

Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!

Mazel-Tov to Rabbi Mendel & Sara Bluming and family on the wedding this coming Wednesday evening in Crown Heights to Rabbi Mendel Katz.

When I was a college student, and when I taught my own college students, many exam questions had more than a single correct answer. In general, a correct response of true or false to an exam question would be worth around 10 to 20 percent. The remainder of the score would depend on the quality of the analysis and justification for the response. In short, an intelligent response starting with an incorrect summary statement of true or false could deserve a high score. This procedure from college comes to mind as I read chapter 12 in Re'eh, where Moshe warns B'Nai Yisrael not to follow the worship practices of the Canaanite nations. Moshe warns that all the practices of those nations are an abomination to Hashem – and most disgusting of all, they have even burned their sons and daughters as offerings to their heathen gods (12:31).

In a fascinating podcast on alephbeta.org, Rabbi David Fohrman and Beth Lesch demonstrate with numerous examples that much of the discourse in chapter 12, including significant parts of the language, parallel that in the Akeidah. God tells Avraham to take his son Yitzhak, his beloved son, his only son, to a place that He will show him, to offer his son as an olah (a burnt offering to God) (Bereishis ch. 22). In Re'eh, Moshe tells the people that God will show them a place (the same place) that will become the only location where they will be able to offer their sacrifices. When Avraham is about to kill Yitzhak, an angel calls to him and forbids him to complete the act. God praises Avraham for not withholding his most precious possession and promises as a reward to give Avraham many descendants and the land surrounding that location as a reward. Orthodox Jewish commentators unanimously praise Avraham for his supreme faith in going through to the end at the Akeidah.

When we read Moshe's parallel telling of the Akeidah in Re'eh, however, the conclusion is different. Moshe tells B'Nai Yisrael that killing a child and other Canaanite worship practices are an abomination to Hashem, and sacrificing a child is the most disgusting of all their practices. Moshe's warning raises an interesting question. Was Avraham's silent immediate action in bringing and nearly sacrificing Yitzhak the only possible way that Avraham could have passed this last and most difficult of the tests that Hashem presented to him? Earlier in Vayeira, God tells Avraham that He is about to destroy the evil cities of Sodom and Amorah (18:17-33). Avraham immediately argues that Hashem is the God of mercy as well as justice and therefore cannot destroy a city if there are sufficient righteous people there. Avraham bargains God down to agreeing to save Sodom if there are ten righteous people in the city (the exact number in Lot's family).

Carrying the Sodom example forward, what if Avraham had argued with God that the God who loved life and looked for a righteous nation to spread God's name in the world would not, could not, want him to sacrifice a child. Avraham's argument could be that a righteous nation could not follow the evil example of the Canaanite nations and burn a child as a sacrifice. While a pagan god might make such a demand, the God of justice and divine mercy could never make such an evil demand. Avraham's argument would probably have concluded with words very similar to Moshe's in Re'eh 12:31.

A classical Orthodox response to my hypothetical is that Avraham knew when God wanted and when he didn't want Avraham to argue. Why would God have told Avraham about his plans to destroy Sodom and Amarah, something that did not directly involve him, if God had not wanted Avraham to try to talk him out of His plans? In contrast, the command to take his son and sacrifice him did not involve people outside Avraham and his immediate family. In such a case, God expected Avraham to obey and not to question the demand. (A counter argument is that the demand also involved Yitzhak and Sarah – but Yitzhak, at least, followed Avraham without objecting.) Rabbi David Fohrman's response is that Avraham and Yitzhak showed complete faith in Hashem, trusting that God would find a way to keep his promise to Avraham to make a great nation from him and through Yitzhak, despite the command to Avraham to perform the sacrifice. This true and complete faith in God's ability and dedication to coming up with a solution is why Avraham made the correct choice. Arguing with God, even with all the correct arguments, would not have demonstrated complete faith in God's ability and dedication to finding a solution, even one that a human could not imagine – and that is why Avraham (and Yitzhak) could not have passed God's test by arguing with the demand.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, would have enjoyed my hypothetical and would have brought in many examples of opinions from classical Jewish commentators and modern less traditional ones. With his sharp mind, Rabbi Cahan loved delving into serious questions about Tanach. My college professors would have responded with Rabbi Cahan that there can often be multiple "correct" interpretations to even a question that initially appears simple. Despite my hypothetical, I believe that Rabbi Fohrman's response makes the most sense of the interpretations I have seen of the Akeidah. I welcome feedback and more insights.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirza Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Allegra, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Hannah & Alan

Lifeline: Reeh: The Individual and the Nation

By Rabbi Yaakov Menken © 1997

"Behold, I place before you this day, blessing and curse. The blessing, that you will listen to the Commandments of HaShem your G-d, which I command you today; and the curse, if you will not listen to the commands of HaShem your G-d, and you turn away from the path which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known." [11:26-28]

The word "re'eh," meaning "see" or "behold," is given in the singular, whereas "lifneichem," "before you," is said in the plural.

The Chasam Sofer explains that this verse hints to a saying of our Sages (Talmud Kiddushin 40): a person should always view the world as if it is half good and half bad, or half meritorious and half lacking. If he does even one Mitzvah, then he tilts the scales and the entire world is found meritorious; but if he commits even one transgression, then he tilts them the other way, and the entire world is found lacking.

Therefore the verse tells each and every individual: see (in your mind) that I am placing the entire world in front of you, blessing and curse, and you control the scales...

People tend to view themselves only as individuals, and often resent interference from others. But there is a famous parable (offered by the Kli Yakar in his commentary to the verse “and you shall surely rebuke your nation,” Leviticus 19:17) about a group of people traveling in a boat. One takes out a drill, and he begins to make a hole in the boat beneath his seat. When the other passengers protest, he responds “why is this your business? I’m making a hole beneath my seat! Leave me alone!” But when the water comes in, everyone will sink.

The Chasam Sofer drives home the idea that we are all interconnected. Yes, we are all responsible as individuals for our own actions, but we must also realize that everything we do affects those around us. If we think about this, obviously we will choose to do good!

We see that good is indeed “obvious” in the verses which follow. Concerning the blessing, the verse says “that you will listen,” but the next verse reads “if you will not listen” in connection with the curse. It is obvious that we will listen! Every Jew, at some point, hears the message! Even those who often don’t are still doing something unnatural. It’s never a second-nature “that you don’t listen,” but a temporary “if.”

Rabbi Shimshon Rephael Hirsch explains that the verse is telling us something else as well: the blessing is that you will listen. The blessing doesn’t merely follow the Mitzvah – the Mitzvah is a blessing which is realized immediately. Every time we do a Mitzvah, our entire being takes a step forward, and we bless ourselves through every good deed.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/lifeline-5757-reeh/>

Adding and Subtracting From the Torah: The Rabbi’s Role in the Legal Process

by Rabbi Avi Weiss, Founding Rabbi, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2016

The portion of Re’eh gives us a curious mitzvah. It tells us not to add or subtract to the commandments (Deuteronomy 13:1). This seems to go against the idea of the ongoing development of Jewish law on the part of the rabbis (See Deuteronomy 17:8-13).

Consider, for example, one of the dietary laws. The Torah states that one may not eat meat and milk together. The rabbis take this prohibition, and extend it to include the consumption of fowl and milk. Does this extension violate the prohibition of adding to the Torah?

Rambam (Maimonides) feels that this in fact may be the case. He codifies that if one maintains that fowl and milk are enjoined by Torah law, this extension is a violation of adding to the Torah. However, if the rabbis declared that as an added precaution, because of the similarity between fowl and animal food, that fowl together with milk is rabbinically forbidden — including fowl as a rabbinic prohibition is perfectly legitimate (Laws of Mamrim 2:9).

This idea helps explain a well known midrashic comment on the Garden of Eden narrative. According to the text of the Torah, Eve tells the serpent that God had commanded that the tree of knowledge not be touched. Eve, however, adds to the decree. As the Midrash explains, God had only forbidden eating, not touching. The serpent then pushed Eve against the tree, declaring, “as you have not died from touching it, so you will not die from eating thereof.” In the words of Rashi: “She added to the command (of God), therefore, she was led to diminish from it” (Rashi, Genesis 3:3,4).

One could argue that Eve acted properly, after all, she, like the rabbis, only tried to protect God’s commandment by extending the prohibition to touching. Her mistake, however, was saying that God had actually issued such a command.

She should have declared that while God forbade the eating from the tree, as a precaution, as a “fence” around the law, she decided not to touch it as well.

Thus, rabbinic law is pivotal. Still, it is important to understand which laws are rabbinic and which are biblical in nature.

One final note: Separate from rabbinic legislation and interpretation is the halakhic realm of humra. Humra is imposing a very stringent observance of the law. While stringency can elevate spirituality, it is essential to know when a practice falls into the category of humra and when it does not. Failure to make this distinction can often lead to the humra becoming the only accepted practice. This can be dangerous because it can lead to a lack of understanding and intolerance of the sometimes wide range of practices within a certain rabbinic law.

So, rabbis can extend the laws when there is a critical need, but they must do so with a realization of their responsibility not to blur the lines set out in the Torah. Throughout the ages rabbis have done so with the hope that their interpretations and legislations bring people closer to God and to one another.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2016/05/adding-and-subtracting-from-the-torah-the-rabbis-role-in-the-legal-process/>

Parshas Re'eh -- The Pregnant Spoon by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine © 2014 Teach 613

One of the readily understood commands of the Torah is “You shall not detract from Torah.” If not for this command, every generation would feel entitled to undo the silver spoon mitzvos that they think are outdated. G-d is assuring us that the Torah is Divine. It speaks to the essence of human existence, and applies in all generations.

What is less easy to understand is the adjoining command, “You shall not add to the Torah.” What is so terrible if someone will add to the Torah? We are still observing Torah. What is so terrible if we do a little extra?

The story is told of a man who lived in a close knit community and was making a birthday party for his son. He wanted to make a really nice party but he didn't own silverware. So he went to a neighbor and asked to borrow one place setting of silverware so that at least the birthday boy should feel special at the party. The neighbor agreed. A few days later the neighbor watched as the boy's friend's came and went; he knew the party went well. About a week later the birthday boy's father showed up at his doorstep with a big smile. “I truly apologize for the delay, but I come to give you my sincere congratulations. You see, while your silverware was in my home, the large soup spoon gave birth. So I am returning your setting with the new baby spoon. Mazal Tov!”

The neighbor wasn't sure how to react, but he took the silverware with the extra spoon, and tried to forget the incident.

A few weeks later, the man came again to borrow silverware for a different party, and a week later he came back with a whole extra place setting. His explanation was the same: While the silverware was in his home the knife, fork, and spoon, all gave birth. He merely was returning the results.

Again, the neighbor wondered how this worked exactly, but he took the silverware and decided to forget the story.

A few weeks passed and again the man was on his neighbor's doorstep asking to borrow silverware. This time he was making a small wedding for one of the unfortunates in town. He wanted to serve the meal in style so he wanted to borrow a full set of silverware. Normally the neighbor would have been cautious. But here it almost seemed like a good investment. As he handed over his best set of silverware, the wealthy man wondered, “Who knows, maybe I'll get back a full identical set of silver.”

The wedding went well, but weeks passed and the man didn't return the silverware. Finally the neighbor decided to approach the man and ask for the return of his silverware. When asked what happened, and when he intended to return the silverware, the man's face turned sad and sympathetic. He said, “Oh, I really have unfortunate news to tell you. Just after the wedding your entire set of silverware was pregnant and it went into labor. But unfortunately it was a very difficult labor, and...well we thought it would work out, but it just didn't. I'm sad to inform you that your entire set of silverware died in childbirth.”

This story, formulated by the Chofetz Chayim, was used to explain how the mitzvah “not to add to Torah” is directly linked to the mitzvah “not to subtract from Torah.” When a person thinks that they have the right to add, invariably they begin to think that they have the right to subtract as well. G-d’s command is to respect the integrity of Torah and not to take liberties with it.

This principle explains one of the great peculiarities in Jewish scholarship.

Jewish law is comprised of laws that are Biblical in origin, as well as laws whose origin is Rabbinic. The Torah itself commands us to legislate protection for the Torah. And so the leaders of each generation legislated what came to known as Rabbinic law.

For example, Biblical law only prohibits eating cooked mixtures of milk and meat. Rabbinic law, however, legislated a “safeguard” which prohibits eating all kinds of mixtures of milk and meat, even if they aren’t cooked. Today, Jewish custom requires that even the tablecloths, or placemats, be distinctive for meat and dairy.

When I first entered the field of advanced Jewish scholarship I wondered why scholars would spend a good part of the semester identifying which laws were Rabbinic in origin and which ones were Biblical. If we are sincere in our observance, wouldn’t it be a better use of time to be practical and simply identify what is permitted and what is forbidden. Why would we spend the critical first weeks of a semester identifying whether something is Biblical or Rabbinic in origin?

I believe that much of the importance in differentiating between Biblical and Rabbinic laws has to do with the prohibition “not to add to Torah.” We must not view Torah as if it is ours to tamper with. One who “adds to Torah” will eventually come to take away. Instead we safeguard Torah so that we don’t even come close to a Biblical violation. But we maintain the integrity of Torah by keeping track of what is Biblical and what is Rabbinic.

One Might Say: It is good and healthy to polish, treasure, and safeguard a silver spoon. One may even fill the spoon with tasty foods. But beware of the person who is muddled in his scholarship and claims that the spoon is pregnant.

Let us treasure both Biblical and Rabbinic law. But let us study well to know the difference.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

<http://www.teach613.org/parshas-reeh-the-pregnant-spoon/> [Emphasis added]

Doing the Good and the Right: Thoughts for Parashat Re'eh

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"...for you will do that which is good and right in the eyes of the Lord..."

In several places, the Torah reminds us of the general commandment to do that which is good and right in the eyes of the Lord. This is often understood to refer to the proper observance of mitzvot, and the requirement to act "lifnim mi-shurat ha-din," i.e., to behave even more compassionately than demanded by the strict letter of the law. Since the mitzvot are a reflection of God's wisdom and mercy, they should be fulfilled in a spirit of wisdom and mercy.

Rabbi Benzion Uziel, late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, commented on the seeming dilemma which confronts the rabbinic judge (Introduction to Mishpetei Uziel, 5700). "Righteousness and justice, compassion and truth – these concepts exist simultaneously, as difficult as this is to comprehend. The fundamental teaching of the law of justice is that one may not show compassion in justice, but should uphold the law whatever the consequences. On the other hand, we are taught to do that which is good and upright, and we may compel behavior which is beyond the letter of the law."

Rabbi Uziel notes that the rabbinic judge must balance these seemingly conflicting claims. A decision must be reached that reflects both truth and compassion. The halakha must not only be right – it must be good. In his own writings, Rabbi Uziel reflected a profound commitment to truth, and an overwhelming commitment to compassion. His rabbinic rulings are

classic models of halakhic decision-making. He understood that the halakha must relate to real human beings in real life situations; halakha is not a set of abstract rules to be observed by sectarians and ascetics.

In one of his lectures many years ago, Rabbi Ovadya Yosef referred to two tendencies in religious life. One is "gevurah" – heroism. This tendency is marked by the desire to adopt as many stringencies as possible to demonstrate how self-sacrificing one can be in fulfilling the mitzvot. Followers of the "gevurah" approach draw on the strictest halakhic views, even when there are much more cogent and sensible views available within halakha. They prefer extreme positions, thinking that stringency is equated with greater religiosity.

The second tendency is "hessed" – compassion. This tendency is marked by the desire to deal with halakha in a humane, loving and kind manner. Religion should reflect lovingkindness, a profound sympathy for the human predicament, an optimism that God loves us. Followers of the "hessed" approach shun extremism and unnecessary stringencies. Rabbi Yosef comes down on the side of "hessed," indicating that this was the quality that characterized the School of Hillel, whose opinions were accepted over those of the School of Shammai.

Surely one must fulfill mitzvot carefully; but just as surely, one must fulfill them in a spirit of joy and compassion. The mitzvot were given to bring us happiness and spiritual fulfillment, not to serve as a constant source of fear and spiritual inadequacy. Excessive stringency is no more a sign of true religiosity than excessive leniency.

We are called upon to do that which is good and right in the eyes of God. This is a tremendous challenge – and an honor. It entails the fulfillment of the teachings of the Torah in a spirit of truth and compassion, but favoring the tendency to "hessed."

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/doing-good-and-right-thoughts-parashat-reeh> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

Do our Charity Dollars Work for or Against Our Ideals?

Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

We are good-hearted people who do our best to be kind and charitable. We want to build a better society, ease suffering, aid the needy, support worthy institutions etc. We are barraged by those who solicit funds for one cause or another. We may give a few dollars to each; we may give a lot to a few; we may give more or less, depending on our mood when we receive the solicitation for charity.

Do we have a philosophy that governs our charitable outlays? Or do we just make contributions randomly, based on who asks us first or who approaches us most respectfully?

I would like to suggest that we think carefully about our charitable giving, and view our charitable dollars as a means of advancing our vision of a better Jewish community and a better world.

I hear many people complain about the "hareidization" of Orthodoxy--that religious institutions are taken over by extremist, fundamentalist Orthodox zealots. People complain: why do the "hareidim" control the rabbinic courts, the mikvaot, the kashruth agencies, the yeshivot etc? Here is one answer: because WE are providing them with funds to do so! A great many charitable dollars from Modern Orthodox (and non-Orthodox) Jews are poured into Hareidi hands. In our generosity and good-heartedness, we support individuals and institutions who strive to undermine our own vision of a healthy Judaism and a good society. In effect, many of our charity dollars are used to work against us.

Should we be giving our limited charity funds to those who foster a religious life in which men do not receive training or encouragement to find gainful employment? or in which men (in Israel) avoid military service in Tzahal by staying in

kollels? or in which people are imbued with neutral-Zionist or even anti-Zionist attitudes; or in which obscurantist and fundamentalist teachings are presented as the true word of God? Should we be supporting institutions that promote a narrow, xenophobic vision of Judaism, or that have moved far "to the right", that seek to undermine Modern Orthodox ideals and values where ever they can?

Instead of complaining about negative trends within Orthodoxy (and Judaism in general), we could actually accomplish something useful by developing a clear philosophy of our own philanthropy. What institutions best reflect the vision of Judaism which we feel should be promoted? How can we best use our charity dollars to work for our vision of Judaism and humanity, and how can we avoid having these dollars used to undermine our ideals?

If we will focus more carefully on the impact of our charity, we may find that we indeed can make a real difference. If the institutions we believe in are well supported, they can accomplish more. If more dollars are devoted to the causes which foster our vision, then less dollars are available to those who would undermine our vision.

Each dollar we contribute is, in effect, a "vote". It reflects who we are and what we believe and what we dream. If we would all vote wisely, if we would all contribute in ways that advance our ideals--we would be voting for real change. We would be voting for an Orthodox Judaism that is intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive. We would be voting for an Orthodox Judaism that is engaged meaningfully with the entire Jewish community and with society at large.

We all should give generously and graciously. But we need to think carefully when deciding to whom to entrust our charity dollars.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

[Ed. Note: In reprinting this blog, I am not taking a position for or against any particular outlook on Judaism. Some readers may find any of the reprinted articles too far to the "left" or to the "right." The basic point is valid in any case – research the charities that contact you and donate to those whose goals and funds they support generally reflect your views. Any intelligent economist would concur with this advice.]

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/do-our-charity-dollars-work-or-against-our-ideals>

Re'ey – The Secret of the Eternal Jew by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

At the end of this week's parsha, Moshe discusses the laws of the Pilgrimage Festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Succot. He concludes his teaching of Shavuot with an unexpected verse; "And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall safeguard and do these statutes." (Devarim 16:12) Shavuot is the holiday celebrating the receiving of the Torah. Why does Moshe leave out any reference to our acceptance of the Torah, and instead enjoin us to remember the prior event of the Exodus?

The Ramban (ibid.) explains that this closing statement was not intended as an explanation of the holiday. Rather, Moshe is explaining to us why we should take these statutes to heart. Moshe is telling us to remember that we have a national history. We used to be slaves. We are only where we are today because G-d freed us from Egyptian bondage. Therefore, we should keep these statutes that the Master who redeemed us from the house of slavery has commanded us.

As with all of Torah, Moshe's directive here is intended for all generations, and not only for those who were preparing to enter the land of Israel. As such, Moshe's enjoiner seems to be rather difficult to understand. If someone is struggling with celebrating the holidays in today's world, almost three and a half millennia after the Exodus, does Moshe truly expect that ancient history should change our approach to the holidays? We could understand that some recognition of our national history and heritage is appropriate and that it is important to remember who we are and where we came from. However, Moshe is asking much more of us here. He is asking us to "safeguard and do these statutes" – to study them in detail and keep all aspects of the holiday in full measure. How can ancient history alone lead me to feel responsible for every command of the G-d who redeemed us?

The Sforno (ibid.) gives an explanation that is even more difficult to understand. He explains that in the previous verse Moshe had instructed us in the mitzvah to bring joy to those in need and to share of our wealth so they too can enjoy the holiday. Since parting with our hard-earned money is a natural challenge of life, Moshe is giving us a tool to ease the

challenge and enable us to properly share of our wealth. We should remember how we were once slaves and did not have any money of our own. We should therefore willingly share of our wealth with those who need it to find favor before G-d, Who took us out of Egypt and gave us wealth and property. The Sforno is saying that we are commanded to feel that ancient history so keenly, so as to feel indebted to G-d for our current wealth! So much changes with the course of time. So much has happened since the Exodus. Are we to emotionally connect our current situation to the Exodus? Perhaps this Ramban and Sforno are providing us with part of the answer to Mark Twain's famous question, "All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?" Perhaps part of our secret lies in our national identity. If we consider the bondage in Egypt, we begin to realize that our mortality should have been realized before we ever became a nation. We are the bearers of an ancient legacy of G-d's love for the world and of G-d's dreams for humanity. He took us out of a bitter slavery and led us to greatness, for He saw in us the ability to bring His world to its intended purpose. Our secret, since the birth of our nation, is that G-d is, was and will be with us. It is this legacy which Moshe exhorts us to remember. We are a nation which has existed since our birth by nothing more than the grace of G-d. We had nothing and should never have even been recorded on the pages of history. Yet, we were born and thrived since our very inception, and we have continued to do so for all time. When we recall this, even today, we can realize how we truly owe everything to G-d.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Seek First. Prophecy Later

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Have you ever seen Hamilton? Yes I mean the Broadway show. I had the chance to finally watch it on Disney+ while I was away. Not only is the music wonderful, but the character development strikes a chord as well. During the show we see a contrast between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton in how they approach life. While Burr is determined to go slow and steady, talk less and smile more, and "Wait for It," Hamilton insists at going at a relentless pace, constantly talking, writing, and shaking up the people around him. Even in situations filled with uncertainty, Hamilton elects not to wait but rather to seek whether through action or his pen.

No one can say what method is "better." But regarding our spirit, both personal and national, the Torah states "Seek His Dwelling and you will come there" (Deut. 12:5). Nachmanides quotes the Midrash which interpret this verse as a mandate to seek God and seek where to build His home in this world. "You might think that you should wait for a prophet to tell you where He is first. So the Torah tells us that we first must seek and then a prophet can guide us."

In other words, we have to make the first move. Throughout history, Jews have rushed back to Israel whenever the doors swung open. From Suleiman the Magnificent to Napoleon Bonaparte to the modern Zionist movement, Jews have always run to make the first move when it comes to the Land of Israel. Would we have the State of Israel if Menachem Begin and David Ben Gurion had "waited for it"?

Elul comes around next week, and with it the start of the holiday season. The season that personifies Isaiah's call of "Seek Hashem when He shall be found" (Isaiah 55:6). Like the Temple, which sanctifies space, this time is sanctified for seeking. To do actions that bring us closer. For you that may mean reading a new book, taking on a new good character trait, or maybe just a commitment to smile at others more. But we have to do something. Our job is to seek. Only after we do that, can a prophet come and guide us (in whatever form that may take).

Shanah Tovah and Shabbat Shalom!

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
Re'eih: Open Your Hand Generously

Rav Kook taught that the true goal of tzedakah is not to assist the poor, but rather to refine the character traits of the person giving. After all, if the purpose was to help the poor, God could have provided other means for their support without having to rely on the generosity of society.

"The clearest proof that poverty exists in order to perfect society is the fact that it is a constant and common phenomenon... Thus it must have a clear purpose and design by Divine Providence."

"Without a doubt, [assisting] the needy promotes a number of virtues. It develops our traits of humanity, softens the heart's callousness, fosters our sense of generosity and empathy for others, and enables us to actualize our innate love for goodness and kindness — precious qualities that crown the human soul."

Below are two stories which illustrate Rav Kook's remarkable generosity. Both incidents occurred during the years that he served as chief rabbi of Jaffa, from 1904 to 1914. These incidents were not meant to serve as an example for others, but were simply natural expressions of the rabbi's profound caring and compassion for those who needed help.

The Rabbi's Salary

Rav Kook's wife once appeared before the community directorate of Jaffa, headed by Mr. Meir Dizengoff, with a serious complaint. She had not seen her husband's salary for months and had no means of support. The leaders of the community were shocked. After investigating the matter, however, they discovered that the rabbi himself was distributing his income to the needy.

The leaders asked Rav Kook how he could act in such a manner, caring more for strangers than his own household.

Rav Kook responded simply, "My family can buy food at the local grocery on credit. Others, however, cannot do so. Who would agree to give them what they need on credit?"

From that day on, the treasurer of the community was given strict orders to give the rabbi's salary only to his wife.

The Disqualified Guarantor

In 1907, the Jaffa correspondent for the Chavatzelet newspaper published an article criticizing the Anglo-Palestine Bank (now known as Bank Leumi). Apparently, a man applied for a loan in the bank and was asked to provide eleven guarantors. The man managed to find fourteen people who were willing to sign, one of whom was Rav Kook. The bank, however, disqualified most of them - including the rabbi.

The correspondent's conclusion was that the bank deliberately discriminated against religious Jews.

