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9 years of Points to Ponder on Parashas Vayeilech

**וַיֵּ֖לֶךְ משֶׁ֑ה 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**  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.

**בֶּן־מֵאָה֩ וְעֶשְׂרִ֨ים שָׁנָ֤ה אָֽנֹכִי֙ הַיּ֔וֹם I’m 120 years old today, I cannot go in or out anymore and Hashem told me that I will not cross the Jordan River (31:2**) – Why did Moshe find it important to stress his age? And what does crossing the Yarden have to do with it? **Rav Dovid Feinstein**  explained that it was the cacophony of factors that were at play here: Moshe had reached the age of 120, the end of allotted years; he was not allowed to cross the Yarden and his desire not to interfere with Jewish destiny.

**בֶּן־מֵאָה֩ וְעֶשְׂרִ֨ים שָׁנָ֤ה אָֽנֹכִי֙ הַיּ֔וֹם לֹֽא־אוּכַ֥ל ע֖וֹד לָצֵ֣את וְלָב֑וֹא I am now 120 years old and can no longer go and come (31:2) – Rashi** notes that Moshe did not have Hashem’s permission to go into the land of Israel. The question became what was he supposed to do at that point? **Rav Lord Jonathan Sacks** explained that this is a challenge that affects many who have already achieved their goals in life. Like Moshe, who had already achieved states of human spirituality that were unmatched and after took on the role of teacher to prepare the next generation, we too, can plan a “second mountain” to climb with a potential to be the greatest legacy we pass on.

**לֹ֥א יַרְפְּךָ֖ וְלֹ֥א יַֽעַזְבֶֽךָּ 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**  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.

**חִזְק֣וּ וְאִמְצ֔וּ  Be strong internally and externally (31:6)** – Moshe offers the same encouragement to the people fighting the Emori and later to Yehoshua. Why the same words? **Rav Chasman .** explains that when one has internal doubts coupled with a big foe, one’s Bitachon can easily be shut down. Moshe encouraged both Yehoshua and the people who were faced with formidable tasks to rise to the occasion and be ready to take on the tasks and be victorious.

**חֲזַ֣ק וֶֽאֱמָץ֒ Chazak V’ematz (31:7)** – In Sefer Yehoshua he tells the people to be strong “Meod” (very strong). Why does he add the word “Meod”? **Rav Elyashiv** explains that in order to capture the land of Israel you need the help of Hashem. However in regard to the study of Torah (which is the subject under discussion in Sefer Yehoshua) one needs to hunker down and find his own strength to rise to the occasion.

**בְּב֣וֹא כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵ֗ל לֵֽרָאוֹת֙  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 .** 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, try to get the entire nation to be there.

**הַקְהֵ֣ל  Hakhel (31:12) – Rav Dr. Benny Lau** pointed out that Hakhel was a unique mitzvah because it brought the entirety of the people together to surround a single mitzvah—Limmud HaTorah. EVERYONE – came for Hakhel. Rav Lau called for a new Hakhel which would bring the people together – not around physical commonalities like the needs for vacation spots or malls to shop --- rather around spiritual ideals that would further enhance the spirit of Am Yisrael like Hakhel.

**הַקְהֵ֣ל  Gather the nation – men women and children (31:12)**– The Talmud notes that the children were brought to give Sachar to those who brought them. When Rav Yehoshua heard this idea, he noted that the idea was so ideal that any generation which has the support of Rabbi Elazar Ben Azariah cannot be an orphaned generation. What was so great about the message? **Rav Moshe Feinstein .** suggested that left to their own devices, there would be parents who might decide that their children are not able or capable of Torah study. As a result the children might not ever get a chance to study and experience the wonders of the Torah. However, as a result of Hakhel which makes the issue relevant to merely “being there” to experience – it denied the parents the ability to withhold  child’s chance to experience public Torah study.  **Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach .** offered a different answer: He thought that this is why at times, we offer Sachar for things we would have done anyway – this is a fulfillment of Lifeechach Hirbea LaHem Torh U’Mitzvos.

**הַקְהֵ֣ל  Hakhel Es HaAm (31:12)** – How would this be possible? How could the whole nation hear the Melech at one time? **Rav Schachter**  would often quote from **Rav Schwab .** who thought that the people passed though the Azara in order to hear the king but no one heard the whole thing in order to give everyone a chance.

**וְהַטַּ֔ף 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**  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.

