

פרשות ניצבים-וילך

On the face of it, it seems that the gap between us and *Dor HaMidbar* is immense. For some 40 weeks a year we attend to them, beginning with Parshas Sh'mos and concluding with Parshas V'zos HaBracha in a few weeks.

Despite the emphasis that the Torah gives to their misdeeds and their 'testing of Hashem', we do not forget the praise heaped upon them by the Novi Yirmiyahu (Perek 2/P'sukim 1-2):

וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: הֲלֹךְ וְקִרְאתָ בְּאָזְנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר ה' זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד וְנְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבֵּת כָּל־לִילְתֶיךָ לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:

The Word of Hashem came to me saying. 'Keep yourself going and you should proclaim in the ears of Yerushalayim saying, "So said Hashem, 'I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your marriage [with Me], your going after Me in the wilderness, in an unsown land.

When we read the harsh words of last week's *tocheicha* in Parshas Ki Sovo and the prophetic words that conclude the second of this week's two Parshos – Parshas V'alelelech we see the distinction between us and then. It appears that we are far worse.

And so we read this week (D'vorim Perek 31/Posuk 29):

כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אַחֲרַי מוֹתִי כִּי הַשְּׁחַת תִּשְׁחַתּוּן וְסָרְתֶם מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְקִרְאתֶם אֶתְכֶם הָרָעָה בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים כִּי תַעֲשׂוּ אֶת הָרָע בְּעֵינַי ה' לְהַכְעִיסוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיכֶם:

I [Moshe] know that after my death that you will become surely corrupt and you will turn from the path that I commanded you; evil will happen to you at the End of Days when you will do evil in the eyes of Hashem to anger Him with the deeds of your hands.

It is true, as Rashi points out there, that the 'corruption' was postponed during the life of Yehoshua, but after the death of Yehoshua, this prophecy found its fulfillment¹.

¹ Rashi writes:

אחרי מותי כי השחת תשחתון - והרי כל ימי יהושע לא השחיתו, שנאמר (יהושע כד/לא) ויעבדו בני ישראל את ה' כל ימי יהושע, מכאן שתלמידו של אדם חביב עליו כגופו, שכל זמן שיהושע חי נראה למשה כאלו הוא חי:

The future generations were far less loyal to Torah.

But, it certainly appears that we have a response to such an accusation. Our lives are more challenging. The tests, *nisyonos*, which we face are incredibly difficult. We do not live in the 'ghetto' as did our ancestors some 3300 years ago. We live in a world that presents values and patterns of behavior that are opposed to Torah values and, at the very same time, are enticing.

How can we take *Dor HaMidbar* as an example to admire and to emulate?

But first impressions are not always correct. Because, when we read the warning that Moshe Rabbenu gave Israel during the covenant that was made in the first of this week's Parshos, Nitzovim, the similarities between their generation and ours seem to temper the distinction and may even overcome the differences. There is certainly a common denominator between us and them.

We read (Perek 29/P'sukim 15-17):

כִּי אַתֶּם יִדְעַתֶּם אֶת אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר עֲבַרְנוּ בְּקִרְבֵי הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עֲבַרְתֶּם: וַתִּרְאוּ אֶת שְׁקוּצֵיהֶם וְאֵת גְּלִלְיָהֶם עַץ וְאֲבָן כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב אֲשֶׁר עִמָּהֶם: פֶּן יִשׁ בְּכֶם אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה אוֹ מִשְׁפָּחָה אוֹ שִׁבְטֵי אֲשֶׁר לָבְבוּ פְנֵי הַיּוֹם מֵעַם ה' אֲלֵי...לְקִינוּ לְלַכֵּת לְעַבֵּד אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם פֶּן יִשׁ בְּכֶם שָׂרֵשׁ פְּרָה רֹאשׁ וְלַעֲנָה:

Because you know how it was when we dwelled in the Land of Egypt and how it was when we passed in the midst of the nations that you passed. You saw their disgusting behavior and their repulsive idolatry – of wood and stone, silver and gold that was with them. Lest there is among you a man or a woman or a family or a tribe whose heart turns away today from Hashem

After my death you will become surely corrupt – Is it not so that during the entire life of Yehoshua as it says, 'B'nei Yisroel served Hashem all the days of Yehoshua'? From this [that even though Moshe's prophecy was that following *his* death, they would turn from Hashem, they did not turn until after Yehoshua's death] we learn that a person's *talmid* is beloved to him as his own self. For as long as Yehoshua lived, it appeared to Moshe that *he*, Moshe, was living.

our G-d to go and to serve the gods of those nations; lest there is among you a root that will grow to be hardened² and be bitter.