A few weeks later, a rejoinder appeared in the paper. The author, almost certainly associated with the bank, argued that the bank was justified in its rejection of Rav Kook's guarantees. He wrote:

"The rabbi is extremely good-hearted and gentle by nature. The poor cling to him. The only reason there are some beggars who do not knock on his door is because they know he has no money. If they only knew that they could get money in exchange for a small piece of paper, which he can always grant them, they would give him no peace."

"Besides which, [if the rabbi would be accepted as a guarantor], he would unwittingly put himself under the burden of debts, from which he would be unable to escape. Large amounts of money would be lost, and one of the following would suffer: either the esteemed rabbi — and it would be highly unpleasant for the bank to extract money from him — or the bank itself. Therefore, the bank decided unanimously not to honor the rabbi's guarantees."

(Adapted from Ein Eyah on Pe'ah, pp. 308-310. Stories from An Angel Among Men by Simcha Raz, translated by R. Moshe Lichtman, pp. 344-346.)

On Not Being a Victim (Re'eh 5778)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Making a series of programmes for the BBC on morality in the twenty-first century, I felt I had to travel to Toronto to have a conversation with a man I had not met before, Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson. He has recently become an iconic intellectual for millions of young people, as well as a figure of caricature and abuse by others who should know better.[1] The vast popularity of his podcasts – hours long and formidably intellectual – suggests that he has been saying something that many people feel a need to hear and are not adequately hearing from other contemporary voices. During our conversation there was a moment of searing intensity. Peterson was talking about his daughter Mikhaila. At the age of six, she was found to be suffering from severe polyarticular juvenile idiopathic arthritis. Thirty-seven of her joints were affected. During her childhood and teen years, she had to have a hip replacement, then an ankle replacement. She was in acute, incessant pain. Describing her ordeal, Peterson's voice was wavering on the verge of tears. Then he said:

One of the things we were very careful about and talked with her a lot about was to not allow herself to regard herself as a victim. And man, she had reason to regard herself as a victim ... [but] as soon as you see yourself as a victim ... that breeds thoughts of anger and revenge – and that takes you to a place that's psychologically as terrible as the physiological place. And to her great credit I would say this is part of what allowed her to emerge from this because she did eventually figure out what was wrong with her, and by all appearances fix it by about 90%. It's unstable but it's way better because of the fact that she didn't allow herself to become existentially enraged by her condition ... People have every reason to construe themselves as victims. Their lives are characterised by suffering and betrayal. Those are ineradicable experiences. [The question is] what's the right attitude to take to that – anger or rejection, resentment, hostility, murderousness? That's the story of Cain and Abel, [and] that's not good. That leads to Hell.

As soon as I heard those words I understood what had led me to this man, because much of my life has been driven by the same search, though it came about in a different way. It happened because of the Holocaust survivors I came to know. They really were victims of one of the worst crimes against humanity in all of history. Yet they did not see themselves as victims. The survivors I knew, with almost superhuman courage, looked forward, built a new life for themselves, supported one another emotionally, and then, many years later, told their story, not for the sake of revisiting the past but for the sake of educating today's young people on the importance of taking responsibility for a more human and humane future.

But how is this possible? *How can you be a victim and yet not see yourself as a victim without being guilty of denial, or deliberate forgetfulness, or wishful thinking?*

The answer is that uniquely – this is what makes us Homo sapiens – in any given situation we can look back or we can look forward. We can ask: "Why did this happen?" That involves looking back for some cause in the past. Or we can ask, "What then shall I do?" This involves looking forward, trying to work out some future destination given that this is our starting point.

There is a massive difference between the two. I can't change the past. But I can change the future. Looking back, I see myself as an object acted on by forces largely beyond my control. Looking forward, I see myself as a subject, a choosing moral agent, deciding which path to take from here to where I want eventually to be.

Both are legitimate ways of thinking, but one leads to resentment, bitterness, rage and a desire for revenge. The other leads to challenge, courage, strength of will and self-control. That for me is what Mikhaila Peterson and the Holocaust survivors represent: the triumph of choice over fate.

Jordan Peterson came to his philosophy through his own and his father's battles with depression and his daughter's battle with her physical condition. Jews came to it through the life-changing teachings of Moses, especially in the book of Deuteronomy. They are epitomised in the opening verses of our parsha.

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; and the curse, if you do not heed the commandments of the Lord your God, but stray from the way I am commanding you today ... (Deut. 11:26-28)

Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses keeps saying: don't think your future will be determined by forces outside your control. You are indeed surrounded by forces outside your control, but what matters is how you choose. Everything else will follow from that. Choose the good and good things will happen to you. Choose the bad, and eventually you will suffer. Bad choices create bad people who create bad societies, and in such societies, in the fullness of time, liberty is lost. I cannot make that choice for you.

The choice, he says again and again, is yours alone: you as an individual, second person singular, and you as a people, second person plural. The result was that remarkably, Jews did not see themselves as victims. A key figure here, centuries after Moses, was Jeremiah. Jeremiah kept warning the people that the strength of a country does not depend on the strength of its army but on the strength of its society. Is there justice? Is there compassion? Are people concerned about the welfare of others or only about their own? Is there corruption in high places?

Do religious leaders overlook the moral failings of their people, believing that all you have to do is perform the Temple rituals and all will be well: God will save us from our enemies? Jeremiah kept saying, in so many words, that God will not save us from our enemies until we save ourselves from our own lesser selves.

When disaster came – the destruction of the Temple – Jeremiah made one of the most important assertions in all history. He did not see the Babylonian conquest as the defeat of Israel and its God. He saw it as the defeat of Israel by its God. And this proved to be the salvaging of hope. God is still there, he was saying. Return to Him and He will return to you. Don't define yourself as a victim of the Babylonians. Define yourself as a free moral agent, capable of choosing a better future.

Jews paid an enormous psychological price for seeing history the way they did. "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land," we say repeatedly in our prayers. We refuse to define ourselves as the victims of anyone else, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, fate, the inexorability of history, original sin, unconscious drives, blind evolution, genetic determinism or the inevitable consequences of the struggle for power. We blame ourselves: "Because of our sins."

That is a heavy burden of guilt, unbearable were it not for our faith in Divine forgiveness. But the alternative is heavier still, namely, to define ourselves as victims, asking not, "What did we do wrong?" but "Who did this to us?"

"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse." That was Moses' insistent message in the last month of his life. There is always a choice. As Viktor Frankl said, even in Auschwitz there was one freedom they could not take away from us: the freedom to choose how to respond. Victimhood focuses us on a past we can't change. Choice focuses us on a future we can change, liberating us from being held captive by our resentments, and summoning us to what Emmanuel Levinas called *Difficile Liberte*, "difficult freedom."

There really are victims in this world, and none of us should minimise their experiences. But in most cases (admittedly, not all) the most important thing we can do is help them recover their sense of agency. This is never easy, but is essential if they are not to drown in their own learned helplessness. No one should ever blame a victim. But neither should any of us encourage a victim to stay a victim. It took immense courage for Mikhaila Peterson and the Holocaust survivors to rise above their victimhood, but what a victory they won for human freedom, dignity and responsibility.

Hence the life changing idea: Never define yourself as a victim. You cannot change your past but you can change your future. There is always a choice, and by exercising the strength to choose, we can rise above fate.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] The fact that he has been accused of being an anti-Semite makes me deeply ashamed of those who said this. There is enough real antisemitism in the world today for us to focus on the real thing, and not portray as an enemy a man who is a friend.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See

<https://rabbisacks.org/not-being-a-victim-reeh-5778/>

Why Does G-d Send Us False Prophets?

By Aharon Loschak * © Chabad 2021

During the height of WWII, a certain Polish rabbi fled from his native country to relative safety in London, England. As the Nazis bombed the British capital daily, a city-wide blackout was put into effect, to darken the area so as not to expose any targets to the trigger-happy pilots of the feared Luftwaffe.

This posed a problem to the learned rabbi: How would he study Torah throughout the evening as he was accustomed? He was advised about blackout curtains—thick, strong drapes to hang over the windows and block out all light. They could be purchased at the shop just around the corner.

Upon entering, the shopkeeper asked him, “I have two questions for you: How close to the window is your lightbulb, and how many watts is it?” The rabbi seemed mystified, so the shopkeeper explained: “The closer to the window your bulb is, and the stronger it is, the thicker your curtains must be.”

Back home, the rabbi announced, “I just learned an incredible lesson! When the darkness is the most intense, when the curtains seem to be absolutely impenetrable, that means the lightbulb on the other side is that much brighter and that much closer.”

G d is Testing You

Our parshah devotes a considerable amount of space to the saga of the false prophet. The Torah warns that snake-oil salesmen will eventually arise, and will even present miracles and other tricks to lure people into believing them, and yet, we must do our best to ignore them and stay loyal and devoted to G d.

It is in this context that the Torah tells us:

You shall not heed the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of a dream; for the L rd, your G d, is testing you, to know whether you really love the L rd, your G d, with all your heart and with all your soul.¹

It's all a test. Precisely because the false prophet gives off a veneer of legitimacy, that is why it's such a test to withstand.

But the words, and really, the entire concept, is puzzling. When you, a human being of flesh and blood, want to test someone's loyalty, it's because you genuinely don't know the answer. Lack of knowledge and information is why people test each other.

But G d doesn't lack any knowledge, obviously! G d knows if you, me, and your neighbor are loyal to Him, so why would He need to send a prophet to test us and find out what He surely already knows?

For You to Know

The test is not for G d. It's for you.

When the verse states, “For G d is testing you to know,” it's not for G d to know anything. It's for you to know G d.

This interpretation cuts right to the heart of life itself. “Why is my life so challenging?” people ask. It’s a tough question, and if there was an easy answer, many authors, mentors, and teachers would be long out of business.

But there isn’t an easy answer. People go through tremendous challenges; deep, dark struggles that make them tear their hair out in pain. There is no shortage of grief, struggle, and darkness in this world, and when they come up in your life like a tidal wave, it can be outrageously unnerving.

“What should I do? Why is this happening to me?” you scream into the night.

This one’s mother is dying from cancer, that one just lost her job, and the next one is in the middle of a nasty divorce. “Why, oh why? Why do these things happen?” each one cries. “What am I supposed to make of this misery? What does G d want from me?”

A Testy Packaging

There aren’t any easy answers.

But here’s something to think about: G d sends you a test for one reason, and one reason only — for you to overcome it and discover the treasure inside.

According to the Kabbalistic masters, G d has different ways of relating to this world. There are more obvious, relatable ways, such as the natural order of things that we’re all accustomed to. The sun rises, you wake up, your house is still there, and your friends still like you.

All these natural and typical things are symptoms of a level of G dliness that inhabits the world on the world’s terms (relatively speaking).

But then there are parts of G d that absolutely don’t relate to this world. If you can imagine G d as He is for Himself, without bothering to “think about” a world or the entire concept of Creation, well, that space is far loftier than to be able to relate to our mundane, worldly reality.

From time to time, G d wants to give you and me some of that, a slice of that tremendous energy that is well beyond anything we’re accustomed to. So He sends it in a counterintuitive package, for it is precisely something so unconventional that can host something so powerful.

And so, it presents itself in your life as a challenge. A dark, dark test that stretches your capabilities to the limit. But, deep inside that test, buried within the struggle, is something incredibly powerful and remarkably deep.

So, here’s how it works: You’re tested. It’s hard. No, not just hard, it’s insanely difficult. And the entire point of the test is for you to overcome it and expose what it really has in store for you: a potent force of G dliness that will catapult you to something fabulous.

Don’t Give Up

So, the test is for you to know. For you to discover just how much you believe, to go on a mining expedition and find out how much you’re actually capable of. G d already knows. Now, go ahead and discover it yourself.

Is your life dark? Very dark? Are you being tested every day, multiple times a day?

Remember: On the other side of that test is a bright, bright lightbulb. And it’s very close, right there on the other side. If you think that your life is just too dark, well, then know that the lightbulb for you is even brighter and even closer.

Peek behind the blackout curtains.²

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy 13:4.

2. This essay is based on Likutei Torah, Re'eh 19b-c.

* Writer, editor, and Rabbi, from Brooklyn, N.Y., and Editor of JLI's popular Torah Studies program,

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5197160/jewish/Why-Does-G-d-Send-Us-False-Prophets.htm

Why Was the Holy Temple Built on a Slope?

By Yossi Ives *

The Holy Temple that was planned by King David and built by King Solomon was erected on Mount Moriah, which then became known as Har HaBayit, or Temple Mount. The peak of the mountain had a flat surface, but it sloped down on all sides. Given the large size of the complex, only the core of the Temple stood on a flat surface. The courtyard areas were built on the sides of the mountain, requiring a good number of stairs to navigate the incline.

When describing the layout of the Temple, Maimonides begins by saying that “The Temple complex was not built entirely on flat ground, but rather on the incline of the mountain.”¹ He proceeds to detail the various areas that constituted the Temple complex, explaining that the more sacred the section, the higher up the mountain it was located:

Getting from the rampart (known as the chayl) to the Women's Courtyard involved climbing twelve steps. To reach the Courtyard of the Israelites – which is where the Temple proper begins – required an ascent of a fifteen more steps. The Priestly Courtyard was one step above, followed by a platform raised by three steps. To enter the Grand Hall (known as the ulam), one would need to go up another fifteen steps. The rest of the Temple main building was on the same level.²

The fact that the Temple complex involved dozens of steps is unsurprising, seeing as it was situated on a mountain, which by its very nature has slopes. But why does Maimonides emphasize that the entire Temple complex was not on a single level? He could just as well have given the description of the levels and the steps between them and it would have been abundantly clear that there were varying gradations.

It seems clear that Maimonides was intent on highlighting that the Temple was not flat by writing, “The Temple complex was not built entirely on flat ground, but rather on the incline of the mountain.” It would have been simpler for him to write: “The Temple complex was built on the incline of the mountain.” Instead, he specifies that the Temple was not on flat ground, as if this is a detail of significance – not merely a result of the topography.

It seems particularly peculiar that the elevation of the Temple would be treated as a key feature, given that most aspects of the Temple were modeled after the portable Tabernacle (Mishkan) used by the Israelites in the desert – and that Tabernacle was, of course, all on a single plane. If the differing levels of the Temple were an inevitable consequence of its location, that would be one thing, but why would Maimonides give the impression that the Temple's multiple levels were intentional, when that is a marked deviation from the original sanctuary constructed by Moses?

The Rebbe's explanation puts things in an entirely different perspective: The reason the Temple was built in gradations was not because it was built on the side of a mountain. The opposite is true: because the Temple was supposed to have varying levels, that is why it was situated on the side of a mountain!

But why? The Tabernacle with which the Israelites sojourned through the desert was entirely level, why would the Temple in Jerusalem need to be different?

It turns out, says the Rebbe, that this issue gets to the very heart of what the Temple was for, and the most significant manner in which it differed from the Tabernacle.

The holiness of the Tabernacle was entirely contained to the parts out of which it was assembled — its boards, coverings, curtains, etc. There was no holiness in the ground upon which the Tabernacle stood; it could have been established anywhere.

In contrast, the place where the Temple stood was hallowed ground, sacred from the beginning of history.³ The Temple was to be established “in the place that G d shall choose to set his name there”⁴ -- a uniquely holy spot possessing special characteristics for being the residence of G d’s presence on earth.

Moreover, the land upon which the Tabernacle stood was never consecrated, and the minute the Tabernacle was taken down the land upon which it had stood minutes earlier returned to its mundane use. We don’t know of a single spot where the Tabernacle stood during its four decades in the desert.

The land upon which the Temple stood, on the other hand, was consecrated, and remains sacred to this day. The holiness of the Temple Mount survived the destruction of the Temple that was built upon it. Indeed, Maimonides⁵ rules that sacrificial offerings may be brought there even if the Temple is no longer standing.

So, the sacredness of the Tabernacle was in its structure, while the sacredness of the Temple was in its land. The holiness of the land upon which the Tabernacle stood was only because it held the sanctuary; with the Temple it was the other way round: the holiness of Temple was because it stood on holy ground.

Now we understand why the Temple had to be on levels. Because the holiness of the Temple was so connected to the sacredness of the land, the stages of holiness also had to be reflected in their position on the incline toward the pinnacle of the mountain.

The varying levels of sanctity of the Temple edifice were a product of the varying levels of sacredness of the land on which it stood. Each successive upgrade in sacredness required a commensurate physical elevation up the mountain.

The only exception was the innermost sanctum known as the Holy of Holies — the place of the Ark of the Covenant — whose holiness was so immense that it rose above the confines of space. The Holy of Holies thus did not need to be further elevated from the main sanctuary building, because it represented a level of holiness so lofty that transcends all physical dimensions.

There is an important lesson inherent in all of this. While we may be passing through this physical world, we have a mission to leave a permanent imprint of holiness. It was a central part of the Divine plan to invest the material reality with true holiness, so as to transform our universe into a place imbued and saturated with G dliness. It is not enough to build a Tabernacle that makes its space holy for the duration of its existence. Rather, the entire world must become like the place of the Temple, sanctified and elevated to a state of holiness.

As true as this is about the holiest place on earth, it is also true to a significant extent in our own space. By doing mitzvot we can bring true holiness into our homes and into the physical objects we own. When we live lives of sanctity, we succeed in uplifting the very world to its intended state of G dliness. We have both the power and the duty to transform darkness into light, and the physical into spiritual.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, vol. 29, Parshat Reeh I.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Hilchot Beit Habechirah 6:1-4.
2. *ibid*.
3. Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit Habechirah 3:1-2.
4. Deuteronomy 12:11.
5. Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Beit Habechirah 6:15.

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Re'eh: Making a Living

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G-d, your G-d, will bless you in all that you do. (Deuteronomy 15:18)

G-d will bless you in all that you do: The sages understand this verse to imply that although G-d determines which of us will succeed in our efforts to provide ourselves with a livelihood and amass wealth, we must not rely solely on His providence, but must rather put forth reasonable efforts to earn our living naturally.

By the same token, however, we must keep in mind that our efforts are not the direct cause of our material success; they are only a "vessel," a receptacle to contain G-d's blessing. In this context, along with taking care to ensure that our "vessels" are fit to receive G-d's blessing, our main concern should not be with the vessels per se but with making ourselves worthy of receiving the blessing with which we hope G-d will fill our vessels.

On one level, this orientation is based on our recognition that G-d is the master of nature, and therefore, if we want our natural efforts to be successful, we should ensure that they accord with His will.

On a deeper level:

Our livelihood is an altogether miraculous affair, and the natural efforts we are required to engage in are no more than a ruse that G-d arranged so that it would appear as if we are earning our livelihood through totally natural means.

In this context, unduly devoting ourselves to enhancing the efficacy of our jobs while neglecting to enhance our spiritual worthiness of G-d's blessing is like working feverishly to sew sturdy pockets into our garments while forgetting to go to work to earn the money with which to fill them.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Defining Reality

One of the gifts of great leaders, and one from which each of us can learn, is that they frame reality for the group. They define its situation. They specify its aims. They articulate its choices. They tell us where we are and where we are going in a way no satellite navigation system could. They show us the map and the destination, and help us see why we should choose this route not that. That is one of their most magisterial roles, and no one did it more powerfully than did Moses in the book of Deuteronomy.

Here is how he does it at the beginning of this week's parsha:

See, I am setting before you today the blessing and the curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. (Deut. 11:26-28)

Here, in even more powerful words, is how Moses puts it later in the book:

See, I set before you today life and the good, death and the bad... I call Heaven and Earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, so you and your children may live. (Deut. 30:15, 19)

What Moses is doing here is defining reality for the next generation and for all generations. He is doing so as a preface to what is about to follow in the next many chapters, namely a systematic restatement of Jewish law covering all aspects of life for the new nation in its land.

Moses does not want the people to lose the big picture by being overwhelmed by the details. Jewish law with its 613 commands is detailed. It aims at the sanctification of all aspects of life, from daily ritual to the very structure of society and its institutions. Its aim is to shape a social world in which we turn even seemingly secular occasions into encounters with the Divine Presence. Despite the details, says Moses, the choice I set before you is really quite simple.

We, he tells the next generation, are unique. We are a small nation. We have not the numbers, the wealth, nor the sophisticated weaponry of the great empires. We are smaller even than many of our neighbouring nations. As of now we do not even have a land. But we are different, and that difference defines, once and for all, who we are and why. God has

chosen to make us His stake in history. He set us free from slavery and took us as His own covenantal partner.

This is not because of our merits. "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land." (Deut. 9:5) We are not more righteous than others, said Moses. It is because our ancestors – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah – were the first people to heed the call of the one God and follow Him, worshipping not nature but the Creator of nature, not power but justice and compassion, not hierarchy but a society of equal dignity that includes within its ambit of concern the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

Do not think, says Moses, that we can survive as a nation among nations, worshipping what they worship and living as they live. If we do, we will be subject to the universal law that has governed the fate of nations from the dawn of civilisation to today. Nations are born, they grow, they flourish; they become complacent, then corrupt, then divided, then defeated, then they die, to be remembered only in history books and museums. In the case of Israel, small and intensely vulnerable, that fate will happen sooner rather than later. That is what Moses calls "the curse."

The alternative is simple – even though it is demanding and detailed. It means taking God as our Sovereign, Judge of our deeds, Framers of our laws, Author of our liberty, Defender of our destiny, Object of our worship and our love. If we predicate our existence on something – some One – vastly greater than ourselves then we will be lifted higher than we could reach by ourselves. But that demands total loyalty to God and His law. That is the only way we will avoid decay, decline and defeat.

There is nothing puritanical about this vision. Two of the key words of Deuteronomy are love and joy. The word "love" (the root a-h-v) appears twice in Exodus, twice in Leviticus, not all in Numbers, but 23 times in Deuteronomy. The word "joy" (with the root s-m-ch) appears only once in Genesis, once in Exodus, once in Leviticus, once in Numbers but twelve times in Deuteronomy. Moses does not hide the fact, though, that life under the covenant will be demanding. Neither love nor joy come on a social scale without codes of self-restraint and commitment to the common good.

Moses knows that people often think and act in short-term ways, preferring today's pleasure to

tomorrow's happiness, personal advantage to the good of society as a whole. They do foolish things, individually and collectively. So throughout Devarim he insists time and again that the road to long-term flourishing – the 'good,' the 'blessing,' life itself – consists in making one simple choice: accept God as your Sovereign, do His will, and blessings will follow. If not, sooner or later you will be conquered and dispersed and you will suffer more than you can imagine. Thus Moses defined reality for the Israelites of his time and all time.

What has this to do with leadership? The answer is that the meaning of events is never self-evident. It is always subject to interpretation. Sometimes, out of folly or fear or failure of imagination, leaders get it wrong. Neville Chamberlain defined the challenge of the rise to power of Nazi Germany as the search for "peace in our time." It took a Churchill to realise that this was wrong, and that the real challenge was the defence of liberty against tyranny.

In Abraham Lincoln's day there were any number of people for and against slavery but it took Lincoln to define the abolition of slavery as the necessary step to the preservation of the union. It was that larger vision that allowed him to say, in the Second Inaugural, "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds." [1] He allowed neither abolition itself, nor the end of the Civil War, to be seen as a victory for one side over the other but instead defined it as a victory for the nation as a whole.

I explained in my book on religion and science, *The Great Partnership*, [2] that there is a difference between the cause of something and its meaning. The search for causes is the task of explanation. The search for meaning is the work of interpretation. Science can explain but it cannot interpret. Were the Ten Plagues in Egypt a natural sequence of events, or Divine punishment, or both? There is no scientific experiment that could resolve this question. Was the division of the Red Sea a Divine intervention in history or a freak easterly wind exposing a submerged and ancient riverbank? Was the Exodus an act of Divine liberation or a series of lucky coincidences that allowed a group of fugitive slaves to escape? When all the causal explanations have been given, the

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quality of miracle – an epoch-changing event in which we see the hand of God – remains. Culture is not nature. There are causes in nature, but only in culture are there meanings. Homo sapiens is uniquely the culture-creating, meaning-seeking animal, and this affects all we do.

Viktor Frankl used to emphasise that our lives are determined not by what happens to us but by how we respond to what happens to us – and how we respond depends on how we interpret events. Is this disaster the end of my world or is it life calling on me to exercise heroic strength so that I can survive and help others to survive? The same circumstances may be interpreted differently by two people, leading one to despair, the other to heroic endurance. The facts may be the same but the meanings are diametrically different. How we interpret the world affects how we respond to the world, and it is our responses that shape our lives, individually and collectively. That is why, in the famous words of Max De Pree, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.”[3]

Within every family, every community, and every organisation, there are tests, trials and tribulations. Do these lead to arguments, blame and recrimination? Or does the group see them providentially, as a route to some future good (a “descent that leads to an ascent” as the Lubavitcher Rebbe always used to say)? Does it work together to meet the challenge? Much, perhaps all, will depend on how the group defines its reality. This in turn will depend on the leadership or absence of leadership that it has had until now. Strong families and communities have a clear sense of what their ideals are, and they are not blown off-course by the winds of change.

No one did this more powerfully than Moses in the way he monumentally framed the choice: between good and bad, life and death, the blessing and the curse, following God on the one hand, or choosing the values of neighbouring civilisations on the other. That clarity is why the Hittites, Canaanites, Perizzites and Jebusites are no more, while the people of Israel still lives, despite an unparalleled history of circumstantial change.

Who are we? Where are we? What are we trying to achieve and what kind of people do we aspire to be? These are the questions leaders help the group ask and answer, and when a group does so together it is blessed with exceptional resilience and strength.

[1] Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address (United States Capitol, March 4, 1865).

[2] The Great Partnership: Science, Religion, and the Search for Meaning (New York: Schocken Books, 2011).

[3] Max De Pree, Leadership is an Art, New York, Doubleday, 1989, p.11.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“But the place which the Lord your God shall choose from among all of your tribes to place His Name there, for His dwelling place, shall you seek and shall you come there. And you shall bring there your whole burnt offerings and your sacrifices...” (Deut. 12:5-6).

Apparently, the Torah is here speaking of our Holy City of Jerusalem, because it appears in the context of Israel’s entry into the Promised Land and the necessity to destroy the altars of idolatry before establishing our Temple to God. But why is Jerusalem not named?

The Bible has already identified Malki-Zedek as the King of Salem (Jeru-Salem the City of Peace) as far back as the period of Abraham (Gen. 14:18), and Mount Moriah had been designated as the place where the Almighty “would be seen” right after the Binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:14). Moreover, the Bible has no hesitation in identifying places; witness the specific geographic description of Mount Gerizim and Mount Eyal (Deut. 11:29, 30). So why the reluctance to name Jerusalem in this particular context of the Bible?

Maimonides deals with this question in his great philosophic masterpiece, Guide for the Perplexed (part 3, chapter 45). He establishes the principle that Divine Service in the Temple was mainly directed against idolatry. Mount Moriah was the highest mountain in the region, so it was specifically chosen by God for the Holy Temple in order to attest to the superiority of God over all other idols! And this Divine intent had previously been revealed to Abraham, as we have seen. If so, why does Moses here hide the precise identity of the City of God?

Maimonides offers three reasons. First of all, he felt that publication of the name of the unique city would only incite the other nations to make war against Israel in order to acquire Jerusalem for themselves. Second, the other nations might even attempt to destroy the city – if only in order that the Israelites not acquire it. And finally, Moses feared lest all the tribes would fight over it, each desirous of having Jerusalem within its own borders!

I believe that in addition to Maimonides’ prophetic insights, there is even further significance behind Moses’ reluctance to reveal the precise name of the city. In the ancient world, every nation-state had its own god – whom the citizens believed lived within the boundaries of that nation-state. Jerusalem was to be the city which would house the Holy Temple of God – but God would exclusively dwell neither within the Temple nor within that city; God was the Lord of the entire universe, who could not be encompassed even by the heaven of the heavens, by the entire cosmos, so certainly not by a single structure or even a single city.

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One of the most difficult messages Moses had to convey to his people was that God is not limited by physical dimensions. Yes, Maimonides sets down in his Mishneh Torah that the sanctity of Jerusalem is the sanctity of the Divine Presence (Shekhinah), and just as the Divine Presence is eternal and can never be destroyed, so the sanctity of Jerusalem is eternal and can never be made obsolete (Laws of the Chosen Temple, 6:14). The great Sage’s point is that the Divine Presence can never be physically destroyed because the Divine Presence is not a physical entity, it is not in any way subject to creation or destruction.

There is one place in the world, teaches Moses, where God has consistently been recognized as the Creator of the world and foundation of ethical monotheism for all of humanity. One’s name is not one’s physical being, but one’s name is the medium by which one is recognized and called upon. Malki-Zedek, ancient King of Jerusalem and identified with Shem the son of Noah, recognized God as the power who enabled Abraham to emerge victorious in his battle against the four despotic Kings and thereby rescue Lot from captivity; Abraham himself recognized God as the ultimate arbiter over life and death, the one to whom we must commit ourselves and our future, when he brought his beloved son Isaac to the akedah on Mount Moriah (Jerusalem). God’s name is on Jerusalem; it is the city in which the God of ethical monotheism is to be recognized and served!

Finally, the name Jerusalem is not specifically mentioned because this recognition of God as the guardian of justice and compassion, lovingkindness and truth is necessary not only for the people of Jerusalem, not only for all the tribes of Israel, but rather for the entire world. When God initially elects Abraham, the Almighty charges him and his descendants with a universal mission: “Through you all the families of earth shall be blessed”. (Gen. 12:3). The prophet Isaiah speaks of our vision of the end of the days, when the Holy Temple will rise from the top of the mountains, and all nations will rush to it to learn from our ways: “From Zion shall come forth Torah and the word of God from Jerusalem... so that nation shall not lift up sword against nation and humanity will not learn war anymore.” (Isa. 2:3-4)

May the God who cannot be confined to any physical place reveal His teaching of peace and security from Jerusalem His City to every human being throughout the world.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb Acquiring Faith

This week’s Torah portion, Parshat Re’eh (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17), invariably is read near the beginning of the Hebrew month of Elul. Elul is the last month of the year before Rosh Hashanah. It has a special place in religious life because it is viewed as a time to

prepare oneself for the process of divine judgment, which begins on Rosh Hashanah and concludes on Yom Kippur.

Despite my excellent early Jewish education, I was fairly ignorant about the significance of Elul until the year I began my post-high school Jewish studies. It was then that a teacher introduced me to a spiritual approach known as the Mussar movement. This movement was inspired by a charismatic, scholarly, creative Lithuanian rabbi in the second half of the 19th century. His name was Israel Salanter. He found the religious condition of the Jews of his time to be deficient in several respects. For one thing, he was convinced that people were ignoring the ethical dimensions of our tradition. He insisted that one had to be very meticulous in his or her ethical behavior and devote extra caution to relationships with other people. He was also concerned with the lack of true faith, the absence of *yir'at shamayim*, fear of Heaven.

Thus, he developed a comprehensive methodology for achieving faith in the Almighty, true "fear of heaven." He also formulated a program through which individuals could attain greater sensitivity to their own ethical behavior with regard to their spouses, friends, employers and employees, and neighbors, Jewish or otherwise. He placed special emphasis upon the month of Elul, when Jews approach the impending days of judgment; he realized that these waning days of the Jewish year represent the optimal time to focus on what we would call faith in God and one's duties to his fellow man.

The teacher who inspired me to learn more about Rabbi Israel Salanter and to follow his rigorous program of religious and ethical self-improvement was a man named Rabbi Zeidel Epstein, may he rest in peace. I will reserve a detailed description of this remarkable spiritual mentor for another venue. Suffice it to say that he was, for me and for my peers, a bridge to the lost world of the disciples and followers of Rabbi Salanter. Rabbi Epstein had a long and distinguished teaching career, which began at the yeshiva I attended in New York City and which culminated in the holy city of Jerusalem, where he passed away about ten years ago, at nearly one hundred years old.

I was intrigued by one of the central teachings of Rabbi Salanter. For, you see, about the time that I was attending Rabbi Epstein's lectures, I was also enrolled in a secular university and was taking a course in the philosophy of religion. One of the questions we explored in that class was how to obtain religious faith. We studied a wide range of techniques ranging from meditation and contemplation to the proofs of the existence of God, which were popular even among traditional Jewish philosophers during the Middle Ages. It was then that I was first exposed to William James' classic work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. We even experimented with

methods of cultivating ecstatic mental states in order to directly apprehend the Divine.

Rabbi Salanter suggested a very different approach, one which was nowhere to be found on the curriculum of the college course in which I was enrolled. Instead, he preached that the way to achieve *emunah*, faith, or to use the term he preferred, *yir'at shamayim*, fear of heaven, was to engage in moral behavior and character refinement. He emphatically maintained that only when we improve our relationships with others do we begin to connect with God.

Permit me to attempt to illuminate Rabbi Salanter's theory by referring to a passage from one of the literary works we studied in that class on the philosophy of religion. It was from the section entitled "The Grand Inquisitor" in Fyodor Dostoevsky's classic novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. In it, one of the brothers, Ivan, states that "if God is absent, then everything is permitted." In other words, the basis of ethics and morality is the existence of God. Without God, there is no reason to be ethical or moral, and anarchy reigns in human life.

Ironically, Rabbi Salanter and the famous Russian novelist were exact contemporaries of each other, although it is highly doubtful that either of them knew of the other's existence. But Ivan Karamazov's words, if inverted, express Rabbi Salanter's insight very well: Instead of "If God is absent then everything is permitted" invert the words to read "If everything is permitted, then God is absent." Meaning, God is absent in a society where men behave as if everything is permitted and there is no distinction between right and wrong. In such a society, it is futile to search for God and try to gain religious faith.

On the other hand, if a society acts in accordance with principles of right and wrong, and realizes that not everything is permitted, possibilities of faith in the divine open up. Belief in God depends upon righteous behavior. Elul is the time to intensify and enhance righteous behavior in the individual and in society, thus creating an opening for *emunah* and *yir'at shamayim*. In the words of one of Rabbi Salanter's disciples, "Emunah (faith) can only be achieved through *tikkun hamidot* (character development)."

This insight, seemingly so simple and direct yet philosophically so profound, is expressed in the wording of one particular phrase in this week's Torah portion. The verse reads:

"Observe and understand (*shamor v'shamata*) all these matters that I command you; so that it will go well with you and with your descendants after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 12:28)

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The commentator Ohr HaChaim wonders about the first part of this verse. Should it not read "understand and observe?" Why is the observation, the fulfillment, written before the need for understanding? Surely it would be preferable to first understand and only then to obey.

Rabbi Chaim Zaitchik, an ardent devotee of Rabbi Salanter's movement who survived the Holocaust, wrote an essay entitled "Flawed Character Traits Weaken Faith," which offers the following explanation of why we must first "do what is good and right in the sight of the Lord" and only then understand Him:

"From this we gain the following guidance: in order for a person to achieve the precious quality of faith in the Almighty in his life, he cannot do so through intellectual inquiry. He must first rectify his ethical and moral conduct, laying down a foundation of good deeds and charitable acts, and then thereby develop a complete and strong faith. Only then can he understand the meaning of *yir'at shamayim*, only then will faith be revealed to him."

As we advance from the advent of Elul to the High Holy Days, to the days of awe and judgment, we would do well to remember the teachings of the 19th century Rabbi Israel Salanter, and the teachings of those of his disciples, Rabbis Epstein and Zaitchik, who survived into the late 20th and even early 21st century. We would do well to focus on character development and self-improvement in our ethical and moral conduct; for to the extent that we grow in our behavior to other persons, we will be granted strengthened faith and a more profound appreciation of the *Ribbono shel Olam*, the Master of the Universe.

OTS Dvar Torah

'Choose Life': A Privilege or a Duty?

Chana Assis

In a world that sees relativism and absolutism as interchangeable, the Torah tells us, loud and clear: there is good, there is evil, there is wrong and right, and there is truth and falsehood.

Our parasha opens with the two alternatives presented to the people. They can either follow the path of Hashem and receive His blessings, or they can stray off of that path and risking the consequences, including a curse:

"See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: The blessing, if you obey the commandments of Hashem your God that I enjoin upon you this day. And the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of Hashem your God, but turn away from the path that I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods, whom you have not experienced." (Deuteronomy 11:26-29)

Surprisingly, the content of the blessings and curses appears, in great detail, in Parashat Ki

Tavo, which describes the blessing's bountifulness (ibid. 28:1-14), followed by a bone-chilling description of the terrible curses that may beset the Israelites, if they do not follow Hashem's path (ibid. 28:15-68). A passage strikingly similar to our Parasha, and comparably worded, appears in Parashat Netzavim (ibid. 30:15-20), where Moses explains these two alternatives to the nation. How can we explain this repetition? Why does Moses explain these things twice?

A meticulous reading of the texts could shed light on the stark differences between these two passages. It seems that according to the passage in Parashat Re'eh, the very act of listening to Hashem is the blessing, while sinning is the curse. This isn't necessarily a system of reward and punishment. Rather, if the path itself is good, it constitutes the blessing, while the path of sin is the curse. In contrast, a system of reward and punishment is presented in Parashat Nitzavim. "See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity... Choose life—if you and your offspring would live" (ibid. 30:15-20). Walking in the path of Hashem leads to a fitting reward, while sin leads to punishment and curse. As such, this is precisely why the precept of free choice given to human beings is stressed in this parasha – choosing good and reward and avoiding evil and the punishment it entails.

In this week's parasha, the distinction between good and evil is about how we look at reality, while Parashat Nitzavim introduces a new idea – that mankind has been given the responsibility to choose between good and evil. In these verses, the Torah establishes one of the vital foundations of human and religious existence, namely, free choice. People are free to choose their paths, and they must take responsibility for those choices. These verses explicitly state that reality is comprised of good and evil – that there is a good path, and an evil path. The good path leads to a reward of blessings, while the evil path leads to curses. The Torah makes people responsible for their actions and accountable for their fate. It is through a person's actions that his or her fate is sealed. This is precisely the difference between humans and all other creatures on Earth, who have no right or responsibility to make choices.

This plain and clear-cut assertion in the Torah tries to resonate within a world that confuses relativism with absolutism, where the only option is to be subjective, and where indulgence becomes key to how we operate, socially and pedagogically. The Torah asserts that there is good and there is evil, and that these are hard-coded into nature. There is right and wrong. There is truth and falsehood. A person's path could be good and could foster life, but it could also be bad, and lead that person to dark alleys. The Torah sets boundaries. Not all things are relative, and not

all things are subjective. There is a proper way. There is a correct way.

By making humans responsible for choosing the right path, the Torah establishes that it's hard to choose between good and evil. Sometimes, that difficulty stems from the challenge involved in choosing good over evil, while resisting the simplicity, the appeal and the razzle-dazzle of the latter option. At times, we may feel that different interpretations are given for good and evil at different times in history, and each time, this challenges each new generation with this process of choosing.

Occasionally, we may feel that this is perhaps one of the greatest challenges facing us today. We truly find it difficult to discern between good and evil. We end up greatly perplexed. The process of making that distinction is difficult and deceptive, echoing the words of the parasha: "And now, O Israel, what does Hashem your God demand of you?"

We often tend to see freedom of choice as a great privilege, setting us apart from mindless beasts. It is a manifestation of a progressive social and humanistic view that prioritizes individual rights and wellbeing. Yet the texts appearing in Parashat Re'eh and Parashat Nitzavim depict free choice as something that is as much of a duty as it is a privilege. People can't avoid making choices. The option not to choose is a non-option. "Choose life".

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Daniel Stein

The Mysterious Makom

Surprisingly, the word "Yerushalayim" never appears anywhere in the Torah. The first time it is mentioned is in Sefer Yehoshua chapter 10. Prior to that, the Torah only speaks about an anonymous place or a mysterious makom which will be chosen by Hashem as the future site of the Beis Hamikdash, as the pasuk states, "But only to the place which Hashem shall choose from all your tribes, to set His Name there" (Devarim 12:5). The Torah is equally as vague when describing the location of the akeidas Yitzchak, where the Torah simply says, "Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar" (Breishis 22:4). Similarly, when Yaakov falls asleep on that very spot, the Torah dodges divulging any specific details and reveals only that "he arrived at the place and lodged there because the sun had set" (Breishis 28:11).

The Rambam (in Moreh Nevuchim part 3, chapter 45) suggests three reasons why the whereabouts of Yerushalayim and the Har Habayis were initially shrouded in some measure of secrecy. He writes, "First, if the nations had learnt that this place was to be the center of the highest religious truths, they would occupy it, or fight about it most perseveringly. Secondly, those who were then in possession of it might destroy and ruin the place with all their might. Thirdly, and chiefly, every one of the twelve tribes would desire to

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have this place in its borders and under its control. This could lead to divisions and discord, such as were caused by the desire for the priesthood. Therefore, it was commanded that the Temple should not be built before the election of a king who would designate its location and construction, and thus remove the cause for dispute."

The notion raised by the Rambam, that the distinctiveness of the Temple Mount was deliberately concealed in order to prevent it from being seized by other religions and beliefs is supported by the preceding pasuk which commands us to "destroy all the places where the nations...worshipped their gods, upon the lofty mountains and upon the hills and under every lush tree" (Devarim 12:2). Rav Rueven Katz (Degel Reuven vol. 3 section 3) derives from the juxtaposition of these two issues that had the Temple Mount been defiled by idol worship it would have been permanently disqualified as the site for the future Beis Hamikdash. Indeed, the interceding pasuk "You shall not do so to the Lord your God" (Devarim 12:4), implies that despite the fact that the mitzvah to destroy objects of idol worship applies only to their gods and not to the mountains themselves (Avodah Zarah 45a), nonetheless, a location that was designated for idol worship may not subsequently be recommissioned to the service of Hashem.

However, Rav Yisroel Reisman proposes that the Torah concealed the exact identity of Yerushalayim and the specific location of the Har Habayis for another reason, namely, in order to enhance its mystique and allure. At the time of the Akeidas Yitzchak the Torah states, "Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar" (Breishis 22:4). The Kli Yakar explains that Avraham was only able to appreciate the extraordinary nature of the Har Habayis from a distance, because when something is close by and easily accessible, it tends to become familiar and overlooked. Therefore, in order to properly gauge the unique qualities of the Har Habayis, Avraham had to pause along the way and look at it from afar. Similarly, at the time of the burning bush Moshe said, "Let me turn now and see this great spectacle why does the thorn bush not burn up" (Shemos 3:3). The Kli Yakar suggests, that Moshe had to take a step back and remove himself from the scene in order to grasp what he was observing.

We find a similar dynamic later on in the Parsha when the Torah tells us about the "agitator" who, "tempts you in secret...saying Let us go and worship other gods...of the gods of the peoples around you, whether near to you or far from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth...you shall surely kill him" (Devarim 13:7-10). Why does the pasuk differentiate between the gods of the nations that are nearby and those that are faraway? Rashi comments, that the Torah is instructing us to conclude that just like there is nothing real about the gods that are familiar and nearby

so too there is no substance in those that are faraway. However, the premise is perplexing. Why would we have thought in the first place that the gods that are remote are more legitimate or authentic than those that are close by? Moreover, why does the Torah emphasize that the conversation with the "agitator" is taking place specifically in "secret"?

The Tolna Rebbe explains that people are naturally attracted to those things and experiences that seem exotic and mysterious. Anything new or different catches their attention and arouses their curiosity. This is what drives people to visit faraway lands and sometimes pursue bizarre segulos and remedies to their problems at the expense of more classical methods and tools, such as prayer, hard work, and bitachon. This tendency is exploited by the "agitator" who recruits people by quietly whispering in their ear about new forms of idol worship that are wildly effective. Therefore, the Torah needed to stress the danger of idolatry that is enigmatic and emanates from exotic places because these forms of idol worship tend to be the most enticing.

Perhaps the specific spot of the Beis Hamikdash was deliberately obscured in order to generate greater interest and intrigue around this very special place. The cryptic descriptions of Yerushalayim remind us that much of its significance is elusive and beyond our comprehension. Unfortunately, the accessibility of Yerushalayim in recent years has undermined some of its mystique, and has led us to underestimate and overlook its sublime and singular nature. However, maybe the travel restrictions instituted this summer have served as a kind of step back from the status quo and restored some of our appreciation for this magnificent and mysterious makom which currently many of us can only view from a distance.

OU Dvar Torah

“You are Children to Hashem, your God” Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

Concept: The Role of Chumash Devarim in our Relationship with Hashem

בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לֹא תִתְגַּדְּדוּ... לְמַת

You are children to Hashem, your God, you shall not wound yourselves... over a dead body.[1]

Introduction: the Verse in Pshat and Drash - The simple meaning of the above verse is as presented in the translation – that we are forbidden to inflict wounds in our flesh as an expression of mourning. Alongside this, there is a well-known midrashic exposition of these words that is recorded in the Talmud:[2]

לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ אִגּוּדוֹת אִגּוּדוֹת

Do not make yourselves into separate groups.

As we have seen many times, pshat and drash have distinct methodologies resulting in different interpretations of the same word or words. Nevertheless, when considering these two interpretations of our verse, it is worthwhile pondering if they intersect on any level, or does each simply follow its own path, yielding its own interpretation, and “never the twain shall meet”?

The Theme of Chumash Devarim - By way of preface to answering this question, let us refer to a profound idea that we have discussed in an earlier parsha, based on the writings of R' Leib Mintzberg zt”l, relating to the division of the Torah into five chumashim. We noted that this is not simply the breaking up of a long sefer into five parts for purposes of convenience. Our relationship with Hashem is multi-faceted. He is our Creator, our Savior, our God, our King and our Father. Each of the Chumashim focusses on a different aspect of that relationship, harmonizing together with all the other aspects into our fulfilment of His will as expressed in the Torah:

Chumash Bereishis – the Book of Creation, focusses on Hashem as Creator of the world.

Chumash Shemos – the Book of Redemption, focusses on Hashem as Savior of the Jewish people, discussing their Exodus and initiation into their historic role as His people.

Once we have received the Torah and become Hashem's people, the following three Chumashim develop the three core aspects of our relationship with Him:

Chumash Vayikra – the Book of Avodah (Divine Service), is devoted to matters of sanctity generally and the Divine service of korbanos specifically. This highlights our relationship with Hashem as our God, the Infinite Spiritual Being, Whose ways we are looking to emulate and Whose closeness we are seeking to rise above the mundane in order to attain.

Chumash Bamidbar – the Book of Royalty. The theme of this Chumash is Hashem's presence among us as our King. It is in this Chumash that Hashem is first described with this term, as Bilaam proclaims, “וַתִּרְעַע מַלְכָּךְ בּוֹ” – the friendship of the King [Hashem] is with him [Israel].”[3]

All of this brings us to the final Chumash: Chumash Devarim – emphasizes the theme of Hashem as our Father, as the verse therein proclaims, “הֲלוֹא הוּא אָבִיךָ” – is He not your Father?”[4] Likewise, our verse opens with the words, “בְּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם” – You are children to Hashem, your God.”[5]

New Perspectives - The theme of Hashem as our Father which characterizes Chumash Devarim expresses itself throughout its parshiyos. In this Chumash, we are introduced to a new element in our relationship with

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Hashem – love. From our side, this finds expression in the mitzvah for us to love Hashem – “וְאַהֲבַת אֱת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ” – as mentioned in Chapter 6.[6] and which we recite daily in the first paragraph of the Shema. Paralleling this, the next chapter describes Hashem's love for the Jewish people:

לֹא מִרַבֶּכֶם מִכָּל הָעַמִּים הָיָה בְכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בְּכֶם... כִּי מְאֻהָבָת ה' אֶתְכֶם

It is not because you are more numerous than the nations that Hashem desired and chose you... rather, it is because of Hashem's love for you.[7]

This element in our relationship likewise gives new perspective on the major themes mentioned in Devarim. Much of the Chumash is devoted to exhortations to keep the mitzvot and the calamity that will befall the people if they should neglect their obligations. However, within the course of his exhortations to the people, Moshe adds the following key point of perspective regarding these experiences:

וַיְדַעְתָּ עִם לְבָבְךָ כִּי כְאִשֶּׁר יִסֵּר אִישׁ אֶת בְּנוֹ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִיִּסְרֶךָ

You should know in your heart that just as a father chastises his son, so Hashem, your God, chastises you.[8]

A similar development occurs with regards to the keeping of the mitzvot themselves. Until now, the mitzvot have been simply presented as obligations – in keeping with our status as Hashem's servants (Vayikra) and His subjects (Bamidbar) – which of course they are. However, in Chumash Devarim, Moshe underlines an additional element within the mitzvot:

וַיִּצְוֵנוּ ה' לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה... לְטוֹב לָנוּ כָּל הַיָּמִים לְחַיֵּינוּ בְּיָמֵי הַזֶּה

Hashem commanded us to perform all these decrees... for our good all the days, to give us life as this very day.[9]

As our Father, Hashem seeks to inform us that the mitzvot are not only commands which we must perform, but they are things that are for our ultimate benefit.

Children – and Siblings - With the above in mind, we return to our verse which – in keeping with the theme of Chumash Devarim – opens with the words, “You are children to Hashem your God.” The commentators point out, that these words are not merely a statement of fact; rather, they serve as the background to the mitzvah which follows of not inflicting a wound over a dead person. The Seforno explains that wounding oneself as a sign of excessive mourning expresses the feeling that one has lost everyone and is utterly alone. However, Hashem informs us that this is never the case, for He is always our Father. Therefore, although it is appropriate to mourn

the loss of a relative, at the same time, we cannot lose sight of our relationship with Hashem as His children for whom He will always be there.

And this brings us back to the drash explanation of the verse – not to split into separate factions. Once we understand the background to the pshat of the verse, we will see how it is also the background to the drash. For if Hashem is our Father and we are all His children, then we are all, by definition, brothers and sisters with each other. As such, while as siblings we may each have our distinct character, we can never allow ourselves to form into factions that are categorically separate and detached from one another. This is the overarching theme of Chumash Devarim: If Hashem is your Father, then your fellow-Jew is your brother!

“Devarim Details” within Mitzvos – Hashavas Aveidah - Taking this idea one stage further, this will help us understand another phenomenon within Chumash Devarim. There are numerous mitzvos that have already been mentioned in earlier chumashim but which then have additional details presented in Devarim. Why are not all the details of the mitzvah mentioned at once? Based on our discussion, the answer is that these details reflect the “family element” within the Jewish people, and hence are introduced in the Chumash that is devoted to this theme. Let us see some examples:

The mitzvah to return a lost object appears for the first time in Parshas Mishpatim of Chumash Shemos.[10] There, the Torah commands that if you see the lost object of your fellow, you should return it to him. This represents what we could call the basic aspect of the mitzvah. Chumash Devarim then adds a completely new dimension to the mitzvah: “If your brother [the owner] is not near you and you do not know him, then gather [the lost object] inside your house, and it shall remain with you until your brother inquires after it.” [11] This aspect of the mitzvah can certainly be characterized as “going the extra mile,” to return the object. After all, I am fully prepared to return it, but I don’t know who to! In this situation, what more can be asked of me? The Torah’s answer is: “For your fellowman – perhaps nothing; but for your brother – do more. Take it home with you, and hopefully he will come looking for it.”

Eved Ivri - Another mitzvah that is reiterated in Devarim along with further details is that of Eved Ivri – a Jew who is sold into servitude in order to pay off his debts. In this case, the mitzvah has already been presented in two prior chumashim: in Chumash Shemos[12] and in Chumash Vayikra.[13] However, in Chumash Devarim, we find an additional element within this mitzvah that pertains when his term of servitude is up: “But when you send him away... do not send him away empty-handed. [Rather,] give him gifts from

your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your wine press.”[14]

What is the meaning of this mitzvah spread out over three Chumashim?

- Chumash Shemos which establishes the Torah’s obligations for a free and fair society presents the basic idea that this individual needs to be sold in order to work off his debts.

- Chumash Vayikra, which deals with our obligations towards Hashem as His servants, discusses how this impacts on our relationship with our own Hebrew servants, as discussed there: 1) The servant cannot be given demeaning or unduly hard work 2) He cannot be sold permanently, but must be released at the Yovel. As the verse there states in explanation of all this: “For they are My servants whom I took out of Egypt.”

- Chumash Devarim reminds us that there is yet more to it than that: Even when the servant finishes working for you, you cannot just say goodbye and send him on his way, congratulating yourself for having treated him fairly and kindly. He is your brother, he is family,[15] and he is about to begin making his way in the outside world. As such, you are obligated to give him something for the way to help him make a new start.

Shemithah - Another example of a mitzvah that has been discussed in two Chumashim prior to being mentioned in Chumash Devarim is that of shemithah – the sabbatical year.[16] In this case, too, each Chumash contains the elements of the mitzvah which relate to that Chumash:

- Chumash Shemos mentions only the obligation to leave the produce of the fields in the seventh year for the poor, as part of the general societal obligation to care for their wellbeing.

- Chumash Vayikra, the Chumash of Divine service and sanctity, introduces the idea the seventh year is holy for Hashem, similar to the day of Shabbos, and that the produce of that year is likewise holy and cannot be bought and sold on the normal commercial manner, nor be allowed to go to waste.

- Chumash Devarim once again introduces the aspect of the mitzvah that pertains to brotherhood and family, informing us that in addition to the laws relating to the land, all monetary debts are cancelled by the shemithah year. We note that this aspect of shemithah has nothing to do with resting from the land whatsoever, for the debts that are cancelled are simply those incurred by money that was loaned! Yet, the Torah says, “The shemithah year represents the end of a term of years, and ushers in a new start. Give your brother a break as well. Cancel any debts he has incurred with you and let him make a fresh start.”

Likutei Divrei Torah

These examples should encourage us to approach Chumash Devarim with a new and profound appreciation regarding its distinct role within the totality of the Torah – as a Chumash that fills in the aspect of our relationship, both with Hashem as our Father, and with the Jewish people as our brothers and sisters.[17]

[1] Devarim 14:1.

[2] See e.g. Yevamos 13b.

[3] Ibid. 23:21.

[4] Devarim 32:6.

[5] Ibid. 14:1.

[6] Verse 5.

[7] 7:7-8.

[8] 8:5.

[9] 6:24.

[10] 23:4.

[11] 22:2.

[12] 21:2-6

[13] 25-39-44.

[14] 15:13-14.

[15] Ibid. verse 12.

[16] See Shemos 23:11 and Vayikra 25:1-7.

[17] R’ Leib Mintzberg, Ben Melech, Introductory Chapters to Commentary on the Torah, chap. 4.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

To Produce the Blessing

See I place before you today blessing and curse. The blessing if you listen to the Mitzvos of HASHEM your G-d that I am commanding you today and the curse if you do not obey the Mitzvos of HASHEM your G-d and you turn from the path that I am commanding you today... (Devarim 11:26-28)

Moshe is speaking not only to the generation of Jews that stood before him at that time but he is giving a message directly to we who have arrived here in the 21st century, as well. The Torah is not a history book. It speaks to us contemporaneously. Moshe says, “See I place before you today blessing and curse...”, and the word “today” means “today”.

So how do we see the blessing and the curse “today”. Where is this currently evident? Where is our Har Grizim, which, through its flowering appearance, displays the blessed path and Har Eivil which, with its desolate look represents the cursed approach?! Is this merely an abstract concept that needs to be internalized with some symbolic representation or is it a concrete reality!?

Since Moshe uttered these prophetic words 3300 years ago a lot of history has transpired. Jews who are around today as Jews are the near descendants of people who had been loyal to Torah. There is a slow disassembling process for those who have lost touch with Torah Living even if they continue to cherish Jewish sentiments. It may take a few generations to devolve but there is a certain conclusion for anyone who does not remain loyally obedient to the Torah.

The odd reality is that most are blissfully unaware that this is happening. Not much

thought is given to a Jewish future until it is almost too late and then in many cases it is sadly too late.

It's truly tragic! The ball is marched down field 3700 years from Avraham Avinu only to be fumbled or willfully forfeited on the 1 yard line of history, but how is one to know it's the one yard line without familiarity with Torah and the rules of engagement. It may explain why so many who faced with a choice of extinction or distinction have nobly chosen to become Baalei Teshuva and return to a Torah way of Life.

Here is a small slice of American Jewish history. The Talmud tells us that Torah is compared to water. Water catalyzes life. A community cannot survive physically if there is no water source. It can't happen! It's quite amazing to take note of the many communities that popped up across the fruited plain that do not exist today. Even if they had a large population at some time, they faded over time.

I have visited many old empty synagogues. There on the wall are the pictures of the handsome and dedicated individuals who were their officers. What happened? Why is the building an empty shell housing lonely Sifre Torah for the last few surviving members? At one point there were 500 Orthodox Synagogues in the Bronx but most are gone now and the few remaining places are struggling. What happened? No water! Water brings blessing!

A Shul is beyond wonderful, but it is not sufficient. Pardon my crude analogy but I believe it can be helpful here. If there is good Shul in a neighborhood it's like having a gas station nearby where you can refuel. That's nice. If, in that Shul, they learn a few Mishnayos between Mincha and Maariv, then it's like there is gas station that offers a 20 minute lube job. If there is a learned Rabbi who knows how to answer Hallachic questions, then it's like a gas station with a sign "mechanic on premises". Some cars can be repaired and get an even longer life with each of these features.

However, where there is a Yeshiva, a Torah learning center, and there are scholars that are learning and teaching and students that are learning with excellence, then it's like living in one of those cities that produces new cars. Every graduating class of boys and girls mean brand new cars rolling off the proverbial assembly line. With fresh enthusiasm new generations are launched. Cottage industries arise like Kashrus, Mikvos, Shuls, and more Yeshivos to service all ages and interests in Torah. The city comes alive with blessedness!

Those cities that not only survived but have thrived over many decades here in America had this reservoir of living waters that was created by the study of Torah. This catalyzes life and it continues to produce the blessing.



To: parsha@groups.io
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BS"D

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Two Kosher Signs

But this you shall not eat from among those that bring up their cud or have a completely separated split hoof the camel, the hare and the hyrax, for they bring up their cud, but their hoof is not split - they are unclean to you. And the pig, for it has a split hoof but not the cud - it is unclean to you. (Reeh 14:7,8)

Among the many mitzvos that are repeated in Chumash Devariin (Mishneh Torah) are the guidelines for identifying which animals are permitted to be eaten. The Torah gives two identifying characteristics of kosher animals - they chew their cud and have completely separated split hooves. Any animal that does not have these two features is forbidden.

The overwhelming majority of animals on earth have none of these characteristics. In the entire Creation, only four animals have one kosher sign. The Torah lists them - the camel, hare and hyrax, which chew their cud and the pig which has split hooves.

The Alter of Kelm notes this as a proof of the Divine origin of the Torah. No human author would dare to declare publicly that there are only four animals in the world with but one kosher sign. By doing so, he would open himself up to refutation and ridicule if other animals with one kosher sign would later be discovered in some distant part of the globe. Only the One who created the world, and knows exactly what He created can make such an unequivocal statement.

The Kli Yakar comments homiletically on the Torah's description of these four unique animals. Why does the Torah begin by first noting their one

kosher sign? If they are indeed not kosher because they lack a kosher sign, shouldn't that be stressed first in the pasuk? He explains by saying that the fact that these animals have one kosher sign makes their non kosher status worse, so to speak.

He mentions the Midrash (Vayikra Rabba, end of ch. 13) which compares Esau and his Edomite descendants to a pig. A pig lies on the ground and displays its cloven hooves, as if to delude people into thinking that it is indeed kosher. In fact, this is the source of the Yiddish expression "Chazer-fissel kosher" (pig's foot) which is used to describe hypocritical people who present themselves as paragons of virtue, but in reality are very far from righteous behavior.'

The Kli Yakar says that the stress of the Torah on the kosher sign of these non-kosher animals is a parallel to two-faced people who deceive others with their acts of piety while camouflaging their inner wickedness. This makes them more dangerous than those who openly embrace sin.

In the Talmud (Shabbos 105b) we find the expression Adam Kasher an upright (lit. kosher) person. This denotes someone who has two "kosher signs," so to speak. He is "good to Heaven and good to people," meaning that he performs the mitzvos "between man and man" in the same manner that he performs the mitzvos "between man and G-d."

There are some people who go to great lengths to fulfill the mitzvos "between man and G-d." They spare no expense to buy the most mehudar (beautiful) tefillin. They spend days looking for the most beautiful esrog. They pray with great intensity and devotion and their Shemoneh Esrai is extended. While this is certainly meritorious, it is their conduct concerning mitzvos between man and man that is sorely lacking. They have no qualms about destroying the reputation of a business competitor. They angrily refuse a call to come to the aid of a neighbor in need. Their Shalom Bayis leaves much to be desired. Thus, the fact that they have one "kosher sign," (i.e. their devotion to performing mitzvos "between man and G-d") only serves to highlight their lacking a second "kosher sign", (i.e. their failure to do mitzvos "between man and man").

This shortcoming is infinitely worse when displayed by a Jew with one "kosher sign" than it is by a Jew with none. One does not automatically expect exemplary ethical behavior from someone who is not a Torah Jew. His lack of proper conduct is taken in stride. In fact, his deficiency can serve as an example to others displaying what happens when a Jew's life is not inextricably bound to the Torah.

On the other hand, a person who is conscientious of his Torah obligations to Heaven and yet acts improperly in his interpersonal relationships is undermining the Torah itself. People will say, "Why should we aspire to a holy Torah life if this is what happens to a person who learns Torah and performs mitzvos?"

The Talmud Shabbos (31a) tells of the Gentile who came to the great nasi, Hillel and agreed to convert if he could be taught the whole Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel replied that the entire Torah can be encapsulated into one phrase, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man." Basing it on the pasuk in Vayikra (19:18), Love your neighbor as yourself, Hillel said, "This is the entire Torah. The rest is but an elaboration. Go and learn it."

The commentators are puzzled by Hillel's statement. It is a summary of all the mitzvos "between man and man". But where is there a reference to the mitzvos "between man and G-d"? Thus, when one completely fulfills his interpersonal obligations as required by the Torah, it shows that his G-dly obligations are being fulfilled as well.

The question that comes to mind on this is that we see honest. Jews who are polite and well-mannered, considerate, generous and honest. How can this be, if they obviously don't perform mitzvos "between man and G-d"? The explanation of this that their meritorious conduct is only exhibited under normal conditions. At times of stress, pain and anxiety their true personality shortcomings emerge. They will explode in anger and act in a selfish and cruel manner. The nations of the world have yet to produce a Chofetz Chaim - a person who was a paragon of ethical conduct under even the most trying

circumstances. such purity of spirit is only possible when it is motivated by a total halves to the mitzvos "between man and G-d." Thus, the two halves of mitzvah observance - between "man and man" and "ma and G-d", are inextricably tied together.

This is the underlying message of the Kli Yakar. One must strive to be an Adam Kasher, to excel in both kosher signs. This is especially relevant to B'nei Torah who spend their life in the intricacies of Halacha. They expend great energy and cost in trying to fulfill every nuance of a mitzvah, including the minhagim and chumras (stringencies) of the mitzvos and G-d." They go well beyond the letter of the law. Shouldn't their stringencies be equally applicable to the mitzvos "between man and man?"

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RABBI AVROHOM YAAKOV PAM (1913-2001)

Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Pam was a great Talmudic scholar, and the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn, New York.

Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Pam was born in Vidz, a small village in Lithuania. His father, Rabbi Meir, was an exceptional Torah scholar. Rabbi Pam would tell his family and students that his father almost never went to bed. He would learn until he dozed off from fatigue, and would wake up in the middle of the night and return to his studies. His mother was a learned and pious woman. Rabbi Pam would say about her that since she was incapable of seeing bad in people, she never could speak ill of anyone. She was also fluent in the entire Tanach and was expert at using its lessons to comfort the downtrodden.

Rabbi Meir Pam first learned in Knesses Bais Yitzchak, and later in the Chofetz Chaim's Kollel Kodoshim, where two of his colleagues were Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman and Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, the future Ponevitzer Rav. Rabbi Kahaneman later was the Rabbi of Vidz for a while, and invited Reb Meir to give lectures in the yeshiva there. In 1927, Rabbi Meir Pam came to the United States. After securing positions as a Talmud lecturer in Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin and as rabbi of the Beis Medrash Hagadol in Brownsville. He then brought over his family. .

When Rabbi Avrohom Pam was 11 years old, his parents sent him away from home to a yeshiva. There was a time when he slept on a bench in the local shul, but nothing deterred him from learning as long and intensely as he could. He was part of a special group of youngsters in Slabodka, where he became a frequent Shabbos guest of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky. It was a warm relationship that was to be resumed many years later when Rabbi Kamenetzky became Rosh Yeshiva in Torah Vodaath.

When Rabbi Pam returned to America he became a student in Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn. He remained there for the rest of his life. Rabbi Pam's teaching career began at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas in 1938, when was appointed a Talmudic lecturer there. Holding various teaching positions at Torah Vodaas, Rabbi Pam spent over sixty years there, including even teaching mathematics, utilizing his degree from City College. For many years he delivered the semicha class to students studying toward rabbinic ordination. Rabbi Pam was totally unassuming; in his dress, his speech, as well as in his mannerisms. Rabbi Pam was a great Talmudic scholar, but he was famous for his humility and soft-spoken style. He was one of the great spiritual leaders of our generation and a member of the Council of Torah Sages of Agudath Israel.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha RE'EH 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Stripping away all the details that oftentimes clutter our lives, we can agree that the type of life that we live is pretty much dependent upon the choices that we make throughout our lifetimes. Often, these choices were made when we were yet young and immature. Nevertheless, we are forced to live by

those choices and decisions, that we may now, with greater life experience under our belts, regret.

Personal choices, professional and career choices, lifestyle choices all combine to make up our individual life stories. This week's Torah reading highlights the importance and consequences of choices that we make. Many times, we make serious choices when we are not in a serious mood. Many important choices are made flippantly, on the spur of the moment, or under the influence of others. Peer pressure is a fact of life, especially for the young, and often, when we allow others to make choices for us, at the end they are very detrimental to our well-being.

It is simply peer pressure that causes young people to take on unhealthy life habits – smoking is a prime example of this – and once the habit is ingrained within us, it is very difficult to break, and escape from its consequences. Life inflicts upon us, on a daily basis, the necessity of making decisions. What choices we do make become the expression of gift of free will that the Lord has endowed us with. Choices are, therefore, the highest form of human opportunity, as well as being the most dangerous and perilous of all the human traits.

The Torah, in this week's reading, presents us with the most basic choice that we can make – the stark choice between eternal life and death itself. At first glance, this choice is a relatively simple one to make. The life instinct within us, as human beings, is always present. However, we are witness to the fact that many times human beings make choices that are anti-life. There are many distractions that exist in this world, many illusory ideas and false prophets that somehow combine to dissuade us from choosing life. The Torah, therefore, encourages us and even warns us to choose life.

We acknowledge in our daily prayers that the Lord implanted within us an eternal soul which can sustain eternal life within us. We should not fritter away this most precious of gifts. Therefore, when we consider choices that exist before us regarding our behavior and attitudes, we should always judge the matter through the prism of a life and death choice. This makes even the most simple and apparent decisions that we make in life of great consequence and lasting importance.

In effect, there are no small choices, for they all have consequences and later effects that are unknown to us when we make the choice. Seeing these decisions that way may grant us life. It will enable us to choose wisely and carefully, and to allow our good instincts and fundamental human intelligence to control our emotions and desires and help us make correct life choices.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

from: torahweb@torahweb.org

to: weeklydt@torahweb.org

date: Aug 5, 2021, 11:51 AM

subject: **Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - A Different Kind of Outreach**

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

A Different Kind of Outreach

Among the fifty-five mitzvos found in Parshas Re'eh, the Sefer Hachinuch counts the mitzvah of tzedakah as containing both a negative and positive mitzvah. The restriction is not to harden one's heart in response to the request of the needy, and the positive mitzvah is to give tzedakah in accordance with one's ability.

It is fascinating to note that the Chinuch (#479) begins his discussion of the mitzvah of tzedakah by defining the mitzvah as to give "b'simcha u'v'tuv levav - With happiness and a glad heart." It is understandable that the mitzvah of Vesamachta Bechagecha (#488, also found in this parsha) requires that one be in a happy and joyous state of being during the Shalosh Regalim. Why, however, does the Chinuch require the emotional element of simcha to accompany the mitzvah of tzedakah? He does not instruct us to affix a mezuzah nor to don one's tefillin b'simcha; what is special about this mitzvah that must be done b'simcha? I'd like to suggest two answers to this question.

The first answer is based on the Gemara (Bava Basra 10a) where Turnas Rufus asked R' Akiva, if Hashem loves the poor of Israel, why does He not provide for them Himself? R' Akiva answered that Hashem ordained the mitzvah of tzedakah to save the wealthy from "dino shel Gehinom", that they be rewarded and not punished in the world to come. Commenting on this Gemara, the Alter of Kelm taught that it is not the giving of the tzedakah per se that saves the donor, but rather the manner in which he gives, namely fulfilling that which the Torah prescribes "Lo yerah l'avicha bisitcha lo" - one is not to feel bad and resentful when giving tzedakah. It is, says the Alter, the attainment of "v'avanta l'recha kamocha", feeling the plight of the other, i.e. not only giving him money but uplifting his spirit, which saves the donor from Gehinom. Therefore, he must give "b'simcha u'v'tuv levav", to attain the necessary emotional and uplifting manner in which the mitzvah is performed.

Our second answer is a lesson from Shemos (22:24) where the Torah teaches that we should lend money to, "es heani imach", which literally means "to the poor person who is with you."

According to the Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh, the Torah is teaching the donor that what appears to be a magnanimous manifestation of generosity on his part, is, in reality, simply giving the poor and needy what is rightfully theirs. How so? Hashem orchestrates society such that (Devarim 15:11), "destitute people will not cease to exist within the land", and He blesses and endows others with more than they need, thereby enabling them to give to the poor what is rightfully theirs. If one truly appreciates the privilege of being chosen to be a giver, then he will be in a state of simcha and tuv lev, recognizing that Hashem has blessed him with the privilege of doing His work.

It is so sad, and indeed tragic, that often when a meshulach or needy individual comes to someone's door, a parent might instruct his children "tell them I am not home." This behavior is doubly misfortunate. Firstly, the parent is teaching that it is okay to lie. Secondly, the foolish parents do not realize that they are missing out on a golden opportunity. What could have been a positive opportunity to assist and enrich, both monetarily and emotionally, an individual, as well as adding dividends to their life insurance for their soul, was not only wasted, but unfortunately there was a violation of mitzvah 488, that of hardening one's heart in response to the request of tzedakah.

In addition, Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva 3:36) writes that it is possible for one to give charity to a needy individual, but if he does so in a cold and begrudging fashion, he has violated the prohibition of (15:7) "Lo sisametz es levavcha - You shall not harden your heart." Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 249:3) legislates that one is to give tzedakah "b'sever panim yafos" and "b'simcha u'v'tuv levav." The Gr"a attributes the source for this to the Avos D'rabi Nosson (13:4), "Havei mikabel es kol ha'adam b'sever panim yafos", which teaches us that we are to be cheerful and respectful not only to our friends and all other individuals we meet, but especially to the indigent and downtrodden of society.

This Sunday is Rosh Chodesh Elul. There are many acronyms which charge us to appreciate this month. The Megaleh Amukos, Rav Nosson Shapira, who was the Av Beis Din in Crakow and a great mekubal, ascribed the following acronym to Elul: Echad Ladin V'echad L'tzedakah. The Gemara (Chagiga 14a) understands a verse in Daniel (7:9) to mean that there are two thrones in Heaven. The Gemara understands the two thrones to be Echad Ladin V'echad L'tzedakah, meaning one throne is for Hashem to execute justice and the other is for tzedakah. Many attribute the recitation of Tehillim 47 - lam'natzeiach - on Rosh Hashana prior to the blowing of the shofar to be based upon the verse contained therein, "alah Elokim b'truah", meaning Hashem has ascended with the blast. "Alah Elokim b'truah" is understood by Vayikrah Rabbah (29) to mean that the blowing of the shofar accompanied by the repentance of the Jewish nation causes Hashem to arise from The Throne of Judgement and ascend The Throne of Mercy. May we use this acronym to remind us of the great opportunity we have especially in the month of Elul to give tzedakah in a manner of b'simcha u'v'tuv levav and thereby merit to be judged by Hashem b'tzedakah.

from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

Defining Reality (Re'eh 5781)

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

One of the gifts of great leaders, and one from which each of us can learn, is that they frame reality for the group. They define its situation. They specify its aims. They articulate its choices. They tell us where we are and where we are going in a way no satellite navigation system could. They show us the map and the destination, and help us see why we should choose this route not that. That is one of their most magisterial roles, and no one did it more powerfully than did Moses in the book of Deuteronomy.

Here is how he does it at the beginning of this week's parsha:

See, I am setting before you today the blessing and the curse—the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. (Deut. 11:26-28)

Here, in even more powerful words, is how Moses puts it later in the book:

See, I set before you today life and the good, death and the bad... I call Heaven and Earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore choose life, so you and your children may live. (Deut. 30:15, 19)

What Moses is doing here is defining reality for the next generation and for all generations. He is doing so as a preface to what is about to follow in the next many chapters, namely a systematic restatement of Jewish law covering all aspects of life for the new nation in its land.

Moses does not want the people to lose the big picture by being overwhelmed by the details. Jewish law with its 613 commands is detailed. It aims at the sanctification of all aspects of life, from daily ritual to the very structure of society and its institutions. Its aim is to shape a social world in which we turn even seemingly secular occasions into encounters with the Divine Presence. Despite the details, says Moses, the choice I set before you is really quite simple.

We, he tells the next generation, are unique. We are a small nation. We have not the numbers, the wealth, nor the sophisticated weaponry of the great empires. We are smaller even than many of our neighbouring nations. As of now we do not even have a land. But we are different, and that difference defines, once and for all, who we are and why. God has chosen to make us His stake in history. He set us free from slavery and took us as His own covenantal partner.

This is not because of our merits. "It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going in to take possession of their land." (Deut. 9:5) We are not more righteous than others, said Moses. It is because our ancestors – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah – were the first people to heed the call of the one God and follow Him, worshipping not nature but the Creator of nature, not power but justice and compassion, not hierarchy but a society of equal dignity that includes within its ambit of concern the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

Do not think, says Moses, that we can survive as a nation among nations, worshipping what they worship and living as they live. If we do, we will be subject to the universal law that has governed the fate of nations from the dawn of civilisation to today. Nations are born, they grow, they flourish; they become complacent, then corrupt, then divided, then defeated, then they die, to be remembered only in history books and museums. In the case of Israel, small and intensely vulnerable, that fate will happen sooner rather than later. That is what Moses calls "the curse."

The alternative is simple – even though it is demanding and detailed. It means taking God as our Sovereign, Judge of our deeds, Framer of our laws, Author of our liberty, Defender of our destiny, Object of our worship and our love. If we predicate our existence on something – some One – vastly greater than ourselves then we will be lifted higher than we could reach by

ourselves. But that demands total loyalty to God and His law. That is the only way we will avoid decay, decline and defeat.

There is nothing puritanical about this vision. Two of the key words of Deuteronomy are love and joy. The word “love” (the root a-h-v) appears twice in Exodus, twice in Leviticus, not all in Numbers, but 23 times in Deuteronomy. The word “joy” (with the root s-m-ch) appears only once in Genesis, once in Exodus, once in Leviticus, once in Numbers but twelve times in Deuteronomy. Moses does not hide the fact, though, that life under the covenant will be demanding. Neither love nor joy come on a social scale without codes of self-restraint and commitment to the common good.

Moses knows that people often think and act in short-term ways, preferring today’s pleasure to tomorrow’s happiness, personal advantage to the good of society as a whole. They do foolish things, individually and collectively. So throughout Devarim he insists time and again that the road to long-term flourishing – the ‘good,’ the ‘blessing,’ life itself – consists in making one simple choice: accept God as your Sovereign, do His will, and blessings will follow. If not, sooner or later you will be conquered and dispersed and you will suffer more than you can imagine. Thus Moses defined reality for the Israelites of his time and all time.

What has this to do with leadership? The answer is that the meaning of events is never self-evident. It is always subject to interpretation. Sometimes, out of folly or fear or failure of imagination, leaders get it wrong. Neville Chamberlain defined the challenge of the rise to power of Nazi Germany as the search for “peace in our time.” It took a Churchill to realise that this was wrong, and that the real challenge was the defence of liberty against tyranny. In Abraham Lincoln’s day there were any number of people for and against slavery but it took Lincoln to define the abolition of slavery as the necessary step to the preservation of the union. It was that larger vision that allowed him to say, in the Second Inaugural, “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds.”[1] He allowed neither abolition itself, nor the end of the Civil War, to be seen as a victory for one side over the other but instead defined it as a victory for the nation as a whole.

I explained in my book on religion and science, *The Great Partnership*,[2] that there is a difference between the cause of something and its meaning. The search for causes is the task of explanation. The search for meaning is the work of interpretation. Science can explain but it cannot interpret. Were the Ten Plagues in Egypt a natural sequence of events, or Divine punishment, or both? There is no scientific experiment that could resolve this question. Was the division of the Red Sea a Divine intervention in history or a freak easterly wind exposing a submerged and ancient riverbank? Was the Exodus an act of Divine liberation or a series of lucky coincidences that allowed a group of fugitive slaves to escape? When all the causal explanations have been given, the quality of miracle – an epoch-changing event in which we see the hand of God – remains. Culture is not nature. There are causes in nature, but only in culture are there meanings. Homo sapiens is uniquely the culture-creating, meaning-seeking animal, and this affects all we do.

Viktor Frankl used to emphasise that our lives are determined not by what happens to us but by how we respond to what happens to us – and how we respond depends on how we interpret events. Is this disaster the end of my world or is it life calling on me to exercise heroic strength so that I can survive and help others to survive? The same circumstances may be interpreted differently by two people, leading one to despair, the other to heroic endurance. The facts may be the same but the meanings are diametrically different. How we interpret the world affects how we respond to the world, and it is our responses that shape our lives, individually and collectively. That is why, in the famous words of Max De Pree, “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.”[3]

Within every family, every community, and every organisation, there are tests, trials and tribulations. Do these lead to arguments, blame and recrimination? Or does the group see them providentially, as a route to some

future good (a “descent that leads to an ascent” as the Lubavitcher Rebbe always used to say)? Does it work together to meet the challenge? Much, perhaps all, will depend on how the group defines its reality. This in turn will depend on the leadership or absence of leadership that it has had until now. Strong families and communities have a clear sense of what their ideals are, and they are not blown off-course by the winds of change.

No one did this more powerfully than Moses in the way he monumentally framed the choice: between good and bad, life and death, the blessing and the curse, following God on the one hand, or choosing the values of neighbouring civilisations on the other. That clarity is why the Hittites, Canaanites, Perizzites and Jebusites are no more, while the people of Israel still lives, despite an unparalleled history of circumstantial change. Who are we? Where are we? What are we trying to achieve and what kind of people do we aspire to be? These are the questions leaders help the group ask and answer, and when a group does so together it is blessed with exceptional resilience and strength.

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Parshas Re’eih includes the commandment that instructs us how to prepare our meat for our table (Devorim 12:15).

Hunting for Meat

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

Sheis, the son of Adom Harishon, was traveling one day and realized that he had not packed enough peanut butter sandwiches for the trip. Now hungry, he witnessed a travel accident, which resulted in an animal being killed. Was he permitted to cook the carcass for lunch?

Question #2:

Sheis’ descendant, Linda, lives in the modern era and is Jewish. While traveling in an unfamiliar area, she hunts for kosher meat, discovering some with an unfamiliar supervision, and calls her rabbi to ask whether he recommends it. What factors does he consider in advising her whether to use this product?

Question #3:

In a previous position, I was responsible for researching sources of meat that our local Vaad HaKashrus would accept. I traveled to many cities and visited many meat packing facilities. People have often asked why, sometimes, my hunt resulted in a new acceptable source, and why sometimes it did not. What was I looking for?

Before answering these questions, we need to understand what are the Torah’s requirements for allowable meat.

Upon Noah’s emerging from the teivah (the ark), Hashem speaks to Noah, notifying him that he and his descendants may now eat meat for the very first time. Prior to this time, no one had ever been permitted to sink his teeth into a steak or even a schnitzel (Sanhedrin 59b, based on Bereishis 1:29-30, 9:3; as interpreted by Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 9:1). In actuality, not all authorities agree that Adam and his pre-mabul descendants were required to be vegetarian – some maintain that they were permitted to eat the meat of animals that had already died, and were forbidden only to kill animals for meat (Rashi, Bereishis 1:29 and Sanhedrin 57a s.v. limishri basar; Tosafos, Sanhedrin 56b s.v. ahal). According to this last opinion, pre-Noach mankind may have eaten sushi, steak or schnitzel, provided that they did not take the animal’s life.

Thus, whether Sheis could barbecue the discovered road kill (Question #1 above) depends upon whether he held like Rashi, in which case he could, or like the Rambam, in which case he could not. According to the Rambam, he was restricted to a vegetarian diet, which included the responsibility to check that his veggies were insect-free. Presumably, he called the local Vaad HaKashrus to determine how to check each type of vegetable. I wonder what he did when he wanted to eat Brussels sprouts!

However, when Noah emerged from the teivah, he and his descendents were permitted to give up their vegetarian lifestyle, provided that they ate no meat that had been removed from an animal while it was still alive (eiver min hachai). Just think -- had Sheis lived after the time of Noah, he could have included some tuna sandwiches in his lunchbox or picked up a salami at the local grocery, instead of going hungry!

When the Torah was given, it both limited the species that a Jew may eat and created many other regulations, including that kosher meat and poultry must be slaughtered in the halachically-approved way (shechitah), and may be eaten only if they are without certain defects that render them tereifah. Even after ascertaining that the animal, itself, may be eaten, one must still remove the blood, certain fats called cheilev, and the sciatic nerve (the gid hanasheh). These last two prohibitions do not apply to fowl.

In the contemporary world, guaranteeing that one's meat is appropriate for the Jewish table involves several trained and G-d-fearing people, including shochatim, bod'kim, menakerim, mashgichim, and knowledgeable rabbonim to oversee the entire process.

THE SHOCHET'S JOB

Aside from the shochet's obvious responsibility to slaughter the animal the way Hashem commanded, he must also fulfill another very important task: following the slaughtering, he must verify that he performed the shechitah correctly. This is a vitally important step; without this inspection, the animal or bird must be considered non-kosher – it will be acceptable for the table of Bnei Noach, but not for Klal Yisroel.

Next, the animal or bird is examined to ensure that it is not tereifah. Although common use of the word "treif" means something that is non-kosher, for any reason whatsoever, the technical meaning of the word refers to an animal with a physical defect that renders it non-kosher, even if it was the beneficiary of a proper shechitah.

THE BODEIK

In a meat packing plant (beef, veal or lamb), the individual accountable to check for these defects is called a bodeik (pl. bod'kim). Most bod'kim are trained shochatim, and, indeed, in most plants, the bod'kim and shochatim rotate their tasks, thus making it easier for them to be as attentive as the post requires. As a result, a person licensed both as a shochet and as a bodeik is usually called a shochet, although, technically, he should be called a shochet ubodeik, to truly reflect the extent of his training.

THE SECOND BODEIK

The responsibility to check for tereifos is divided between two bod'kim. The first, the bodeik penim, checks the lungs in situ, which is the only way one can properly check that the lungs do not adhere to the ribs, to the membrane surrounding the heart (the pericardium), or to themselves in an improper way, all of which render the animal non-kosher. This checking is performed completely based on feel. The bodeik gently inserts his hand, and runs his fingers carefully over all eight sections of the lung, to see if he feels any adhesion between the lung and one of the other areas.

The second bodeik, the bodeik chutz, rechecks the lungs and makes a cursory check of other organs, upon their removal from the carcass, particularly the stomachs and intestines, for swallowed nails and for various imperfections that render the animal non-kosher.

After the two bod'kim are satisfied that the animal is kosher, the second bodeik or a mashgiach tags the different parts of the animal as kosher with lead or plastic seals. Longstanding practice is that, in addition, the bodeik or a mashgiach makes small slits between the ribs that identify the day and parsha of the week, to mark the piece as kosher. A mark made when the meat is this fresh appears completely different from one made even a few hours later, making it difficult to counterfeit. Of course, this mark is not, alone, used to verify that the meat is kosher, but it is an essential crosscheck, since the old-styled tags can be tampered with.

The modern kosher poultry plant is organized slightly differently: The shochatim perform shechitah only, whereas the bedikah inspection is performed by mashgichim trained to notice abnormalities. If they notice any, they remove the bird from the production line; a rav or bodeik then rules whether these birds are kosher.

For both animals and birds, one needs to check only for commonly occurring tereifos, but not for uncommon problems. For example, the established halachic practice of over a thousand years is to check an animal's lungs, because of their high rate of tereifos, and today it is common practice in Israel to check legs. Animal lungs frequently have adhesions called sirchos, which render them non-kosher (Chullin 46b), although Ashkenazic custom is that easily removed adhesions on mature cattle do not render them treif (Rosh, Chullin 3:14; Rema, Yoreh Deah 39:13). An animal without any sircha adhesions is called glatt kosher, meaning that its lung is completely smooth – that is, without any adhesions, even of the easily removable variety.

The rav hamachshir's responsibilities include deciding which problems are prevalent enough to require scrutiny and what is considered an adequate method of inspection. Depending on the factory, the next steps in the preparation of beef, veal or lamb are occasionally performed in the same facility where the shechitah was performed, or alternatively, they are performed at the butcher shop.

TRABERING

Prior to soaking and salting meat to remove the blood, certain non-kosher parts of the animal, including the gid hanasheh (the sciatic nerve), non-kosher fats called "cheilev," and certain large blood vessels, must be removed (Yoreh Deah 65:1). The Hebrew word for this process is "nikur," excising, and the artisan who possesses the skill to properly perform it is called a menakeir (pl. menak'rim). The Yiddish word for this process is traberem, which derives from tarba, the Aramaic word for cheilev, the non-kosher fat. This step is omitted in the production of poultry, since it is exempt from the prohibitions of gid hanasheh and cheilev, and its blood vessels are small enough that it is sufficient to puncture them prior to the soaking and salting procedures.

Early in its butchering, a side of beef (which is half its carcass) is divided into its forequarter and hindquarter. Since the gid hanasheh and most of the cheilev are located

in the hindquarter, traberem is a tedious process that requires a highly skilled menakeir. (On RabbiKaganoff.com, there is an article on the history and halachic issues germane to this practice.) The forequarters must still be traberem prior to soaking and salting, to remove blood vessels and some fat (Rema, Yoreh Deah 64:1; Pischei Teshuvah 64:3). Although traberem is a relatively easy skill to learn, Linda's rabbi might need to check whether the hechsher can be trusted that this was done properly, as the following story indicates.

I once investigated the kashrus of a certain well-known resort hotel, one not usually frequented by frum clientele. I called the hotel and asked who provided their hechsher, and was soon on the telephone with both the resident mashgiach and the rav hamachshir.

I began by introducing myself and the reason for my phone call, and then asked about the sources of the meat used in the hotel. In the course of the conversation, it became evident that neither the rabbi nor the mashgiach knew the slightest thing about traberem, although they were officially overseeing a staff of in-house butchers, none of whom was an observant Jew. I realized that the rather poor kashrus reputation of this establishment was, indeed, well deserved. The rabbi overseeing the hechsher, himself, did not know traberem, nor did he have any halachically reliable supervisor. What was he overseeing?

SOAKING AND SALTING

Returning to our brief overview of the proper preparations for kosher meat: After the meat has been properly traberem, it is ready to be soaked and salted to remove its blood. In earlier generations, this process, usually called kashering meat, was performed exclusively at home, but today, common practice is that this is performed either by the butcher or at the meat packer. Almost all kosher poultry operations today soak and salt the meat immediately after shechitah, and it is becoming increasingly more common in beef operations.

To kasher meat, it should be rinsed well, soaked in water for half an hour, drained, salted for an hour, and then rinsed three times (Rema, Yoreh Deah 69:1, 5, 7). The halacha requires that the meat be covered with salt on all exposed surfaces (Yoreh Deah 69:4). Most packing plants do this job appropriately, although I have seen places where the salting was inadequate; entire areas of the meat were not salted. This is, probably, simple negligence; although when I called this problem to the attention of the mashgiach, he insisted that it was performed adequately, notwithstanding my observing the contrary. Needless to say, I did not approve this source.

WASHED MEAT

The Geonim instituted a requirement that meat be soaked and salted within 72 hours of its slaughter (Yoreh Deah 69:12). This is because of concern that once 72 hours have passed, the blood becomes hardened inside the meat, and salting no longer removes it. If more than 72 hours passed without the meat being salted, the Geonim ruled that if the meat is broiled, it may be eaten, since this process will still remove the blood, even though salting will not (Yoreh Deah 69:12).

A question that developed with time was whether wetting the meat prevents the blood from hardening inside. Some early authorities permitted soaking meat to extend the 72-hour period (Shach 69:53). However, this leniency often led to highly liberal interpretations. I have seen butchers take a damp rag and wipe the outside of the meat and considered it washed. Thus, there are two different reasons why most reliable kashrus operations do not allow the use of "washed meat," either because they do not accept this leniency, altogether, or because of concern that once one accepts hosed meat, it becomes difficult to control what type of washing is acceptable.

THE RAV HAMACHSHIR

Thus far, I have described the tremendous responsibilities of most of the staff necessary to guarantee that the meat is of the highest kashrus standards. One person that I have not adequately discussed is the rav hamachshir, the supervising rabbi, who has the final say on the kashrus standards that the meat packer and butcher follow. Although a rav overseeing meat kashrus does not necessarily have to be a shochet or trained menakeir himself, he certainly must be proficient in all of these areas, both in terms of thorough knowledge of halacha and in terms of practical experience. For most of Jewish history, the most basic requirement of every rav demanded that he be proficient in all the halachos of kosher meat production. As the local rav, his responsibility included all shechitah and bedikah in his town.

However, in the contemporary world of mass production and shipping, the local shul rav is rarely involved in the details of shechitah, and often has limited experience and training in these areas. Depending on the semicha program he attended, he may not have been required to study the laws of shechitah and tereifos. Thus, what was once the province of every rav has now become a specialty area, and, sometimes, rabbonim involved in the giving of meat hechsherim lack the proper training.

I was once given a tour of a meat packing plant by the supervising rabbi of the plant. During the course of the tour, I became painfully aware of the rabbi's incompetence in this area of kashrus. For example, he was clearly unaware of how to check shechitah

knives properly, certainly a basic skill necessary to oversee this type of hechsher. Would you approve this meat supplier for your local Vaad HaKashrus?

At this point, I want to address the third question I raised above: Sometimes, my visit to a meat packer resulted in a new, acceptable source, and sometimes it did not. What was I looking for, and why would I disapprove a source that a different rav was approving?

The answers to these questions are sometimes subjective, but I will provide you with some observations of mine.

IS THE SYSTEM WORKABLE?

There are many subtle and not-so-subtle observations that a rav makes when examining a meat packer. I could not possibly list in one article all the types of problems I have seen, but I will mention certain specific concerns to which I would always be attentive.

Is the production line too quick for the shocheit or mashgiach to do his job properly?

Are the shochatim or mashgichim expected to perform their job in an unrealistic manner, either because of a shortage of trained manpower or because of the speed or organization of the production line?

QUALITY OF PERSONNEL

Are the shochatim knowledgeable? Do they appear to be G-d fearing individuals? Although it is impossible to know whether someone is, indeed, a yarei shamayim, it is unfortunately often very obvious that he is not. It can happen that one rav has questions about the staff, and for this reason, he does not approve a source of supply.

I will give you an example of this. While visiting a plant to determine whether we should allow this shechitah, we heard a conversation in which one of the shochatim showed a shortcoming in tzeniyyus within his family. Although one could point to a specific law that disqualifies him as a shocheit, I, personally, was uncomfortable with entrusting him with decisions that would affect what I eat. After discussion with the other rabbonim in our community, we decided not to accept meat from this shechitah.

Does this mean that we considered this meat non-kosher? G-d forbid. It simply means that we were uncomfortable allowing it, and decided that we have that responsibility as rabbonim of our community.

Thus, it could indeed happen that what one rav considers acceptable, another rav feels is not. The differences may be based on the interpretation of halacha, or they may result from a rav's inclination as to how a plant should be run.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above information, we can better understand many aspects of the preparation of kosher meat and why it is important to use only meat that has a proper hechsher. We can also gain a greater appreciation of how hard rabbonim and shochatim work to maintain a high kashrus standard. Now that we recognize the complexity involved in maintaining kosher meat standards, we should always hope and pray that the food we eat fulfills all the halachos that the Torah commands us.

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ask Rav Aviner: toratravaviner@yahoo.com

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Learning Maran Ha-Rav Kook in High School

Q: Is it appropriate for boys and girls to learning the writings of Maran Ha-Rav Kook in high school?

A: Selected portions.

Tip for Poor Service

Q: Do I still have to give a tip if someone provides poor service at a restaurant?

A: A small one.

Expulsion from Meiron

Q: Is the claim true that last year the Rashbi did not allow us to visit him on Lag Be-Omer, and this year he expelled us?

A: No.

Calling Mom

Q: When I go out late at night, my mother asks me to check in, and sometimes it wakes her up. Is it permissible to do so from the perspective of honoring parents?

A: Yes. A person's desire is his honor. See Tosafot in Kiddush 31b quoting the Yerushalami regarding Rabbi Tarfon's mother.

Treif Cooking Show

Q: Is it permissible to watch a cooking show where they prepare Treif food?

A: Yes, on condition they are non-Jews.

Unproven Stories about Rishonim

Q: Is it true that Rashi's daughters put on Tefillin?

A: There is no source for this, not among Rashi's descendants or his students.

Q: Did the Ramban's son convert to Christianity?

A: It is mentioned in a few books, but it never happened.

Q: Is the book Shut Besamin Rosh from the Rosh?

A: No. None of it is from the Rosh. An enlightened Jew from Berlin wrote it.

Q: Is the story about Maharam Mi-Rottenburg in jail reliable?

A: It is brought in Yam Shel Shlomo, but there is no earlier source for it. It could be that an inaccurate story reached him.

Reserve Duty in Tzahal

Q: Should I perform reserve duty in Tzahal if it is difficult for my wife?

A: Certainly. Reserve duty is a Mitzvah, an obligation, and a great merit.

Call from Another Phone Number

Q: If someone refuses to answer my telephone call, can I call from another person's telephone, or is it Genivat Da'at (deceit)?

A: It is certainly forbidden. But you can ask your friend to call in your name.

Arab who Raises Palestinian Flag

Q: If I see an Arab raising a Palestinian flag, should I physically confront him in order to show that we are the sovereign authority here?

A: No. 1. Do not lower yourself to his level. 2. He knows full well that we are the sovereign authority here, and feels great shame, and therefore is involved with childish nonsense.

Mitzvah of Shalom Bayit

Q: If Shalom Bayit is so important, why doesn't the Torah make more mention of it?

A: It is the pinnacle of "Love your fellow as yourself".

Son in Father's Class

Q: Can a son be a student in his father's class?

A: It is sometimes a blessing and sometimes a curse. Each class must be decided on its own. If there is a doubt, one should be strict and refrain from doing so.

Returning Corpses of Fallen Tzahal Soldiers

Q: What Mitzvah is there in returning corpses of fallen Tzahal soldiers from Gaza? Redeeming captives?

A: No, it is the Mitzvah of honoring the deceased.

from: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com>

subject: Rabbi Reisman's Chumash Shiur - Audio and Print Version

Rabbi Reisman – Parshas Re'eh 5781

Topic – A Really Wonderful Dvar Torah on the Parsha

We have the Mitzvah of giving Tzedaka as is found in 15:10 (וְתָתַן תְּתִין לוֹ). It says (וְלֹא-יֵרַע לְבָבְךָ בְּתַתָּהּ לוֹ). Don't feel bad and don't act sad when you give Tzedaka. (וְלֹא-יֵרַע לְבָבְךָ בְּתַתָּהּ לוֹ: כִּי בְגִלְלֵי הַדָּבָר הִנֵּה, יִבְרָכְךָ יְיָ, וְיִרְוּךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ). Because when you give Tzedaka you get blessing. (בְּכֵל-מַעֲשֶׂה, וּבְכֵל מִשְׁלַח יָדָךְ). You get blessing from giving Tzedaka.

The Hafla'a is quoted by the Tchebner Rav as having said the following. The Hafla'a said that all of the Berochos of Schar of wealth that come from giving Tzedaka only come if you give B'saveir Panim Yafos, if you give together with a Chizuk to the person taking the Tzedaka, a smile to the person. So the Posuk says (וְלֹא-יֵרַע לְבָבְךָ בְּתַתָּהּ לוֹ). Don't give in a sad way. Why? (כִּי בְגִלְלֵי הַדָּבָר הִנֵּה). (הַדָּבָר הִנֵּה). The Sifri says and it is quoted here in the Hameik Davar on the Posuk. The Sifri says (הַדָּבָר הִנֵּה) is Hadibur Hazeh. (כִּי יִבְרָכְךָ יְיָ, וְיִרְוּךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ), the way you talk when you give Tzedaka. (בְּכֵל-מַעֲשֶׂה). Then you get the blessings. (יִבְרָכְךָ). The Sifri as a matter of fact says even if you don't give the Ani any money, just (הַדָּבָר הִנֵּה) you speak to him and you give him Chizuk (יִבְרָכְךָ יְיָ, וְיִרְוּךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ). So the Yesod is that all of

the Schar for Tzedaka that is promised is when a person gives it B'saiveir Panim Yafos, in a happy way. In a way that he feels privileged to give it.

With this, the Hafla'a answers a Kasha of the Rishonim in Bava Basra 8. The Halacha is Kofin Alav Tzedaka. Batei Dinim used to compel (force) people to give Tzedaka. Tosafos asks we have a rule that any Mitzvah that the Torah spells out Schar it is a Mitzvah that we are not Kof'e, we do not force people to do. By Tzedaka the Torah spells out the Schar for giving Tzedaka. So Freigt Tosafos why do we compel, why do we force, why are we Kofin Alav Tzedaka?

Enfert the Hafla'a, beautiful. He says the Schar is for someone who gives happily, someone who gives happily we don't force him, he is giving happily. This fellow who needs to be forced to give Tzedaka, for him there is no Mattan Sechara B'tzida. It doesn't say the Schar that a person is going to get. For him we are Kof'e him, we force him.

I saw from Rav Shternbuch that he adds. The Gemara says in Rosh Hashana 4a (8 lines from the top) that if someone gives Tzedaka Al Menas She'yich'ye B'ni, Harei Zeh Tzaddik Gamur (האומר סלע זו לצדקה בשביל (שיחיו בני ובשביל שאזכה בה לחיי העולם הבא הרי זה צדיק גמור). He gives Tzedaka and in the Zechus of the Tzedaka he should have a Refuah for a child or long life for a child, Harei Zeh Tzaddik Gamur. Why Tzaddik Gamur? If you give not Al Menas She'yich'ye B'ni it is also Tzaddik Gamur.

Zagt Rav Shternbuch according to the Hafla'a it is beautiful. When you go to an Ani and you give him Tzedaka he feels bad that he has to take. But if you tell him I need this Zechus, I want that in the Zechus of the fact that I am helping you that Al Menas She'yich'ye B'ni, I need that my child should have a Refuah Sh'leimah. So if you tell the Ani and the Ani feels that he is helping you and you tell the Ani Daven for me. If you give to an Ani from Eretz Yisrael, tell him you are lucky to be in Eretz Yisrael please Daven for my child. In that way you are giving it B'saiveir Panim Yafos, in a happy way.

People here from Eretz Yisrael Shlepp to America to raise money. It is not easy. It is difficult. Some of these men are 60, 70 or even older. It is hard for them, it is very difficult. It is sad that they have to do it. Really we should be traveling to Eretz Yisrael looking for the Aniyim. But when they come to your door, be Mekabeil them B'saiver Panim Yafos. And when they are sad that you can't give them a large amount of money say what I say to them. I always tell them Oy I wish I had a spare million dollars to give you, and they smile. Then I give them a drink and they go on their way. B'saiveir Panim Yafos.

I should remember to do it all of the time. When they come in and I am relaxed it is easy. When they come in and I am in middle of something it is not so easy. We have to remember that (כי בגלל הדבר הזה, יברכה ה'ך וירן אֶלְרִיךְ). And so, speaking to you from Artzeinu Hakedosha, the Ir Hakodesh, the Yeshiva Kedosha Ohr Sameiach. So many Kedushos I am Zoche to be standing in. HKB"H should help that I should absorb some of the Kedusha. It should give me an Aliyah and you too should be Zoche to come and have an Aliyah B'karov Mamash. A Gutten Shabbos to one and all!

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

date: Aug 5, 2021, 5:40 AM

subject: Torah Weekly - Parashat Re'eh

Parashat Re'eh

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem. When the nation enters Eretz Yisrael, they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there, but not to a private altar.

Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in Eretz Yisrael meat may be shechted anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of foods that may be eaten only in

Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying the ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added to or subtracted from it. If a so-called prophet tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot.

Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem and eaten there. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. Bnei Yisrael are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted, and then Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee Year. This Torah portion concludes with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

from: Rabbi Yochanan Zweig <genesis@torah.org>

to: rabbizweig@torah.org

date: Aug 4, 2021, 10:29 PM

subject: Rabbi Zweig on the Parsha - Restoring Dignity

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Eliyahu ben Moshe Aron Lefkowitz OBM by the Lefkowitz family.

"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Getting By Giving

You shall truly tithe... (14:22)

The Gemara (Taanis 9a) records a fascinating conversation between R' Yochanan and his young nephew. R' Yochanan asked his nephew, "Recite to me the Bible verse [you have learned today]." The latter replied, "You shall surely tithe." At the same time, his nephew asked, "What are the meaning of these words?" R' Yochanan answered, "Give tithes that you may be enriched."

The boy then asked, "How do you know this?" R' Yochanan replied: "Go test it [for yourself]." The boy thereupon asked, "Is it permissible to test the Holy One, blessed be He? Do we not have a verse (Devarim 6:16) that says, 'You shall not try the Lord?'" R' Yochanan replied, "Thus said R' Oshaia: The case of tithe-giving is excepted [from the prohibition], as it is said (Malachi 3:10), 'Bring the tithes unto the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and with this you may test me.'"

In other words, a person can literally test Hashem's promise to enrich those who give tzedakah. Even though the general rule is that one may not test the Almighty; the mitzvah of giving charity is exempted from this prohibition. Not only is it exempted, but Hashem actually encourages us to test Him by giving charity. Additionally, the Gemara (Pesachim 8a) states that if a person says, "I am giving this money in order that my son shall live," he is a complete tzaddik. Meaning that even though he is giving the money with an ulterior motive, it is a proper act of tzedakah and he is considered righteous. Why is the mitzvah of tzedakah an exemption to the prohibition of testing Hashem? Furthermore, there is a general rule laid down in Pirkei Avos (1:3) that says, "Do not be as a servant serving his master in order to receive reward." So, why is the mitzvah of tzedakah different?

Rashi (Vayikra 20:17) explains that the word chessed in Aramaic means shame. In prior editions of INSIGHTS it has been explained that Aramaic is the language of understanding another person's perspective. While a person may feel good about sharing his good fortune with others by giving tzedakah, one has to also consider the receiver's perspective. In other words, when a person has to accept chessed from someone there is a devastating feeling of embarrassment that he cannot take care of his own needs.

This is why we ask Hashem in bentching: “Do not cause us to come to need to rely on gifts or loans from others.” It is debilitating to one’s psyche to have to rely on the largesse of others for survival. Yet, we know that giving tzedakah and doing chessed are key components of one’s obligation to “follow in His ways.” So how do we reconcile this obligation with the pain being caused to the recipient of tzedakah?

This is the reason why Hashem created a system by which the person giving is monetarily enriched by his act of tzedakah. Just as a person would not be embarrassed to be paid for giving someone terrific investment advice, so too a person receiving tzedakah is providing the giver the opportunity to enrich themselves. In fact, it is better than ordinary investment advice; its success is actually guaranteed by the Almighty. Hashem, in his infinite wisdom, is removing the poor person’s shame in receiving tzedakah by enabling him to give back to the person giving the tzedakah. Perhaps this is why the word “nassan – to give” in Hebrew is a palindrome – a word that reads the same backwards and forward; because the giving goes in both directions.

The Tipping Point

And when you send him out free from you, you shall not let him go away empty handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, and out of your threshing floor, and out of your vineyard; of that with which Hashem your God has blessed you, you shall give to him (15:13-14).

The Torah charges us with giving a gift to our Jewish servants when they leave our service; the Hebrew word for this is “hanaka.” Rashi (ad loc) explains that this comes from the Hebrew word for adornment. Similarly, the word anak is used in scriptures to mean necklace (Shir Hashirim 4:9). In fact, giants are called anakim because they wear the sun around their neck like a necklace (Sotah 34b). Rashi on this verse explains that you have to give the freed slave something that makes it clear that you have given him a gift. Why are we obligated to give him a gift at all? He had already been paid in advance for all of his years of servitude, why does the Torah place an obligation to bestow him with a parting gift? In addition, this reference to a necklace indicates that he needs to leave our service bejeweled. But what does that really mean? He actually isn’t given jewelry – as the verses go on to explain, and further elucidated in the Talmud and Rambam (Hilchos Avadim 3:14) – he receives food and food related items. What is this reference to being bejeweled?

Did you ever wonder why when checking in at a hotel you tip the bell person and chambermaid, but not the person who checked you in? Or when shopping, you tip the person who carries your bags to the car, but not the cashier? When ordering food in a restaurant, you tip the waitress; but if you go to the counter and order, you do not tip the person at the register. Why? When do we instinctively give a tip and when do we not give one? In fact, what is the purpose of giving a tip?

The answer is, we give a tip when someone performs a personal service for us. In other words, these are all situations where we would physically be taking care of ourselves; carrying bags to a car or room, cleaning the room, bringing food to the table, etc. In all of these situations a person has demeaned themselves and acted in our service so that we didn’t have to. One could not check himself into a hotel or a flight – the hotel or airline has to check a person in – therefore no tip is warranted.

A tip is given to restore a person’s dignity. Giving a tip is a statement that we appreciate that someone else is doing something that we would otherwise do for ourselves. The very giving of the gift means that the person isn’t a servant, we have no right to expect the act of them, and we appreciate what they are doing for us.

But perhaps even more important is the lesson in what our attitude toward them should be: If we are obligated to restore someone’s dignity for their act of service, how much more so do we have to speak and relate to them in a kindly fashion during their act of service, and ensure that we do not further diminish their dignity.

That is why the Torah describes it as bejeweling a person even though no jewelry is involved. We want to make sure that the Jewish servant who is leaving our service has a measure of his dignity restored. Meaning, by

recognizing him as an individual he is now coming back into the community not as a servant, but as a respected member of society.

Did You Know...

This week’s parsha discusses the physical signs that distinguish between kosher animals and fish and their non-kosher counterparts. The section concludes with several halachos, including the prohibition of cooking meat with milk.

There’s a Gemara (Chullin 109b) that relates a fascinating principle: “Whatever the Merciful has forbidden he permitted something just like it.” This means that for every food that the Torah has prohibited, there’s another permissible food that tastes exactly like it. This, as explained by the Achronim, was provided by Hashem in order to teach us that the reason for prohibiting the food wasn’t because he wanted to deny us of its special taste. The Gemara continues and lists several of these examples:

- Blood is forbidden to be consumed, but eating an animal’s liver is fine. Rashi here explains that the liver is made up entirely of dried blood and tastes like blood. Aruch HaShulchan (Yoreh Deah 73:2) writes that we know we are allowed to eat the liver because the kohanim were permitted to eat it.
- Certain fats of domesticated animals we may not eat (ox, lamb, and goat), but the corresponding fats of undomesticated kosher animals (deer, etc.) we may eat.
- We are not allowed to eat pork, but we can eat the brains of the shibuta fish. Consequently, there have been many attempts to identify the shibuta fish, however the most likely match is the Iraqi fish (and remarkably named to this very day) “shabout,” a type of carp known today by its scientific name, *barbus grypus*.
- He forbade girusa, a non-kosher bird species, but allowed fish tongue. Tosafos (Moed Katan 11a), explains that not all fish tongues have this unique taste, but a specific species of fish does.
- Lastly, since Hashem forbade the consumption of milk and meat together, what is permitted is the cow’s udder, which contains the milk.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> via mailchimpapp.net

date: Aug 5, 2021, 1:41 AM

subject: **Rav Kook on Re'eih:** Private and Public Redemption
When Did the Exodus Occur?

At what time of day did the Jewish people leave Egypt? The Torah appears to contradict itself regarding the hour of the Exodus.

In Deut. 16:1 we read, “It was in the month of spring that the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt at night.” Clearly, the verse states that the Israelites departed in the night. However, the Torah previously stated in Num. 33:3 that they left during the daytime:

“On the day after the Passover sacrifice, the Israelites left triumphantly before the eyes of the Egyptians.”

So when did they leave — during the night, or in broad daylight, “before the eyes of the Egyptians”?

Two Stages of Redemption

The Talmud in Berachot 9a resolves this apparent contradiction by explaining that both verses are correct. The redemption began at night, but it was only completed the following morning.

After the plague of the first-born struck at midnight, Pharaoh went to Moses, pleading that the Israelites should immediately leave Egypt. At that point, the Hebrew slaves were free to depart. Officially, then, their servitude ended during the night.

However, God did not want His people to sneak away “like thieves in the night.” The Israelites were commanded to wait until daybreak before proudly quitting their Egyptian slavery. Thus, the de facto redemption occurred during the day.

Night and Day

Rav Kook explained that there is an intrinsic correlation between these two time periods — night and day — and the two stages of redemption.

The initial redemption at night was an inner freedom. Egyptian slavery was officially over, but their freedom was not yet realized in practical terms. The joy of independence, while great, was an inner joy. Their delight was not visible to others, and thus corresponded to the hidden part of the day — the night.

The second stage of redemption was the actual procession of the Jewish people out of Egypt. This was a public event, before the eyes of Egypt and the entire world. The consummation of their freedom took place at daybreak, emphasizing the public nature of their liberation from Egyptian bondage. As the sun shone, “the Israelites marched out triumphantly” (Ex. 14:18).

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 316-317. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 43-44)

from: **Peninim on the Torah** <peninim@hac1.org>

date: Aug 3, 2021, 11:52 AM

subject: Parashas Re'eh

It shall be when Hashem, your G-d, brings you to the Land to which you come to possess it, then you shall deliver the blessing on Har Gerizim and the curse on Har Eival. (11:29)

Home->Re'eh-> 5781

As the nation prepared to enter the Land, Hashem instructed them to initiate a new covenant upon entering Eretz Yisrael. One does not enter Eretz Yisrael unless he first prepares himself with the appropriate sense of submission born of awe. Kabbolas haTorah, receiving the Torah forty years earlier, carried them along their journey through the wilderness. A new generation was preparing to enter the Land. In the Plains of Moav this new generation also received an induction into kabbolas ol Malchus Shomayim, accepting upon themselves the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom. The covenant into which the nation was now entering was made in Eretz Yisrael, a land which demands humility on the part of the newcomer. As Eretz Yisrael is a holy land which Hashem has bequeathed to Am Yisrael, the people were to view the Land through eyes of deference and lowliness, because this Land is unlike any other, which is defined by its geographical locus. Eretz Yisrael is the parcel of land that Hashem designated to Avraham Avinu, the Patriarch, as the homeland for his descendants. It is the land in which the fulfillment of the Torah's mitzvos achieves its apex.

Interestingly, throughout Sefer Devarim, whenever living in Eretz Yisrael is underscored and reiterated, the word yerushah, inheritance (in various forms and conjugations), is used to refer to our relationship with the Land. This term presents an inconsistency with regards to Shevet Levi. The Torah writes: “You shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d – and the Levi who is in your cities, for he has no share and inheritance with you” (Ibid. 12:12).

Shevet Levi did not inherit a portion in Eretz Yisrael. Hashem is their portion. This in and of itself is a difficult concept to understand. One would think that he who devotes his life to spiritual service, to serving in the Bais HaMikdash as representatives of the nation, would, in fact, receive a portion in the Land. In his commentary to Devarim 10:9, Rashi explains that Shevet Levi was distinguished from the other tribes to serve in the Bais HaMikdash, thus not leaving them sufficient time to plow and seed, to fulfill the agricultural responsibilities that are part and parcel of land ownership. Shevet Levi received their portion from the people (without the necessary work involved in obtaining it). They received the finished product, so that they would be free to devote themselves fully to serving Hashem in the Bais HaMikdash. In conclusion, by right, Shevet Levi should have received a portion in the Land. They did not, due to their obligation to serve in the spiritual sphere, a service which does not allow for their involvement in the agricultural upkeep of the Land.

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, cites Rashi's comment to the initial pasuk of the Torah, “In the beginning of G-d's creating the heaven and the earth.” The Torah should have commenced its narrative with the first mitzvah that Klal Yisrael was enjoined prior to leaving Egypt. Why did it start with Bereishis? Koach Maasav Higeed l'Amo, lasseis lahem nachalas goyim; “The strength of His works He declared to His nation, to give them the heritage of the

peoples” (Tehillim 11:6). When the nations of the world confront us with the accusation that we are thieves who conquered/stole the land of Eretz Yisrael, which was inhabited by the seven pagan nations, we will contest that Hashem created the world, so that He had the right to give the land to whomever He pleased. What validity does such an accusation have? Nations are constantly at war, with one conquering the other, and to the victor go the spoils. Why would we need to respond to world opinion when, in fact, it is a commonplace occurrence that one nation conquers another? What was one nation's land yesterday is another nation's land today. Why pay even lip service to such a ludicrous accusation?

Rav Heyman explains that it is not the anti-Semitic diatribe of the nations of the world that is relevant, but rather, the accusations the angels that represent the gentile nations level in the Heavenly sphere. They would question our right to Eretz Yisrael based on our spiritual designation as a Mamleches kohanim v'goi kadosh, Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation. As such, we are all Kohanim/Leviim (or should be) and, by right, our designated “vocation” does not permit us to devote our time to the land. Proof positive was apparent during the nation's forty-year trek in the wilderness, during which Hashem fully sustained millions of men, women and children. The Jewish People might require a place to live, but why would they warrant a particular land assigned specifically to them?

This, explains Rav Heyman, is exactly what the sarei ha'umos, angels of the nations, would have claimed had the Torah not opened with Bereishis bara Elokim. Hashem created the world. It is His, and He gave it to whom He designated. After twenty generations of “pain” resulting from the negative, immoral behavior which Adam's and Noach's descendants perpetuated, Hashem selected Avraham Avinu to be His standard bearer in the world. He would initiate, teach and guide his descendants on the proper course of life – a life committed to Hashem and His precepts. As a result, Hashem promised him Eretz Yisrael, for only there could his descendants fulfill the Torah in its entirety. Veritably, the nation was in the wilderness for forty years, during which Hashem completely sustained them – no work; no plowing, harvesting or any form of agricultural endeavoring. This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience whose goal was to inculcate the nation with faith and trust in Hashem in preparation for their entrance into the Land and a life of material and physical laboring, under the aegis of, and commitment to, the Torah. Their wilderness experience was their hachsharah, training, for life in Eretz Yisrael which would, for all intents and purposes, appear to be teva, natural, but, in fact, could not be farther from the truth.

In conclusion, posits Rav Heyman, the purpose of inhabiting the Holy Land is to sanctify it with our mitzvah performance and for it to consecrate us through its holy essence. If we view Eretz Yisrael as our birthright and homeland, however, and that becomes the sole reason for our occupying it, we become no different than the nations of the world, who contend: “Why did you not select an uninhabited land to serve your nationalistic purposes?”

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Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT RE'AY

To our surprise, the city of Jerusalem (by that name) is never mentioned in Chumash. However, the underlying concept of that eternal city emerges as a major theme in Parshat Re'ay.

In the following shiur, we uncover the 'foundations of Jerusalem' in our study of the Torah's repeated use of the phrase: "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" [lit. the site that God will choose], and its thematic significance.

INTRODUCTION

When we speak of Jerusalem, we usually relate to either one of its two aspects:

- a) its geographic **location**
- b) its **function** as the national center of the Jewish Nation.

Even though Chumash never informs us in regard to its precise location, its function as a 'national center' for the Jewish Nation unfolds as a fundamental theme in Sefer Devarim.

To understand how and why, we must begin our shiur by returning to our analysis of the **CHUKIM & MISHPATIM** section of the main speech of Sefer Devarim.

Recall from our introductory shiur on Sefer Devarim that the main speech of Sefer Devarim (chaps. 5-26) discusses primarily the mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep when they enter the land (see 6:1), to establish themselves as an "am kadosh". This speech divides neatly into two distinct sections:

- I - "Ha'**MITZVA**" (6:4 - 11:31)
- II - "Ha'**CHUKIM** v'ha'**MISHPATIM** (12:1 - 26:19)

The **MITZVAH** section, we explained, contains primarily mitzvot and repeated reminders ("tochaychot") regarding the proper **attitude** towards God ("ahavat Hashem") e.g. 6:5, 10:12, 11:22), while the **CHUKIM & MISHPATIM** section contains the more **practical** laws that Bnei Yisrael must keep when setting up their nation in the Land.

These 'practical laws' begin in Parshat Re'ay (see 12:1) and continue all the way until the laws of "bikurim" in Parshat Ki-tavo (see 26:1-15). As this section is the Torah's largest corpus of laws, we should expect for its manner of presentation to be significant. As we shall now discuss in greater detail, the very first primary topic of this section just so happens to be "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem". Therefore, we begin our study with an analysis of how the Torah first presents these laws:

HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM

Let's read the opening psukim of the **CHUKIM & MISHPATIM** section, noting the progression of the commandments and the development of its main topic:

"**THESE** are the 'chukim & mishpatim' which you must observe in the **LAND WHICH HASHEM IS GIVING YOU...** :

* You must totally destroy all the sites where the nations worshiped their idols... on the high hills and mountains... you must **ERADICATE THEIR NAMES** from this place.

* **DO NOT WORSHIP YOUR GOD IN THIS MANNER** (in multiple places of worship/ read carefully!).

* Rather, at the **SITE WHICH GOD WILL CHOOSE** - **HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** - amongst all your tribes, - **LASUM ET SHMO SHAM**; -

"I'shichno ti'**DRSHU** u'ba'ta shama"

* **THERE** you must bring all of your offerings and tithes etc. Eat and rejoice there in front of your Lord...

* ... After you cross the Jordan and enter the Land and find rest from your enemies and enjoy security, then - **HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM L'SHAKEYN SHMO SHAM** - bring **THERE** everything I command...

* Be careful not to offer your sacrifices anywhere that you want, rather at **HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**, only **THERE** may you bring your offerings...
 (see 12:1-14)

Note that the first commandment - to destroy all places of idol worship in order to eradicate the **NAMES** of other gods from your land - serves as a 'pre-requisite' for the commandments that follow: to establish a central **SITE IN WHICH GOD'S NAME WILL DWELL**.

This obligation - to transform Eretz Canaan into a land in which God's Name (i.e. reputation) becomes known - emerges as the first topic of this section. This goal is accomplished not only by ridding the land of the names of **OTHER** gods (12:2-3), but also by establishing a national religious center - i.e. **HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM L'SHAKEYN SHMO SHAM** - a vehicle through which this goal can be realized.

In relation to the framework of the main speech, this opening commandment is quite appropriate, for Bnei Yisrael are about to enter and conquer the Promised Land in order to establish God's special nation. Therefore, it is significant that the opening commandment be to rid the land from the names of other gods, while establishing a site in which God's **NAME** will become known.

A RECURRING THEME

Not only is - **HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** - repeated several times in the opening "parshia" (i.e. chapter 12), this phrase is mentioned some **TWENTY** times throughout the entire **CHUKIM & MISHPATIM** section of the main speech (chapters 12-26)! As illustrated in the following table, not only is it the **FIRST** topic of this section, it also develops as a recurring theme.

The table below summarizes each mention of the phrase "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" together with its related topic:

PEREK/pasuk	TOPIC
=====	=====
12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26	The place to bring all "korbanot"
14:23, 24, 25	The place to eat "maaser sheni"
15:20	The place to eat "bchor b'heyema"
16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16	The site for "aliya l'regel" on the holidays
17:8, 10	The seat of the Supreme Court
18:6	The service of the Leviim
26:2	The place to bring one's 'first fruits'

A NATIONAL CENTER

A quick glance at this table immediately shows that the purpose of this site is not only to offer 'korbanot'; rather it emerges as a National Religious Center. These mitzvot in Sefer Devarim facilitate the establishment of this center, for in order to fulfill them, one must frequent this site on numerous occasions during the course of the year!

First and foremost, every individual is obligated to make a pilgrimage to the site on the three agricultural holidays ("aliyah l'regel" / chapter 16). Moreover, one is obligated to visit this site whenever he must offer a "korban" (be it "n'dava" or "chovah").

The farmer must bring there not only his first fruits ("bikurim"), but also 10% of his harvest to eat and share at this site ("maaser sheni"). Likewise, the shepherd must bring not only the first born animals ("bchor"), but also 10% of his entire flock ("maaser b'heyema")! Furthermore, the Supreme Court for all judicial and halachik judgment must be located at this site.

Thus, this site - **HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** - is much more than a location to bring "korbanot". It unfolds as the National Center of the Jewish people.

What is the purpose of this center? How should it function?

One could suggest that the establishment of this site would greatly facilitate the development of Am Yisrael as God's special nation. The establishment of this center, and the obligation of every individual to frequent this site, ensures the unity of the people and of the religion. Without such a center, within several generations it would be more likely that we would find twelve different religions rather than twelve tribes.

This center was to serve as a center not only for gathering and

offering "korbanot", but also for justice, judgment, Torah education, and culture - a site that would enhance the spirituality of each individual.

To prove this point, let's take a closer look at the mitzvah of "maaser sheni":

"You shall set aside every year a tenth of the yield of your field. And you should eat this tithe in the presence of your Lord "baMakom asher yivchar Hashem l'shakeyn shmo sham"... **IN ORDER THAT YOU LEARN TO FEAR GOD** forever..." (14:22)

The Torah commands us to tithe ten percent of our produce, and eat it (or share it) within the confines of that center - an act that we are told will teach us to fear God.

But why should simply 'eating food' at this site cause one to fear God? To understand why, we must conjecture as to how this site was to develop.

THE SITE / THE TEMPLE / AND JERUSALEM

Even though it is not explicitly stated, it is implicit that the Bet Ha'Mikdash [Temple] was to become the focal point of this national center - for the simple reason that Devarim commands us to bring our "korbanot" there. [These are obviously the same korbanot as described in Sefer Vayikra.]

However, "maaser sheni" itself is produce, and not an animal offering (i.e. it doesn't require a mizbayach). Nevertheless; the Torah demands that we eat this "maseh" at this site. This implies that there must be an additional area surrounding the Mikdash where this "maseh" can be eaten (which Halacha defines this as the area within the walls of the **CITY** that surrounds the Bet Ha'Mikdash - the same law that applies to eating the meat of the "korban shlamim".]

But when one eats his "maseh" within the walls of this city, other people will be there as well. Let's review who else should be in this special city on a daily basis. First of all, the Torah designates 'civil servants' who are to officiate and administer the Bet Ha'Mikdash - i.e. the "kohanim" and "leviim" - whose entire lives are dedicated to the service of God. There will also be the judges and scholars of the supreme court system, populating this 'holy city' surrounding the Temple, infusing it with an atmosphere of "kedusha" (sanctity).

Therefore, the experience of eating "maaser sheni" in this 'holy' city, mingling there with the kohanim, leviim, and Torah scholars, while sharing one's food together with family and the needy (see 14:25-27), would create an environment that enhances one's "yirat shamayim" - the fear of God.

Note how Chizkuni's interpretation of the pasuk re: "maseh sheni" reflects this same idea:

"...when you will go up [to this site] to eat your maseh sheni, you will see the priests officiating and the levites singing... and the Sanhedrin sitting in judgment and teaching laws..., and thus learn [from them] how to fear your God." (14:23, see also Seforno)

A PROOF FROM HAKHEL

This obligation to frequent **HAMAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** culminates every seven years with the "Hakhel" ceremony, where the entire nation - including the women and children - gather to hear the Torah at this very same site. Here, once again, we find "yirat Hashem" - the fear of God - as the primary purpose:

"... every seventh year... when all Israel gathers before Hashem "ba'Makom asher yivchar", you shall read this Torah (Sefer Dvarim) in the presence of all Israel. Gather ("hakhel") the people, men, women and children and the strangers, that they may hear and so learn **TO FEAR THE LORD** and to observe... Their children too ... shall hear and learn **TO FEAR GOD** as long as they live on the Land..." (see Devarim 31:10-13)

Not only do we find once again the site "hamakom asher yivchar Hashem", we also find the purpose of this gathering to instill the fear of God in those who gather. As you review the above psukim, note as well the similarities to Ma'amad Har Sinai. This beautifully supports Ramban's interpretation that the underlying purpose of the Mikdash was to perpetuate the Sinai experience (see Ramban on

Shmot 25:1 /and TSC shiur on Parshat Terumah).

To conclude our discussion of the 'function' of this site ["hamakom asher yivchar..."], we return to Torah's special use of the word "makom" in a very similar context in Sefer Breishit.

BACK TO SEFER BREISHIT

Review the story of Yaakov's dream at the beginning of Parshat Va'yetze (i.e. Breishit 28:10-22), noting not only the word ha'makom" (five times) but also its theme. At the conclusion of this episode, Yaakov vows that upon his return to this site ["ha'makom"], he will establish a Bet Elokim - a House for God. Here, we already find a thematic connection between the word "ha'makom" and the Mikdash.

Similarly, in the story of the "akeyda" (see Breishit chapter 22) the Torah uses the word "**makom**" to describe that site. [See 22:2,3,4,9,14.] Recall as well how Avraham Avinu names this "makom" - "Hashem yireh" (see 22:14), a site that Chazal later identify as the very same mountain where the Bet Ha'Mikdash was built in Yerushalayim. In fact, in Divrei Ha'yamim we are informed that Shlomo ha'melech built the Bet ha'Mikdash on Har ha'Moriah, the site of the "akeyda" (see II D.H. 3:1-3).

Even though it is not clear where Yaakov's dream took place, the Torah's use of the word "makom" in both stories, and their common theme certainly support Chazal's conclusion that both events happened at the same site (see Rashi 28:11), which later became the Bet ha'Mikdash in Yerushalayim.

HOLY GROUND OR HOLY PURPOSE

Our analysis thus far demonstrates how the Torah puts more emphasis on the 'function', than the location, of this site. In fact, the Torah appears to be rather evasive in regard to where this site is actually to be located (see below).

However, this very point may be very fundamental towards our understanding of Jerusalem. The site is special because of its function - to serve as a national center, to promote the reputation of God's Name ["shem Hashem"] among all mankind.

This emphasis is important, for man is very vulnerable towards focusing on the holiness of a site rather than the holiness of its purpose. [Sort of like dovening TO the "kotel" instead dovening AT the "kotel", or saying tehillim TO "kivrei tzadikim" instead of AT "kivrei tzadikim".]

For this reason, most all of the later prophets rebuke the people for misunderstanding the Temple in this manner. Take for example Yirmiyahu chapter 7 (in case you are not familiar, read 7:1-28, see also the first chapter of Yeshayahu). This rebuke does not imply that there is no value to holy sites. Precisely the opposite, the physical location is important for it provides a vehicle to promote its purpose. Yet, it always remains cardinal not to allow the holiness of the site to override the holiness of its purpose.

[For a nice perspective on the balance between these two ideas, see Tehillim 51. I realize that this is a 'touchy topic', so I'd rather you base your conclusions of David ha'Melech's explanation, rather than my own.]

JERUSALEM / SEEK AND FIND

As we have shown, Sefer Devarim never specifies the precise geographic location of where this site is to be, i.e. where the permanent Bet Ha'Mikdash is to be constructed. Instead, the site is consistently referred to as "the one which God will choose" ("HaMakom asher yivchar Hashem").

However, in Parshat Reay we do find a very obscure hint regarding how we are to find this site: "I'shichno ti'drshu, u'bata shama" - (see 12:5)

God will only show us the site if **WE** look for it. This 'hide and seek' type relationship is reflective of every Divine encounter. To find God, man must **SEARCH** for Him. According to these psukim in Parshat Re'ay, this principle applies to the nation in same manner as it applies to the individual. [As we say in the daily Ashrei: "karov Hashem l'chol kor'av" - God is close to those who call out to Him.]

When Am Yisrael as a nation, begins a serious search for God, then God will show them the proper location to build the Mikdash.

The generation of Yehoshua, despite their military conquests, did not succeed in establishing the permanent Mikdash (after conquering the Land). Instead, they erected the temporary Mishkan in Shilo. There it remained, quite neglected, during the entire time period of the Judges. After the city of Shilo was destroyed by the Philistim (during the time of Eli / see Shmuel chapters 4-6) both the Mishkan and the "aron" wandered from site to site. It was only during the time period of David ha'melech that Bnei Yisrael actively aspired to build the Mikdash.

