Points to Ponder

Nitzavim 5781

**Nitzavim comment on the Parsha** -- **Rav Pam ztl.** noted that it is interesting that in a year like this one it is possible to have read 2 large parshiyos (Matos & Maasei) together which total 244 possukim while separating Nitzavim and VaYeilech which have only 70 in total. Why not combine these and separate those Parshiyos? Rav Pam cited the Halacha that one needs to read the Tochacha before the year is over but in order not to end the year on a bad note, we add a Parsha as a buffer. Rav Pam added that if we put in a buffer for us not to start a year on a bad foot, shouldn’t we remind educators not to do the same for their students and allow a buffer for growth as well?

**לְעָבְרְךָ֗ בִּבְרִ֛ית To enter a covenant with you (29:11)** - Why do we need a second Bris? We already entered on with Hashem? **Rav Schachter Shlita** noted that the Bris mentioned in Netzavim includes those who aren’t “here” -- those who weren’t around at Har Sinai. That group was not a part of the Bris at Har Sinai. this one was. Why is this Bris different? **Rav Schachter quoted Rav Soloveitchik ztl** who explained that God wanted to make the second Bris in Eretz Yisrael when the concept of Arvus (guarantorship) would apply. However, Moshe wasn’t able to enter Eretz Yisrael and would lose. As such, Moshe started it here, and then the one made at Har Eival/Grizim was a continuation of this second bris. In other words, God wanted to make the bris only in Eretz Yisrael since the land connects us. At the same time, God wanted Moshe to be involved in the Bris which is why He had Moshe start off this bris מעבר לירדן.

**וַתִּרְאוּ֙ אֶת־שִׁקּ֣וּצֵיהֶ֔ם  You have seen their detestable things (29:16)** - If Bnei Yisrael had already seen how detestable Avoda Zara is, why does Moshe need to go into such a discourse about it? **Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski ztl.** explained that we find that when we use scare tactics in order to discourage people from engaging in certain forbidden pleasures, the audience tends to be more stimulated to try that illicit pleasure and the stimulation for immediate pleasure may exceed the deterrent effect. Moshe understood this but in order to turn off the desire for dangerous pleasure, Moshe needed something beyond scare tactics.

**וְשַׁבְתָּ֞ עַד־ה And you will return to Hashem (30:2) -** Chazal throughout Jewish history have viewed Teshuva as a tremendous gift. As **Rav Shmelke of Nikolsburg** noted “I wonder what kind of existence would there be in Shomayim if one could not perform Teshuvah? But still, we do not seem to try to do it. Why? **Rav Yechiel Meir of Gustenin** explained that people have a hard time believing that Teshuva can wipe a slate clean. He noted that this is an error. Teshuva is not like chess. When playing chess, you cannot retract a wrong move. In Teshuva one can undo every wrong. It just takes sincerity.

**כִּ֚י הַמִּצְוָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את For this Mitzva (30:11) - Rashi** notes that the Mitzva referred to is that of Torah while Ramban explains that it refers to Teshuva. **Rav Wolbe ztl.** explained that despite the distance between Hashem and his creations, we can bridge the gap through Torah and Mitzvos which are close to us. He added that true Torah connection comes with the awareness that Torah is infused within each of us -- like it was for Dovid who discovered in the bathhouse that he still was connected with the Mitzva of Bris Milah. His intention and fear, explains Rav Wolbe, was that his connection to Hashem and His Mitzvos was merely external. What he discovered was that they were in his very fiber and makeup.

**הַיּ֔וֹם Today (30:15)** - There is a tremendous stress on the word Hayom in this week’s Torah reading. When is “Hayom?” Is it a reference to every day or is it a reference to Rosh Hashana? **Rav Zevin ztl.** explained that the 2 options are not contradictory. Rosh Hashana is the Today -- the beginning of each subsequent day and the “Today” of each day is a continuation and a renewal of the commitment of the days of Rosh Hashana.

**וּבָֽחַרְתָּ֙ בַּֽחַיִּ֔ים And you will choose life (30:19)** - The Torah values life and will choose it at every circumstance. This raises a challenge to a strange debate in the Gemara (Eruvin 13b) as to whether one is better off being alive or not. How does that fit with the choice of life? The **Mei HaShiloach** explains that the Gemara is debating what is “Noach -- easier” not necessarily what is better. Would a person rather an easier life without challenges or is he better with life’s challenges? This is the Gemara’s debate. **Rav Yaakov Nagen** adds that this is the challenge that exists with the Yetzer HaRa -- it is not one of good and evil but rather good and convenient. We commit Avairos not because we are evil but rather because they are the path of least resistance.

**Haftara**

**מִי־זֶ֣ה | בָּ֣א מֵֽאֱד֗וֹם Who is this coming from Edom (Yeshayahu 63:1)** - **Rav Dovid Feinstein ztl.** noted that Hashem’s vengence against Edom is described as if He were coming from outside Eretz Yisrael. This is because when Bnei Yisrael are in exile, He is with us. Thematically, this idea pervades the Haftara --- that He is with us experiencing our travails along with us.