It is extraordinary. We may have thought of our ancestors as inhabitants of a ghetto, with tall walls, reinforced, to prevent any of the outside world from permeating. We may have envisioned them as being protected and insulated, unaware of a world that the Torah describes as being replete with

שְׁקוּצִיּוֹת וְאֵת גְּלִיּוֹתָם

Disgusting behavior and their repulsive idolatry.

Our translation attempts to follow Rashi who writes that these terms describing idolatry are:

וּתְרָאוּ אֶת שְׁקוּצֵיהֶם - עַל שֵׁם שֶׁהֵם מְאוֹסִים כְּשִׁקְצִים:

You saw their disgusting behavior – it is because the idolatry is disgusting like rodents.

גְּלִיּוֹתָם - שֶׁמוֹסְרָחִים וּמְאוֹסִין כַּגִּלְל:

Their repulsive idolatry – they are foul-odored and repulsive like dung.

And if we investigate that which we know, we are reminded of a verse in Sefer Vayikra which will be read soon on Yom HaKippurim afternoon during the Minchah Torah reading. The Posuk in Acharei Mos (Perek 18/Posuk 3) reads:

כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבְּתֶם בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וְכַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מֵבִיא אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וּבְחַקְתִּיהֶם לֹא תֵלְכוּ:

² The word ראש in this verse has many interpretations. Our translation follows Rashi, according to *Sifsei Chachamim*, who says it means ‘hardened’. That is, this tendency to idolatry may begin without complete determination to follow through with this Avoda Zara. As it continues, the determination becomes hardened and the person won’t change his mind.

The *Targumim* see this Posuk as a parable with the *shoresh*-root referring to the common man and the *rosh*-head referring to the leadership of the Shevet.

Malbim understands the term as being a separate type of bitter plant.

Do not do like the actions of the Land of Egypt that you dwelled in it; and do not do like the actions of the Land of Canaan that I Hashem am bringing your there; do not go in their statutes.

Rashi teaches of the depth of this strong condemnation of the Egyptians and the Canaanites and their threat to Israel:

כמעשה ארץ מצרים - מגיד שמעשיהם של מצריים ושל כנעניים מקולקלים מכל האומות, ואותו מקום שישבו בו ישראל מקולקל מן הכל:

Like the actions of the Land of Egypt – This tells us that the actions of the Egyptians and the Canaanites were the most ruinous of all of the nations and, that place where Israel dwelled [Goshen] was the worst of it.

אשר אני מביא אתכם שמה - מגיד שאותן עממין שכבשו ישראלו מקולקלים יותר מכולם:

That I bring you there – This tells us that the nations that Israel conquered in Eretz Yisroel were even more ruinous than the rest.

So, like in so many other instances, first-impressions here are inaccurate. Although we correctly translate *midbar* as wilderness, a place *mi-daber*, in which there was no speaking, i.e. far from populated areas, the *midbar* was not a desert of escape from civilization. Our ancestors were not spared from challenges. Our ancestors were not bereft of exposure to foreign influences that stood in opposition to Torah values and that were, at the very same time, attracting and enticing.

In fact, if we revisit the introduction of the Netziv to Sefer B'midbar, we can now understand the profundity of his words.

We read:

...דעיקר זה הספר הוא המחליף ומשנה הליכות עם ה' בחיי העולם מאז שהגיעו לארץ ישראל. מן הדרך שהלכו במדבר. שבמדבר היו מתנהגים במדת תפארת שהלך לימין משה שהוא לגמרי למעלה מהליכות הטבע. ובארץ ישראל הלכו בדרך הטבע בסתרי השגחת מלכות שמים ברוך הוא. וזה השנוי התחיל עודם במדבר בשנת הארבעים כמו שביארנו בפרשת חקת. על פי זה השנוי נעשו מלחמות ישראל עם הכנעני ועם סיחון בדרך הטבע. וגם המטה לא היה עוד ביד משה תמיד אלא לעת הצורך לפי ההכרח כמו שביארנו שם. ועל זה השנוי המצוין בזה הספר אמרו חז"ל בבראשית רבה פ"ג ויבדל א...ל'קים בין האור ובין החשך זה ספר במדבר שהוא מבדיל בין יוצאי מצרים ובין באי הארץ. דבהליכות יוצאי מצרים היה אור השגחת ה'

מופיע לעין כל, שהוא כבוד ה' ותכלית הבריאה. מה שאין כן בהליכות באי הארץ היתה ההשגחה מכוסה. ורק המביט בעין יפה היה מרגיש בה כמו ההולך בחשכת לילה. או רק לפרקים היה נרגש ההשגחה לעין כל. כמו אור הברק המאיר חשכת לילה.

