

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת נצבים-וילך

הנסתרת לה' אל קינו והנגלת לנו ולבנינו עד עולם לעשות את כל דברי התורה
הזאת

“The hidden is for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed is for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of the Torah” (29:28)

In the Warsaw Ghetto, the people were becoming depressed that they were forced to observe the Torah in hiding and could not gather together to pray or do any mitzvos. R' Kalonymus Kalman Shapira (see a biography at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kalonymus_Kalman_Shapira) tried to raise the people's flagging spirits. He said: “Even though we can't pray in public with raised voices, our hidden prayers will also reach Hashem. We know this because the Torah tells us that ‘The hidden is for Hashem.’ Private observance is no less precious to Hashem than mitzvos done in the open. However, we must remember that this is not the ideal way. We must make a commitment that when we will be liberated, we will once again serve Hashem in an open manner. One day, we will again raise our voices in public prayer with increased concentration. That is the optimum way to serve Hashem, not to hide religion and make it private. We know this because the Torah says that “the revealed is for us and our children forever.”

One lesson that we can learn from this story is that we see how the Torah talks to every person in every possible situation. Everything can be found in the Torah. Whenever one needs advice or guidance for his current situation, the Torah contains the answer to all his questions, provided that he knows where to find it or consults with a Torah scholar.

ומל ה' אל קיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך לאהבה את ה' אל קיך בכל לבבך ובכל
נפשך למען חיך

“Hashem, your G-d, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (30:6)

What does the Torah mean by saying that Hashem will circumcise your heart “that you may live”? R’ Avraham Yitzchak Shain (of MTJ-Staten Island) writes in Birkas Ish that when a person does teshuva because he fears Hashem, he erases the negative things that he has done from his record. Nevertheless, at that point he still has not done anything positive other than to bring about the absence of transgressions. Hashem helps us reach a level where we feel a great love for Hashem and raise our repentance to one that it does out of love. That will help us do more mitzvos and give us a life of positive growth. In addition, Chazal say that teshuva motivated by love transforms aveiros into mitzvos. This added level of teshuva enables us to truly live life in the way that Hashem intended for us. Of course, even the first level of repentance is a great accomplishment, but the added level that involves love of Hashem is the key to life.

Elul is an auspicious time for this type of teshuva. The posuk hints to this because the initial letters of the words אֵת לְבַבְךָ וְאֵת לְבַבִּי spell Elul.

כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם לֹא נִפְלְאָתָה הוּא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רַחֲקָה הוּא
“For this commandment that I command you today – it is not hidden from you and it is not distant” (30:11)

The Ramban explains that this posuk discusses the mitzvah of teshuva. The Tzror HaMor asks: What does the Torah mean to say when it says that teshuva is neither hidden nor distant? One may have difficulty grasping the concept that one can repent and have all his sins forgiven. After all, he is still the same person who sinned. The Torah teaches us that the understanding of repentance is not hidden or distant. It is completely logical. When a person totally changes the way he acts by following the steps prescribed by the Torah as part of the teshuva process, it makes him into a totally different person. The sinner is gone and there is a new person now in his place. This is not strange or a cause for wonder. It makes perfect sense that teshuva should be effective when one thinks about it.

The Sefer HaChinuch says that the mitzvah of teshuva applies at all times, but there is a deadline in place. Yom Kippur is the last day for a person to admit any sins done during the past year. If a Jew fails to repent on Yom Kippur, he has transgressed a positive commandment in the Torah.

Even though one is obligated to repent, he has a limited window of time in which to fulfill a mitzvah for doing so. In these weeks, we must take advantage of the limited time opportunity to perform this mitzvah before its time expires.

וילך משה וידבר את הדברים האלה אל כל ישראל

“Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel” (31:1)

The Malbim writes the following as an introduction to the final day of Moshe Rabbeinu’s life: “Hashem has placed old age into nature for man’s good. He should feel that he is approaching death so that he should think of how to improve his soul. As his end nears, he falls ill so that his relatives and friends should come to visit him and assist him. When he sees their love, he heart grows close to them and if there is any animosity between them, he will rectify it during these days...

“According to the deeds of the person, so is his fate. Whoever feels death approaching earlier will be able to improve his soul more. Dasan and Aviram, who fought against Moshe, died in the worst possible way according to this measure. First, all Jews separated from them... They then stood defiantly outside their tents with their families to show that they were happy with this separation. Certainly, they did not consider their impending deaths at all.

“Now the Torah tells us that the departure of Moshe was in the best possible way. He knew the day of his death, not from illness...but from the word of Hashem he knew that he would live no more than 120 years. He felt an attachment of love with the people of his generation, and not because he was sick and they came to visit him. Just the opposite – he went to their tents to take leave of them, as one who embarks on a journey, and informed them of his death so that they should not become agitated. He comforted them so that they should not be exceedingly saddened by his death, for he had completed his days and his death would not prevent them from entering the land. Hashem had appointed Yehoshua to lead them, a man in whom the spirit of Hashem rested and who knew how to act with each person according to his spirit. This is how these pesukim should be explained.”

We see that when a person is sick and people visit him, it creates good feelings. But the reverse is also true. If a sick person does not receive visitors, he can become bitter and full of ill will toward those around him. By visiting the sick, we foster positive feelings among people and help the sick person.

הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגרך אשר בשעריך למען ישמעו ולמען
ילמדו ויראו את ה' אלקיכם ושמרו לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת
“Gather together the people – the men, the women and the small children, and your stranger who is in your cities – so that they will hear and so that they will learn, and they shall fear Hashem, your G-d, and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah” (31:12)

Rashi writes that the children were obligated to come to hakhel in order to give reward to the parents who bring them. What distinguishes this from every other mitzvah for which a person receives reward? R' Moshe Feinstein writes that there is an important message in this idea that is especially related to the education of children. Sometimes parents see that their children are not the brightest, or that they won't keep the Torah or will not devote their lives to the study of Torah. They decide not to give their children a Torah education because, as they might say, “what's the point?” The Torah tells us that this is not true. The need to bring a child to learn Torah is not dependent on how much they will understand and how much they will translate into action. There is an obligation to teach children Torah regardless of the outcome. Eventually, even children who do not have so much ability or desire to learn will grow closer to a life of Torah as a result of the education that they receive.

*Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann*