

Parashat Terumah, 5781, 2021:

Rabbi David Etengoff

*In My Name*

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, 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.

The word, “*terumah*,” appears in the second *pasuk* of this week’s Torah portion and is the namesake of our *parasha*: “Speak to the children of Israel and have them take for Me an offering (*v’yikaku li terumah*); from every person whose heart inspires him to generosity, you shall take My offering.” (*Sefer Shemot* 25:2, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, underlining my own) This *terumah* differs from the agriculturally-based offering that is given to the *kohanim*, as it consists of the various objects donated by the *dor hamidbar* (Generation of the Desert) for the construction of the *mishkan* (Portable Desert Sanctuary). The phraseology of our *pasuk* is of particular interest, since it could have been written *v’yikaku terumah*, rather than *v’yikaku li terumah*. Rashi (1040-1105), therefore, interprets “*li*” as the functional equivalent of “*lishmi*” — in My Name. In other words, this contribution was to be given in fervent dedication to the Almighty.

*Midrash Tanchuma* (Warsaw), *Parashat Terumah*, Chapter III, includes a passage that further advances our understanding of the term “*li*:”

“Speak to the children of Israel, and have them take for Me (*li*) an offering...” In all instances in the Torah wherein the Holy One Blessed be He utilizes the word “*li*,” it refers

to a connection [that exists in] *olam hazeh* (this world) and *olam habah* (the world to come), between the Almighty and that which is mentioned. How so? “The land [of Israel] shall not be sold permanently, for the land belongs to Me (*li*) ... (*Sefer Vayikra* 25:23) — this refers to *olam hazeh* and *olam habah*. [Another example:] “For all the firstborns are Mine (*li*) (*Sefer Bamidbar* 3:13) — this refers to *olam hazeh* and *olam habah*. [Another example:] “... and the Levites shall become Mine (*li*) — this refers to *olam hazeh* and *olam habah*. The Jewish people [are G-d’s holy possession] in both this world and the world to come. As it is written: “And you shall be to Me (*li*) a kingdom of princes and a holy nation... (*Sefer Shemot* 19:6). Therefore the Torah states: “and have them take for Me (*li*) an offering...” — this refers to *olam hazeh* and *olam habah*. (Translation my own)

Herein we find five entities that are designated as belonging to Hashem in perpetuity (that is, in *olam hazeh* and *olam habah*): Terumah, the Land of Israel, the first born among the Jewish nation, the *levi'im*, and the Jewish people.

When did the election of the Jewish people begin? At first glance, one might think it began when Hashem took us out of Egypt: “... We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the L-rd took us out of Egypt with a strong hand.” (*Sefer Devarim* 6:21) In such a view, the Almighty, having conquered Pharaoh and his army, thereby “earned the right” to demand our loyalty as His people. My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as the Rav by his students and followers, however, suggests an entirely different rationale as to how and when we became the *am hanivchar* (Chosen People):

The election of Israel in Egypt did not come about through conquest, through the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, through signs and wonders, but rather through the divine revelation of a still, small voice in the soul of the nation, through the fulfillment of “You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood” (Ex. 12:22), through the sudden elevation of soul and spirit, through “And all the people bowed low” (Ex. 12:27), through the acceptance of the sanctity of Israel and of the commandments, ... through being transformed into G-d’s Temple — and just as the sanctity of the Temple is never annulled, so too the election of Israel exists forever... (*Festival of Freedom: Essays on Pesah and the Haggadah*, p. 87, underlining my own)

We most often think of ourselves as having been chosen by the Creator to be His people.

It might seem that we were passive objects rather than free-willed volitional subjects. This,

according to the Rav, is simply not true. Instead, “The eternity of the Jewish people was not created through the signs and wonders of the mighty hand and the outstretched arm, but rather through the dipping of the bunch of hyssop in blood, through the heroic behavior of the Jews in Egypt when they brought the paschal sacrifice.” The Jews in Egypt were heroic figures! How so? They kept the Almighty’s commandment to sacrifice the paschal lamb, the god of the Egyptians, even though this act put their very lives in danger. The Rav is teaching us a truly novel idea — without our heroic actions, without our willingness to keep His commandments, we would never have become Hashem’s chosen nation! We needed to assert our spiritual and psychological independence from Pharaoh and his people, “...not by military force and not by physical strength...” (*Sefer Zechariah* 4:6), but rather, by beginning to live lives dedicated to the Torah and its *mitzvot*. As the Rav so beautifully states:

... the great sanctity of the night-of-watching [Passover] is grounded not in the miracles and wonders which G-d displayed that night, not in the acquisition through conquest accomplished with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, but rather through the divine revelation of a still, small voice. The Jews themselves created the greatest miracle: they raised themselves to the level of a holy nation. Only after that miracle took place did the redemption through conquest and miracles of a mighty hand and an outstretched arm first begin. Had the Jews not first redeemed themselves by self-sanctification on that night-of-watching in Egypt, the redemption through conquest would not have been complete. (page 88, underlining my own)

A new and deeper understanding of the Exodus and *bechirat yisrael* (the Election of Israel) emerges based upon a careful analysis of the Rav’s ideas, namely, our progenitors’ self-sanctification led to their redemption and, subsequently, to their election. This transformative process laid the foundation for our ancestors’ spiritual self-sacrifice and willingness to ignore potential physical danger in order to fulfill Hashem’s will. We must always remember that as great as Hashem’s role in the Exodus indisputably was, we had to act first in order to gain our physical freedom. We had to incontrovertibly prove to the

Master of the Universe that we were committed to His goal of creating the world anew through the vehicle of His holy Torah. We had to demonstrate our belief that He, alone, ran the world. When we rose to this challenge and heroically offered the *korban pesach* (paschal lamb), we ensured our role as G-d's chosen people for all time.

May it be His will and our heartfelt desire that we, like our ancestors of old, have the strength to be true spiritual heroes. May each of us become an unbreakable link in the great chain of Jewish being — now and for evermore. *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:rdb718@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.