

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת נצבים

אתם נצבים היום כלכם לפני ה' אלקיכם ראשיכם שבטיכם זקניכם ושטריכם כל איש ישראל

“You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your G-d: the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers - all the men of Israel” (29:9)

Why did Moshe say that the tribes were present if he later mentioned that "all the men of Israel" were present? It seems redundant to mention both. Rashi says that the heads and the tribes go together. Moshe meant to say "the heads of the tribes." If this is so, why does the posuk not just say so outright? What is the Torah trying to teach us?

Rabbi Friedman suggests that a leader has to be nothing more than a representation of his constituents. The leaders represented their people and had no personal agenda. They were nothing in and of themselves but held their position as a delegate of their tribe. It was as if the heads were the tribes themselves. That is why the posuk says "your heads, your tribes." It was as if they were one and the same.

R' Moshe Feinstein writes that every person has to recognize that he has the potential to become a leader. A person should have high goals and never feel as if nothing will become of himself. Anybody can grow to be the leader of his tribe or the entire generation. A person has to recognize his abilities and have faith in himself. Moshe was telling the people that their heads came from within their tribes. He was trying to stress that any one of them had the ability to become leaders. People should not be content to be one of the masses but should strive for higher goals. Obviously, this only if he has no personal agenda to achieve. One of the reasons why we bless children to be like Ephraim and Menashe is because we want them to grow up to be leaders to Ephraim and Menashe.

The Baal HaTurim comments on the juxtaposition of "all the men of Israel" at the end of this posuk to the "children" mentioned at the beginning of the next posuk. He explains that the leaders should view the people as children when leading them. They should create a personal relationship with those who are beneath them and guide them with proper patience and leadership.

כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפין ובלבבך לעשתו

“Rather, the matter is very near to you - in your mouth and your heart - to perform it” (30:14)

What mitzvah is this posuk referring to? Rashi says that it refers to Torah study. Learning Torah does not require an extraordinary effort. It is right in front of us and readily available. Because Torah is our lifeline and is essential to our daily living, it was given in a way that it is easily accessible to all.

Ramban, however, disagrees and says that this refers to the mitzvah of teshuva. Repentance is not some complicated concept that requires one to go through a very difficult process. It is very close to every person and can be easily accomplished. Teshuva

is “in your mouth and in your heart,” it is natural and comes easily. This is why the Gemara in Kiddushin says that when a wicked man marries a woman on the condition that he is righteous, she needs a divorce because we are concerned that perhaps he did teshuva immediately beforehand and the condition was thus met, even if he has a bad reputation. Teshuva comes easily and can be accomplished quickly if one just puts the effort into it.

The Ponevezher Rav once went to visit the Jewish communities in Africa. Before he left, he first stopped off to visit the Chofetz Chaim in Radin. He asked what message he should give to the people in Africa. The Chofetz Chaim said to tell them that it is easy to do teshuva. We only think that it is so difficult because the yetzer hara deceives us into believing so. The Ramban clearly tells us that it is within our reach. It is so close to a person and it does not demand very much of him. Hashem wants us to repent and to change are ways so it he made the teshuva process easily accessible to all. This is especially true during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva when Hashem is closer to us. It is a time when teshuva comes to a person even more readily than the rest of the year.

ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע
“See, I have placed before you today the life and the good, and the death and the evil” (30:15)

Why does the posuk stress that this choice between good and evil confronts the people "today"? R' Moshe Feinstein answer that we have to recognize that each day is a new battle. Choices have to be made and internal battles have to be won. If a person fails one day, the next day is a new start. Every day is an opportunity for blessing or otherwise. Each day can be used for good or bad. A person can use his time properly or waste it. This choice between good and evil is made afresh each day of a person's life.

העדתי בכם היום את השמים ואת הארץ החיים והמות נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה ובחרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה וזרעך
“I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you: I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse; and you shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring” (30:19)

Why does the Torah repeat the declaration to choose life a second time? R' Moshe Feinstein says that the focus here is the consequence, "so that you will live, you and your offspring." It is important to choose to live in such a way that one's children should see the joy and beauty of a life of serving Hashem. The choice of life has to be carried out in a way that inspires others to continue to live in a way of Torah, a way of choosing life. This is why a person should always serve Hashem joyfully. If children see their parents treating mitzvos as a burden, they will want no part of it. Life should be injected into mitzvos in order to make them want it more. We should take steps to ensure that we are putting our heart and soul into our service of Hashem.

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