

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 11 #47, August 30-31, 2024; 26-27 Av 5784; Reeh; Mevarchim HaHodesh
Rosh Hodesh Elul Tuesday and Wednesday

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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Because of travel and meetings, I shall not be able to post an issue for Shoftim and am uncertain about Ki Tetzei (next two weeks). See my archives at PotomacTorah.org for Shoftim and Ki Tetzei from previous years.

Hamas continues to manipulate the media while pretending to negotiate with Israel. **Hersh Polin Goldberg, cousin of very close friends of ours and a U.S. citizen, remains a captive. Concerns are increasing that fewer than half of the hostages may still be alive. We continue our prayers for the hostages and all our people stuck in Gaza. May Hashem enable us and our people in Israel to wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by Hezbollah and other anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully.**

"See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse" (11:26). Moshe opens Reeh with these words and urges all of us to follow the ways and mitzvot of Hashem to receive the blessings rather than curses. In recent years, I have discussed insights from Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars from alephbeta.org – especially many instances when specific mitzvot relate back to specific instances in the lives of the Avot (our ancestors). You may review this material in the first two pages of my archives for Reeh, especially for 5783 and 5782. My focus this year is on the meanings of blessings and curses.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that Moshe presents us with a unique choice – not a blessing or a curse, but the opportunity to turn curses into blessings. Viewed properly, a "curse" can often be a tremendous opportunity. Rabbi Brander goes back to Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm's experience in 1969, when she started her career in Congress. She was greatly disappointed to be appointed to an obscure subcommittee of the Agriculture Committee rather than the House Education and Labor Committee. The Lubavich Rebbe phoned Mrs. Chisholm to ask how she was doing. His response to her committee assignment surprised her. He said that the assignment was a blessing and a great opportunity. The country had a great surplus of food and many poor people. He urged her to accept God's gift of giving her an opportunity to feed the hungry and urged her to find a creative way to do so. She met with first term senator Bob Dole. Together they originated what became the Food Stamp and WIC programs – a blessing for poor and hungry citizens and a way to increase income for farmers.

Israel Outreach Associate Benji Zoller interprets Moshe's words as stating that God blesses people with responsibility and with sustenance. This interpretation goes back to Rabbi David Fohrman's insight that God gave our Avot children, wealth, and land – not to consume and enjoy but to use to enable them to devote their lives to tikkun olam. With their secure wealth and families, they could spend their time teaching others about Hashem and His mitzvot. God focuses on creating a small nation devoted to His mitzvot as a way to influence other nations to move toward chesed and mitzvot – kindness and justice. The Torah and Navi (prophets) focused much of their attention on chesed and mitzvot, and Moshe's reminder in his last days reaches the heart of what it means to be a Jew.

Rabbi Marc Angel goes back to Rav Kook's image of a ladder. We are all on a ladder. The key is that some people are going up the ladder by adding more mitzvot while others are going down the ladder by turning away from Hashem's message. Moshe's message of blessings and curses urges all of us to climb the ladder by adding mitzvot and performing more chesed and mishpat (tikkun olam).

Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, reminds us that Israel is a small nation. We are not inherently more righteous than other nations, and we cannot survive by adopting the religious practices and customs of larger nations. The history of nations is that new nations arise, grow, flourish, and become powerful. However, over time they become complacent, corrupt, and divided. Eventually some other nation comes up and destroys them. Only the Jews have survived for 3500 plus years. For any nation to survive so long is a miracle. For one of the smallest nations to do so makes the miracle even more amazing. Israel has survived so long because most of our people have followed Moshe's urging and accepted Hashem's blessings. We have turned curses into opportunities. Those among our people who have not followed the mitzvot have disappeared, but the core of our people is still here. We must teach this lesson to our children and grandchildren while we follow Moshe's reminder to accept Hashem's blessings and to turn any curses into opportunities rather than into defeats.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, began teaching me Torah and mitzvot approximately 54 years ago. His teachings were consistent with those of Moshe and the Rabbis I discuss today. His memory is a blessing, and his lessons live on with me and with many others.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Reeh: “Transforming Adversity Into Opportunity”

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2020)
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

[Ed.: Rabbi Brander is on vacation. In his absence, his office has provided a beautiful and inspiring Dvar Torah from his archives for Reeh.]

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

The year was 1969, and Shirley Chisholm had just made history as the first Black woman ever elected to Congress. She represented a heavily-urban district that included the neighborhood of Crown Heights, New York, where she resided.

Chisholm had high hopes of improving the lives of her constituents, many of whom were poor and uneducated, by serving on the House Education and Labor Committee.

But instead, powerful politicians maneuvered to blunt her influence and popularity back home by forcing her to focus on issues irrelevant to her inner-city constituency: they relegated her to an obscure subcommittee of the Agriculture Committee.

Representative Chisholm was understandably frustrated. But one day, she received a phone call from the office of a rabbi who lived just one block away from her: none other than Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

At the Rebbe's urging, Chisholm shared her feelings of hurt and anger at being sidelined from a position in which she could truly help her district.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe's response surprised Chisholm – and changed the trajectory of her career. *“What a blessing God has given you!”* he said about her appointment to the Agriculture Committee. *“This country has so much surplus food, and there are so many hungry people. You can use this gift that God gave you to feed the hungry. Find a creative way to do it.”*

Shortly afterward, Congresswoman Chisholm met with Bob Dole, then a first-term senator from Kansas, who told her that Midwestern farmers were producing more food than they could sell and losing money on their crops.

Chisholm immediately recalled her conversation with the Rebbe, and knew what to do. Together with Senator Dole, she led the way in ensuring that those most in need would have access to food through what became the Food Stamp Program and WIC.

In other words, the infrastructure of welfare in the United States changed forever as a result of a meeting between Congresswoman Chisholm and the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

When Chisholm retired from Congress in 1983, she credited the Rebbe: *“A rabbi who is an optimist taught me that what you may think is a challenge is a gift from God. And if poor babies have milk, and poor children have food, it's because this Rabbi in Crown Heights had vision.”*

This week's parsha opens with the words,

“Behold I set in front of you today, blessing and curse.” Deuteronomy 11:26

Nachmanides comments that deciding whether something is a blessing or a curse is up to us. Ramban on Deuteronomy 11:29. As Representative Chisholm learned from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, we can decide whether to view things as a challenge or as an opportunity.

Whether it involves our physical health, our mental health, our economic health, or any aspect of our lives; whether in the context of this COVID-19 pandemic or anytime, we always have the power to choose whether we see the glass half empty or half full.

May we always be blessed with the ability to transform what may seem to be a curse into a blessing and to turn challenges into opportunities.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Reeh: The Tree of Knowledge

By Rabbi Naftali Reich *)2013(

Since the dawn of human history, mankind has faced, in one guise or another, the same temptations that confronted the very first man and woman, Adam and Chava. After giving us the details of their creation, the Torah describes the challenge they faced in the blissful spiritual existence Hashem provided for them in the Garden of Eden. They were expressly prohibited to eat from the eitz hadaas, the tree of knowledge, yet its delightful fruit proved irresistible to Eve. The Torah describes the nature of the temptation. *"It was desirable to be eaten and beautiful to behold"*! The challenge Adam and Chava faced echoes and re-echoes as each and every generation confronts its unique 'eitz hadaas' in an ever-changing and often bewildering variation of guises.

Our generation has its own enticing 'tree of knowledge' that glistens alluringly, urging us to sample its illicit fruits. Its appeal has tragically proven irresistible to so many of our youth. Can they be blamed for surrendering to the tantalizing attraction? Religious rules seem so onerous, rigid and inhibiting to a generation that has been nurtured with an inherent sense of personal entitlement. Don't we deserve it, and don't we deserve it now? Freedom of expression and freedom of choice have been elevated to the highest status in society's scale of values.

How then are we to protect both ourselves and our children from the shimmering 'tree of knowledge' whose fruits appear 'so good to eat and so delightful to the eye'?

In the first verse of this week's Torah portion, Moshe Rabbeinu, in his parting message to the Jewish people, provides them with an eternal answer. *"Behold! I have placed before you today the blessing and the curse. The blessing is that you shall listen to the words of Hashem your G-d, and the curse is when you do not hearken to His voice."*

Living in our Creator's embrace and following His dictates is defined as a life of blessing. Living outside its pale is defined as a life of curse. Herein Moshe Rabbeinu frames the arena of life and articulates the challenge that we mortals in every age and in every society are forced to grapple with.

But how can we imbibe this important message when all our senses and feelings experience and see just the opposite?

Perhaps we can explain this with a verse in last week's Torah portion.)Chapter 10 verse 12(: *"And now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you? Only to see/fear Him, to walk in all His ways, to love Him and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul."* The Talmud questions the word "only"; is this long list such a simple request? Isn't it disingenuous

to request from us the relatively simple assignment of seeing and thus fearing Hasher, immediately followed by a string of complex and challenging spiritual demands?

A doting father and mother were tearfully watching their sick son's vitality drain from him as he lay in bed. His temperature continued to soar. His burning fever robbed him of his appetite; he steadfastly refused the delicious food they put before him as well as all medicine. All their exhortations and pleas were futile. They begged a specialist to come to their home to treat their beloved son. The specialist came and saw that the child's prognosis was very serious. He extracted a strong medicine from his briefcase and told the child that he will only ask him to swallow the medicine a single time. Hearing that this was only a one-time request, the child acquiesced and reluctantly sipped a measure of the life giving elixir. As the doctor walked towards the door, the child's mother burst out crying. "Dr." she exclaimed, "he has only agreed to take it this one time, what will we do tonight when you're gone?"

"Don't worry," the doctor reassured her. "Now that he has drunk from this medicine, his appetite will be restored. Once he begins ingesting food, he will regain his appreciation for its taste. Before long you can be assured that he will be willing to take the necessary medicine every day until he is fully recovered."

With this parable, the Dubna Maggid explains the meaning of our verse about the Torah's expectation: We are asked "only" to "see" and fear G-d. If we only 'see and fear' our Creator a single time, we will be naturally inclined towards continuing our pathway towards spiritual growth. We will be primed and ready to see the blessing in living a spiritual life.

Once we experience the sublime joy of 'seeing' Hashem and having a heart-to-heart dialogue with Him; once we taste the pleasure of a true Shabbat; once we absorb the self-fulfillment that overtakes every fiber of our being as we extend ourselves to the less fortunate, we will encounter His precious blessings. The allure of tree of knowledge's artificial stimulants will no longer exert their magnetic draw. At that point, the distinction between the blessing and the curse will be abundantly clear.

This then, is perhaps what Moshe meant at the beginning of our Torah portion. Re'eh, 'see' that I present you today with a blessing and a curse. Only after we have seen and experienced the light and delight of a spiritual life pathway will we be able to make a crystal clear distinction in our life choice. How true the maxim that "a little light banishes a great deal of darkness." By infusing our homes with a joyous life in the presence of Hasher, we will ensure that we will always delight in the kosher fruits of our Garden of Eden.

Wishing you a wonderful Shabbos.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/legacy-5773-reeh-2/>

Re'eh – The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Meat Deep Fryer for Pareve to Be Eaten With Dairy ** by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah **

"I will eat meat", because your soul desires to eat meat; you may eat meat whenever you wish"
(Devarim 12:20).

QUESTION

What do you think about using a fleishig deep fryer that hasn't been used in a week with new oil to deep fry pareve things at an event where dairy will be separately served? The event is a drive-through where people will pick up pizza and then a few minutes later pick up something deep fried.

ANSWER

If we were to ignore the be'ein (actual foodstuff), then the rule is that a fleishig or milkhig keli eino ben yomo (utensil that hasn't been used in 24 hours) can be used lekatchilah for something pareve, even if one is going to eat it with the other min. So, for example, you can use your fleishig soup pot to cook noodles that you will afterwards melt cheese on.

Given the be'ein issue here — if there genuinely is edible be'ein remnants on the grate, etc., then you have fleishig cooking directly with pareve, and you can't eat the pareve things with milkhigs. That being said — I assume that there is easily 60x the gunk, so it is bateil (nullified) once you cook it, and it can be argued that it isn't the prohibition of deliberately nullifying forbidden food because (1) it is heter (permitted food), not issur (forbidden food) and (2) you are just trying to use the fryer, you are not trying to mix up the gunk. Add to that that if you have used industrial cleaner on it, it is all pagum (ruined). So, assuming it is definitely 60, and you have cleaned it with a poisonous/pogem cleaner, I can definitely see being lenient if needed.

* Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

** This question is taken from a WhatsApp group in which Rabbi Linzer responds to halakhic questions from rabbis and community members.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/08/ryrreeh/>

The Joy of Giving

By Benji Zoller *

In his beloved children's book, *The Giving Tree*, Shel Silverstein paints a picture of a boy who loves a tree, and a tree who loves a boy. In the boy's youth, he would play with the tree, asking nothing in return except for the company of a friend under the shade of her branches. But, as time goes by, the boy grows older and the two companions drift apart.

Many years pass, and the boy returns to the tree. "*Come, Boy, come and climb up my trunk...*" she begs. But the boy is no longer a boy, and he no longer wants to play. Now, as a young man, he has responsibilities and needs to support himself. And the giving tree wants nothing more than to help. So, the boy, now too big to swing on the tree's branches, comes time and time again and takes from the giving tree. First her apples, then her branches and eventually her trunk. "*And the tree was happy,*" goes the refrain; "*...but not really.*"

Shel Silverstein famously said very little about his best-seller, merely that, "*It's just a relationship between two people; one gives and the other takes.*" Henceforth, children, who over decades have been raised on the words of this wise and quirky poet, believe in a world where they have the choice to be a giver or to be a taker.

God, in Deuteronomy, seems to speak of a very similar world.

Yet, there will be no pauper among you, for the Lord will surely bless you in the land which the Lord your God is about to give you in estate to take hold of it. (Parshat Re'eh, Devarim 15:4)

Like the tree, God promises to provide God's people with all of their needs. Indeed, God's people will not starve nor will they lie destitute. Rather, like the boy, all of their needs will be met.

However, the Torah continues,

Should there be a pauper among you, from one of your brothers within one of your gates in your land that the Lord your God is about to give you, you shall not harden your heart and clench your hand against your brother the pauper... You shall surely give to him, and your heart shall not be mean when you give to him, for by virtue of this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your doings and in all that your hand reaches. For the pauper will not cease from the midst of the land. Therefore I charge you, saying, 'You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your pauper, in your land.' (Devarim 15:7, 10-11)

Though at first God guarantees abundance for all, just a few verses later God clarifies that indeed there will be those in need. This obvious contradiction highlights the society the Torah wishes to create. While God will be the giver and the

people will be takers, not everyone will be dealt the same hand — while some will prosper, others will unfortunately suffer. It is at this very juncture where the taker is charged with the responsibility to become the giver.

Unlike The Giving Tree, the world is much more complex than givers and takers. The tree, though kind, does not know the true meaning of giving. To give does not mean to sacrifice for another; to give means to pass goodness forward.

God does not simply bless people with sustenance, God blesses people with responsibility. It is easy to take, to be handed wealth and do with it what one pleases. Far more difficult is learning how to give — how to share blessings with others in a healthy and loving way.

Commenting on an earlier verse in this week's Parsha, the Amora Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, asks what the Torah teaches when it says, "*You shall walk in the ways of the Lord your God*" (Devarim 13:5)? The meaning, he teaches, is that one should imitate the attributes of God (Talmud Bavli Sota 14a).

Just as God gives to us, so shall we give to others. Recognizing these blessings and learning how to share them with the rest of the world is our Divine responsibility. For we do not meet the Divine in the sole act of accepting God's blessings, we encounter God by sharing these blessings with others.

May we learn to see and accept God's blessings all around us, and merit to walk in God's ways as we give.

* Israel Outreach Associate; student of Jewish Thought and Hebrew Literature at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2024/08/reeh5784/>

Failure...and Success: Thoughts for Parashat Re'eh

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Some time ago, I met with a friend who is a very successful entrepreneur who deals with top people at leading high-tech companies such as Microsoft, Google and Amazon. He told me that when these companies look to hire new employees, they especially value applicants with entrepreneurial experience — even if these applicants had run their own businesses and failed!

Why would they want to hire "failed" entrepreneurs?

My friend explained: a high percentage of start-up companies fail. To start such businesses requires imagination, risk-taking ability, creativity, hard work. These are exactly the qualities the big high-tech companies are looking for. Even if the entrepreneurs failed in their own businesses, yet they have demonstrated unique courage and willingness to think "out of the box." They showed that they were willing to try something new and to invest their lives in it.

If people are willing to think imaginatively and to work hard at developing their plans, they increase their odds of success. Even if their original businesses did not turn out well, they eventually can find the right framework for their talents and energies.

It is not "failure" to have high aspirations that one has not fulfilled. It is failure for one not to have had high aspirations in the first place.

This week's Torah portion begins with the words, "*behold I set before you this day...*" Rabbi Hayyim Benattar, in his Torah commentary *Ohr Hahayyim*, offers an interesting interpretation based on the words "*Re'eh anokhi*." He suggests that these words might be understood in the sense of Moses telling the people of Israel: "*behold me*" i.e. see how high I've been able to rise, to have related to God "*face to face*." In setting himself as a model, Moses was reminding the Israelites that each of them could rise to great spiritual heights. If they would each strive to the best of their abilities, they could achieve great things.

Moses was calling on the Israelites to have high religious aspirations. Even if they experienced many failures along the way, they ultimately would maximize their opportunities for spiritual growth if they kept striving to attain their ideals. It is not “failure” to have been unable to fulfill all one’s aspirations: it is failure not to have aspired in the first place.

Religious life is not static. Indeed, the hallmark of religion at its best is an ongoing sense of striving, failing, growing, falling back, moving forward. Religion at its best is dynamic and life-transforming. Those who are masters of religious life are precisely those who demonstrate “entrepreneurial” spirit: the willingness to try, to take risks, to invest oneself totally in a set of grand ideas and ideals, to fail but then to pick oneself up and try again.

Religious life is deficient when it lacks enthusiasm and energy. Unless we are growing and developing, we are stagnating or regressing. Religion isn’t about maintaining a dull status quo: it is about dynamic self-transformation and spiritual growth. It is looking to the example of Moses and other great men and women — and aspiring to raise ourselves to their models.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who was Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel in the early 20th century, once compared religious life to being on a ladder. Was someone on a higher rung more “religious” than one on a lower rung? Rabbi Kook answered:

it depends which direction the people were going. A person might be on a higher rung — with more knowledge and greater level of mitzvah observance — and yet be stagnant or actually on the way down the ladder. Another person might be on a lower rung of religious knowledge and observance, and yet be ascending, moving up with each passing day. So the one who is ascending is experiencing a dynamic and growing religious life, while the one on the higher rung is experiencing a dry and diminishing religious life. The one on the lower rung is aspiring to grow, while the one on the higher rung has surrendered to rote and dullness.

Religion is not a part time sideline, or something to do in our spare time. It isn’t a collection of laws and customs for us to perform in a mechanical way. It is, at root, a framework for striving toward a dynamic relationship with the Almighty. It is not so much a pattern of life as an attitude toward living, of reaching beyond ourselves, of aspiring to raise ourselves above the mundane, of climbing one more rung in our quest for self-understanding and confrontation with the Divine.

Yes, we will surely experience failures along the way. But it is not these failures that define who we are. What defines us is our aspirations...and our willingness to strive to attain them. [emphasis added]

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3269>

Refining our Messaging on Anti-Semitism

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

[This op ed piece by Rabbi Marc D. Angel appeared in the *Jewish Journal of Los Angeles*, August 20, 2024.]

We are rightfully concerned with anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, and we are quick to publicize every instance of malice and injustice against our people. Our media decry the spread of Jew-hatred. Our various spokespeople lament the increase in anti-Semitic acts, especially since October 7.

It is important to expose and combat anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism with all our might.

But is our messaging unwittingly actually leading to an increase in Jew-hatred?

In his book, *Subliminal*, Dr. Leonard Mlodinow discusses a surprising phenomenon. Public service announcements sometimes backfire. For example, some ads urge visitors to national parks not to litter. In one controlled study, an ad denounced littering and this resulted in less littering. But another ad included the phrase “*Americans will produce more litter than ever.*” This ad actually led to an increase in littering. Dr. Mlodinow points out that the subliminal message of the latter ad is that it’s really okay to litter; everyone is doing it! (pp. 170-171).

When people are constantly told that anti-Israel sentiment is rampant, subliminally at least some of them will think: it’s okay to hate Israel, lots of people do. If people are given statistics that anti-Semitic or anti-Israel acts are increasing dramatically, at least some of them will conclude: if so many people hate Jews and Israel, it’s okay for me to do so also.

Publicizing anti-Israel and anti-Jewish behavior can be a double edged sword. We need the world to know what’s happening and rally good people to fight the injustices against us. But by highlighting how many people hate us, we actually may be encouraging closet anti-Semites to come out into the open with their venom. The more visibility anti-Semites have, the more they create a snowball effect drawing others into the hatred syndrome.

In another of his books (*Emotional*), Dr. Mlodinow writes about psychological contagion. Research is being done about “*the spread of emotion from person to person or throughout an organization or even an entire society*” (p. 184). When crowds get fired up against Israel and against Jews, the hatred can become “*contagious.*” It is difficult to combat this type of psychological contagion; but just condemning it will not make it disappear.

We fight the anti-Semites and anti-Zionists by strengthening our own communities; by insisting on prosecution of hate crimes; by electing pro-Israel officials; by working with good people to foster civil society. But we also have to promote positive messaging to the general public.

Instead of constantly publicizing the increase in anti-Jewish words and deeds, we ought to be emphasizing the many millions of people who admire and support Israel and Jews. Instead of giving front page attention to anti-Israel “*celebrities*” we ought to highlight the pro-Israel voices and reserve the bad actors for the back pages.

The overwhelming majority of the public abhors terrorism. They resent “*activists*” i.e. haters who block highways, disrupt college campuses, vandalize businesses, attack innocent individuals on the basis of religion, race, nationality or other reasons. Instead of the media showering so much attention on the haters, we should be demanding even more attention on those who promote civility, mutual respect, and intergroup cooperation.

We certainly must condemn and fight anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. But our messaging must be positive and must draw on the goodwill of millions of people who appreciate the values of Israel and the Jewish People.

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3268>

Parshas Re'eh – The Pregnant Spoon

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

Rabbi Rhine is on vacation, so I am reprinting a Dvar Torah from his archives: <https://www.teach613.org/parshas-reeh-the-pregnant-spoon/>

Parshas Re’ey

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer © 2020 *

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

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

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

The Maharz”u explains that there is a deeper lesson to be learned from the blessings than that which is learned from the curses. Blessings and incentives are not always beneficial to the recipient. If one has certain goals in mind but is told that they must achieve other foreign goals to receive blessing, then the blessing is nothing more than a distraction. There are many who prefer excitement and pleasure over material gain. If one wants to live for this world alone, one may decide that a life of pleasure-seeking and thrills is the wealth and bliss they prefer. For such a person, the blessings for following

G-d's Torah could indeed be considered detrimental. These blessings of prosperity and peace are contingent on living a different life. This person may feel he is being distracted or even coerced away from the life and joy he truly seeks.

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

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

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

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Reeh
by Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Rabbi Hefter did not send in a Dvar Torah for Reeh. Watch this space for his future Devrei Torah]

* 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.

Dvar Torah for Re'eh
By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

"You shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk")Deut. 14:21(.

This prohibition, our rabbis explain, is not limited to goats or to cooking the offspring in its mother's milk, but rather includes cooking of meat with milk together, if both are of kosher mammals. The formulation of the prohibition, as referring to a specific young animal in its own mother's milk, is strange and has caused a lot of confusion. Why didn't the Torah write simply: *"You shall not cook meat and milk together"*?

The answer is that the whole matter of meat consumption is a concession. I would like to argue that the Torah is not in favor of a carnivorous humanity.

The Parasha refers several times to meat-consumption in the following manner: *“If you wish to eat meat... if you desire meat... if your soul craves meat.”* The Torah obviously allows limited consumption of meat, and it does so to provide the needs of the people. The prohibition of cooking milk and meat together is to remind us of the cruelty of killing an animal to feed ourselves when there are other means to do so. The Torah reminds us to raise and eat meat responsibly by forbidding extreme cruelty, in the form of cooking an animal's meat with its life sustaining liquid, milk.

This insight is of extreme importance today as beef consumption is at unprecedented levels. While in the past, only the very wealthy could afford eating meat daily, today Americans can have a burger for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and they're lovin' it.

The ratio of poultry to humans is almost 3-to-1, and that of cattle to humans is one animal per 5 people, or 1-3 if we take into account sheep and pigs. Uruguay, New Zealand, Argentina, Australia, and Brazil already have more cattle than humans. Many of these animals don't graze or live naturally anymore; instead, they are confined to tiny spaces and subsist on a diet of processed feed. It is not meant to be that way, as animals should be grazing in the open, but the market demands more meat and so the process has become industrialized.

The growing demand for meat and the conditions in which the animals live, sometimes in close proximity to humans, have produced a whole new line of potential catastrophes, including avian and swine flu, and the release of methane into the atmosphere.

In other words, according to Halakha, even if we decide to eat animal-based foods, we should strive for organic and free-range farming. It's good for the animals. It's good for us. It's good for the planet.

As Jews, we are used to being called on for higher standards and to respond to a higher authority. We must remember that the laws of ritual slaughtering were also meant to prevent over-consumption of meat and to ensure that the shohet will be a learned, and hopefully more sensitive man, who will maintain his humanity despite his profession.

The higher authority to which we respond is that of the Creator of the Universe, who placed mankind on this Earth, in the Garden of Eden, to protect and cultivate it, not destroy it. We are responsible for the planet and for mankind, and we also must nurture our own spirituality and sensitivity. We should all strive to reduce, if not eliminate, the use of animal-based foods, and demand that kosher standards include humane treatment and ecological awareness.

]disclosure: I have been a vegetarian for five years.[

Shabbat Shalom

* Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **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.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Re-eh: Kosher Birds

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Have you ever had roasted Yanshuf or Tinsames tacos? Of course not, because our portion of Re-eh lists these birds as not kosher.)See Chapter 14 Verse 11-21(

Whereas for animals, the Torah gives us the signs of split hoofs and cud-chewing to identify which are kosher, the Torah skips that for birds and just gives us a long list of birds we may not eat.

Now that's all well and good for our Hebraic nomad ancestors, who knew exactly what Tinsames, Yanshuf and Atalef referred to. However we moderns have been left in the dark. Even one who knows Hebrew, cannot be certain what these terms referred to all those years ago.

So when it comes to the kashrut of birds, we actually have nothing to say. We do not have any objective halachic criteria to determine what makes a bird kosher. All we have is tradition. If we know that Jews have identified a certain bird as kosher, then we assume that it is. Sadly, the list of tradition-approved birds is a short one. Chicken makes up the bulk of our kosher bird diet, with an occasional visit from turkey and duck. Others like the Philby Partridge are almost extinct.

However, I have been toying with the idea that the kiwi-bird could be kosher as it is a species of bird native to New Zealand completely unknown to the ancient Israelites. So there really is no chance that the kiwi could have been on the list of non kosher birds spelled out in Re-eh.

That gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "Kosher Kiwi."

Shabbat Shalom.

[Ed. note: when Europeans first imported turkey from America, the halachic authorities debated whether the newly discovered bird was Kosher. The final decision was that a turkey is a "big chicken," and therefore it was designated as Kosher.]

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Rav Kook Torah Re'eih: Uprooting Idolatry in the Land of Israel

As a condition for inheriting the Land of Israel, the Torah demands that all forms of idolatry be destroyed:

"You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations whom you are driving out worship their gods.... You must tear down their altars, break up their sacred pillars, burn their Asheirah trees, and chop down the statues of their gods. You must obliterate their names from that place.")Deut. 12:2-3(

The Torah stresses that this obligation to destroy idolatrous artifacts is primarily binding in the Land of Israel. As the Sages commented on the words, *"You will obliterate their names from that place"*:

"In the Land of Israel you are commanded to pursue idolatry until it is totally eradicated[, but not outside the Land.]")Sifri; see Maimonides, *Laws of Idolatry* 7:2(

Idolatry is clearly the antithesis of Judaism's message of monotheism. The imperative to fight idolatry should not be limited to a particular location. So why does the Torah confine the eradication of idolatry to the Land of Israel?

Opposing Worldviews

The conflict between monotheism and idolatry is a contest between two fundamentally opposing worldviews. Idolatry sees the world as divided and fragmented, a place where competing gods/forces of nature clash and struggle with one another. In this bleak worldview, the material outweighs the spiritual, and life is reduced to the pursuit of physical wants.

Monotheism, on the other hand, teaches that the world has an underlying unity. As one's sense of the universe's inner harmony deepens, one's longing for the spiritual grows stronger. Higher aspirations take on greater significance; the world advances and is progressively enlightened.

The Land of Israel and Monotheism

The Sages wrote that "*The air of the Land of Israel makes one wise*")*Baba Batra* 158b(. Eretz Yisrael is bound to the spiritual life of Israel, the Torah; and the essence of the Torah's wisdom is the inner truth of a united reality. The special atmosphere of the Land of Israel instills greater awareness of the world's unified foundation. For this reason, obliteration of idolatry is especially important in the Land of Israel.

Outside the Land of Israel, the harmonious vision of a unified world cannot be fully revealed. There, a fragmented worldview reigns, emphasizing division and isolation. A grim sense of existential estrangement pervades all aspects of life. Any attempt to reveal the hidden unity of the world is hindered by the "*impurity of the lands of the nations*." The lands outside of Israel suffer from the foul odor of idolatry. The Sages wrote that Jews living outside the Land are "*idol-worshippers in purity*")*Avodah Zarah* 8a(. In other words, they are unintentionally influenced by the cultural environment of the foreign countries in which they live.

This distinction is also manifest in the difference between the Torah of Eretz Yisrael and the Torah of the exile. The Torah outside the Land excels in detailed arguments and the fine dialectics of pilpul. Its qualities reflect the general sense of divisiveness felt there.¹ The Torah of the Land of Israel, on the other hand, is illuminated by a lofty wisdom that connects the details to their governing moral principles. "*There is no Torah like the Torah of the Land of Israel*")*Breishit Rabbah* 16:7(.

Only by residing in the Land of Israel can one be truly free from the influence of idolatry. The Torah explicitly links living in the Land and monotheistic faith:

"I took you out from the Land of Egypt in order to give you the Land of Canaan, to be your God"
)*Lev. 25:38*(.

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Orot HaKodesh* vol. II, pp. 423-424.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/REEH_64.htm

Reeh: Defining Reality (5474, 5781)

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

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

the book of Deuteronomy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is nothing puritanical about this vision. **Two of the key words of Deuteronomy are love and joy.** [emphasis added] The word "love" (the root a-h-v) appears twice in Exodus, twice in Leviticus, not all in Numbers, but 23 times in Deuteronomy. The word "joy" (with the root s-m-ch) appears only once in Genesis, once in Exodus, once in Leviticus, once in Numbers but twelve times in Deuteronomy. Moses does not hide the fact, though, that life under the covenant will

be demanding. Neither love nor joy come on a social scale without codes of self-restraint and commitment to the common good.

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

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

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

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

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

Viktor Frankl used to emphasise that our lives are determined not by what happens to us but by how we respond to what happens to us – and how we respond depends on how we interpret events. Is this disaster the end of my world or is it life calling on me to exercise heroic strength so that I can survive and help others to survive? The same circumstances may be interpreted differently by two people, leading one to despair, the other to heroic endurance. The facts may be the same but

the meanings are diametrically different. How we interpret the world affects how we respond to the world, and it is our responses that shape our lives, individually and collectively. That is why, in the famous words of Max De Pree, "*The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality.*"³

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

No one did this more powerfully than Moses in the way he monumentally framed the choice: between good and bad, life

and death, the blessing and the curse, following God on the one hand, or choosing the values of neighbouring civilisations on the other. That clarity is why the Hittites, Canaanites, Perizzites and Jebusites are no more, while the people of Israel still lives, despite an unparalleled history of circumstantial change.

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

* 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.

FOOTNOTES:

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

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

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

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

]1[Why did Moses decide to give the people the “big picture” of Judaism at this point in their journey?

]2[What is the “big picture” of Judaism according to Rabbi Sacks?

]3[How does Moses’ ability to define reality for the people show us that he was a great leader?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/reeh/defining-reality/>

Choosing the Right Path: Life Lessons From the Parshah - Re’eh

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l * © Chabad 2024

Blessings and Curses

*“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.”*¹

With these words, the Torah portion of Re’eh opens. Moses is still addressing the Children of Israel as they are gathered east of the Jordan River, poised to enter the Holy Land.

Moses continues:

*The blessing, that you will heed the commandments of the L-rd your G d, which I command you today; and the curse, if you will not heed the commandments of the L-rd your G d, but turn away from the way I command you this day, to follow other gods, which you did not know.*²

Moses informs the Jewish People that they can receive either tremendous blessings if they adhere to G d’s commandments or curses if they do not.

What exactly is the “turning away” that leads to “following other gods”?

How can it be that a Jew would not only sin, but go so far as to deny the entire Torah? It begins with a tiny misstep, a slight veering from the right path.

Imagine a person walking through a dense forest. He turns off the path for whatever reason, intending to return. If he strays only briefly and doesn't wander too far, he will likely find his way back. But if he continues walking for a while after taking that slight turn, he will be very far from where he meant to go and will likely struggle to find his way back to the original path.

This is how a Jew can go from observing all the mitzvahs to, G d forbid, waking up one morning and finding himself serving idols. It all begins with one small step off of the straight and narrow.

Accelerated Journeys

My father, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, explained this idea with a contemporary application:

Once upon a time, this transition away from mitzvah observance was a slow process. A person might stop attending one Torah class, compromise on one Torah law, or make one small change in the interpretation of a Torah teaching, believing that he had only taken one small step off the path. The result of that one misstep, though it may take several generations, could be grandchildren or great-grandchildren who are assimilated, G d forbid.

Why did it take so long? Because he was walking, leisurely strolling along a forest trail. But what if he had a horse and was galloping down a road? Or a car, speeding along a highway? With a faster mode of transportation, even a slight deviation from the path can quickly lead a person far away. Today, with the advances in technology that have become a part of our lives, we can very quickly cover a lot of distance and, in a short time, turn around and find that we are lost.

However, the same is true in reverse: when a person is on the road to return but is walking, then the road home is a long one. But with today's speedy technology, he can return very quickly.

Of Rebbes and Horses

One of the disciples of the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Rebbe of Chabad, had a son who abandoned Judaism. Among other things, the young man became passionate about horses and horse riding.

When the disciple asked the Rebbe what he could do to bring his son back to the ways of Torah, he was instructed to bring his son along on his next visit.

The young man, however, was not interested.

Eventually, he agreed to see the Rebbe, but only if he could go on horseback and remain on his horse throughout the visit.

When they arrived, the Rebbe inquired of the young man, *"Tell me, which is better, a slow horse or a fast horse?"*

"Rebbe," the young man exclaimed, *"obviously, a fast horse is better!"*

"And why is a fast horse so much better than a slow one?" the Rebbe asked.

The young man patiently explained that a fast horse can take you from place to place with such speed that you reach your destination much faster.

"I hear you," said the Rebbe, *"but what if the fast horse is going in the wrong direction? Then the speed is a disadvantage because you end up much further in the wrong direction than you would on a slow horse."*

“That’s true,” the young man admitted. “But as soon as you realize you’re going the wrong way, you can turn around and go back in the right direction much faster.”

The Rebbe looked directly at the young man and replied, *“Yes, as soon as you realize it’s the wrong direction. Just as soon as you realize.”*

The young man internalized the Rebbe’s words, and, ultimately, on his fast horse, he came back.

Idol Worship 2.0

Our Sages saw that the allure of pagan idol worship during the times of the First Holy Temple was so powerful that no one could resist it. It was, in fact, why that Temple was destroyed. Today, it is difficult to understand why idol worship was so appealing to our ancestors.

What led to the disappearance of this overwhelming desire for idolatry? The Talmud³ relates that the Sages — reasoning that the risk of idol worship outweighed the benefit of avoiding it — requested that G d remove the temptation from the world, and G d agreed.

What do we have today in its place? The phenomenon of money worship — the overwhelming desire for *“success.”*

Like the guy who said, *“My wife and I got divorced for religious reasons: she worships money, and I don’t have any!”*

Today, the quest for wealth can lead us to stray from the path of Torah, with an insatiable desire for more and more becoming an obstacle to serving G d.

In truth, our money is one of the three main elements with which we are meant to love and serve G d. In Va’etchanan, the portion we read a few weeks back, Moses instructed the Jewish people in what later became a part of the pivotal Shema prayer(, *“And you shall love the L-rd, your G d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might.”*⁴

Serving G d with *“all your might”* means serving G d with all your means. A person invests maximum effort and energy — indeed, all their might — into plotting and planning, working and sweating, to make a living. Thus, money is a very dear and necessary possession. There is nothing greater than taking that hard-earned money and using it to serve G d.

Give and Get

Much of the portion of Re’eh is devoted to detailing how we serve G d with our money, particularly through charity and tithing.

The mitzvah of tithing — setting aside ten percent of one’s profits for charity — followed the seven-year agricultural cycle of the Sabbatical years. With the seventh year being a year of rest, each cycle had six years of earning. In years 1, 2, 4, and 5, ten percent of every farmer’s produce had to be brought to Jerusalem and eaten there, and in years 3 and 6, ten percent of the yield had to be given to the poor. And in all years, ten percent was given to the Levite, and a portion was given to the Kohen, the priest.

While the obligation to tithe does not apply to produce grown outside the Land of Israel, the practice of tithing still applies to monetary profits.

Tithe, says G d. Give charity. Giving is the best way to get.

G d says, *“Aser ti’aser”* – *“You shall surely tithe all the seed crop that the field gives forth.”*⁵ Since the root word aser, which means *“tithe,”* can be read as asher, *“rich,”* the Sages interpret *“Aser ti’asher”* to mean, *“Tithe in order to become rich.”* Give charity so that you will be wealthy! And while we are not meant to do mitzvahs for the sake of reward, when it comes to charity, G d tells us to do just that.

*“Test me on this!” says G d.*⁶

Give charity with the express intention of becoming wealthy. G d will fulfill His promise.

Paid On Commission

Hearing that we must give at least ten percent of our earnings to charity might seem burdensome. Of course, charity is admirable, and we are happy to give. But to give away ten dollars of every hundred we make? That might feel like too much.

A certain rabbi was once addressing a gathering of salespeople, aiming to motivate them to give charity. *“Everyone in this room gets paid on commission,”* he began. *“What’s your commission rate?”*

The salespeople responded with rates of 25%, 40%, and 50%. One was even getting 60%.

“G d offers the best commission rate ever,” exclaimed the rabbi. *“He gives us 90% commission. All He wants for the company is 10%!”*

The Unwitting Levite

The Midrash⁷ tells the story of a wealthy man who owned a field that reliably produced a thousand tons of produce each year. In accordance with the Torah’s commandment to tithe, he would set aside 100 tons annually. As he lay on his deathbed, he summoned his son and gave him these final instructions: *“My son, this field which I am leaving to you produces a thousand tons every year. Be sure to continue tithing 100 tons, just as I have throughout my life.”* Shortly after giving this advice, he passed away.

After his father’s death, the son inherited the field, which indeed produced the expected 1,000 tons in the first year. Faithfully, he set aside the 100 tons for tithing. However, in the second year, his accountant began pestering him. *“This is too much to give away,”* he advised. *“Maybe you should reduce it a little.”*

The son decided not to tithe that year. To his surprise and disappointment, the following year, the field produced only 100 tons — just ten percent of its usual yield. He had thought he was saving money, but instead, he discovered that withholding the tithe had led to a significant loss.

The dejected son came to the synagogue, and to his surprise, the rabbi prepared a kiddush in his honor. *“Rabbi!”* he exclaimed, *“My family is in financial ruin, and you’re making a kiddush?! Are you mocking us?”*

“G d forbid,” replied the rabbi. *“We’re celebrating. You used to be a very wealthy man — now you have become a Levite! You used to keep ninety percent and give ten percent to the Levite; now G d is keeping the ninety percent, and you’re getting ten.”*

We have a choice: we can either give 10% and keep 90%, or vice versa. The choice is ours.

“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse.”

Let’s choose the right path. And may the merit of our mitzvahs — especially our charity — hasten the arrival of our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days. Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy 11:26.

2. Deuteronomy 11:27-28.
3. Yoma 69b.
4. Deuteronomy 6:5.
5. Deuteronomy 14:22.
6. Malachi 3:10.
7. Sifri quoted by Tosafot on Taanit 9a.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6557160/jewish/Choosing-the-Right-Path.htm

Reeh: Infinite Power

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Infinite Power

Safeguard all these words that I am commanding you, and hearken, that it may benefit you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and proper in the eyes of G-d, your G-d.)Deut. 12:28(

G-d asks of us only what He gives us the power to do, and crowns our sincere efforts with success.

Thus, all the commandments in the Torah can be seen as empowerments and promises. The very fact that G-d has commanded us to do what He asks of us means that He has already given us the power to do it.

In other words, doing "*what is good in the eyes of G-d*" and what is "*proper in the eyes of humanity*" is not only possible; G-d promises us that – if we study the Torah devotedly and follow its directives – we will succeed. We will become sources of illumination and inspiration to the world around us, guiding them to lead lives of goodness and devotion to G-d.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3 *

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on parshat Ma'sei, selected from our *Daily Wisdom*, by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

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Likutei Divrei Torah

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With Love from their Children and Grandchildren

Volume 30, Issue 46

Shabbat Parashat Reeh

5784 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Deep Power of Joy

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

By Rene and Rami Isser
in Loving Memory of Rene's Mother,
Devorah bat Chaim Eliyahua, a"h,
on the occasion of her 14th Yahrzeit,
(24th Of Av)

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;

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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: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Can Bad Things Happen to Good People?
"Behold [see], I present before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, when you internalize [heed] the commandments of the Lord your God.... And the curse, if you do not internalize [heed] the commandments of the Lord your God." (Deuteronomy 11:26-28)

Two problems face us as we read these verses, one textual and the other existential. The textual issue is based on the lack of parallelism: "the blessing, when (asher) you internalize, the curse if (im) you do not internalize." We would expect to find parallel consistency, either "when...when" or "if you do...if you do not" in both instances.

The existential issue hits us hard, especially in Israel during these fateful but difficult times. Our cemeteries are filled with children who have been buried by their parents, either soldiers in the line of battle or innocent victims at home, at school, at a bus stop, who were targeted by inhumane suicide bombers. Many if not most of these were our best, our brightest, and our most deserving of reward in accordance with the opening verses of our Torah portion. How then can we possibly explain the many instances of suffering and pain on the part of so many virtuous souls who certainly internalized the commandments of God?

I believe that the precise biblical language reveals a profound truth about Torah commandments and human affairs. After all, the Torah iterates and reiterates that the Almighty gave us His laws "for your good"; proper ethical conduct ensures a well-ordered social structure devoid of aggression and violence. The Sabbaths, festivals, and laws of ritual purity provide for a stable and inter-generational familial nucleus, united by meaningful occasions of joy, study, and song. Hence an immediate blessing always comes together with, and precisely when, we perform the commandment: "the reward for a commandment is the very fulfillment of the commandment" – built-in!

In the instance of transgressions, there is also a built-in punishment; evil bears bitter fruit, the sinner is eventually discovered, unfaithfulness and deception destroy relationships and undermine families. However, unlike the blessing, the "built-in" curse is often not experienced until later on, sometimes not until the last years of the life of the transgressor. Hence the adverb used by the Torah is not when – which connotes immediacy – but is rather "if you do not internalize the commandments," then the curse will come, but not necessarily right away.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Although this is the ultimate truth regarding the immediate reward of the mitzva and the eventual punishment of the transgression, the accompanying emotion when doing the one or the other may be quite different, even opposite.

The great Hasidic sage known as the Shpolle Zeide explained that the most fundamental lesson of all is the ability to distinguish between good deed and transgression, to overcome the evil impulse by embracing the former and distancing oneself from the latter. He tells how, as a child, he would go to a shvitz (a steam bath – the much larger and more vigorous European version of our contemporary sauna) with his father, who would pour out a small bucket of freezing water upon him just as he would begin to perspire profusely. "Ooh!" he would inadvertently scream as the cold water contacted his burning-hot flesh; but – after cooling down a bit – he would exclaim happily, "Aah!" (I myself had the exact same experience as a child attending the Tenth Street Baths on the Lower East Side every Thursday evening with my father and grandfather; may their souls rest in peace.)

"Remember, my child, the lesson of the 'ooh' and 'aah,'" the Shpolle would hear from his father. Before (and often even during) the commission of a transgression, you have physical enjoyment "–aah." But afterwards, when you ponder your sin and suffer its consequences "–ooh!" In the case of a mitzva, however, you might cry "ooh" when you have to get up early for prayers or for a lesson of Daf Yomi, but in reflection of your religious accomplishment, you will always exclaim "aah" afterwards. Make sure you conclude your life with an "aah" and not with an "ooh!"

The underlying assumption of this interpretation is that aside from the natural cause and effect of our actions, the Almighty does not extrinsically reward the righteous or punish the sinner in this world; one does not have the right to expect that if one is an honest businessman, one will be guaranteed great profits, or that if one observes the Sabbath, one will live a long and healthy life. This world, according to many of our Talmudic sages, is a world of freedom of choice for every individual. If the righteous would consistently be rewarded with long life, good health, and a large bank account, and the sinners would die at an early age in poverty, choosing to follow the commandments would be a no-brainer. Free choice precludes extrinsic rewards; free choice also means that an individual can even choose to do something which the Almighty does not desire. This world is largely a result of human action and natural happenstance: "There is no [extrinsic] reward for the commandments in this world" (Kiddushin 39b).

Indeed, the only guarantee that the Almighty makes is the eternity of the Jewish people: Israel will never be destroyed. We are assured of our return to our ancestral homeland no matter how long or arduous the exile, and the eventual perfection of human society. As far as everything else is concerned, “not on individual merit does the length of one’s life, the number and quality of one’s children, and the extent of one’s sustenance depend, but rather on luck (mazel) do these things depend” (Moed Katan 28a).

We also believe in the reality of the human soul, the “portion of God from on high,” which resides within every one of us created in the divine image. Just as God is indestructible, so is the soul indestructible, the physical dimension of our beings may pass away at the end of our lifetimes, but the soul – our spirit essence which emanates from the Divine – lives eternally. To the extent that we develop our spiritual selves in our lifetimes – in deed and in thought – we prepare for ourselves a continued eternal life in the dimension of the divine.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

You Are Children to Hashem Your G-d

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.” (Devarim 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 Yeshivish 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.”

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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?

Likutei Divrei Torah

‘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 yeirah 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.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Why is Jerusalem Chosen?

Sara and Rabbi Mark Fishman

In Parshat Re’eh we are told that three times a year the Jewish People are to come to the “place that He [God] will choose”. We are taught that the people are to offer their sacrifices and celebrate “before Hashem” (Devarim 16:16). Ask any school child which ‘place’ is being referred to and they will easily tell you that the verse refers to the city of Jerusalem. Yet upon further inspection it is not at all clear that this location is so easily identified.

Further, assuming that the verse is speaking about Jerusalem, why does the Torah not spell this out explicitly? In other words, why does the Torah not mention the future capital? Indeed, Jerusalem is not mentioned once anywhere in the Torah. This leads one to wonder: Why in fact was Jerusalem chosen as the capital in the first place?

A number of theories are put forward by the classic commentators. Perhaps Jerusalem was chosen as the capital due to topographical considerations. The larger city of Jerusalem is built on two hills, the lower and the upper. This gave the city a natural protection on the one hand, and due to the proximity of the Gichon Spring, access to the city's water needs.

The Rambam proffers a novel interpretation in his Guide for the Perplexed (Book 3; Ch. 45). He suggests that had the nations of world known the special status Jerusalem would be elevated to they would battle violently to control it, or alternatively, he suggests that they would have completely destroyed it, thus preventing others from having it.

In an opposite approach, Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz in his famed *Kli Yakar* (published 1602) writes that Hashem deliberately keeps the choice of Jerusalem a secret lest the Jewish people would come to belittle the previous locations of where the Mishkan temporarily settled. The cities of Gilgal, Shiloh, Nov and Givon are all elevated today by their mere association with the Mishkan. Had Jerusalem been given its pride of place at the outset, these cities would have been considered insignificant.

The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser, d.1879) writes that Jerusalem was chosen as the capital for purely political considerations. In an effort to unite the tribes into one consolidated and unified nation, in particular Yehuda and Binyamin, King David needed to choose a neutral territory[1]. Jerusalem did not belong to any particular tribe and as such could belong to all of them.

The above three approaches all seem to give practical and pragmatic reasons for Jerusalem's chosen status. Yet did it not already gain status in the eyes of the nation due to its importance in the era of the Avot? Perhaps not! The Avot set up multiple altars in a variety of locations including Shechem (Bereishit 12:6 and 33:18), Beit El (Bereishit 28 and 35:1), Hevron (Bereishit 13:18) and Beer Sheva (Bereishit 21:33). These locations are seemingly the spiritual centres of the land in the period of the Avot. True, the Binding of Yitzhak will take place in Jerusalem, yet the Torah never spells this out explicitly. In a nod to the general geographic location we are told about: "one of the mountains", in the "land of Moryiah[2]".

The reasons for Jerusalem to be chosen as the capital are thus varied. However, the considerations of the above commentators hint that each reason is not necessarily mutually exclusive but rather complimentary. Be it political, topographical or to avoid scorn (either the gentile nations or the tribes towards the earlier locations of the Mishkan). What we are left with is the understanding the Jerusalem can serve as a place of unity. A location of great natural gifts and a city of strength. No wonder that King David will write of this place: Jerusalem is a city built up and united together (Tehillim 122:3). May we continue to marvel at our incredible capital and as the verse concludes: "May we give thanks to the name of God" (ibid. 4).

[1] However, see the Talmud Bavli, Yoma 12a and Avot DeRebbi Natan, Ch. 35 for additional opinions as to whether Jerusalem was divided equally among all of the tribes, whether it was split between Binyamin and Yehuda only, or perhaps was owned by no one. For a fuller treatment see Yisrael Ta-Shma's article: מעמד ירושלים בחלוקת הארץ.

[2] It is only due to a verse in Divrei HaYamim II 3:1 which locates the site as being where David sacrificed on the threshing floor of Aravnah the Jebusite, that we know the location of the akeida took place in Jerusalem at all.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky: The Right in Our Eyes; The Right in Hashem's Eyes

This week's parsha describes one of the most important changes in halachah that takes effect in Eretz Yisroel when the Beis Hamikdash will be built. It is the prohibition against sacrificing animals in any place other than the Beis Hamikdash. The Torah describes the prohibition against these sacrifices in a very peculiar way, saying (Devarim 12:8), "you shall not do there as we all do here today, each person doing that which is right [yashar] in his own eyes." Usually, the phrase "right in his eyes" is somewhat derogatory. In Tanach (Shoftim 17:6 and other places) it denotes lawlessness and anarchy. But here it refers to something which is a mitzvah in its time and in its place; it is not at all negative.

The gemara explains that 'right in his eyes' refers to a certain type of sacrifice. Before there Beis Hamikdash was built, people were indeed allowed to sacrifice on makeshift altars (bamah), and performed a mitzvah thereby, but could only do so with regards to sacrifices that were voluntary, not obligatory. Thus, the type of sacrifices that a person would offer when he sinned, and the like, could not be brought in this makeshift altar. It is only when they came to the Land of Israel, and built the Beis Hamikdash, that they could they now bring those sacrifices that are obligatory, such as a sin offering, etc.

The characterization of this period of time is therefore, "each person as he sees fit" versus a

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period of time when one could bring other sacrifices as well. It's very hard to understand that this should be a core definition of Klal Yisroel before the Beis Hamikdash was built, versus the state of Klal Yisroel after the Beis Hamikdash was built. To us it seems to be a mere technical detail in the specifics of the laws of sacrificial offerings.

Let us consider people's relationship with Hashem and the truths of Torah. When a person begins his journey to finding Hashem and truth, the initiative is always one's own. The paradigm of this is Avraham Avinu, who came from nowhere and on his very own came to the realization of Hashem and the truth of His Torah. It is described in seforim as "chessed" which in a very specific sense means "kindness" but in the bigger sweep of things, chessed's main emphasis is on its voluntary nature; it is motivated by one's own personal aspiration and not by any obligation. Thus, every type of spiritual undertaking must start with that type of self-motivation. When asked, "why are you doing such and such?" the answer is, "because I have found this to be true; I have come to the realization that this is right." However, when a person has already, in fact, discovered Hashem and firmly established the emess of Hashem, an important change comes into his perception of things. Hashem is now a given, an established entity, and is no longer dependent on the person's recognition thereof.

Let's draw an analogy to this. Imagine a scientist is probing the reason for a certain physical phenomenon. He has a hunch and devises various experiments to prove the veracity of that hunch. At this point it's his theory and idea. But if, after testing and observing and recording, it is found to be in fact true, it is then understood to be a fact in its own merit. It is no longer the scientist's idea, but rather a fact, with the scientist merely getting the credit for making us aware of this fact.

The same is true concerning a person's own search for the Divine and His truth. Similarly, it is true about Klal Yisroel's search for, and eventual establishment of, the Divine truth. The era of Klal Yisroel in the desert was their era of search, of wandering. There was a lack of "permanence" to their religious recognition, for Hashem travelled with them wherever they went. Coming into the Land of Israel, however, meant that this personal type of experience and search would now become a given rock-solid point of reference. This is what the Beis Hamikdash is; it is described (Devarim 12:9) as, "the inheritance and tranquility". It means that at this point we are enabled to worship Hashem not only through personal recognition, but through acknowledgement and obligation. We can now

offer those sacrifices that stem from obligation, rather than voluntary donation.

In some ways this runs counter to our sense of things. We tend to feel that doing things voluntarily, out of personal recognition and offer, is the ultimate in Divine service. It certainly adds a lot to one's deeds when they are inspired, as well. But the ultimate recognition of Hashem lies in this statement that, "whether I feel like it or not, it is emess, and like it or not, I'm obligated". One donates willingly to a cause of one's own; but unwillingly paying taxes is the recognition of someone's sovereignty over me.

This, then, is what the psukim are telling us. At first it says (ibid), "do not do there (i.e. in the Land of Israel) as we are doing today; each person [bringing the sacrifices] that are right in his eyes." Once they come into the Land of Israel and build the Beis Hamikdash, the possuk says (Devarim 12:28), "listen to all of the things that I'm commanding you... to do the good and the righteous in the eyes of Hashem." From this point onwards, what establishes the good and the right is not our personal sense of it, but rather Hashem's.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

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

When Moshe uttered these words to the Jewish People nearing the end of their 40-year period of wandering in the desert there was a visual aid there to point to. In that context, with Har Eivel and Har Grizim on display, the command "SEE" makes plenty of sense. The Torah is also contemporaneous and is speaking to us now, especially since we are being told "SEE I place before you TODAY".

"Today" can be the historical "today" from back then or "today" of now! So, how are we meant to understand this mandate "SEE"? See what? Where? There are endless answers and approaches to this question but let us try one on for size.

It's been 3,335 years since we stood as a nation by Mount Sinai and we heard the Almighty announce, "ANOCHI HASHEM Elokecha... I am HASHEM you G-d Who took you out of the Land of Egypt...". The verse testifies about that experience, "And the entire nation saw the

sounds...". We were able to see what could normally only be heard. It was that real!

According to the Ohr HaChaim we are called upon TODAY to SEE that ANOCHI of; "ANOCHI HASHEM Elokecha..." that HASHEM is placing blessing before us TODAY! How so?

It is a curious observation that the Nefesh HaChaim makes that almost all the blessings we make in the course of a day are said in the present tense! When readying to eat an apple, for example, we declare, "Boreh Pri HaEitz". "Boreh" implies that it is being created Yeish M'Ayin—Something from Nothing now! This is completely consistent with another statement we recite twice each day in Davening, "HaMechadesh B'Chol Yom Tamid Maaseh Breishis" – "That HASHEM renews with his kindness all day constantly the act of creation!".

We are meant to recognize that this is not an old apple at all. It is being created and reaffirmed anew by the explicit will of HASHEM at each moment. Old is an illusion! New is reality! Just like the picture on your screen saver, if the program would be punched out or the power removed the screen would go blank, so too if HASHEM was not willing the world to be exactly as it is now it would revert to TOHU V'VOHU. That picture is not a still life, a cut flower. It is very much alive! So too that apple is being delivered now and is as truly fresh as can be!

The Talmud tells us that anyone who says Tehillim 145 three times a day is guaranteed to be a citizen of the Next World. WOW! That is ASHREI Yoshvei... three times daily. The Talmud clarifies that ASHREI is selected because of one particular verse, "Posayach es Yadecha U'Msbia L'Chol Chai Ratson" – "You open your hand and satisfy the desire of all living things". We thinking creatures are meant to install over a lifetime, by reciting this consistently, a consciousness and a true imagination that it is HASHEM Who is extending His generous hand and feeding us this apple. It is not an apple that comes generically from a store or a tree or the ground but from HASHEM directly and for us personally!

It is because we know too much or even a little that we may tend to forget this. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. I ask my grandkids on SHABBOS "hard-hard questions" and for that they get sweet-sweet treats. They almost always get the answers right. Here is a sample or two: Q: Who made the sky? A: HASHEM! Q: Who made the trees? A: HASHEM! Then I will ask, "Is HASHEM the answer to all questions?" They shout emphatically, "YES!" It's cute and deep and so true. One time I asked after a series of

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"Who made this and Who made that...", "Who made water?" and 5-year-old Mordy said, "You turn the thing!" We chuckled. He figured out the mechanism for getting water and that stood as a mental barrier to seeing the real source. The Baal Shem Tov said on the verse, "ANOCHI Omed Bein HASHEM U'Beincha" ... (Devarim 5:5) It's the "I", the inflated ego that blocks us from HASHEM. Once that mini-"anochi" is whittled then we begin to SEE ACHOCHI HASHEM giving us daily blessings!

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash Equality and the Temple By Rav Alex Israel

Our Parsha this week focuses on 2 themes. The 1st theme is the centralized worship of God. The Torah goes to great lengths to ban multiple worship sites & worship of other gods. The Jewish alternative to the Pagan temples & altars "on mountains & hills & under every fertile tree" is "the site that the Lord your God will choose amidst all your tribes as His habitation, to establish His name there" (12 :5). There is to be only 1 place of worship, 1 sacrificial altar, & this is to be situated in a yet undesignated place - the site which God will choose. With the hindsight of history, we know this place to be the Temple Mount in Jerusalem [see II Sam . 24 :15-24].

The second theme is a theme of social justice and cohesion. This is expressed through the laws of charity which are mentioned in the Parsha, the benevolent treatment and freeing of a slave, the remission of debts in the Sabbatical Year (see ch . 15). There are passages in which the 2 themes - the Temple as the sole place of sacrifice and worship, and the concern for the status of the poorer classes in society - come together. One example would be the 3 Pilgrim Festivals which are described towards the end of our Parsha (ch .16) Here, we read (16 :14-15) : You shall rejoice in your festival with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow in your communities. You shall hold festival for the Lord your God 7 days in the place that the Lord will choose ...

The Torah paints here an image of social cohesion with the Temple at the epicenter. During a festival, the possibility exists that those on the fringes of society and those who have no independent means of living might be excluded from the celebrations, for financial reasons or for social reasons. The Torah deliberately stresses that at the Temple all people celebrate together. The Torah is proposing here a certain equality, an attempt at unity despite economic and societal differences. The place where this can happen is at "the place that the Lord will choose." Before God, all are equal. But how exactly does this work? Why would the downtrodden person feel included in the festive Jerusalem environment? What is it that the Temple

manages to create that might generate this mass rejoicing of the entire nation together?

MA'ASER SHENI I believe that some of the answer is provided by the law of Ma'aser Sheni - the Second Tithe - which can also be found in our Parsha. Let us read the verses together and we will then engage in a deeper analysis (14 :22-26): You shall set aside every year a tenth part of all your grain produce that your field yields. You shall consume the tithes of your new grain & wine & oil & the firstlings of your herds & flocks in the presence of the Lord your God, in the place where He will choose to establish His name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God forever. Should the distance be too great for you, should you be unable to transport them ... you may convert them into money. Wrap up the money and take it with you to the place that the Lord your God has chosen and spend the money on anything you want - cattle, sheep, wine, or other intoxicant or anything you may desire. And you shall feast there, in the presence of the Lord your God, and rejoice with your household.

What does this text tell us? It instructs the Jewish farmer to set aside a tenth of his agricultural produce. This tenth must be brought to "the place which God chooses," i.e. the Temple, where the food will be eaten. For those who live so distant that the food will spoil on the journey, they may sell the food, taking the monetary value to spend on food and drink in the chosen city. What is the value of all this? What difference does it make if one eats produce at home or in Jerusalem? The food is not holier! Why do it? Let us add that a tenth of a year's harvest is an enormous amount of food. Can a single family eat all this food? What is the reason to transport that volume of food to the capital city? Another point might be to mention that at times, these tithes seem a little like taxes. It is possible that Jewish farmers resented them just like many people resent taxes. Is that what they were? But then, this tax is consumed by the owner! It does not go to the Treasury or something. We will attempt to delve into this simple law and to illustrate the way in which law might have made a marked impact upon the social and religious substance of the nation.

SOCIAL IMPACT - Maimonides gives the following rationale for this law (Guide to the Perplexed 3:39): God commanded that The Second Tithe be spent only on food products, and consumption was restricted to Jerusalem. This ensures a culture of generosity and kindness (in the city). The money must be spent on food, and the sums build up throughout the year. Eventually the money will be used to finance some sort of gathering in order to strengthen love and bonds of brotherhood between people.

The benefits of the festivals ... the second tithe money were used for expenses ... as well as the first born animals ... there will be an enormous amount of food ... and a person will

naturally donate to the needy. The verse has already stressed the notion of charity at festival times when it states : "You shall rejoice in your festival with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow in your communities ... " (16 :14) . Maimonides informs us of the effect this law has in the social realm. With so much food to consume in Jerusalem, what was a family to do? They would save the money of the second tithe which had collected during the course of the year & would spend it in Jerusalem on their festival expenses . However even the most luxurious restaurants in Jerusalem will not use up the vast sums (10 % of everything) which had accumulated. Hence, people would simply make handouts to the poor. The markets of Jerusalem were full of the best food & everybody was only too delighted to provide generously for the poor. After all the money had to be spent, & only in Jerusalem . Likewise, a person who had a wedding, a bar mitzva, a party for whatever reason might decide to have it in Jerusalem .

Why? Because the entire cost of the caterer can be paid for by Ma 'aser Sheni money! So Jerusalem became a place of "gathering ." So let us summarize. Ma'aser Sheni on a basic level acts to attract Jews to Jerusalem for the Pilgrim Festivals and to enjoy the festival fully - expenses paid! But over and above this, it encourages everybody in Jerusalem to share their food, to provide for any and everyone else. And further still, Jerusalem becomes a place of family gatherings and celebrations. Now maybe we understand how Jerusalem became such a welcoming place for "outsiders." On the festivals, it was simply a place of giving, everybody happy to give freely without a second thought. It was a place where all could feel comfortable. **SPIRITUAL REASONS.** The passage in our Parsha talks about the second tithe as being aimed at a purpose: "so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God forever." How does this law ensure this spiritual goal? Here are comments by 2 mediaeval commentators: **SO THAT YOU MAY LEARN TO REVERE THE LORD** : When you witness that place of God's immanent presence (shekhina), the priests going about the Temple service, the Levites at their posts, and Israel gathering (to pray and study) . (Rashbam) **SO THAT YOU MAY LEARN TO REVERE THE LORD** : Because in that chosen place of the Temple there will also be the Supreme Court of law who research and legislate (lit. teach) . (Sephorno)

The 2 commentators are discussing the precise nature of the spiritual experience in Jerusalem . Rashbam chooses to see the Temple as a source of spiritual inspiration . The magnificent structure itself, its impressive service and the very feeling of God 's close presence. The overall emotional-spiritual experience of the Temple ensured its role as a catalyst for greater closeness with God and deeper personal spirituality. The Sephorno

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however, sees the entire spiritual experience as related to a more intellectual experience. He talks about visiting the Supreme Court, the Beit Din HaGadol. There one would hear the finest scholars in the land analyzing legal intricacies and issuing legal - Halakhic - rulings which would bind all of Israel by their authority. The intellectual process, the Yeshiva experience, is the fundamental factor in the spiritual inspiration of the city.