**וְהַטַּ֔ף And their children will hear and learn to fear Hashem (31:12) – Or HaChaim** asks who the children are who are too young to understand. Are they toddlers? He answers that this refers to the children who can understand the concept of Yiras Shomayim. Why does the possuk continue to refer to the days YOU are crossing the Yarden as opposed to the days that THEY cross**? Rav Mordechai Kamenetzsky** explained that children need to trained not for post-parental existence but rather while the parent is still there – to enjoy the nachas and experience the passing of the torch of Torah that is our Mesorah. It needs to begin in life – not only in replacement.

**הָֽאֲנָשִׁ֤ים וְהַנָּשִׁים֙ וְהַטַּ֔ף  Gather the people, the men, women and the children (31:12)** **– Rashi** quotes that the children are told to be brought in order to give reward to those who bring them. **Kli Yakar** asks why Hashem would do something senseless just to give Sachar for something purposeless? The **Tosefes Beracha** explains that there is a purpose in creating an environment of Torah supremacy. **Rav Yisroel Reisman** asked how this fits with the words of Rashi – after all, the answer of the Tosefes Beracha is nice but it doesn’t explain the Sachar for those who bring the kids. What is the explanation? Rav Reisman answered that the value is in the Chinuch of the parents. There is a purpose in having parents who have a desire that their children grow up with the Hashpaah of Torah. This is the purpose.

**וּבְנֵיהֶ֞ם אֲשֶׁ֣ר לֹא־יָֽדְע֗וּ יִשְׁמְעוּ֙ וְלָ֣מְד֔וּ  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 .** 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.

**בְּעַמּ֣וּד עָנָ֑ן  And Hashem appeared at Ohel Moed in an Amud HaAnan (31:15)** – The Midrash quotes that Moshe tried to retire and had Yehoshua take over. He walked Yehoshua to Ohel Moed and Yehoshua got a Nevuah. Moshe asked him what the Nevuah was and Yehoshua told him that all the years he was leader, Moshe did not reveal the Nevuah to Yehoshua unless instructed to do so. Why should it be different now? The Meforshim ask why was Yehoshua so Chutzpahdik**? Radal** explains that this was the Nevuah – not to reveal Nevuos. The Midrash added that at moment Moshe preferred 100 deaths than to be jealous once. **Rav Schachter**  added that it is hard for a student to take over and have his Rebbe still there but retired.

**הִנְּךָ֥ שֹׁכֵ֖ב עִם־אֲבֹתֶ֑יךָ  Behold you will lie with your forefathers (31:16) – Rav Eli Munk** notes that the word “Hein” consists of 2 letters “Heh” and Nun” each of which needs another to be pronounced (nun needs another nun and heh needs another Heh to be pronounced). Moshe used this word to praise Hashem while Hashem used the same in reply. In essence Hashem was highlighting to Moshe that his use of this world and the next one were directly linked and inseparable.

**עַ֣ל כִּי Because there is no God within me these troubles have found me (31:17) – Rav Shabsi Rosenthal**  explained that one only sins when he does not see Hashem as HIS – close to him personally. Yet, merely looking around would show the individual otherwise.

**מְצָא֖וּנִי הָֽרָע֥וֹת הָאֵֽלֶּה: 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**  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.

**הַסְתֵּ֨ר אַסְתִּ֤יר פָּנַי֙  I will hide my face on that day (31:18**) – What does Hester Panim mean? **Rav Schachter**  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.

**הַסְתֵּ֨ר אַסְתִּ֤יר פָּנַי֙**  **I will hide my face (31:18)** – How is one to understand the concept of Hester Panim? **Rav Schachter**  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.

**הַשִּׁירָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את And now write this Shirah and teach it to Bnei Yisrael (31:19) – Rav Shach .** commented that there would be a time when the Torah would be called upon to defend the people and the only way it would be able to protect us is if it is left unadulterated. If it will be altered to the people it will not be able to testify on behalf of the people.

**Now write this Shirah and teach it to Bnei Yisrael place it in their mouths (31:19) – Rav Shaul Yisraeli .** explains that it must be a united Torah (SheBaal Peh with She’B’Ksav). The endurance of Torah is predicated on its recognition as a united component with the Mesorah of Torah She’Baal Peh (a similar thought is advanced by **Rav Aharon Soloveitchik .** in the name of his father). If it is just biblical criticism, it is doomed to fail the test of time.

