Jewish Tribune – Ki Seitzei

**New Beginnings**

As the summer holidays draw to a close, we contemplate new beginnings, be they a new school year, yeshiva, sem, work or Ellul and the Yomim Noroim.

Beginnings are important and this week’s parsha reinforces this quite dramatically.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that it is for this reason the ben sorer u’morer receives such swift and emphatic treatment. If we see that his first three months as an adult (that is the whole timespan of the ben sorer u’morer) is involved in theft and gluttonous consumption, his fate is doomed. He has begun a path whose trajectory will have a tragic end and we therefore prefer him to leave this world innocent rather than guilty.

In the same way that a building is only as secure as its foundations, the future life of a person depends heavily on his formative years.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia (85b) describes how R’Chiya reintroduced Torah to generation in which it had been forgotten. He began by planting flax from which he made nets to trap deer. He caught the deer and used their skins as parchment to write down Chumash and Mishna and began teaching.

Why was it necessary for R’Chiya to plant the flax, make nets, trap animals and obtain skins for parchment? Could he not have just purchased parchment?

The Vilna Gaon answers that beginnings are critical and serve as a foundation for what is to follow. Only if every step is taken with holy and pure intentions will the result be holy and pure.

It is for this reason that we are extra scrupulous during the Asseres Yemei Teshuva. It is not double standards to take on chumras that we may not keep all year round. Rather, it is an awareness that the first ten days of the year are the foundations for all that follows.

But new beginnings come with challenges. Picture the fresh-faced student with his or her new pencil case, nervous anticipation, hope and desire for a successful year. How long will that last? It doesn’t take long for the pencil case to lose its shine.

When we wrap the tefillin straps around our hand we say the beautiful words from Hoshea: v’erastich li l’oilam - and I will betroth you to Me forever.

Rav Pam asks why use the word v’erastich which is from the word erusin. In any marriage, there are two stages, erusin and nissuin. Erusin is more akin to a short-term engagement whereas nissuin is the long-term marriage. Would it not be more appropriate to use the word nissuin to express our connection to HKBH? After all, we say it is l’oilam – forever!

Rav Pam explains that in any relationship, the challenge is to maintain the initial excitement. Our hope is that we will indeed bind ourselves to HKBH forever, but the freshness of that relationship should not fade. This is also the intention of the words we have begun saying in L’Dovid: “shivti b’veis Hashem … u’lvaker b’heicholo”. Permanence coupled with the excitement of the new.

And perhaps this answers a question that I once heard from R’Noach Schwarz. In the brocho before krias shema, we say HKBH loves us with an “ahavas oilam” – an everlasting love. Yet, a few words later we say “ahavoscho al tosir mimenu” – do not remove this love. But we just said it’s everlasting?

Perhaps we are referring to the freshness and excitement of the love. Yes, it is an everlasting love, but we daven that it should not become staid but remain fresh and exciting.

As Shlomo Hamelech, the wisest of all men, says in Koheles: “tov acharis dovor me’reishiso” which is usually translated as “the end of the matter is greater than the beginning”. The Yerushalmi understands it differently: “a good end emanates from the beginning”.

May the beginning we are now encountering indeed pave the way for a good end for all of us.

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