Points to Ponder

Vayeilech/Shuva 5780

Moshe went, and spoke (31:2) - Where did Moshe go? What words did he speak? Kli Yakar  explains that typically a person does not see his own faults and will not go of his own accord to seek guidance for repentance. Therefore, Moshe “went” around the tents of Israel to spur each and every individual to  teshuva. Rav Meir Orlian Shlita commented that This is what it says, “Moshe went.” He actively went around and exhorted Israel about repentance  and the paths of teshuva, i.e., the two kinds of peace.“These words,” are words of viduy between  man and G-d and words of appeasement between man and his fellow.

He will not weaken or leave you (31:6) – Rashi comments that the words “Lo Yarpecha” refers to the fact that Hashem will not allow us to be weakened to be forgotten by Him. Rav Wolbe ztl asked how this differs from the last words where Hashem promises not to leave us? He explains that Rashi is showing us that the reasons Hashem leaves is that we try to let him go. Thus, the antidote to the problem is to hold on to Him. It is not a REWARD for believing that Hashem does not leave – it is a natural consequence. If a person strengthens himself with Emunah, Hashem cannot leave him.

And the children (31:12) – The Talmud (Chagigah 3a) asks why we bring the children to Hakhel. The Gemara answers that they are brought to bring reward to those who bring them. Yet, the Maharsha asks why we ask the question – the Torah itself tells us that people come for Hakhel in order to listen and learn. He explains that the issue here is about bringing children who are too young to listen and learn. They are still brought so that they can bring reward to those who brought them. But why should those who get nothing out of coming bring reward to those who brought them? They are serving no purpose in being at Hakhel? Rav Shaul Yisraeli ztl explains that the influence that a Chinuch experience has on a child makes a difference even if the ability to do the Mitzva even at a level of Chinuch is not totally understood. That the child is so much a part of the Mitzva that he brings Sachar to the parents is a Mitzva enough to make an impact on the child to appreciate the experience. That appreciation makes an impression likely to influence a child to do more for the Mitzva in the future.

It is because Hashem is not with me that I have these problems (31:17) – Ramban comments that this is an incomplete Vidui for while it recognizes that man has sinned, it does not move man back to Hashem. Rav Gifter ztl added that we see that stopping to go down the wrong road is not the same as heading down the proper one. This is similar to both the Haftara where the Novi notes that we need to return to Hashem despite already being aware that we have tripped in our sins. It is also similar to that which we daven each day – V’Hachazeereinu B’Teshuvah Sheleima Lifaneicha – that true Teshuva is recognizing that we are in front of Hashem.

I will hide my face on that day (31:18) – What does Hester Panim mean? Rav Schachter Shlita would pointed out to us that Hester Panim is the process described in Shir HaShirim that Hashem peers through the cracks. In those moments he can peek and see us but we cannot see him. It is our job in these moments to recognize that He is still there.

This song (31:19) – The song refers to the Torah (See Rambam Mezuzah 7:1). Why does the Torah command us to write a Torah with the command to write a song? Rav Wosner ztl explained that when one studies Torah as an academic pursuit it is not guaranteed that such a practice will not be forgotten from their children. However, when there is a Shirah to Torah – when there is a Niggun to the learning, it is indicative of a certain Dveikus to Torah. It is that Dveikus that does not get forgotten easily.

It will not be forgotten from the children (31:21) – Rav Mattisyahu Solomon Shlita pointed out that it is nothing short of miraculous that the Torah has not been forgotten. After all, there have been periods in our history that there were edicts against the study of Torah, Other times where the Torah was burned and still others when educating our kids was forbidden. Notwithstanding, Torah has never been forgotten – it has remained alive with us even in Galus. The sheer existence of Torah and its study and adherence especially as the Galus extends, is testament daily to the miraculous hand of Hashem.

Haftara: קחו עמכם דברים Take with you words (Hoshea 14:3) – Why does the person need to take words with him? What is the role of the Teshuva mentioned both before (Shuva Yisrael) and after (v’Shuvu El Hashem) the taking of the words? Rav Benny Lau Shlita explained that often we get fleeting Teshuva thoughts. These thoughts are helpful but only when acted upon. Therefore the Novi warns us that when we want to act on the Teshuva intentions, we need to take words – the vidui that is the practical Teshuva – and use it to complete the original intent, crystallizing and concretizing it making our Teshuva complete.