

Shabbat Chanukah 5781, 2020:

By My Spirit

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.

This week's *haftarah* contains a celebrated verse: "...This is the word of the L-rd to Zerubbabel, saying: 'Lo b'chayil v'lo b'koach ki im b'ruchi amar Hashem Tzivakot — Not by force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit,' says the L-rd of Hosts." (*Sefer Zechariah* 4:6, this and all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In some ways, it is as cryptic as it is famous, as there is little consensus among our classic *meforshim* as to the content of this prophecy and to what it refers. This is particularly the case, since our *pasuk* is preceded by:

And [there were] two olive trees near it [that is, the golden Menorah]; one on the right of the bowl, and one on its left. So I [Zechariah] answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" And the angel who spoke with me answered, and he said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." (4:3-5)

Even a cursory reading of our passage leads to the conclusion that *lo b'chayil v'lo b'koach ki im b'ruchi amar Hashem Tzivakot* does not *prima facie* answer the angel's question posed to Zechariah regarding the inherent meaning of the two olive trees. As such, we are fortunate that in his collection of responsa entitled *Beit Yitzchak*, Rabbi Yitzchak Yehudah Shmelkis *zatzal* (1827-1905) provides us with a valuable insight, suggesting that the olive trees symbolically represent the two inclinations within humankind, the *yetzer tov* (the good inclination, to the right of the Menorah) and the *yetzer harah* (the evil inclination, to the left of the Menorah). Moreover, in his view, the angel was really asking Zechariah, "Do you know why the Holy One blessed be He

created man and placed within him two possible approaches [to life] and two inclinations?” To this the angel answered:

“*Lo b'chayil v'lo b'koach ki im b'ruchi amar Hashem Tzivakot*” — for if the Holy One blessed be He had not created the evil inclination; man would have been forced to perform each of his actions and there never would have been a place or an opportunity for *schar* — reward based upon his righteous and just [behaviors]. This, then, is the meaning of *lo b'chayil v'lo b'koach*, regarding all of mankind's actions [that would have been devoid of free choice], but rather, *ki im b'ruchi amar Hashem Tzivakot*” — that is, solely through the G-d-endowed spirit of *habechirah hachafshite* — free choice — will a person plan and implement their actions... (Responsa *Yoreh Deah* II, *Petach HaBayit*, translation, brackets and underlining my own)

Rav Shmelkis' analysis is an exegetical tour de force. In relatively few words, he places Zechariah's *nevuah* squarely in the context of one of Judaism's most fundamental theological underpinnings, namely, the G-d-given spirit of *bechirah chafshite*, which, in turn, is the basis for the doctrine of *schar v'onesh* — Reward and Punishment. In so doing, he underscores the Rambam's (1135-1204) words in *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah*:

Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his... Each person is fit to be righteous like Moses, our teacher, or wicked, like Jeroboam... There is no one who compels him, sentences him, or leads him towards either of these two paths. Rather, he, on his own initiative and decision, tends to the path he chooses... This principle is a fundamental concept and a pillar [on which rests the totality] of the Torah and *mitzvot* as the [text] states: “Behold, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil.” (*Sefer Devarim* 30:15) And as it is written: “Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse,” implying that the choice is in your hands. (Chapter 5:1-3, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger)

We must always remember that while *bechirah chafshite* has great power, it carries with it great responsibility. In other words, it is crucial to recognize that each of our free-willed choices affects not only ourselves, but in a very real way, the entire world. Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon gave powerful voice to this idea when he declared:

Since the world is judged after the majority of its deeds, and the individual is judged after the majority of his actions, if he does one *mitzvah*, he should rejoice, for he has tilted the scales of justice for himself and the entire world *l'kaf zechut* — toward the side of merit. [Unfortunately, however,] if he does one *aveirah* — sin, woe unto him, for he has tilted the scales of justice for both himself and the entire world to the side of guilt. (*Talmud Bavli, Kiddushin* 40b, translation my own)

With Hashem's help, and our fervent desire, may we be ever vigilant in our exercise of *bechirah chafshite* recognizing the power with which it is endowed, and may we be among those who rejoice as we bring ourselves and the entire world *l'kaf zechut. 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/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.