The main theme of this Book of B'midbar is the switch and the change from the way of 'going with Hashem' in the life of this world once they reached Eretz Yisroel from the way that they went in the wilderness.

In the wilderness life was directed by the heavenly attribute of *Tiferes* that was to the right of Moshe in his support and which was completely above the natural world. In Eretz Yisroel they lived a life of *teva*, with the Divine Providence of Hashem hidden.

This change began when they were still in the wilderness in the fortieth year as we explained in Parshas Chukkas³. Because of this change, the wars between Israel and the Canaanites and with Sichon were without supernatural intervention. Moshe's staff [with which he performed miracles] was not with him always, only when necessary when the situation demanded it, as we explained there.

Regarding this change that is noted in this Book, Chazal said that the meaning of the verse, 'G-d separated between the light and the darkness' is referring to Sefer B'midbar that distinguishes between those who left Egypt and those who entered Eretz Yisroel.

Regarding those who left Egypt, the events in which they were involved were with Divine Providence that was completely apparent; that is the Honor of G-d and the intent of Creation. It was not so with the events of those who entered Eretz Yisroel. There Divine Providence was covered and only one who would like well would sense that Divine Providence – just like someone walking in the dark. But, sometimes [even in Eretz Yisroel] the Divine Providence could be sensed by all – like lightening that enlightens in the darkness of the night.

Thus, it could very well be that the special nature of Divine Providence until the closing year of the sojourn in the Midbar protected Israel from the deleterious

³ Perek 20/Posuk 5.

impact of *ma'aseh Eretz Mitzrayim*, but it did not remove it from the consciousness of our ancestors.

Thus, once life in the Wilderness began its transformation from *Derech Neis* to *Derech Teva* the impressions that that our ancestors received from the Egyptians were felt.

Perhaps, the strongest proof of this thesis is the event that concludes Parshas Bolok and begins Parshas Pinchos⁴.

The behavior of our ancestors who sinned at *Ba'al Peor* met all of the 'standards' of

שיקוציהם וגילוליהם

Disgusting behavior and their repulsive idolatry.

It is uncomfortable to even write about the service of *Ba'al Peor* which was one that would be repugnant to anyone with only a modicum of culture and good sense. The service of *Ba'al Peor* was for the worshipper to relieve him or herself upon their god⁵!

And so, in that low and shameful episode in our history we see that Israel was not inure from the most animalistic level of behavior.

Nonetheless, on the whole, the description of Yirmiyahu HaNovi, which will be part of the Haftarah of the Second Day of Rosh Hashanah, is the definitive profile of our ancestors.

Now that we have seen that to a certain degree our experiences and those of our ancestors have a good deal in common in that we and they were bombarded by

⁴ ER suggests that the episode of the Golden Calf is no less an example of this point than that of *Arvos Mo'av*. This would seem particularly true according to Rashi who explains that the *Eirev Rav*, the Egyptians who left Egypt with Israel, were the instigators of the worship of the *Eigel* and the attendant murder and promiscuity that accompanied it.

⁵ See Masseches Sanhedrin 64 a for a description of how a non-Jewess served *Ba'al Peor* 'lemehadrin'.

outside influences, we may ask how can we go forward and, at the same time, attempt to emulate our forbearers.

How can we realistically aspire to achieve the bond of ⁶כלולות, an all-encompassing relationship with HaKodosh Boruch Hu?

In Perek 2 of Masseches Ovos we read of the five unique disciples of Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and these *talmidim* were responsible for preserving and restoring Torah at the time of the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdosh. It is therefore not surprising that we learn their names, their praises and the values that they espoused. It is also not surprising that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, their *Rebbe*, evaluated and reflected upon those responses.

In Mishnah 9 there, we read:

היה מונה שבחן

He would list their praise.

Undoubtedly, each of these *Gedolei Yisroel* had a large list of laudatory accomplishments and a wonderful profile. But, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai focused on the particular aspect of their lives that was their individual and unique שבח – praise.

In the following Mishnah, we learn of the way that the Rebbe developed the values and sensitivities of this illustrious group of five.

He first told them

צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם

Go out and see the correct path of life to which a person should cleave.

⁶ The word כלולות as the word כל as its base word and it means entirety. The plural form כלולות means, in the context of a marriage, that the relationship that is being established is all-encompassing for both husband and wife.

