

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 more than 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 archives.

Note: We have an obligation out of town next week and will not be back until mid to late afternoon on Friday. I cannot promise to send out Devrei Torah for Shoftim. In case I do not post next week, you may find and download my materials from the past two years at PotomacTorah.org.

Reeh opens as Moshe tells B'Nai Yisrael that Hashem presents them with a blessing and a curse. We have a choice – if we really see this choice and internalize the options, we can build a relationship with Hashem and receive His blessings. Rabbi Sacks (below) notes that seven times in this parsha Moshe reminds the people that living a life bound to our Creator brings joy.

Moshe uses examples from earlier in Jewish history to show that incidents of danger and curses, with proper connections to God, instead lead to blessings. In chapter 12, the language and specific situations mirror God's challenge to Avraham to take his only son, Yitzhak, on a three day journey to a place that He will reveal, and sacrifice him as a korban olah (burnt offering). Since Yitzhak only exists because God creates a miracle to permit Avraham at age 99 and Sarah at age 89 to conceive and have a child, Yitzhak ultimately is Hashem's child. As Rabbi David Fohrman and Beth Lesch discuss, God ultimately has the right to do what He wishes with Yitzhak – even to insist that Avraham turn him over. At the last second, God has His angel stop Avraham from making Yitzhak a korban. In Reeh, Moshe reminds B'Nai Yisrael that God abhors pagans and their idols, especially the awful practice of sacrificing children. Instead of asking a Jew to sacrifice a child, God demands that B'Nai Yisrael destroy all signs, idols, and places of worship of all of the pagan nations that they encounter.

Rather than turning a child into a korban, God now gives the Jews a special gift. Whenever a Jew finds himself too far from the place that Hashem designates as the exclusive place to offer korbanot, Jews may now eat meat – as long as they slaughter the Kosher animal properly. Rabbi Ovadia (below) presents the texts (in translation here; original in Sefaria) that provide the basis for Kosher slaughter. As Moshe records, "to our heart's desire you may slaughter and eat meat, according to the blessings that Hashem, your God, will have given you. . ." (12:15). With Avraham, God asks for Yitzhak as a korban. In Reeh, we have the complete opposite – the child, instead of being a korban, becomes a person who may eat meat and enjoy it with family and friends. This right to eat and enjoy Kosher meat, when done properly, is a gift from Hashem. Moreover, for the first time, the gift of meat is universal, not tied to being part of a korban.

The gift of meat recalls another ugly incident from earlier Jewish history. As soon as the Jews depart from the base of Har Sinai for the final journey to the land, "The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel also wept once more, and said, 'Who will feed us meat'" (Bemidbar 11:4). A desire for meat makes Hashem and Moshe furious in the Midbar. Now God provides Kosher meat without restrictions as a unilateral gift.

Moshe and Rabbi Sacks both remind us that living as a Torah Jew brings joy. This lesson reminds me of a story from Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky. Some years ago, a non-religious family moved next door to his home. He asked his grandfather, HaGaon Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, how his family should relate to non-religious neighbors. His grandfather said to do nothing special but to live as they always have – and invite the family to join them and see that frum living creates joy. The neighbors started asking about religion, then eating Kosher and attending shul. Finally the neighbors decided to make aliyah, because they found the Five Towns in New York to be insufficiently religious. Rabbi Kamenetzky's grandfather was right. Frum living brings joy and attracts others to seek the blessings that Hashem offers to those who see, understand, and absorb this lesson.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, emulated the lessons of Rabbi Kamenetsky. When I met Rabbi Cahan, coming from an assimilated family, I knew little about our religion except how to read Hebrew. Rabbi Cahan started me reading Torah commentaries and other books to fill in some of the gaps in my background. Rabbi Cahan and his beloved wife Elizabeth invited me for Shabbas and Yom Tov meals, had me join a shul committee, and introduced me to Hannah, who soon became my wife. Once we had children, he encouraged us to send them to Orthodox schools and later to join an Orthodox shul. This model is the way to recover Jews who have lost or never learned the derech (path). By recovering me, Rabbi Cahan brought my family, sons, and grandchildren back to Judaism. In Reeh, Moshe offers us the choice of gaining these blessings. May each of us have the opportunity to help other non religious Jews find their way to the joy of Hashem's blessings. Shabbat Shalom.

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 Shlema for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Reeh: See What Can Be Seen

by Rabbi Label Lam © 2007

See I place before you today blessing and curse. The blessing that you listen to the commandments of HASHEM your G-d that I command you today, and the curse if you do not listen to the commandments of HASHEM your G-d and you turn away from the path that I command you today to go after other gods that you did not know. (Devarim 11:26-2)

These words are spoken to the entire Nation of Israel, at the very end of a forty year term in the desert. Two distinct mountains were on open display. Mount Grizim is plush, rich, and flowering with the promise of life. Mount Evil, in stark contrast, is conspicuously barren and empty. This visual aid is employed to etch into the psyche of the assembled the lesson of remaining loyal to the task and mission of Torah and Mitzvos. In the recording of the event Moshe refers to that day as -- “today.” What’s so special about that day? Every day he spoke was also a “today.” Why was that day worthy of a title for all time “today”?

The Ohr HaChaim answers that that day they were capable of understanding his lesson based on the statement of the sages, “A person does not stand on (truly grasp) the knowledge-opinion of his teacher until after forty years” (Avodah Zara 5B).

That means that now after forty years they can begin to truly comprehend what Moshe had told them back then. Why does it take forty years? Were these not brilliant people? Surely they understood what Moshe had spoken to them and they followed along all that time. Why is now the teachable moment for anchoring this all-time lesson?

Reb Chaim Soloveichik z"l wired the Chofetz Chaim ztl. to come to St. Petersburg immediately for an emergency meeting with the sages of the generation to discuss and remedy a decree by the government that rabbis are required to be certified with a secular education.

Since the train left once a day the Chofetz Chaim had wait many hours before departing. During the time of preparing and waiting to leave he walked about with a somber face and tears in his eyes. He was asked, "Is it such a disaster for rabbis to need a fourth grade secular education?"

The Chofetz Chaim answered, "If we look into the near future we can foresee frightening consequences to the Torah. Think of what happened with choosing Shochtim (one who slaughters animals in a way obedient to the laws of Kosher). It used to be that a Shochet was chosen for his fear of G-d, his knowledge of the laws of Shechita, and his expertise in slaughtering animals. If, in addition, if he had a good voice and could lead the prayers on the High Holy Days and sing at weddings, it was all the better. But in recent times with the decrease in learning and fear of G-d, the priorities have been reversed. The Shochet is chosen because of his voice; the other qualifications have become secondary. The same thing is liable to happen with selection of rabbis. Secular education will become the main qualification, and the requirement of Torah scholarship will become secondary."

Just to be able measure how prescient were the words of the Chofetz Chaim more than seventy years ago, when we read the story, many of us are no doubt left wondering quietly within our heads, "What's so bad about that?"

Now we can understand even the emotion of Moshe's appeal. With the wisdom of perfect hindsight, based on forty years of empirical observation, "today" you can best verify the validity of the value of all you have heard. Those who did not made it this far deviated from the proven path and dead-ended in the desert. Those who have survived to this point have made it for one reason alone. This generation, poised now to enter the "Promised Land," must project into the future and see what can be seen!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5771-reeh/>

Listening and Seeing: Thoughts on Parashat Re'eh

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Talmudic discussions are often introduced by the phrase "ta shema," come listen. The connotation is that we are to apply our intellects to analyze a particular passage, to "listen" to alternative interpretations, to iron out possible contradictions. "Shema" — listening — calls on us to utilize our intellects.

Discussions in the Zohar, the classic work of Kabbalah, often are introduced by the phrase "ta hazei," come see. The connotation is that we need to use our "vision," to go beyond the realm of pure logic. When we are challenged to "see" a text or teaching, we are asked to do more than "listen." We are asked to draw on other human resources — imagination, creativity, aesthetics, faith.

Parashat Va-et-hanan includes the famous passage: Shema Yisrael...Listen Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. This verse, recited in our prayers several times each day, calls on us to be attentive to the reality of God and God's unity. As Rambam taught, proper faith in God is based on intellectual striving and philosophic analysis.

Parashat Re'eh begins: "See, I have set before you this day a blessing and a curse." We are told that if we observe the mitzvoth we will be blessed, but if we fail to observe them we will be subject to negative consequences. The Torah uses the word "re'eh"...see. What does seeing have to do with blessings and curses?

The Torah states that blessings and curses are correlated to our observance of the mitzvoth. The implication should be that religiously observant people enjoy blessings and religiously non-observant people receive curses. But in our experience, we see that this correlation does not always seem to hold. There are fine pious people who suffer terribly, and

there are highly immoral people who enjoy good health and prosperity. If we rely only on our "listening" — our power of reason — we cannot understand why bad things happen to good people, or why good things happen to bad people.

So the Torah teaches: when it comes to comprehending blessings and curses, "listening" isn't enough. We need the power of "seeing" — going beyond surface understanding.

Sages and philosophers over the ages have sought explanations as to why good people suffer and bad people thrive. Some have explained that the blessings and curses relate not to external conditions, but to internal life. Righteous people, even if suffering, find meaning and blessing in life. Their faith sustains them. Wicked people, even when seeming to be successful, may actually be extremely unhappy. They are cursed with all sorts of anxieties and frustrations that sap their lives of real joy.

Blessings and curses are not objective conditions in themselves, but are connected to how we relate to them. Different people may be undergoing identical physical sufferings, but one deals courageously and finds meaning in the suffering; while the other wallows in pain and self-pity. Different people may be enjoying identical blessings, but one expresses humble gratitude to the Almighty while the other is dissatisfied and always wants more.

The Talmud (Hagigah 14b) tells of four great sages who entered the "parde," i.e. the world of profound speculation. Ben Azzai died; Ben Zoma lost his mind; Elisha ben Abuya became a heretic. Only Rabbi Akiva entered in peace and emerged in peace.

Elisha and Akiva listened to and saw the same things. Why did they come to opposite conclusions?

Elisha relied entirely on "listening" — his faculty of reason. He concluded that the world seems to operate without Judge and without justice. Things are random. There is no correlation between righteousness and blessing.

Akiva relied not only on "listening" but on "seeing." He was just as aware as Elisha of the intellectual problem before them. But Akiva "saw" beyond. He was wise enough to be able to live with intellectual questions and to recognize that there is a dimension of understanding that transcends cold logic. A person of faith does not deny reality...but knows that there is a reality that goes beyond our power of reason.

If we rely entirely on "listening," we sometimes come to a dead end.

If we also incorporate "seeing," we learn to internalize blessings and curses as personal opportunities and challenges in our relationship with God. How we deal with blessings and curses is an indication of who we really are.

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

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 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.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/listening-and-seeing-thoughts-parashat-reeh>

Jerusalem Undivided: Thoughts for Yom Yerushalayim **

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

On December 6, 2017, President Donald Trump made it official that the United States recognizes Jerusalem as the Capital of the State of Israel. On May 14, 2018, the American embassy in Jerusalem was officially opened.

That Jerusalem is Israel's capital should be obvious to everyone...and many thoughtful people rejoiced at this acknowledgment of truth. Yet, in the "politically correct" community, it has been assumed that Israel has no right to its own capital city. People raise the concerns of Palestinians, of the Arab world, of Muslims, of the sanctity of Christian holy sites.

They worry about everyone's rights – except the rights of Jews. Some people don't remember the pre-1967 years when Jerusalem was divided; when Jews had no access to our holy sites in the Old City;

During the Six Day War in 1967, Israel regained control of East Jerusalem. This was a historic event that returned the ancient holy sites of the Old City to Israeli sovereignty. Yom Yerushalayim has become a day of religious and national commemoration.

While pundits comment on the status of Jerusalem, it is important to put things into historic context.

The Muslim Ottoman Empire controlled the land of Israel for hundreds of years. Relatively few Jews lived in the holy land during those centuries. **The Ottoman Empire could very easily have established a Muslim country in the land of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital city. The thought never occurred to them!** "Palestine" was a poor backwater of little significance; Jerusalem was an old, decrepit city that no one (except Jews) cared very much about. There was no call for a "Palestinian State", and no claim that Jerusalem should be a capitol of a Muslim country.

Between 1948 and 1967, Jordan controlled the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. Egypt controlled Gaza. Neither Jordan nor Egypt ceded one inch of territory to Palestinian Arab rule. Neither suggested the need for a Palestinian country, nor took any steps in the direction of creating a Palestinian State. Jordan did not declare Jerusalem as a capital city of Palestinians.

In June 1967, Israel defeated its Arab enemies in the remarkable Six Days War. In the process, Israel took control of the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. In making peace with Egypt, Israel ceded the Sinai to Egypt. In attempting to create conciliatory gestures to Palestinian Arabs, Israel ceded much of the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. **Israel is the only country in the world to have given territory to the Palestinian Arabs.** Israel has a legitimate claim to much of this territory, but for the sake of peace decided to forego pressing its claims.

Although no Muslim or Arab nation, when having control of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, created (or even suggested creating) a Palestinian State with a capital of Jerusalem – the current propaganda in the "politically correct" world is: the Palestinian Arabs have a right to their own State with Jerusalem as capital.

Why did this "politically correct" position gain so much credence? Doesn't everyone know that Israel's claim to Jerusalem goes back 3000 years, and that Jews have prayed facing Jerusalem from time immemorial? Don't both Christianity and Islam recognize the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible – a Bible that highlights the centrality of Jerusalem in so many texts?

When the land of Israel was a desolate, poor backwater, no one cared much about it. But once Jews came and revitalized the land – suddenly people started to take notice. Jews planted farms, developed progressive agricultural techniques, built cities, roads, schools, universities. Suddenly, this desolate backwater became desirable due to the labor and ingenuity of Jews. Before the Six Day War, no one cared much about the desolate West Bank or the poverty-stricken Gaza Strip or the poorly maintained Old City of Jerusalem. But once Israel took control and started to turn these places into beautiful, modern areas – then these places became desirable. Once the Jews had made so many improvements, now claims were made on behalf of Palestinian Arabs that they should have all these things themselves.

Israel has a right to flourish and to enjoy the fruits of its labors and creativity and idealistic endeavors. Israel does not ask to be judged more kindly than any other nation – only that it should not be judged less kindly than any other nation.

The current "politically correct" propaganda ignores hundreds of years of history of the holy land; ignores the rights of the people of Israel; ignores truth.

If we are to have peace between Israel and the Palestinians, it would be most helpful if people understood the historic context of the unrest, if both sides strove to establish a spirit of mutual respect, if both sides focused on how much benefit all would have if a just and fair peace were to be in place. Misguided individuals and countries who forget history, who ignore or deny Israel's rights, who look the other way when Israel is maligned and attacked – such people are part of the problem, not the solution.

As we read in Psalm 122: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love thee.

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

**]Note: In Reeh, we read that God will establish a single location where we Jews may offer korbanot to Hashem. Later in history, during the time of King David, we learned that this place was the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Reeh is therefore an appropriate week to ponder the implications of an undivided Jerusalem. Emphasis added[

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/jerusalem-undivided-thoughts-yom-yerushalayim>

Re'eh -- Miraculously Unbelievable

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2014

Let's say a miracle man would arrive in town. The locals would be duly impressed by his talents and expertise. But what if he started sharing a message which differed from Torah and mitzvos? I contend that the Jews would opt out. Do you know why? Because miraculously speaking we are unbelievers.

The Torah (Devarim 13:2-5) describes a case where a "holy man" might appear and perform signs and wonders to buttress his vision to abandon Torah and belief in Hashem. The Torah warns us not to trust his miracles. We are told that Hashem might allow someone to do wonders through a variety of occult or spiritual forces, "to test you, to see if you really want Hashem as your G-d," or will you quickly excuse yourself from Him if you perceive the opportunity.

Interestingly, the Rambam (Yesodey HaTorah 8) writes that Jewish people do not believe in Judaism because of the miracles that Moshe performed. "The miracles that Moshe performed were done not for purposes of trust or faith but because of their functionality." The people needed food, so Manna was provided. The people needed to escape, so he split the sea. The source of our belief in Moshe and in the Torah he instructed us is that we were present as a people at the great revelation at Sinai when we heard Hashem speak to Moshe in our presence. We then witnessed how Moshe repeated the mitzvos to us. Our faith in Moshe's Torah is based on the truthfulness of instruction. But miracles in Judaism are not facilitators of faith.

Nevertheless, the human being craves the miraculous. We continue to describe the rags to riches dream as someone who wins the lottery, even though we know that 99% of the people who go from rags to riches and stay there for any significant period of time do not do so as a result of winning the lottery. A far more accurate picture of success is one who perseveres day in and day out until he is blessed with a few successful opportunities. But advocating perseverance and trustworthiness, as Judaism does (Talmud, Niddah 70b), doesn't have the same flair as dreaming of a miraculous win of the lottery.

Sometimes miraculous thinking even makes its way foolishly into our daily decision making. I recall an instance where a stockbroker intern was instructed to buy shares for a customer, and accidentally mistook GE for GM, and bought the wrong stock. One would expect that he would get at least a warning for his grievous mistake. But when the stock market gyrations made his decision the better "gamble" he was applauded for his "magic fingers." Somehow, the miraculous is exotic and exciting, even if the miracle worker is actually displaying feeble judgment or skill.

This is not to say that Jews don't believe in miracles. We do. But as the Rambam describes it, we believe in functional miracles, not miracles to show us how to lead our lives. When we need G-d's help (which is all the time) we know that He cares about us, and salvation- both hidden and miraculous- come from Him.

Perhaps one reason that Jews are so skeptical about proving things from miracles is because we recognize that we ourselves are a miracle. It is said that when one Emperor asked his philosophers for a miracle that he could see, they replied, "The Jews, your majesty, the Jews." Torah and the Jewish people may not appear to be the exotic miracle that some people think of when they talk of wondrous miracles. But Torah is the permanence of a message that can carry the human being through all life cycles and through all environments both good and bad.

Perhaps, as is the case with honor, those who pursue it will find it elusive. One who strives for the miraculous will find values that are remarkably short lived. But those who say, "Miracles are functional. We get them when we need them, but our faith is not based on them," are granted miracles with such frequency that they themselves become synonymous with the imagery of miracles and with the Hand of the Divine. It is that miraculous Hand that will guide the destiny of mankind and of each individual until the end of time.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

<http://www.teach613.org/parshas-reeh-miraculously-unbelievable/>

Note: Rabbi Rhine is on vacation for a few weeks, and he has authorized me to reprint selected Devrei Torah from his archives during this period.

Parshas Re'ey

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer © 2020 *

This week's Parsha begins with a perplexing passuk – "See I have placed before you blessing and curse." (Devarim 11:26) Why do we need to be told to "see" to focus and take note of the blessings and curses? Certainly anyone who hears the blessings and curses promised for observing or violating the Torah will be aware of them. Why is Moshe asking us to take note? What is it that he wishes us to "see"?

The Medrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 4:1) teaches us that Moshe is enjoining us to take note of the nature and purpose of these blessings and curses. "The Holy One, Blessed is He, said 'It is not for their detriment that I have given them blessings and curses, but to make known to them which is the good path that they should choose in order that they should take reward.'" Moshe wants us to see that these blessings and curses have a higher purpose and are not merely to force us into following Hashem's way. Hashem didn't simply tell us of our obligations, but also gave us deterrents and incentives to help guide us along the way.

The Maharz"u (ibid.) points out that this answer does not fully answer the question. While, we now understand why Moshe was asking us to "see" and properly understand the curses, why was Moshe also asking us to "see" the blessings? The Medrash itself says that G-d felt the need to clarify not only the curses, but also the blessings – "It is not for their detriment that I have given them blessings and curses". How could blessings possibly be to our detriment? What harm could there be in receiving reward?

