

Parashat Yitro, 5781, 2021:

*The Eternality of the Torah*

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 Yecheiel, 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.

Our *parasha* is one of two *parshiot* in the Torah that presents the narrative of the Revelation at Mount Sinai, the other is Parashat Va'etchanan in *Sefer Devarim*. *Ma'amad Har Sinai* (the Revelation) changed the world for all time, for at that moment, Hashem the Infinite spoke to humankind and gave the Jewish people His holy Torah. This extraordinary event was preceded by an unparalleled display of the Almighty's power:

It came to pass on the third day when it was morning, that there were thunderclaps and lightning flashes, and a thick cloud was upon the mountain, and a very powerful blast of a *shofar*, and the entire nation that was in the camp shuddered...And the entire Mount Sinai smoked because the L-rd had descended upon it in fire, and its smoke ascended like the smoke of the kiln, and the entire mountain quaked violently. The sound of the *shofar* grew increasingly stronger; Moshe would speak and G-d would answer him with a voice. (*Sefer Shemot* 19:16, 18-19, this and all Tanach translations, unless noted, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Parashat Va'etchanan expands upon the significance of our *parasha's* passage:

But beware and watch yourself very well, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw, and lest these things depart from your heart, all the days of your life, and you shall make them known to your children and to your children's children, the day you stood before the L-rd your G-d at Horeb [Mount Sinai], when the L-rd said to me, "Assemble the people for Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children." (4:9-10)

In his *Commentary on the Torah* on these *pasukim*, the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) maintains that these verses are imperative, rather than declarative in nature, and contain

two distinct *mitzvot*:

Behold, prior to mentioning the [*asseret*] *hadibrot* (Ten Commandments) that were said there, the text cautions us *b'mitzvat lo ta'aseh* (in a negative commandment) that no aspect of that *ma'amad* should never be forgotten, and it should never be removed from our minds. [Additionally,] it commands us in a *mitzvat aseh* (positive commandment) that we should [make this demonstration of the Almighty's omnipotence] known to all of our descendants throughout the generations — inclusive of all that occurred there, both visually and auditorily. (This and the following translations my own)

Following this trenchant analysis, the Ramban notes that the benefit inherent in the *mitzvat aseh* cannot be overestimated, as it underscores the concepts of the authenticity and immutability of the Torah:

And the value in this *mitzvah* is very great: For if the words of the Torah were to have come to us through Moshe's words alone, then, even though his prophecy was supported by signs and wonders, if there would have [subsequently] arisen amongst us a "prophet" or a soothsayer and commanded us in opposition to the Torah and given us a sign or a wonder [like Moshe had done], then doubts would have arisen in our minds [as to the veracity of the Torah]. Since, however, the Torah came to us from the All Powerful One Himself — through the vehicle of what our ears heard and our eyes saw **without any intermediary whatsoever** — we can readily repudiate anything that seemingly denies [the truth and eternity of the Torah] and any doubt that may ensue...

On measure, the Ramban's gloss emerges as a fundamental theological statement regarding the unique status of the Torah. Clearly, *lo b'shamayim he* — the Torah is no longer in Heaven (*Sefer Devarim* 30:12) — and, as a corollary, there can be no other. As the Torah states: "V'zot *haTorah asher sam Moshe lifnei b'nai yisrael*" ("And this is the Torah that Moshe placed before the Jewish people," *Sefer Devarim* 4:44, my translation) With Hashem's help, may we ever recognize and teach these principles of faith to our descendants throughout all the generations. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic 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\*\*](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.