

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 10 #42, August 11, 2023; 24 Av 5783; Reeh Mevarchim Ha Hodesh 5783

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.

Moshe instructs us "Reeh" – see what Hashem has placed before us, a choice of blessing or curse. "Reeh" involves more than eyesight – Moshe instructs us to see, absorb, and understand deeply the choice we have of following Hashem's mitzvot for a life of blessing or ignoring them and facing curses for ourselves, our families, and our people.

In selecting his examples, Moshe uses specific language and situations that reflect back earlier incidents in Jewish history. When the people enter the land, there will be only one place, which Hashem will select, where they may go to bring their korbanot (especially the olot, or burnt offerings (12:5-7)). Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org explore the text and several details to demonstrate that this restriction provides a parallel to the Akeidah. When before does God tell a Jew to bring a burnt offering to a specific place that Hashem will designate? Avraham's instruction to bring and sacrifice Yitzhak at some specific place that He will designate later. At the Akeidah, God stops Avraham at the last minute and tells him not to sacrifice Yitzhak. In Reeh, Moshe first tells B'Nai Yisrael to destroy all the places of worship of every other nation and not to follow the disgusting practices of the Canaanite nation. Moshe then tells the people that Hashem finds the practices of the other nations an abomination, especially their practice of sacrificing their sons and daughters (12:29-31).

We see the parallel to the Akeidah by comparing Moshe's description with Hashem's initial instructions to Avraham. God tests Avraham's faith by first telling him to sacrifice his beloved son. Moshe opens the parallel discussion by telling the people that when they bring sacrifices to Hashem at the place He designates, they will eat meat and rejoice with their children. Avraham calls the place "Hashem yei'ra'eh," God will see. Moshe opens the parsha by telling the people, Reeh, see – really see – Hashem's blessings. While there are many parallels in the two events, Moshe focuses on the blessings we receive because of Avraham's complete faith in Hashem. Instead of fearing that we might need to sacrifice children, Moshe opens and repeats God's absolute hatred of sacrificing any child – a perversion of any positive religion.

Another parallel to earlier Jewish history is Moshe's discussion of how to treat Jewish slaves (15:12-18). We are to treat Jewish slaves as well as members of our family. After six years, we are to free our slaves and send them away with generous gifts sufficient to enable them to acquire self esteem and start an independent life. Should the slave desire to stay longer, we are to pierce his ear against the door post. As Rabbi Fohrman observes, piercing the ear will leave blood on the door post – a reminder of our ancestors placing blood on their doors the night of the exodus from Egyptian slavery. Also, God makes the Egyptian neighbors generous so they will give our ancestors gifts when they leave Egypt. The mitzvot of how to treat our freed slaves parallels the way that God arranges for us to leave slavery in Egypt.

Rabbi Yehoshua Singer and Rabbi Mordechai Rhine both remind us that we are here 3300 years after Moshe brings our ancestors to the border of Israel because Hashem loves us and enables us, such a small nation in numbers, to survive as a separate people. Modern genetic research demonstrates that Kohenim continue to have many of the same genetic markings even after 3300 years. As Mark Twain observes, the continued survival of the Jewish people after so many centuries, when much larger nations and religions have disappeared as separate people, is a miracle from God. The

miracle of our continued survival proves that Moshe's instructions from Reeh from 3300 years ago still apply. We have a choice of blessings or curses. As Rabbi Rhine states, we should choose blessings, but do so with proper intent. Do not live a life in the middle – make a true and faithful decision to choose blessings rather than being wishy-washy or selecting a life of curses.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, loved delving into relationships across Tanach, examples such as how Moshe's statements late in the Torah reflected earlier instances in the Torah, or why a story in Sefer Devarim differed from an account of the same instance as presented earlier in the Torah. His Torah discussions on Shabbat mornings always helped us probe the many levels of insights in the Torah. My wife and I are currently planning a family trip to Israel in time for Purim. As we tour Israel, hopefully we can share some of our insights from our Torah study when we visit the sites with our grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, 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; Sarah Feige bat Chaya, 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

Legacy: Reeh: Walk Behind Me

By Rabbi Naftali Reich * © 5768

How far back is “behind”? In Hebrew, there are different words for “behind” that address this question. The word achar indicates a short distance behind, while the word acharei indicates a long distance behind.

If the Almighty invites us to walk “behind” him, it would seem to be a positive thing, an expression of divine favor drawing us near into a close relationship with Him. If so, He would want us to walk close behind Him, so to speak. Strangely, however, when Moses exhorts the Jewish people to walk “behind the Lord,” he uses the word acharei, which means far behind. How do we account for this anomaly?

The commentators explain that Moses actually intended the word acharei to be a source of hope and encouragement for the Jewish people. Sometimes, a person may become so wrapped up in his own little world that he loses sight of the big picture. Instead of making good use of his youth, health and vigor to grow in a spiritual sense and come close to the Almighty, he focuses primarily on material acquisitions and status symbols.

The years fly by. One day, he takes stock of his life and comes to the shocking realization that he has frittered away his best and most vigorous years on matters of little consequence. He suddenly perceives how far he has drifted away from

the Almighty, and he is discouraged. Where can he begin? How can he ever make up all that ground he has lost? How can he ever hope to achieve the closeness with the Almighty that derives from lifetime of spiritual exertions.

Do not be discouraged, says Moses. Walk behind the Lord even if it is acharei, even if following behind from a very great distance. The Almighty values highly a “walking behind” motivated by a desperate awareness of the gulf that needs to be traversed. Take one step at a time. One step will lead to the next and bring you ever closer. Do not lose hope.

A king was seeking a suitable husband for his daughter. He wanted a man of stout heart and strong character, and he devised a contest to find such a man. He placed a long ladder, whose rungs were slippery and rickety, against an extremely high wall. The ladder reached to the roof.

“The first young man that reaches the roof,” declared the king, “will have won the hand of the royal princess in marriage. But anyone who attempts the climb and fails will be sent to the dungeon.”

A few athletic young men, experienced mountain climbers, rose to challenge, but when they were no more than halfway up the ladder they could no longer maintain their grip on the slippery and unstable rungs. They fell to the ground and were immediately dragged off to the dungeon for wasting the king’s time. Witnessing their failure, no other young men dared make the attempt.

Presently, one fellow steeped forward and offered to make the climb. Halfway up, he too began to lose his grip. He looked up at the long distance remaining and could not imagine how he would ever reach the top, but he refused to give up. Tenaciously, he continued to climb, hand over hand, rung by painful rung. All of a sudden, he found himself on the roof. He had activated a hidden spring that catapulted him all the way to the top.

“You have won my daughter’s hand,” said the king. “But how did you know about the hidden spring?”

“I didn’t,” said the young man. “But I knew that the king’s offer was not frivolous. If the king laid down the challenge, it must be somehow possible to accomplish it. So I refused to give up, no matter what.”

In our own lives, we sometimes look at a distant spiritual goal and think it is way beyond our grasp, and so we become discouraged and give up. But we can never know how things will develop. If we keep trying tenaciously without becoming discouraged, it is always possible that the Almighty will send us unexpected break that will catapult us all the way to that elusive goal. Whether it is in prayer, study or some other spiritual endeavor, we may think we are on such an elementary level that there is no hope for us. Never give up hope. One day, everything may just fall into place so that we suddenly find ourselves making great strides we never thought possible.

* Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum Education Center, Monsey, NY.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/legacy-5768-reeh/>

When Does Less Become More?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015, 2023

Twice in the book of Devarim, Moshe warns the people to keep the totality of the Torah, not adding to or detracting from it. In Parashat Re’eh we read, *“Whatsoever I command you, that thing you shall observe to do; you shall not add to it, nor diminish from it”* (13:1), echoing a parallel prohibition in Parashat Va’Etchanan (Devarim, 4:2). While the literal, simple sense of these verses is that one should not add to or detract from the entire body of mitzvot, the halakhic meaning is quite different. Rashi puts it succinctly, writing, *“You shall not add – for instance, five compartments of tefillin, five species for the lulav, and five tzitzit. And similarly is the meaning of ‘you shall not detract’”* (on Devarim, 4:2). In other words, an individual cannot perform a mitzvah in a way that changes its core components. However, the Talmud never interprets this verse to mean that one should not add to the corpus of mitzvot. Reading this verse in the latter sense would raise many challenging questions about the Rabbinic enterprise, for isn’t creating new laws and adding to those commanded in

the Torah what the Rabbis did?

Before attempting an answer to this question, we should stop to consider why adding to the Torah is so wrong. The reason to prohibit detracting is clear: doing so leads to the transgression of Torah prohibitions and to the non-fulfillment of Torah commandments. But why not add? What is wrong with doing more?

The most obvious answer is that additions would compromise the integrity of the Torah. Adding to the Torah leads to misrepresentations of its core message; it is a perversion of *dvar Hashem*, the actual word of God. This is illustrated by the following tale from Irish mythology:

A man traveling in a forest in Ireland chances upon a leprechaun and succeeds in catching him. He forces the leprechaun to reveal under which tree his pot of gold is buried. The Irishman tied a red handkerchief around the trunk of the tree so he would be able to locate it when he returned with a shovel. Before leaving, he made the leprechaun swear that he would not remove the handkerchief. When he returned the next day, he found that the leprechaun had tied red handkerchiefs around every tree in the forest!

We can efface a thing's identity by adding just as easily as we can by taking away. In the words of the Rabbis: "*Kol ha'mosif goreya*." Whoever adds, diminishes.

Adding to the corpus of mitzvot holds another inherent danger: it may undermine observance. If every law and practice is treated as God's direct word and given equal weight, then a person who finds herself unable to keep one law might wind up rejecting all, viewing, as she does, all her obligations as one piece. In Haredi cultures, for example, the weight of different halakhot tends to be less differentiated (consider the current intransigence of Haredi rabbis when it comes to the practice of *metzitzah b'peh*). Often when people leave this world, they land in a place of full secularism and non-observance rather than finding a home in a different form of Orthodoxy or in one of the other movements. Of course, each individual's story is different and has its own dynamics, but often we hear that this phenomenon is rooted in a belief that it is all or nothing. If some of it can't be upheld, then none of it can.

There is also the related concern that adding prohibitions to the Torah can sometimes work at cross-purposes to the Torah's goals. This is what the Rabbis refer to as a *chumrah ha'asi lidei kula*, a stringency that leads to an unwarranted leniency. This may happen much more frequently than we think, since we are often not sensitive to what we might be sacrificing or compromising by adopting additional strictures. For example, greater demands in the area of ritual mitzvot often translate into compromises in the area of interpersonal mitzvot. Consider the following statement from the Shakh, Rabbi Shabtai Kohen, a seventeenth-century commentator on Shulchan Arukh:

For in the majority of cases there is a leniency (i.e., a compromise of the law) that results in another area because this thing was made forbidden, and it will thus be a stringency that leads to a leniency. And even if it appears that no (unwarranted) leniency will result, it is possible that one thing will lead to another and a hundred steps down this will be the case. (Practices of Prohibitions and Allowances, Yoreh Deah, 248)

Now of course, stringencies are sometimes necessary, but in such cases, Shakh warns, the posek must be careful to make it clear that his ruling is merely a stringency and not the actual halakha. This will help ensure that such rulings are not given undo weight and that they do not compromise more central values and principles.

So the concerns about adding to the Torah are clear: it can undermine the Torah's identity and potentially undermine observance and compromise core values. So how could the Rabbis do what they did?

This question can be skirted by insisting that the meaning of the verse is restricted to its narrow halakhic definition not to add to the core components in the performance of mitzvot. However, both Rambam (twelfth c.) and Ramban (thirteenth c.) insist that this verse does indeed prohibit adding to the body of mitzvot as a whole. Rambam states that this verse also forbids the Rabbis from presenting a Rabbinic law as a Biblical one or representing the meaning of a Biblical law as broader or narrower than it actually is (Laws of Rebels, 2:9). In his commentary on the Torah, Ramban echoes this position in a slightly nuanced fashion when he states that one cannot add new practices to those commanded by the

Torah (on Devarim, 4:2).

So the question returns in full force: But isn't this what the Rabbis are always doing, adding new practices? Ramban provides an answer: *"Now regarding what the Rabbis prohibited as safeguards....that activity is a Biblical mitzvah, provided that they make it known that these restrictions are made as a safeguard and are not from God's word that is in the Torah."*

Ramban's answer contains two points that make the Rabbinic activity allowed: First, they are given explicit license in the Torah to make their legislation and safeguards. This refers to the verse, *"u'shmartem mishmarti,"* and you shall guard my ordinances (Vayikra, 18:30). The Rabbis interpret this to mean, *"asu mishmeret li'mishmarti,"* you – the Rabbis -- must protect My mitzvot; you must make safeguards. This is key. It states that the mandate to protect the Torah – to respond to contemporary realities and create practices, institutions, and laws that will ensure the survival of the Torah -- is equal to and opposite the concern of adding to the Torah.

Does this mean that the concern of adding to the Torah can be discarded? Hardly. This is where the second part of Ramban's answer comes in. All of this is only allowed if the Rabbinic legislation does not obfuscate what is and is not the Torah. That is, the Rabbis must clearly identify that their activity is of a Rabbinic nature. This point is also made by Rambam: the prohibition only applies when Rabbinic rulings are misrepresented as Biblical.

As Ra'avad states in his critique of Rambam, there is a problem with this. Namely, the claim that the Rabbis were clear about the lines is not borne out by the facts. There are many laws in the Talmud which are not clearly identified as Rabbinic or Biblical. Moreover, the Rabbis sometimes intentionally present Rabbinic laws as Biblical to give them more backing, i.e., an *asmakhta*. On these grounds, Ra'avad rejects that there is a problem adding to the mitzvot! He states that the meaning of the prohibition is only that one should not alter the performance of a mitzvah; there is no prohibition against adding to the corpus of what is Biblical: the Rabbis do it all the time!

In the end, there are no easy answers. Either the Rabbis clearly identify what is Rabbinic and what is Biblical (they do not), or the *pshat* meaning of the verse is inaccurate and one can add to the mitzvot. Neither explanation is fully satisfactory. Concerns over adding to the Torah are too often forgotten or ignored, but the importance of the rabbinic safeguards and well-chosen stringencies cannot be minimized. It is only by maintaining this uneasy dialectic that we can hope to truly succeed both in protecting the Torah and in maintaining its integrity.

Shabbat shalom!

<https://library.yctorah.org/2015/08/when-does-less-become-more/>

Divisiveness: Thoughts for Parashat Re'eh

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"You are children of the Lord, your God. You shall neither cut yourselves (lo titgodedu) nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead" (Devarim 14:1).

The Torah prohibits idolatrous practices such as gashing oneself as a sign of mourning. The prohibition is *lo titgodedu*, do not cut. The Talmud (Yevamot 13b) expands the prohibition to mean, you shall not cut yourselves into separate groups (*agudot agudot*). The goal is to serve God as a united people.

Maimonides recorded a halakha based on the Talmudic interpretation (*Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim* 12:14): *"This commandment also includes [a prohibition] against there being two courts which follow different customs in a single city, since this can cause great strife. [Because of the similarity in the Hebrew roots,] the prohibition against gashing ourselves [can be interpreted] to mean: Do not separate into different groupings."*

While halakha generally allows for different traditions and courts even in a single city, the ideal is for each tradition and

court to be respectful of the others. For example, it is fine to have separate courts for Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities living in the same city. The prohibition would apply if the courts denigrated and delegitimized each other. Respectful co-existence is allowed; disrespectful “cutting” of the others is a violation of the halakha.

Within the Jewish people, we have remarkable diversity of traditions, opinions, and political views. A problem arises when the diversity is not respectful and responsible but descends into vilification and outright hatred. This group believes it has a monopoly on religious truth; that group believes it alone has the correct view on what’s best for the State of Israel. Liberals and Conservatives don’t merely disagree, they engage in disparaging and even physically attacking each other. When people violate *lo titgodedu*, they are acting in ways akin to idolatry. By cutting each other, they cut God out.

But *lo titgodedu* is a concept that goes beyond the Jewish People; it relates to humanity as a whole. The divisiveness, violence, hatred and warfare that plague our world often stem from the “cutting off” and “cutting down” other people. The biblical teaching of the universal brotherhood/sisterhood of human beings--all created in the image of God--is set aside. Instead of focusing on our universal humanity, the forces of hatred and violence see the world as a battle ground where they can maintain superiority and power.

Martin Buber pointed out the obvious crisis facing humanity today: “That peoples can no longer carry on authentic dialogue with one another is not only the most acute symptom of the pathology of our time, it is also that which most urgently makes a demand of us” (A Believing Humanism, p. 202).

Lo Titgodeu is a warning to the Jewish People and to the world. When we “cut” ourselves into self-enclosed and self-righteous groups, we ultimately “cut” ourselves off from our fellow human beings...and from God.

* 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/node/3147>

Discussing Politics on Shabbat; Military Service in America; Tuition/Day Camp Expenses: Rabbi Marc Angel Replies to Questions from the Jewish Press

Is it appropriate to discuss politics at the Shabbos table?

Response of Rabbi Marc D. Angel, Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals:

Ideally, Shabbat should be sanctified by devoting ourselves to religious fulfillment. We are to avoid discussing business and other mundane matters. To engage in conversations/debates about politics would seem to be in the category of *divrei hol* (secular matters) that should be avoided at the Shabbat table.

However, political discussion often is interrelated with moral issues e.g. abortion, assistance to immigrants, anti-Semitism. Since we are deeply affected by the political process, we feel a need to discuss relevant issues, to gain new insights, to learn more details about projected laws. If such conversations are carried on in good faith as a means of exploring moral implications of various policies, then these are not strictly in the category of *divrei hol*.

The problem with talking politics in general — as well as on Shabbat — is that people may come to the discussion with strong opinions. Instead of useful conversation, the discussion becomes acrimonious. Arguments about this candidate or that candidate can quickly deteriorate into name-calling and other unpleasantness.

It is fine to discuss moral issues that are impacted by the political process, as long as the conversation is for the sake of gaining clarity and sharing views. But if discussing politics ends up being a shouting match, then this clearly crosses the line of what is appropriate on Shabbat (or any other time!).

Torah observant Jews need to understand political issues that impact on our religious way of life. We have the right and obligation to discuss relevant issues in a responsible way to clarify our thinking and determining how we can best promote the ideas and ideals for which we stand.

* * *

Should a parent encourage a child who wants to join the U.S. Army?

It has long been observed that parents must give their children roots...and wings. We want our children to be deeply attached to our traditions, our family's values and ideals. We also want them to grow into strong, healthy human beings who will live as responsible adults.

If a child has reached the age and maturity level where he/she wants to join the U.S. army, parents would want to know what has motivated this decision. Is it from idealism and patriotism? Is it due to peer pressure? Is it an escape from current life patterns? Has the child given full thought to how army service will impact on religious observance?

It is right and proper for parents to have candid discussions with a child who wants to join the army. It is important to listen to the child...and listen very carefully. It is important to share one's pride, concerns, and fears. But ultimately, it is important to let the child make his/her own decision.

If after serious thought the child has decided to join the army, parents should be supportive. American military history includes many Jewish soldiers and officers who have served their country with distinction and courage. They have brought honor to their families and to their country.

Grown children have the right and responsibility to make decisions that will impact their own lives. We pray that they will be faithful to their roots and family traditions; and that they will spread their own wings in ways that will bring blessing to themselves and others.

* * *

Is it proper to send your kids to sleepaway camp if they receive tuition assistance?