The Maharz"u explains that there is a deeper lesson to be learned from the blessings than that which is learned from the curses. Blessings and incentives are not always beneficial to the recipient. If one has certain goals in mind but is told that they must achieve other foreign goals to receive blessing, then the blessing is nothing more than a distraction. There are many who prefer excitement and pleasure over material gain. If one wants to live for this world alone, one may decide that a life of pleasure-seeking and thrills is the wealth and bliss they prefer. For such a person, the blessings for following G-d's Torah could indeed be considered detrimental. These blessings of prosperity and peace are contingent on living a different life. This person may feel he is being distracted or even coerced away from the life and joy he truly seeks.

It is specifically with this in mind that Moshe is telling us "See that I have placed before you blessings and curses." Take note of both the blessings and the curses and understand that they come from the G-d Who took you out of Egypt and sustained you throughout the travels in the desert. The G-d Who created and maintains Heaven and Earth, ecosystems and universes, the G-d who gives each of us life day in and day out surely would not be giving us blessings and curses for our detriment. "See" this, says Moshe, and understand that there is a higher purpose not only to the curses, but also a higher purpose to the blessings.

The Maharz"u explains that the blessings themselves are not the goal, but rather there is a better more pristine and complete joy both in this world and in the World to Come. The blessings are merely intended as a tool to compensate for the other joys and pleasures of this world which may blind us to the greater meaning of life. In this context, the blessings are certainly not for our detriment. On the contrary, the blessings are there to save us from getting distracted with the fleeting pleasures and to know which is the path that leads to the true joy and pleasure for which G-d created the world and created us.

We must take heed of Moshe's words and "see" and understand the message of the blessings which G-d has given us. The true goal is not the blessings themselves. The true goal is developing our true selves, achieving the nobility of G-dliness and reaping the ultimate benefits of closeness with the Eternal G-d.

* Rabbi, * Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Am HaTorah has moved. The new address is 5909 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda, MD 20814. Because Rabbi Singer is on vacation this week, I am reprinting an earlier Dvar Torah.

Slaughtering in the Bible -- Abridged **

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

[One gift from Hashem to B'Nai Yisrael in Reeh is permission to eat meat, if slaughtered properly, at any location in Israel, not only at the place that God will select for korbanot. Rabbi Ovadia has compiled a list of the relevant halachos of slaughter. For the Hebrew, see his complete article in Sefaria.]

(30) *You shall be holy people to Me: you must not eat flesh torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs.* Exodus 22:30

(15) *The priest shall bring it to the altar, pinch off its head, and turn it into smoke on the altar; and its blood shall be drained out against the side of the altar.* Leviticus 1:15

(13) *And if any Israelite or any stranger who resides among them hunts down an animal or a bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.* (15) *Any person, whether citizen or stranger, who eats what has died or has been torn by beasts shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain unclean until evening; then he shall be clean.* Leviticus 17:13-15

(21) *If the place where the LORD has chosen to establish His name is too far from you, you may slaughter any of the cattle or sheep that the LORD gives you, as I have instructed you; and you may eat to your heart's content in your settlements.* (22) *Eat it, however, as the gazelle and the deer are eaten: the unclean may eat it together with the clean.* Deuteronomy 12:21-22

(21) *You shall not eat anything that has died a natural death; give it to the stranger in your community to eat, or you may sell it to a foreigner. For you are a people consecrated to the LORD your God. You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.* Deuteronomy 14:21

(22) *Eat it in your settlements, the unclean among you no less than the clean, just like the gazelle and the deer.* (23) *Only you must not partake of its blood; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.* Deuteronomy 15:22-23

(13) *[Where is] the lion that tore victims for his cubs And strangled for his lionesses, And filled his lairs with prey And his dens with mangled flesh?* Nahum 2:13

(14) *Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD, my person was never defiled; nor have I eaten anything that died of itself or was torn by beasts from my youth until now, nor has foul flesh entered my mouth."* Ezekiel 4:14

(31) *Priests shall not eat anything, whether bird or animal, that died or was torn by beasts.* Ezekiel 44:31

(15) *At that time I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the sabbath, and others bringing heaps of grain and loading them onto asses, also wine, grapes, figs, and all sorts of goods, and bringing them into Jerusalem on the sabbath. I admonished them there and then for selling provisions.* Nehemiah 13:15

the verse speaks only of wild animals, what about domestic birds... it says תְּעַד to include all... why it written "who will hunt"? Rabbi Yehuda said: the torah teaches us manners. Sifra, Acharei Mot, Chapter 11 3

What does God care whether you kill the animal from the front or from the back? does it help or harm Him? ... the mitzvoth are only an educational tool

Rabbi Elazar HaKappar son of Rabbi says: deer and gazelle are like disqualified sacrifices in the sense that both require slaughtering, but fowl requires slaughtering only miderabanan Chullin 28a:3-4

The kohanim should not eat nevelah and terefah. does this mean that israelites are allowed to eat? R Yohnan says: Eliyahu will explain this. Ravina said, the kohanim would have thought that they are allowed because they eat fowl sacrifices (which were killed from the back) Menachot 45a:14-15

It is a Mitzva to slaughter animals, wild or domestic and fowl, before eating them as it is written: "slaughter of your cattle and sheep", and regarding blemished bekhor it says "like the deer and gazelle" to teach that wild animals require slaughtering like domestic ones, and the verse equates fowls to animals in the discussion about covering blood Mishneh Torah, Ritual Slaughter 1:1

Shabbat Shalom.

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Shalom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia's original, most available in Sefaria.

** <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/52367?lang=bi>

Act Before You Feel

by Adam Cohen *

Do I kiss somebody because I love them or feel love for that person after I kiss them? William James does not think that we lose something valuable and cry because we are sad. Or that we meet a bear, are frightened and run. Or that we are insulted by someone, get angry and hit them. Rather, we feel sorry **because** we cry, angry **because** we strike, afraid **because** we tremble.

And he is reflecting a massive debate in the world of therapy. Do our emotions lead to our actions and we should therefore change how we feel to change how we live? Or do our actions lead to our emotions, and we should rather change how we live to change how we feel?

This week, Moshe outlines to the Jewish people the different offerings they will bring to God once the Temple is built. Which sounds more effective? Forcing people to bring compulsory sacrifices at specific times or asking them to bring free will, voluntary offerings, when their heart desires? (Dev. 12:6) On the surface, we like the idea of everyone giving what they want and acting on how they feel in the process. And yet HaShem knows that, even if someone does not feel like giving an offering, such an act could easily trigger off a positive emotion. Nowadays, we have replaced offering a sacrifice with offering tefillot and the same principle applies. Davening, even when we do not feel in the mood, can still give us peace of mind and help us connect spiritually or think things through.

Too often, we think the emotion has to come first. I am not going to do something unless I am in the mood to do it. The best example is probably exercise. If we followed our emotions, many of us would probably never work out. Instead we do the action, knowing that the feeling afterwards will be an immensely positive one. So too when you can not be bothered to do something for someone close to you or in so many other areas of our lives. We have to work hard to build a future-oriented mindset. Do the positive act and the positive emotions will inevitably follow.

Shabbat shalom!

* Rabbinic student, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Riverdale, NY. Adam Cohen has studied and worked for Jewish organizations in the United Kingdom, Israel, Australia, and the United States.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2022/08/reeh/>

Emotional Resilience During Covid-19

by Rabbi Moshe Rube * © 2020

The phrase "Rabbi, I'm ready for this to be over." has been said to me a few times over the past week or two. Since March, the world has been turned upside down by the coronavirus and we've all been sent scrambling, searching for answers and arguing over the best ways to fight this new enemy. But now, it seems we've reached a point of fatigue. Not in the sense that we are being less cautious but in more of an emotional sense of "it's just time to get back to normal. When can that happen?" The human being cannot remain in a sense of frenzy all the time, and we're just exhausted from it all already. The prayer of 'Chadeish Yamenu Kikedem' (Renew our days like how it was before) has taken on a new meaning. So what do we do to continue moving forward and keep ourselves emotionally healthy and resilient?

Now one thing I can do is tell stories of how the pandemic has brought families closer, or how in the long run this experience will be good for humanity, God has a plan and we just don't see all the pieces yet, etc. But to me these answers do not satisfy. Perhaps in twenty years with the power of hindsight they will, but for us who are experiencing this now, we require a different type of explanation.

Let me a quote a story to you from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin's "Stories of the Chassidim." Like in many stories, the point of this being historically factual is irrelevant in the face of the ultimate goal, which is to communicate a deep truth about Torah and the human condition. (And of course we don't need to identify as a chassid to appreciate it any more than we need to identify as a "Litvak" to appreciate the religious value of science and philosophy.)

"There was once a man who related to his friends that he had studied thirty-six interpretations of Isaiah 40:26, "Lift up your eyes to heaven and see Who created these" and found them wanting. He then started studying Chassidut and found the correct way to see this verse. His friends asked him, "So what is the Chassidic explanation?" He answered the Chassidic explanation of this verse is "Lift up your eyes to heaven and see Who created these." His friends replied, "That's good but maybe you should write it down so others can benefit." The man shook his head and said "I will not, for then it would become the thirty-seventh interpretation."

No amount of interpretation can replicate the awe inspiring experience of seeing a heaven full of stars. If we were looking at such a sight with others and one of our friends started talking about planetary motion and gravity, most likely we would give him an old-fashioned "Shush." We seek to process these experiences fully.

We know this regarding positive experiences but we do not employ such methods as easily when it comes to negative ones. Ironically though, that's where healing and resilience reside.

Last night SEED hosted one of my teachers and mentors, Dr. David Pelcovitz, to talk about emotional strength during quarantine. He made his main point by quoting noted positive psychologist Tal Ben Schachar, who taught an overbooked class in Harvard on the Principles of Happiness for over 20 years. Dr. Ben Schachar stated that "All emotions flow through one pipeline. If I block one I am not allowing joy and love room to dwell". In other words, we need to fully immerse ourselves in all of our experiences if we want to experience joy and build mental resilience. Building this mindfulness and processing everything we're going through fully like we would when standing on the edge of the Grand Canyon is one of our best tools for emotional well-being. Dr. Pelcovitz followed with a quote from Golda Meir, "Those who don't know how to weep with a full heart don't know how to laugh either."

So as we continue to face the coronavirus, I say to myself and all of us that we should immerse yourself in all we experience. We're alive. We live during this time and this is what's happening. We're doing whatever we can and whatever comes we will allow it to flow.

Interpretations can be offered but they do not have to block our pipelines.

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL

Rabbi Rube is in the process of moving from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he will be Senior Rabbi of a synagogue. We look forward to his completing this move and returning to send us new learning weekly.

Rav Kook Torah **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.)

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/REEH59.htm>

The Deep Power of Joy (5776)

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

If we were to ask what key word epitomises the society Jews were to make in the Promised Land, several concepts would come to mind: justice, compassion, reverence, respect, holiness, responsibility, dignity, loyalty. Surprisingly, though, another word figures centrally in Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy. It is a word that appears only once in each of the other books of the Torah: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers.[1] Yet it appears twelve times in Deuteronomy, seven of them in Parshat Re'eh. The word is simcha, joy.

It is an unexpected word. The story of the Israelites thus far has not been a joyous one. It has been marked by suffering on the one hand, rebellion and dissension on the other. Yet Moses makes it eminently clear that joy is what the life of faith in the land of promise is about. Here are the seven instances in this parsha, and their contexts:

1. *The central Sanctuary, initially Shilo*: “*There in the presence of the Lord your God you and your families shall eat and rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you*” (Deut. 12:7).
2. *Jerusalem and the Temple*: “*And there you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns*” (Deut. 12:12).
3. *Sacred food that may be eaten only in Jerusalem*: “*Eat them in the presence of the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will choose – you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns – and you are to rejoice before the Lord your God in everything you put your hand to*” (Deut. 12:18).
4. *The second tithe*: “*Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine, or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice*” (Deut. 14:26).
5. *The festival of Shavuot*: “*And rejoice before the Lord your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His name – you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the strangers, the fatherless, and the widows living among you*” (Deut. 16:11).
6. *The festival of Succot*: “*Be joyful at your feast – you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the strangers, the fatherless, and the widows who live in your towns*” (Deut. 16:14).
7. *Succot, again*: “*For seven days, celebrate the feast to the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete [vehayita ach same'ach]*” (Deut. 16:15).

Why does Moses emphasise joy specifically in the book of Deuteronomy? Perhaps because is there, in the speeches Moses delivered in the last month of his life, that he scaled the heights of prophetic vision never reached by anyone else before or since. It is as if, standing on a mountaintop, he sees the whole course of Jewish history unfold below him, and from that dizzying altitude he brings back a message to the people gathered around him: the next generation, the children of those he led out of Egypt, the people who will cross the Jordan he will not cross and enter the land he is only able to

see from afar.

What he tells them is unexpected, counter-intuitive. In effect he says this: "You know what your parents suffered. You have heard about their slavery in Egypt. You yourselves have known what it is to wander in the wilderness without a home or shelter or security. You may think those were the greatest trials, but you are wrong. You are about to face a harder trial. The real test is security and contentment."

Absurd though this sounds, it has proved true throughout Jewish history. In the many centuries of dispersion and persecution, from the destruction of the Second Temple to the nineteenth century, no one raised doubts about Jewish continuity. They did not ask, "Will we have Jewish grandchildren?" Only since Jews achieved freedom and equality in the Diaspora and independence and sovereignty in the State of Israel has that question come to be asked. When Jews had little to thank God for, they thanked Him, prayed to Him, and came to the synagogue and the house of study to hear and heed His word. When they had everything to thank Him for, many turned their backs on the synagogue and the house of study.

Moses was giving prophetic expression to the great paradox of faith: It is easy to speak to God in tears. It is hard to serve God in joy. It is the warning he delivered as the people came within sight of their destination: the Promised Land. Once there, they were in danger of forgetting that the land was theirs only because of God's promise to them, and only for as long as they remembered their promise to God.

Simcha is usually translated as joy, rejoicing, gladness, happiness, pleasure, or delight. In fact, simcha has a nuance untranslatable into English. Joy, happiness, pleasure, and the like are all states of mind, emotions. They belong to the individual. We can feel them alone. Simcha, by contrast, is not a private emotion. It means happiness shared. It is a social state, a predicate of "we," not "I." There is no such thing as feeling simcha alone.

Moses repeatedly labours the point. When you rejoice, he says time and again, it must be "you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the strangers, the fatherless, and the widows in your towns." A key theme of Parshat Re'eh is the idea of a central Sanctuary "in the place the Lord your God will choose." As we know from later Jewish history, during the reign of King David, this place was Jerusalem, where David's son Solomon eventually built the Temple.

What Moses is articulating for the first time is the idea of simcha as communal, social, and national rejoicing. The nation was to be brought together not just by crisis, catastrophe, or impending war, but by collective celebration in the presence of God. The celebration itself was to be deeply moral. Not only was this a religious act of thanksgiving; it was also to be a form of social inclusion. No one was to be left out: not the stranger, or the servant, or the lonely (the orphan and widow). In a remarkable passage in the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides makes this point in the strongest possible terms:

And while one eats and drinks, it is their duty to feed the stranger, the orphan, the widow, and other poor and unfortunate people, for those who lock the doors to their courtyard, eating and drinking with their family, without giving anything to eat and drink to the poor and the bitter in soul – their meal is not a rejoicing in a Divine commandment, but a rejoicing only in their own stomach. It is of such persons that Scripture says, "Their sacrifices shall be to them as the bread of mourners, all that eat thereof shall be polluted; for their bread is a disgrace to their own appetite" (Hos. 9:4). Rejoicing of this kind is a disgrace to those who indulge in it, as Scripture says, "And I will spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your sacrifices." (Mal. 2:3). Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yom Tov 6:18.

Moses' insight remains valid today. The West is more affluent than any previous society has ever been. Our life expectancy is longer, our standards of living higher, and our choices wider than at any time since Homo sapiens first walked on earth. Yet Western societies are not measurably happier. The most telling indices of unhappiness – drug and alcohol abuse, depressive illness, stress-related syndromes, eating disorders, and the rest – have risen by between 300 and 1,000 per cent in the space of two generations. Why so?

In 1968 I met the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, of blessed memory, for the first time. While I was there, the Chassidim told me the following story. A man had written to the Rebbe in roughly these terms: "I am depressed. I am lonely. I feel that life is meaningless. I try to pray, but the words do not come. I keep mitzvot but find no peace of mind. I need the Rebbe's help." The Rebbe sent a brilliant reply without using a single word. He simply circled the first word of every sentence and sent the letter back. The word in each case was "I."

Our contemporary consumer is constructed in the first-person singular: I want, I need, I must have. There are many things we can achieve in the first-person singular but one we cannot, namely, simcha – because simcha is the joy we share, the joy we have only because we share. That, said Moses before the Israelites entered their land, would be their greatest challenge. Suffering, persecution, a common enemy, unite a people and turn it into a nation. But freedom, affluence, and security turn a nation into a collection of individuals, each pursuing his or her own happiness, often indifferent to the fate of those who have less, the lonely, the marginal, and the excluded. When that happens, societies start to disintegrate. At the height of their good fortune, the long slow process of decline begins.

The only way to avoid it, said Moses, is to share your happiness with others, and, in the midst of that collective, national celebration, serve God.^[2] Blessings are not measured by how much we own or earn or spend or possess but by how much we share. Simcha is the mark of a sacred society. It is a place of collective joy.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Gen. 31:27; Ex. 4:14; Lev. 23:40; Num. 10:10.

[2] The great French sociologist Émile Durkheim (whose father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all rabbis) argued, in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (trans. Karen E. Fields [New York: Free Press, 1995]), that religion is born in the experience of "collective effervescence," which is closely related to simcha in the biblical sense.

* 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.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/reeh/collective-joy/>

Appreciate Your Blessings

By Yossy Goldman * © Chabad 2022

Who is wise, and who is foolish? Who is rich, and who is poor? Who is healthy, and who is sick? Who is happy, and who is sad? Not easy questions to answer. Everything is, of course, relative. More importantly, it all depends on our perspective.

Parshat Re'eh begins with the words: "See, I give you this day a blessing and a curse."¹ The Sages understand this to mean that how we see will determine what we see. Whether your life is a blessing or a curse can depend more on your own perspective than on the hard realities on the ground.

I think of the people of the Ukraine today. Those who are still living there and those who managed to get out with one or two suitcases in which to pack up all their life's possessions. Can we even begin to imagine the hardships they are enduring? What about our own grandparents or great-grandparents who left Eastern Europe for the shores of the New World? Many of them came with not much more than the shirts on their backs, and they had to start from scratch just to survive. In comparison, our lives are an absolute breeze. Even those of us who may be suffering financial pressures are living lives of luxury compared to them.

There is a Hebrew proverb that "the troubles of the many are half a comfort." The idea is that although times may be tough, the fact that many others are going through similar difficulties somehow eases our pain.

It reminds me of a rather curious comment made to me once by one of my congregants who began attending shul

regularly to say Kaddish after the loss of his mother.

“Rabbi, I must tell you, I am finding coming to shul very comforting.”

“That’s nice to hear,” I responded. “Is it the serenity of the synagogue, or perhaps the power of prayer that you find comforting?”

“No,” he said. “Just seeing that there are other people who have to say Kaddish too makes me feel better.”

Indeed, “the troubles of many are half a comfort.”

And another incident occurred some years ago when we were distributing jackets for underprivileged people living in the inner city without shelter or warm clothing. A generous congregant had donated several boxes of jackets and asked me to distribute them to the needy as winter was approaching. They were probably minimally damaged in one way or another, but they still could have been sold. In kindness, however, he chose to donate them to the destitute instead.

I joined forces with a number of dedicated welfare workers, and one morning we announced that the jackets would be made available on a “first come first served” basis. Hundreds of people lined up outside and filed by, one by one, to receive their jackets.

