Points to Ponder

Vayeilech 5779

When all the nation comes to be with Hashem in the place he will choose, you will read the Torah…gather the people (31:11-12) – The Meforshim ask why the command to gather came after the command to read the Torah? Rav Shimon Schwab ztl. opined that the need to read the Torah is paramount even when the entire nation cannot be gathered. Thus, the Torah says read the Torah and thereafter, ty to get the entire nation to be there.

And their children who did not know shall listen and learn (31:13) – The Meshech Chochma derives that when it comes to a child we do not find reference to the act of “doing” because children are obligated in Chinuch on a Rabbinic level only. Rav Nissan Alpert ztl. explained that the Chinuch on the specific Mitzva may be rabbinic but the requirement to implant a love and desire for Torah and Mitzvos is a biblical obligation on parents for their children.

I will hide my face (31:18) – How is one to understand the concept of Hester Panim? Rav Schachter Shlita would often quote from the Yad HaKetana that Hashem may not be able to be seen by us but he is always watching us and watching over us. Rav Schachter pointed to the gemara in Chagigah which explains that this was played out in pantomime between one of the Amoraim and a challenger. The challenger noted that we were not Am HaNivchar for we have fallen but the Amora explained that the fact that Hashem is still being tough with us shows that he is still interested in us The challenger did not know what he was saying and lost his life in the process.

Now write the song for yourselves and teach Bnei Yisrael place it in their mouths (31:19) – Why would the Torah refer to itself as a song? Rav Elyashiv ztl. explains that Torah is referred to as a song because like a song, it can be accessible to every member of Klal Yisrael. This is the meaning of Simah B’Fihem. Torah needs to be transmitted in a manner that is appreciated by all.

It shall be when many evils and distresses come on it (31:21) – In the end of days in the period before Moshiach, there will be many troubles. Why? The Dubno Maggid compares the situation to the peddler who takes the leftover fruits and piles them together and sells them for half-price in order to get rid of them. Likewise, when Klal Yisrael sees a potpourri of distresses befall them, evils and afflictions of all kinds we know Moshiach is close.

Take this Sefer Torah and place it on the side of the Aron (31:26) – The Midrash notes that when Moshe figured out that it was his last day on earth, he sat down and wrote out 13 Sifrei Torah. He gave one to each Shevet and put the 13th into the Aron in case of any challenge to the text. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin ztl. explained that in every generation, Hashem selects one of the Gedolim whose job it is to serve as the compass in order to make sure that we, the people, stay honest within the Torah. This Gadol is the one whom everyone knows best represents authentic Torah living and will not allow the words of the torah to be falsified. He added that in his generation the 13th Torah was the Brisker Rav ztl.

Gather to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers (31:28) – Rashi notes that Moshe used the Chatzozros to gather the people. These Chatzozros were exclusively used by Moshe and Yehoshua and others were not to use them. Rav Modechai Ilan ztl. explains that each Jewish leader is endowed with a particular set of abilities and talents that assist him in leading his generation but what works for his generation will not necessarily work in the next one. Each leader has his singular trumpet.

Haftara: 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.