It is proper to be an honest, upstanding person, who provides as best as possible for the upbringing of one's children.

Parents are faced with many challenges in raising their families, including the enormous financial pressures relating to yeshiva/day school tuitions and the high cost of sleepaway camp. The ideal from a practical and religious point of view is to live within one's means. Children need to understand the possibilities — and limitations — of their parents' financial situation.

If parents are in fact financially unable to pay full tuition so that it's necessary to apply for financial aid, then they are not in a financial condition to afford sleepaway camp for their children. The children need to be given affordable options e.g. day camps, summer groups, summer school. Yes, there are social pressures to send kids to sleepaway camps — but parents and kids need to overcome these pressures and do what is financially appropriate for them.

There are cases, unfortunately, where people live well beyond their means but then apply for tuition assistance and expect charity dollars to cover the difference. Aside from being a morally and financially problematic practice, this is unfair

to all others who struggle to pay full fare. When it becomes “normal” to evade full payment, then the whole system suffers. People falsify their financial records in order to let others defray tuition and/or camp costs.

It would be best if tuition and camp costs were kept at reasonable levels so that most people could actually afford to pay full fare without going deep into debt. It would also be best if everyone paid what they honestly can afford, and not apply for tuition or camp assistance unless absolutely necessary. If the day school/yeshiva/camp system could rely on everyone living up to the highest religious and financial standards, life would be better for all families...and for the entire system.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3146>

Re'eh -- The Fisherman Who Got Away

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2016

As we near the conclusion of the Torah-reading cycle, the Torah informs us that the stakes are high. One who is righteous will be rewarded; one who is fishing rod wicked will be punished. The Torah states this in very clear terms. *“See, I am placing before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing if you obey; the curse if you do not”* One wonders: Is there no middle ground? Can't I just be average?

Indeed, the commentaries tell us that the Torah's message is that we should not live our lives in neutral. *“See!”* the Torah demands of us. Pay attention! Live life with focus and with blessing. There is no “middle ground.” Even when you do things that seem “average,” do them with positive intent. When you are shopping, when you are involved in business, even when you drive your car, don't just do it. Make every effort to do things – even mundane things -- in a way that sanctifies G-d's Name.

In my recent summer travels I had the privilege to meet a gentleman by the name of Gary. My wife and I were walking pleasantly on the dock at a river. Gary was fishing. I don't know if it was my yarmulka, or perhaps my tzitzis that he saw, but he made eye contact with me and made small talk about the weather.

As the gentle evening breeze rustled the leaves, we stood absorbing the pleasant scene of the river, the boats, and the people strolling on the dock. I said to him, “You must enjoy fishing.” He said, “Yes, very much.” And as we stood there quietly, he looked up at me and said, “You are probably wondering why I am not catching any fish.”

Before I could say anything, he leaned over to his supply box and showed me a pliers, and the hooks which he had straightened and blunted. He said, “I go fishing to relax. The last thing that I want to do is to catch a fish. Then I would have to clean it and cook it. When I am on vacation I like to eat out. So I straighten the hooks before I set them in the water.”

I smiled and wished him well. But all evening his insightful comment whirled in my head. “He doesn't go fishing to catch fish. He goes fishing to relax.”

This week's Torah portion demands that we pay attention as to why we do things. *“See!”* Pay attention! Do not live life without thinking about what you are doing.

It is a great lesson -- a moshol. Let me give you some examples.

We all know why a person has a job: “To make money,” of course. But if the only reason to have a job is to make money, why doesn't G-d -- who is all powerful -- just give you the money that you need. And why do people still work even after they have enough money for retirement and beyond?

The commentaries maintain that one of the reasons that G-d created the concept called “work” is to keep us busy and out of trouble. Ask seniors who volunteer. They will tell you. A job is not just to make money. A job is to give a person a sense of purpose. It gives one the opportunity to make a difference.

Consider prayer as another example. We all know why we pray. "To get something." Yet Jewish literature indicates the opposite. *"Why were the Matriarchs barren? Because G-d likes to hear the prayer of righteous people."* The need is not a mistake. The need exists as a catalyst for communication with G-d.

In fact, the Torah doesn't promise that all our prayers will be answered as we see fit. But it does promise: *"G-d is close to all those who call to him sincerely."* As King Shlomo stated, *"G-d is your friend, and your father's friend."* He has a good track record. Prayer isn't about getting what we want as we see fit. Prayer is about communicating. It is about having a trusted friend with Whom to share life, even in the most difficult of times.

When the Torah states, *"See,"* it is telling us to pay attention to why we do things. It is an important lesson. Because if you take the time to think about it, the obvious reason isn't necessarily the real reason that we do things.

Some people don't go fishing to catch fish. They go fishing to relax.

Some people don't have a job just to make money. They have a job to be busy and productive.

Some people don't pray to get things. They pray to come closer to G-d.

Certainly if you do these things you may end up catching fish, making money, or getting what you prayed for. But, as in the case of prayer, traveling life in G-d's company is itself a worthwhile endeavor.

The Torah tells us that things may not be what they are often understood to be. *"See,"* and pay attention, *"For I place before you today a world of blessing."* See, and make a choice. *"You shall choose life."*

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.**

Rabbi Rhine is on summer vacation for some weeks. During this time, with his blessing, I am posting some of his outstanding archived Devrei Torah. To find more of Rabbi Rhine's Devrei Torah, go to Teach613.org and search by parsha.

<http://www.teach613.org/reeh-the-fisherman-who-got-away/>

Re'ey – The Secret of the Eternal Jew

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

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

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

As with all of Torah, Moshe's directive here is intended for all generations, and not only for those who were preparing to

enter the land of Israel. As such, Moshe's enjoiner seems to be rather difficult to understand. If someone is struggling with celebrating the holidays in today's world, almost three and a half millennia after the Exodus, does Moshe truly expect that ancient history should change our approach to the holidays? We could understand that some recognition of our national history and heritage is appropriate and that it is important to remember who we are and where we came from. However, Moshe is asking much more of us here. He is asking us to "*safeguard and do these statutes*" – to study them in detail and keep all aspects of the holiday in full measure. How can ancient history alone lead me to feel responsible for every command of the G-d who redeemed us?

The Sforno (ibid.) gives an explanation that is even more difficult to understand. He explains that in the previous verse Moshe had instructed us in the mitzvah to bring joy to those in need and to share of our wealth so they too can enjoy the holiday. Since parting with our hard-earned money is a natural challenge of life, Moshe is giving us a tool to ease the challenge and enable us to properly share our wealth. We should remember how we were once slaves and did not have any money of our own. We should therefore willingly share some of our wealth with those who need it: to find favor before G-d, Who took us out of Egypt and gave us wealth and property. The Sforno is saying that we are commanded to feel that ancient history so keenly, so as to feel indebted to G-d for our current wealth! So much changes with the course of time. So much has happened since the Exodus. Are we to emotionally connect our current situation to the Exodus?

Perhaps this Ramban and Sforno are providing us with part of the answer to Mark Twain's famous question, "*All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?*" Perhaps part of our secret lies in our national identity. If we consider the bondage in Egypt, we begin to realize that our mortality should have been realized before we ever became a nation. We are the bearers of an ancient legacy of G-d's love for the world and of G-d's dreams for humanity. He took us out of a bitter slavery and led us to greatness, for He saw in us the ability to bring His world to its intended purpose. Our secret, since the birth of our nation, is that G-d is, was and will be with us.

It is this legacy which Moshe exhorts us to remember. We are a nation which has existed since our birth by nothing more than the grace of G-d. We had nothing and should never have even been recorded on the pages of history. Yet, we were born and thrived since our very inception, and we have continued to do so for all time. When we recall this, even today, we can realize how we truly owe everything to G-d.

* Rosh Kollel, Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Note: Has just moved from Bethesda to Savannah this week and will not have Internet service until next week. In the meantime, I am running a Dvar Torah from his archives.

Re'eh

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Rabbi Hefter did not send a Devar Torah this week. Watch for future Devrei Torah from Rabbi Hefter in this spot.]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Re'eh: A Blessing and a Curse)11:26-29(

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

The theme of choosing between the blessing and the curse, death and life, is central in Sefer Devarim. Obviously, no one would choose a curse over a blessing or death over life. I would like to explain the choice offered in Sefer Devarim as an incentive to consider consequences responsibly. Humans are driven by emotions and rarely stop to think logically before reacting. When we offer a logical explanation to our actions, it is usually an afterthought, a process of justification. The Torah tells us to see beyond the moment and consider the consequences. Stop and think, we are told. If you act this way now, what will happen next? Where will you be a week, a month, or a year from now? The message of the Torah should

be read thus: You probably want a good life, a life full of blessings, so take a moment to stop and consider the consequences and lead yourself in the right direction.

The Place)12:4-29(

Sefer Devarim never mentions the location of the Temple or the Altar. The reference is always to *the "Place which HaShem your God will choose to have His Name dwell there."* In several places there is an addendum: You will seek out that place and you shall go there. The yearly pilgrimage visits to the Temple were few, and they had to be meaningful. Instead of naming the place, we are told to search and find that place. This should be understood both literally and metaphorically.

Eating Meat)12:15-25(

When I read the permission to eat meat which the Torah grants the Israelites, it reminds me of how my mother used to grant me permission against her will. She would say OK Haim, if this is what you want to do, go ahead and do it. I would try to get a clearer statement: but Ima, I really want to do it, do you agree? And she would say: Do. Whatever. You. Want. I should have known better back then that she was really opposed to my plans, but I only read the text and ignored the intonation. The Torah similarly tells us that we are allowed to eat meat, if we want to eat meat, if we truly desire meat, we can eat meat. The intention of the Torah is not necessarily to make us vegetarians, but rather to recommend a modest consumption of meat. We should definitely consider this admonition today in view of the toll our consumption habits take on the environment, including the effects of methane gas, deforestation, drought, and spread of diseases. Just like the warning on alcohol and tobacco, maybe the Torah would want us to add a label to meat products: consume responsibly.

Halakha of the week: Should I say Tahanun after Selihot?

We will start saying Selihot this coming Monday]Sephardic custom[. If you say Selihot immediately before Shaharit, saying the Viduy and the Tahanun after the Amidah should feel weird. If it doesn't, it is because we got so used to it that we barely think about the content and the message. The Viduy and the Tahanun, supplications, which follow it, are a call for confession and repentance. This is exactly what we did, tenfold, a short while before the prayers, during Selihot. We banged our chests and said the confession and read prayers and more prayers... How can we say moments later, with a straight face, that we have sinned. What did we do between the Selihot and the prayers? What crime have we committed that we have to confess and repent again?

It is difficult to bring about change at the community or the synagogue level, so at least as individuals, you can feel totally free to read a chapter of psalms or some inspirational text while Tahanun is recited.

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom 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> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Shavuon Re'eh by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

An old Jewish Music group called the "Bet Gimmels" came out with a hit song in the 60's with the lyrics "Oy Yoy Yoy Yoy Stayin' Alive Stayin' Alive."

I consider that a Jewish song because it hits on the most important thing we have to do in our life. Stay Alive. God tells us as much in this week's Parsha when he tells us to choose life. In fact we can violate nearly any precept of the Torah if it means saving a life. Staying alive is the most important thing.

That is why I have the highest admiration for those who do our security over Shabbat, whether they are volunteers or the people we hire. They help us stay alive.

So a shout out and thanks to them for all they do. And if you are reading this and have a hankering to help us stay alive, feel free to contact CSG to volunteer for security and perform this most ennobling service. And if you are not so inclined, thank you for all that you already do to keep yourself and those who you love, in the state of aliveness.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Kneseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah Re'eih: A Rabbi's Public Conduct

Despite his prominence as the chief judge in Babylonia and head of the famed yeshiva of Nehardea, Rav Nachman came under attack from Rabbi Ammi of Tiberius. Or more accurately — Rav Nachman was attacked precisely due to his rabbinical prominence.

On two occasions, Rav Nachman instructed his servant to follow the accepted lenient opinion in Halakhah. The first concerned hatmanah — insulating food on Shabbat. The scholar requested that his food be insulated on Shabbat to keep it cold. This is in accordance with the accepted ruling that hatmanah is only prohibited when keeping food hot.

The second incident took place on a weekday, when Rav Nachman requested that a non-Jewish chef boil him some hot water to drink. The accepted opinion is that Bishul Akum)the rabbinic prohibition to eat foods cooked by non-Jews(does not apply to foods which may be eaten also uncooked, such as water)Shabbat 51a(.

So why did Rabbi Ammi object?

Two Models of Personal Example

While we learn from great scholars through their lectures and classes, an even more powerful method is by way of personal example. There are, however, two different models for the way a scholar serves as an example and influences others. These two models are often contradictory. Acting according to one paradigm will frequently be misleading or incorrect in terms of the second.

The first model is for the rabbi to be seen as a practical example of normative Halakhah. People are drawn to the scholar's nobility of character and great esteem. They see him literally as a living Torah. All of his actions are precisely measured by the Torah's standards of holiness and Halakhah. People scrutinize his conduct in order to emulate his lifestyle of Torah and mitzvot.

In this situation, the scholar should take care to always follow accepted Halachic rulings. Then it will be clear that his actions are Torah practices applicable to all. If he were to publicly take on special acts of piety, others could no longer learn from him.

This principle is true even if the scholar is naturally drawn to higher religious observance beyond the Halachic norm — *middat hassidut* — due to deep inner aspirations to be close to God. Nonetheless, he must subdue this desire, so that the people will know that his actions are relevant for all to emulate and follow.

There is, however, a second model of spiritual influence. This is an inspirational influence, when the people see a great scholar as a giant of spirit and intellect. His breadth of knowledge and depth of piety is clearly on a plane far beyond the common man. The people recognize this distance and revere the saintly scholar. His punctilious observance of mitzvot,

even in the smallest details, is clearly not a lifestyle to be emulated, but an inspiring expression of a sublime love of God and Torah.

In this model of influence, it is proper for the scholar to act according to middat hassidut, observing extra stringencies when fulfilling mitzvot, consistent with his exceptional spiritual stature.

Guard against Extremism

The two areas in which Rav Nachman followed the accepted lenient opinion — the laws of Shabbat and Bishul Akum — relate to two fundamental themes in Judaism. Shabbat is an expression of Israel's spiritual greatness. The Sabbath is “a sign between Me and you”)Ex. 31:13(. And the laws of Bishul Akum are designed to emphasize the distinction of the Jewish people, so that the people will be aware and guard over the lofty segulah nature of Israel.

In both of these areas – the greatness of Israel and its separation from the nations — a zealous, unbalanced individual could distort the Torah's intent, adding extraneous, disturbing, even xenophobic elements. It is necessary to prevent such excesses with qualifying parameters in order to maintain the proper balance. This is rooted in the Torah's command,

“Carefully observe everything that I am commanding you. Do not add to it and do not subtract from it.”)Deut. 13:1(

For this reason, Rabbi Nachman publicly ordered that his cold food be insulated on Shabbat, limiting the extent of the Sabbath rest. And he requested that a non-Jew heat up his water, so that the divide between Jew and non-Jew not be exaggerated.

But the perfected individual — who fully grasps the wisdom and intent of the Torah — does not need such restrictions. There is no limit to the heights of elevated thought. Going beyond the norms of Halakhah and observing middat hassidut is thus appropriate — and even expected, as Rabbi Ammi forcefully noted — for a great scholar.

)Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 13-14, on Shabbat 51a.(

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/REEH-76.htm>

Reeh: The Good Society)5780(

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

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. Deut. 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 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.

FOOTNOTE:

^[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.

Around the Shabbat Table:

^[1] What is the blessing and what is the curse?

^[2] Why can't the market and the state create a good society? What can do this?

]3[How do you think the strength of a society can be measured?

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/reeh/the-good-society/#_ftnref4

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.

The Power of Seeing: The Path to Blessing and Personal Growth

By Katia Bolotin* © Chabad 2023

“One should live with the times.”¹ At first glance, this could imply adapting to current ideologies and trends. But Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Chabad Rebbe, often repeated this dictum with a far different intention. He’d explain that *“One should live with, and experience in one’s own life, the specific teachings of that week’s Torah portion.”*²

Parshat Re’eh contains allusions to the approaching Days of Awe, calling on us to initiate the process of spiritual introspection. Not surprisingly, it begins with *“See, I put before you this day a blessing and a curse — a blessing if you listen to the commandments of your G d ... and a curse if you do not listen to the commandments of your G d.”*²

Ibn Ezra notes that, although Moses was speaking to the entire Jewish people, the Hebrew word *re’eh* (is singular. This indicates that every person is to listen to what Moses is saying, as if he was speaking to him or her, individually.

As we enter the Hebrew month of Elul, we focus on the spiritual preparation for the upcoming High Holy Days. Are we ready to confront those inner stumbling blocks that prevent us from progressing, spiritually and personally? It’s time to realistically evaluate our thoughts, actions and lifestyles.

To cultivate real change that lasts, we must be willing to see ourselves clearly — not through the lens of the past but as we appear right now. How would we like to see ourselves in the year to come — same old, same old, or moving closer to who we’re striving to become? Living with the times also means utilizing our present opportunity to make a life-affirming change. Now is the optimal time for serious spiritual work.

Why does the first line of the portion of Re’eh begin with the word “see”? Are blessings and curses visible? Sometimes, they may appear to be obvious, but what seems to be a curse can turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

The word “see” alludes to a heightened kind of vision, one that is more than just physical. It includes one’s inner vision or insights. The sages taught us that a wise person is *“one who sees that which is born.”*³ This means seeing and discerning all of the possible consequences of our actions.

It’s interesting to note that the first letters of the Hebrew word for *“blessing”* *berachah* (and *“curse”* *kelalah* — bet and koof — have the same combined numeric value as the Hebrew word for *“faith”* *emunah* (102. ⁴ Faith helps us see the hidden good in our lives.⁵ Perhaps this is why the Talmud instructs us to bless both the good and the bad;⁶ everything that G d does ultimately will come to be seen as good.

Another lesson from Parshat Re’eh’s opening verse can be understood if it’s read slightly differently. The word *“I”* *anochi* represents the ego. The verse could be read homiletically as saying, *“See, the ego that I placed within you today, can be used as a blessing or a curse.”* This interpretation by the Ba’al Shem Tov implies that the ego stands between a person and G d. When left unchecked, the ego can come between one’s relationships with G d and others. In this sense, the ego can be a curse. When contained and channeled appropriately, however, the ego can be a tool to assist one to actualize goals. When utilized for good, the ego becomes a blessing.

Every word of the Torah is intentional and significant. *“See, I put before you this day a blessing and a curse.”* Moses said these words thousands of years ago, yet you’re reading them now. They are speaking to each of us right now.

Be ever mindful that today's choices can ultimately bring about a blessing or a curse. How you choose to "see" yourself and your circumstances can reveal a blessing or conceal it. And what you "see" today is up to you.

Choose to enrich your day and yourself with the Torah's teachings. You'll be "*living with the times*," the very best of times.

Making It Relevant

]1[How can you choose to see your life with a "positive eye," just for today? What are practical steps you could take to achieve this goal?

]2[Be mindful that G-d's commandments are specifically designed to produce good, even if our eyes can't perceive it now. Remember, the trees that look dead in the winter are really just preparing to blossom in the future.

]3[Read the Torah portion. Find at least one lesson and incorporate it to "live with the times."

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Hayom Yom*, 2 Cheshvan.

2. Deuteronomy 11:26.

3. *Tamid*, 32a.

