Points to Ponder

Vaeschanan 5781

**וָֽאֶתְחַנַּ֖ן אֶל־ה And I prayed to Hashem (3: 23**) – The Midrash comments that Moshe offered 515 Tefillos (the Gematria of VaEschanan) to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael. What was the purpose of the 525 Tefillos? **Rav Schachter Shlita** cited the Yirushalmi which notes that the more that one davens for something, the better chance he has of having one of his Tefillos accepted. Thus, unlike a child who badgers a parent with pleading, when it comes to Hashem, it is better to daven and not give up. Rav Schachter added that this was the purpose of Neilah and why it is only said on a Taanis Tzibbur when we are pleading with Hashem to hear our Tefillos. At those moments we can combine the Tefillah with tears and we know that the gates of tears are not closed. Rav Schachter added that the author of the Migaleh Amukos explains the purpose of the 515 prayers individually based on Kabbalah.

**לְמַ֣עַן תִּֽחְי֗וּ  So that you will live (4:1) – Rav Yerucham Levovitz ztl.** noted that the purpose of Sefer Devarim was to teach us that Torah is the secret to our survival. Even the preparatory steps to receiving the Torah’s influence is a significant matter to record. The preparation teaches us how to prepare to be divinely inspired.

**לֹ֣א תֹסִ֗פוּ עַל־הַדָּבָר֙  Don’t add to the words that I am commanding you (4:2)** – It is interesting to note that this idea seems to be repeated in Parshas Re’eh (13:1). Why do we need to know not to add to the words of the Torah? **Rav Eizel Charif ztl**. explains that there are 2 separate prohibitions being defined here. The one in this week’s Parsha refers to not adding to a Mitzva itself – like 5 parshiyos to Tefillin or 5 minim on Sukkos. The prohibition is adding to the Mitzva. In Parshas Re’eh we are referring to looking at the way that others do their religion and adopting it for ourselves. **Rav Yisroel Reisman Shlita** explained that there is an inherent Yetzer HaRa to try to find new Mitzvos and use them as a lucky segulah. Creating new ways to serve Hashem is a violation of Lo Soseif – we should use the Torah’s means to serve Him.

**בְּכָל־קָרְאֵ֖נוּ אֵלָֽיו In all of our calling to Him (4:7)** – Does one only call out to Hashem for big things? The **Chazon Ish** seemed to say “no”. Citing the Gemara (Berachos 5b) which tells us of Rav Huna whose 400 barrels of wine spoiled. His friends asked him to engage in soul-searching in order discover the reason for the decree. They told him that he was not giving his sharecropper the proper amount of portion for his crop. He explained that this was because the sharecropper was a thief. They told him stealing from a thief is still stealing. The Chazon Ish added that in today’s society, man’s impact on his own deeds is often overlooked when explaining anomalies in life. We need to know that Hashem is there in all callings. Nothing happens without a cause.

**וְיָֽדַעְתָּ֣ הַיּ֗וֹם וַֽהֲשֵֽׁבֹתָ֘ אֶל־לְבָבֶ֒ךָ֒ And you will know today and place on your heart (4:39) – Rav Nachman of Breslov** noted that this is one of the greatest challenges that a Jew has – equating the logic of the mind with the emotional experience of the heart. **Mrs. Sivan Rahav Meir ShTc”Y** adds that we find this disconnect throughout our lives – between what we KNOW is good for us and really don’t listen to, and what we choose to do with our lives. We need to make connections between what we know and how to put it into practice.

**אָ֣ז יַבְדִּ֤יל משֶׁה֙ Then Moshe established the 3 cities (4:41) – Rashi** notes that the Arei Miklat did not function until all 6 were established. Notwithstanding he wanted to perform the Mitzva of establishing these cities. **Rav Bernard Weinberger ztl.** explains that Moshe demonstrates to us that one has to try to do as many Mitzvos as he can even if he will not fulfill the Mitzvos fully.

**כִּֽי־אַתֶּ֥ם הַמְעַ֖ט מִכָּל־הָֽעַמִּֽים For you are the fewest of all peoples (7:7)** – Why are we the smallest? Didn’t Hashem promise us a large size that could not be counted – like the sand and stars? **Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ztl.** explained that they were numerous in comparison to where they were but were still smaller than even the other nations in the region. The reason for the small size was that we are here to show the other nations that it is not necessary to be a large nation in order to be a great one.

**Haftara**

**נַֽחֲמ֥וּ נַֽחֲמ֖וּ Be consoled Be consoled (40:1)** – The Midrash notes that they sinned doubly and needed double consolation**. Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** explained that while it is one thing to transgress Mitzvos but it is even worse to rationalize it. This was the double sin, the actual actions and the thoughts behind them. Therefore, the consolation would have to be a double effort, first teaching them the true way and then turning them away from their habitual sins.