**וְעַתָּ֗ה כִּתְב֤וּ לָכֶם֙ אֶת־הַשִּׁירָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את Write this song (31:19)** - Parashas Vayelech teaches the mitzvah of writing a sefer Torah. The Gemara, Sanhedrin, 21b, states that even if one inherits a sefer Torah from his father, he has to write one himself. **Ksav Sofer** says that there are two messages here: 1) that the Torah shouldn’t be observed by rote, just following what we have done in previous generations. We have to accept it as if we received it ourselves at Har Sinai. 2) We all have to make a personal contribution to Torah learning.

**וְעַתָּ֗ה כִּתְב֤וּ לָכֶם֙ אֶת־הַשִּׁירָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את So now write this song for yourselves and teach it to Bnei Yisrael place it into their mouth (31:19**) – Why is the Torah called a song? **Rav Moshe Swift** suggests that music gives meaning and harmony to life. It transforms a sorrowful event into one of hope and joy. Torah works the same way.

**הַשִּׁירָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את** **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** . 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.

**הַשִּׁירָ֣ה הַזֹּ֔את 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**  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.

**וְהָיָ֠ה כִּֽי־תִמְצֶ֨אןָ אֹת֜וֹ רָע֣וֹת רַבּוֹת֘ וְצָרוֹת֒ And it will when bad things befall you (31:21)** – Does this not undo the words mentioned before where Hashem promises that the words shall not be forgotten? How can Hashem promise something that is dependent on Bechira? **Rav Shteinman** suggests that for the entirety of the Jewish people, it is an impossibility that Torah will be forgotten. However which individuals choose to be in the know, is a matter of Bechira.

**וְהָיָ֠ה כִּֽי־תִמְצֶ֨אןָ אֹת֜וֹ רָע֣וֹת רַבּוֹת֘ וְצָרוֹת֒ 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.

**וְ֠עָֽנְתָ֠ה הַשִּׁירָ֨ה הַזֹּ֤את לְפָנָיו֙ לְעֵ֔ד כִּ֛י לֹ֥א תִשָּׁכַ֖ח מִפִּ֣י זַרְע֑וֹ** **And this Shirah will be a testimony in that it will not be forgotten from the children’s mouths (31:21) – Rav Chaim Shlomo Leibovitz .** quoted his grandfather **Rav Boruch Ber** . who noted that this Possuk contains 2 components – a promise and a miracle. The promise was that Torah would not be forgotten no matter what happened and sure enough it is wondrous miracle that indeed Torah thrives in all situations.

**לֹ֥א תִשָּׁכַ֖ח מִפִּ֣י זַרְע֑וֹ It will not be forgotten from the children (31:21) – Rav Mattisyahu Solomon**  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.

**לֹ֥א תִשָּׁכַ֖ח מִפִּ֣י זַרְע֑וֹ It shall not be forgotten from his children (31:21) – Rashi**comments that this is a promise from Hashem that Torah shall not be forgotten from the children entirely. **The Ponevizher Rav .** commented that Rashi’s words can be interpreted in 2 ways – either that the Torah will never be forgotten from the entire nation or that no child will ever fully forget Torah values for they will strive to have some connection to the Torah.

**לָקֹ֗חַ אֵ֣ת סֵ֤פֶר הַתּוֹרָה֙ הַזֶּ֔ה 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 .** 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 .

**הַקְהִ֧ילוּ אֵלַ֛י אֶת־כָּל־זִקְנֵ֥י שִׁבְטֵיכֶ֖ם וְשֹֽׁטְרֵיכֶ֑ם 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 .** 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:**

**שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל Shuva Yisrael (14:2)** – The midrash comments that Reuven was the first to open with Teshuva and thus his descendant Hoshea would also be the first – instructing Bnei Yisrael to return to Hashem. The only thing is both Reuven and Hoshea were not the first to engage in their jobs. Why are they so credited? The **Meshech Chochma** explains that Reuven was the first to realize that embedded in his need to ask for Teshuva from his father is the need to ask from Hashem whose relationship with you is clearly strained as indicated by the ability to sin. Reuven saw this and worked on his Teshuva. Hosea highlighted the message within Teshuva – they were the first to make these links clear.

**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**  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.

**קחו עמכם דברים Take words with you (Hoshea 14:3)** – What things are we to take with us? The **Chessed L’Avraham** explains that Moshe received the second Luchos on Yom Kippur and it became accepted as a day of atonement. Thus, the receipt of the Torah was a sign of the acceptability of the Teshuva – the words then must clearly refer to the words of Torah.