4. Numerology (gematria) is a system that assigns a numeric value to each Hebrew letter (e.g., aleph=1; bet=2). The numeric value of a word is calculated by adding the numeric values of each of its letters. Commentators may draw conceptual comparisons between two words or phrases whose numeric values are the same.

5. *Likkutei Sichot* vol. one p284

6. *Berachot*, 54a.

* Writer, pianist, songwriter, and composer of contemporary classical music. Her thought-provoking articles and audio talks highlight the enduring relevance of the Torah in our ever-changing world.

https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/31582/jewish/Katia-Bolotin.htm

Reeih: How to Eradicate Idolatry Today

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Eradicting Idolatry

You must utterly eradicate their deities from all the places where the nations whom you will dispossess worshiped, upon the lofty mountains, upon the hills, and under every lush tree.)Deut. 12:2(

G-d is the source of all power and potential in the world, including our own.

The Ba'al Shem Tov teaches us that we must keep this truth constantly in mind, for if we allow it to slip from our consciousness, we will perforce look to other sources of power (such as "nature" or "ego"), ascribing to them the ability to act on their own.

This is a subtle form of idolatry. Furthermore, this misconstruction is diametrically opposed to the objective of the Torah and its commandments, which is to refine materiality so it can serve as a means to reveal Divinity rather than to obscure it.

It is therefore crucial that we “utterly eradicate” every vestige of this misconception.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
You may donate here: <https://www.kehot.org/Dedicate/Sponsorships>

To receive the complete D’Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D’Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available)no fee(. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah
via the Internet

By Rene and Rami Isser
in loving memory of Rene's mother,
Devorah bat Chaim Eliyahua, a"h,
on the occasion of the her 13th Yahrzeit, (24th of Av)

Volume 29, Issue 41

Shabbat Parashat Reeh

5783 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Second Tithe and Strong Societies

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, shicheha 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

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350
or email: sgreenberg@jhu.edu
<http://torah.saadia.info>

Sponsored by Esther and Alan Baldinger
in loving memory of Esther's father,
Stanley Bloch, a"h,
Shlomo Aharon ben Dov Michelon
the occasion of his yahrzeit

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. Gachter, “Antisocial Punishment Across Societies.” *Science* 319.5868 (2008): 1362-367.

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb** **The Thief of Blessing**

I am sure that you, dear reader, have had the occasion to come across a book which you simply could not put down. Something so fascinating, so gripping, that you were compelled to read it cover to cover in as short a time as you could manage.

I came across such a book several weeks ago. It is a Hebrew book, the biography of a rabbi named Dov Cohen. Rabbi Cohen passed away several years ago at the advanced age of 94. He was one of the last, if not the last, of the students of the yeshiva in Hebron which experienced the horrible massacre there in the summer of 1929, almost exactly 81 years ago.

The book is entitled *Vayelchu Shnayhem Yachdav* (And the Two of Them Walked Together). Much of Rabbi Cohen’s story is encapsulated in that title. For, you see, he was born in Seattle, WA into a family of Lithuanian Jewish immigrants. The family faced all of the challenges of Americanization in the early decades of the last century.

Rabbi Cohen’s mother witnessed the inexorable process of assimilation with which

Likutei Divrei Torah

her older children were involved. She was determined that her youngest child, Dov, would receive a Jewish education as intensive as the one she witnessed back in the old country.

So, in 1926, she took her then 14-year-old son from Seattle eastward across the United States, across the Atlantic Ocean, through the straits of Gibraltar, and ultimately to the then totally primitive and isolated village of Hebron. She committed him there to the tutelage of the famed Rabbi Nossan Tzvi Finkel of Slobodka. Indeed, “the two of them walked together.”

I cannot possibly share with you, in the context of this column, all of the ensuing adventures in Rabbi Cohen’s life. But there is one episode that I must relate.

Dov visited the United States several times during the eighty years that followed his first days in the land of Israel. And each time he experienced a sort of “culture shock”.

Once, on a Sunday morning, he found himself in a taxicab with the radio on. He soon realized that the radio was playing a sermon being delivered by a Christian minister in his church. He was unable to have the taxi driver change the radio station. And so, quite uncomfortably, he listened to the preacher’s sermon. And this is what he heard:

“The group in charge of increasing the enrollment in gehenna, or hell, was discussing ways to get more people to sin. One suggested encouraging them to steal. But the others all protested that the laws against theft were too strict and not enough people would sin by stealing. Another suggested encouraging people to lie. Again, the others protested that lying would make people feel too guilty. Finally came the suggestion with which everyone agreed:

“‘Let’s encourage people to do good deeds, acts of loving kindness, acts of charity, acts of courage and justice. But let’s tell them not to do those things today. But rather, tomorrow!’”

Rabbi Cohen was moved to the core by that story and was inspired by it. Indeed, he shared it with Jewish audiences whenever he could. The lesson he learned and shared was one that Judaism also teaches, albeit not with that particular story. It is the lesson of the dangers of procrastination, of the importance of doing things as soon as possible and not putting them off for tomorrow.

This lesson is conveyed in the opening verse of this week’s Torah portion, Re’eh. “See, I set before you today blessing and curse.” Homiletically, the stress is upon “today,” this day and this moment. Do the right thing today and it will be a blessing. Put it off until tomorrow and the result is cursed.

We have all heard the advice, "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today." This advice is useful in all aspects of life, but it is especially useful in the context of religious behavior and spiritual service. Postponing until a tomorrow which may never come can be, as the Gentile preacher's story suggests, nothing less than sinful.

You may also have heard the adage, which originates with the 18th century poet Edward Young, "Procrastination is the thief of time." The opening words of the Torah portion suggest that procrastination is not only the thief of time but it is the thief of life and of blessing.

"See, I have given you today, this day, now and not later, to perform the good deed, and if you do it now it will be a blessing. If you procrastinate you may never do it at all, and the result may be quite different from a blessing." This is the lesson of the opening verse of Re'eh. And how ironic it is that the subject of the engrossing biography that I just finished reading, Rabbi Dov Cohen, a yeshiva boy and eventually a well-known Jewish rabbi, learned this lesson from a Protestant preacher on a Sunday morning long ago!

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

The Ellul Mood

As welcome the month of Ellul on this very important Shabbat, I am inclined to recall how Jews of old once experienced the same event. The solemnity and sacredness that was ushered in with this penitential season, this forty-day period of Teshuvah, was more than just an idea or a principle. It was something which enveloped one's whole existence. There was an indefinable warmth about it. There was the thrill of expectancy. There was a fear of the unknown. There was a clean feeling about it all that permeated even little Yeshiva boys who had not sinned enough to repent. It was a happy solemnity, a gay seriousness, almost a sort of adventure into the sacred days that were to follow. Perhaps all this can be summed up by calling it the "Ellul Mood." For that is just what it was - a mood. It was an invaluable, cleansing, holy and thoroughly Jewish mood, and one which we should and must recapture this morning. We must get into the Ellul Mood.

If we are to recreate this Mood and recapture some of its great spirit for ourselves, we must attempt to analyze it, to break it down into its components so that we can build it up again. What, then, are the components of the Ellul Mood? Let us analyze it down to three basic elements.

First and foremost, the Ellul Mood consists of a determination to seek out G-d - not to just to find Him by accident, as it were, but to look for Him conscientiously. Waldo Frank, in a recent issue of *The Nation* (June 19, 1954) voices the fear that America is becoming a "people that holds on," whereas in the past we

have been a "people that sought," with writers of maturity who ennobled this search. It is that distinction which we become aware of, in a Jewish sense, at this time of the year. It is not enough to hold on. We must search for greater achievements.

All year long we speak and preach and argue "Jewish survival." We put our minds together figuring out ways and means of surviving as Jews. Some think a Sunday School will help Judaism survive. Most others think we must have afternoon or all-day education for survival. But, and this is the crux of the matter, we are interested in "survival." That is, we want to hold on, to consolidate. We are on the spiritual defensive. All we ask is to survive. Or take the phrase "Jewish identification." We try with all our might to ensure the "Jewish identification" of our youth. We give them a Center. Perhaps a picnic will make them identify themselves as Jews. Maybe a dance. Perhaps charitable work. At least, we sigh, identify yourselves as members of our people. We want at least to hold on.

What a tragedy if this "holding on" philosophy were [the] sum total of our Jewish aspirations! Imagine if, year in year out, you worked only so that your business should survive. You would be, financially, in a very sorry state of affairs. Or imagine if your family conditions reached such a point that you would have to take special measures, and be satisfied with, making your children keep up their "identification" as your sons or daughters. You would say that the psychiatrist or family counsellor or social workers should have stepped in long ago.

What then is it that we must do this month? We must seek. We must look for something greater, deeper, holier, for something more Jewish and more positive. We must become seekers for G-d. We must not be satisfied with anything less.

The 27th Psalm, which we recite beginning tomorrow, emphasizes this element of the Ellul Mood with David's moving words: L'CHA AMAR LIBI BASKSHU FAINAI, ESS PANECHA HA'SHEM AVAKESH, my heart hath said unto Thee... I will seek Thy presence, O G-d. O G-d, all year I'm satisfied with holding on. Now I'm going out to search for You and for Your presence. Now I'm not satisfied with not slipping. Now I've got to climb. I've got to come closer and nearer to G-d. ESS PANECHA HA'SHEM AVAKESH.

And perhaps we should emphasize that this search which is an integral part of the Ellul Mood is a very specific one. It means more than more charity. It means more than more study. It means more than more kindness. It means that in addition to all these there must be more of the purely religious element, the emotional content of Judaism, more of the AHAVAS HASHEM we spoke of last week. If we can manage to participate in that search for

Likutei Divrei Torah

G-d, then the rest will follow. Then we will realize that the G-d we seek demands more charity, more kindness, more study, more prayer, more Mitzvos. The famed "Yud Ha'kadosh" was once heard to comment about his colleague, Rabbi David Lelover, that "I came to fear the Lord through my study of the Torah; but my friend Reb Dovid came to study the Torah through his fear of G-d. He is therefore greater than I am." Once we search for G-d Himself, once we too say ESS PANECHA HA'SHEM AVAKESH, we will find the rest - and it will have more meaning. The first element of the Ellul Mood, then, is to search for G-d; not to be satisfied with holding on, with surviving, with being on the defensive, but to go on the greater heights by seeking G-d's presence.

The second component of the Ellul Mood follows from the first. And that is, the knowledge that G-d responds to the search. He wants to be found. He makes Himself available. It may be more courageous to seek than to hold on, but it's worth it.

It is told of the famed Hassidic teacher, R. Barch Mezbozer, that he chanced upon his grandson, Yechiel Michel, who was crying. He explained to R. Baruch that he was playing hide-and-seek with his friends, and he was hiding, but no one came to look for him. Thereupon R. Baruch thought for a moment, and he too began to cry. When asked for an explanation by his Hassidim, he said, "That is G-d's complaint too. He says 'VA'ASTIR PANAY MI'CHEM', and I will hide My presence from you, and He waits for us to look for Him, but no one seeks..."

So that G-d's hiding from man is not spiteful. It is calculated to increase Man's desire for G-d - and G-d's promise to respond. It is a rewarding search, one which promises fulfillment and meaningfulness... The very name of this month, ELLUL Mood, the idea that G-d responds to us, the more we are for Him, the more is He for us. The more we love, the more He loves; the more we seek Him, the more does He come to us. Happiness for man is the reward for the search for G-d.

As Ellul comes, we know that if we call upon G-d, then sometimes during this season He will answer: that is, we will feel that thrill, that warmth, that confidence, that thrill of the heart, which is Judaism's great discovery: that seeking G-d is finding Him. ANI LE'DODI VE'DODI LI.

And both these elements are contingent upon the third. The confidence that it is worth the effort to seek - nay, even the heart-ache that seeking G-d sometimes entails - and the faith that G-d will respond and, in ways now unknown to me, reward my search with the thrill of discovery, are based upon the third element, namely, the knowledge that, basically, this is a good world. If the first element of seeking gives to the Mood the fear of the

unknown, and if the second, G-d's response, gives to it the thrill of expectancy, then the third gives it the feeling of warmth and happiness.

When we say that we believe that life is essentially good, we do not mean to say that, in the words of Voltaire's philosopher in "Candide," that this is "the best of all possible worlds." Far from it indeed! There is much that is rotten and evil and spiteful and degenerate in this world of ours. We would have to be misguided simpletons to really believe that all of life is just one cheerful sleddride on the smooth surface of existence. It is nothing of the sort. But neither is it the dreadful torture that we sometimes label it. How often do we come across a man who has a prosperous business, is the head of a wonderful family, is in the best of health and, chewing on a big cigar, complains that "life is miserable." There is a Yiddish expression to the effect that if G-d gave us the choice, we would all again choose the same bundle of TSARUS in preference to that of our neighbors. No, life is neither all good nor all bad. But, and this is the essence of what we want to say, the Good in life is part and parcel of existence, it is inherent in Life. But the Evil we find is only incidental, it is not a necessary ingredient, it can be avoided.

The Gerer Rebbe makes an interesting observation on the beginning of this morning's Sidra. We read that G-d gives us freedom of choice. There is before us both BRACHAH and KLALLAH. We can choose good or evil, blessing or curse. And then [the] Torah tells us when we will receive the BRACHA and when, Heaven Forbid, the KLALLAH. ESS HA'BRACHAH ASHER TISHME'U EL MITZVOS HA'SHEM...VE'HA'KLALLAH IM LO SISHME'U... "the blessing when you will obey G-d's commandments, and the curse if you will not obey..." Why the difference in the two pronouns, he asks, why here ASHER-"when," and here IM - "if?" And, he answers, because BRACHAH is always present, it is an indigenous part of all life, it is only a matter of time, hence: ASHER - when. But KLALLAH is not essential to life, and it can be avoided, hence IM - if. Blessing is basic; curse is not.

It is that knowledge, the knowledge that when all the columns are compared, and the question resolved with level-headedness and sobriety, that G-d's world is a good one. BRACHAH predominates, and waits for us to take advantage of it. In a world of this sort, we feel, it is worth the effort of seeking out G-d. The Creator of a world must answer. If indeed Life is a gamble, we place the odds on BRACHAH.

Fear and apprehension can never be absent from the YOM HA'DIN. But as we Jews face the coming Day of Judgement, we do so also with a sense of happiness and anticipation.

As we welcome the month of Ellul, let us recapture the Ellul Mood which is its

outstanding feature. Let us determine to seek G-d to await His response, and to be happy in the knowledge the Good G-d have given us every opportunity to live a blessed life.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

"I am for my Beloved and my Beloved is for me." These beautiful words, authored by King Solomon in Shir HaShirim 6:3, in the original Hebrew, "Ani ledodi vedodi li," present to us a mnemonic for Elul, the Hebrew month which will be commencing this coming Sunday.

Our Sages tell us that the word 'dodi' – my beloved – can refer to a person that one feels very close to and also to the Almighty Himself, whom we are commanded in the Shema to love with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our minds. Therefore this verse highlights for us the importance of deepening and enriching our relationships with our fellow human beings and with Hashem.

The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, remarkably in pre-computer times, provides us with three additional mnemonics in the Bible for Elul. We will see how these additional three verses all amplify the very same message.

The second verse comes from the book of Esther 9:22. It is well known and refers to the mitzvot of mishloach manot and matanot l'evyonim – giving portions of food and alms to the poor on the festival of Purim. The verse is, "Ish lerei'ehu umatanot l'evyonim," the first letters of which spell Elul.

The third verse comes from the book of Shemot 21:13 and teaches us that a person who tragically takes the life of another by mistake, "Vehaelokim ina leyado vesamti lecha makom," – if one's hands slips and as a result a life is taken, then one is able to flee to one of the cities of refuge.

Here the message concerns the care we must take over the life, the welfare and the wellbeing of others.

The fourth verse from the book of Devarim 30:6 tells us, "Umal Hashem Elokeicha et levavcha v'et levav zarecha," – "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants," indicating how our connection with Hashem must be whole and perfect.

So therefore we find that the month Elul which provides for us 30 days of preparation for the High Holy Days must be a period of introspection, a time when we focus on our priorities in our lives, a time when we recognise how crucially important it is for us to come closer to Hashem and for us also to deepen our relationships with our fellow human beings, so that by the time we get to Rosh Hashana, we can indeed exclaim, "Ani ledodi vedodi li," – "I am for my Beloved and my Beloved is for me."

Likutei Divrei Torah

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Jerusalem

Our Torah Portion obviously speaks about the city of Jerusalem and devotes twenty-four verses to the ideas and Jewish laws involved regarding the Holy City (Deuteronomy 12:5-29). It mentions three times in these verses "the place where God will choose for His name to reside," but does not specifically state the name of Jerusalem even once. In fact, in the entire Torah, Jerusalem is not mentioned even once, although in the Prophets and *Ketuvim*-Writings, Jerusalem is mentioned hundreds of times. It is clear that the Jews already had an oral tradition that God would eventually have a "permanent" residence, as echoed in the words by the Jews in the Shira (Exodus 15:17). The experiences of Abraham (Genesis 22:15) and Jacob (Genesis 28:16) also ties the Jews to the specific place of the Two Temples and the place we today call Jerusalem. So, why isn't Jerusalem mentioned in the Torah? More importantly, what made Jerusalem so holy already in the time of Abraham? What is that special connection of the Jewish people to Jerusalem, in every generation? Why is it so important, more important than every other value? (Psalms 137:5-6).

Although many new aspects of this city will be discussed below, a few basics, already discussed before Tisha B'av, must be reiterated. According to Jewish tradition, the spot located under the Holy of Holies in the Temple is the Foundation Stone (*Even Shtiyah*), the very place from which God created the entire world (Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 12:4, Tanchuma Pikudei 3). The earth from which man was created comes from this area of the Temple (Yerushalmi, Nazir 35b). All of the ancients mentioned in the Torah who brought sacrifices to God, brought them from the Temple area, which was already known to be the holy place where Heaven and Earth meet. This included the sacrifices of Adam, Cain and Abel, Noah, and the place of the binding of Isaac by Abraham (Maimonides, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 2:2). The location of the Temple marks both the geographic and spiritual center of the world (Midrash Tanchuma, Kedoshim 10).

Because of the specialness of this place, the Code of Jewish Law instructs every God-fearing Jew, at the very beginning of the Shulchan Aruch, to be aware of the Temple's destruction repeatedly throughout each day of the year (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1:3). Every time an observant Jew eats a meal, the concluding blessing of thanks includes a mention of the Temple, with the hope of its rebuilding (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 1:3). In the *Shmoneh Esreh* – the silent prayer that a Jewish male says three times daily (and which women also recite), a Jew faces Jerusalem and the Temple. In the weekday version of the prayer, a special blessing is

recited asking God to return to Jerusalem and establish the third and final Temple (Blessing #14 of the weekday Shmoneh Esreh).

At the height of joy in life, a Jew remembers that no joy is complete without a rebuilt Temple. Thus, when making the largest purchase or investment in one's life, i.e., when building or buying a home, it is customary to leave one square in the house unpainted, as a reminder of the destruction (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 560:1). And at the greatest moment of joy in a person's life, when he or she gets married, one of the seven blessings at the wedding ceremony tries to comfort those who mourn for the Temple's destruction (Blessing #4 of the seven blessings at a Jewish wedding).