Years ago, we were taught by our unique teacher of *L'shon HaKodesh*, Rav Hirsch Isenberg Z'L that there is no such word as כלולת, in a singular form. If it means 'all-encompassing' then, by definition, it must be in the plural to include all who are encompassed.

The Mishnah gives us their responses and Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai gives his evaluation.

Then, as the Mishnah continues, we read the next directive of the *Rebbe*:

צאו וראו איזוהי דרך רעה שיתרחק ממנה האדם

Go out and see the evil path of life from which a person should distance himself.

Here, too, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai gives his evaluation to the responses that the Mishnah lists.

Regarding the *Tanna* Rabi Yehoshua ben Chananya, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai tell us the singular praise of his student:

אשרי יולדתו

Happy is the one who gave birth to him.

Of course, when we read this for the first time we express wonderment: is Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai praising Rabi Yehoshua or is he praising his mother? How can this phrase be understood to reflect upon the son, not on the mother?

Bartenura offers two explanations. First, we read:

אשרי יולדתו - מאושר במדות טובות עד שכל העולם אומרים עליו אשרי מי שילדתו.

Happy is the one who gave birth to him – He is so firm⁷ with all of the good personal attributes that everyone says about him ‘Happy is the one who gave birth to him’.

Every mother would be gratified to be told time and time again that her son is an ‘angel’. Rabi Yehoshua’s mother was afforded that *nachas* because of the especially exemplary behaviour by which he always conducted himself.

The second explanation reads:

ויש אומרים, על שם שהיא גרמה לו שיהא חכם, שהיתה מחזרת על כל בתי מדרשות שבעירה ואומרת להם בבקשה מכם בקשו רחמים על העובר הזה שבמעי שיהיה

⁷ The word אשרי can mean steady and firm. It is also a form of the word, אישור, means granting permission – hence an alternative translation would be ‘validation’.

חכם, ומיום שנולד לא הוציאה ערשתו מבית המדרש כדי שלא יכנסו באזניו אלא דברי תורה:

There are those who say that this because it was his mother who was the cause of his being a *Chacham*. [When she was pregnant with Rabi Yehoshua] she would seek out the *Botei Midrash* in her city and say to the Chachamim there, 'Please, seek mercy for this fetus in my insides that he should be a *Chacham*.

After he was born she did not remove his crib from the Beis HaMidrash so that only words of Torah would enter into his ears.⁸

One can only admire, from afar, the dedication of the mother of Rabi Yehoshua. We are reminded of *Chana*, mother of Sh'muel Hanovi who will be the subject of the Haftarah on the first day of Rosh Hashanah.

And the results were superb.

What were the maxims that Rabi Yehoshua applauded and decried? The Mishnah tells us:

אמר להם צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה...רבי יהושע אומר חבר טוב...אמר להם צאו וראו איזוהי דרך רעה שיתרחק ממנה...רבי יהושע אומר חבר רע

Go out and see the correct path of life to which a person should cleave – Rabi Yehoshua said, 'A good friend'.

צאו וראו איזוהי דרך רעה שיתרחק ממנה האדם

Go out and see the evil path of life from which a person should distance himself – Rabi Yehoshua said, 'A bad friend'.

What is the depth of meaning in the two-sided coin of *chaver*?

⁸ Rashi brings this in his commentary as well and writes שמעתי – 'I have heard this [about Rabi Yehoshu'a's mother].

In his commentary, *Tiferes Yisroel*, who will be quoted shortly, refers us to Yerushalmi Masseches Yevomos (5 a) for the story regarding the crib in the Beis HaMidrash.

Certainly the explanation of almost all of the commentators is easy to understand. The *Meiri* writes this consensus succinctly:

ר' יהושע חבר טוב - שיתיעץ עמו בכל ענייניו ויוכיחנו מכל שגיאותיו וידריכנו על הטובות ובו יושלמו ענייניו

Rabi Yehoshua: a good friend – One with whom he can consult about all matters and who will correct him regarding any mistakes that he may make and guide him regarding all that is good and through him, he will reach perfection in all matters.

The *chaver ra'*, of course, is one who will mislead and misdirect and cause ongoing harm.

However, in *his* commentary, Tiferes Yisroel provides a thread connecting the praise that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai upon Rabi Yehoshua and the *middah tovah* and its opposite that he suggested to his Rebbe.

