Points to Ponder

Ki Tavo 5781

וַיָּ֥גָר שָׁ֖ם בִּמְתֵ֣י מְעָ֑ט He lived there (26:5) - We note in the Haggadah that this teaches us that Yaakov went to dwell in  Mitzrayim temporarily, not permanently. The **Maharal** adds that had Yaakov intended on going permanently, we could never have been redeemed. The **Baal Shem Tov** adds that where a man’s thought that’s where he is. **The Novominsker Rebbe ztl.** added that we can learn this concept ourselves when we consume ourselves with Eretz Yisrael it is as if we ARE in Eretz Yisrael. If our minds are there then so are we.

**וַיָּרֵ֧עוּ אֹתָ֛נוּ הַמִּצְרִ֖ים The Egyptians mistreated us (26:6) - Rav Schachter Shlita** would quote Rav Soloveitchik who explained that the correct phrase should have been “Lanu” not “Osanu”. But this was the nefarious intent of the Egyptians. They wanted us to be seen as the “other” and worthy of degradation. This has been a canard that began in Egypt and continues to fuel antisemitism until today.

**וּבְמֹרָ֖א גָּדֹ֑ל And with great awe (26:8)** - The Midrash (and Haggada) note that this refers to the revelation of the Shechina. Usually one would expect great terror to be a time where Shechina would NOT be realized**? Rav Lamm Ztl.** uses this and other examples to highlight the ironies of the Pesach night. These ironies remind us that when man confronts his own limitations, finitudes and inadequacies -- when he sees how weak he is -- that is when he discovers his greatest blessing and strength and hope --- in Hashem.

**אֵ֠לֶּה יַֽעַמְד֞וּ לְבָרֵ֤ךְ אֶת־הָעָם֙ עַל־הַ֣ר גְּרִזִּ֔ים Har Grizim and Har Eival (27:12)** - Why do we make 6 tribes the “blessed” ones and 6 others as the cursed? **Rav Belsky ztl.** explained that we do not do this. Instead, we speak of different ways that we relate to Hashem, one is through Ahava and another is through Yirah. **The Ramban** explains that love is the source of Mitzvos Aseh and Yirah of the Mitzvos Lo Taaseh. Naturally there are things that rise up like a mountain as Ahava (there are high points in Ahava) and others that rush like Yirah like the Yam Suf.

**וְרָאוּ֙ כָּל־עַמֵּ֣י הָאָ֔רֶץ All of the nations will see the name of Hashem upon you and they will fear you (28:10)** - The Gemara notes that this refers to the Tefillin on the head (Berachos 6a). Why have so many put Tefillin and not achieved this sense of reverence? **Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev** explains that the Gemara does not say that they will revere the tefillin ON the head but rather the tefillin IN the head. Only when the ideas have been incorporated into the person’s mind can one achieve the reverence of other people. **Rav Dr. Twerski ztl.** added that our mission to the nations of the world is to set an example of spiritual life and merit reverence. This can only be attained when the Tefillin are in the head.

**לְרֹאשׁ֙ וְלֹ֣א לְזָנָ֔ב  And Hashem shall place you as a head and not as a tail (28:13) - Rav Pam ztl.** noted that the antidote to the Tochcha is to have higher aspirations in life. How is one to achieve that? It begins, says Rav Pam, with the realization that we are a head and not a tail. We need to lead and not follow the fashions of the world around us. “Must Haves” of today become the dust-heaps of tomorrow.

**לֵב֙ לָדַ֔עַת וְעֵינַ֥יִם לִרְא֖וֹת Hashem didn’t give you a heart to know and eyes to see (29:3)** - **Rashi** explains that people do not fully get the words of their teacher until 40 years later. **Rav Neriah ztl**. explained that there is a level of understanding called sight beyond sight. After all, when we consider the generation led by Moshe and Aharon who were shown so much and still, they commented on needing the 40 years to really understand...it proves the point!

Haftara

**כִּֽי־הִנֵּ֚ה הַחֹ֙שֶׁךְ֙ יְכַסֶּה־אֶ֔רֶץ For behold Darkness may cover the earth (Yeshayahu 60:2) - Rav Dovid Feinstein ztl.** explained that darkness here refers to the denial of Hashem’s power believing instead in the forces of nature. Chazal tell us that before the coming of Moshiach the leaders of the world will become heretics. Still, Hashem will give us the spiritual strength to withstand false ideas. It will be our faith that will prevail.