But What Makes This City So Special? Why is The Temple Located Here? - Because of this unique location and all the events that occurred at this place, the entire city of Jerusalem is infused with holiness -- so much so that the city of Jerusalem is called the connecting point between the two worlds, this physical world and physical Jerusalem, with the heavenly world with the heavenly Jerusalem (Psalms 122:3 with Rashi commentary). Thus, there is a parallel, ethereal Jerusalem that is hovering above, which in some ways mirrors the physical Jerusalem below. From the time the Temple was built, the city of Jerusalem became God's "residence" on earth, and, according to tradition, it will be so once again when the Temple is rebuilt (Psalms 122:3 with Rashi commentary). Therefore, it is not only the Temple that is holy or the Temple Mount that houses the Temple that possessed holiness, but the entire city of Jerusalem possesses holiness (Maimonides, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 7:14).

Why, Then, Is Jerusalem Not Mentioned In The Torah? - The city of Jerusalem is not mentioned even once in the Koran, but it is mentioned 669 separate times in Jewish Scripture (Tanach). But, as noted, not once in the Torah. Why not? If the nations of the world had known in advance that Jerusalem was the holiest city of the Jewish people (through its proclamation in the Torah), those other nations would have fought desperately never to allow the Jews to conquer this city and proclaim it as their capital. Furthermore, the non-Jewish religions of the time would have taken that Jewish holiness and intentionally used the city of Jerusalem for their idol worship (which is what happened in later times), something that would be an anathema to Jews. In addition, non-Jews might have purposely razed the city and destroyed it, simply to prevent the Jewish people from ever using it as their holy city and capital. Finally, the sibling rivalry between the Jewish tribes might have caused each tribe to claim Jerusalem for itself, in its territory. Thus, God intentionally never mentioned the name of the city in the Torah, before the Jews conquered Jerusalem, but merely called it "the

place where I will choose to put My name" in our Parsha.

The Unique Laws That Pertain to This Unique City - Because Jerusalem was so distinctive, many special laws were enacted and maintained to demonstrate that Jerusalem is unique. In a certain sense, these laws show us what the ideal Jewish city should look like and how it should be taken care of. Since Jerusalem was holy and certain sacrifices could be eaten only within the city walls, Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Beit HaBechira 7:14) outlines numerous laws and procedures to maintain Jerusalem as the holy city. When someone died, burial had to be immediate, in order not to have the corpse remaining overnight in the city. Since the city of Jerusalem belonged to the entire Jewish people, it was forbidden to take money or rent from lodgers, especially when the entire people of Israel came to the city for the Holidays three times a year. These lodgers, after all, were technically part owners in the city. (The Rabbis worked out a system whereby the people living in Jerusalem did not lose money). At that time, no cemeteries were allowed in the city proper, except for the graves of the family of King David and Chulda the prophetess. Certain plants and fruits could not be planted in the city because they would give off a foul odor, and the scent of the holy city had to remain sweet. In the same vein, no garbage heaps could be located in the city proper. No smokestacks were permitted in Jerusalem so there should be no air pollution and smoke in the city.

Because Jerusalem belonged to all Jews and was considered holier than any other city, a husband or wife could legally force his or her spouse to move to Jerusalem from any other city in Israel (in the same way that a spouse could force his or her partner to move to the Land of Israel against his or her will) from the Diaspora. If the spouse refused, this was grounds for divorce, and the side that refused would forfeit the money promised in the Ketuba (dowry) (Ketuvot 110a). In the same manner, no spouse could force his or her partner to leave the city of Jerusalem or the Land of Israel (Jerusalem Talmud, Ketuvot 22a). Both Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Ishut 13:20) and Tur (Tur, Even Ha-Ezer 85) cite these Talmudic cases as normative Jewish law.

The Jerusalem Talmud states (Jerusalem Talmud Ketuvot 67b) that in Jerusalem of Talmudic times, there were 460 synagogues, but tied to each synagogue was its own (equivalent to today's) elementary school and high school. Unlike any other city then (and some cities even today), the streets of Jerusalem were cleaned daily (Bava Metzia 26a). Rashi (Rashi commentary on Bava Metzia 26a) states that the reason for the cleaning was to remove the dirt that might accumulate upon the feet (which was not permitted in the Temple), while Tosafot

Likutei Divrei Torah

(Tosafot on Bava Metzia 26a) explains the reason was to clear away all dead bugs and rodents that might impurify people, which was forbidden in Jerusalem. In order not to create any sadness in the city of Jerusalem, an accounting station was set up outside the city, for people who had to settle accounts to do so outside the city, so that feelings of anger or disappointment would not be felt inside the city itself (Midrash, Shemot Rabbah 52:5).

Special Customs by Its Residents That Made Jerusalem Unique - There are certain customs and stringencies that the people who lived in Jerusalem took upon themselves, as they recognized that better behavior and a higher level of spirituality were required in the Holy City.

While everyone in the rest of the world slept on Yom Kippur night, with Jews preparing for a day of prayer and repentance, the leaders/prominent people of Jerusalem stayed up all night, to ensure that the Kohen Gadol-High Priest would not fall asleep (Yoma 19b and Rashi commentary there), which would have been a violation of Jewish law (Mishna, Yoma 1:7). On Sukkot, these noble people would bind their Lulavim-Palm Branches with gold strands to hold it together (Sukkah 37a), unlike the customary strands from the Lulav itself that people use today. The entire population of Jerusalem observed a very unusual pattern of ritual behavior regarding the Four Species (Sukkah 41a), in that all daily activities were performed with the Lulav and Etrog in hand (unlike the custom today, which is to take the Four Species only during the Hallel and Hoshanot prayers in the synagogue): They would walk around the city with the Four Species in hand, walk to the synagogue, say the Shema and Amidah -- all with the Lulav and Etrog in hand. They would put these on the side only for Torah Reading and Priestly blessing. They even went to visit the sick, comforted a mourner in his home and learned Torah with Lulav and Etrog in hand.

Some have heard of the following customs that were performed only by the single ladies of Jerusalem on the afternoons of Yom Kippur and the 15th day of the Month of Av (Tu B'av) (Taanit 26b). These young women would borrow white clothes from each other, so that none of the single men could know who was wealthy and who was poor. They would go out into the fields and ask the single men to choose a bride, not according to beauty and looks but based on family and values. Unlike in other cities where each family decided when children should begin fasting on Yom Kippur (before the mandatory fast at the age of majority[HW1] 13 for boys and 12 for girls), all the children of Jerusalem who reached the age of 11 would fast half a day (Soferim 18:5). At age 12 they would all fast the entire day and then each child would pass before each elderly person in Jerusalem and receive a blessing. The parents would then take the children

directly to the synagogue to inspire them to keep the commandments properly.

Another custom unique to Jerusalem was for the benefit of the poor and the guests who came to the city on holidays three times a year. Rather than merely give out leftover food to feed the poor or guests, which was an undignified way to provide them with meals (ask anyone who has had to wait in line at a soup kitchen or wait for food stamps), the residents of Jerusalem would put a special napkin on their doors, indicating that anyone who wished could come and dine with the family. When the napkin was removed, it was a sign that the time of dining was over. In this way, people felt that they received their food as welcomed guests, rather than as a handout (Bava Batra 93b).

Jerusalem was also the site of other unique customs that benefitted people in need. A place was set up in the city called the “Stone of Claims” in an era when Internet message boards were not available. Anyone who lost an item went to this place, as did anyone who found a lost object. The “finder” would stand up on the stone and announce what was found. If the owner supplied proper signs indicating the object was his, he claimed it (Bava Metzia 28b). Similarly, based on a verse (Deuteronomy 15:10) that the Midrash (Midrash, Sifri Re-eh 64) explains refers to Jerusalem, two Chambers of Secret Gifts were established in the city (Mishna Shekalim 5:6). People who no longer needed any items in the house donated them to one chamber, and those unfortunates who did not possess many needed objects could come and take what they needed from that chamber. The second chamber worked in the same manner but involved money. People of means could leave money for the poor, and the poor took only the minimum they required to survive. Amazingly, there was never any reported gouging of these chambers, where thieves robbed everything in the chamber, or that one poor person hoarded all its contents.

Finally, Rabbi Eliezer says (Soferim 19:12) that King Solomon saw many charitable people of Jerusalem, and he built two gates of the city, one for these generous people, and the other for the downtrodden and those in need of help, such as grooms, mourners and those who were ostracized. On Shabbat, all these groups would go up to the Temple and sit between these two gates, as the generous people helped out all those in need. Later, after the Temple was destroyed, these same people would gather at the back of the synagogue, where the practice continued. The mourners would receive a special blessing and then would say the Mourner’s Kaddish prayer. This may be the origin of the practice of mourners saying this prayer together, and, in some congregations today, it may be the reason this recitation always takes place at the back of the synagogue.

*** 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**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

What Does God Have to Do with Social Justice? - Rabbi Dr. Yakov Nagen

The Torah addresses both interpersonal relations and the individual’s relationship with God. There are those who think the human, social realm is more important, and others who insist that the religious life is preeminent. To my mind, Judaism’s unique message is not these two aspects on their own, but rather the profound connection between them – the insight that one’s relationship with God influences one’s relationship with others, and vice versa.

Shemitta is a good example of this cross-fertilization. For six years we till the land, but on the seventh it is given a sabbatical and lies fallow. The Torah mentions the mitzva of Shemitta three times: Parashat Mishpatim expounds its social aspects, Behar gives the religious angle, while Re’eh, our parasha, blends the two approaches. Let us examine these three instances so that we can better understand the two aspects and the connection between them.

Mishpatim: Social Shemitta – And six years you shall sow your land, and gather in the increase thereof; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beast of the field shall eat. (Ex. 23:10–11)

On the seventh year, we are enjoined to relax our grasp of the land for the sake of the poor. Furthermore, we are called upon to think of the animals as well, for they claim the food that goes uneaten by the poor. Thus a parallel is drawn between Shemitta and the social vision of Shabbat, as it appears in Exodus 23:12: “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your ass may have rest, and the son of your handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed.” Shabbat addresses the needs of the weaker strata of society – strangers and slaves – as well as those of the animals: the oxen and asses. It is noteworthy that the name of God is absent from the passage above – a glaring absence in comparison to the passage in Parashat Behar.

Behar: A Sabbath of the Land
And the Lord spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, ‘When you come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a Sabbath to the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field.... But in the seventh year it shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord.’” (Lev. 25:1–4)

Likutei Divrei Torah

At the outset, the Torah emphasizes that God addresses Moses at Mount Sinai. Rashi famously asks, “What does Shemitta have to do with Mount Sinai? Were not all the commandments given at Sinai?” The question “What does Shemitta have to do with Mount Sinai?” has become an idiom used to express skepticism when someone tries to link two apparently unconnected things.

It seems, however, that the very premise of the question is in doubt. The word “Shemitta” does not appear once in Parashat Behar, and indeed, there is no special significance to Mount Sinai vis-à-vis Shemitta. Rather, the parasha says that “the land [shall] keep a Sabbath.” When we rephrase the question as “What does a Sabbath of the land have to do with Mount Sinai?” it loses its bite. Indeed, the covenant over the land is sealed at Sinai.

We already know that Shabbat is an expression of the covenant between the Jewish people and God: “Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant” (Ex. 31:16). It emerges that a Sabbath is an appropriate expression of the covenant over the land, as sealed at Sinai.

In this vein, Ibn Ezra explain that Behar and Behukkotai are the “book of the covenant” mentioned in Parashat Mishpatim (Ex. 24:7): “It concludes the covenant that was mentioned in Parashat Mishpatim. It appears here, out of order, to connect...the conditions under which the land was given” (Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 25:1). By relinquishing the land into God’s hands on every seventh year, we internalize the idea that the land was given by God and that its use is contingent on fulfilling the covenant. It is noteworthy that at the end of the seventh year, when the land again reverts to humanity, the people assemble for the Hak’hel ceremony, during which parts of the Torah are read. The description of the assembly (Deut. 31:10–13) is rife with parallels to the revelation at Sinai. This is an expression of its purpose: to renew the covenant between the people and the land at the conclusion of the Shemitta year.

To break the covenant, and especially the Sabbath of the land, is to forfeit the land, as we learn in Parashat Behukkotai. In the Book of Chronicles, the number of years the Jewish people spend in exile in Babylon is tied to the number of times they failed to observe the Shemitta year (II Chr. 36:21).

The varying meanings ascribed to the Shemitta year also give rise to practical differences. Thus, according to Parashat Mishpatim, the purpose of Shemitta is to better the lot of the poor, which is why the fruits of the field are reserved for them. In Parashat Behar, in contrast, letting the land lie fallow expresses acknowledgment of God’s ownership of it. It follows that the fruits are a gift from God to all of humanity: “And the Sabbath-produce of the

land shall be for food for you: for you and for your servant" (Lev. 25:6).

The Midrash offers a creative explanation of the above contradiction by blending the two values, the spiritual and the social: "That the poor of your people may eat" – by implication, only the poor. How do we learn that the rich [also may eat]? The Torah teaches us: 'And the Sabbath-produce of the land shall be for food for you.' Why, then, does it say 'the poor of your people'? [To teach us that] most of it is for the poor" (Mekhilta DeRabbi Shimon 23:11).

Re'eh: The Lord's Shemitta – At the end of every seven years you shall make a release (Shemitta). And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release that which he has lent to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother; because the release [to the Lord] hath been proclaimed. (Deut. 15:1–2)

The unique formulation "the Lord's Shemitta" combines the terminology found in Parashat Mishpatim with that found in Behar. As in Mishpatim, we have a "Shemitta," meaning the emphasis is placed on the person releasing (there it is land, here it is debt), and as in Behar, the Torah notes that the Shemitta is "to the Lord."

Parashat Re'eh links between social statutes and the religious life. There are two consequences to the demand for debt forgiveness: financially speaking, it allows borrowers to start afresh every seven years, and socially, it undoes the problematic situation whereby creditors control (emotionally as well) their debtors. In effect, it prevents the long-term enslavement of borrowers. We learn of this sensitivity from the formulation "he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother," which means that one must not compel or pressure the other.

The purpose of Shemitta is thus social, but the explanations for it are theological:

But there shall be no needy among you – for the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess it.... Beware that there is not a base thought in your heart, saying, "The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand"; and your eye is evil against your needy brother, and you give him nothing; and he cries to the Lord against you, and it is sin in you. You shall surely give him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him; because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work, and in all that you put your hand to. (Deut. 15:4, 9–10)

It is not only the force of divine decree that compels us to help the other, but also the Torah's conception of reality. The belief that God granted the land, and continues to direct the course of life within it, prompts us to take a

different view of our property. The very notion of property rights is cast in a new light when we realize that God is the source of all that we have ("the land which the Lord your God gives you") and, ultimately, retains ownership of it. This can be seen in the idea that people's continued presence on the land is contingent upon their behavior ("Beware...") and that on the seventh year the land reverts to God (Parashat Behar). The awareness that the land belongs to God can make it easier for us to share its bounty with others, for when we know that our future situation is determined by our ethical conduct in the present ("because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you"), we are more able to open our hearts to others. Helping the other is not merely a matter of divine decree; it is human nature.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

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

Likutei Divrei Torah

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 Ribbono 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?

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

It is Caught with Two Hands

See I place before you today blessing and curse. (Devarim 11:26)

Hear O'Israel Hashem is our G-d Hashem is One! (Devarim 6:4)

Hearing is not comparable to seeing! (Talmud Rosh HaShana)

We see that sometimes the Torah shouts "LISTEN" or "Hear" and sometimes we are told "LOOK"- "SEE". We know that the Torah is both read and heard. There is an Oral and a Written Torah. When the Talmud wants to invite us to inquire and to study more deeply it states, "Ta Shma" – "Come Hear" and when the Zohar wants us to delve deeper it says, "Ta Chazi" – "Come see"! Sometimes it's an appeal to the ears and sometimes there is an invitation to the eyes. What is the difference between the way we learn with hearing and the way we learn by seeing?

The answer may be in these familiar Torah instructions, "You should know today and return it to your heart that Hashem is G-d in the heavens above and on the earth below. There is no other!" (Devarim 4:39) How is that done?

That we know there is HASHEM may be the easier task. Moshe is speaking to the generation that experienced firsthand and witnessed the plagues in Egypt, the splitting of the sea, and the giving of the Torah. He is also speaking contemporaneously to us, "know it today".

Since that date we, as a nation of individuals and families have not gone a day or a week or a year without doing something that harkens back to and reverberates from those cosmic events. They are on our lips in the reading of the 3rd paragraph of Shema, twice a day. They are scripted on to the Tefillin that we don daily. Every Shabbos we mention at Kiddush that all of this is a reminder of the exodus from Egypt. Every year we dive deeply again and again into the entire event. Sukkos too is in order that our generations should know that HASHEM housed us in Sukkos in the desert when we left Egypt.

Knowing it even today is something that can be accomplished with patient thought and utter honesty. Yet even after knowing this well, there is much work to be done. What does it mean to "return it to your heart? That seems to be a separate task.

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter had said, "The distance between the mind and the heart is greater than the distance between the sun and the earth!" To get what we know into our hearts is giant job and when it is done it is a humongous accomplishment. How does that job look? What we hear through our ears is processed as intellectual knowledge. The advantage of hearing a thing is that it can remain in cold storage in our minds for a long time, like thousands of years long. That is the beauty of listening and hearing O' Israel. The facts don't change whether we are in a good mood or bad or if the economy is doing well or not. It's money in the bank! It's a steak in the freezer.

The only problem is that sometimes money is not always liquid and a frozen steak is inedible. A person can remain emotionally starved and be led to live in violation of what he truly knows if he cannot get his heart engaged. The heart is like a barbecue grill, a fire pit. There is a fire in the heart! The heart is less responsive to hollow words and more reactive to pictures and images. Sometimes picture words can excite images in the mind and awaken a fire. When we take what we know intellectually out of the freezer of our mind and place it on the heart then we are having an authentically edible Jewish experience.

We don't act on what we know! We act on what we feel! Feelings, however, are reliably unreliable, spontaneous, and short lived. The challenge is that the world around us wants to impress their pictures on our minds and turn feelings into facts, as if feelings alone are holy. The Torah mandates that we take what we know to be true and create richly colorful pictures that will begin to inspire that inner fire. Then noble ideals become a holy reality.

Madeline Hunter wrote a book on the elements of instruction. It shows how to make great lesson plans. She says that when a teacher employs both audio and visual cues then it is like teaching a student to catch a ball with two hands. There is more likely to be a clean reception. It only makes sense then, that at the greatest lesson of all time, the giving of the Torah, the best teaching methodologies were employed. The verse testifies, "The whole nation saw the sounds". We saw what could normally only be heard. We heard and saw simultaneously. This breathes new meaning into the saying, "Yiddishkeit is not taught, it is caught", with two hands!

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz: How to be Happy

How do we achieve happiness? A piece of research done a number of years ago found

Likutei Divrei Torah

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 far 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.

This is truly remarkable, and 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.

Home Weekly Parsha RE'EH
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In this week's parsha the Torah continues with the theme that runs through the previous parshiyot of Dvarim, that we are always faced with stark choices in life – either blessings or curses, good or evil. The words of the Torah seemingly offer little option for middle ground on these basic issues of belief and behavior. Yet, we are all aware that the events in life are rarely, if ever, all or nothing, one hundred percent blessing or curse. In fact, Jewish tradition and teachings instruct us that hidden in tragedy there is always a glimmer of hope and goodness, and that all joy and happiness contains within it the taste of the bittersweet.

