the substantive meaning of “*aleh hamitzvot*” is elusive, we are fortunate that the *Talmud Yerushalmi* enables us to better understand this phrase: “[This means,] that these [and these alone] are the commandments that Moses instructed us to observe.” (*Megilah* I:V) The *Talmud Yerushalmi* continues this thought with a crucial statement “And so, too, did Moses teach us: ‘In the future, and from this point forward, no other prophet may originate a new commandment for you.’” (Translation my own) In addition, this principle is found in the *Midrash Sifrei* to *Sefer Bamidbar*, and four separate times in the *Talmud Bavli*. Its inclusion in these multiple sources bears powerful testimony to its singular import in classical halachic thought.

The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204), basing himself upon the above cited sources, codifies the expression, “no prophet is permitted to create a new matter (i.e. *mitzvah*) from this point forward,” in a straightforward juridic formulation:

It is clear and explicit in the Torah that it is [G-d’s] commandment, remaining forever without change, addition, or diminishment, as [*Sefer Devarim* 13:1] states: “All these matters which I command to you, you shall be careful to perform. You may not add to it or diminish from it,” and [*Sefer Devarim* 29:28] states: “What is revealed is for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of this Torah.” This teaches that we are commanded to fulfill all the Torah’s directives forever. It is also said: “It is an everlasting statute for all your generations,” and [*Sefer Devarim* 30:20] states: “It is not in the heavens.” This teaches that a prophet can no longer add a new precept [to the Torah]. (*Mishneh Torah, Sefer Hamada, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* 9:1, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger, underlining my own)

The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel, 1809-1879) further explicates the meaning of our phrase, “no prophet is permitted to create a new matter from this point forward.” He opines that “*aleh hamitzvot*” connotes “these and no others,” and adds, “our

teacher Moses was the sole prophet of the Torah.” As such, the Malbim explains, “all of the subsequent prophets had but one purpose – to encourage loyalty to Moses’ Torah (*Torat Moshe*).” Thus, by definition, “they could neither add nor subtract [from the Torah].” (*Commentary on Sefer Vayikra*, section 120, translation my own) The Malbim’s use of the expression, “*Torat Moshe*,” is similar in kind to a verse in *Sefer Malachi* wherein the prophet proclaims, “Remember My servant Moses’ Torah (*Torat Moshe*) [inclusive of] the laws and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb (i.e. at Mount Sinai) for all Israel.” (3:22, translation my own)

The promise of reward for fulfilling *Torat Moshe* (i.e. the *mitzvot*) is found throughout the Torah. One of the most celebrated of these passages appears in the second paragraph of the *Shema*:

And it will be, if you hearken to My commandments that I command you this day to love the L-rd, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give the rain of your land at its time, the early rain and the latter rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil. And I will give grass in your field for your livestock, and you will eat and be sated. (*Sefer Devarim* 11:3)

This narrative focuses upon the physical rewards that will accrue to our nation if we demonstrate true allegiance to the Almighty. Thus, the focus is on rain, grain, wine, oil, livestock and the general satisfaction of our earthly needs. In contrast, the prophet Malachi turns our attention to the ultimate spiritual reward, namely, the fulfillment of Judaism’s eschatological vision: “Behold, 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...” (23-24)

With Hashem’s love and guidance, may we have the wisdom and desire to keep His eternal *Torat Moshe*. Then, with His *chane v’chesed v’rachamim* (grace, kindness and mercy) may we, as Michah declared, behold Elijah the prophet and the coming of *Mashiach ben David* (the Messiah son of David) soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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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 *Megillat Esther* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

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