What can I say? You think we made those poor people warm by giving them the jackets? I tell you, we were the ones left with the very warm feeling of having helped bring comfort and cheer to our fellow human beings. Their big smiles and appreciation were absolutely heartwarming.

And, boy, did that encounter give us perspective. Whatever problems we may be facing, we are absolutely affluent and privileged compared to thousands of cold, often homeless people.

I conclude by sharing a few lines I found by an unknown author. You may have come across these words before, but they are worth repeating because they certainly provide perspective.

“If you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world.”

“If you have money in the bank, your wallet, and some spare change, you are among the top 8% of the world’s wealthy.”

“If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the millions of people who will not survive this week.”

“If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the agony of imprisonment or torture, or the horrible pangs of starvation, you are luckier than 750 million people alive and suffering.”

“If you can read this message, you are more fortunate than 3 billion people in the world who cannot read at all.”

We will all be far happier and realize how much we have to be grateful for, if we know how to see the blessing, rather than the curse. By developing perspective in life, we learn how to count our blessings. Only then do we realize how truly blessed we really are, and how truly happy we can be.

“See, I give you this day a blessing...”

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy 11:26

* Founding director of the first Chabad in South Africa (1976). Since 1986, rabbi of the iconic Sydenham Shul, where he is now Life Rabbi Emeritus. He is also president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5600618/jewish/The-Little-Moses-in-You.htm

Reeh: The Basis of a Spiritual Life

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnfsky *

Moses promised the Jewish people that if they would keep G-d's commandments, imitate His goodness, and cleave to the sages of the Torah, G-d would enable them to successfully drive out the nations that were occupying the Land of Israel.

The Basis of a Spiritual Life

If your brother, son of your mother; your son; your daughter; the wife of your embrace; or your friend who is as your own soul incites you in secret, saying, "let us go and worship other deities, which neither you nor your fathers have known." Deuteronomy 13:7

Allegorically, all relations mentioned in this verse are aspects of our personalities -- our intellect and emotions. Although we must make full use of our intellect and emotions in our spiritual life, we must be aware of their potential to lead us astray. The only attribute of ours that we can unhesitatingly rely upon to keep us true to our Divine selves is our fundamental bond with G-d. This fundamental bond expresses itself as our unconditional commitment to G-d's purposes and agenda, regardless of what our intellect or emotions might be whispering in our ear at any particular moment.

When we strengthen this fundamental commitment to G-d, we can be assured that our intellect and emotions will never be enticed to lead us astray. On the contrary, they will only aid us in enhancing our connections to G-d, the ultimate source of all truth.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Good Society

Moses, having set out the prologue and preamble to the covenant and its broad guiding principles, now turns to the details, which occupy the greater part of the book of Devarim, from chapter 12 to chapter 26. But before he begins with the details, he states a proposition that is the most fundamental one in the book, and one that would be echoed endlessly by Israel's Prophets:

See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you this day; and curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn away from the path that I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods, whom you have not experienced. (Deut. 11:26-28)

If you behave well, things will go well. If you act badly, things will turn out badly. Behaving well means honouring our covenant with God, being faithful to Him, heeding His words and acting in accordance with His commands. That was the foundation of the nation. Uniquely it had God as its liberator and lawgiver, its sovereign, judge and defender. Other nations had their gods, but none had a covenant with any of them, let alone with the Creator of heaven and earth.

And yes, as we saw last week, there are times when God acts out of chessed, performing kindness to us even though we do not deserve it. But do not depend on that. There are things Israel must do in order to survive. Therefore, warned Moses, beware of any temptation to act like the nations around you, adopting their gods, worship or practices. Their way is not yours. If you behave like them, you will perish like them. To survive, let alone thrive, stay true to your faith, history and destiny, your mission, calling and task as "a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation."

As you act, so shall you fare. As I put it in my book *Morality*, a free society is a moral achievement. The paradoxical truth is that a society is strong when it cares for the weak, rich when it cares for the poor, and invulnerable when it takes care of the vulnerable. Historically, the only ultimate guarantor of this is a belief in Someone greater than this time and place, greater than all time and place, who guides us in the path of righteousness, seeing all we do, urging us to see the world as His work, and humans as His image, and therefore to care for both. Bein adam le-Makom and bein adam le-chavero – the duties we have to God and those we owe

our fellow humans – are inseparable. Without a belief in God we would pursue our own interests, and eventually those at the social margins, with little power and less wealth, would lose. That is not the kind of society Jews are supposed to build.

The good society does not just happen. Nor is it created by the market or the state. It is made from the moral choices of each of us. That is the basic message of Deuteronomy: will we choose the blessing or the curse? As Moses says at the end of the book:

This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live. (30:15, 19)

The test of a society is not military, political, economic or demographic. It is moral and spiritual. That is what is revolutionary about the biblical message. But is it really so? Did not ancient Egypt have the concept of ma'at, order, balance, harmony with the universe, social stability, justice and truth? Did not the Greeks and Romans, Aristotle especially, give a central place to virtue? Did not the Stoics create an influential moral system, set out in the writings of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius? What is different about the way of Torah?

Those ancient systems were essentially ways of worshipping the state, which was given cosmic significance in Pharaonic Egypt and heroic significance in Greece and Rome. In Judaism we do not serve the state; we serve God alone. The unique ethic of the covenant, whose key text is the book of Devarim, places on each of us an immense dual responsibility, both individual and collective.

I am responsible for what I do. But I am also responsible for what you do. That is one meaning of the command in Kedoshim: "You shall surely remonstrate with your neighbour and not bear sin because of him." As Maimonides wrote in his *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, "It is not right for any of us to say, 'I will not sin, and if someone else sins, that is a matter between him and his God'. This is the opposite of the Torah." [1] In other words, it is not the state, the government, the army or the police that is the primary guardian of the law, though these may be necessary (as indicated at the beginning of next week's parsha: "You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes"). It is each of us and all of us together. That is what makes the ethic of the covenant unique.

We see this in a phrase that is central to American politics and does not exist at all in

British politics: "We, the people." These are the opening words of the preamble to the American constitution. Britain is not ruled by "We, the people." It is ruled by Her Majesty the Queen whose loyal subjects we are. The difference is that Britain is not a covenant society whereas America is: its earliest key texts, the Mayflower Compact of 1620 and John Winthrop's address on board the *Arbella* in 1630, were both covenants, built on the Deuteronomy model. [2] Covenant means we cannot delegate moral responsibility away to either the market or the state. We – each of us, separately and together – make or break society.

Stoicism is an ethic of endurance, and it has some kinship with Judaism's wisdom literature. Aristotle's ethic is about virtue, and much of what he has to say is of permanent value. Rambam had enormous respect for it. But embedded in his outlook was a hierarchical mindset. His portrait of the "great-souled man" is of a person of aristocratic bearing, independent wealth and high social status. Aristotle would not have understood Abraham Lincoln's statement about a new nation, "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

The Greeks were fascinated by structures. Virtually all the terms we use today – democracy, aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny – are Greek in origin. The message of *Sefer Devarim* is, yes, create structures – courts, judges, officers, priests, kings – but what really matters is how each of you behaves. Are you faithful to our collective mission in such a way that "All the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will be in awe of you" (Deut. 28:10)? A free society is made less by structures than by personal responsibility for the moral-spiritual order.

This was once fully understood by the key figures associated with the emergence (in their different ways) of the free societies of England and America. In England Locke distinguished between liberty, the freedom to do what you may, and licence, the freedom to do what you want. [3] Alexis de Tocqueville, in *Democracy in America*, wrote that "Liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith." [4] In his *Farewell Address*, George Washington wrote, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political

prosperity, religion, and morality are indispensable supports.”

Why so? What is the connection between morality and freedom? The answer was given by Edmund Burke:

“Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites... Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.”[5]

In other words, the less law enforcement depends on surveillance or the police, and the more on internalised habits of law-abidingness, the freer the society. That is why Moses, and later Ezra, and later still the rabbis, put so much emphasis on learning the law so that it became natural to keep the law.

What is sad is that this entire constellation of beliefs – the biblical foundations of a free society – has been almost completely lost to the liberal democracies of the West. Today it is assumed that morality is a private affair. It has nothing to do with the fate of the nation. Even the concept of a nation has become questionable in a global age. National cultures are now multi-cultures. Elites no longer belong “somewhere”; they are at home “anywhere.” [6] A nation’s strength is now measured by the size and growth of its economy. The West has reverted to the Hellenistic idea that freedom has to do with structures – nowadays, democratically elected governments – rather than the internalised morality of “We, the people.”

I believe Moses was right when he taught us otherwise: that the great choice is between the blessing and the curse, between following the voice of God or the seductive call of instinct and desire. Freedom is sustained only when a nation becomes a moral community. And any moral community achieves a greatness far beyond its numbers, as we lift others and they lift us.

[1] Rambam, *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, positive command 205.

[2] See the recent survey: Meir Soloveichik, Matthew Holbreich, Jonathan Silver and Stuart Halpern, *Proclaim liberty throughout the land: the Hebrew Bible in the United States, a sourcebook*, 2019.

[3] John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), chapter 2.

[4] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Introduction.

[5] Edmund Burke, *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791).

[6] David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere*, Penguin, 2017.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“See, I am giving before you this day a blessing and a curse...” (Deuteronomy 11:26)

So opens our Biblical portion, making reference to the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eybal which dramatically concludes the Book of Deuteronomy and precedes our entry into the land of Israel.

What I would like to analyze in this commentary is a curious and seemingly pedantic detail, a strange grammatical formulation which, when properly understood, will shed light not only upon the nature of this third and final Pentateuchal covenant but also upon a fundamental philosophy of our religious nationality.

Our verse begins with a singular verb which addresses an individual, “re’eh – see,” but then continues with a plural pronoun, “lifnehem – [giving] before you,” addressing a multitude. This grammatical switch in number – from singular to plural – is especially worthy of note, because when we do find such Biblical changes they take place in the opposite direction, from plural to singular.

In the Biblical portion of the Decalogue, for example, God’s introduction addresses in plural form the multitude of Israelites (Exodus 18: 4 ff : “You have seen – re’etem – what I have done to Egypt, and I lifted you – et’hem – upon eagles’ wings...”), but then switches to the singular form in the ten commandments themselves (Exodus 20:1 ff: “I am the Lord your God – E-lohekhha, singular – whom I took you – hotzeitikha, singular – from the land of Egypt..., You shall not murder, lo tirzah, singular”).

Nahmanides explains the switch from plural to singular, and catalogues many other instances when such a transition in number appears, as the desire of God to make certain that His words are being heard not only as a command to the general masses but also as a personal injunction to each and every individual! (Ramban, on Genesis 18:3 s.v. Al na).

In effect, God is thereby appearing as a Hassidic Rebbe rather than as a Congregational Rabbi, in accordance with the common folk understanding of the distinction between the two. When a congregational Rabbi speaks, every individual believes that he is addressing the person next to him; when a Hassidic Rebbe speaks, every person listening knows and feels that he is addressing him personally.

But if this is the case, how can we understand our opening verse, in which God begins with the singular and continues with the plural? I believe that this unusual grammatical phenomenon speaks to the very definition of this third covenant, known as the covenant of arevut, or mutual responsibility (B.T. Sotah 33 b). The Israelites, divided by the tribes in two groups of six, stand together to receive God’s blessings on Mt. Gerizim and God’s curses on Mt. Eyval, poised before Shechem and ready to enter the Promised Land.

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Our Biblical portion provides the exact location: “Are they not beyond the Jordan, ... in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the Aravah, over against Gilgal, beside the oak tree of Moreh?” (Deut. 11:30). And the term aravah, or plains, is taken by the sages of the Talmud as a double entendre (play on words), the Hebrew arev also meaning co-singer, the individual who takes financial responsibility if a borrower reneges on the payment of his debt.

This is the covenant which insists that every Israelite must see himself as part of a whole, as a member of a nation which sees itself as a united organism whose separate individuals feel inextricably and indelibly bound to each other in fate, destiny and responsibility. Hence God begins with the singular and continues into the plural in order to impress upon the individual Israelite that he must in some way merge with the multitude that he must assume responsibility for the entire Jewish people, that “every Israelite is a co-signer, responsible for every other Israelite.”

This is what I believe to be the higher meaning of a shomer Torah u’Mitzvot, literally a guardian over the Torah and tradition. It is not sufficient to merely study Torah and to perform the commandments; just as a guardian takes responsibility for the objects in his possession, so must each of us – everyone in his/her own way – take responsibility for the dissemination of Torah and the establishment of proper Torah institutions in his/her community, in his/her generation.

It is recorded that the famed Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin (early 20th century) was forced into a dispute with a Cardinal concerning the quality of our Jewish tradition. “The Talmud is blatantly anti-Christian,” argued the Cardinal. “Does it not state that ‘only Israelites are called adam (Hebrew for human beings), whereas Gentiles are not called adam,’ and therefore we Gentiles are not considered by you to be human beings?!”

The rabbi explained that there are four synonyms for “human being” in the Hebrew language: *gever*, *ish*, *enosh* and *adam*. The first three of these nouns have both a singular and a plural: *gevarim*, *ishim*, *aneshim*. Only *adam* has just one form, both singular and plural, humanity – a compound noun, including everyone together as a single organism. If a Jew is suffering in an Islamic fundamentalist country, or if Israel seems to be in danger, Jews worldwide demonstrate and flock to their homeland. This is a unique Jewish quality, built into our third covenant. In the case of the Jewish nation, the singular merges into the plural, the individual Jew is an inextricable part of his people.

The Lord's Children

Normally, when the Torah records a commandment, it does so without offering any reasons or explanations. In this morning's portion, however, we read one commandment for which no less than two explanations are offered. The Torah tells us (Deuteronomy 14:1), "lo titgodedu," "you shall not cut any gashes in your body" as a sign of mourning. It was the custom of the pagans of antiquity that as a sign of grief they would cut into their flesh until they bled. In prohibiting such disfigurement, the Torah begins by telling us, "You are children of the Lord your God," and then after the commandment it explains, "for you are a holy people."

These two explanations – that of being a holy people and that of being children of God – were interpreted by one of our most eminent commentators, Rabbi Yosef Bekhor Shor, as follows: It is not fitting for a member of a venerable people, possessing a proud and sacred history, to tolerate such disfigurement; every individual must remember that he is a child of God. Therefore, even if that person suffers excruciating loneliness because he grieves for a lost parent or other relative, that individual must recognize that solitude is never absolute, for he is a child of God, and our Heavenly Father lives forever. Therefore, in addition to the dignity of being a Jew, the mourning must be tempered by the knowledge that mankind is never alone as long as God is there.

Actually, these two motifs can serve as splendid insights into all the commandments of the Torah. All the mitzvot enhance the dignity of the Jew as a Jew; they reinforce our nationhood and endow it with particular grace. Furthermore, in addition to the nationalistic aspect, there is a purely spiritual obligation that each individual owes to his Creator.

Of course, the two elements of nationalism and religion are truly universal. We need no elaboration of the prevalence of nationalism as a fact of modern experience. What is interesting is the most recent confirmation of the irrepressibility of religion as a natural inclination of humankind. Only this week we read how in Russia itself, on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, the Russians have discovered that the third generation born into official governmental atheism still shows remarkable signs of religious initiative. The daughter of Stalin speaks of God, the Christian sects refuse to disappear, and Communist youth publications still must debate the existence of God and of religion in their newspapers.

But whereas the two facts of nationalism and religion are indeed universal, with Jews they are especially important because they are so intimately associated with each other. One category flows into the other, and one cannot

exist without the other. Perhaps this is what our great Kabbalists meant when they said in a most interesting comment in the Zohar (Mishpatim, 97b-98a):

Who is a child of the Holy One? When one reaches his thirteenth year he is called "a child of the congregation of Israel"; and when he is twenty years old – if he is deserving because of his obedience to Torah and the commandments – he is called "a son of the Holy One." And that is why it is written, "You are children of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 14:1).

In other words, the nationalistic awareness and the spiritual striving are two levels of maturity that are indigenous to every Jew. A Jew cannot attain spiritual eminence and fullness unless he is first a loyal son of Israel; and once that person has become a loyal child of our people, he is on his way to becoming a child of God.

That this is so has been amply demonstrated in recent months and years. For one example, Elie Wiesel, in his *The Jews of Silence*, recounts his experiences from his recent visit to Russia. One of them is especially worthy of retelling. A certain Jew in Russia was known to be a mohel which is, of course, a completely illegal profession in Russia. He did his sacred work clandestinely, at the risk of imprisonment or exile or even death. One day, this mohel heard a knock on his door and the man who opened it was a colonel of the Russian army in full uniform. "Is it true," asked the colonel of the frightened mohel, "that you circumcise children?" The man denied it vehemently, frightened at the appearance of this army officer in full regalia. "I do not believe you," said the colonel, "and I order you immediately to get dressed, take your bag of instruments, and follow me." When the mohel did so, the colonel blindfolded him, took him by his arm out of the door and into his car. After a frightening half hour drive in which not a single word was exchanged, he was led out of the car and into a house. There his blindfold was removed, and he saw before him a woman – obviously the wife of the colonel – in bed with an eight-day old infant. "This is my child," said the colonel, "and I want you to perform the circumcision at once." After the mohel did so, he was asked for his fee, and replied that he would not charge anything at all for this mitzva. But the colonel insisted, paid him well, gave him some gifts, blindfolded him once again – he would trust no one with the knowledge of his illegal act – and returned the mohel to his home.

Here, then, was a man born into a materialistic and atheistic society, deprived of even the most elementary Jewish education, but who nevertheless recognized himself as a "a child of the congregation of Israel," as a Jew – and this feeling translated itself into the performance of a great mitzva, although the entire idea was so vague and alien to him intellectually. Intuitively he knew that once

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you seek to identify yourself as a "a child of the congregation of Israel," you already are on your way to being among the "children of the Lord your God"; every act of Jewishness, no matter how apparently unexpressive of spiritual content, is in and by and of itself at least a partial confirmation of the acceptance of the Holy One.

Indeed, the world saw this when at the capture of Old Jerusalem, many young Israelis who had never before seen even a picture of tefillin gladly and enthusiastically donned tefillin at the Western Wall. Once we recognize "for you are a holy people," then we are ready to approach "you are children of the Lord your God"; one who is a child of the congregation of Israel is on his way to being a child of the Holy One.

This places upon us religious Jews a dual obligation. One is to encourage every manifestation of Jewishness, no matter how superficial and vacuous it may seem to us who are more committed. It means that every self-identification as a Jew is a spiritually precious phenomenon.

And second, it means that we ourselves must make the trek from Jewishness to Judaism, from our national consciousness to a spiritual consciousness, from being a son of our people to being, as well, a son of the Lord our God.

Indeed, this is the essence of the month of Elul which we welcome this day. The entire summer is spent by the Jew in concern with his people, in affirming "for you are a holy people." We observe Tisha B'Av, and mourn over the destruction of the Holy City, the Temple, and our national independence. Then we emerge into Shabbat Nahamu and the shiva denehemta (seven Sabbaths of consolation), and we entertain the consolations that are promised to us in the future – and this year, thank God, we were able to experience this consolation in the present as well. And then, out of this profound awareness of each of us being a "child of the congregation of Israel," we come to the last month of the year, the month of repentance when we reach out for God Himself. It is during this season of repentance, beginning with the new month of Elul until the end of the High Holiday season, that we recite each day the psalm (27) that begins with "LeDavid Hashem ori veiyishi." In it David speaks of his confidence in God despite all the enemies that beset him. And in one particularly moving verse he cries out, "Though my father and mother forsake me, nevertheless the Lord will gather me in." Even when the "for you are a holy people" is in jeopardy, even when my knowledge that I am a "child of the congregation of Israel" is not of much avail to me because I, together with my people, am surrounded by oppressive and cruel enemies – even then I realize that the ultimate anchorage of our people is in heaven itself. Though earthly parents abandon us, or do not understand us, or have left us orphaned, the

Lord is our ever loving and eternal Father, and it is to Him to whom we look for our ultimate help and redemption.