Jewish philosophy and theology has taught us that evil somehow has a place in God's good and benign world. We are faced with the problem of why the Torah addresses these matters without nuance, in such a harsh way which seemingly brooks no compromise, without a hint of a middle ground. After all, the Torah is not a debating society where one is forced to take an extreme uncompromising stand in order to focus the issue being discussed more sharply and definitively.

Many rabbinic scholars of previous generations have maintained that it is only in our imperfect, post Temple period that we are to search for good in evil and temper our joy with feelings of seriousness and even sadness. But in an idyllic world, where the Divine Spirit is a palpable entity, the choices are really stark and the divisions are 100 percent to zero. Far be it from me to not accept the opinion of these great scholars of Israel. However I wish to interject a somewhat different thought into this matter. This parsha begins with the word re'eh – see. As all of us are well aware, there are stages in life that we can see well only with the aid of corrective lenses. Without that correction, we can easily make grave mistakes trying to read and see what appears before us. If we have to read small print, such as looking up a number in the Jerusalem telephone directly – it is almost impossible without the aid of corrective lenses. Well, this situation is not limited to the physical world, of just our actual eyesight, but it applies equally to our spiritual world of Torah observance and personal morality.

Many times we think we are behaving righteously when we are in fact behaving badly because we are not seeing the matter correctly. We are not wearing our corrective lenses, with the benefit of halacha, history, good common sense and a Jewish value system that should govern our lives. Without this advantage, we see blessings and curses, good and evil, blurry, and undefined before our eyes. The Torah wishes us to see clearly - to instinctively be able to recognize what is the blessing in our life and what is not.

The Torah itself has been kind enough to provide us with the necessary corrective lenses to see clearly and accurately. These lenses consist of observance of Torah and its commandments and loyalty to Jewish values and traditions.

Shabat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Deep Power of Joy
RE'EH

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

On 14 October 1663, the famous diarist Samuel Pepys paid a visit to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Creechurch Lane in the city of London. Jews had been exiled from England in 1290 but in 1656, following an intercession by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel of Amsterdam, Oliver Cromwell concluded that there was in fact no legal barrier to Jews living there. So for the first time since the thirteenth century Jews were able to worship openly.

The first synagogue, the one Pepys visited, was simply a private house belonging to a successful Portuguese Jewish merchant, Antonio Fernandez Carvajal, that had been extended to house the congregation. Pepys had been in the synagogue once before, at the memorial service for Carvajal who died in 1659. That occasion had been sombre and decorous. What he saw on his second visit was something else altogether, a scene of celebration that left him scandalised. This is what he wrote in his diary:

... after dinner my wife and I, by Mr. Rawlinson's conduct, to the Jewish Synagogue: where the men and boys in their vayles (i.e. tallitot), and the women behind a lattice out of sight; and some things stand up, which I believe is their Law, in a press (i.e. the Torah in the Aron) to which all coming in do bow; and at the putting on their vayles do say something, to which others that hear him do cry Amen, and the party do kiss his vayle. Their service all in a singing way, and in Hebrew. And anon their Laws that they take out of the press are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that everyone desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing ... But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.

Poor Pepys. No one told him that the day he chose to come to the synagogue was Simchat Torah, nor had he ever seen in a house of worship anything like the exuberant joy of the day when we dance with the Torah scroll as if the

world was a wedding and the book a bride, with the same abandon as King David when he brought the holy ark into Jerusalem.

Joy is not the first word that naturally comes to mind when we think of the severity of Judaism as a moral code or the tear-stained pages of Jewish history. As Jews we have degrees in misery, postgraduate qualifications in guilt, and gold-medal performances in wailing and lamentation. Someone once summed up the Jewish festivals in three sentences: "They tried to kill us. We survived. Let's eat." Yet in truth what shines through so many of the psalms is pure, radiant joy. And joy is one of the keywords of the book of Devarim. The root 's-m-ch' (the root of the word simcha, joy) appears once each in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, but twelve times in Deuteronomy, seven of them in our parsha.

What Moses says again and again is that joy is what we should feel in the Land of Israel, the land given to us by God, the place to which the whole of Jewish life since the days of Abraham and Sarah has been a journey. The vast universe with its myriad galaxies and stars is God's work of art, but within it planet earth, and within that the Land of Israel, and the sacred city of Jerusalem, is where He is closest, where His Presence lingers in the air, where the sky is the blue of heaven and the stones are a golden throne. There, said Moses, in "the place the Lord your God will choose ... to place His Name there for His dwelling" (Deut. 12:5), you will celebrate the love between a small and otherwise insignificant people and the God who, taking them as His own, lifted them to greatness.

It will be there, said Moses, that the entire tangled narrative of Jewish history would become lucid, where a whole people – "you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no hereditary portion with you" – will sing together, worship together, and celebrate the festivals together, knowing that history is not about empire or conquest, nor society about hierarchy and power, that commoner and king, Israelite and Priest are all equal in the sight of God, all voices in His holy choir, all dancers in the circle at whose centre is the radiance of the Divine. This is what the covenant is about: the transformation of the human condition through what Wordsworth called "the deep power of joy." [1]

Happiness (in Greek eudaemonia), Aristotle said, is the ultimate purpose of human existence. We desire many things, but usually as a means to something else. Only one thing is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else, namely happiness. [2]

There is such a sentiment in Judaism. The biblical word for happiness, ashrei, is the first word of the book of Psalms and a key word of our daily prayers. But far more often, Tanach speaks about simchah, joy – and they are different things. Happiness is something you can feel alone, but joy, in Tanach, is something you share with

others. For the first year of marriage, rules Deuteronomy (24:5) a husband must "stay at home and bring joy to the wife he has married." Bringing first-fruits to the Temple, "You and the Levite and the stranger living among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household" (Deut. 26:11). In one of the most extraordinary lines in the Torah, Moses says that curses will befall the nation not because they served idols or abandoned God but "because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness out of the abundance of all things" (Deut. 28:47). A failure to rejoice is the first sign of decadence and decay.

There are other differences. Happiness is about a lifetime but joy lives in the moment. Happiness tends to be a cool emotion, but joy makes you want to dance and sing. It's hard to feel happy in the midst of uncertainty. But you can still feel joy. King David in the Psalms spoke of danger, fear, dejection, sometimes even despair, but his songs usually end in the major key:

For His anger lasts only a moment,
but His favour lasts a lifetime;
weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning ...
You turned my wailing into dancing;
You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
that my heart may sing Your praises and not be silent.
Lord my God, I will praise You forever.

Psalm 30:6-13

In Judaism joy is the supreme religious emotion. Here we are, in a world filled with beauty. Every breath we breathe is the spirit of God within us. Around us is the love that moves the sun and all the stars. We are here because someone wanted us to be. The soul that celebrates, sings.

And yes, life is full of grief and disappointments, problems and pains, but beneath it all is the wonder that we are here, in a universe filled with beauty, among people each of whom carries within them a trace of the face of God. Robert Louis Stevenson rightly said: "Find out where joy resides and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all." [3]

In Judaism, faith is not a rival to science, an attempt to explain the universe. It's a sense of wonder, born in a feeling of gratitude. Judaism is about taking life in both hands and making a blessing over it. It is as if God had said to us: I made all this for you. This is My gift. Enjoy it and help others to enjoy it also. Wherever you can, heal some of the pain that people inflict on one another, or the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Because pain, sadness, fear, anger, envy, resentment, these are things that cloud your vision and separate you from others and from Me.

Kierkegaard once wrote: "It takes moral courage to grieve. It takes religious courage to rejoice." [4] I believe that with all my heart. So I am moved by the way Jews, who know what it is to walk through the valley of the

shadow of death, still see joy as the supreme religious emotion. Every day we begin our morning prayers with a litany of thanks, that we are here, with a world to live in, family and friends to love and be loved by, about to start a day full of possibilities, in which, by acts of loving kindness, we allow God's Presence to flow through us into the lives of others. Joy helps heal some of the wounds of our injured, troubled world.

[1] William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798."

[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a 30-34.

[3] Robert Louis Stevenson, "The Lantern-Bearers," in *The Lantern-Bearers and Other Essays* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1999).

[4] Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 2179.

Shabbat Shalom: Re'eh (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17) By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

RSR Head Shot Gershon Ellinson creditEfrat, Israel – "You shall smite, yes smite, all of the inhabitants of that city by the sword... and you shall burn entirely with fire the city and all of it spoils to the Lord your God, and it shall be an everlasting desolation (tel); it shall not be rebuilt again" (Deuteronomy 13:16,17).

The Bible ordains the destruction of an entire city which has been seduced and deceived into practicing idolatry. And, although many sages of the Talmud maintain that such a situation "never was and was never created" (B.T. Sanhedrin), the harsh words nevertheless sear our souls.

What is even more difficult to understand are the concluding words of the Bible regarding this idolatrous and hapless city: "... [and the Lord] shall give you compassion, and He shall be compassionate towards you, and He shall cause you to increase as he has sworn to your forbearers... This is because you have hearkened to the voice of the Lord your God to observe all of His commandments... to do what is righteous (hayashar) in the eyes of the Lord your God" (13:18,19).

Compassion? Righteousness? Are these fitting words to describe such an extreme punishment? To understand the simple meaning of the Biblical command, it is necessary to explore the actual meaning – and nature of the offense – of idolatry.

The Bible lashes out against idolatry more than any other transgression, and of the 14 verses that comprise the Decalogue, four of them focus on idolatrous worship, its evils constantly reiterated.

Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, in their penetrating study *Idolatry*, cite various commentaries as to why idolatry is presented as so repulsive in the Bible. For Maimonides the sin of idolatry is theological; for the Meiri it was the number of innocent children sacrificed to Moloch, the eating of flesh cruelly torn from living animals, and the wanton sexual orgies associated with the

Dionysian rites which so incensed the Lord. Indeed, the Bible seems to support the Meiri position; to give but two examples: "You shall not bow down to their gods and you shall not serve them; you shall not act in accordance with their deeds (Exodus 23:24)"... "You shall destroy, yes destroy [the seven indigenous nations of Canaan] lest they teach you to do all the abominations which they do before their gods (Deuteronomy 20:17,18)."

The Bible never understood monotheism in terms of faith alone; from the very beginning of God's election of Abraham who was commanded to convey to subsequent generations not only belief in one God, but rather in a God "...whose path it is to do compassionate righteousness and justice" (Genesis 18:19), belief in ethical monotheism. Moses asks for a glimpse into the Divine (Exodus 32:18). The Almighty, after explaining that no mortal being can ever truly understand the Ineffable and the Infinite, does grant a partial glimpse: "The Lord, the Lord, is a God of Compassion (rahum) and freely-giving love, long-suffering, full of lovingkindness, and truth ..." (Exodus 34:6).

Even Maimonides suggests that these descriptions, known as the 13 Attributes of the Divine, are not so much theological as anthropological, to teach us mortals – commanded to imitate God– precisely how to do so: just as He is Compassionate, you humans must be compassionate, just as He gives love freely, so must you humans...

Hence, the essence of Judaism is not proper intellectual understanding of the Divine, (which is impossible), but rather proper human imitation of the Divine traits, acting towards other human beings the way God would have us act, in compassionately righteous and just ways. And so Maimonides concludes his *Guide for the Perplexed*, written at the end of his life, with a citation from Jeremiah:

"Thus says the Lord: But only in this should one glory if he wishes to glory: Learn about and come to know Me. I am the Lord who does lovingkindness, justice and righteous compassion on earth. Only in these do I delight, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 9:22,23).

From this perspective, only a religion which teaches love of every human being, which demands a system of righteousness and morality, and which preaches a world of peace, can take its rightful place as a religion of ethical monotheism. Islam, for example, has enriched the world with architectural and decorative breakthroughs, glorious poetry, mathematical genius, and philosophical writings influenced by Aristotle. And certainly, the Kalami and Sufi interpretations of the Koran, which present jihad as a spiritual struggle, place Islam alongside Judaism and Christianity as a worthy vehicle and noble model for ethical monotheism. Tragically, however, the Jihadism, spawned from Saudi Arabia's brand of Wahhabi Islam, the Al-Qaida culture of homicide-bomber terrorism wreaking worldwide fear and destruction – from Manhattan to Bali –

and threatening anyone who is not a Jihad believing Muslim, is the antithesis of ethical monotheism.

George Weigel, a Catholic theologian and distinguished Senior Fellow at the Ethical and Public Policy Center in Washington D.C., cites a definition of Jihadism in his compelling study, *Faith, Reason and the War against Jihadism*. "It is the religiously inspired ideology which teaches that it is the moral obligation of Muslims to employ whatever means are necessary to compel the world's submission to Islam." He also analyzes the theology of Sayyid Qutb (d.1966), who stresses the fact that God's oneness demands universal fealty, that the very existence of a non-Muslim constitutes a threat to the success of Islam and therefore of God, and so such an individual must be converted or killed; other religions and modern secularism are not merely mistaken but are evil, "filth to be expunged." The goal is Global Jihad. Such a perverted "theology" only transmutes true Sufi Moslem monotheism into hateful Wahabi mono-Satanism. The enemy of the free world is not Islam; it is Jihadism.

Let me return to our Biblical passage regarding the idolatrous city. An army hell-bent upon the destruction of innocent people, whose only sin is to believe differently than they do, enters the category of "...the one who is coming to kill you must be first killed by you." One cannot love the good without hating the evil, 'good' defined as the protection of the innocent and 'evil' as the destruction of the innocent.

The only justification for taking a life is in order to protect innocent lives – when taking a life is not only permitted but mandatory. Hence the Bible refers to the destruction of the murderous inhabitants of such a city as an act committed for the sake of righteousness. Just imagine the world today if the United States had not committed its forces to help fight Nazi Germany!

But even the most justified of wars wreaks havoc, collateral damage can never be completely prevented, and the soul of one who takes even a guilty human life must become in some way injured to the inestimable value of human life. Hence some of our Sages determine that such a city's destruction had never been decreed, that the Bible is speaking in theory only. Certainly all other possibilities must be exhausted before taking such a final step of destroying a city.

Nevertheless, the Biblical account – well aware of the moral and ethical ambiguities involved – guarantees that those who fight rank evil will not thereby lose their inner sense of compassion for the suffering of innocent individuals or their over-arching reverence for life. To the contrary, he who is compassionate towards those perpetrating cruelty will end up being cruel towards those who are compassionate.

Shabbat Shalom

Let's Talk Turkey – and Prairie Chicken and Muscovy Duck

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: "While camping in Western Canada, we saw thousands of wild, roaming birds called "prairie chicken." They were clearly different from the familiar, common chicken, but appeared so similar that I was tempted to bring one to a shocheit to prepare for us. Halachically, could I have done this?"

Question #2: "Someone told me that a variety of duck, called the Muscovy duck, is raised in Israel for its kosher meat and liver, although the American rabbonim prohibit eating this bird. How could this be?"

Question #3: According to the popular story or legend, Benjamin Franklin advocated that the United States choose the turkey, which is also native American, as its national bird, rather than the bald eagle. He preferred the turkey's midos and felt that it better reflects American values. However, if turkey is indeed indigenous only to North America, how can it have a Jewish tradition that it is kosher?

IDENTIFYING AS KOSHER

Although the Torah identified kosher animal and fish through specific attributes called simanim, it specifically listed the bird species that are non-kosher, implying that all other birds are kosher. Indeed, the Gemara records that someone familiar with all the avian non-kosher varieties may identify all other fowl, even those unfamiliar to him, as kosher, and teach this to others. Since it is not always practical to find someone familiar with all 24 varieties of non-kosher birds, the Mishnah provided four simanim. A bird with all four simanim is definitely kosher, whereas one with some of these simanim may or may not be kosher. Any bird without any of the simanim is certainly non-kosher.

WHAT ARE THE FOUR SIMANIM?

The Mishnah reports that any bird that is doreis is not kosher. There are several different ways to explain the meaning of the word doreis, most meaning that the bird uses its claws in a distinctive way when it preys or eats. The other three simanim describe physical characteristics of the bird, not feeding habits. They are:

- (1) The bird has a crop, an expandable food pouch for storing undigested food.
- (2) The inner lining of its gizzard (the pupek) can be peeled.
- (3) It possesses an "extra claw," a term that is interpreted by different Rishonim in diverse ways.

SIGNS OF DOREIS

We find three distinctive features that demonstrate whether a bird is doreis. The first, recorded by the Mishnah, is that any bird that, when sitting on a rope or stick, places two of its claws on one side of the rope or stick and the other two on the opposite side is definitely doreis and non-kosher. The second is that a bird that swallows its food in mid-

flight is not kosher (Chullin 65a). The third is that any bird that has webbed feet and a wide beak is certainly not doreis (Baal HaMaor). Since this information will become significant as we proceed, allow me to explain these avian characteristics.

SEPARATES ITS CLAWS

The Mishnah teaches, “Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Tzadok says, ‘Any bird that separates its legs is non-kosher’” (Chullin 59a). The Gemara explains that one stretches a length of rope for the bird to walk or rest on: A bird that places two claws of its leg on one side of the rope and two on the opposite side is non-kosher because this indicates that it is doreis. If it places three claws on one side of the rope and one on the other, it is probably kosher (Chullin 65a).

The morning I wrote these words, I visited someone who owns a pet cockatiel, a small Australian parrot, and noted that the bird clenched the stick it stood on in the classic doreis position of two claws fore and two aft. I found this surprising since the cockatiel’s diet of seeds, combined with its owner’s observations of its docile behavior, make it difficult to imagine that this bird is doreis. However, one could explain this Mishnah in the following fashion:

The Mishnah does not clarify how often a bird needs to be doreis to be non-kosher. The Gemara describes a variety of bird called a “marsh chicken” that was assumed to be kosher until the amora, Mareimar, noticed it being doreis (Chullin 62b). Rashi notes that we could observe a bird for quite some time without seeing it being doreis, and only then catch it being doreis! Thus, indeed, the marsh chicken was non-kosher the entire time, although they did not know. For this reason, Rashi concludes that we do not rely on our observation that a bird is not doreis; instead, we do not consume fowl unless we have a mesorah that this variety is not doreis.

Thus, it could be that the cockatiel is indeed a doreis, even though it is doreis so rarely that we may never notice.

WEBBED FEET

As I mentioned earlier, many Rishonim cite a tradition that a bird with webbed feet and a wide beak is definitely not doreis. Following this approach, someone discovering a bird that possesses all of the following body simanim: it has a crop, a gizzard that can be peeled, an “extra claw” (whatever the term means), webbed feet, and a wide beak, can assume that this bird is kosher.

It is noteworthy that while many early authorities quote Rashi’s opinion that we do not rely on our observation to determine that a bird is not doreis, they also quote the tradition that a bird with webbed feet and a wide beak is not doreis (Rosh, Chullin 3:59 and 60; Issur VaHeter 56:18; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 82:2, 3). Obviously, they understood that we have a mesorah that any bird possessing webbed feet and a wide beak is not doreis, and is kosher if it has the other body simanim -- even though no

one recalls a specific mesorah on this bird. In other words, Rashi did not declare that no birds can be eaten without a mesorah -- he only contended that we do not rely on our observation that a bird is not doreis. This is indeed the Shulchan Aruch’s ruling on this subject, as well as many later halachic authorities, both Ashkenazic and Sefardic (Yam shel Shelomoh; Pri Chodosh; Pleisi, Kuntros Pnei Neshet, located after his commentary to Yoreh Deah 82; Shu”t Sho’eil Umeishiv 5:1:69).

MESORAH IS ABSOLUTE

I am unaware of any authority who disagrees with the above conclusion, prior to the time of the Rema (Yoreh Deah 82:3). The Rema, however, records an accepted minhag prohibiting consumption of any bird without a known mesorah that it is kosher. Most authorities assume that, as a result of this ruling, Ashkenazim do not consume any fowl lacking a known mesorah to be kosher, although some contend that no such minhag exists (Yam shel Shelomoh, Chullin 3:115; Pleisi; Shu”t Sho’eil Umeishiv 5:1:69). (It should be noted that the Taz cites Rashi as the source for the Rema’s minhag. Although the obvious interpretation of the Taz’s comment is that he feels that Rashi rejects the approach that webbed feet and wide beak are valid proof that the bird is not doreis [Minchas Yitzchak 2:85], his comments can be interpreted in a different way.)

MUSCOVY DUCK AND THE CIVIL WAR

By definition, a non-migratory bird native to the Americas, Australia, or New Zealand cannot have an ancient mesorah ascertaining that it is a kosher species, since no one resides there who could possess such a mesorah. Does this mean that, according to the Rema, any bird native to the Americas cannot be eaten? Some poskim indeed held this position regarding the Muscovy duck, a bird that, notwithstanding its name, is a Mexican native. (No one is certain why this duck is named after frigid Moscow, when it is indigenous to a much warmer climate.)

A rav in Civil War-era New Orleans, Rabbi Yissachar Dov Illowy, who was extensively involved in kiruv rechokim over a hundred years before the field became popular, discovered that members of his community were raising this duck for food and that the local shochatim were shechting it. Rav Illowy notes that the Muscovy appears to have all the simanim of any common duck, including the webbed feet and wide beak that indicate it is not doreis. Nevertheless, he maintained that since this bird has no mesorah, it cannot be considered kosher. He then sent the shaylah to Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch and to Rav Nosson Adler, who agreed with Rav Illowy’s decision.

Notwithstanding this psak, the Muscovy apparently became a popular food in many kosher communities, both in the Union and the Confederacy, and eventually in Europe, also. Later its liver became popular when prepared as foie gras, a delicacy once made exclusively from goose liver. (Nowadays, foie gras is more commonly produced

from the liver of the mullard, a crossbreed of the Muscovy with the pekin, an established kosher variety of duck.) Indeed several prominent later authorities, including the Netziv, Rav Shmuel Salant, and Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank, ruled that the Muscovy duck is indeed kosher, since observant Jews had been consuming it (Shu"t Har Tzvi, Yoreh Deah #75). How could they permit a bird that clearly has no mesorah?

The Netziv ruled that, since observant Jews were already consuming Muscovy, they can be considered kosher for three reasons:

1. They are fairly similar to varieties of duck that possess a mesorah that they are kosher, and could perhaps be considered the same min as far as halacha is concerned. One should note that the halachic definition of a min is highly unclear, although one matter is certain: It has little relationship to any scientific definition of what is considered a species.

2. They will freely breed in the wild with varieties known to be kosher ducks, even when other Muscovies are readily available. This factor is significant because the Gemara rules that two species, one kosher and the other non-kosher, will not reproduce together (Bechoros 7a). Although there is debate over whether this rule applies to birds or only to mammals, several authorities contend that it also applies to birds (Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #74; Shu"t Avnei Nezer, Yoreh Deah #75:4 and many others). According to this approach, since a Muscovy readily mates with varieties of known kosher duck, one may assume that it is kosher.

3. The Rema's minhag prohibiting consumption of fowl without a mesorah applies only to a newly discovered bird and not to a variety that observant Jews are already eating (Shu"t Meishiv Davar 2:22).

ANOTHER NATIVE AMERICAN

Of course, this leads to our discussion of the turkey (question #3), also a Native American bird that appears to have found its way to the Jewish pot since its introduction to Europe in the 16th century. The Kenesses HaGedolah, authored in the 17th century, is the earliest source I found discussing the kashrus of the turkey, and it is apparent from his comments that Jews were already eating it. Although one would imagine much discussion on the kashrus issues of this bird, every other teshuvah I have seen discusses not whether the turkey is kosher, but why, and each is written hundreds of years after turkey consumption became commonplace in the kosher world.

For those who question whether the turkey was commonly eaten in this earlier era, I refer them to the comments of the Magen Avraham (79:14), who assumes that a passing reference to a "red chicken" by the Shulchan Aruch refers to the turkey, providing us with fairly clear evidence that in the mid-1600's the turkey was a common item in Jewish menu. The Magen Avraham makes no reference to any controversy regarding the kashrus of this

bird, which was already a well established member of Jewish households.

TURKEY VS. DUCK

From a strictly anatomical perspective, the Muscovy duck can rally better proof to its kosher status than can a turkey. Whereas the Muscovy duck needs to contend only with the ruling of the Rema that it bears no mesorah, it certainly has the wide beak and webbed feet that the Rishonim accept as proof that it is not doreis and seemingly has the other kosher simanim that I mentioned earlier. Thus, according to all authorities prior to the Rema, one could consume Muscovy based on its possessing kosher simanim. Rav Hirsch and the others who prohibit it did so because we have accepted the minhag recorded by Rema not to rely on simanim.

On the other hand, the turkey is faced with more of an uphill battle anatomically.

It does not have webbed feet or a wide beak – thus, to permit it because of simanim we must ascertain that it is not doreis, and Rashi rules that we do not rely on observation to determine that a bird is not doreis. Yet, the common practice of hundreds of years is to consider it kosher!

TALKING TURKEY

I have seen numerous attempts to explain why indeed we consume turkey, of which I will share some. Many authorities thought that the turkey had a mesorah from India as a kosher bird (see Kenesses HaGedolah 82:31 and several others quoted by Darchei Teshuvah 82:26). However, this appears to be based on a factual error -- the Yiddish and Modern Hebrew name for turkey is "Indian chicken," and it is so named in many other languages, based on the same confusion that resulted in the islands of the Caribbean being called the "West Indies." Notwithstanding that these names merely reflect Columbus's impression that he had discovered an area near India, the confusion led some to conclude that the Indian Jews possess an ancient mesorah that the turkey is kosher.

Others contend that the practice of eating turkey predates the Rema's ruling that we consume only birds that have a mesorah. Thus, one could say that it was grandfathered into kosher cuisine.

Still others contend that although we usually do not rely on our observation that a bird is not doreis, since thousands of Jews have raised turkeys and never seen them being doreis, we can be absolutely certain that they do not, and we can therefore assume them to be kosher because of simanim (Darchei Teshuvah 82:26, quoting Arugos HaBosem).

A different approach is that, although the Rema required mesorah to permit the consumption of fowl, once observant Jews have accepted to eat a certain variety of bird, one may continue this practice (if it is not definitely non-kosher). Once Klal Yisroel has accepted a bird that appears to be kosher, we assume that it is kosher even if we do not, and

cannot, have a mesorah on its kashrus (see Taz, Yoreh Deah 82:4). The Netziv justifies the consumption of the Muscovy duck because of the fact that turkey is accepted to be kosher even though it also has no mesorah!

To answer our original question #2, the Muscovy duck has not escaped contemporary controversy: some rabbonim and hechsherim, particularly in Eretz Yisroel, permit it; others forbid it; still others will consider it kosher but not mehadrin. I have been told that the North American hechsherim do not treat it as kosher.

Regarding the prairie chicken (question #1), it is assumed to be non-kosher, or, more accurately, without either a mesorah or acceptance that it is kosher. I am unaware of any place where it is slaughtered as a kosher bird.

TURKEY VS. EAGLE

Did Benjamin Franklin really want the turkey to be the symbol of the United States of America?

In a letter to his daughter, Ben wrote:

“For my own part I wish the eagle had not been chosen the representative of our country. He is a bird of bad moral character. He does not get his living honestly... He is therefore by no means a proper emblem for the brave and honest... The turkey is in comparison a much more respectable bird, and withal a true original native of America... He is... a bird of courage and would not hesitate to attack a grenadier of the British Guards who should presume to invade his farm yard with a red coat.”

To reinforce good old Ben’s argument, we note that whereas the turkey has all four simanim of a kosher bird, the eagle has none (according to Rashi’s opinion). The Ramban explains that the Torah forbade the non-kosher birds because the Torah wants us to avoid the bad midos that they exhibit. One could assume that the kosher species may exhibit admirable traits that the Torah wants us to emulate. Certainly, the courage to observe mitzvos in times of adversity is a tremendous virtue worth thinking about the next time we eat turkey.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Reeh

Tough Love

Not only does the Torah teach us what to do and what not to do. It admonishes us before we turn off the proper path. Last week’s portion cautions us not to turn after our eyes or hearts. Exodus 34:11 enjoins us not to socialize with idol worshippers lest we marry a spouse who will lead us away from our faith.

Most often the warnings about sin are succinct and precise. The focus of the Torah is clear: avoid any activity that will lead to straying from the path of Hashem. This week the Torah seems to spend as much effort exhorting us about involvement with bad influences as it does with sin itself.

The Torah discusses two scenarios where people intend to lead Jews astray. The first case is of the false prophet. Deuteronomy 13:2: “If there should stand a prophet or dreamer who will produce a sign or a wonder saying, ‘let us follow gods of other folk,’ do not hearken to him.” The Torah then exhorts us to keep our faith and elucidates how to deal with the bogus seer. The next section deals not with a false prophet but with a kinsman. Deuteronomy 13:7: “If your brother, son of your mother, or your son or daughter or your wife or a friend who is like your soul, secretly entices you saying let us worship other gods, those that you or your forefathers did not know.”

The Torah does more than exhort us not to follow the would-be influencer. It reiterates the admonition in no less than five different expressions. “You shall not accede to him; you shall not hearken to him; your eye shall not take pity on him; you shall not be compassionate toward him; you shall not conceal him.”

When it refers to our own misdoing or those of a false prophet the Torah simply warns us, “do not listen” or “do not follow your heart.” Yet when referring to kin the Torah offers a litany of variations on a theme of disregard.

Shouldn’t our own feelings need more and stronger admonitions than ideas suggested by a friend or relative? Surely a prophet who conjures awesome miracles should warrant five or six expressions of caution. In that case, all the Torah says is, “do not listen to him for Hashem is testing you.” There is no talk of mercy, compassion, or concealment, as there is when the Torah talks about kin. Why?

Robert A. Rockaway, a well-known author on Jewish American history, decided to publish a work on a less glorified Jewish persona, the Jewish gangster. In his research he interviewed old-time Jewish mobsters, their families and friends. A native of Detroit, Michigan, he actually interviewed his own mother who knew some of the notorious families that he was writing about.

In discussing some of the nefarious deeds of one of the local thugs, his mother stopped him abruptly. “That all may be true, but he was good to his mother!”

The Torah understands the intimate affinity our people have towards relatives.

It only needs one or two words of warning for us not to listen to the false prophet who comes with miraculous signs and mesmerizing oratory. It only tells us, “don’t listen to him.” Even when discussing our own desires and infatuations it simply warns us, “do not turn after your heart.”

However, when referring to kin, brothers, sisters and relatives, the Torah has a difficult mission. We tend to excuse wrongdoing, cover up for misdeeds, and harmonize with our loved ones — although the results may be terribly destructive. There are countless stories of parents who did not have the heart to restrict their children’s late-night activities. Too many tales are told of the man who was

ensnared by his brother-in-law's misdoing because he had not the heart to refuse his overtures to evil.

The Torah expresses its warning in five different ways. You must love your kin to a point, but way before the point of no return.

Good Shabbos

Dedicated by the Martz Family in memory of Nettie Mertz & Florence Mertz

But — He was Good To His Mother, The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters, by Robert A. Rockaway, (c) 1993 Gefen Publishing Ltd.

Parsha Insights

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Reeh

Exchanging Gold for Copper

Parshas "R'ay" begins with the Moshe saying: "R'ay anochi nosain lifnaichem ha'yom b'racha u'klalah – See that I place before you today a blessing and a curse(11:26)." Moshe lays out very clearly the choice that we have in life.

The Ohr HaChaim explains an added meaning of Moshe saying "r'ay anochi – see I". Moshe is trying to convince them to choose the eternal pleasures of the next world, rejecting the fleeting pleasures of this world. Only one who has a clear picture of the pleasures of both worlds can effectively convince others what to choose. Without clarity of the next world, one doesn't truly know what to offer. Without firsthand knowledge of the pleasures of this world, others will respond that if he'd known what this world really had to offer, he'd be singing a different tune.

To this Moshe said "r'ay anochi" – look at me! I am one of the wealthiest people with a clear picture of what this world has to offer, and I ascended Har Sinai, entered the heavenly realm and clearly saw what the next world has to offer. I, of all people, can tell you what is bracha (blessing) and what is klalah (curse). Choose wisely!

I'm often challenged by students who claim that, being that we only know the physical and not the spiritual pleasures, how can we discuss and work toward something that we are totally removed from?! I counter with a simple question. Which of the following pleasures would you choose? On one hand, all you can eat of your favorite food. A purely physical pleasure. On the other hand, speaking and connecting to a person who is feeling depressed and really helping that person. After the conversation, the person looks at you and says, "Thank you, I can't begin to tell you how much you've helped me." A pleasure which, even if we'll say is not spiritual, is certainly removed from the realm of the physical.

Any honest individual would clearly pick the second pleasure. If, when we are encloded in our physical bodies, living in this physical world, we recognize the depth of the spiritual and the shallowness of the physical, how much more so when we'll shed the physical!

The Kli Yakar has a different approach. He notes that the word "r'ay" is in the singular, addressing a single person, yet, the word "lifnaichem", is in the plural, before y'all. Why does the pasuk make this switch?

The gemara (Kiddushin 40:) teaches that a person should always view the world as hanging in perfect balance between merits and sins. Your performing a single mitzva will tilt the scale of the entire world towards merit and the credit is all yours. A single sin will tip the scale of the entire world to that side, and the responsibility is all yours. 'R'ay!' – you, the individual, you must realize, that it is in your hands to determine the fate of the entire world. "Lifnaychem" – before them. If bracha or klalah will be before them, before the whole world that is hanging in balance, is dependent on you.

Our parsha also discusses giving one tenth (ma'aser) of one's earnings to charity. "A'ser t'aser – you should tithe (14:22)." Chaza"l explain, "aser k'day she'tisasher", give one tenth in order to become rich. Giving to others is the way to guarantee that you'll have a plentiful amount. The gemara (Kesuvos 66.) states "melech mamone chaser". The salt, meaning the preservative, for money is to make sure that some is missing (chaser). Share what you have! The Chofetz Chaim illustrates this with a parable. A farmer would bring his produce to sell to a merchant at a price of a gold coin per bagful. The agreed upon procedure was that a mark was made on the wall each time the bag was filled. Afterwards, the marks were counted, thereby determining the amount delivered, and the number of gold coins to be paid.

The farmer began to get suspicious about this procedure, being that the merchant could possibly erase some of the marks, thereby cheating the farmer out of his due payment. He suggested to the merchant an alternative method. For every bagful measured, the merchant would place a copper coin on a plate. They would then tally the amount of coins, thereby determining the quantity delivered and the amount of gold coins owed by the merchant.

They instituted this method and it ran smoothly for a while. However, the farmer had a hard time controlling himself. When the merchant wasn't looking he would reach forth and steal some of these copper coins!

The Chofetz Chaim would compare a person who felt he'd gain by either working on Shabbos or by withholding charity, to this farmer. A blessing is promised to those who don't work on Shabbos and to those who give ma'aser. A person who tries to make some extra money by neglecting either of these mitzvos is gaining copper coins at the expense of gold ones!

Our parsha also teaches the Jewish attitude toward death. "Banim atem laHashem Elokaichem, lo tsgoddu! (14:1)" The gentiles, upon hearing of the death of a loved one, would scratch and cut themselves in agony. We are told, "You are sons of Hashem, do not maul yourselves!". The connection between our being sons of Hashem and the

prohibition against this cutting display of anguish is explained in different ways.

The Ba'alei Tosafos explain that a person, upon losing a close relative, is comforted by the realization that he still has close relatives. "Banim atem laHashem Elokaichem!" You are not an orphan! You are the sons of Hashem! Your eternal father is still alive! Sadness is in order, anguish is not. The story is told of a woman who watched the Nazis yshv"z murder her only child. She looked heavenward and cried out, "Master of the Universe! Until now I have divided my love between You and my child. My love for You is now undivided!"

Though this is a level that is far beyond us, there is much to be learned from it.

The Ohr HaChaim takes a different approach, offering a parable which I'll embellish. A father sent a son to a far-away land in order to procure some items that weren't available locally. The son lived there for an extended period of time and built many close relationships. Finally, the long awaited letter from his father arrived, requesting him to come back home. On the day of his departure, those who loved him come to the port to bid their farewell. There was much sadness and tears, but not agony or anguish. The thought of someone tearing himself up would have seemed preposterous. Why? Because the child was returning to the parent. The time had come to take the return journey back to his true home. The friends cried tears of sadness, realizing that they will no longer see him, but that his existence continues. Tears expressing the personal loss of not being able to maintain and build a relationship are proper and justified. Bitter anguish is not. "Banim atem laHashem Elokaichem!"

May we all remember, when we deal with lives inevitable tragedies and whenever we deal with others, "Banim atem laHashem Elokaichem!"

Good Shabbos.

Yisroel Ciner

TORAH SHORTS: Reeh

by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Spitz

Commentary based on the Bat Ayin

The Curse of Lottery Winnings (Reeh)

We must do our business faithfully, without trouble or disquiet, recalling our mind to God mildly, and with tranquility, as often as we find it wandering from him. - Brother Lawrence

Statistics indicate that over seventy percent of lottery winners become broke within five years of winning the lottery. That means they become WORSE off than before they won millions of dollars.

Related to the above perhaps counterintuitive expectation, the Bat Ayin on Deuteronomy 11:26 ponders the very purpose of material wealth and rewards in this world. If indeed the purpose of the journey of our souls in this world is for the eternal spiritual rewards of the next

world, then why should we be concerned with bounty in this world, why should we pray for it and why should God promise it to us if we follow His laws?

The Bat Ayin explains that material wealth in this world is merely a means to an end. The objective of God's physical blessings during our mortal existence is for one purpose – to better serve Him. Having a roof over our heads, decent clothing, nutritious food, effective transportation, and the income to support all our needs is solely to allow us to carry out our divine obligations. The tangible rewards we receive are a means to serve God with greater tranquility. The greater our economic stability, the more capable and tranquil we should be in our service of God.

However, the Bat Ayin adds that God also knows that money and wealth can corrupt. He knows the corrosive impact that material plenty can have on a soul. Therefore, in some cases, God withholds the bounty for our own good. Not only does He not want us to be among those seventy percent of lottery winners who lose their money, but He also doesn't want us to be among the well-off who lose their souls.

May we remember what our divine blessings are for.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the Aliyah of our niece and nephew, Leora and Sammy Landesman. Mazal Tov!

Parashat Re'eh

by Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Consideration, Emancipation & Fulfillment

The Torah has a way of condensing complex issues with countless details into a few words; for example, how Jews should relate to each other, with the short phrase:

וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ אֲנִי

Love your fellow Jew as you love yourself, I am HaShem.

I take it one step forward and reduce it to one word – consideration (for your fellow Jew).

The Torah contains many verses that instruct us to be HaShem's chosen nation in Eretz Yisrael.

I reduce it to one word – emancipation (freedom for the neshama and the body).

Moshe descended from Har Sinai with a message from HaShem to Am YIsrael:

וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ לִי מַמְלַכְת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ

And you shall be for me a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation.

Or in one word HaShem granted us – infinity.

However, in the light (or darkness) of our "disappointing" history when our nation did not achieve those two goals; except perhaps in the 40 years beginning with the reign of King Shlomo until the reign of his son, Rechav'am when the nation succeeded into Yehuda and Yisrael.

HaShem's message and the ultimate process towards that goal which has turned into 3000 years of unfulfilled struggle, I call in one word – fulfillment.

True, we have returned home – a giant leap towards the goal, however there are deep pitfalls still in front of us.

Like the 400 thousand non-Jews from Eastern Europe who were welcomed here by way of the asinine grandfather clause in the Law of Return, passed by our government many of its members who had no idea what it means to be a Jew or to be a Zionist.

The 2 million plus Moslems and other religions who reside here are a drawback from attaining the goal.

The observant Jews in the galut, are they contributing to the goal of a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation even by their intense spirituality in the Torah centers of Florida and California?

I believe that all world history revolves around HaShem's relationship with the Jewish people, so all history in one way or another are particles of energy driving us towards the goal of being a Kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation.

Based on this premise, I have over time taken the precarious and sometime ludicrous step of predicting the future based on what I see in the present. These predictions are not necessarily what I hope for, some are even distasteful – but it is what it is. Among them:

1- The US, home to the largest Jewish community in the world, second only to Eretz Yisrael, will soon be forced to restore military conscription. The US has not had a draft since 1973 and Congress and the president would have to authorize one in the case of a national emergency. World events such as the war in eastern Europe, an increasing US presence in Poland, and the Iranian threat continue to evolve, but they might not necessarily evoke the draft.

However, the way I view current events, what will force this change will be the very tenuous and fragile social interaction between political, racial, ethnic and socio-economic groups that could suddenly erupt into mass demonstrations and from there into chaos, necessitating strong police and military forces based on conscription.

So, the smart Jews will leave for home now, in contrast to the 80% of Jews who at the time of the Exodus refused to leave the flesh pots of Egypt and are now a mere footnote in our literature.

2. Large numbers of Israeli residents, perhaps even in the millions, will “relocate”. No one is leaving yet, but there are rumblings among certain groups who have decided or are contemplating the possibility -as long as there are places for Jews to “relocate”. Of those, there are also the hundreds of thousands of above-mentioned non-Jews who entered the country by way of the “grandfather” clause in the Law of Return. Their departure will contribute to our metamorphosis into a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation. The dramatic increase of churches and stores

that sell pig which did not exist previously are the results of these gentile immigrants.

3. Then there are Jews here who are by choice or by upbringing disconnected from Judaism; they feel comfortable in the presence of goyim but are annoyed when a religious Jew passes by – they too are candidates for relocation (yerida).

ALL in all, those who will remain will be the proud and dedicated descendants of proud and dedicated generations of Jews who tenaciously fought to remain Jews.

The next prediction is the collapse of our democratic governmental system and the necessity of the military to replace it. Ours is a democratic parliamentary system with local and national elections.

Question: if this system is so great why isn't it recommended in the Torah for the Jewish nation?

The Torah's social and political system is a four branch Theocracy. Initially twelve tribes each under the leadership of a shofet (judge) like Gidon or a prophet like Shmuel, and when it became necessary for all the tribes to act as one the system changed to four branches: Monarchy, Kohen Gadol (High Priest), Sanhedrin, and the reigning prophet of the time.

There are no national elections in a Torah government. So, the words of Abraham Lincoln, “government, of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth,” that is based on a fundamental trust in the logic and morality of the ‘people’ spoken at Gettysburg, are not stated in the holy Torah.

Perhaps our basic makeup is not fit for democracy, where the loser accepts the outcome and plays along. The Jewish mentality is that any dispute be it even over a minor item like the neighbor's cat crossing into one's yard, becomes a matter of principal (it's not the cat, it's the principle) and principles cannot be compromised. So, the loser never forgets, and the winner never remembers (those who helped him).

In any event the vector of Jewish history in our long and challenging pilgrimage towards the goals set for us by HaShem is pointing upwards. We have returned to Eretz Yisrael and HaShem has returned Yerushalayim to us. The holy atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael has rejuvenated the dry souls of galut and we have today a Kingdom of Torah.

Our parasha begins with HaShem promising the Jewish nation “bracha” if we deserve it, or G-d forbid “Klala” if we deserve to be cursed.

It is apparent that the klala of the galut has run its course. HaShem's blessings can be seen and felt in every corner of this country. If you wish to feel HaShem's presence, go to a yeshiva here, if you want to see HaShem's blessings go the shuk of Machane Yehuda.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

Finding commonality between the Rav and the Satmar Rebbe

Where do we see any nechama after Tisha B'Av? Year after year another Tisha B'Av passes, and we are left bereft of a Third Temple.

Steven Genack

I recently interviewed my uncle, Rabbi Menachem Genack, CEO of OU Kosher. "Serendipitously," I also recently heard a shiur from Rabbi Eli Mansour. Based on the interview and the shiur, I found common ground with regard to Israel between two gedolim: The Rav (Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l) and the Satmar Rebbe.

The synthesis of both opinions came by way of an existential question that Rabbi Mansour posed. He asked: Where do we see any nechama after Tisha B'Av? Year after year another Tisha B'Av passes, and we are left bereft of a Third Temple.

To answer, Rabbi Mansour discussed a seemingly perplexing midrash (Yalkut Shimoni on Nach 443) to which the Satmar Rebbe shines light upon. The midrash expresses that G-d asked all the Nevi'im throughout history to visit one by one the children of Israel and offer them comfort. One after another, each comes to comfort the Jews and they are utterly rejected.

Even Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and Moshe are rejected. Then the midrash says, "Immediately, all [of the Nevi'im] walked before the Holy Blessed One and said: Master of the Universe — she does not accept our comfortings, as it is written: "Unhappy, storm-tossed one, un comforted!" (Isaiah 54:11). The Holy Blessed One said: I and you shall walk to comfort her, i.e. "Comfort O comfort my people" — 'Comfort Her, O comfort her, my people.'"

The Satmar Rebbe explains that Bnei Yisroel would take comfort in only one kind of final redemption, one where God "walks" and delivers it.

All previous redeemers took us out of one galut only to lead us into another. We want God only for the last one; that's where our comfort will lie.

Rabbi Mansour notes that the Satmar Rebbe had a great love for Israel. He just wanted it to be redeemed in the purest of ways, through God, as he was concerned that man, in his limitations, like previous redeemers, will fall short.

In the interview with my uncle, we discussed various topics and one of them was how he thinks the Rav would view today's government in Israel. The Rav was known to have more of a moderate approach and believed the establishment of the State of Israel was an expression of sovereignty and triggered yishuv HaAretz.

However, he was also concerned with a government that would be bent towards secularism. My uncle said that the Rav would certainly be concerned today about the divisions in the government.

My mother attended Camp Massad in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania. The camp existed from the early 1940s to the 60s. At that time, there was a built-in love for Israel that all the campers felt. Israel was something to be cherished. My mother told me about my great uncle, Eliyahu-Moshe Genechovsky who served in the first and second Knesset. He had great passion for Israel.

If Israel was cherished as it once was, the Knesset could not possibly become only a civil body. The Satmar Rebbe, who survived the Holocaust, had a great love for Israel, and wanted to see a final redemption without the potential limitations of man. The Rav also had his yearnings and hopes tied to Israel with the hopes of final redemption. Though the Rav saw the importance of sovereignty and the establishment of the State of Israel, he would have concerns about the current schisms taking place in the government. Hoping for an exclusive Godly Redemption is something that both of these gedolim would look forward to as it would be final, complete and not vulnerable to the foibles of man.

On Controversy, Unity, and Tu B'Av Revivim

What characterizes a dispute for Heaven's sake, and why in such a dispute, the position of the opposing party should not be rejected * The right way to reach a compromise that will satisfy the will of both parties * The goal of unity reflected in the events of Tu B'Av * In contrast to Yom Kippur, Tu B'Av remains a day on which weddings and matters of matchmaking abound, and in consequence, brotherly love is increased

A Dispute for the Sake of Heaven

Usually, when a great controversy breaks out, strong feelings of hatred arise, and as a result, many people are shocked that here, once again, we are failing in *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred) which destroyed our Temple, and therefore, we have to increase *ahavat chinam* (loving others freely without judgement). A demand arises for all parties to cancel their opinion, in order to stop the dispute. Some groups hold unity gatherings, while others write and speak about condemning discord, which involves all the prohibitions between man and his fellow neighbor.

However, in practice, despite the good intentions, the demand for *ahavat chinam*, and the shock from *sinat chinam*, do not register. This, because while a dispute is taking place, each side is sure they are in the right, its future depends on it, and if the other side wins, its world will be destroyed. Therefore, even when the fear arises that if they continue the dispute, together, both sides will be destroyed, they continue the dispute, because, even then, each side believes that if the other wins, everything will be destroyed.

Indeed, the Torah does not require people, or groups, to forego their opinion, because standing by their opinion is

of great benefit to the clarification of the truth and the advancement of society, and this is a dispute le'Shem Shamayim (for the sake of Heaven). The prohibition is to engage in a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim.

It is worth adding that there is no justice in asking one of the parties to forgo his position, therefore, as long as his claim is not listened to seriously, the sense of justice pulsating in him will not allow him to remain silent. And if in the name of peace they demand one forgo his position, the dispute will worsen, because instead of addressing the substantive claims, they will make the dispute more personal, and dangerous.

The Sign of Controversy for the Sake of Heaven

In a dispute le'Shem Shamayim, one continues to love and respect the other side, while in a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim, the other side is hated, and despised. A person who carries on an evil dispute can deceive himself and claim that he loves and respects the other person, however, the test for this is simple: if he loves the other party – he wishes for his good, is unhappy with his failure, and does not wish for his destruction. As a result, he respects the other side, and sees all the good qualities in him, and appreciates them. Out of this, he is also able to present the position of the other side honestly, in such a way that the other side will also be satisfied with the presentation of his position.

On the other hand, in a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim, the disputants despise the other side, fail to see the good in it, and are unable to express their position in a fair manner. They interpret every position and action of the other side as being bad, and wish to see their opponents defeated, and suffer.

In other words, a dispute le'Shem Shamayim is a substantive dispute on the subject being argued about, which does not spread beyond the focused area of the argument. Whereas a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim becomes a personal dispute against all the positions of the other side. And when the disagreement is colossal, it spreads over the entire outlook and character of the group that expresses the opposite opinion. If they are from the left, the other side claims they hate all the settlers and haredim, despise the mesoratim (traditional Jews), and victimize them. They are alienated from their Jewish identity. They took over the legal system, the economy, academia, and other state resources. Their children serve in army troops that will afford them a springboard for future jobs, and avoid combat service in field units. They are not willing to give up power, and with various legal pretexts, find a way to denigrate the other side's position, and harm it. And if they are from the right, well then they despise the law, hate Arabs, and want to turn the State of Israel into an apartheid state that all countries will hate. And if they are religious as well, then they also hate LGBT people, Reform Jews, members of other religions, and if they only had the power, they would impose harsh religious and modesty

laws on the secular Jews, and harm science, the economy, and the army. The last remaining secular Jews will have to finance the kollel families, and their countless children, with their taxes.

And even though all these claims contain a grain of truth, the exaggeration is a lie, and expresses a dispute that is not le'Shem Shamayim.

A Dispute for the Sake of Heaven Allows for a Good Compromise

When a dispute is conducted properly, the positions are clarified in a beneficial manner, and as a result, a compromise can be reached in which each side achieves half of its ambitions. If, out of a positive outlook, they manage to understand each other better, each side will achieve the majority of its ambitions. In other words, if they delve deeper into what the other side has said, they will be able to agree that each side will receive what is more important to them, and consequently, it will turn out that the majority, or the most important issue of the ambitions of both sides, will be fulfilled.

On the other hand, in an antagonistic dispute, each side usually obtains less than half of its ambitions, since each side sabotages the opposing side, and thus each side achieves at best, some of its ambitions, and in a worst case scenario, is harmed, and achieves nothing.

Tu B'Av

It is appropriate in these days to deal with the subject of Tu B'Av. Our Sages said: "Israel never knew such wonderful holidays as 'Tu B'Av' (the 15th of the Jewish month of Av) and Yom Kippur" (Mishna Ta'anit 4:8). Several reasons were given for this in the Talmud (Ta'anit 30b), and all of them are related to events that took place on this day, three of which are related to events that increased the unity and peace between the Tribes of Israel, and as a result, is a correction of the sin of sinat chinam, because of which, the Second Temple was destroyed.

The Three Events Related to Strengthening Unity

The first: on this day, a daughter who had no brothers was permitted to marry a member of another tribe, which until then was forbidden, so that the inheritance she inherited would not pass from the members of her father's tribe to the members of her husband's tribe, and as it was said in relation to the daughters of Zelophehad: "Every daughter among the Israelite tribes who inherits a share must become the wife of someone from a clan of her father's tribe, in order that every Israelite [heir] may keep an ancestral share. Thus no inheritance shall pass over from one tribe to another, but the Israelite tribes shall remain bound each to its portion" (Bamidbar 36: 8-9).

The second: on this day the members of the tribe of Benjamin were allowed to marry women from the daughters of the other tribes. Because following the refusal of the members of the tribe of Benjamin to punish the sinners in the act of the concubine at Gibeah, a terrible civil war broke out in which tens of thousands of Israelites were

killed, and the tribe of Benjamin was almost annihilated. In the framework of the war, and anger with the tribe of Benjamin, the Israelites swore that they would not give their daughters to the sons of the tribe of Benjamin, as it is said: "Now Israel's forces had taken an oath at Mizpah: "None of us must ever give his daughter in marriage to a Benjaminite" (Judges 21:1).

At the end of the war, there were only hundreds of men from Benjamin left, and in order to save the tribe of Benjamin from extinction, they had to find a permit to their oath by which they could marry. It was agreed that the sons of Benjamin would wait in the vineyards for the daughters of Shiloh, while they used to dance and make merry there in preparation for their wedding, and initiate the relationship with the girls without the girls' fathers approving it, thus finding brides for them without the fathers breaking the oath. And as the elders of Israel said to the sons of Benjamin: "As soon as you see the daughters of Shiloh coming out to join in the dances, come out from the vineyards; let each of you seize a wife from among the daughters of Shiloh (with the consent of the girls, but without the permission of the fathers), and be off for the land of Benjamin" (ibid. 21:21).

Our Sages also said (Ta'anit 30b), that after the division of the Kingdom of Israel, Jeroboam ben Nevat placed guards to prevent the ten tribes in his kingdom from ascending to Jerusalem and the Temple in the kingdom of Judah. And on Tu B'Av, after several generations, King Hosea ben Elah canceled the matter, thus allowing all of Israel to return and unite around the Temple, as in the days of Solomon.

Matchmaking and Weddings

In addition to this, the day of Tu B'Av, as well as Yom Kippur, was designated for matchmaking, in which the daughters of Jerusalem would continue the custom of the daughters of Shiloh, and go to the vineyards to find their match, out of joy. And as our Sages said: "There were no days as joyous for the Jewish people as the fifteenth of Av and as Yom Kippur, as on them the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in white clothes, which each woman borrowed from another. Why were they borrowed? They did this so as not to embarrass one who did not have her own white garments... and the daughters of Jerusalem would go out and dance in the vineyards. And what would they say? Young man, please lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself for a wife. Do not set your eyes toward beauty, but set your eyes toward a good family, as the verse states: "Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30), and it further says: "Give her the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates" (Mishna Ta'anit 26:2).

What these two days have in common is that they are days of peace and unity in the world – on Yom Kippur, between God and Israel, and on Tu B'Av, between Jews. On Yom Kippur, Israel repents, and God in His great love

for His people, atones for their transgressions and purifies them, and they return to connect with Him in the holiness of their faith, and unite with Him out of love (Peninei Halakha: Yamim Nora'im 6:1). On Tu B'Av, peace was made amongst the Jews, for the deepest division is between the tribes, and on Tu B'Av, the tribes removed the barriers and divisions between them, and returned to merge in unity.

Out of the general unity of these days, Jews are accustomed to engage in matchmaking, in which every couple who marries with love and joy, expresses on a small scale, the uniqueness between God and Israel and His people, and the unity within Israel, and consequently, the Shechinah (Divine Presence) dwells between them. In the marriage covenant, which includes a commitment to live in total loyalty to one another, there is an expression of the sanctity of the covenant between Israel and God, and as is said in the blessing of the Kiddushin: "Blessed art thou God, who has sanctified His people Israel by chuppah and kiddushin." That is why the relationship between God and Israel is likened to the joy of a bridegroom and a bride, as it is said: "And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Also, by marrying, which includes a commitment to love and make each other happy, the couple fulfills in the most complete way the mitzvah which is a major tenet in the Torah, the mitzvah "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18, Sifra ibid). And resultantly, the unity between all the tribes of Israel is revealed, and between Israel and their Father in Heaven, and an abundance of blessing and life is added to the world (Peninei Halakha: Simchat HaBayit U'Birchato 1:1; 5-6).

Since the Temple was destroyed, it is not customary to engage in matchmaking on Yom Kippur, and we suffice with prayers – that single men and women merit to marry, and that couples merit to intensify their love and happiness (Peninei Halakha: Yamim Nora'im 6:12). However, Tu B'Av remains a day on which people often marry, and engage in matchmaking and unity between the different segments of the people of Israel. Therefore, it is considered a Yom Tov, and Tachanun (supplications) is not recited in prayers, and fasting is prohibited.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Office of the Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Re'eh: Three ways to assess character

What are the three ways in which one can assess a person's character?

The Gemara in Masechet Eruvin 65b tells us the answer is,

"Kisoh, kosoh and ka'asoh."

'Kisoh' – ones' pocket. To what degree is a person generous?

'Kosoh' – one's cup. How does a person conduct him or herself when inebriated?

And ‘Ka’asoh’ – one’s anger – when in a rage, when really upset, to what degree can a person control themselves?

It is from here that Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch is able to give a beautiful understanding of the very final verse of Parshat Re’eh. The Torah (Devarim 16:16) tells us how, over the three pilgrim festivals,

“Veloh yeirach pnei Hashem reikam,” – “We should not come to Jerusalem, to the presence of Hashem, empty handed.”

“Ish k’matnat yadoh,” – “Every person should give according to the gift that comes from their hands,”

“kevirkat Hashem Elokeicha asher natan lach,” – “according to the blessing that Hashem has given to them.”

Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains that there is another way to read the seemingly unnecessary words ‘ish k’matnat yadoh’ – ‘every person according to the gift of their hands’. We can read it as follows:

‘Ish’ – how do you tell the character of a person? The answer is, ‘k’matnat yado’ – according to the way that their hands give.

This is an example of ‘kisoh’. Hashem has blessed this individual, so to what degree is this person being generous? Now we can understand the continuation of the verse: ‘kebirkat Hashem Elokeicha asher natan lach’ – if you give to charity, if you give of yourself to others according to the blessings that Hashem has given you, commensurate with what you have, that is the sign of a truly outstanding character.

So therefore, when coming to Jerusalem on the pilgrim festivals, to pray to Hashem and be in the presence of the Almighty, the Torah highlights for us how central generosity to fellow human beings is. Ultimately, one of the key ways to test the true character of a person will depend on how giving they are.

Shabbat shalom.