He writes first:

אשרי יולדתו. שאמו הדריכתו לתורה ולמדות ישרות, וכבר כשהיתה מעוברת ממנו, חזרה בבתי מדרשות ובקשה שיתפללו שיהיה העובר זה תלמיד חכם וצדיק

Happy is she who gave birth to him – His mother guided him to Torah and to proper *middos*. Even when she was pregnant with him she went to the different Botei Midrash and requested that they should pray the fetus to be a *Talmid Chacham* and a *Tzaddik*.

It is with this background that the proper *derech* that Rabi Yehoshua espoused was one which bred him. Tiferes Yisroel continues:

חבר טוב. שכשיעצו להסיר חסרונותיו, לא יתבייש מפניו ולא יכעס, בידעו שלבו תמים עמו, וישמע עצתו, כמו שהיתה אמו לר' יהושע:

A good friend – One who will counsel him about how to remove that his deficiencies; one before whom he will not be embarrassed and not get angry since he knows that the friend's heart is purely there to be with him and he will attend to his counsel.

That is what was between Rabi Yehoshua and his mother.

I think that it would be very difficult to find a more moving passage in Masseches Ovos nor one that could be more motivational for a parent than this Mishnah with the commentary of Tiferes Yisroel.

The gist is that the parent can set a pattern for his child's future relationships. If it is a healthy, beneficial relationship from which the child prospers, then the child can use it as a model for the uplifting and beneficial relationships to which he will aspire as he reaches maturity.

However, it certainly appears that the mother of Rabi Yehoshua was unique in her behavior. Had it been that others followed a similar path of behavior, it is not likely that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai would have singled her out for special mention nor would Rabi Yehuda HaNosi entered her noble example in the Mishnah to be a message and a beacon for all generations.

How can we be inspired by the mother of Rabi Yehoshua on the one hand and be aware, on the other hand, that we cannot emulate her deeds?

The second Parsha of this week, *Vayelech*, provides us with an approach. We learn there of the Mitzvah of הַקְהֵל, a once-in-seven-years convocation to hear the reading of the Torah. *Hakhel* – gather the people to hear as we read (D'vorim Perek 31/P'sukim 10-13):

וַיִּצַו מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מִקֵּץ שִׁבְעֵי שָׁנִים בְּמַעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בְּחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת: בָּבוֹא כָל יִשְׂרָאֵל לִרְאוֹת אֶת פְּנֵי ה' א...לְקִיָּה בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר וַתִּקְרָא אֶת הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת נֹגֵד כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם: הַקְהֵל אֶת הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׁים וְהַטַּף וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְדוּ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת ה' א...לְקִיְכֶם וְשָׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת: וּבְנֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדְעוּ יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְדוּ לִירְאֶה אֶת ה' א...לְקִיְכֶם כָּל הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

Moshe commanded them saying, 'At the end of seven years on the holiday of the year of Shemitta during the Festival of Sukkos. When all of Israel comes to be seen before Hashem your G-d, in the place that He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all of Israel, in their ears.

Gather all of the people, the men, the women and the children and your convert who is within your gates in order that they shall learn to fear Hashem your G-d and to observe to do all of the words of this Torah. Their children, who do not know, will hear and will learn to fear Hashem your G-d all of the

days that you live on this land that your crossing the Jordan River to there to inherit it.

Rashi writes:

מקץ שבע שנים - בשנה ראשונה של שמטה, שהיא שנה בשמינית. ולמה קורא אותה שנת השמטה, שעדיין שביעית נוהגת בה בקציר של שביעית היוצא למוצאי שביעית:

At the end of seven years – in the first year of the [new] Shemitta cycle – which is the eighth year. What is it called the Shemitta year? Because still some of the Halachos of the Seventh year apply regarding the harvesting of the seventh year produce that is only ingathered in the eighth year⁹.

תקרא את התורה הזאת - המלך היה קורא מתחלת אלה הדברים...

You shall read this Torah – the King would read it from the beginning of Sefer D'vorim.

האנשים - ללמוד:

The men- to learn

והנשים - לשמוע:

The women – to hear

והטף - למה בא, לתת שכר למביאיהם:

The children – why did they come? To give reward for those who bring them.

Ramban explains this verse differently than Rashi¹⁰. He writes:

למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו - האנשים והנשים, כי גם הן שומעות ולומדות ליראה את ה'. ובניהם אשר לא ידעו ישמעו ולמדו - הם הטף, כי ישמעו וישאלו, והאבות ירגילום

⁹ We find something similar in Parshas Ki Sovo (D'vorim Perek 26/Posuk 12) where the Torah talks about שנה שלישית, the third year, when the discussed Halachah applies only in the fourth year. The reason there is the same as here. Much produce that grows in the third year is only fit to be harvested and consumed in the following year.