For example, when David became king over all of Israel (see II Shmuel 5:1-9), his first act was to conquer the city of Jerusalem. His next project was to gather the nation in order to bring the "aron" (the holy ark) to his new capital city (see II Shmuel chapter 6). Note how Divrei ha'yamim describes how David explained his plan (and the reason) to the nation:

"David said to the entire congregation of Israel: If you approve, and this is from God (the events of David's rise to power), let us go forward and invite all our brethren in the land of Israel, together with the **KOHANIM** and **LEVIIM** and gather together, **IN ORDER TO BRING BACK** to us God's **HOLY ARK** - 'ki lo **DRASH'NU'HU** b'yimei Shaul' - for during the time of Shaul **WE DID NOT SEEK IT**" (I Divrei Hayamim 13:2-3)

[Note the use of the shresh "d.r.sh." here and in Devarim 12:5]

David Ha'melech notes how the "aron" had been neglected during the generation of Shaul at the national level. In contrast to Shaul, David ha'melech considered bringing the "aron" to Yerushalayim as his highest national priority.

After the "aron" finally arrived in Jerusalem, the next step in David's master plan was to build a permanent house for the "aron", i.e. the Bet Ha'Mikdash in Yerushalayim:

"When the King was settled in his palace and God has granted him safety from his enemies [he'niach lo m'kol oyvav m'saviv], the King said to Natan the prophet: Here I am dwelling in a **HOUSE** of cedar wood, while the 'aron' is dwelling only in a **TENT!**" (see II Shmuel 7:1-2)

[Note again the textual parallel to Devarim 12:10-11]

Even though God informed David that Am Yisrael would have to wait another generation before the Temple could be built (in the next generation by his son Shlomo, see II Shmuel chapter 7), its precise site was already designated in David's own lifetime (see I Divrei Ha'yamim 22:1). In fact, David ha'melech himself prepared all the necessary building materials (see the remainder of that chapter).

If you read the above sources carefully, you'll see that the underlying reason for God's decision to delay its construction for one more generation stemmed from the need to wait until its 'function' - to make a Name for God - could be properly fulfilled.

JERUSALEM TODAY

As we have seen in our study, according to the guidelines of Sefer Devarim - 'Jerusalem' is destined to become more than just the city that houses the Temple. Ideally, Jerusalem should become the National Cultural and Religious Center of the Jewish people, while making a Name for God. This aspiration is found in the prophecies of most all of the later prophets. For example:

"For Jerusalem will be called the city of Truth ("ir ha'emet"), and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts - "har ha'Kodesh" (see Zecharya 8:3).

"For out of Zion will come forth Torah and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (see Isaiah 2:3).

Today, be it for halachic, technical, or political reasons, we are not permitted to rebuild the Bet HaMikdash. Until the proper time comes, this aspiration remains our national dream and an everlasting prayer. Nonetheless, to rebuild the city of Jerusalem as our National Center - a city of Truth, Justice, and Sanctity - is not only permitted, it is our duty. In our own generation, God has opened for us a historic opportunity. The achievement of this goal remains our national responsibility.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Even though the chagim have already been presented in Parshiot Mishpatim, Emor, and Pinchas, they are repeated again in Dvarim chap 16. Read this chapter carefully.

1. What laws are added which we did not already learn from the earlier sources?
2. What would you say is the primary topic of this perek? (which key phrase repeats itself many times?)
3. Attempt to explain this perek as an expansion of Shmot 23:14-17!
4. How does all this relate to the above shiur?
5. Why aren't Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur mentioned in this parsha?

B. "LO TA'ASUN KEYN L'HASHEM ELOKEICHEM" (12:4)

In the above shiur, we explained that this pasuk implies that we are commanded not to worship God in multiple places of worship. This is "pshat" of the pasuk based on 12:2 and 12:5, For just as they worshiped their gods on the high places and under mighty trees etc. (12:2) you should not, rather - only in the place which God chooses ("ha'makom..."). That is, at **ONE** place and not at many places.

Note the two explanations given by Rashi. The first follows this reading according to "pshat". The second is a Midrash Halacha. Do these two pirushim contradict each other, or can they both be correct? Use your answer to explain the nature of Midrashei Halacha.

C. MIKRA BIKURIM - THE FINALE

Note the final mitzvot of the chukim & mishpatim are Mikra Bikurim and vidduy maaser (perek 26), again focusing on **HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM** - (note 27:1 also).

1. Does this parsha belong in Parshat Ki-tavo, or do you think that it would be more fitting to Parshat Reay? Relate to the parsha of maaser sheni (14:22-29)! Why do think it was chosen to conclude the main speech? Relate your answer to the purpose of this speech, and the content of "mikra bikurim" and to Breishit perek 15.

D. Even though Sefer Breishit does not mention Jerusalem by name, it does mention the city of 'Shalem' (see 14:18) in relation to Malki Tzedek (note the significance of his name) and Mount Moriah (see 22:2,14), the site of the Akeyda', as Hashem YIREH. Together YIREH - SHALEM, may allude to the final name of this city - YERU-SHALAYIM.

PARSHAT RE'AY - Part Two

Bad influences? Surely we should stay away from them, but how do we identify them? In Parshat Reay, we find an example of how the Torah deals with this problem, as Bnei Yisrael prepare to enter the land.

INTRODUCTION

Our previous shiur on Parshat Re'ay, discussed how "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" - emerged as its primary topic. Even though this holds true for chapters 12 and 15, chapters 13 and 14 appear to form a digression from this topic.

To illustrate how the topic of 'bad influences' is sandwiched with the topic of "ha'makom asher yivchar", the following table summarizes the main topics of the Parsha:

*** HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**

- 12:1-19 - Establishing the Bet ha'Mikdash as the national center
- 12:20-28 - Permission for eating meat outside of that center

*** BAD INFLUENCES**

- 12:29-31 - Don't seek after the gods of the nations of Canaan
- 13:2-6 - Don't follow the instructions of a false prophet
- 13:7-12 - Don't follow a family member who may lead you astray
- 13:13-19 - Ir ha'nidachat - when an entire city goes astray
- 14:1-21 - Misc. dietary laws (what one cannot eat)

*** HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**

14:22-27 - Eating "maaser sheni" (there) in years 1,2,4,& 5
14:28-29 - Giving this "maaser" to the poor in years 3 & 6
15:1-18 - The laws of "shmittah" for the 7th year
15:19-23 -Bringing the 'first born' to "ha'makom asher..."
16:1-17 - Celebrating the "shalosh regalim, ba'makom asher..."
=====

As you most probably have guessed by now, in our shiur we will search for a theme that ties all of these topics together.

FOUR 'BAD EXAMPLES'

To begin our shiur, we must first explain why we categorized all of the topics in chapter 13 as 'bad influences'.

Note how each topic relates to a certain warning that 'somebody else' will not lead you astray towards following other gods.

First we find a warning against following the gods of your 'non-jewish' neighbors (12:29-31). Then we are warned not to follow a charismatic leader (be he a 'prophet' or 'dreamer'), even if he performs a miracle, should he suggest that we worship a different god (13:2-6). Afterward, we are warned against following a family member or close friend who may secretly suggest that we worship a different god. Finally, as a society, we are warned not to allow an entire town to go astray; and if so, that entire town must be destroyed.

Note how we find examples of influences from:

- a) society at large, i.e. our global community
- b) our leaders, either religious or lay
- c) our family and close friends
- d) our city, i.e. our local community

These laws are followed by a lengthy list of dietary laws in 14:3-21. Note however that the reason for keeping these laws is given both at the beginning and end of this unit, in 14:2 and 14:21 - for you are an "am kadosh l'Hashem elokecha" - a designated [holy] nation for your God - hence you must separate yourselves from them.

Even though the Torah does not explain HOW these laws accomplish this goal, we know quite well from our daily life how the laws of "kashrut" severely limit our cultural contact with people of other religions. Therefore, we find yet another example of how the laws of the Torah protect us from the influences of those who may lead us towards following other gods.

With this in mind, we must now consider the connection between this unit of 'bad influences' and the primary topic of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem".

INFLUENCES - GOOD & BAD

When we consider the purpose of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem", i.e. the establishment of the city of Yerushalayim and the Bet ha'Mikdash as the nation's vibrant cultural and religious center, we find yet another example of what will influence the society of Am Yisrael, this time from the positive aspect.

In other words, Parshat Re'ay discusses all types of influences that will shape the nature of society (as Bnei Yisrael prepare to enter the land). First and foremost, by the establishment of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" and the requirement that every Jew frequent that site and eat his "maaser sheni" in Yerushalayim, we assure the proper development of Am Yisrael as an "am kadosh l'Hashem".

By warning against bad influences, the Torah attempts to make sure that the fabric of that society won't crumble.

In Parshat Shoftim, we will find additional examples of what will provide a 'good influence' upon the nation. The Torah will discuss the judicial system, the priesthood, and the various other institutions of political leadership in their ideal form.

Till then,
shabbat shalom
menachem

PARASHAT RE'EH

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

SOME QUICK DERASH:

Parashat Re'eh begins with instructions about a peculiar ceremony to be enacted once the people reach Eretz Yisrael: they are to "place the blessing" on one mountain and "place the curse" on a mountain opposite it. Later on, Moshe will explain that the two mountains and the valley between them will be the scene for a covenant ceremony. There, the people will affirm the "blessing" and "curse." What does the Torah mean by "blessing" and "curse"? What good things does "blessing" entail, and what evil does "curse" connote?

DEVARIM 11:26-28 --

"See that I place before you today BLESSING and CURSE; the BLESSING: that ["asher"] you obey the commands of Y-HVH, your God, which I command you today. The CURSE: if you do not listen to the commands of Y-HVH, your God, and stray from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods, which you have not known."

The Torah's formulation of "the blessing" is strange. Instead of telling us what great things are in store for us, the Torah tells us that the blessing is "that you obey the commands of Y-HVH, your God" Unlike Parashat Eikev, which spends so much time spelling out exactly what rewards Hashem will shower upon us for our obedience, Parashat Re'eh promises a lot but then refuses to give us details!

Reading further in the section above, we find that the Torah's formulation of "the curse" is also strange. Instead of telling us what evil awaits us for flouting Hashem's will, the Torah tells us that we will merit "the curse" if we disobey: ". . . if you do not listen to the commands of Y-HVH, your God" Why does the Torah bring up blessing and curse but refuse to define them?

Perhaps the Torah actually *has* spelled out the blessing and the curse! The blessing is not what "goodies" we can expect for doing the mitzvot, it is the very *state* of observing the mitzvot; the curse is not what punishments we will suffer if we ignore and violate the mitzvot, it is the *state* of ignoring and violating the mitzvot.

If you read Parashat Eikev, you come away understanding that obeying Hashem brings physical and spiritual rewards, while disobeying Hashem brings physical and spiritual punishment. Eikev posits a system of extrinsic reward and punishment. If I make Kiddush on Shabbat, for example, Hashem is 'pleased' and rewards me with, say, a new car, a good day at the office, a vacation with my spouse. If I spend Shabbat planting asparagus, on the other hand, Hashem is 'upset' (since planting is one of the chief categories of forbidden creative work) and punishes me with, say, tripping on a rake a few weeks later and fracturing my hip (God forbid!). So much for Eikev.

But Parashat Re'eh communicates another aspect of the scheme of reward and punishment, an intrinsic one. From this perspective, the greatest reward for the mitzvot is that we are in a state of observing the mitzvot themselves; the greatest punishment for averot (sins) is the state of having done averot. The ideal of human perfection is to achieve the stance of a servant of Hashem, an obeyer of His will. We do the mitzvot not in expectation of the "goodies" promised by Parashat Eikev, but solely for the purpose of standing before Hashem as His faithful servants. We obey Hashem's will because that is our highest value, not because we expect that he will do our will (i.e., make us happy by giving us things we want). This is the ultimate stance of the Jew, "the blessing": to respond to Hashem's command, to stand before Him and say, "Hineni," "Here I am." On the other end, disobeying Hashem is "the curse" not because of the extrinsic punishments it may bring, but for the position it represents in our stance before Hashem: we face the other way, giving Him our backs, disengaged, standing not before Hashem but merely by ourselves. This is the ultimate failure of human purpose, "the curse": to ignore Hashem's command, to stand before Him and say nothing in response to His command, or worse, to counter His will with our own.

These two aspects of reward and punishment, that of Eikev and that of Re'eh, are steps on the spiritual ladder. The conception which should guide us is that of Re'eh, while the conception of Eikev is there to encourage or warn us when our more lofty mode of interaction with Hashem becomes weakened. We do the mitzvot "Lo al menat le-kabel peras," as Pirkei Avot tells us -- not in order to earn reward -- but simply because we accept that obeying Hashem's will is the ultimate religious stance (exemplified best, probably, in the Akeida).

NOW FOR SOME 'PESHAT': THE LAY OF THE TEXTUAL LAND:

Our parasha opens with Moshe's command to the people to enact a covenant ceremony on Har Gerizim and Har Eival when they enter the Land. Blessing will 'sit' on one mountain, curse on the other, and the people will accept Hashem's mitzvot under the terms of the blessing and curse. The command by Moshe to enact this ceremony constitutes an "opening bookend": it signals the beginning of a huge halakhic section which will continue from here (perek 11) to the beginning of perek (chapter) 27. Chapter 27 contains the "closing

bookend": it tells us once again about this blessing/curse covenant ceremony, this time in greater detail. Following this "bookend" is a lengthy section of blessings which we will merit for obeying Hashem and curses we will suffer for disobeying, Heaven forbid.

The long section between the "bookends" is halakhic (legal) material which covers just about all the bases the Torah has been to already in earlier sefarim (books) -- ritual law, interpersonal law, theological law, national institutional structure, and other categories of law and procedure. Many mitzvot which appear earlier in the Torah are repeated here, some with elaboration or modification; some mitzvot appear for the first time. It is typical of the Torah (and legal codes or parts of codes which have come down to us from Ancient Near Eastern sources) to find a section of law (halakha) followed by blessings and curses to reinforce the laws. This is a structure we see in the Torah in several places: Shemot 23 -- which comes after the halakhot of Parashat Mishpatim, the first major legal unit in the Torah -- contains mostly blessings (and some curses); a better example is VaYikra 26, a long section of blessings and curses which follows the huge section of solidly halakhic material which comprises the meat of Sefer VaYikra (pun not intended).

Our job in the series of parshiot ahead is not only to understand each of the mitzvot which Moshe commands, but also to extract from the flow of the text a sense of the underlying themes. Even at this early point, it is already clear that it will often be difficult to understand the sequence of the mitzvot, which tend to swing from one type of law to another without much warning and without an obvious organizing principle. When we cannot make sense of the connections between the various sections of halakhot before us, we will at least focus on the mitzvot of each section to deepen our understanding of them.

THEMES OF RE'EH:

Parashat Re'eh brings together many themes. We will focus briefly on the following themes:

1. Centralization of worship in the "Chosen Place."
2. Worship of other gods (avoda zara) as an "interpersonal" crime.
3. Mitzvot in a communal context.

THE CHOSEN PLACE:

Parashat Re'eh introduces the idea that once we enter the Land, it is no longer appropriate to serve Hashem in our backyards. Instead of sacrificing offerings to Hashem on our private altars (or on multiple public altars), we are commanded to bring all korbanot (offerings) to the "place Hashem will choose," the location of the Mishkan (portable Temple) or Beit HaMikdash.

Our parasha devotes a lengthy section to this theme of centralization and its reinforcement. But the opening words of the section seem at first to be about another topic: "You shall certainly destroy all of the places where the nations served . . . their gods, atop the high mountains and on the hills . . . you shall smash their altars, break their offering-pedestals; their asherim [trees used in idol worship] you shall burn with fire, and the idols of their gods you shall cut down." The Torah seems to be instructing us to eradicate avoda zara, not to focus our service to Hashem at one place.

But then comes a turn in the text: "You shall not do in this manner to Y-HVH, your God." Hazal interpret this pasuk (verse) to mean, "Although you should destroy all manifestations of idol worship, you are forbidden to destroy manifestations of the worship of Hashem." For example, according to Hazal, this pasuk would forbid destroying any part of the Beit HaMikdash, where Hashem is worshipped. But in context, the pasuk is not telling us to spare Hashem's sanctuary, it is telling us not to worship Hashem all over the place, as the Canaanites worshipped their gods. The next pasuk confirms this reading: "You shall not do in this manner to Y-HVH, your God. Instead, TO THE PLACE WHICH HASHEM, your God, SHALL CHOOSE from among all of your tribes, to place His Name there, ONLY HIS DWELLING should you seek and come to there." The Torah goes on to command us to bring all offerings to Hashem to the Chosen Place instead of offering them to Him wherever we may be.

It seems, then, that the command to destroy the numerous outposts of idol worship is not so much a command to eradicate existing idol-worship centers as it is part of the effort to centralize all worship. It is not simply that we are to avoid worshipping the old idols ourselves - even if we do not worship them, we must destroy every local temple, every neighborhood worship site. If we allow the local idol parlor to remain, we might be tempted to worship even Hashem there, which would defeat the effort to centralize His worship in the Beit HaMikdash.

The theme of centralization threads through the parasha and beyond. Some examples within the parasha:

- 1) Later on in the parasha, in instructing us how to handle ma'aser sheni, the "Second Tithe," the Torah commands us to bring it to the "Chosen Place" and eat it there.
- 2) Further in the parasha, we are commanded to bring all first-born animals to the "Chosen Place" for sacrifice.
- 3) Towards the end of the parasha, the Torah presents a Parashat Ha-Mo'adim, a section on the major holidays. Each holiday -- Pesah, Shavuot, and Succot -- is accompanied by a separate mention of the command to celebrate the holiday at the "Chosen Place." We are to sacrifice the Korban Pesah there and celebrate the harvest festivals of Shavuot and Succot there. After the Torah concludes its

exposition on each of the three "Regalim" ("feet," so named because part of the essence of these celebrations is making the pilgrimage to the Chosen Place), it moves to a slightly different theme: not only are we to bring the Korban Pesah to the Chosen Place on Pesah, not only are we to celebrate the harvest there on Shavuot and Succot, but we (I should say all males, "kol zekhurekha") are commanded to "appear" there before the "Face of Y-HVH." We are to make the pilgrimage not only to offer sacrifices and celebrate, but also to stand in the Presence of Hashem.

Why is centralization such a big deal? What difference does it make where we worship Hashem? Sure, it seems appropriate to have a main center of worship, but why is it necessary to outlaw worship at any other place? Several possibilities:

1) Although we suggested above that the purpose of destroying the many outposts of Cana'nite idolatry is to aid in the worship centralization process, and not to prevent us from worshipping the idols left behind by the Cana'anites, we could turn this theme on its head: perhaps the entire purpose of centralization is to prevent idol worship! Ideally, it would be nice to allow worship of Hashem everywhere. But worship of Hashem can easily deteriorate into worship of other things. If today I can bring an offering to Hashem in my backyard, ten years from now I may decide to bring an offering to the sun, which is, after all, a loyal servant of Hashem and might be understood to represent Hashem's power, His radiance, or His provident benevolence. Fifty years from then, I will have forgotten about Hashem and established a sun-worshipping cult.

If this seems far-fetched, check Rambam, Sefer Ha-Madda, Hilkhot Avoda Zara, Chapter 1, where Maimonides describes exactly this process -- not as a hypothetical possibility, but as history! Adam knew Hashem, and so did his descendants, but once they began to worship Hashem's intermediaries (e.g., stars) and creations, it wasn't long before the intermediaries became the focus and Hashem was forgotten.

That centralization is aimed at preventing avoda zara is hinted by a pasuk in the section on bringing ma'aser sheni to the Chosen Place: "You shall eat, before Y-HVH, your God, in the Place He shall choose to rest His Name there, the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, and the firstborn of your flocks and cattle, SO THAT YOU SHALL LEARN TO FEAR Y-HVH, your God, for all days" (14:23). What does eating all of this stuff in the Chosen Place have to do with fearing Hashem "for all days"? If we see the centralization drive as a brake on avoda zara, it makes sense that requiring us to ascend to the Chosen Place to celebrate before Hashem will contribute to our continuing to worship Hashem and not deteriorating into corruption back home.

2) One other possible rationale for centralization: to achieve national unity in worshipping Hashem. Considering the potential for distant relationships between the tribes, each of which has its own land, each of which is required to inmarry (until somewhat later on), each of which has its own defense forces and leaders, some structures are needed to bring the nation together, to bring the "states" into a "federal union." Besides the monarchy (which has its own problems), one of these structures is the Beit HaMikdash and its status as the center of worship of Hashem. Later in Sefer Devarim, we will see that the Beit HaMikdash unifies the people in another way: it is also the judicial center, the seat of the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court.

3) Finally, centralization creates the opportunity for pilgrimage, which entails two elements: the journey and the arrival. The journey itself may be seen as more than simply instrumental: imagine the drama of leaving home and property behind, not to vacation or for business, but for *religious* reasons! When was the last time you went on a pilgrimage? Imagine the entire nation dropping everything, packing up, and hitting the road, headed for Hashem's House. The second element is the arrival, the experience of standing with all of Yisrael before the Face of Hashem, offering our gifts to Him and bowing before Him in submission and love. Neither the journey nor the arrival could be duplicated by a trip to the local synagogue (if you disagree, I'd love to hear about your shul!).

AVODA ZARA AS AN "INTERPERSONAL" CRIME:

Usually, we conceive of avoda zara as a theological crime, a failure to achieve one of our most fundamental purposes as humans: to recognize Hashem and worship Him. Particularly if you believe, like some rationalists, that the goal of human existence is to cognize correct ideas about Hashem, to understand Him to the deepest degree possible, it is hard to imagine a greater misappropriation of our godlike potential than to accept and worship a false god. Avoda zara is not only a capital crime, it is also one of the "big three," the all-time cardinal-sin hit parade: avoda zara, gilluy arayot ("revealing nakedness," the cardinal sexual crimes), and shefikhut damim (murder). We are commanded to surrender our lives to avoid committing these sins. (There is a lot of halakhic detail involved in this issue; "consult your local Orthodox rabbi.")

But there are many indications in the Torah that there is another dimension to avoda zara, one we usually overlook and which I have termed (with considerable license) the "interpersonal" dimension. By this I do not mean that we somehow harm other people by worshipping avoda zara (although some forms of avoda zara, such as human sacrifice, can be hazardous to the health of other people), but that we 'harm' Hashem in ways we usually think of as interpersonal.

Although there are hints to this theme all over the Torah, we will look at only the few that appear in our parasha (if you are interested in pursuing this, I can provide a more complete list.):

Perek 13 presents three scenarios and prescribes our reactions to them:

a. A prophet appears, proves his or her authenticity by performing some sort of sign (usually making a prediction, which then comes true), and then delivers to us a command to worship gods other than Hashem. In response, we are to execute the prophet. The Torah's formulations in this context are critical: why does Hashem allow the prophet to make a true prediction, which creates the potential for us to be fooled into following him or her? The Torah explains: "For Hashem is testing you, to know IF YOU **LOVE** Y-HVH, your God, with all your HEART and all your SOUL." In other words, Hashem is testing not our theological fidelity, but the strength of our EMOTIONS: do we love Him? If we do love Him, worshipping any other would be inconceivable, literally adulterous. (Indeed, Tanakh takes full advantage of the metaphor of avoda zara as adultery, portraying Bnei Yisrael in times of idolatry as a woman who has rejected her husband and embraced other lovers in His place.)

The Torah's formulation of the false prophet's call to avoda zara is also revealing. The prophet calls, "Let us go after other gods ["elohim aherim"]" -- the Torah interjects, "WHICH YOU DO NOT KNOW" -- and the prophet continues, "and serve them." Not only are these "other gods," but they are gods that until now "you do not know." This phrase -- "you do not know" -- appears with startling frequency through the Torah and Tanakh as a characterization of the false gods we are warned not to embrace. Not only are they not true gods, but we have only heard of them today. So what? The point is that the true God is One we "know" so deeply, so intimately He is the God to Whom we as a people owe everything: as the Torah points out in the false prophet section, "he [the prophet] spoke untruly of Y-HVH, your God, who TOOK YOU OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT and REDEEMED YOU FROM THE HOUSE OF SLAVERY" This is the God we have rejected for some other God, as casually as if we were changing to a new toothpaste or trying a new flavor of ice cream. We forget what He has done for us and wipe clean the slate of our relationship to make room for something new and attractive. The "interpersonal" crime here is catastrophic ungratefulness, terminal insensitivity to our pre-existing relationship with Hashem. It is a failure of love.

b. The next section in Perek 13 presents a different tempter to avoda zara: "If he shall tempt you -- your brother, the son of your mother, or your son, or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is like your own soul -- in secret, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' WHICH YOU HAVE NOT KNOWN, YOU AND YOUR FATHERS." Here again, the other gods are described not simply as meaningless and empty vanities, but as *foreigners* to an existing relationship; neither we nor our fathers have known them. Again, the Torah commands us to reject the temptation and, incredibly, to execute the tempter -- our own brother, child, spouse, or best friend. Here it is love versus love: whom do we love more, Hashem or the tempter? Hashem, the Torah reminds us once again, is "the One who took you out of Egypt, the house of slavery."

c. The last scenario described in Perek 13 is the "ir ha-nidachat," a city in Eretz Yisrael which has turned as a whole to idolatry. Not surprisingly, we are to execute the inhabitants for following the gods described once again as gods "which you have not known." Why such fury? Here again, the "interpersonal" appears: the Torah describes the wayward city as "one of your cities which Y-HVH, your God, gives to you." Hashem gives us a city, and we thank Him very much, forget Him, and take the city He gave us and turn it into a den of avoda zara. This is not simply theological error, it is profound ingratitude. What happens to the city itself, once the inhabitants have been destroyed?

"All of its booty [property], you shall gather to the midst of its street, and you shall burn in fire the city and all its booty completely ["kalil"] *TO* Y-HVH, your God"

The language the Torah uses is unmistakable: the city is being offered to Hashem as a korban, a sacrifice. It is burned not simply to destroy the scene of sinful disaster, it is burned "to Hashem," offered to Him. The word "kalil," "completely," adds to the picture: the same word appears in six other places in the Torah (to my knowledge). In every single instance, the context is a "cultic" one: "kalil" always appears in reference to the Mishkan and its appurtenances. Three of these six appearances refer to the completely blue color of draperies of the Mishkan's utensils, while the other three match our "kalil" exactly: they are references to completely burning a korban to Hashem (VaYikra 6:15, 6:16, Devarim 33:10). The wayward city, given to us by Hashem but then dedicated to the worship of a foreigner, is now being "rededicated" to Hashem through the smoke it offers to Him.