That must be our special spiritual orientation on this day and for the months and season that follow. We must strive for the greater and more mature status of being among “the children of the Lord your God.” And David told us how to strive for that in the verse immediately following his declaration of faith in our Heavenly Father: “Teach me, O Lord, Your way,” and lead me in the path of righteousness. Give me the strength to observe Your Torah and commandments, and then we will have fulfilled the great and ineffable potential with which we were created – being in the image of God. *[Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's *Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Deuteronomy*, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern]*

Dvar Torah **Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

The Torah has been given to us today.

That is how we should approach the Torah and its mitzvot on every day of our lives. The inspiration for this comes from the beginning of Parshat Re’eh. There the Torah says (Devarim 11:26),

“Re’eh anochi notein lifneichem hayom,” – “See,” says Hashem, “How I am giving you today all these opportunities to enhance your lives and to make this into a better world.”

In similar fashion, in the Shema, Hashem says (Devarim 30:11),

“Asher anochi metzavecha hayom,” – “Which I am giving you today.”

It’s obvious that it was being given on that particular day so why does Hashem repetitively say the word ‘hayom’ – ‘today’?

Chazal our sages teach that this is in order that we should remember,

“Bechol yom vayom yihyu be’einecha kachadashim,” – “That on every single day of our lives the mitzvot should appear to us as if they are brand new,” given to us ‘hayom’ – on this very day.

Rashi adds that we should not, God forbid, relate to the mitzvot as being old fashioned, belonging to an era long past without any relevance to us, but rather the mitzvot should be like something which is brand new in our eyes, as something given today. It’s very much like the latest model of a particular product being advertised. Everybody is talking about it. Everybody’s trading in their old models for this brand new one. As you hold it in your hands, you appreciate everything that it does for you; all its exciting features. That’s how we should relate to the mitzvot on every day of our lives. And the great thing about the mitzvot

is that this is not just a PR stunt – it is true! That’s the greatness of Hashem and the Torah we’ve been given: given thousands of years ago, in truth it has relevance and meaning on every single day of our lives.

“Ashreinu ma tov chelkeinu ma naim goraleinu,” – “How happy and privileged we are,” to have the mitzvot to use and to enjoy, in order that ‘hayom’ – this day, and every single day of our lives is full of meaning and purpose as a result.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel **Encyclopedia of Jewish Values***

Inciting Other to Sin

One of the main foundations of Judaism is free will, the belief that a person is responsible for his or her own actions (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19) and is repaid accordingly (Maimonides, Thirteen Principles of Faith, Principle #11). However, there are often times when a person performs an immoral act, at the urging of another individual, such as a Mafia hit man killing for the organization, at the behest of his or her boss. If the person only asks or orders another person to sin, why should he or she be guilty at all, as he or she did no immoral action, and broke no law (In the United States, as of late, there is a legal concept called conspiracy, which deems person guilty who conspires to commit a crime but does not actually do the deed). How does Judaism view the inciter of sin who does nothing except urge others to sin -- is he also guilty or not guilty of the sin? If guilty, is he or she as guilty as the actual sinner? And if the inciter of the sin is guilty, will the actual sinner then be blameless, or must he or she also assume some guilt? Our Torah portion speaks directly about this situation.

The Sin of Incitement in Our Torah Portion - This is one and only Mitzvah in the Torah in which the sin itself is clearly instigating someone else to do evil: - in our Parsha - goading a person to worship idols (Deuteronomy 13:7-11). The Torah talks about such a person in the most heinous terms. The sin of idol worship is so hated in the Torah that even if the person only incited another to do the deed (and even if the deed was never even done), the inciter is punishable. It is the only case of incitement where a human court can exact punishment. However, because idol worship is such a severe sin, one may not extrapolate and generalize the sin of incitement to any other sins mentioned in the Torah (Sanhedrin 29a). In fact this is not only one sin, but according to Sefer HaChinuch (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvot #457, #458, #459, #460), there four separate acts of sin involving this person worshipping an idol, which demonstrate the severity of the crime: not to love the inciter, not to forget this terrible sin and let him get away with it, not to save the inciter if he is in danger and not to give this person the benefit of the doubt. Thus, four of the 613 commandments relate to this one heinous individual.

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It Seems An Inciter Should Be Blameless -
Since free will is indeed basic to Jewish belief, then, logically, each person who freely chooses to perform any particular action must accept full responsibility for that deed. Therefore, even though a person’s action was incited and brought about some another individual, the perpetrator of a crime committed out of free will, must assume full responsibility. Inciting the deed by another person may explain why the person committed the sin, but it should not excuse him or her. And if the sinner takes full responsibility, then logically the inciter bears no responsibility, even if the inciter urged that the deed be committed and knew what was happening at the time of the deed. This concept seems to have support from specific Jewish sources.

Maimonides rules (Maimonides, Hilchot Kelayim 10:31) that if one man puts clothes a second individual with a garment of wool and linen, a Torah prohibition (Deuteronomy 22:11), and if the person wearing the garment was unaware of the illicit mixture in the clothing, then the one who caused the sin by placing the garment on the individual is the blameworthy party and is punished, while the wearer is exonerated. Similarly, if a man sends a shepherd with cattle to graze in someone else’s field, the shepherd, and not the sender, is responsible for the damages (Kiddushin 42b). Thus, the inciter in these cases is blameless. However, if the inciter sends a child or a mentally incompetent shepherd, then the child or incompetent person is not liable for damages, and the sender is guilty, but only at the hand of God, not man. The reason that the child or mentally incompetent individual bears no guilt is that these individuals commit the crime without an informed decision (Daat, in legal Jewish terminology) concerning right and wrong. Therefore, the guilt reverts to the sender. However, since the sender did not actually do the destruction, the injured party cannot collect from the inciter in a human court.

What is the logic for making the shepherd guilty (or the Mafia hit man guilty) for merely following the instructions of the sender or inciter? Can’t he claim that “I am only acting as his messenger” and assume no personal guilt? The answer is that in Judaism (Kiddushin 42b) there is a concept that there is no agency to commit a sin. While I may generally act at someone’s behest to do a Mitzvah-commandment, and my action makes it as if he or she performed the action, if a person asks me to commit a sin, I may not listen to him or her and carry out the sin, even in the other person’s name. If I do the act, I am doing it of my own free will. The Talmudic passage continues and explains the logic of this ruling. If the student (the inciter) asks you to do something and the teacher (God) asks you to do the opposite action, to whom should you listen? Obviously, the request of the teacher (God) should be adhered to. Therefore, if a person decides to ignore God’s wishes and sin by listening to someone else, he or she is blameworthy and cannot claim “I was just following orders.” Many hundreds of years after the Talmud

declared this principle, the Nuremberg Trials in 1946 upheld this same concept in convicting Nazi war criminals, asserting that these individuals were indeed blameworthy even though the crimes were incited and ordered by superiors.

But what about the inciter himself or herself? True, the perpetrator is guilty if he listens to the inciter, but can we also attach guilt to the inciter? On the surface, it seems from the previous source quoted in Maimonides regarding the illicit clothing, that the implication is that only if the wearer were unaware of the sin would the inciter (the man who clothed the individual) be guilty. Thus, if the wearer had been aware that the clothes were not permitted, logically the law should be that the wearer is guilty and the person who clothed the person should be blameless. However, the very next law quoted by Maimonides (Maimonides, *Hilchot Kelayim* 10:31) rules that this inference is incorrect. If the wearer was cognizant that wearing the clothes incurred a sin, then he, too, is indeed guilty. Yet, the man who clothed the individual, i.e., the inciter, is also guilty, but, rather, guilty of the sin "You shall not place a stumbling block before a blind man (Leviticus 19:14)." What does this verse mean precisely, and what is the nature of this prohibition which finds the inciter guilty as well?

Placing A Stumbling Block Before A Blind Man
 - The plain intention of the Torah in this verse could not have been merely the simple and literal meaning of the text, since there are numerous other places in the Torah forbidding intentional damage to another human being. In addition, the end of the verse (Leviticus 19:14) says that "you shall fear your God, I am the Lord." There is no need to insert this phrase if the intention in the verse were literal (See *Siftei Chachamim* commentary to Rashi on this verse (Leviticus 19:14)). Therefore, Rashi (Rashi commentary to Leviticus 19:14) says that the "simple" meaning of this verse is referring to the infraction of intentionally giving bad advice to someone. By purposely misleading a person in a situation in which the person is "blind," the counsel becomes a "stumbling block", and the advisor has sinned. Now, the end of the verse about fearing the Lord makes sense, since only God knows one's true intention in this matter. But from where did Maimonides derive that inciting is a violation of "putting a stumbling block" even if the sinner is also aware of his sin, as in the case of the illicit garment? Maimonides based his ruling on the Talmud.

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 6b) speaks of a case where a Nazirite, who is forbidden to drink wine, (among other prohibitions) asks you to give him some wine. If you give the Nazirite wine, you violate "putting a stumbling block before a blind man." It is clear from the context that the Nazirite certainly does know that wine is forbidden to him. Therefore, here is a case where the sinner is aware of the sin, and, nevertheless, you are guilty of "putting a stumbling block" by helping him sin, i.e.,

inciting his sin. How is this related to the verse -- after all, the Nazirite is not blind, unaware of the sin? Commentators have answered that he is blind, in the sense that he is "blind" to his passion, because of his desire for wine. The Talmud continues and gives other examples. Since all non-Jews are obligated to keep the seven Noahide laws, they may not take off and eat a limb from a live animal. Thus, if a non-Jew asks a Jew to give him or her this limb, knowing it is forbidden to him or her, and that Jew then complies, then this person has violated the prohibition of "placing a stumbling block." A second Talmudic passage (Bava Metzia 75b) gives another example. There are usually numerous people involved in any business deal or loan transaction. If interest is charged on the loan, Jewish law is violated (Exodus 22:24 and Leviticus 25:36). Therefore, in such a business loan, says the Talmud, not only has the actual lender sinned, but all the parties involved, including the guarantors, witnesses, and scribe, and all have violated "placing a stumbling block" by enabling the sin of interest being charged. *Tosafot* (*Tosafot* commentary, "Minayin" on *Avodah Zarah* 6b) says that this prohibition against enabling a sin applies to all sins in the Torah, not only the ones cited in the Talmud. By actively helping or enabling any person to sin, you are an inciter, and you violate the Torah prohibition of "placing a stumbling block," even when the sinner is clearly aware of the sin. Certainly, any inciter or initiator of the sin, even with the full knowledge of the sinner, would also violate this prohibition.

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 6b) does mention one caveat, however. You, the enabler of the sin, are only guilty of the prohibition when the Nazirite is on one side of the river, and you are on the other side. Therefore, without your specific help, the Nazirite could not have obtained the wine, and would not have sinned to begin with. If, however, both of you are on the same side of the river, i.e., the Nazirite could have sinned by himself without your assistance, then you are not guilty of "placing a stumbling block." However, many later commentaries including *Tosafot* (*Tosafot* commentary, "Beva" on *Shabbat* 3a) believe that while a Torah violation is not incurred when both parties are on the same side of the river, i.e., the sin could have been committed without your assistance, there is still a Rabbinic violation. Some agree with this opinion (Ran commentary, "Minayin" on *Avodah Zarah* 1b), while others (Mordechai commentary on *Avodah Zarah* 6b) maintain that the practice of helping a person sin when he could have done so himself is not forbidden at all. *Shulchan Aruch* (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 151:1) decides according to the opinion of *Tosafot* and *Ran* in codifying this law, that there is indeed a Rabbinic violation even when the sinner could have sinned by himself. Thus, he rules that a Jew may not sell an item to a non-Jew which the Jewish seller knows will be used for idol worship (a Torah prohibition even for non-Jew), even if the non-Jew can obtain the items elsewhere (both are on one side of the river). The upshot from all the legal discussion

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is that, while it may be debated if aiding a sinner who knowingly sins is a Biblical or Rabbinic prohibition, it is clear that if a person initiates and incites the sin to begin with, he is guilty on some level, although it may not technically be the Biblical violation of "placing a stumbling block." Lest the reader think this is merely an esoteric theory, some have ruled that inviting Jewish people to one's home to experience Shabbat, knowing that the invitees will violate Shabbat to get there, is similar to inciting someone to violate Shabbat to get to one's home and the great food and atmosphere planned. This article should not be used to decide Jewish law and whether inviting a Jew for Shabbat meal, causing him and her to sin, is indeed a violation of incitement or not.

The very first sin in the Torah involved incitement to commit wrongdoing, as the serpent provoked Eve to sin by convincing her that there was nothing really wrong with eating the fruit (Genesis 3:1-6). In this case, it was all the initiative of the serpent. From this story, we can confirm two of the principles demonstrated earlier. Claiming that "I was only following orders" or that it is the inciter's fault is not deemed an adequate defense, as Eve did, is not sufficient to exclude guilt of the sinner (Genesis 3:13). The fact is that Eve was still punished (Genesis 3:14-15) demonstrates the doctrine that "there is no agency for sin." In addition, we see that both the inciter and the actual sinner are punished for the act, as both Eve and the serpent received retribution. According to numerous opinions, this, the serpent's action is a form of inciting to worship idols since the serpent induced Eve to rebel against God.

Inciting People For Good - Until now, we have only discussed the idea of inciting for evil purposes, such as for crime and for sin. The connotation of the word incitement is usually a negative one. But a person can also incite others to do acts of goodness (see the chapter on Peer Pressure vol. 2 for an expansion of this idea). This type of incitement is certainly to be praised and encouraged wholeheartedly. We will mention here only two of the more noted examples. The same Mishna which discussed the inciter of masses to sin (Avot 5:18), continues and says that for he who can incite masses to do acts of righteousness, no iniquity will come to that person. Regarding the Mitzvah of *Tzedaka*-Charity, Maimonides (Maimonides, *Hilchot Matanot Aniyim* 10:6) states that the person who instigates others to give *Tzedaka* is greater than the person who actually gives the *Tzedaka*.

* This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com

'Tithe all the produce that you sow...and eat it in the place that God will choose to make his presence rest...so that you will learn to fear the Lord your God all of the days' (Devarim/ Deuteronomy 14:23)

These verses introduce the topic of Ma'aser Sheini, one of the tithes on food in Israel, as well as the procedure for eating the tithed produce at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Why in Temple times was Ma'aser Sheini eaten at the Temple?

Why might the Torah give as the reason for this, 'so that you will learn to fear the Lord your God all of the days'?

We will summarise selected comments of some Rishonim, the great Mefarashim (Biblical commentators) of the Medieval period whose content and methodology are so important in providing a framework for studying the Bible.

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (aka 'Ibn Ezra'), 1089-1167, explains that this Mitzva (commandment) provides us with the opportunity to go to the Temple which was a place to learn and experience the Torah in action.

As such, the experiential nature of this Mitzva is particularly significant, not just the eating of the produce.

Specifically attending the Temple would also provide a lasting inspirational imprint, increasing our subsequent appreciation and application of the Torah in more general terms.

This imprint did not disappear with the Temple.

For example, Franz Rosenzweig, the 20th century German philosopher, had such a moment of inspiration in a small shul on Kol Nidre night in the early 20th century that started his return to Judaism.

Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, (aka 'Rashbam') 1085-1158, notes that by seeing the revelation of God's presence at the Temple, the Cohanim (priests) and Levi'im (Levites) as well as the other Jews working in the Temple, visitors would garner such inspiration.

It may be hard for us to appreciate properly the elevating experiential effect of a visit to the Temple, which was a quasi Yom Tov for the visitor.

Rabbi Chizkia ben Manoach (aka 'Chizkuni'), a 13th century commentator, augments Rashbam's comments, stating that the experience of seeing the Sanhedrin (supreme Rabbinical court) in action at the Temple

ruling on Halacha (Jewish law) for the Jewish people, would encourage us to 'fear' God in the sense of appreciating the seriousness of the Mitzvot and thereby observing them.

These approaches explain why the experience of going to the Temple, even on a regular weekday rather than just on Yom Tov, was highly significant in developing a religious personality.

Such experiential moments are not outside of our grasp even in the absence of the Temple. Franz Rosenzweig found such a moment at Kol Nidre prayers.

Our prayers and services are full of such opportunities. We should seek these out wherever we can, which seems in the spirit of a Sidra called 'Re-ay' a word meaning to see and understand.

'Tithe all the produce that you sow...and eat it in the place that God will choose to make his presence rest...so that you will learn to fear the Lord your God all of the days' (Devarim/ Deuteronomy 14:23)

These verses introduce the topic of Ma'aser Sheini, one of the tithes on food in Israel, as well as the procedure for eating the tithed produce at the Temple in Jerusalem.

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Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

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 teffillin 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 say 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'ahavta l'reacha 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 unfortunate. 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 Nisson (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 Nisson Shapira, who was the Av Beis Din in Krakow and a great mekubal, ascribed the following acronym to Elul: Echad Ladin V'eched 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'eched 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.

World Mizrachi Dear Torah

How to be Happy Rav Doron Perez

Who are the happiest people in the world?

Research that took place a number of years ago by UCLA and the University of North Carolina reveal that there are two categories of happiness: hedonistic and eudaimonic.

Hedonistic happiness is from those who get happiness through their own self-indulgence, the physical pleasures they have – eating and other pleasures.

Eudaimonic happiness is from those with a spirit of volunteerism, not happy through what they get, but from what they give. Not through their physical experiences, but through their spiritual meaning – kindness, community, giving to others.

Time and again they saw that those who are happier are not those who are getting, but those who are giving.

So much so, showed the research, it has an effect on a person's genes which change according whether involved in getting or giving.

Likutei Divrei Torah

This is supported by this week's Parasha of Re'eh, the happiness Parasha. Seven times in the Parasha the word simcha, happiness, is mentioned regarding the Chagim, the Festivals, and the Temple.

Rashi points out that the people being happy with you are not just your family and those close to you but also the Levites, convert, orphan and widow. If your happiness is only about filling your and your family's stomach and you are not involved with others, then you have misinterpreted what simcha, happiness, is all about.

The happiest people in the world are those whose lives are not invested in their own personal happiness, but are spreading joy and happiness to others.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Most Uplifting Experience

You are children of HASHEM, your G-d. You shall neither cut yourselves nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For you are a holy people to HASHEM, your G-d, and HASHEM has chosen you to be a treasured people for Him, out of all the nations that are upon the earth. You shall not eat any abomination. (Devarim 14:1-3)

You shall neither cut yourselves: Do not make cuts and incisions in your flesh [to mourn] for the dead, in the manner that the Amorites do, because you are the children of the Omnipresent and it is appropriate for you to be handsome and not to be cut or have your hair torn out. – Rashi

Here we have an intersection of some gigantic topics. The introduction to many details of the laws of Kashrus, not to cut yourself or harm your appearance in the depth of anguish, and the idea, the ideal of the chosen people. Each of these would be worthy of a lengthy discussion by themselves but taken together, as they are arranged here in the Holy Torah, may save us some precious time and good ink.

People wonder aloud and to themselves all the time, what's wrong with a Jew eating this or that. It looks temptingly good on the plate of my gentle friend. He's eating it and not dying. Why can't I? What is the reason why a Jew has restricted eating laws? Why can't a Jew get, for example; a tattoo? Why can I not mark or harm my body? It's my body? This is a question that is often voiced these days. From a certain perspective the Torah seems intrusive and overly restrictive with its rules, and with this mindset too many have casually walked away from a 3333 year old national way of living.

Anything that we try to understand out of context is certain to be misunderstood. Affirmatively stated, a thing can only be properly understood in the correct context. If

you would go with a little child to a bank and hand over a bundle of cash and get a pink receipt in return, the child will be left with a profound sense of wonderment. What can this pink slip possibly be worth? It's a serious puzzle to the mind of the uninitiated in matters of banking. We trust that the money is tucked away in a savings account. The child doesn't understand the context.

Now the grand opening to these subjects is a line we cannot ignore. It puts everything into context. It's the greatest compliment possible in the entire universe. If anybody tells me I did a good job or I am special it always feels good, even if they are not such a credible source. Maybe they are insincere or they lack the expertise to offer serious praise.

That's not the case here. The Almighty Himself, The Creator of Heaven and Earth declares, "You are My children! You are Holy? You are beautiful!"

This was a frightening and life changing experience. A good many years ago I went to visit a Dr. friend of mine, a hand surgeon, with a swelling on my finger. He looked at it briefly and told me, "Get up on the scale!" I told him that my finger is swollen. He repeated, "Get up on the scale!" I tried to get him back to the subject of my finger but he insisted I get up on the scale. I got up on the scale and he started to move those metal bars far to the right.

When he was done, I was shocked. I hadn't been on a scale in too many years. Of course, he treated my finger but not before giving me a lecture. "Rabbi, you represent the law; HASHEM's law; you represent HASHEM!" That was the strongest medicine he could have given. He prescribed a regimen of exercise and diet that changed my life.

An old friend tells me he was walking out of a Shul in Brooklyn and he noticed a Spanish young man occupied with his cell phone. His hat was cocked sideways and his pants were hanging way down exposing his undergarments. This is all not atypical these days. It irked him but he walked on by.

Half a block later he got an urge to go back and say something. He approached this young fellow and after getting his attention he said to him emphatically, "You are a prince! You are a prince! You don't know how important you are! You have no idea how important you are!" With that he turned and walked away. Again, half a block later, out of curiosity he turned around to look, and the fellow had pulled up his pants. Now that was a miniature version of what the Torah has in mind for us, not less than the most uplifting experience.

Home Weekly Parsha RE'AH 5782

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

There is a shift in mood in the book of Dvarim beginning with this week's parsha. It no longer is a review of the events of the desert or of the Exodus from Egypt. Moshe no longer will concentrate on the faults and failures of the generation that left Egypt – a generation with that saw their high hopes dashed by their stubbornness and a lack of faith. The past is the past and it cannot be changed. God, so to speak, will not turn the film back again for some sort of replay.

The direction of Moshe is now the future, the entry into the Land of Israel and the establishment of a normative Jewish society in that land. Moshe warns the Jewish people that the lessons of the past should not be forgotten or ignored. Their consequences are likely to be repeated if the Jewish people will backslide again.

Life and death, good and evil, success and failure – these are the choices that lie before the Jewish people. And Moshe advises us to choose wisely, to treasure life and do good and honor tradition and Torah. A positive future always depends upon making wiser choices than were made in the past.

The word *re'ah* which means "see" is the key word in the parsha. This entails a vision for the future and an understanding as to its new demands and changing circumstances. Moshe turns the attention of the Jewish people to its future in the Land of Israel and to new commandments not mentioned before in the Torah. It appears that these new commandments are brought to the fore to help the Jewish people be successful in their new environment.

The holy days of the Jewish calendar appear in detail in this week's parsha. In the Land of Israel these holy days had a physical and agricultural content as well as their inherent spiritual nature. In the long and dark Jewish exile, the physical and agricultural aspects of the holidays were lost but the spiritual and holy qualities of those days nevertheless sustained the Jewish people.

The early pioneers who returned to the Land of Israel, secularized and Marxist to the hilt but nonetheless Jewish, attempted to reinsert the physical and agricultural qualities of the holidays of the year and at the same time to discard completely the spiritual and Torah qualities. Unfortunately, that experiment has proved to be a dismal failure.

The holidays are bereft of any spiritual content and of any agricultural or national meaning. Moshe would caution us to begin again, to include life, goodness, and tradition into the holy days so that they would have true meaning and impact – and through them to revive our attachment to the holy land and its bountiful produce.

I think that the revival of the true spirit of the holidays is one of the great challenges that face us in our land today. In its own way, it is a key to solving many of the difficulties that bedevil us currently. Moshe bids us to look clearly at all these matters and to decide wisely.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Second Tithe and Strong Societies

RE'EH

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Biblical Israel from the time of Joshua until the destruction of the Second Temple was a predominantly agricultural society. Accordingly, it was through agriculture that the Torah pursued its religious and social programme. It has three fundamental elements.

The first was the alleviation of poverty. For many reasons, the Torah accepts the basic principles of what we now call a market economy. But though market economics is good at creating wealth it is less good at distributing it equitably. Thus the Torah's social legislation aimed, in the words of Henry George, "to lay the foundation of a social state in which deep poverty and degrading want should be unknown."^[1]

Hence the institutions that left parts of the harvest for the poor: *leket*, *shichecha* and *pe'ah* – fallen ears of grain, the forgotten sheaf, and the corners of the field. There was the produce of the seventh year, which

belonged to no-one and everyone, and *ma'aser ani* – the tithe for the poor given in the third and sixth years of the seven-year cycle. Shmittah and Yovel – the seventh and fiftieth years with their release of debts, manumission of slaves, and the return of ancestral property to its original owners, restored essential elements of the economy to their default position of fairness. So the first principle was: no one should be desperately poor.

The second, which included *terumah* and *ma'aser rishon* – the priestly portion and the first tithe, went to support, respectively, the Priests and the Levites. These were a religious elite within the nation in biblical times with no land of their own, whose role was to ensure that the service of God – especially in the Temple – continued at the heart of national life. They had other essential functions, among them education and the administration of justice, as teachers and judges.

The third was more personal and spiritual. There were laws such as the bringing of first-fruits to Jerusalem, and the three pilgrimage festivals – *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Succot* – as they marked seasons in the agricultural year that had to do with driving home the lessons of gratitude and humility. They taught that the land belongs to God and we are merely His tenants and guests. The rain, the sun, and the earth itself yield their produce only because of His blessing. Without such regular reminders, societies slowly but inexorably become materialistic and self-satisfied. Rulers and elites forget that their role is to serve the people, and instead they expect the people to serve them. That is how nations at the height of their success begin their decline, unwittingly laying the ground for their defeat.

All this makes one law in our parsha – the law of the Second Tithe – hard to understand. As we noted above, in the third and sixth year of the septennial cycle, this was given to the poor. However, in the first, second, fourth, and fifth years, it was to be taken by the farmers to Jerusalem and eaten there in a state of purity

You shall eat the tithe of your grain, new wine, and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.

Deut. 14:23

If the farmer lived at a great distance from Jerusalem, he was allowed an alternative:

You may exchange the tithe for money. Wrap up the money in your hand, go to the place that the Lord your God will choose, and spend the money on whatever you choose: cattle, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever else you wish.

Deut. 14:25-26

The problem is obvious. The second tithe did not go to poor, or to the priests and Levites, so it was not part of the first or second principle. It may have been part of the third, to remind the farmer that the land belonged to God, but this too seems unlikely. There was no declaration, as happened in the case of first-fruits, and no specific religious service, as took place on the festivals. Other than being in Jerusalem, the institution of the second tithe seemingly had no cognitive or spiritual content. What then was the logic of the second tithe?

The Sages,^[2] focussing on the phrase, "so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God" said that it was to encourage people to study. Staying for a while in Jerusalem while they consumed the tithe or the food bought with its monetary substitute, they would be influenced by the mood of the holy city, with its population engaged either in Divine service or sacred study.^[3] This would have been much as happens today for synagogue groups that arrange study tours to Israel.

Maimonides, however, gives a completely different explanation.

The second tithe was commanded to be spent on food in Jerusalem: in this way the owner was compelled to give part of it away as charity. As he was not able to use it otherwise than by way of eating and drinking, he must have easily been induced to give it gradually away. This rule brought multitudes together in one place, and strengthened the bond of love and brotherhood among the children of men.^[4]

For Maimonides, the second tithe served a social purpose. It strengthened civil society. It created bonds of connectedness and friendship among the people. It encouraged visitors to share the blessings of the harvest with others. Strangers would meet and become friends. There would be an atmosphere of camaraderie among the pilgrims. There would be a sense of shared citizenship, common belonging, and collective identity. Indeed Maimonides says something similar about the festivals themselves:

The use of keeping festivals is plain. Man derives benefit from such assemblies: the emotions produced renew the attachment to religion; they lead to friendly and social intercourse among the people.[5]

The atmosphere in Jerusalem, says Maimonides, would encourage public spiritedness. Food would always be plentiful, since the fruit of trees in their fourth year, the tithe of cattle, and the corn, wine, and oil of the second tithe would all have been brought there. They could not be sold and they could not be kept for the next year; therefore much would be given away in charity, especially (as the Torah specifies) to “the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow.” (Deut. 14:29)

Writing about America in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville found that he had to coin a new word for the phenomenon he encountered there and saw as one of the dangers in a democratic society. The word was individualism. He defined it as “a mature and calm feeling which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends,” leaving “society at large to itself.”[6] Tocqueville believed that democracy encouraged individualism. As a result, people would leave the business of the common good entirely to the government, which would become ever more powerful, eventually threatening freedom itself.

It was a brilliant insight. Two recent examples illustrate the point. The first was charted by Robert Putnam, the great Harvard sociologist, in his study of Italian towns in the 1990s.[7] During the 1970s all Italian regions were given local government on equal terms, but over the next twenty years, some prospered, others stagnated; some had effective governance and economic growth, while others were mired in corruption and underachievement. The key difference, he found, was the extent to which the regions had an active and public-spirited citizenry.

The other example focuses on the “free-rider” attitude. It is often tempting to take advantage of public facilities without paying your fair share (for example, travelling on public transport without paying for a ticket: hence the term “free rider”). You then obtain the benefit without bearing a fair share of the costs. When this happens, trust is eroded and public spiritedness declines. This is illustrated in an experiment known as the “free rider game,” designed to test public spiritedness within a group. We mentioned this study earlier in this year’s series, in parshat Ki Tissa.

In the game, as you may recall, each of the participants is given a certain amount of money, and then invited to contribute to a common pot, which is then multiplied and returned in equal parts to the players. So, for example, if each contributes \$10, each will receive \$30. However, if one player chooses not to contribute anything, then if there are six players, there will be \$50 in the pot and \$150 after multiplication. Each of the players will then receive \$25, but one will now have \$35: the money from the pot plus the \$10 which they originally received.

When played over several rounds, the other players soon notice that not everyone is contributing equally. The unfairness causes the others to contribute less to the shared pot. The group suffers and no one gains. If, however, the other players are given the chance to punish the suspected cheat by paying a dollar to make them forfeit three dollars, they tend to do so. The experiment demonstrates that there is always a potential conflict between self-interest and the common good. When individuals only act for themselves, the group suffers. When the free-riders stop acting selfishly, everyone benefits.

As I was writing about this in 2015, the Greek economy was in a state of collapse. Years earlier, in 2008, an economist, Benedikt Herrmann, had tested people in different cities throughout the world to see whether there were geographical and cultural variations in the way people played the free rider game. He found that in places like Boston, Copenhagen,

Bonn, and Seoul, voluntary contributions to the common pot were high. They were much lower in Istanbul, Riyadh, and Minsk, where the economy was less developed. But they were lowest of all in Athens, Greece. What is more, when players in Athens penalised the free riders, those penalised did not stop free-riding. Instead they took revenge by punishing their punishers.[8] The conclusion drawn was that where public spiritedness is low, society fails to cohere and the economy fails to grow.

Hence the brilliance of Maimonides’ insight that the second tithe existed to create social capital, meaning bonds of trust and reciprocal altruism among the population, which came about through sharing food with strangers in the holy precincts of Jerusalem. Loving God helps make us better citizens and more generous people, thus countering the individualism that eventually makes democracies fail.

[1] “Moses: Apostle of Freedom” (address first delivered to the Young Men’s Hebrew Association of San Francisco, June 1878).

[2] Sifrei ad loc. A more extended version of this interpretation can be found in the Sefer ha-Chinnuch, command 360.

[3] See also Tosafot, Baba Batra 21a, s.v. Ki MiTzion.

[4] The Guide for the Perplexed III:39.

[5] Ibid, III:46.

[6] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Book II, ch. 2.

[7] Putnam, Robert D., Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti. Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993.

[8] B. Herrmann, C. Thoni, and S. Gächter, “Antisocial Punishment Across Societies.” Science 319.5868 (2008): 1362-367.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Reeh (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “See, I am giving before you this day a blessing and a curse...” (Deuteronomy 11:26)

So opens our Biblical portion, making reference to the covenant at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eybal which dramatically concludes the Book of Deuteronomy and precedes our entry into the land of Israel.

What I would like to analyze in this commentary is a curious and seemingly pedantic detail, a strange grammatical formulation which, when properly understood, will shed light not only upon the nature of this third and final Pentateuchal covenant but also upon a fundamental philosophy of our religious nationality.

Our verse begins with a singular verb which addresses an individual, “re’eh – see,” but then continues with a plural pronoun, “lifnehem – [giving] before you,” addressing a multitude. This grammatical switch in number – from singular to plural – is especially worthy of note, because when we do find such Biblical changes they take place in the opposite direction, from plural to singular.

In the Biblical portion of the Decalogue, for example, God’s introduction addresses in plural form the multitude of Israelites (Exodus 18: 4 ff : “You have seen – re’tem – what I have done to Egypt, and I lifted you – et’hem – upon eagles’ wings...”), but then switches to the singular form in the ten commandments themselves (Exodus 20:1 ff: “I am the Lord your God – E-lohekhha, singular – whom I took you – hotzeitikha, singular – from the land of Egypt..., You shall not murder, lo tirzah, singular”).

Nahmanides explains the switch from plural to singular, and catalogues many other instances when such a transition in number appears, as the desire of God to make certain that His words are being heard not only as a command to the general masses but also as a personal injunction to each and every individual! (Ramban, on Genesis 18:3 s.v. Al na).

In effect, God is thereby appearing as a Hassidic Rebbe rather than as a Congregational Rabbi, in accordance with the common folk understanding of the distinction between the two. When a congregational Rabbi speaks, every individual believes that he is addressing the person next to him; when a Hassidic Rebbe speaks, every person listening knows and feels that he is addressing him personally.

But if this is the case, how can we understand our opening verse, in which God begins with the singular and continues with the plural? I

believe that this unusual grammatical phenomenon speaks to the very definition of this third covenant, known as the covenant of arevut, or mutual responsibility (B.T. Sotah 33 b). The Israelites, divided by the tribes in two groups of six, stand together to receive God's blessings on Mt. Gerizim and God's curses on Mt. Eival, poised before Shekhem and ready to enter the Promised Land.

Our Biblical portion provides the exact location: "Are they not beyond the Jordan, ... in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the Aravah, over against Gilgal, beside the oak tree of Moreh?" (Deut. 11:30). And the term aravah, or plains, is taken by the sages of the Talmud as a double entendre (play on words); the Hebrew arev also meaning co-singer, the individual who takes financial responsibility if a borrower reneges on the payment of his debt.

This is the covenant which insists that every Israelite must see himself as part of a whole, as a member of a nation which sees itself as a united organism whose separate individuals feel inextricably and indelibly bound to each other in fate, destiny and responsibility. Hence God begins with the singular and continues into the plural in order to impress upon the individual Israelite that he must in some way merge with the multitude that he must assume responsibility for the entire Jewish people, that "every Israelite is a co-signer, responsible for every other Israelite."

This is what I believe to be the higher meaning of a shomer Torah u'Mitzvot, literally a guardian over the Torah and tradition. It is not sufficient to merely study Torah and to perform the commandments; just as a guardian takes responsibility for the objects in his possession, so must each of us – everyone in his/her own way – take responsibility for the dissemination of Torah and the establishment of proper Torah institutions in his/her community, in his/her generation.

It is recorded that the famed Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin (early 20th century) was forced into a dispute with a Cardinal concerning the quality of our Jewish tradition. "The Talmud is blatantly anti-Christian," argued the Cardinal. "Does it not state that 'only Israelites are called adam (Hebrew for human beings), whereas Gentiles are not called adam,' and therefore we Gentiles are not considered by you to be human beings?!" The rabbi explained that there are four synonyms for "human being" in the Hebrew language: gever, ish, enosh and adam. The first three of these nouns have both a singular and a plural: gevurim, ishim, aneshim. Only adam has just one form, both singular and plural, humanity – a compound noun, including everyone together as a single organism. If a Jew is suffering in an Islamic fundamentalist country, or if Israel seems to be in danger, Jews worldwide demonstrate and flock to their homeland. This is a unique Jewish quality, built into our third covenant. In the case of the Jewish nation, the singular merges into the plural, the individual Jew is an inextricable part of his people.

Shabbat Shalom!

Shemittas Kesafim

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: Stores

Someone purchased an item from a store on Erev Rosh Hashanah, after the storeowner had made his pruzbul, but did not yet pay for the item. May the storeowner send him a bill after Rosh Hashanah, or is this a violation of the Torah's prohibition of shemittas kesafim?

Question #2: Suits

Yankel sues Shmerel in beis din to recover a debt. Shmerel is over his head in debt and decides to deny that he owes Yankel (which, by the way, violates a Torah prohibition). Yankel produces an IOU note and Shmerel confesses, telling beis din that he had forgotten about this loan. The beis din writes a decision that Shmerel owes the money. Does Yankel need a pruzbul to collect this loan?

Question #3: The Barber's Cut

Reuven, a yeshiva bochur who cannot remember ever having had money to lend, did not make a pruzbul. On Rosh Hashanah, he remembers that, as the yeshiva barber, there are some guys to whom he gave haircuts who forgot to bring money and did not yet pay him. Has he lost his right to collect?

Foreword

This year is shemittah year, and, at the end of the year, the mitzvos of shemittas kesafim, releasing debts, apply. As the Torah teaches in parshas Re'eh: "At the end of seven years you shall 'make shemittah.' And this is the 'word' of the shemittah: Every creditor must release his hand from what his fellow owes him. He may not demand payment from his fellow, his brother, because he has declared a release for Hashem" (Devarim 15:1-2). These verses teach that, rather than Rosh Hashanah of the eighth year ending shemittah with a whimper, the shemittah year ends with a bang – making borrowed money uncollectable.

As we will see, this does not mean that the borrower has no obligation to pay. It means that the lender may not attempt to collect the loan, and that he has a mitzvah to notify a borrower who comes to pay that he, the lender, has released the right to demand reimbursement[DB1].

After discussing a tangential matter, the Torah continues: "When, among your brethren living in your city, in your land that Hashem your G-d is giving you, there is a pauper – do not make your heart stubborn and close your hand from your impoverished brother. You shall open your hand for him, repeatedly [if necessary], and provide him whatever he lacks. Be careful, lest a wicked idea enters your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the shemittah year, is coming near' and your eye disdains your brother, the pauper, and you fail to give him" (Devarim 15:7-9). The posuk seems to close with a non sequitur. Why should the approaching shemittah deter someone from giving tzedakah? The answer is that this part of the posuk is not referring to tzedakah – the Torah has now reverted its discussion to the laws of shemittas kesafim, introducing a lo sa'aseh that prohibits refusing to lend out of concern that, when shemittah arrives, you will be left unpaid, because your loan has been released by the Torah.

Allow me to explain this last law. If a borrower has a history of being careless about repaying money that he owes, the halacha is that, not only is there no requirement to lend him, it is prohibited. This is because borrowing money and not repaying it is a violation of the Torah; someone who lends to such a borrower causes him to violate this prohibition. The lender now violates the law of lifnei iveir, placing a stumbling block in front of the blind, which includes causing someone to violate a mitzvah. (He "stumbles" when he violates the mitzvah, and he is "blind" to recognizing the harm he is bringing upon himself.) Thus, when the Torah warns not to refrain from lending, it is referring to a borrower whom we assume is responsible, and yet the lender is afraid that he will not be repaid because of shemittas kesafim.

The Mishnah (Shevi'is 10:3) notes that Hillel had observed that Jews were violating this prohibition and refusing to lend money. In order to prevent violation of this lo sa'aseh (#231), Hillel created a means, called a pruzbul, whereby a loan can be collected, notwithstanding the mitzvah of shemittas kesafim. The topic of pruzbul and how it works will be left for a different article.

How many mitzvos?

Aside from the various mitzvos that (1) prohibit interest-bearing loans, (2) establish the halachic rules regarding collateral, (3) oblige paying workers promptly and (4) require giving tzedakah, there are three different positive mitzvos and three different lo sa'aseh prohibitions governing the laws of providing and collecting loans. Listing these mitzvos in the order in which the Rambam lists them in Sefer Hamitzvos, they are:

Positive mitzvah #141:

To release loans at the end of shemittah year.

Positive mitzvah #142:

To collect loans that a non-Jew borrowed.

Positive mitzvah #197:

To lend money to the poor.

This is not the same mitzvah as giving tzedakah, which is positive mitzvah #195. This is a Torah requirement that, should someone ask a potential lender for a loan, for a legitimate reason, the person being asked must provide it, if he has the money. If the potential lender is concerned that he will not receive payment back, he may request a mashkon, appropriate collateral for the loan. A mashkon is property of the

borrower that the creditor holds as a pledge against the loan that the creditor may keep in the event of default. According to the Chafetz Chayim, this mitzvah to lend money applies also if a wealthy person requests a no-interest loan and I am in a position to provide it (Ahavas Chesed 1:1).

Negative mitzvos (lo sa'aseh) Having mentioned the three mitzvos aseih that apply directly to lending and collecting loans, I will now cite the three lo sa'aseh mitzvos, the three prohibitions.

Negative mitzvah (lo sa'aseh) #230:

Prohibition against suing someone after shemittah for a loan that is still unpaid.

Does this mitzvah always apply? The Gemara quotes a dispute whether this mitzvah applies min haTorah only at a time in history when the mitzvah of yovel applies. Most rishonim and Shulchan Aruch consider this to be the accepted halacha (Gittin 36a).

Assuming this is the case, the rishonim dispute whether shemittas kesafim applies in our era miderabbanan. Most authorities conclude that it does apply miderabbanan, yet the Rema mentions that “in our countries” the custom is to follow those who rule leniently that shemittas kesafim does not apply in our day, even miderabbanan (Choshen Mishpat 67:1). The Rosh is very opposed to following this leniency, as the Rema notes, and therefore, one may not rely on this lenient ruling, unless this is the custom in his area (Sma 67:37). A greater discussion of this question will be presented below.

Negative mitzvah (lo sa'aseh) #231:

A prohibition against refusing to lend money because the lender is concerned that shemittah will come and he will be unable to collect the loan.

Negative mitzvah (lo sa'aseh) #232:

A prohibition against pressuring a borrower to repay a loan, when the lender knows that the borrower has no means with which to pay.

The shemittah “word”

Above, when I quoted the pesukim, I translated the Torah as saying that “this is the ‘word’ of shemittah,” a literal translation of the Hebrew words, zeh devar hashemittah. The Mishnah (Shevi’is 10:8) notes the unusual terminology, pointing out that, where a similar wording exists, it means that someone must make a declaration concerning the topic at hand. In the case of shemittas kesafim, this means that if the debtor comes to pay, the mitzvas aseih (#141) requires the creditor to tell him meshameit ana, I am releasing the debt and will not insist on payment.

As we see from the Mishnah, the correct action for the debtor to take is to say af al pi kein, I still want to pay; I fully understand that you cannot force me to make compensation, but I choose to pay anyway. (This is the opinion of most rishonim. However, see Sefer Yerei’im #164). This is the correct, moral thing for him to do (Shevi’is 10:8-9 and Gemara Gittin 37b). [DB2] After the lender says af al pi kein, the lender may accept payment, although he is not permitted to tell the borrower that the money is owed. To what extent he may hint that he would like to be paid is a dispute among rishonim (see Rashi, Rosh, Rambam, Ra’avad, etc.)

Storekeeper

At this point, we can discuss the opening questions. Our first was: “Someone purchased an item from a store on Erev Rosh Hashanah, after the storeowner had made his pruzbul, but did not yet pay for the item. May the storeowner send him a bill after Rosh Hashanah, or is this a violation of the Torah’s prohibition of shemittas kesafim?”

To answer this question, we need to explain some laws about shemittas kesafim. The Mishnah (Shevi’is 10:1) provides the following cases: “Shevi’is releases a loan, whether it was in a written document or not. It does not release the balance of what was purchased in a store, unless it was made into a loan. [Similarly, Shevi’is] does not release wages owed to a worker, unless it was made into a loan.”

When you hire a worker, payment is compensation for his time or work, not repaying a loan. Similarly, paying for an item purchased is the completion of the transaction. In these instances, the mitzvah of shemittas kesafim does not apply – the payment must be made, even if the shemittah year occurred in the meantime.

The Mishnah teaches that the law of shemittas kesafim applies to transactions that have been converted into debts, but not to other unpaid non-loan transactions that were not converted [DB3]. For example, when purchasing something, I am usually expected to pay for it immediately. But at times, it is understood that the item will be purchased and not paid for immediately. In some of these cases, shemittas kesafim applies; in others, it does not.

For example, a grocer adds new purchases to a bill, and it is understood that the customer will pay the grocer later. In this situation, shemittas kesafim applies, since the grocer agrees to create a loan out of the transaction. However, if there is a simple purchase, for which the customer is expected to pay immediately, shemittas kesafim would not apply. Thus, the answer to the question, “Someone purchased an item from a store -- does sending a bill violate the Torah’s prohibition of shemittas kesafim?” is that it usually does not.

In practice, it may be unclear whether shemittas kesafim applies, and a rav or dayan should be asked.

The barber’s cut

At this point, we can also answer the third of our opening questions: “Reuven, ia yeshiva bochur who cannot remember ever having any money to lend out, did not make a pruzbul. On Rosh Hashanah, he remembers that, as the yeshiva barber, there are some guys whom he gave haircuts who forgot to bring money and did not yet pay him. Has he lost his right to collect?”

The answer is that, assuming there was never any discussion about making the outstanding moneys into a loan, this is not considered a loan, but payment for services rendered, and is not subject to the laws of shemittas kesafim.

Mashkon

The law is that shemittas kesafim does not apply to a loan that was collateralized at its inception, whether by a movable item, such as jewelry or gold bars, that were given to the lender as security, or by land that was collateralized or hypothecated [DB4] against the loan.

Topics of interest

A heter iska is a contract used commonly to “lend” money without violating the laws of charging and paying interest, ribbis. Depending on the details of the heter iska contract, half the principle is usually subject to shemittas kesafim and half is not. Why this is so requires devoting considerable time to how a heter iska operates, which is not the topic of this article.

Yovel

Does shemittas kesafim apply when there is no yovel year? In fact, there is an extensive discussion whether the mitzvah of shemittas kesafim applies when the mitzvos of yovel, the fiftieth year, are not relevant. Many mitzvos apply during the yovel year, including that lands inherited from the original division of Eretz Yisrael under Yehoshua, Elazar and the tribal leaders return to the descendants of the original owner. There is also a mitzvah, similar to shevi’is, to leave the land uncultivated and treat its produce as ownerless. None of these mitzvos applies today, not even miderabbanan. This is somewhat surprising; virtually all mitzvos that do not apply today min haTorah because of the dispersal of Klal Yisrael or the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, such as shemittah, terumos and maasros, apply miderabbanan, so that these mitzvos should not be forgotten. (Some mitzvos, such as bikkurim and korbanos, do not apply today, because there is no way to fulfill them without the Beis Hamikdash.) Chazal did not apply the mitzvah of yovel today, requiring the land to remain fallow and its produce treated ownerless, because of the difficulty in observing two consecutive years -- the shemittah year on the 49th year and the following yovel year -- without agriculture. When these mitzvos apply min haTorah, Hashem promises that commitment to observe the mitzvah will bring a huge, bountiful crop the year before shemittah that will supply all the needs until the crop of the post-yovel season is distributed (Vayikra 25:21). However, there is no such commitment when the mitzvah does not apply min haTorah; therefore, Chazal did not establish the mitzvah of yovel today (Sma, 67:2; cf. Chazon Ish, Zera’im 18:4, who disagrees).

The accepted halacha is that, min haTorah, the laws of shemittas kesafim are contingent on whether the law of yovel is in effect (see most rishonim Gittin 36-37). Since yovel does not apply, shemittas kesafim does not apply min haTorah. Most authorities rule that the laws of shemittas kesafim still apply miderabbanan, and this is the practice in most places, although there are rishonim who contend that shemittas kesafim does not apply at all until yovel again is in effect (Ra'avad, Gittin 36). Many poskim report that, in many parts of Europe, there was a longstanding custom to follow those opinions who contend that when there is no requirement to observe yovel, there is no requirement to observe shemittas kesafim, even miderabbanan (Terumas Hadeshen 1:304; Shu't Maharik #92; Rema, Choshen Mishpat 67:1).

Beis din decisions

At this point, we should discuss another of our opening questions: Yankel sues Shmerel in beis din to recover a debt. Shmerel is over his head in debt and decides to deny that he owes Yankel (which, by the way, violates a Torah prohibition). Yankel produces an IOU note and Shmerel confesses, telling beis din that he had forgotten about this loan. The beis din writes a decision that Shmerel owes the money. Does Yankel need a pruzbul to collect this loan?

The Mishnah and Gemara explain that shemittas kesafim applies only to a debt owed to an individual, but not to a debt established by a beis din. This includes kenisos of the Torah, penalties that the Torah declares (Mishnah Shevi'is 10:2), and decisions made by a beis din that were issued in writing (Yerushalmi, Shevi'is 10:2). Had Shmerel not denied the debt, it might have been released at the end of shemittah. When beis din writes a decision that he owes the money, shemittas kesafim will no longer apply. This demonstrates that crime does not pay!

An oath

Let me show you a similar case, but with a very different outcome: The borrower, who is far behind in meeting his debts, still plans to pay them all off, although he is not certain how he will do so. To comfort his creditor, he swears an oath of the Torah (a shavua) that he will certainly pay back the debt. The creditor, the malveh, did not make a pruzbul and the shemittah year has now passed. Is the debtor obligated to pay the loan because he swore an oath that he would do so?

The Rashba was asked this very question, and answers that the purpose of this oath was to guarantee to the creditor the debtor's intention to comply with his Torah requirements to pay back the debt, even if it would be very hard for him to do so. However, this is true only as long as he is required to pay back the debt. Since the shemittah year passed and shemittas kesafim took place, the debtor is under no obligation to pay back his loan, and the oath does not obligate him to do so (Shu't Harashba 1:775).

For a more in-depth discussion of this question, see Shavuos 45a and 49a and the rishonim ad locum.

Conclusion

For someone living in Eretz Yisroel, observing shemittah properly involves Torah education, halachic responsibility and commitment. The consumer has to be constantly vigilant to purchase only shemittah-permitted produce. Those living in chutz la'aretz are hardly exposed to this powerful demonstration of the relationship that Klal Yisroel and the land of Yisroel have with the Ribbono Shel Olam. But properly studying and observing the mitzvah of shemittas kesafim allows those in chutz la'aretz to share this very special relationship.

[DB1]My understanding from the web is that the term "imbursement" is obsolete.

[DB2]Avoid "At this point" here and 5 lines down.

[DB3]Avoid "not....not."

[DB4]I don't know that the oilam knows the difference between these two terms (I certainly don't, even after looking it up online). Is it necessary to use both?

Never Broken

How a Rebbe Helped a Survivor Embrace His Fragments

Rabbi YY Jaconson

The Jewish Perspective

Ammunition had run out for a unit in the Russian army, but it was still under fierce attack. "Take out your bayonets," said the corporal, "we are going to engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat."

"Please sir," said Pvt. Finkelstein. "Show me my man. Maybe he and I can reach some kind of agreement."

The Survivor

Let me share a story[1]:

After the war, a Holocaust survivor came to visit his one-time spiritual master, the famed Rebbe of the Chassidic dynasty of Ger, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter[2]. This broken Jew had been deported to the death camps together with his wife, children, relatives, and the entire community. The man's wife and children were gassed, his relatives exterminated and his entire community wiped out. He emerged from the ashes a lonely man in a vast world that had silently swallowed the blood of six million Jews. This Jew lost one more thing in the camps: his G-d. After what he experienced in the Nazi death camps, he could not continue believing in a G-d who allowed Auschwitz.

Although after the war he made aliyah to Eretz Israel (then known as Palestine), he completely abandoned Jewish practice and observance. Yet he missed his old Rebbe and went to visit him in Tel Aviv. The Gerer Rebbe himself lost many grandchildren and relatives in the Holocaust. In addition, nearly all of his 200,000 followers were wiped out by the Germans. The Rebbe of Ger and his immediate children managed to escape Warsaw in 1940 and arrived in Eretz Israel soon after.

Upon hearing the story of his disciple, the Rebbe of Ger broke into tears. The man and his Rebbe sat together mourning what they had lost. After a long period of weeping, the Gerer Rebbe wiped his tears and communicated—in Yiddish—the following idea.

"Before Your Eyes"

In his farewell address to his people, in the Torah portion of Eikev, Moses recounts the moment when he descended from Mount Sinai with the two Divine tablets to present to the Jewish people[3]:

"I descended from the mountain," Moses recalls, "the mountain was still burning with fire and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands. I immediately saw that you had sinned to G-d, making a calf. You were so quick to turn from the path that G-d had prescribed. "I grasped the two tablets, and threw them down from my two hands, and I smashed them before your eyes."

Moses proceeds to relate how after much toil he succeeded in "convincing" G-d to forgive the Jewish people for their sin. He then, as mentioned above, carved out a second pair of tablets to replace the first ones. Though the two sets were identical in content, containing the Ten Commandments, the second pair did not possess the same Divine quality as the first tablets, which were "G-d's handiwork and G-d's script[4]." The second tablets were Moses' creation, endorsed by G-d, but not G-d's own creation.

Now, considering the well-known meticulousness of each word in the Bible, Moses' words "I smashed them before your eyes" seem superfluous. Suppose Moses had turned around and broken the tablets out of view; would that in any way have lessened the tragedy? Why did Moses find it important to emphasize that the breaking of the tablets occurred "before your eyes"[5]?

Two Worlds

What Moses was saying, explained the Rebbe of Ger, was that "I smashed the tablets only before your eyes." The shattering of the tablets occurred only before your eyes and from your perception. In reality, though, there exists a world in which the tablets have never been broken. What Moses was attempting to communicate, the Rebbe of Ger explained is that what may seem to us as utter destruction and chaos, does not always capture the complete story. "I smashed them before your eyes." Before your eyes, there is nothing but devastation. Yet, what in our world bespeaks total disaster may, in a different world, be wholesome.

"As difficult as it is to digest, the Gerer Rebbe went on to say, "there is meaning in the absurdness of history; there is dignity in the valley of

tears. G-d—the G-d who transcends all human logic, understanding, and imagination—was present in our broken pieces."

"As difficult as it is for you and me to believe," the Rebbe concluded, "I want you to know that the extermination of our families, our communities, and our people occurred only 'before our eyes.' There remains a world in which the Jewish people are wholesome. Beneath the surface of our perception, there exists a reality in which every single Jew from Abraham till our present day is alive, his or her soul absolutely intact."

"The day will come," said the Rebbe of Ger, "when that world will be exposed. G-d will transform our perceptions and paradigms. He will mend our broken tablets and our broken nation. We will discover how the tablets were really never broken and the Jewish people were always complete."

These are words that could be effective only when communicated by a man who experienced the suffering of the war on his own flesh. Pain is not an intellectual subject; it is raw, personal, and real. When the Rebbe of Ger spoke these words, he spoke them with tears, with grief. He was not an objective preacher of religion; together with the Holocaust survivor, he walked through his tunnel of darkness. Thus, his words gave back to this broken Jew his soul, his faith, and his courage.

Shattered Dreams

Notwithstanding the grand distinctions, the above message applies to our lives as well. Many of us once owned a set of sacred tablets that at some point in our lives were destroyed. It may have been the death of a mother or father at a young age, bringing to an abrupt end the nurturing and security a child so desperately needs from parents. It may have been any other form of pain, abuse, or loss that you experienced during your life that denied you the love, confidence, joy, and optimism you once called your own. It may be profound fear, shame, insecurity, guilt, disappointment, mistrust, or other forms of emotional trauma that afflict you, shattering your inner sacred and Divine "tablets."

Many of us create for ourselves a second pair of "tablets" in order to substitute for the first ones that were lost. But they are not quite the same. The second set of "tablets" lacks the magic and the innocence of the original "tablets" that no longer exist. In the depth of our hearts, we crave to reclaim something of the wonder of the old tablets.

But it is to no avail: The clock of life never turns back. Here lay the empowering message of Moses to his beloved people before his own demise: There is a secret world in which your first tablets were never broken. Notwithstanding the abuse and pain you experienced, each of you possesses a core self that forever remains invincible, pure, and sacred.

What is more, when your perception expands, you might discover how your shattered dreams may be part of your individual path to wholesomeness. Wholesomeness does not come in one shape; for some, it comes in the form of a broken heart. What is broken in one level of perception may be wholesome in another.

The Final Month

In a few days, we will commence the last month of the Hebrew calendar, known as the month of Elul, when we bid farewell to a year gone by, and prepare to embrace a new one in its stead, beginning on Rosh Hashanah.

The great sage and mystic Rabbi Nathan Shapiro (d. 1640 in Krakow, Poland) writes^[6] that the four Hebrew letters of the name Elul (spelled Aleph, Lamed, Vuv, Lamed) is the acronym of the four Hebrew words "Aron, Luchos, V'shevrei, Luchos" (which also begin with the Hebrew letters Aleph, Lamed, Vuv, Lamed). These words, quoted from the Talmud^[7], mean this: "The Ark containing the whole tablets and the broken tablets."

What does this mean? In the book of Exodus, the Torah captures the dramatic tale of how, following the Revelation at Sinai, G-d carved out two tablets, engraved the Ten Commandments on them, and presented them to Moses on Mount Sinai. When Moses descended the mountain, however, he observed that the Israelites had created a golden calf as an idol. Seeing this, Moses threw the tablets from his hands and smashed them on the ground. After a powerful confrontation with G-d, Moses

persuades Him, as it were, to forgive the Jewish people for their betrayal. Moses then, acting on G-d's instructions, carves out a second pair of tablets, to replace the smashed first ones. When the Ark was built to be located inside the holiest chamber in the Tabernacle the Jews erected in the desert, both sets of tablets were placed therein: the second whole pair of tablets, as well as the fragmented pieces of the first smashed tablets^[8].

But what is the connection to the month of Elul? Why does the name of this month symbolize this idea of the Ark containing both sets of Tablets, the complete ones, and the broken ones?

The above story can provide insight. The unique power of the final month of the year, the name of which spells out the words "The Ark containing the whole Tablets and the broken Tablets" is this: This is the month that allows you to build in your personal life an "ark" which will contain not only your second complete tablets but will also embrace the broken pieces of your first tablets. This is the time when you are empowered and can pick up the broken pieces of your life and discover that there is a part of yourself that was never really broken.

What is more, during this month you may lift up with tender love every broken component of your life, learning how each of them constituted another hue of wholesomeness.

[1] I read the story in a sermon by Rabbi Moshe Weinberger shlita, spiritual leader of Aish Kodesh Institute in Woodmere, N.Y. Afterward I heard it from an elder Gerer Chassid who visited the Imrei Emes as a young man in Poland before the war. Another Gerer Chassid told me that this insight was presented by the Gerer Rebbe at a prayer gathering in the middle of the Holocaust, on 20 Kislev, 5703, in the "Churvah."

[2] Rabbi Avraham Mordechai (born in 1866), known as the Imrei Emes, was the third Rebbe of Ger and passed away in 1948 in Jerusalem. The city was under siege at the time, so he was buried in the courtyard of his yeshiva.

[3] Deuteronomy 9:15-17.

[4] Exodus 32:16.

[5] Cf. Abarbanel to Deuteronomy 9:17. Likkutei Sichos vol. 9 p. 241; vol. 26 p. 252. My gratitude to Shmuel Levin, a writer and editor in Pittsburgh, for his editorial assistance.

[6] Sefer Megaleh Amukos.

[7] Bava Basra 14b.

[8] On a literal level the connection is this: On the 29th of Av, at the end of Moses' second 40-day period on Mount Sinai, G-d agreed to give the second set of tablets to Israel. The following day Moses ascended again, and remained on the mountain throughout the month of Elul. On Yom Kippur he descended with the new set of tablets (Rashi to Exodus).

Blessings over landscapes and animals

Blessings over seeing certain phenomena are said after a lapse of 30 days. One example of the halakhot in the article below.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Nowadays, when many people are traveling around the country, it is appropriate to go over the laws of Birkot Ha're'e'yah (the blessings over seeing certain phenomena). Every day, we praise and thank God for the wonderful world he created for us in Birkot HaShachar (the Morning Blessings), in the blessings of reading the Shema, and in prayers. However, in addition to the regular order of prayers and blessings, sometimes we encounter special, exciting and awe-inspiring sights, and in order to express their value content, our Sages enacted reciting a blessing over seeing them, and thereby tie them to their faith-based roots.

After Thirty Days

In order to recite the blessings of "sighting", two conditions must be met. First, the appearance be special and awe-inspiring for the majority of people. Second, that the seer has not seen it for thirty days, for then there is a newness in his vision. And although some people are so receptive that they are stirred after not having seen the unique landscape even after a week, and on the other hand, others are so indifferent they are not enthused even after a year – our Sages determined to bless in

accordance with the excepted practice among the majority of people, that after thirty days have passed, they are stirred once again.

Sea and River

For seeing a sea such as the Mediterranean Sea, as well as a sea such as the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, the blessing ‘oseh ma’aseh Bereishit’ (that God made the works of creation) is recited. On oceans that surround continents, the blessing ‘she’asah et ha’yam ha’gadol’ (He Who made the great sea) is recited. There are no blessings on an artificial lake, since it was created by man.

On rivers, the blessing ‘oseh ma’aseh Bereishit’ is recited, provided they are at least as big as the Euphrates which is called “gadol” in the Torah. Throughout the State of Israel, we do not have a river big enough to recite a blessing over it.

Mountains, Hills and Desert

A blessing is recited over mountains that are particularly high in relation to their surroundings, such as the Hermon, Arbel, Tabor, Masada, and Sartaba. A blessing is also recited over hills with a special appearance even though they are not high, including steep and pointed cliffs, such as the cliffs of the Judean Desert.

The desert is a barren and desolate place, where little rain falls. A blessing is recited provided its appearance elicits an extraordinary reaction, such as hiking in it and all the surrounding areas are deserted, or going to a lookout point to observe the arid expanses.

Seeing from Afar

Someone who sees a special sight that elicits excitement in most people, is obligated to recite a blessing even if he himself is not moved by the sight. And if he sees it from a distance – if such a sight still arouses excitement in most people, he should recite the blessing, and if not, he should not recite a blessing. The guiding principle is excitement from the very sight, that is, from the enormous size of the sea or the mountain, and not from the fact that, despite the distance, he manages to see the sea or the mountain. Therefore, for example, someone who sees the Mediterranean Sea, the Edom Mountains, or the snow-covered Mount Hermon from Har Bracha, does not recite a blessing.

Time of Reciting the Blessing

The blessing must be said within the duration of the viewing, or at the latest, while saying three words after the end of seeing it. If one did not bless then, and did not see the sight again during that day – he lost the opportunity to recite the blessing for thirty days.

When several people see an impressive sight, it is better for each of the seers to recite the blessing for themselves, than to fulfill their obligation by hearing the blessing by one of them. However, when a group goes on a trip, since they look together at the impressive view, it is possible for one to recite the blessing aloud for everyone, especially when there is a concern that some of the group do not know how to recite the blessing.

Numerous Blessings in the Same Day

Although a blessing is not recited over seeing the same sea or the same mountain within thirty days, one who sees different landscapes even on the same day, recites a blessing once more. Consequently, on a trip from the center of the country to the north, if one has not seen the sea for thirty days, while driving along the coastal road and he sees the sea – he should recite the blessing “oseh ma’aseh Bereshit”. If he sees the Carmel – he should recite a blessing again. When he gets to Mount Tabor – he should bless once more. When he reaches the Sea of Galilee – he should bless once again.

Similarly, a traveler in the Judean desert, when he enters the desert – he should recite a blessing over the desert, and if he later sees a particularly large mountain – he should recite a blessing over it as well. And when he arrives at the place of the impressive cliffs – he recites a blessing over them as well, as is the law over hills. However, if he later sees more special cliffs there, the blessing he initially blessed on the cliffs includes them all, since they are in the same area, and of the same type. And if he sees several landscapes together, even of different types, such as he sees Mount Arbel and the Kinneret together – he should recite one blessing over both of them.

Routine Sightings

Our Sages enacted these blessings as obligatory. However, a question arose: in the past when people walked on foot, or travelled on a donkey, usually, seeing an impressive landscape along the way aroused excitement. However, today it is common that people go to work and pass by landscapes every day, and the question is, whether over this kind of sighting a blessing should be recited. For example, a person who lives in Jerusalem and needs to travel to his business or to a family event in Haifa, when he reaches the coastal road, to the places from which he can see the sea – does he have to bless “oseh ma’aseh Bereshit” over the sea? And then, when he sees the Carmel, must he bless over it “oseh ma’aseh Bereshit”?

Answer: In such a situation, the decision is in the hands of the individual. If he decides to observe and admire the sight – he should recite the blessing, but if he does not want to do so – he does not bless.

Someone Who Lives Near the Sea or a High Mountain

Someone who lives near the sea or a high mountain, or is used to traveling near it – because there is no novelty in his view, he does not recite a blessing. And even if by chance thirty days pass without him looking at it, he should not bless, since having easily been able to see it, there is no novelty in seeing it. However, if he leaves his place for thirty days, and when he returns, wants to stare at the sea or the mountain – he should bless. And of course, on seeing a different sea, or another mountain, one should bless.

Beautiful Creatures

Our Sages determined that someone who sees particularly nice-looking or strong animals, or especially beautiful or superior trees, or an exceptionally good-looking, or tall, strong person – whether Jewish or Gentile – recites the blessing: “Baruch Atah A-d-o-n-I, E-l-o-h-e-i-n-u Melech ha’Olam She’kacha Lo Be’Olam” (Blessed are You, G-d, our Lord, King of the Universe, who has such [beautiful things] in His universe) (Brachot 58b).

By reciting this blessing, a great tikkun (rectification) is made, for quite often people marvel at exceptionally beautiful, or strong and large creatures – some people even hold beauty or physical strength contests between certain creatures (both humans and animals). It is extremely important to connect these feelings to their roots, and give praise to the Creator, who has such beautiful things in His universe.

Blessings are recited over two types of exceptionally beautiful creatures:

1) An animal unique in relation to others of the same species.

An expert on horses who sees a particularly handsome, strong, or fast horse recites the blessing “She’kacha Lo Be’Olam”. Likewise, if an expert on dogs or cats sees a beautiful or particularly large one, he recites the blessing.

Regarding a person who is not knowledgeable about horses or dogs – even if the animals are unique and have won awards – if one is not impressed by seeing them, he does not recite the blessing. If he is impressed, he does recite the blessing.

Similarly, a person who sees an award-winning cow for producing the most amount of milk – if he is impressed by seeing it, the blessing is recited. If not, the blessing is not recited.

2) Unique species such as parrots and stunning peacocks.

The second type of animals, those found in zoos, are species considered particularly beautiful due to their appearance and special colors, such as a large and spectacularly colored parrot, or a peacock with beautiful feathers. Since they are considered beautiful compared to other birds, and people travel distances to take pleasure in their beauty, the blessing “She’kacha Lo Be’Olam” is recited upon seeing them. Similarly, one who travels to see exotic fish, such as those in the Gulf of Eilat, given that they are considered particularly beautiful in comparison to other fish, recites the blessing.

One who sees a particularly handsome, large, or strong person, or an athlete with particularly notable achievements – recites the blessing. However, if the special beauty was created by plastic surgery, or the outstanding strength is thanks to the use of steroids – since it is not natural, a blessing should not be recited. And out of modesty, a man should not recite a blessing over a particularly beautiful woman.

One should not recite a blessing over the same creature once again, but if after thirty days, he sees another creature of the same kind, a little different in appearance and no less beautiful – he should recite the blessing (Peninei Halakha: Berachot 15:12-13:9).

A Visit to a Zoo

A visitor to the zoo should recite the blessing “She’kacha Lo Be’Olamo” over the first beautiful species he sees, and have kavana (intention) to exempt all the other beautiful species with his blessing. This pertains to most people, who are not particularly impressed by all the gorgeous species. However, someone greatly moved by seeing them, recites a blessing on each one individually.

A person taking children to the zoo, who sees they are particularly impressed by a certain animal, should instruct them to recite an additional blessing. It is best for an adult taking a group of children to visit the zoo to first recite the blessing for himself out loud, and for everyone to answer ‘amen’. Afterwards, each time they encounter a particularly beautiful species, a different child should be honored with reciting a blessing, thereby educating them to bless and admire God’s creatures. Together with this, they will also learn that the accepted practice is for each individual to recite one blessing over all the beautiful animals.

The Blessing “Mishaneh Ha’Briyot” for a Monkey or Elephant

Our Sages determined that a person who sees a monkey or an elephant recites the blessing: “Baruch Atah A-d-o-n-o-I, E-l-o-h-e-i-n-u Melech ha’Olam mishaneh ha’briyot”. Indeed, there is an opinion that a blessing should be recited upon seeing any unique-looking animal. In practice, however, according to the opinion of most poskim (Jewish law arbiters), our Sages determined to recite a blessing specifically on monkeys and elephants, because more than any other creatures, their appearance arouses particular astonishment, for although they are animals, they possess a certain resemblance to humans. A monkey is similar to man in the shape of its body and the use of its hands. An elephant is unique among animals in that its skin is smooth and hairless, and uses its trunk like a hand.

A person who sees a monkey and an elephant together, recites one blessing over both. However, when they are in different locations, as is common in zoos, a separate blessing is recited over each one.

A Suggestion for Zoo Managers

It would be appropriate for zoo managers to hang attractive signs near the animals which require a blessing upon seeing them – “She’kacha Lo Be’Olamo” next to the beautiful parrots and peacocks, and “Meshaneh ba’Briyot” near the elephants and monkeys, and to indicate that anyone who has visited the zoo within thirty days should not recite the blessing once again.

A Blessing on the Settlement of the Land

According to the takana (ordinance) of our Sages, one must recite the blessing “matziv gevul alamna” on all Jewish communities in Israel seen for the first time, and after that, as long as one did not see it for thirty days, recite the blessing once again, in keeping with the accepted rules of ‘berachot ha’re’iah’.

However, since one of the major stipulations of ‘berachot ha’re’iah’ is that the sight being viewed must be awe-inspiring, consequently, one should not bless over communities whose observation is not stirring because one has already seen it a number of times, or because the location had long been inhabited by a large Jewish population and forgotten that it was once desolate.

The Blessing is recited over Communities in Which the Redemption of the Land is Evident

Therefore, in areas not yet settled appropriately where efforts must still be made to fulfill the mitzvoth of yishuv ha’aretz so that the Land remains in our hands and not in the possession of any other nation or left desolate – even if one sees an established community there, he should recite the blessing. This includes the following areas: Judea and Samaria, the Golan Heights, the Negev, and parts of the Galilee and Jezreel Valley.

It seems that even those who are not so moved about seeing the community – the first time one sees it, he should recite the blessing, for

anyone who sees houses in places where the redemption of the land is evident, is considered as ‘seeing the houses of Israel when inhabited’, i.e., settling the land, and setting the boundary of the widow.

After Thirty Days

One who sees an established community in which the redemption of the land is evident, such as Alon Shvut, Karnei Shomron and Katzrin, after thirty days have passed since seeing it last – if one marvels anew at their settling of the land – he should recite the blessing; if one is not moved, he should not bless. And if one returns to the community a second time and sees they have built an additional neighborhood, he should recite the blessing.

But in the new communities in those areas, or in established communities facing greater difficulties in settlement, such as the communities of Itamar and Elon Moreh in Gav Ha’Har, and Otniel and Ma’on in the southern Hebron hills, in all probability the excitement of seeing them is greater, and as long as thirty days have passed, one may recite the blessing. However, even in places such as these, if one is not moved, a blessing should not be recited the second time. However, if in the meantime more houses were built, one who sees them should bless. Similarly, a Jew who comes from abroad and sees the big cities for the first time, if he marvels at the return of Israel to their land – he should bless. Likewise, one who sees for the first time a newly built city, if he marvels at the strength of the settlement in it – he should bless. And in Jerusalem, the city of our holiness and glory, whoever admires its building, and sees some new buildings that add a small neighborhood to Jerusalem – even though he has already been to Jerusalem many times, he should recite the blessing “matziv gevul alamna”.

Joy and Comfort

I encountered a number of joyous events recently. About two weeks ago, a group of girls finished studying the ‘Peninei Halakha’ series. The study began about six years ago with my daughter Milcha, and after she got married and moved to Beit El, Ilanit Weinberger continued the studies. The study takes place mainly on Shabbats and holidays. The grand finishing party has not taken place yet.

A week ago, two additional groups of girls finished studying the entire Tanakh for the second time, as part of a daily chapter study, about half an hour to forty minutes a day. The class is taught by Hana Steinbach and Hodia Rosenberg. The study takes place all year round without exception (on Tisha B’av they study Lamentations). Even though the study is called a ‘daily chapter’, in practice the girls finish on average a chapter and a half. At the conclusion itself, parents and grandparents participated.

At the same time, there are two groups of boys who study a daily chapter in the Tanakh, and another two groups who study a daily chapter in the Mishnah. It turns out that the organization ‘B’nei Zion’ encourages daily Tanakh study that takes place in about thirty other places. The coordinator of the organization that participated in the party whispered in my ear that in Har Bracha, the number of participants in the study is much greater than in the other places.

Towards the end of the summer break, there is going to be a concluding event of about a hundred boys in the ‘Peninei Halakha’ books as part of the Har Bracha branch of the Ariel movement. Beyond happiness and contentment, one may learn from this that the systematic engagement with the value of learning Torah is effective.

The excitement of the shmita year: challenges with opportunities

Some aspects of the shmita year in Israel about which not everyone knows. As told by farmers and staff at the Torah and Haaretz Institute.

Shmita

It is perhaps unexpected to hear shmita, a year during which agricultural fields lie fallow, as an exciting year. But that is just how **Rabbi Itzhak Dvir** of the Torah and Haaretz Institute (the Institute for Torah and the Land of Israel) describes it.

“We have come to the end of an exciting year, in which we were privileged to meet heroic farmers, who were willing to put aside their

main livelihood in favor of the shmita. We have a lot to learn from these people - their connection to the Land of Israel, and their personal sacrifice for the sake of the Torah. We need to take this strength and continue it for six the next years".

In the seventh year of a seven-year cycle, farmers set aside tilling and working the land as commanded in the Torah. Also called the Sabbatical year, it is observed only in the Land of Israel. Jewish farmers outside of Israel do not observe the shmita.

Dr. Moti Shomron, agronomist and head of the Department of Scientific Research at the institute, adds, "This year we were very excited to see farmers who devoted themselves to keeping shmita in different ways. They took on the challenge of the shmita, understood its depth and significance, understood the connection of the Jewish People with the Land of Israel, and observed this year despite the difficulties and the loss of profits when they could have earned a lot more. I was amazed to hear one farmer from the Jordan Valley say that, after making all his calculations for the year, he hopes to come out without having earned a single shekel from the farm this past year."

While the land cannot be worked, that does not mean that fruits and vegetables that grow on the land naturally during the fallow year cannot be eaten. In fact, farmers have to let anyone onto the land to pick what is growing. The farmer cannot charge for this produce. But since it is generally inconvenient for many people to go out to the fields, themselves, an organization called Otsar Beit Din manages the picking, packaging, and transportation of produce to consumer distribution centers. The consumer pays for the cost of the handling so that those doing the work get paid but they do not pay for the produce itself and costs are lower than regular retail prices.

Tomer Goldenberg, of the Antman-Goldenberg Farm in Moshav Gimzo, says, "For 35 years, we have been working with Otsar Beit Din during the shmita year. In the current year, we are serving as Otsar Beit Din of Moshav Gimzo. The rabbis help us with any halachic question and also come to the field."

"Why observe shmita? My grandparents on both sides lived abroad, observed Shabbat and put on tefillin, but they had no possibility to observe the shmita year. We are privileged to live in the Land of Israel, work the land, and this is really part of Zionism: to keep the shmita and observe what was forgotten for almost two thousand years."

Shlomi Saban from the gardening company 'Yotzer Be Teva', which also owns a nursery, says that the shmita year is full of challenges, but it is permissible to maintain gardens and to establish new ones that only use synthetic grass. In the nursery, the volume of sales decreased significantly. "In terms of opportunities, we are happy that during the shmita year we have the opportunity to live by our pure faith and, of course, there is more time to dedicate to our families and develop other business ventures."

Parshas Re'eh

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Reuven ben Aharon z"l.

Seeing is Believing

See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse (11:26).

This week's parsha opens with Moshe enjoining Bnei Yisroel to follow the proper path of Torah and mitzvos, and not to stray from it: "The blessing – that you listen to the commandments of Hashem, your God, that I command you today. And the curse – if you do not listen to the commandments of Hashem, your God, and you stray from the path that I commanded you today, to follow the gods of others that you did not know" (11:27-28).

Many commentators point out the incongruity in the pesukim: By the blessing it says, "that you will listen to the commandments of Hashem," and yet by the curses it says, "if you do not listen to Hashem." In other words, it should have either said "if you will listen" and "if you will not listen" by both, or "that you will listen" and "that you will not listen" by

both. Why does the Torah choose the words "that you will listen" by the blessing and "if you do not listen" by the curse?

The Ohr Hachaim points out that the parsha also begins in a very unusual manner: "See, I present before you today [...]" Why should the Torah use the word "see"? After all, there wasn't anything to actually look at; it is merely an expression to try and get the people to focus on a concept. Yet, in general, the Torah uses the word "listen" or "hear" in such circumstances; why does the Torah wander from the usual terminology?

The Gemara (Tamid 32a) asks, "who is a wise man? One who sees what is already born." Generally, this is understood to mean that a wise person sees what the future will bring; he can discern a situation and its consequences. However, if we read the passage more carefully, it tells us a great deal more. A wise person doesn't merely see what will happen, he actually sees the future that is born right now. In other words, it doesn't mean that the chacham can predict what will be, he actually sees it happening right now. A good example of this would be the difference between Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill. Churchill raised the alarm in the mid 1930's as to the dangers of Nazi Germany; well before Chamberlain made his disastrous attempt to appease Hitler, Yemach Shemo. Churchill recognized many years prior, that Nazi Germany was an evil threat.

Moshe Rabbeinu is telling us that listening to Hashem and following His mitzvos are the very bracha that Hashem is promising. The connection to Hashem is a bracha within itself; the bracha isn't a conditional consequence of doing mitzvos. That is why the possuk says, "The blessing – that you will listen to the commandments of Hashem, your God." On the other hand, if one, God forbid, strays from this path, it could lead to a consequence of a curse. This means that not following the path isn't a curse, it just isn't a blessing, and yes, it might actually lead to a curse if one falls off the path completely and starts worshipping idols. That is why the Torah says by the curse "if you do not listen to Hashem." But, in contrast, following the mitzvos of Hashem in and of itself is an immediate blessing.

That is why the parsha begins with the word "see." Following the path of Hashem is a blessing that you can see right now, not a consequence to be realized at a later date.

Penniless from Heaven

For destitute people will not cease to exist within the land; because of this I command you saying 'you shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor one, and to the destitute in your land' (15:11).

The Torah makes a rather remarkably ominous statement that there will always be poor people in our land. In fact, we aren't really even discussing merely poor people; the word the Torah uses here is "evyon – destitute." Rashi (15:7) defines an evyon as one who is desperately longing. In other words, someone who feels incredibly deprived and is desperate. Quite possibly, this refers to someone who, at one point, had a high standard of living and now has fallen on hard times. For this reason, they are constantly longing and they feel deprived.

The Gemara (Shabbos 151b) uses this very possuk to say that even in messianic times there will always be poor people. What kind of system did Hashem create where there will always be those who are desperate? What possible reason could there be for an infrastructure of poverty in our society?

The prophet Yechezkel, when castigating the Jewish people for straying off the path of Hashem, compares Bnei Yisroel to their "sister" Sodom. What was the sin of Sodom that was so evil? The Navi (Yechezkel 16:49) explains; "This was the sin of your sister Sodom, that she had pride and a surplus of bread and tranquility yet she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and destitute." This seems to imply that the reason Sodom deserved to be destroyed was because the people didn't take care of their poor and desperate inhabitants. This is difficult to comprehend; nowhere in the seven Noachide laws is there a commandment to give charity. How is it possible that they deserved to be totally annihilated for this?

We know that Avraham Avinu was the first person to recognize that Hashem, the Creator of everything, deserved to be recognized in this

lower world. Avraham Avinu, therefore, made it his mission to bring Hashem into the hearts and minds of the inhabitants of this world. This, of course, became the de facto mission of his children, the Jewish people, as well. At the same time, Avraham Avinu was also known as the paragon of chessed; how are these two concepts related?

Avraham Avinu recognized that Hashem's creation of the world was the ultimate act of kindness – chessed. The creation of the world was the vehicle for Hashem to bestow the ultimate good on mankind. Therefore, the very act of creation was for chessed. Avraham recognized that the real way to bring Hashem into this world is to emulate him and do acts of kindness as well. Thus, doing acts of charity is the ultimate way of connecting to Hashem because we are acting in a God-like manner. It is, therefore, not surprising that the only way one is permitted to test Hashem is by giving charity. In this week's parsha, we actually have a guarantee that if we tithe our earnings we will become wealthy and thus enabled to give even more. This is the perfect expression of the very purpose of creation.

When the people of Sodom refused to help those who were desperate and needy, even though they had the resources to perform charity, they were in essence rejecting Hashem and the entire purpose of creation. This sin goes beyond not keeping the laws of social justice; this sin is contrary to the very nature of creation. It is for this reason that they deserved to be utterly annihilated.

This brings us back to the question of why there must always be poor people in the land; it is because we must always stay connected to the purpose of creation and have this opportunity to emulate Hashem. Just as Hashem empowered mankind through kindness, we must help and empower those who cannot do for themselves. In this way, we become God-like and bring Hashem into our world.

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Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

Connecting to Hashem From a Distance

"Acharei Hashem Elokeichem teilei'chu - after Hashem, your G-d, you shall follow; you shall fear Him, observe His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him and cleave to Him. (Re'eh 13:5)" The word "after" in the Torah can be written either as achar or acharei. Chazal (Bereishis Rabba, Lech Lecha 15:1) explain that achar implies a close proximity in time or place, while acharei denotes a sense of distance. Rashi alludes to this earlier in Parshas Re'eh. The posuk says that the blessing should be delivered on Har Gerizim and the curse on Har Eival. "Are they not on the other side of the Jordan, far, in the direction of the sunset - acharei derech mevo ha'shemesh? (11:30)" Rashi explains that since the two mountains are far to the west of the Jordan, the Torah uses the word acharei to describe their location.

But if acharei always implies a sense of distance, then why does the Torah use that term when giving the command to follow Hashem? The posuk should have said, "Achar Hashem Elokeichem teileichu," which would imply that one should follow closely after Hashem?

The Chofetz Chaim answers that the word acharei in this context is meant to highlight that even one who feels distant from Hashem should never give up hope. Rather, he should try as best as he can to reconnect with and draw closer to Hashem. The Chofetz Chaim adds that this is the deeper meaning of the words in the tefillah of Mussaf on Rosh Hashana, "Fortunate is the man who does not forget you, the human being who strengthens himself in You." Praiseworthy is the individual who does not forget Hashem despite his challenges, but rather invests effort to draw closer to Hashem.

The navi Yirmiyahu expresses the pain of Klal Yisrael in exile who feel distant from the Shechina. "Meirachok Hashem nirah li - from a distance Hashem appeared to me. (31:2)" Radak understands that Klal Yisrael is

responding to Hashem's statement in the previous posuk, "Matza chein bamidbar - they found favor in my eyes in the wilderness." Klal Yisrael replies that indeed they enjoyed a closeness to Hashem in the midbar, but that was long ago - meirachok. Now they are in exile and Hashem is hidden from them. Hashem answers, "V'ahavas olam ahavtich - I have always loved you with an eternal love." Hashem proclaims that His love for Klal Yisrael is everlasting. It has not diminished despite their sins, and He anxiously awaits their desire to draw closer to Him.

The potential to reconnect with Hakadosh Boruch Hu exists not only on a national level, but on a personal level as well. "Shalom shalom larachok v'lakarov - peace, peace for the distant and for the close. (Yeshaya 57:19)" Hashem calls out not only to the one who is close, but also to the one who is far away. In truth, anyone who has sinned is distant from Hashem. The Mabit (Beis Elokim, Ch. 1) defines the process of teshuva as "drawing close to Hashem from the distance of sin." But one who is entrenched in a path of wrongdoing naturally feels so estranged from the Ribono shel Olam in his actions and attitudes, that he cannot see any way forward. "Why even bother trying to do teshuva?" he might ask himself. "Hashem doesn't want me anyway." It is precisely to such a person that Hashem calls out. Hashem never gives up on any individual, no matter how far he has strayed. "For You do not wish the death of one deserving of death... You await him; if he repents You will accept him immediately. (Mussaf of Yom Kippur) This is the power of teshuva - to be able to move past prior indiscretions and forge a new path, to establish a new relationship with Hakadosh Boruch Hu. But how is it humanly possible to draw close to Hashem when one feels so distant? The answer is Hashem promises to help. The Torah describes the process of teshuva that will take place when Klal Yisrael is in exile. "It will be when all of these things (trials and tribulations) come upon you... then you will take it to your heart... and you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice... Then Hashem, your G-d, will bring back your captivity... and He will gather you in... (Even) if your dispersed will be at the ends of heaven, from there Hashem, your G-d, will gather you in and from there He will take you. (Nitzavim 30:1-4)" Hashem assures Klal Yisrael that he will never abandon them. No matter how alienated they are from Him - physically or spiritually - He will gather them in and redeem them.

There is always hope to reconnect and strengthen our bond with Hakadosh Boruch Hu. But there is one prerequisite - that "you will take it to your heart." As a nation and as individuals, we must take the first step. The Midrash (Eicha Rabba 5:21) describes how Klal Yisrael says to Hakadosh Boruch Hu, "It (our teshuva) is up to you, 'Bring us back to You, Hashem, and we shall return.' (Eicha 5:21)" But Hashem responds, "No, it is up to you, 'Return to me and I will return to you.' (Malachi 3:7)" Hashem promises that He will return to us, but only if we begin the process and try to draw closer to Him.

During the month of Elul and the yamim noraim, it is somewhat easier to connect with Hashem. His Presence is more perceptible. He makes Himself more accessible to those who seek Him (Rosh Hashana 18a). The question is, are we ready to take the first step?

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All Parsha Meshech Chochmah

Prophecy and the Principle of Chazakah

Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

כִּי יָקֹם בָּקָרֶךָ נָבִיא אָוֹתֶלֶם תְּלִוּם... לְאָמֵר גָּלְבָה אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים... וְעַזְבָּדָם. לֹא תִשְׁמַע אֶל דָּבָר קָבְרִיא הַהָא אָוֹתֶלֶם תְּלִוּם הַהָא

If there should arise in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of dreams... saying, "Let us follow gods of others... and worship them." Do not listen to that prophet or to that dreamer of a dream. (13:1-4)

The Concept and its Source in the Torah

A basic operational principle of halachah which appears countless times throughout the Gemara is that of chazakah. This principle states that if it is not known whether the status of a person or thing has undergone change, we proceed on the assumption that there has been no change,

until we discover otherwise. Although this is a Torah principle, we note that nowhere is there a pasuk that states “You shall rely on Chazakah,” which means that a source in the Torah for chazakah will come in the form of identifying a case in the Torah which clearly and unmistakably relies on chazakah.

In this regard, the Meshech Chochmah cites the Tosefta in Maseches Gittin,[1] which derives this principle from the halachah of ir miklat (city of refuge), whereby if the accidental killer should leave the ir miklat, the goel hadam (relative of the victim) can kill him. Now, the killer is only required to stay in the ir miklat until the Kohen Gadol dies, after which point he may leave and the goel hadam can no longer kill him. However, that being the case, how can the goel hadam ever kill someone who leaves the ir miklat? Perhaps the Kohen Gadol has died in the meanwhile in which case the killer is free to leave and may not be harmed! Rather, says the Tosefta, we see from here, that the Torah allows the goel hadam to rely on the concept of chazakah which states that the Kohen Gadol is still alive, as he was last known to be.

An Alternative Source – The False Prophet?

The Meshech Chochmah on our pasuk raises a most interesting question in the above-mentioned Tosefta; for, as he proceeds to demonstrate, our pasuk would seem to demonstrate the power of chazakah to an even greater degree, making it an arguably better source! The points which form the basis of this suggestion are as follows:

There is a mitzvah to heed the instructions of a prophet who has been verified as such by providing a sign.

Once he has been verified as a true prophet, he retains that status and does not need to re-establish his credentials each time he presents a new prophecy or instructions.

If someone prophesies in Hashem’s name that we should serve avodah zarah, even if he provides a sign, we are to disregard his words, for he is certainly a false prophet.

Based on the above, the question arises:

What if a prophet, whose credentials had already been established issued instructions in Hashem’s name and, subsequent to that, became a false prophet? Are we required to continue to heed the instruction he gave in the interim stage? In other words, it is clear that at some stage he underwent a transition from true to false prophet; the question is when did that transition take place, prior to issuing the interim instructions or afterwards?

Commenting on the words “**אֵל חֹלֶם הַחֲלוֹם הַהֲגָהָה**,” the Sifrei[2] states: “**וְלֹא חַשׁׁד לְמִפְרַעַת** – He is not suspect retroactively.” The Vilna Gaon explains this to mean that all instructions that predated this clearly false message are to continue to be heeded. This halachah, says Meshech Chochmah, is very clearly relying on the principle of chazakah, maintaining the established status of the prophet into a questionable time-period. Moreover, this halachah demonstrates the power of chazakah to a greater degree than the case of ir miklat.

In the case of the ir miklat, we do not know whether there has been a change in the status of the Kohen Gadol (i.e., of being alive). In that case, chazakah says we assume there has been no change.

In our case, we know that there has been a change (from true to false prophet)! However, even here, chazakah says that we are to assume that that change did not occur prior to the time when we became aware of it.

Based on the above, the Meshech Chochmah wonders why our case is not cited as a source for chazakah. Unusually, he leaves this question unanswered.[3] For our purposes, it is fascinating to see how, as R’ Meir Simchah goes through the Chumash, he has an eye not only on answering questions that arise, but also on questioning answers that are provided, in the event that a better answer would seem to be forthcoming!

The Korban Omer and “The Morrow of the Shabbos”

שְׁשָׁת יְמִים תִּאֱכַל מַצּוֹת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְׁבִיעִי עֲזָרָת לְה' אֵלֶיךָ לֹא מַעֲשָׂה מַלְאָכָה
For six days you shall eat matzos, and on the seventh day it shall be an assembly for Hashem, your God, you shall not perform any productive labor (16:8)

A “Shabbos Prohibition” on Yom Tov?

The Meshech Chochmah’s comment on this pasuk opens with his trademark attention to detail and nuance. Generally throughout Chumash, when dealing with Shabbos, the Torah forbids “melachah,” representing all thirty-nine forms of productive labor, while when referring to Yom Tov it uses the term “meleches avodah,” which allows for melachos relating to direct preparation of food to be performed. In light of this, it is somewhat unusual that our pasuk, which is dealing with a Yom Tov (the seventh day of Pesach), nonetheless uses the term that relates to Shabbos (“melachah”)! The Gemara’s Proof from our Pasuk Regarding the Korban Omer

One of the major points of dispute between the Tziddokim (Sadducees) and the Chachamim related to the date of bringing the korban omer, a date which the Torah refers to as “**מְחַרְתַּת הַשְׁבָתָה** – on the morrow of the Shabbos.”[4] The Oral Tradition informs us that this refers to the second day of Pesach, with the term “Shabbos” referring to the Yom Tov of the first day. The Tziddokim, however, who reject the Oral tradition, translate the word “Shabbos” as referring to the seventh day of the week, so that, according to them, the omer is always be brought on a Sunday. Among the numerous refutations of this view recorded in the Gemara,[5] one of them comes from our pasuk: Why does it begin by saying that we should eat chametz for six days? Do we not know that Pesach is a seven-day festival? Rather, the six days in question are the days one can eat from the new crop, after offering the korban omer on the morning of the second day of Pesach. According to the Tziddokim, however, who maintain that the omer is offered on the Sunday following the first Shabbos of Pesach, this would rarely leave six days of the new crop within Pesach. Indeed, it could sometimes involve no such days, for example, if the first day of Pesach fell on Sunday.

Meshech Chochmah: Time-Stamping the Proof

The Meshech Chochmah notes that there is a potential response to this refutation, albeit somewhat forced; for perhaps the pasuk is referring specifically to a situation where the first day of Pesach is in fact a Shabbos, with the second day being a Sunday. This would leave the last six days as being able to eat from the new crop even according to the Tziddokim. It is for purposes of negating such a response that the pasuk concludes by forbidding “melachah” on the seventh day, a term which we noted applies to Shabbos. Through this, the pasuk is indicating that it is referring to a situation where the seventh day of Pesach is in fact a Shabbos, which means the first day was a Sunday! In such a situation, to nonetheless also specify that matzah from the new crop may be eaten on the last six days makes it clear that the day on which we are to bring the omer is the second day of Pesach – even though it is not a Sunday!

Once again, having seen how the Gemara illuminates the pasuk, the Meshech Chochmah brings us back to the pasuk, showing how it illuminates the Gemara!

[1] Perek 2, halachah 13. [2] Sec. 84. [3] The question of the source for chazakah is also discussed in the Gemara (Chullin 10b-11a). At the end of his comment, the Meshech Chochmah makes reference to that sugya, noting that R’ Acha bar Yaakov there rejects the Gemara’s proposed source (tzoraas of a house). Although the Gemara does not openly state which source Rav Acha does adopt, the Meshech Chochmah suggests that it is, in fact, from our pasuk. [4] Vayikra 23:15. [5] See Menachos 66a.

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Subject: Mitzvah Connection -- LaSechvi Vinah -- Related To Parshas Re’Eh’s , "Es HaB’Racha"

LaSECHVI VINAH --- (relationship to " Es HaB’Racha ", at Re’Eh, 11:27)

The following is a Mitzvah Connection relating to a B’Racha we recite at the outset of the Shachris (morning) prayers -- as commented on by the

Sfas Emes (quoting his grandfather, the Chidushei HaRim), to help interpret the words, " Es HaB'Racha " in Re'Eh, at 11:27 . The S'fas Emes' explanation is cited and discussed by Rav Elie Munk in his commentary on Parshas Re'Eh (Kol HaTorah, Re'Eh, 11:27). The outset of Parshas Re'Eh has Moshe telling B'nai Yisrael : See, I Present Before You Today A Blessing And A Curse (Re'Eh Anochi Nosein Lifneichem Bracha U'Klallah , 11:26).

In the next verse, Moshe says that the Blessing, B'Racha , is that " You Hearken To The Commandments Of Hashem ... That I Command You Today ." (11:27) On the words, " Es HaB'Racha ", The Blessing, Rabbi Munk cites the S'fas Emes as follows : S'fas Emes teaches that there is a special blessing to thank Hashem for the gift of free will, which distinguishes man from all other creatures . It is the blessing we say every morning : " Asher Nosan LaSECHVI VINAH LeHavchin Bein Yom U'Vein Lailah " -- Who Gave The Rooster Understanding To Distinguish Between Day And Night .

Rav Munk continues explaining the S'fas Emes' interpretation of " The B'Racha " in 11:27 . The word SECHVI, commonly translated as "rooster", can also mean " HEART " (See Job, 38:36) . This blessing thus can also be referring to man's understanding, renewed at the start of each day, of his perfect freedom to act . " In that interpretation, the blessing's reference to the distinction between day and night alludes to the distinction between good and evil . When a person says this blessing, he is paying tribute to Hashem for this gift . That is why he can say it even before he hears the rooster crow to announce a new day ." (citing Tosafos to Berachos 60a)

After the SEVCHI B'Racha, the Jewish man says the three blessings acknowledging the fact that Hashem has not made him a non-Jew, a

slave, or a woman . Those are three barriers over which man has no control . " Thus, in a few sentences are condensed the characterization of and the limits to free will ." (Kol HaTorah, Re'Eh, at 11:27)

In terms of the paths of B'Racha and K'Lallah articulated at the outset of Re'Eh , we see that the Jew is given the ability to discern and differentiate between the Blessing and the Curse and, via his free will, has the power to choose only B'Racha, the path of Blessing . The Parsha begins with the word, Re'Eh, "See", on which Rabbi Munk notes : " To clearly understand the problem of free will, one must be able to see into his own conscience 'See' suggests an internal perception, penetrating deep into one's soul ." (Kol HaTorah, at 11:26)

In the first B'Racha , the SECHVI blessing, the Sfas Emes understands the B'Racha to mean the man's HEART , (not rooster), as renewed each day to discern good (Yom) from evil (Lailah) . This enables the exercise of free will to SERVE HASHEM devotedly and faithfully . This B'Racha -- A PRAYER -- , then, has a material connection with the " Blessing " and " Curse " options presented in Parshas Re'Eh.

LaSECHVI VINAH equals 433 . Mitzvah Number 433 is : OSO Ta'AVOD -- HIM YOU SHALL SERVE (Devorim, 10:20) . It is a Mitzvah to SERVE Hashem. Chazal explain that this means to serve Hashem WITH ONE'S HEART , THROUGH PRAYER .

M.H.

לע"ג

שרה מושא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
בילא בת (אריה) ליבע ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

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 t'i'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'heyma"
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'heyma")! 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 "maser" at this site. This implies that there must be an additional area surrounding the Mikdash where this "maser" can be eaten (which Halacha defines this as the area within the walls of the **CITY** that surrounds the Bet HaMikdash - the same law that applies to eating the meat of the "korban shlamim".]

But when one eats his "maser" 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: "maser sheni" reflects this same idea:

"...when you will go up [to this site] to eat your maser 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 Seforo)

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 HaMikdash 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 Philistines (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'yamei Shaul' - for during the time of Shaul **WE DID NOT SEEK IT!**" (I Divrei Hayamim 13:2-3)

[Note the use of the shorash "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 Zecharia 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

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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 you 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..."
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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 Cana'anites 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'ites, 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 shefikhet 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-nidahat," 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 was 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 cliche 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 Liebtag 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 Liebtag'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 Hilkiah hoKohen (II Melakhim 22) and the subsequent reform by Yoshiyah 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'foro 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'être 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 commandment. 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'ser '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 the 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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