The Complainer

Rabbi YY Jacobson

When All You Can See Are Carcasses, There is Something Wrong With You

The Raah Bird

This week’s portion Re’eh repeats—for the second time in the Torah[1]—G-d’s “Kosher List,” of mammals, fish and birds, suitable for Jewish consumption. In the category of birds, the Torah enumerates twenty-four species of birds which are not kosher. One of them is called by three names—the Raah, Dayah and Ayah.[2]

The Talmud explains[3] that these are three names for the same bird. The Torah specifies all of them, because if it would mention only one name, then if someone knows the bird by one of its names not mentioned in the Torah, he might have entertained the idea that it was kosher.

What type of bird is this Raah/Ayah/Dayah creature? Many have translated it as the Vulture or the Hawk. Yet, after all the research, it seems that the most accurate translation for

the Raah bird is the Kite, or in its scientific term—the Milvus. Indeed, in Arabic the Kite is known as the “Chadaa” (חדא), quite similar to the biblical Dayah.[4]

Three Names

Why three names for the same bird? “Raah” stems from the verb “to see.” “Dayah” is from the verb “to fly, soar, or glide.” “Ayah” is from the verb “to wail, scream, cry.” All these names describe characteristics of this bird. This Kite indeed is scattered all over the Middle East, feeding chiefly on smaller birds, mice, reptiles, and fish. In the capture of fish the Kite is almost as expert as the osprey (the “Shalach” in the biblical language), darting from a great height into the water, and bearing off the fish in its claws. The wings of the Kite are long and powerful, bearing it through the air in a peculiarly graceful flight. That is why it has been called the Glede or the Kite, representing its gliding movements.

The sight of this bird is remarkably keen and piercing. From the vast elevation to which it soars when in search of food, it is able to survey the face of the land beneath, and to detect the partridge, quail, chicken, or other creature that will become its food.

Should the Kite suspect danger near its nest, it escapes by darting rapidly into the air, soaring at a vast height above the trees among which its home is made. From that elevation it can act as a sentinel, due to its incredible eyesight, and will not come down until it is assured of safety.

The Talmud’s Observation

What is remarkable is that seventeen centuries before all of the scientific research, the Talmud described it in a few words: [5]

אמר רב אבהו, ראה זו איה, ולמה נקרא שמה ראה? שרואה ביותר. וכן הוא אומר [6] נתיב לא ידעו עיט, ולא שפיתו עין איה. תנא עומדת בבבל ורואה גבלה בארץ ישראל!

Rabbi Abahu said, the Raah bird is the same as the Ayah. Why is this bird it called “Raah?” Because it sees exceedingly well.

The Talmud proceeds to prove this from a verse in Job:[7]“There is a path which no bird of prey knows; and which the kite’s eye has not seen.” The very fact that the biblical verse underscores the fact that the Kite’s eye has not perceived the hidden path indicates that the kite usually possesses piercing vision.

The Talmud continues to illustrate the kite’s keen eyesight:

We have learnt that this bird stands in Babylon, and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel!

Now, that’s impressive, being that the distance between Babylon (present day Iraq) and Israel is some 500 miles.[8]

Three Questions

The obvious question is why the Talmud uses such a strange illustration: “This bird stands in Babylon and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel!” It could have used so many

more examples of what the bird is capable of seeing and where it is capable of seeing it.

Another, more substantial question: The reason some animals are not kosher is because the negative characteristics these animals possess can have a negative impact on their consumer. “You are what you eat” is not only a cliché. It is why we are instructed to abstain from eating certain animals whose traits we would not wish to incorporate into our psyche. Kosher animals, on the other hand, are characterized by peaceful traits that are worth imitating. [9]

But why, then, is this bird not kosher? Surely keen eyesight and perception are worthy traits. Shouldn't this bird then be kosher? [10]

What Do You See?

The Talmud is not only illustrating the keen vision of the Kite, or the Raah; it is also explaining to us why it is not kosher: “This bird stands in Babylon, and sees a carcass in the Land of Israel!” When you gaze at the land of Israel, you can see many things, including many positive and heartwarming items; yet what does this bird see? Corpses! Being a carnivorous bird, which kills, devours and eats the meat of other animals, its eyes gaze at Eretz Yisroel but observe only one thing: the carcasses in the land! [11]

This is what makes it a non-kosher animal—because this quality is prevalent among some people as well, and we do not want to “eat” and incorporate this type of behavior into our psyche.

Helpless Critics

Some people are simply chronic complainers. They will gaze at their wife, children, relatives, and community members and all they will see are flaws, deficiencies, mishaps, and negative attributes.

Some people never stop criticizing everybody and everything. While some see the good in everybody, even in the worst situation or person, these characters manage to somehow see the evil in everybody and in everything. They can always show you how everyone has an “agenda,” and everyone is driven by ulterior motives; there are smelly carcasses everywhere.

Are they right? They may be partially, or even completely correct. Every person has flaws. Even the greatest saint has demons; even a great man usually has some skeleton—a corpse—in his closet. That is why we need a Torah to guide us, and that is why the Torah asks of us to never stop working on ourselves, to challenge our conventions, to scrutinize our motives, to refine our behavior, to make amends of our mistakes. But why is that the only thing you manage to observe?

The “Holy” Preacher

A story:[12]

A renowned Maggid (traveling preacher) arrived one day at the hometown of Reb Shmuel Munkes, a noted disciple of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who was a deeply pious man with an incredible sense of humor. After reading his

letter of approbation, lauding him as a tzaddik went to wander from town to town for the sole purpose of inspiring fellow Jews, the townspeople—who were simple, G-d fearing, innocent Jews—invited him to preach.

Throughout his sermon the Maggid berated his fine audience, chastising them for “dreadful sins.” He rebuked them, for being such terrible, lowly and horrendous Jews, evoking G-d’s wrath. He proceeded to describe in vivid detail the severe punishment that awaited them as a result of their evil ways. When finished, the proud orator quickly retired to his room, leaving his crestfallen audience to wail over their horrific moral state and the Divine retribution about to befall them.

No sooner had he made himself comfortable, when a man walked into his room. It was Reb Shmuel himself.

Reb Shmuel took out a long knife and a sharpening stone entered his room. He proceeded to sharpen his knife.

After a few tense and wordless moments, the Maggid broke the silence. “What’s this all about?” he asked with a look of astonishment.

His eyes still trained on the sharpening stone, Rabbi Shmuel Munkes replied in mock sincerity: “As the honorable Maggid knows, we simple folk never had the merit of having a righteous scholar in our midst. Who knows, perhaps it is because of our wanton sins you just described.”

Bemused as to where this was heading, the Maggid replied, “Yes, yes, but what does any of this have to do with the knife you are sharpening?”

“Well,” retorted Reb Shmuel, “We were taught by our parents that before Rosh Hashanah one should pray at the gravesites of the righteous. And sadly, we never had in our cemetery the grave of a righteous man. All of our residents—as you have eloquently described us—have been utterly wicked.”

“Of course, of course, nodded the Maggid. But why the knife!?”

“It’s rather simple,” explained Reb Shmuel calmly. “The nearest burial site of a tzaddik is very far from our town. It is extremely cumbersome for the townsfolk to make the yearly trek. We decided that we finally need to have a righteous man buried in our midst.

“After hearing your speech,” Reb Shmuel continued in a straight face, “I know there is no one more holy and righteous than you in our entire region. So I decided to... slaughter you and bury you right here in our very own cemetery. Finally, before Rosh Hashanah, we will be able to come pray at your sacred grave site.”

As the grim reality began to set in, the Maggid adeptly switched course. “Come to think of it,” he stammered, “I am not all that righteous after all. I have committed some small sins here and there; they were obviously all inadvertent.”

Reb Shmuel dismissed the Maggid’s confession: “Honored Maggid! You are still very righteous and

learned. As for the transgressions? They are so minor; who would even know that these were sins. Your humility is nothing but proof of your exceptional righteousness. Besides, relative to our heinous sins—which you have just described in your sermon—you are, trust me, a complete tzaadik! You are the man we need buried here.”

By now, Reb Shmuel was done with the sharpening of the knife. The “holy preacher” began to panic.

“On second thought,” stuttered the Maggid, “Some of my transgressions were a bit more serious, such as...” He went on to share some immoral things he has done in his life, which disqualified him from being a tzaddik. Rabbi Shmuel quickly dismissed these as well: “To us you are still a great Tzaddik. You are far better than anything we have.”

Finally, the Maggid confessed to some rather ugly and embarrassing transgressions. He admitted that in truth he was far from the great tzaddik that he portrayed himself to be. He was actually a disgraceful low life.

Now, it was Rabbi Shmuel’s turn to preach: “How dare you admonish these beautiful, innocent and pure Jews, when you yourself are a despicable, immoral charlatan! How dare you cause such fine, lovely, well-intended Jews so much anguish. It is you who needs to transform his life; it is you who needs to repent for all of his transgressions.

The Maggid got the message. He left the town in deep inner shame. He never again rebuked his audiences with stern, harsh words.

The Mirror

How did Reb Shmuel know that this guy was really playing a game and that he was far from holy?

The answer is simple: When you are pure and holy, you see innocence and purity in others. When you are in touch with your own soul, you sense the soul in others. When you have a genuine relationship with G-d, and your appreciation of the G-dliness within every person is far more palpable. When you don’t suffer from an inflated ego, or from terrible insecurity, you will truly appreciate the goodness in others.

To be sure, there are corpses, skeletons, demons and ghosts in almost every human person; that is what makes them human. Even the Holy Land has its share of carcasses—physical and psychological. But when that is the only thing you see, it means that you are a non-kosher person. You need your own cleansing.

The Bias Toward Israel Today

This insight of our sages concerning the non-kosher Raah bird is so relevant today when it comes to Israel.

Is Israel a perfect country? We all know the answer. Israel has many challenges and problems. Is the government perfect? Only a fool can think so. Over the last three decades, the Israeli leadership has made some historical errors which might take generations to fix.

But there are those who when they look at Israel see nothing but “corpses.” In our own day and age, with

modern technology, we were all blessed with the eyesight of the Kite. We sit in our homes in Babylon (or US, or Canada, or Europe, Australia, South Africa, or anywhere else in the world), and with the help of CNN or BBC or other news cameras, we can see Israel. But often, all the reporters, journalists, bloggers, academics, and politicians see in Israel are stinky corpses. When they report on Israel, you would think that the country does nothing besides producing Palestinian Children's corpses.

And this is how you know how terribly biased and unfair they are. When someone criticizes Israel—that is legitimate. There is much to comment and argue about. But when one has nothing but criticism for Israel, when there is nothing good to say about Israel, when Israel is portrayed as the most racist country—then you know it has nothing to do with Israel; rather, the person spewing the hate is treif.

At the end of the day, it is all a matter of perspective. Each of us has to choose what we are going to see—in ourselves and in the world around us.

[1] The first time in Leviticus chapter 11, in the portion of Shemini.

[2] Deuteronomy 14:13

[3] Chulin 63b, quoted in Rashi to Deuteronomy ibid.

[4] The bird is mentioned another two times in the Bible: Isaiah 34:15, "There shall the kites [dayos] also be gathered, every one with her mate." In Job 28:7, there is a similar word, ayah. This verse is quoted below in the essay.

[5] Chulin 63b

[6] Job 28:7

[7] Job ibid.

[8] The Maharal of Prague, in his book Beer Hagoleh, explains this in two possible ways: It means literally that this bird has extraordinary vision. Another possible explanation is that this bird in its most perfect state possesses this ability, though practically, the physical bird is always flawed. This is based on the prevalent idea in Jewish philosophy and in the works of the Maharal that every being and object possesses two dimensions: its tzurah and its chomer. The tzurah is the abstract form of this particular object; it is the concept of this object in its most perfect and ideal form. Chomer is the way it is manifested practically in a concrete and flawed universe. This duality is a major theme in the works of the Greek Philosopher Plato.

[9] See Ramban on Leviticus 11:12. See also Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah end of section 81.

[10] This bird is indeed carnivorous, which makes it non-kosher (see references in previous footnote.) Yet the fact that the list of non-kosher birds the Torah titles it as “Raah,” indicates that this quality itself, its keen eyesight, is part of what it makes it non-kosher. Yet, we would think that keen eyesight is a positive quality!

[11] In other words, this bird possesses two negative qualities: it is carnivorous, and it “sees” nothing but the carcasses.

[12] I copied some paragraphs of the story from an article by Rabbi Yosef Kahanov <http://www.crownheights.info/index.php?itemid=23516>

Parshas Re'eh

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

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

Getting By Giving

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

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

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

In other words, a person can literally test Hashem's promise to enrich those who give tzedakah. Even though the general rule is that one may not test the Almighty; the mitzvah of giving charity is exempted from this prohibition. Not only is it exempted, but Hashem actually encourages us to test Him by giving charity. Additionally, the Gemara (Pesachim 8a) states that if a person says, "I am giving this money in order that my son shall live," he is a complete tzaddik. Meaning that even though he is giving the money with an ulterior motive, it is a proper act of tzedakah and he is considered righteous.

Why is the mitzvah of tzedakah an exemption to the prohibition of testing Hashem? Furthermore, there is a general rule laid down in Pirkei Avos (1:3) that says, "Do not be as a servant serving his master in order to receive reward." So, why is the mitzvah of tzedakah different?

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

This is why we ask Hashem in bentching: "Do not cause us to come to need to rely on gifts or loans from others." It is debilitating to one's psyche to have to rely on the

largesse of others for survival. Yet, we know that giving tzedakah and doing chessed are key components of one's obligation to "follow in His ways." So how do we reconcile this obligation with the pain being caused to the recipient of tzedakah?

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

The Tipping Point

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

The Torah charges us with giving a gift to our Jewish servants when they leave our service; the Hebrew word for this is "hanaka." Rashi (ad loc) explains that this comes from the Hebrew word for adornment. Similarly, the word anak is used in scriptures to mean necklace (Shir Hashirim 4:9). In fact, giants are called anakim because they wear the sun around their neck like a necklace (Sotah 34b). Rashi on this verse explains that you have to give the freed slave something that makes it clear that you have given him a gift.

Why are we obligated to give him a gift at all? He had already been paid in advance for all of his years of servitude, why does the Torah place an obligation to bestow him with a parting gift? In addition, this reference to a necklace indicates that he needs to leave our service bejeweled. But what does that really mean? He actually isn't given jewelry – as the verses go on to explain, and further elucidated in the Talmud and Rambam (Hilchos Avadim 3:14) – he receives food and food related items. What is this reference to being bejeweled?

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

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

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

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

That is why the Torah describes it as bejeweling a person even though no jewelry is involved. We want to make sure that the Jewish servant who is leaving our service has a measure of his dignity restored. Meaning, by recognizing him as an individual he is now coming back into the community not as a servant, but as a respected member of society.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Reeh

You Are Children to Hashem Your G-d

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1346 – Minhag Yisroel Torah: The Power of Minhag. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in Parshas Re'eh says, "You are Children to Hashem your G-d, you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person." (Devorim 14:1) In the past, there was a custom among non-Jews for people to cut or somehow mutilate themselves as a sign of mourning when a person's relative died. The Torah prohibits this practice. The commentaries all point out the fact that this is the only mitzvah where a negative prohibition is introduced with the statement "You are Children to Hashem your G-d." We don't find such a preamble by the prohibition to eat pig or to wear shatnez or anywhere else! Why do we find this unique introduction to the mitzvah of "Lo sis'godedu" about mutilating oneself?

The Seforno gives a beautiful interpretation. Rashi gives an interpretation. I heard a different interpretation, also very interesting, from a talmid chochom from England, whom I met while touring the Swiss Alps.

The person identified himself as a "Monarchist" meaning he supports and believes in the monarchy of

England. The fellow is a Yeshivishe fellow, he authored a sefer on the Rambam's Ma'aseh HaKorbonos, and is a fine talmid chochom – but he is into the monarchy.

He mentioned that the year at that time (2017) marked the 20th anniversary of the death of Princess Diana. At the time of her death in 1997, her passing generated headline stories throughout the world for quite a long period of time. He said that at the time when Diana died, her two sons, Prince William and Prince Harry were twelve and ten years old.

In England, the protocol is that the coffin is carried by horse, and the mourners march in back of the coffin as it proceeds to the cemetery. The young boys were instructed to march behind their mother's coffin, and they were told that they were not allowed to cry. The boys protested, "We don't want to march, and if we want to cry, we'll cry!" They were told that this was not their option. They were the princes and this is what protocol called for: March in back of the coffin and do not show any emotion. Bnei melachim, children of kings have special duties. Sons of kings need to act in a certain way.

You and I can disagree, and we can say that telling a ten-year-old that he should not cry at his mother's funeral is ridiculous. We are not here to debate that, but this is the royal protocol in England.

However, this monarchist was making the point that a person who is the son of a king is royalty, and needs to act differently than other people. He needs to be in control of his emotions.

Using this background, he offered insight into the pasuk, "You are Children of Hashem your G-d, do not cut yourself..." You are the sons of royalty, not figurative royalty but real royalty – the King of all kings, the Holy One Bless Be He. We are the children of the Ribono shel Olam. The Gemara says many times that "all of Israel are the children of kings" (e.g., Shabbos 67a, 111a, 158a).

I am not suggesting that we don't cry if chas v'shalom we face tragedies in life. Just the opposite is true. We believe in "three days for crying" (Moed Katan 27b). But we do believe in controlling our emotions. The Torah says over here – you may be tempted to mutilate yourself. Perhaps you have experienced so much pain that you feel like you need to inflict more pain upon yourself. Do not do that! Ay, your emotions drive you in that direction... But, no! You are Children of Hashem, your G-d, and you must retain control over your emotions. You are princes. Princes cannot act like everyone else. They must act with dignity. That is why the Torah says "Do not cut yourself and do not make a bald spot between your eyes over death."

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

Parshas Reeh: Sons and Brothers

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

[Boldface emphasis added]

I. OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. THE SECOND DISTINCTION: A CENTRAL WORSHIP-SITE

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

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

IV. INTERNALIZING A DIVINE ASTHETIC

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

----- SUMMARY

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

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

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

Chapter 14 begins with this powerful banner statement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Midrash Halakhah states:

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

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

VI. SONS AND BROTHERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Tzedakah (15:7-11).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

VII. POSTSCRIPT PESACH AND LECHEM 'ONI

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

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

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

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

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

Text Copyright © 2014 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and Torah.org. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT RE'AY

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A RECURRING THEME

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

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

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

A NATIONAL CENTER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE SITE / THE TEMPLE / AND JERUSALEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

A PROOF FROM HAKHEL

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

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

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

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

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

BACK TO SEFER BREISHIT

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

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

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

HOLY GROUND OR HOLY PURPOSE

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

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

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

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

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

JERUSALEM / SEEK AND FIND

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JERUSALEM TODAY

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

C. MIKRA BIKURIM - THE FINALE

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

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

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

PARSHAT RE'AY - Part Two

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

*** HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**

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

*** BAD INFLUENCES**

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

*** HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**

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

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

FOUR 'BAD EXAMPLES'

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

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

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

Note how we find examples of influences from:

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

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

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

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

INFLUENCES - GOOD & BAD

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

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

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

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

Till then,
shabbat shalom
menachem

PARASHAT RE'EH

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

SOME QUICK DERASH:

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

DEVARIM 11:26-28 --

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THEMES OF RE'EH:

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

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

THE CHOSEN PLACE:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AVODA ZARA AS AN "INTERPERSONAL" CRIME:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MITZVOT IN A COMMUNAL CONTEXT:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAMBAM, HAGIGA 2:14 --

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

RAMBAM, YOM TOV 6:18 --

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

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