¹⁰ At the conclusion of this passage, Ramban does bring the Gemara which is the source of Rashi's commentary.

ויחנכו אותם. כי אין הטף הזה יונקי שדים, אבל הם קטני השנים הקרובים להתחנך,
וזה טעם ולמדו ליראה - בעתיד, כי למעלה אמר ולמדו ויראו...

In order that they should hear and in order that they should learn – Men and women. Because women also hear and learn to fear Hashem.

The children who do not know will hear and learn – the children – when they will hear they will ask and their fathers will accustom them and educate them.

This *taf* - children does not refer to suckling infants. Rather it refers to small children who are close to the age of being educated. Thus it says they *will* learn to fear – in the future. [In contrast, when talking about adults] above, it says they will learn and they will fear [at the moment of *Hakhel*.]

On the one hand, this Mitzvah of *Hakhel* is quite different than the daily and consistent behavior of the mother of Rabi Yehoshua. *Hakhel* occurs only once in seven years and only then where there is a Beis HaMikdosh. Rabi Yehoshua's mother took every opportunity, always, to receive blessings for her son and for her son to hear the sound of Torah exclusively.

How could the Mitzvah of *Hakhel*, one that occurs so infrequently, bring about the result of

ליראה את ה' א...ל'קיכם

To fear Hashem your G-d?

The commentators and sefarim discuss this Mitzvah of *Hakhel* extensively and as part of their discussion, they focus on two words for 'children' that the Torah employs in this section.

First, in Posuk 12 the Torah uses the word טף and then in Posuk 13 it uses the word בניהם. We saw above that the Ramban does seem to distinguish between the two term and the possible distinction is discussed at greater length by others.

In his supra-commentary on Rashi here, *Maharal* writes:

האי "טף" איירי בקטן שיכול ללמוד

The *taf* under discussion here is discussing a child who is capable of learning¹¹.

Minchas Chinuch (Mitzvah 612), in his commentary and discussion regarding the Mitzvah of *Hakhel* writes:

ולא נתבאר שיעור השנים של טף נראה דתיכף שיצאו מכלל נפל או בנווד שרוב כלו
חדשיו חייב במצוה זו. והנה הטף לא נצטוו דלאו בני צווי ניהו אך נצטוו להביאם
כמבואר בגמרא טף למה באין כדי ליתן שכר:

We do not have a source that tells us the age of this *taf*.

It appears that [the Mitzvah of bringing *taf* to *Hakhel* begins] immediately when they are born after they are viable or we know that they were born after a full-term pregnancy¹² – that is when this Mitzvah applies to them.

Certainly this *taf* was not commanded regarding *Hakhel* because they are not obligated in Mitzvos; rather their parents were commanded to bring them as the Gemara explains – to give reward to those who bring them.

However, it does not seem feasible to say that the *only* reason that the *taf* was brought was for the reward that the parents would accrue. The Torah does speak about the *taf* acquiring *Yiras Shamayim* as well.

Thus, we must say that the participation in Mitzvos of even the youngest of children is able to make a profound affect upon their *neshamah*. Their intellect is not impacted; they do not understand and they will have no conscious memory whatsoever of the event in which they participated. Their parents will show them

¹¹ Maharal questions the need to teach children *davka* at Sukkos at the time of *Hakhel*. He thus explains that since the Torah is discussing children who know how to learn, there is a special Torah decree to give parents reward for bringing their children, as Rashi wrote above.

Since it cannot be that the reward is for the learning per se, since one has to instruct is children all of the time, this is a special opportunity to reward the parents for the specific act of bringing the children to the *Hakhel* convocation.

¹² A newly-born infant is considered Halachically viable when it reaches the age of 30 days or when we know it was born after a full-term pregnancy. This distinction is relevant regarding *Pidyon Haben* and *Aveilus* in particular.

their picture on their album and they will enjoy looking at it – without sensing any internal connection. But the connection is there.

In fact, the Mishnah in the second Perek of Massechet Sukkah that teaches us that the Mitzvah of Chinuch for being in the Sukkah begins when the young boy can be separated from his mother without being hysterical tells us a fascinating tale.

We read there (Mishnah 8):

נשים ועבדים וקטנים פטורים מן הסוכה קטן שאינו צריך לאמו חייב בסוכה מעשה וילדה כלתו של שמאי הזקן ופיחת את המעזיבה וסיכך על גבי המטה בשביל קטן:

Women, *Eved K'naa'ni*¹³, and minor boys are exempt from the Torah's obligation of Sukkah.

