**Ve” Etchanan – 5782**

There used to be a time in Ontario when every high school student, every year for five years, had included in their course of study in English literature a novel chosen from among the collection of the greatest achievements in our language. One of the most important principles of fiction driven home to us was that each and every book built up to some sort of climax and what came before was prelude and what came after was dénouement or the resolution of the conflict. If we look at the Five Books of Moses from beginning to end through that lens, then this week’s parsha, Ve” Etchanan, might easily be understood to be the point climax with the rest of the book of Devarim being the dénouement.

The first verses we read relate how Moshe beseeched HaShem to let him cross over the Jordan with the rest of the Israelites even though he had already been told that he would only see the Promised Land from high above overlooking the plain where his feet would never touch. One of the sources I read as I prepared for this morning was written by a feminist rabbi who often sees Torah through her eyes as a woman and a mother. She captures the essence of Moshe’s pain at learning he is yet again being denied as the literal physical pain of childbirth and the fear of what it means to suddenly be the parent to a child you yourself have helped create and will have to nurture. I found those illusions instructive because it reminded me of my years as an educator to both the young in elementary school and the adults in the College of Education.

Moshe’s request was yet again denied and so, now he must say goodbye to the people. Remember that we refer to Moshe as Rabeinu, our teacher. Seen in that light, I was even more fully able to relate to the emotions Moshe must have been feeling because the last day of school is always one filled with both joy and regret, for sure, but with reflections on what we together, teacher and students, have learned. What is the single most important principle or lesson Moshe wants the people to retain? Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. And you shall love him with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Truthfully, these exact words do not come at the beginning of the parsha but rather towards the end. But first we are told why we are to love HaShem – because he redeemed us from slavery, and he brought us out of Egypt, and he sheltered us and cared for us until we came to the gates of the Holy Land which he had promised our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The verses that comprise the majority of the parsha in the middle review the ten commandments but in much greater detail then when first recited in Parshat Yitro. However, as we read them, we are meant to review the essence of the principles of not our faith, but the way we express our faith to HaShem and to those around us. And so, a distinction is made between the adherence to the law and the love of HaShem.

It is only after the review of the commandments with its illusion to the rest of the mitzvot as already taught to the people by Moshe especially in the book of Bamidbar (think Kashrut, Shabbat, Justice, Equality, Reverence for Life), that we then read the words of the Shema. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks though uses these verses to take the message to an even higher, more profound level and it is to that place that I found the greatest meaning for me as a parent and as an educator. Rabbi Sacks questions why the text goes from the words of the Shema to “be very vigilant to keep the commandments of the Lord Your God, and the testimonies and decrees with which He has charged you. Do what is right and what is good the Lord’s eyes.” Sacks asks why this additional step, and, in his answer, I could see other similar situations we can all relate to.

As a parent, and as a teacher, we always hope when our children leave our nest to make their own, and our students move on to the next year and a different teacher, that something of what we have tried to convey will be carried with them. Not only do we try to teach those whom we have influence over what it means to be good and moral but that they will make the same decisions we have made and carry forward that which we have tried to convey to them. I can only hope that the students I had influence over as a teacher educator will treat their own students with respect and dignity the way I tried to convey them was what had to be done. Nothing made me prouder this spring than seeing our son Noah and our daughter Rebecca as parents and spouses and displaying the same values I tried to live up to and display as I had been taught.

Ve” Etchanan depicts Moshe Rabeinu bidding farewell to the children of Israel HaShem had charged him with saving and teacher, reminding the now People of Israel that what HaShem had done for us in the Desert he had done out of love and that we had to repay that love with our own back towards him. We could do that by working to repair the world and bring justice and peace to it. We could do that by creating a nation that would be a light unto the others. We could do that by following the laws as he had set out. But we had to do it out of love, not just respect. It is not enough to say the Shema faithfully, but we have to live up to all that lays behind those few simple words. Deeds not words are what we are called upon to deliver. Shabbat Shalom.