Points to Ponder

Netzavim 5778

 **אתם נצבים היום כולכםYou are all standing here…from leaders to wood choppers and water carriers (29:9-10)** – **Rav Chanan Porat ztl.** pointed out that while we speak of Achdus as a nice photo it needs to have a purpose. Once a common mission is identified, the **Nesivos Shalom** adds, then everyone feels satisfied with his or her role toward the goal. The problem with our idea of Achdus today is that we tend to think everything is ok. This is not the Torah’s way. The Torah wants us to remember that no matter where we come from, we can make a significant contribution to the Kavod Hashem but only if focused on His goals for us as individuals and as our nation – not on everything being out of His place and everyone doing as s/he pleases.

 **ותראו את שקוציהםYou saw their disgusting items, wood and stone – gold and silver that were with them (29:16) – Rav Shalom Schwadron ztl. quoted Rav Leib Chasman ztl.** who explained that this is the way of the Yetzer HaRa. When we see something that is morally wrong -- we see it as Sheketz. If we allow it to be “ok” it will be lowered in our eyes to mere wood and stone but not valuable. Afterward, as we get used to it, it becomes gold and silver. Slowly, these things break down the strong feelings of the human being and once man is broken, it is not too hard to get him to sin – even in the realm of Avodah Zara. We need to be on guard against this possibility.

 **לעברך בברית ה' אלקיך ובאלתוTo get you to enter the covenant of Hashem and his oath (29:11)** – **Ramban** explains that in the covenant at Sinai we do not find a mention of any oath as we do in this one. How then are we to explain the Gemara when we find the statement Mushba V’Oimed M’Har Sinai? **Rav Schachter Shlita often answered in the name of Rav Soloveitchik ztl.** that it is not a reference to Bris Sinai but rather to the bris at Arvos Moav mentioned here. The difference is that the Bris at Sinai was a Bris that created Kedushas Yisrael historically for all future generations. The Bris in Arvos Moav was more personal and stated the responsibilities of each and every Jew. THAT is the oath referred to here – the personal one each of us elected to take now.

**ושבת עד ה' אלקיך ושמעת בקולו And you will return to Hashem and listen to his words (30:2) – Sforno** explains that one’s Teshuva should simply be to do the will of Hashem and listening to Him refers to listening and not simply doing Teshuva by rote. Yeshayahu also cautions that Hashem does not react well to Teshuva done by rote. Why is it so bad to be doing things by rote? **Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi Shlita** noted that the process of doing things by rote removes the person from the experience. What good is the gift of intellect and the gift of emotion if not to use with the opportunity to connect to Hashem. Doing Teshuvah without being there to be in it, is a waste of the opportunity that Teshuvah presents.

 **בפיך ובלבבך לעשותוIt is in your mouth and heart to do it (30:14)** – Shouldn’t the order have been reversed? Shouldn’t the ability come from the heart and get to the mouth? The **Beis Yisrael of Ger ztl.** explained that the Torah here speaks of a person who feels too tired to learn or daven. Lest he think he is doomed, he can force himself forward to start and just try – and thereafter will quickly rediscover his drive in Torah learning and Mitzva performance. **The Kotzker Rebbe** ztl. would add that the key thing is not the Peh or the Lev as much as the doing that each leads to.

 **ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרעBehold I have set before you the way of life and good and the way of death and evil (30:15) – Rav Michel Feinstein ztl.** pointed out that from this Possuk it is clear that evil is a creation just like good is. What difference does it make if evil is a creation or merely the lack of good? The answer, explains Rav Michel ztl. is in the ability to recognize that we need to choose to do good and to weigh to see if the Yetzer HaRa is trying to trick us not only into laziness but rather to actively pursue that which is Ra. How one chooses to respond to a challenge of Ra is dependent on knowing whether Ra is merely going to be a state of lack or whether it is actively pursuing us (and it seems like it is).

 **כי הוא חייך ואורך ימיךFor it is your life and the length of your days (30:20**) – The Torah is highlighting to us that a life filled with Torah and Mitzvos will not only be long but also completely fulfilling**. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ztl.** was known as a patient person. However, twice it is reported that he took a different style. The first was when someone had an appointment with him for 4 pm and did not show until later (4:15). By the time the other person showed, Rav Shlomo Zalman was no longer there. When asked why he did not wait, Rav Shlomo Zalman explained that if the other person cared about the time, he would have left earlier but if he didn’t care about the time, why should Rav Shlomo Zalman? A second time was when someone was walking home with Rav Shlomo Zalman and insisted on walking very slowly for no apparent reason. Rav Shlomo Zalman asked the person to walk somewhat faster and the person refused. Rav Shlomo Zalman then invited the person to meet him at his home. Since these stories were out of character for Rav Shlomo Zalman, it was strange to hear them. However **Rav Yehudah Adas** explained that Rav Shlomo Zalman understood that time was a Pikuach Nefesh – once lost it never returns and Rav Shlomo Zalman could not understand “wasting” it.

**Haftorah: כחתן יכהן פאר וככלה תעדה כליה As a Chosson wearing priestly glory and a Kallah beautified with her garments (Yeshayahu 61:10) – Rav Hirsch** notes that the translation is a bit contrived here as the correct Hebrew would be K’Pe’er Yichahein Chosson . Therefore he offers a different translation: K’Chosson Yichahein Pe’er – in Judaism, it is not the clothes that make the man or woman – it is the person who gives the status to the clothing. Wear clothing that is undignified and the wearer looks ridiculous. Wear a uniform that is unbecoming of one’s station and it looks like dress up. The person makes the status of everything around him.