A look back at Devarim 4:19 deepens the theme of avoda zara as ungratefulness. Moshe delivers a warning about worshipping the heavenly bodies: ". . . Lest you lift your eyes heavenward and see the sun and moon and stars, all of the host of heaven, and you shall go astray and bow down to them and serve them - [those things] which Hashem, YOUR GOD, apportioned to ALL OF THE NATIONS under the entire heavens. BUT YOU, Y-HVH took you [the Torah here hints to marriage with the word 'lakah'], and HE TOOK YOU OUT of the iron melting pot, Egypt, TO BE FOR HIM A TREASURED NATION . . ." What does Moshe mean here, that Hashem "apportioned to all of the nations under the entire heavens" the sun and moon and stars? It seems clear from the next phrases, which are set in opposition: the sun and moon and stars have been apportioned to the nations, but you, Bnei Yisrael, Hashem chose you to be His nation, to worship Him alone, and He therefore rescued you from the death-house of Egypt. Now that He has done all this for you, you 'owe' Him your allegiance.

Rashi, Rashbam, and Hizkuni all confirm the above interpretation of the pasuk -- Hashem does not really care all that much if the other nations worship the sun and stars and moon, but He certainly does care if you, Bnei Yisrael, reject His selection of you and forget what He has done for you. Our responsibility to serve Hashem flows not simply from recognition of theological truth, but from a profound sense of gratitude.

MITZVOT IN A COMMUNAL CONTEXT:

Moshe takes Sefer Devarim as an opportunity not only to strengthen, chastise, and remind us of the mitzvot, but also to introduce the integration of mitzvot with the concept of community. Even the most careless reading of our parasha turns up an incessant preoccupation with the idea of mitzvot in the communal-social context. In the course of discussing mitzvot which seem completely unconnected to the idea of community, Moshe seems to never fail to say the "c" word. Moshe is trying to communicate that serving Hashem does not happen in a vacuum, it takes place in the context of a community, with all of its entanglements, complexities, and problems.

In commanding us to bring all offerings to Hashem only in the Chosen Place and to celebrate there, Moshe adds, "You shall celebrate before Y-HVH, your God, you, your sons, your daughters, your servants, your maidservants, and the Levi in your gates, for he has no portion [of land of his own] among you." Just when we thought we had left the community (and perhaps the family as well) behind to go and serve Hashem in the rarefied holiness of the Chosen Place, Moshe, so to speak, shleps the entire mishpaha and community along with us, using the code word for home city -- "sha'areikhem," "your gates." In case we missed the point, Moshe repeats the whole list of relatives a few pesukim later and specifically warns us to take care of the landless Levi.

The same reminders appear slightly later, in Perek 14. Not only are we to bring ma'aser sheni to the Chosen Place, we are to enjoy it there along with "our household" and, of course, the hapless Levi (I am taking this a little personally since I, as a Kohen, am a member of Levi and get no land). But not only is he a hapless Levi, he is "the Levi in your gates [bi-sh'arekha]" -- he is part of your community, so you are connected with him as with your family.

The very next section picks up and amplifies the same theme. We are to make the ma'aser of the third year available to the Levi (again described as landless) and to the stranger [ger], orphan, and widow, all of whom are "bi-sh'arekha." They are in our gates, so they are ours. Not only are we obliged to support the disadvantaged, we are to involve them in our mitzvot.

The Torah continues with the laws of Shemita, the seventh year, in which all debts owed by Jews to Jews are canceled. Despite the approach of Shemita, we are to continue to generously lend money to the poor, who are not simply our brothers, they are also "be-ahad she'arekha" -- they are within our gates. We are made responsible not just for luckless individuals, but for members of a community to which we and they belong. There will always be poor people, after all, and they will be poor within our communities: "Ki lo yehdal evyon mi-kerev ha-aretz," poor people will never disappear from THE MIDST OF THE LAND. We are therefore commanded to open our hands to our poor brothers -- "in your land."

When we ascend to the Chosen Place on Shavuot and Succot to celebrate, the Torah reminds us again to include our families and the disadvantaged -- the Levi, stranger, orphan, and widow, who are "among you" and "in your gates." We are responsible for our communities, especially responsible to include the powerless and downtrodden in our celebration. Our mitzvot are not crafted to raise us up out of involvement with the 'messy' aspects of life, they are crafted to raise up the community as a whole, bringing happiness to the weak and a spirit of generosity to the powerful.

The community appears in the parasha in the most surprising places. The Torah instructs us not to eat "neveila," meat from an animal which is improperly slaughtered. Instead, we are to give the meat to the "ger asher bi-sh'arekha," the stranger "in our gates," the non-Jew who lives temporarily among us and for whom the Torah makes us responsible.

Even in instructing us to punish sinners, Parashat Re'eh keeps the community in mind. The false prophet does not simply appear, he or she appears "in your midst," "be-kirbekha." When the prophet is executed, we are not simply punishing a sinner, we are acting for the good of the community -- "you shall remove the evil from your midst," "mi-kirbekha." This phrase, "u-vi'arta ha-ra mi-kirbekha," is so common in Sefer Devarim that it is almost a cliché of the Sefer.

Mitzvot are not only personal. We are responsible not only to perform "prescribed actions" for our own growth or edification, but to create and support community in doing so. Failing to achieve this second element is not just leaving the icing off the cake, it compromises the very fulfillment of the 'personal' mitzvah itself:

RAMBAM, HAGIGA 2:14 --

When one sacrifices holiday offerings and celebration offerings, he should not eat with just his children and his wife alone and imagine that he has done a complete mitzvah; he is REQUIRED to bring joy to the poor and the disadvantaged

RAMBAM, YOM TOV 6:18 --

. . . But one who locks the doors of his courtyard and eats and drinks, he and his children and wife, and does not give food and drink to the poor and the embittered of soul, this is not the joy of a mitzvah, it is the joy of his belly

May we maintain a focus always on Hashem, the "Makom" wherever He is, and build communities of mitzvot with sensitivity to those who need assistance.

Parshas Reeh: Sons and Brothers

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

[Boldface emphasis added]

I. OVERVIEW

As we outlined in a previous shiur in Sefer D'varim, the Sefer is made up of three distinct sections:

- * Historical Recounting (Chapters 1-11)
 - * Laws (Chapters 12-26)
 - * Re-covenanting Ceremonies (Chapters 27-33)
- (Mosheh's death (Chapter 34) is an epilogue to the Sefer).

Until now, we have presented this tripartite division, focusing on the content and implications of the "history-sermon" which is the content of the first three Parashiot of the Sefer. Our assumption was that, beginning with Parashat R'eh (a few verses in - since the first 7 verses are a completion of the history-sermon), we have moved cleanly and totally into the "Law Compendium" of D'varim.

We will see, during the course of this shiur, that this "clean" division is not nearly as sharp as originally presented (and as conventionally understood). Before proceeding, it is prudent to point out that the "nickname" of Sefer D'varim presents us with some difficulties. Each of the Humashim is known by at least one alternative name, found in the literature of the Talmudic/Midrashic period and in that of the Rishonim.

* B'resheet is also called "Sefer Y'tzirah" (Book of Creation), for reasons that are somewhat obvious.

* Sh'mot is called "Sefer haG'ulah" (see Ramban's introduction to Sefer Sh'mot for a beautiful explanation of this) or, alternatively, "Humash haSheni" (the second Humash - see Netziv's introduction to Sh'mot for an insight on this term).

* Vayyikra is known, throughout Rabbinic literature, as Torat Kohanim (a more or less literal rendering of "Leviticus" - the laws affecting the Kohanim).

* Bamidbar is called, as early as the Mishnah, "Homesh haP'kudim" (the Humash of the censuses).

* D'varim is called - at least as early as Rabbinic literature - "Mishneh Torah" - (either "a repetition of the Torah" or "a second Torah"). It may be that the Torah is referring to Sefer D'varim when the king is commanded to write a Mishneh Torah (D'varim 17:18).

The conventional understanding of "Mishneh Torah" is "repetition", the notion being that Mosheh was presenting the new generation with a "recap" of the Mitzvot found in the first four Humashim. As Rav Menachem Liebttag has pointed out in one of his insightful Parashah shiurim, if the goal of Sefer D'varim is to serve as a repetition/review of the Mitzvot and/or narratives found in the first four books (as seems to be Rambam's intent in his explanation of his naming his Code "Mishneh Torah" - see his introduction there), it seems to fail its purpose - see Rav Liebttag's shiur for a full treatment of this problem.

The upshot of the problem is that there are some Mitzvot which are repeated from earlier Humashim (e.g. the list of non-Kosher animals, pilgrimage festivals), some which are not repeated here (e.g. Kohanic restrictions, offerings, Rosh haShanah and Yom haKippurim), some which are new to us in D'varim (e.g. marriage and divorce, certain components of juridical procedure) and some which are "repeated" but from a distinctly different perspective (e.g. Sh'mittah - compare Vayyikra 25:2-7 with D'varim 15:1-6). What are we to make of this Law "Review"? As a "recap", it falls short of the mark - yet it does not contain all new information. We will try to answer this by assessing the goal of Sefer D'varim in general - thereby understanding the inclusion of some of the Mitzvot here (and the sequence in which they are presented).

For purposes of this shiur, we will limit the analysis to those Mitzvot which appear in Parashat R'eh - such that this shiur will only answer part of the question.

II. PARASHAT R'EH: THE BRIDGE FROM MITZVOT TO MISHPATIM

In earlier shiurim, we noted that the catchall word "Mitzvot", which is literally translated as "commandments", is utilized in Sefer D'varim with a unique meaning. As we can see from 6:1, 11:13 and other instances, "Mitzvot" are the general attitudinal approaches to God which comprise the telos of the covenant. Loving God, fearing Him, cleaving to Him, imitating His ways etc - these are the "Mitzvot". When Mosheh completed his "lessons" in the "history sermon" of Chapters 1-11, he had brought us well beyond the demand to observe a series of obligations and restrictions - we were asked to fear God, to walk in His ways, to cleave to Him, to love Him... (see 10:12-13). As we noted in our shiur on Parashat va'Et'hanan, this was the ultimate lesson of Mosheh Rabbenu - leading us into a constantly growing relationship with God.

Whereas the Law Compendium which begins at 12:1 has been traditionally understood as an entirely new piece of Mosheh's speech, it seems that the selection of laws (and the order of presentation) suggests a different understanding.

A quick look at the first series of laws in Chapter 12 will give us some insight:

You shall surely destroy all of the worship-sites where the nations who you are uprooting worshipped, atop the high mountains and the hillocks and underneath every tree. You shall take apart their altars, you shall destroy their worship-pillars, their Asherot (worship-trees) you shall burn by fire and you shall break their idols - and you will erase their name from that place. You shall not act thusly with Hashem your God" (12:2-4) The appositional phrase - you shall not act thusly may be understood several ways (see Ramban ad loc.); however, any way it is interpreted, the Torah is making a demand of us which is quite extraordinary. **We are called to behave with great passion and aggression towards the worship-sites of the pagans** - and to promote and keep opposite characteristics regarding the worship-site and Name of God. The Torah (like other religious disciplines) incorporates the full range of emotional characteristics and traits into required behavior.

Even our calendar reflects this range - from the unbridled celebration of Sukkot to the solemnity of Yom haKippurim (without mentioning the hilarity of Purim and the anguish of Tish'a b'Av - both Rabbinically mandated commemorations). We find, in most cases, that people who find Tish'a b'Av "easy" to observe have a difficult time celebrating Purim properly. There are "Simchas Torah Yidin (Jews)" and "Tish'ah b'Av Yidin" - but there aren't a lot of people who are capable of putting their full energies into the proper moods of both types of commemorations. This is because people generally have a particular disposition and those celebrations and rituals which "fit" their emotional makeup are the ones towards which they exuberantly run to participate.

The Torah here is demanding an aggressive approach to pagan sites - to uproot, destroy and erase. There are people who would find this type of behavior easy, as it fits their general emotional makeup. To ask of these same people - who found uprooting and destruction so easy - to treat God in the exact opposite manner is not such a simple task. Conversely, those who "naturally" show the utmost respect and concern for the sanctity of God's Name may find it difficult to act with vigor and determination in destroying a pagan worship-site.

The ability to act with this emotional dexterity is grounded in motivation. If someone is able to participate in the sadness of Tish'ah b'Av because he is a naturally dour person - Purim will be very difficult to celebrate. If, on the other hand, he is sad on Tish'ah b'Av because he has a tremendous love for God and for the Jewish people and is so distraught over the loss of His holy place and the destruction of His people - then he will find it just as easy to celebrate the sanctification of His Name and the salvation of His people on Purim.

In the same way, for someone to be able to uproot and destroy one place while demonstrating the necessary respect for another Place - he must be motivated by more than just natural tendencies and personal character traits. If he is motivated by an overwhelming love for God and a desire to promote God's Name in this world, he will be as zealous in his protection of God's holy place as he will in his readiness to destroy pagan places. **This first series of Mitzvot is an actualization of the ultimate lesson taught by Mosheh Rabbeinu - to love God.** Following this analysis of the first series of Mitzvot, we will then assay the rest of the Mitzvot in Parashat R'eh, viewing them as a bridge between the lessons of Mosheh and the more "legalistic" Mishpatim found in the next two and a half Parashiot (through Chapter 26).

III. THE SECOND DISTINCTION: A CENTRAL WORSHIP-SITE

Much has been made of the relationship between the "novelty" of centralized worship in D'varim and the Sefer Torah found by Hilkiyah hoKohen (II Melakhim 22) and the subsequent reform by Yoshiah to remove all other worship sites, bringing all worship into the realm of the Beit haMikdash. The claims of the bible critics (who maintain that D'varim, or at least this section, were enacted by Yoshiyah in order to strengthen the capitol city) aside, it would be helpful to find an association between the centrality of worship (first mentioned in 12:4-14) and the preceding section.

Following our thesis that the particular restrictions and obligations presented in this first part of the Law Compendium represent expressions of the ideal relationship with God that we are to develop, we can understand the stress on centralized worship in a new light. The pagan nations of K'na'an had multiple worship-sites; although this may have been born of convenience, it certainly fit with their polytheistic approach. **Multiple "gods" can be served in multiple places.** The opening line of Mosheh's "ultimate lesson" (see our earlier shiur on Parashat va'Et'hanan) is Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. In other words, **the overwhelming and consuming love which we are to have for God (see Shir haShirim 8:7) is predicated on His singularity and uniqueness.** This unique nature of God is mirrored in the unique selection of 'Am Yisra'el (see BT B'rakhot 6a-b in the passage about "God's T'fillin"), as well as in the unique selection of one worship-site (and the uniqueness of Eretz Yisra'el - but that belongs to a different shiur). We can now understand the association between the various "relationship-Mitzvot" and the "new" (actually, newly presented) command to maintain a centralized worship locale.

IV. INTERNALIZING A DIVINE ASTHETIC

Along with the promise of God's broadening our boundaries, such that we will not be able to bring all meat to the "place where He shall choose to place His Name"(12:20-28), the Torah expresses a concern that we will want to "adopt" pagan worship-styles for the worship of God (12:29-13:1). Following Ramban's explanation, the concern is that the B'nei Yisra'el will associate the destruction of the pagan nations with the object of their worship (they backed a losing horse) as opposed to the method of their worship. Therefore the Torah warns us not to make this mistake; indeed, "every manner of abomination which Hashem loathes did they do in worship of their gods..." (12:31). In other words, besides having a misguided approach to worship (worshipping nothingness as deities), **the methods they used (including, as the verse states explicitly, child sacrifice) were hateful to God.**

This warning is immediately followed by the injunction against adding to - or diminishing from - God's commands. (Note that the Christian-based division of chapters reads this command as the beginning of a new section whereas the MT [Masoretic Text] sees this as the end of the section above. While the other division is understandable, the MT break is much more reasonable; since it follows the warning to be careful in our worship of God by not introducing foreign elements into that worship.)

In other words, as S'forno explains, **we should not bring our own methods of worship - whether the result of our own creative thinking or adopting the behavior of other nations - into the worship of God.** We won't know if those behaviors will be acceptable to God within the context of worship. (There are certainly other ways to understand the role of creativity within Avodat Hashem; Rabbi Michael Rozensweig of RIETS wrote a comprehensive article on the subject in the first issue of the Torah uMada Journal.)

There is a curious assumption implicit in our distancing ourselves from that which God abhors - and which is re-addressed at the end of Chapter 13 (v. 19). There seems to be an expectation that we will internalize the aesthetics and values of God, such that we will learn to distance ourselves from that which He hates and we will know how to do that which is upright in His eyes (13:19).

This is yet another step in the development and actualization of the "v'Ahavta" ("and you shall love God") relationship: To learn what God finds acceptable and what He loathes - and then to internalize those sensitivities, such that doing that which is right (or Right) and avoiding that which is abhorrent becomes "second nature".

[note: There is much to be written on this subject; as it seems to fly directly in the face of the statement of our Rabbis: A person should ideally desire non-Kosher food, but resist it simply because of the command of God. We have treated this subject in an earlier shiur.]

This point is the tie which connects the three parashiot which make up Chapter 13 - the prophet who threatens to lead us astray (vv. 2-6); the "Meisit" who attempts to seduce people to worship foreign gods (vv. 7-12) and the "Ir haNidachat" - the city which has "gone over" to idolatry. In each of these cases, not only are we commanded to resist the respective temptation, we are also commanded to focus our approach in a way which is the opposite of the usually desired direction:

Do not listen to that prophet... (v. 4)
(as opposed to loyalty to a prophet)

Do not have compassion... (v. 9)
(as opposed to acting compassionately)

Utterly destroy that city... (v. 16)
(as opposed to maintaining concern for our fellows' property)

The Torah is again giving us direction on what should motivate our feelings - not by "natural tendencies", rather by our love for God. Although we are generally called to compassion, loyalty, respect for elders etc., there are situations where a greater value - love for God - "overrules" the other values.

----- SUMMARY

The first part of our Parashah is a series of obligations and restrictions which help guide us into actualizing the love for God which is the *raison d'etre* of the Law. First, we are to demonstrate that our passions are not guided by "natural tendencies", rather by a commitment to promoting God's Name in the world. Next, we are shown how to demonstrate the singular nature of God - via centralized worship. Finally, we are given the charge to internalize the Divine system of values and aesthetics which will help us determine the Right from the Wrong.

So far, we have discussed the first half of the Parashah. Although we have not explained why Sefer D'varim is called "Mishneh Torah", we have suggested why particular Mitzvot were mentioned specifically here.

----- V. YOU ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Chapter 14 begins with this powerful banner statement

Banim Atem l'Hashem Eloheikhem you are children unto your God.

What is the implication of this statement and its purpose specifically at this point in the Law Compendium?

If we follow the next part of the verse - that which seems to be the direct consequence of the Banim Atem avowal - we find a particular and somewhat peculiar ritual prohibition:

[At this point, it is prudent to note that we will find a number of "repetitions" of laws from earlier Humashim; however, they will, at least in some cases, be presented in a different manner than the earlier version.]

You are children of Hashem your God. You must not lacerate yourselves or shave your forelocks for the dead. For you are a people holy to Hashem your God; it is you Hashem has chosen out of all the peoples on earth to be His people, His treasured possession.

What is the connection between our being children of God and not participating in the self-mutilation mourning rituals endemic to the pagan cults of K'na'an?

Rashi answers that since we are the children of God, it is appropriate for us to look dignified and noble - something which would surely be violated by self-mutilation.

Ramban points out that if that were the reason, the violation would not be limited to mourning rituals, it would apply to any circumstance of self-mutilation. If so, why does the Torah specifically say laMet- "for the dead"?

S'forno provides an alternative to Rashi which both satisfies Ramban's challenge and is the key to understanding the rest of the Parashah:

For it is inappropriate to exhibit ultimate anxiety and sorrow over a relative who dies if there remains a more dignified relative alive; therefore, [since] you are "children of God" Who is your father and is eternal, it is never appropriate to exhibit ultimate mourning for any death. In other words, **since we are God's children and He is always with us, there is never an instance of death which we should experience as total devastation - for even when all seems lost, our Father is still there.**

This command is immediately followed by a further explanation - For you are a holy people to God...

If we look at the end of the next series of laws, we find the exact same phrase (v. 21) - thus bookending this section. What is the content of this section which sits between the markers of "You are a holy people to Hashem your God"?

As mentioned above, along with laws which were never mentioned before and laws which were mentioned from a different perspective, Sefer D'varim includes some instances of laws which are nearly "cut-and-paste jobs" from earlier Humashim.

Chapter 14, verses 3-21, is a prime example of this type of "repetition". The list of acceptable and unacceptable animals - along with the guiding characteristics - is almost a repeat of the listing found in Chapter 11 of Vayyikra (Parashat Sh'mini). In other words, the section which is identified by the tag "You are a holy people..." is the laws of Kashrut. Why these laws specifically?

The Midrash Halakhah states:

R. Elazar b. Azariah said: From whence do we know that a man should not say: 'I cannot tolerate wearing Sha'atnez, [or] I cannot tolerate eating pork, [or] I cannot tolerate illicit relations'--Rather that he should say: 'I am capable and willing, but what can I do, my Father in Heaven decreed thus' [that I avoid these things]? Therefore Scripture states: 'I have separated you from the Nations to be Mine' --thus, he avoids the sin and accepts God's Sovereignty." (Sifra Parashat Kedoshim) RABD's reading and comments here seem to strengthen the challenge: "Therefore Scripture states: 'To be Mine'--in other words, practice this law for My sake and not due to your own consideration. (commentary of RABD, ibid.) Although we certainly do not apply this type of reasoning to those areas of Halakhah which build the ethical self - e.g. proper social interaction and respectful behavior towards others and their property - there is room for it within the corpus of Halakhah. To wit, there are some areas of Halakhah where the sole motivation for observance is commandedness. Unlike the integration and internalization of Divine values, outlined above, the laws of Kashrut (along with some other areas of Halakhah) should be driven by - and result in - a conscious and deliberate awareness of God's direct role as Lawgiver and Commander.

If the first consequence of the banner statement: Banim Atem... is the awareness of God's constant presence in our lives, the second is the method by which we maintain that closeness - by separating ourselves and preserving a unique relationship which is "To be Mine".

VI. SONS AND BROTHERS

As surely as "You are children of Hashem your God" implies a close and special relationship with God, it also implies a special bond within that family of children. If we are all children of the One God, we are also all brothers and sisters to each other. The rest of the Halakhot presented in Parashat R'eh are expressions of that relationship - the second prong of "Banim Atem". Let's survey them:

[note: for purposes of brevity - and due to space considerations - I will highlight the phrase in each section which points to the general thread which ties these Halakhot together.]

* Ma'aser Sheni (Second Tithe) (14:22-27)

Note v. 27: As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you.

* Ma'aser 'Ani (Tithe for the Poor) (14:28-29).

V. 29: the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that Hashem your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.

* Sh'mittah. (15:1-6).

As mentioned above, here is an example of a law which is presented in D'varim and which appears earlier - but the presentation in D'varim is from a different perspective. In Vayyikra, Sh'mittah is oriented towards agricultural "resting"; here, it is focused on "Sh'mittat K'safim", the cancellation of all debts on the seventh year. This is driven by the statement -

Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you. There will, however, be no one in need among you... (vv. 4-5).

* Tzedakah (15:7-11).

Note v. 11: Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."

* Ha'anakah (gifting the Hebrew slave when he leaves your employ) (15:12-18)

Note v. 15, the justification for this gift: Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Hashem your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today.

* B'khor Ba'al Mum (Sanctification of the first-born of the flock or herd and the result of its having a permanent blemish) (15:19-23).

This one does not seem to fit the group so easily; however, note verse 22: ...within your towns you may eat it, the Tamei (unclean) and the Tahor (clean) alike, as you would a gazelle or deer.

* Pesach (16:1-8) This section is itself a bit strange, as it comes at the beginning of three parashiot, each devoted to one of the pilgrimage festivals. What is odd is that unlike the latter two, there is no explicit Mitzvah of rejoicing by which we are enjoined here. One additional "oddity"; this is the only place where the Torah refers to Matzah as Lechem 'Oni- the bread of poverty or affliction. We will return to this section at the end of the shiur.

* Shavuot (16:9-12) Note v. 11: Rejoice before Hashem your God - you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you - at the place that Hashem your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

* Sukkot (16:13-17) Note (again) v. 14: Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns.

SUMMARY

What we see throughout these last 9 parashiot of R'eh is a series of Mitzvot where the motivation - and performance - focuses on mutual responsibility for each other's welfare and inclusion. This is, indeed, the second implication of the tenet: Banim Atem l'Hashem Eloheikhem - "You are children unto Hashem your God".

VII. POSTSCRIPT PESACH AND LECHEM 'ONI

As mentioned above, Shavu'ot and Sukkot are both highlighted by explicit commands to rejoice - and Pesach has no such command (although Halakhically there is a Mitzvah of Simchah on Pesach, it is inferred from these others by analogy).

If we consider the "Banim" relationship as it affects our interactions with other Jews, we find yet another motivation for treating each other with such consideration - especially in their realm of financial welfare and sustenance. Besides the theologically-driven argument of fellowship by virtue of a "common Father"; there is a historically-driven argument based on the common experience of slavery. Much more than common success, shared oppression serves to forge a people - as did happen for us in Egypt. It is the commemoration and

constant awareness that, although today some of us are more comfortable and financially secure than others, we all were slaves, with nothing to call our own.

This is the commemoration of Pesach - it serves as a second reason to treat each other with consideration without regard (or perhaps with excessive regard) for class distinctions. This is why the Matzah is called Lechem 'Oni specifically here - because we are to utilize the experience of Pesach to remind ourselves of common oppression - to motivate us to common concern and mutual responsibility.

Note that the section about Pesach is "bookended" by a reminder of our being slaves - once in the section of Ha'anakah (15:15) and once in Shavu'ot (16:12) - these bookends serve to highlight the place of Pesach within the larger schema of the Mitzvot appearing in the second half of R'eh. These Mitzvot are all methods of expressing and fortifying the theme: You are all children of God.

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