A minor boy who does not need his mother is obligated in the Sukkah [for the purpose of *Chinuch*].

There was an event when the daughter-in-law of Shammai the Elder¹⁴ gave birth to a son [at the time of Sukkos] and Shammai the Elder opened up the roof¹⁵ and placed *s'chach* over the bed so that the infant would be in the Sukkah.

Shammai HaZaken wasn't being strict. He wasn't being particularly scrupulously in applying the Halachos of Sukkah to a newborn. What he was doing was

¹³ An *eved K'naani* is a non-Jewish slave purchased by a Jewish owner. In order to remain in the possession of the Jewish owner he has to be willing to accept the Mitzvos of the Torah. The Halachah teaches that the *Eved K'naa'ni* has obligations similar to that of a woman and, specifically, he is exempt from *מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמן*, from positive time-bound commandments.

¹⁴ This is *the* Shammai, the contemporary of Hillel. Hillel is often referred to as *הלל הזקן* because he had descendants that were also named *Hillel* and the distinction between the 'elder' and the 'younger' was necessary. I do not remember that others were named *Shammai* besides the contemporary of Hillel but, perhaps, since Hillel was given the honorific 'The Elder' the same was conferred upon Shammai.

¹⁵ *מעזיבה* is the cement, or whatever was used at that time, to close up the gap between the boards that formed the roof. Shammai broke the cement and thus made an opening that was fitting for *schach* to make a Kosher Sukkah.

expressing the fact that Mitzvos have an impact, even when the individual is not required to fulfill the Mitzvah and even when the one fulfilling the Mitzvah is incapable of appreciating the event.

Truly, this message of the impact of a Torah event of which we are unaware, is the part of the theme of the opening of Parshas Nitzavim regarding the covenant there – and by extension, to an even greater event.

We read (Perek 29/P'sukim 13-14):

וְלֹא אֶתְכֶם לְבַדְכֶם אֶנְכִי כָרַת אֶת הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת וְאֶת הָאֵלֶּה הַזֹּאת: כִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֵשְׁנוּ
פֹּה עִמָּנוּ עַמְּד הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי ה' א...לִיקִינוּ וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר אֵינְנוּ פֹּה עִמָּנוּ הַיּוֹם:

It is not only with you that I make this covenant and this vow. Because he who is here today, standing before Hashem our G-d and he who is not here with us today.

Rashi writes:

ואת אשר איננו פה - ואף עם דורות העתידים להיות:

He who is not here – Also with the generations who will be in the future.

Sifsei Chachamim explains

על העתידים להיות אתי שפיר דאף אם הגופים לא היו שם אבל הנשמות היו שם
וקבלו הבנים הבאים אחריה' גם כן בכלל הברית:

For those who will be in the future – this is understood well. Even if they were not there physically, their souls were there and these children who would come later on in history accepted and thus were part of the covenant as well.

How does Sifsei Chachamim know to say that their souls were there? He based it on an interpretation of Chazal on this verse.

We read (Midrash Tanchuma Nitzavim 8):

וְלֹא אֶתְכֶם לְבַדְכֶם - אלא אף דורות העתידין לבא היו שם, שנאמר כי את אשר ישנו
פה עמנו וגו' ואת אשר איננו פה עמנו היום. ולמה אומר ישנו פה ולמה אומר איננו
פה, לפי שכל הנפשות היו שם, והגוף עדיין לא נברא, לפיכך לא נאמר כאן עמידה

And not with you alone – But with the generations of the future who are yet to come – they were there [as well]. This is as it says, ‘Because he who is here with us [standing] and he is not here with us today.

Why does it say, ‘He who is here’ and why does it say, ‘He who is not here’? This is because all of the souls were there, even if the body of those of the future was not yet created.

Therefore it does not say ‘standing’ [regarding those ‘who are not here’].

But it was not only in *Arvos Moav*, on the very last day of the life of Moshe Rabbenu that all were present to enter the covenant. *Those who were yet to be born [including many who were at the Arvos Moav covenant] were at an earlier and more significant gathering as we read in Midrash Tanchuma Parshas Yisro (11).* The Midrash refers us to the opening verses describing *Mattan Torah* at Sinai. Those P’sukim read (Sh’mos Perek 20/P’sukim 1-2):

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים... לְקִים אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאמֹר: אֲנִכִּי ה' אֵל... לְקִיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים

G-d spoke all of these words saying. I am Hashem your G-d Who took you out of the Land of Egypt.

