

The Thread of Grace

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, Dovid Shmuel ben Chasiyah and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The final three *pasukim* of *Sefer Michah* are found in this week's *haftarah*, as well as immediately after the recitation of *Sefer Yonah* on Yom Kippur afternoon:

Who is a G-d like You, Who forgives iniquity and passes over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not maintain His anger forever, for He desires loving-kindness. He shall return and grant us compassion; He shall hide our iniquities, and You shall cast into the depths of the sea all their sins. *Titane emet l'Ya'akov chesed l'Avraham asher nishbata l'avoteinu mimai kedem* —You shall give the truth of Jacob, the loving-kindness of Abraham, which You swore to our forefathers from days of yore. (7:18-20, This and all Tanach translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

It appears that *Chazal* enacted the dual public reading of this passage based upon its ability to convey some of the major ideas inherent in our encounter with the Almighty on Yom Kippur. In brief, it contains the following six ideas:

- Hashem cannot be compared to any entity.
- The Almighty forgives *avon* — iniquity, and even pardons *pesha* — rebellious transgression.
- Hashem does not sustain his anger against us, for “He desires loving-kindness.”
- Just as we return unto our Creator (*teshuvah*), He will return unto us and treat us with great mercy.
- The Holy One blessed be He will hide our iniquities from His view and metaphorically toss them into the depths of the sea.
- “*Titane emet l'Ya'akov chesed l'Avraham asher nishbata l'avoteinu mimai kedem.*”

The first five statements are not unique to *Sefer Michah*, as they appear in various

formulations in the Tanach. In contrast, “*titane emet l’Ya’akov chesed l’Avraham*,” introduces a new theme regarding our relationship with the Almighty. In his gloss on the 13 Attributes of Mercy presented in his *Commentary on the Torah*, the Abarbanel (1437-1508) explains our phrase in this manner:

This means that [Hashem] will fulfill His attestation to Ya’akov, namely, the *chesed* that He had promised to perform for Avraham, for from this *chesed* will come forth the *emet*, and the fulfillment to Ya’akov and his descendants who are the offspring of Avraham the chosen one; and this is the inner meaning of [the Torah’s expression [“Hashem] Who is great in *chesed v’emet*” (*Sefer Shemot* 34, this and the following R. Abarbanel translation, underlining and brackets my own)

Based upon his comparison of the Torah’s description of Hashem as He “Who is great in *chesed v’emet*,” wherein *chesed* is stated before *emet*, to Michah’s phrase, which reverses this order, the Abarbanel suggests that *emet l’Ya’akov* is the outcome of the *chesed* that Hashem promised to do on Avraham’s behalf. He expands and clarifies this idea in his commentary on the fourth chapter of *Sefer Yonah*:

And the substance of this verse [*titane emet l’Ya’akov*] is that the Holy One blessed be He will give the *emet l’Ya’akov* by bestowing upon Avraham’s descendants the *chesed* that he gave to him, namely, the inheritance of the Land of the Seven Nations [Israel]. It is as if the verse was stated: “*Titane emet l’Ya’akov me’hachessed sh’asita l’Avraham* — You shall give the *emet* of Ya’akov **from the *chesed* that you performed for Avraham**. [And] just as You performed *chesed* for him [Avraham] when he stood at the *Brit bein HaBetarim* — the Covenant of the Pieces, may the *emet* [be] the fulfillment of this covenant for all Ya’akov’s future offspring.

In this exegetical tour de force, the Abarbanel provides us with a powerful insight into the relationship that obtains between the *chesed* of Avraham and the *emet* of Ya’akov. In his view, the *emet* of Ya’akov, namely, the everlasting gift of *Eretz Yisrael* to Ya’akov’s descendants, results from the *chesed* Hashem performed for Avraham at the *Brit bein HaBetarim*. This unbreakable *chut shel chesed* — thread of grace — is inextricably interwoven into the very essence of the Jewish people. In addition, given our passage’s inclusion in the *haftarah* of *Shabbat Shuvah* and its role as the postscript to *Maftir Yonah*,

it is clear it reflects the intrinsic nature of Yom Kippur as well. Perhaps this is the reason *Chazal* ordained that we conclude *tefilat Neilah* with the stirring words, “*l’shanah habah b’Yerushalayim.*” With the Almighty’s help and our fervent desire, may this time come soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom, *G’mar Chatimah Tovah*, and may Hashem in His great 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.