Points to Ponder

Vaeschanan/Nachamu 5780

**כַּה' אֱלֹק֔ינוּ בְּכָל־קָרְאֵ֖נוּ אֵלָֽיו:What nation is close to Hashem like we are whenever we call out to him (4:7)** - **Onkelos** explains that this closeness is reflected in the idea that Hashem accepts our Tefilos. **Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel ztl** added that this is the primary goal of Tefillah -- to feel close to Hashem. When we realize our closeness to Hashem, it is then that our Tefillah is accepted.

**אֲשֶׁ֨ר חָלַ֜ק ה' אֱלֹקיךָ֙ אֹתָ֔ם לְכֹל֙ הָ֣עַמִּ֔ים תַּ֖חַת כָּל־הַשָּׁמָֽיִם Lest you look heavenward and see the sun, moon and stars…that Hashem divided to all of the nations of the world (4:19)** - **Rav Michel Feinstein zt**l quoted **Rav Shmuel Greineman ztl** who quoted the **Chofetz Chaim** who asked how are we to understand the simplifying of Avoda Zara which is so deep into a simple dividable calculation? The Chofetz Chaim explained that Avoda Zara works like a carpenter who has 2 different pieces to attach together. Rather than simply make cuts anywhere, the true carpenter seeks to find the wood pieces to attach wherein the one with the notch best fits the one with the hole. With Avoda Zara, the hole (a need) in a particular nation gets filled with the Avoda Zara of the nation instead of seeking the deeper explanation of the will of Hashem and His running of the world.

**אָ֣ז יַבְדִּ֤יל משֶׁה֙ Then Moshe separated 3 cities in Eiver HaYarden (4:41) - Rashi** explains that at that time he was ready to separate the cities for at that moment he had achieved a unique level of Nevuah. Why at that moment? **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** explained that when Moshe had given 2 Parshiyos of Mussar, it would be impossible for the mussar not to impact the speaker and bring him to a new level of understanding himself -- worthy of designating the Arei Miklat properly and sensing their impact on the land and the people.

**שָׁמ֛וֹר אֶת־י֥וֹם הַשַּׁבָּ֖ת לְקַדְּשׁ֑וֹ Guard the Shabbos (5:12) - Rav Schachter Shlita** would remind us that there are several discrepancies between the version of the *aseres hadibros* in *parshas* *Vaeschanan* and the version in *parshas Yisro*. The Talmud, however, is only concerned about the discrepancy between *shamor* and *zachor* regarding the observance of *Shabbos*. The **Ramban** in his commentary on the Torah points out that whenever the Torah quotes someone as having said something, it is not necessarily intended to be a verbatim quotation. The Torah is only interested in giving us a gist of what was said. As such, neither version of the *aseres hadibros* is necessarily what actually appeared on the *aseres hadibros*. But with respect to *zachor* and *shamor*, the Talmud feels that there is a major discrepancy. *Zachor* is a *mitzvas aseh* while *shamor* implies a *mitzvas lo sa'aseh*. These are not at all the same. The Talmud explains that when *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* was proclaiming the *aseres hadibros* on *Har Sinai*, both the *mitzvas aseh* of zachor and the *mitzvas lo sa'aseh* of *shamor* were given simultaneously. The Talmud does not record any tradition which of the two texts actually appeared on the *luchos*.

**שְׁמַ֖ע יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל Shema (6:4)** - What is so unique about this Tefillah that makes it so fundamental to our religion? **Rav Lamm ztl.** once explained that our tradition makes room for the honest doubter, for without such doubt questions would never be asked, prejudices never challenged, and science would come to a halt. But when are we seriously engaged in prayer, endeavoring to experience the presence of God, it is not the time to entertain intellectual doubts. **Rav Nachman of Bratzlav** taught that we must cast aside all our “wisdom” and stand before our Maker as children; to be child-like in prayer is as appropriate as to be skeptical in thought. When seeking to wrest transcendent meaning out of existence and to pull ourselves out of the void, we should not cast ourselves into that very void. Rather, at that sacred moment, we can put our doubts aside and, in all integrity, proclaim the unity of God whole-heartedly.

**וְעָשִׂ֛יתָ הַיָּשָׁ֥ר וְהַטּ֖וֹב You will do the right and the good (6:18)** - We find that Chazal spent a lot of time finding ways to boil the Torah into a few short ideas (Klal Gadol b’Torah, and also Chabakuk setting the Torah to Tzaddik B’Emunaso Yichyeh) **Rav Wolbe ztl**. asked why we boil things down like that? He explained that by doing this one does not see the 613 Mitzvos as 613 disparate ideas but rather as leading to the common denominator - doing the will of Hashem. The **Chazon Ish** noted that the same is true for Middos wherein the purpose in correcting all of them is for striving for the element of Yashrus in our lives. If you choose an element of Yashrus you will be able to fight to build a mussar intuition and tackle all bad middos at once. Ramban makes this apparent here when he notes that it is impossible for the Torah to record every aspect of proper behavior in every situation. Therefore, the Torah gave us a general rule -- do right and the good -- and that will help make the job of midda clarity better and stronger.

**אֲשֶׁ֨ר אָֽנֹכִ֧י מְצַוְּךָ֛ הַיּ֖וֹם לַֽעֲשׂתָֽם That I command you today to do them (7:11)** - The Gemara notes that one is to do the Mitzvos today and to receive the reward tomorrow -- in Olam Haba. In other words, the reward is not in this world. The **Steipler ztl.** commented that the reason that the world needs to run this way is that if it didn’t there would never be any L’shma in Mitzvos. Everyone would be working for the same thing, external reward, -- and the heart needed in Mitzva performance would be lost. Thus, the Torah tells us that Hashem wants us to do today and be rewarded tomorrow -- so that we can serve Him with a heart today.

**Haftara: עַ֣ל הַר־גָּבֹ֚הַ עֲלִי־לָךְ֙ מְבַשֶּׂ֣רֶת צִיּ֔וֹן הָרִ֚ימִי בַכֹּ֙חַ֙ קוֹלֵ֔ךְ מְבַשֶּׂ֖רֶת יְרֽוּשָׁלִָ֑ם  Mivaseres Tzion/Mivaseres Yirushalayim (Yeshayahu 40:9)** - What is the difference between Mivaseres Tzion and Mivaseres Yirushalayim? **Rav Schlessinger Shlita quotes Rav Kook ztl** who noted that to those who are not openly Torah observant, speak of the secular zionistic element of the capital. Those who speak of Yirushalaiym speak of the holy aspect of the city. The former raise their voices to have impact among the nations of the world. The latter keep their voices for Hashem. The Novi turns to the first group and asks them why they raise their voices down in the court of world approval -- rise up and to the second, the Novi asks why not raise your voices to the rest of Am Yisrael to hear the call that Henei Elokeichem.