The Midrash writes:

וידבר א... ל'קים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר אנכי ה', אמר רבי יצחק אף מה שהנביאים עתידין להתנבאות כלם קבלו מהר סיני, מנין דכתיב (דברים כ"ט) כי את אשר ישנו פה עמנו עומד היום הרי מי שנברא כבר, ישנו מי שהוא בעולם, ואת אשר איננו, הרי מי שעתידי להבראות ואיננו, עמנו היום, עמנו עומד אין כתיב כאן אלא עמנו היום אלו הנשמות שעתידין להבראות שלא נאמר בהן עמידה שאף הן היו בכלל,

Hashem spoke all of these words saying. I am Hashem – Rabi Yitzchak said, ‘Even that which the prophets would prophesy in the future – all of them were received at Sinai. How do we know this? Since it is written, ‘Because whoever is here with us today standing’. This refers to someone who was already created, someone who was already in the world. ‘And he who is not’. This is someone who will be created in the future and he is not here with us today. It does not say ‘standing’, only ‘with us today’. This refers to the souls that will be created in the future about which it does not say ‘standing’. They are included [in *Mattan Torah*].

Perhaps every Mitzvah-experience that we encounter makes a mark on our soul, in miniature, the way that *Mattan Torah* made a mark on our souls in a more encompassing way.

Thus, when we have learned that we are able to compare ourselves to our ancestors of *Dor Hamidbar* and find ourselves deficient, we can see at least one of the opportunities that they had and learn from it and make sure that we adopt it for ourselves and our families.

We must never forget the potential of the impact that we can have upon our families and our children. We can never forget that the encounters that we have make impression upon the soul.

We can never forget that although *Mattan Torah* was a one-time event millennia ago, *Kabbolas HaTorah*, our personal acceptance of the Torah can be an ongoing and continuous phenomenon if we let it be so. If our *Kabbolas HaTorah* is constant and unceasing, so will be its imprint.

For our conclusion, let us return to Rashi who told us that there are different goals for the participants of *Hakhel* but this time we will read his source and see who was involved in publicizing this interpretation.

We read in Masseches Chagiga (3 a):

תנו רבנן: מעשה ברבי יוחנן בן ברוקה ורבי אלעזר חסמא שהלכו להקביל פני רבי יהושע בפקיעין, אמר להם: מה חידוש היה בבית המדרש היום? אמרו לו: תלמידך אנו, ומימך אנו שותין. אמר להם: אף על פי כן, אי אפשר לבית המדרש בלא חידוש, שבת של מי היתה? - שבת של רבי אלעזר בן עזריה היתה. - ובמה היתה הגדה היום? אמרו לו: בפרשת הקהל. - ומה דרש בה? הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף אם אנשים באים ללמוד, נשים באות לשמוע, טף למה באין? כדי ליתן שכר למביאייהן. - אמר להם: מרגלית טובה היתה בידכם ובקשתם לאבדה ממני!

The Braisa taught: An even occurred when Rabi Yochanan ben Broka and Rabi Elazar Chisma when to greet Rabi Yehoshua. He said to them, 'What was said new in the Beis HaMidrash today?' They said, 'We are you students and we drink from *your* waters.' He said to them, 'Whose week was it to be the *Nosi*?' [They said], 'Rabi Elazar ben Azaria.' [He said], 'What *Aggadic* interpretation did he speak about?'

They replied, 'Regarding *Hakhel*.' [He said], 'What was the particular interpretation that he gave?'

[They answered], "Gather the people, the men, the women and the children." If the men come to learn and the women come to hear, why do the children come? To bring reward to those who bring them.'

Rabi Yehoshua said, 'You had this beautiful pearl in your hand and you wanted to make it lost from me?'

Who more than Rabi Yehoshua could appreciate the reward due to parents who bring their children to hear the words of Torah? Who more than Rabi Yehoshua could appreciate the impact of sanctity upon an unborn child and certainly upon one who was already born?

Who more than Rabi Yehoshua could appreciate having a parent who is a true *chaver tov*, always mindful of the holy responsibility to lead and counsel her child with responsibility, sincerity and consistency?

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and Rabi Yehoshua demonstrated to us that the 'pearl of wisdom' that Rabi Yehoshua heard was not a platitude nor a catchy sound-bite.

The pearl of wisdom was a lesson for life, before it has begun and after it has begun and the means of transmitting that lesson for eternity.

Shabbat Shalom

Ksiva Vachsima Tova

Rabbi Pollock