The Sefer HaChinuch takes this particular point a stage further: God knows that most people are attracted to material things for they are all mortal; they cannot apply themselves to the demanding process of Torah study. Thus God devised a situation whereby there would be a place in which everyone would be aware of God and knowledgeable of His law. Now there is no doubt that a person resides where his money lies. Therefore when a person would bring his tithe ... to the place of Torah observance and study - Jerusalem - where the Sanhedrin (Supreme Court) sat, scholars of immense knowledge and shrewdness ... he will, at the very least spend some time in study of Torah, or alternatively he would send a son to study Torah and would maintain him there with the money of the second tithe. Through this will come a situation whereby every household in Israel will have at least 1 representative who was learned in the words of Torah and able to teach the entire family

The Sefer HaChinuch proceeds to explain the effect of communal members who have a passion for and a knowledge of Torah, and the effect that they can have on a community. But let us summarize the view of the Sefer HaChinuch. He proposes the Second Tithe as a tool for spreading the word of Torah & popularizing Torah study. The large sums of money that were designated for food use in Jerusalem would be ideal for supporting a Torah scholar in Jerusalem, preferably the farmer himself, or his son . Let us not forget that if the Sanhedrin was in Jerusalem, then the 70 most prominent sages were also residents of the city. In that case, Jerusalem was filled with Yeshivot, & the tithe money could support a student easily within those environments. Then, this learned person would be able to influence his home community too. So the Second Tithe functions as an incentive and a facilitator of serious high-level Torah Study. It enables every family to have their own, home grown scholar.

SUMMARY - So, we now realize that a simple law like a tithe of this nature can have effects way beyond our immediate expectation . First we have noted the incredible social impact of the tithe, allowing food to be freely distributed in the city, and a lowering of the societal walls that we have built around ourselves. The second dimension to this tithe - Ma'aser Sheni - is the religious dimension . Whether in the emotional-spiritual realm, or in the intellectual-studious dimensions, the tithe facilitates an entire range of possibilities of

quite a unique nature. But from the perspective of Jerusalem - "the place which God chooses" - we realize how this simple law transforms Jerusalem into a city of joy and brotherhood, of kindness and caring, of markets overflowing with every good thing. It is also a city with an intellectual hub, a spiritual core; and a place of Torah study and spiritual betterment.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez

Tzedakah is NOT Charity

Righteousness vs. Self-Righteousness

Charity is not the accurate translation of the Hebrew word "tzedakah". In fact, there is no single English word which accurately captures what the word means. This is because 'charity' implies a charitable act, one where you choose to give and are not obligated to give. But nothing could be further from the truth as to what "tzedakah" is – it is an obligation, part of Torah law, as we read about in this week's parasha.

So much so, that the Rambam brings two powerful examples of how giving tzedakah is something we are obligated to do. First of all, a person collecting for the community can force someone to give. You can't force someone to do an act of volunteerism; that is charity. Tzedakah is an obligation, it is mandated. Secondly, even a poor person who lives off charity is obligated to give charity! Because it is not only something you can choose to do, but even if you don't have, you have to give.

"Charity," therefore, is not the word; it is probably something closer to "social justice" or "justice in society," where we do acts that contribute in a positive way to the justness, fairness, righteousness of society.

This very dichotomy is in the word "tzedakah" – the word "tzaddik" is a person who is righteous, but it can also mean a person who is right. One the one hand it means right and just, and on the other hand it means a good, righteous act to do. That is what is at the core of justice – the right and just thing to do, but we have to be careful it doesn't become self-righteous. Even if we are right about something and fighting for justice, we have also be aware that part of tzedakah is also about righteousness, something that builds society.

As we in Israel have been embroiled in how to move forward with the right balance in the justice system, may both sides be not only 'right – 'and fighting as they see what justice is – but also act with righteousness – to act in a way that is building society and not in a way which is compromising it.

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August 26, 2024

"Stuck" and "Stranded" in Space By Rabbi Efram Goldberg

They went for eight days but will end up being stuck there for eight months. Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore, two NASA astronauts, traveled to the International Space Station in June on Boeing's Starliner spacecraft. However, during the test flight for their return, the propulsion system malfunctioned, and engineers determined it wasn't safe enough to bring the two astronauts back to Earth alive.

NASA and Boeing officials have been careful with their language describing the circumstances, reluctant to use the words, "stuck" and "stranded," which would reflect poorly on them. Describing their predicament, Suni also avoiding those words, saying, "Butch and I have been up here before, and it feels like coming home. It's great to be up here, so I'm not complaining."

Cynics are challenging the diplomatic description of the "extended stay." Delian Asparouhov, a founder and the president of Varda Space Industries, posted on X: "I don't know about you, but if I got stuck at an airport for seven months longer than expected, that would definitely qualify as 'stranded.'"

Starliner, the spacecraft that brought them, will return to Earth unmanned, and the two astronauts are set to return in February on a SpaceX Crew Dragon spacecraft. The two have plenty of supplies and say they aren't anxious about their extended stay or being stuck. Wilmore's wife Deanna told AP that her husband is "content" at the space station, "neither worrying nor fretting." She said he has faith God is in control, and that this gives his family "great peace."

While it may not be for eight months, many of us feel stranded or stuck in situations or places we find ourselves: a cancelled flight, a hospital stay, an unexpected business trip, a long line, even a traffic jam, and it is hard to just feel that it is an "extended stay." The key is to know and internalize that God is in control and thorough that to find great peace.

In 1967, Mrs. Miriam Swerdlov attended a Chabad-sponsored convention for women and girls in Detroit. After the inspiring event, while waiting to board the plane home, Miriam and about 20 other women learned that the flight was canceled due to a snowstorm. The women were somewhat panicked, feeling their families needed them, they had been gone long enough, and really needed to return home.

The group rushed to a payphone and called the Chabad headquarters in New York to ask the Rebbe what to do. Mrs. Swerdlov recalled how the leader of the group, Mrs. Miriam Popack, spoke with Rabbi Binyomin Klein, the Rebbe's secretary and told him that they were stuck in Detroit. He put them on hold, and a minute later came back on the line: "The Rebbe doesn't understand the word 'stuck,'" he said. Mrs. Popack proceeded to explain what the word stuck meant, to which Rabbi Klein replied, "The Rebbe knows what stuck means. The Rebbe says that a Jew is never stuck."

Caught off guard by the Rebbe's response, the women immediately got the message and rose to the occasion. They spread throughout the airport and began handing out Shabbat candles to the Jewish women they met. The result: "There are women and families today all over the United States lighting Shabbat candles because we got 'stuck' in Detroit." (As told by Mrs. Miryam Swerdlov, Here's My Story (JEM) No. 121)

On Tisha B'av, we had the opportunity to interview Sapir Cohen who was abducted from Nir Oz on October 7 and held by Hamas for 55 days. She described being dragged out from her hiding spot under a bed, placed on a motorcycle between two terrorists, and driven back into Gaza where she was abused by civilians. She talked about her harrowing time being held first aboveground and then in a tunnel where she encountered Sinwar.

Her first few days being held hostage, Sapir described she kept replaying what had happened, second-guessing her decisions. Why had she and her boyfriend gone to his family for the Chag? Why did she hide under that bed instead of in a different spot? After several days of feeling tortured by her captors but also by her own mind, Sapir had a major paradigm shift. She simply said to herself, if this is where I am and I have no choice but to be here, this is where God wants me to be. Now, the question is why? What is my mission.

Sapir described that she was being held with a teenage girl who was struggling and suffering terribly with their condition. From the moment she went from feeling stuck and stranded to being there for a reason, she became determined to help this girl and get her out of there alive. She took the girl under her wing, encouraged her, and took great risks to ensure she had enough food. When they learned they were being taken into the tunnels, the girl panicked. Sapir told her, we are in Gaza and what is Gaza's biggest attraction? The tunnels. We can't be here and not see them for ourselves! With humor and positivity, she turned the girl's attitude from helplessness to hope and from dread to determination. After an "extended stay" of 55 days, Sapir and the young girl were released in the final swap on November 30. Of course, we continue to daven that Sapir's boyfriend Sasha and all the hostages are released and return home.

The Torah describes, "These are the journeys of Bnei Yisroel" and then goes on to immediately list 42 encampments, 42 stops. Which is it, where they journeys or stops? The Rebbe explained (Likkutei Sichos, vol. 23, pp. 227-8):

This is because these encampments were not seen as ends unto themselves but as way-stations and stepping-stones in the larger journey of the Jewish People to attain their goal of entering the Promised Land. Therefore, the stops themselves are referred to as journeys, because they were part of what brought about the ultimate objective.

The same is true of our journey through life. Pauses, interruptions, and setbacks are an inadvertent part of a person's sojourn on earth. But when everything a person does is toward the goal of attaining the "Holy Land"—the sanctification of the material world—these, too, become journeys of their own. Ultimately, these unplanned stops are shown to have been the true

motors of progression, each a catalyst propelling us further toward the realization of our mission and purpose in life.

Like, NASA, though for an entirely different and more meaningful reason, we should be intentional and conscious with our language and like Sapir, purposeful with our attitude and approach.

A Jew is always where they are meant to be. Wherever you are, the goal must be to focus on and figure out why, what is your mission, and how can you make the most of this “journey.”

from: **Ira Zlotowitz** <iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Aug 29, 2024, 7:00 PM

subject: Tidbits for Parashas Re'eh

Klal Gavoah in memory of **Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt"l**

Parashas Re'eh • August 31st • 27 Av 5784

This week is Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Elul. Rosh Chodesh is on Tuesday & Wednesday, September 3rd-4th. The molad is Tuesday afternoon 2:37 PM and 12 chalakim.

Some are particular to observe Yom Kippur Katan particularly for the month of Elul, to inaugurate the month as a month of Teshuvah. Yom Kippur Katan is Monday, September 2nd.

On the second day of Rosh Chodesh, we begin adding LeDavid Hashem Ori at the end of davening. Nusach Ashkenaz adds LeDavid at Maariv and Shacharis, and will begin on Tuesday night during Maariv. Nusach Sefard adds LeDavid at Shacharis and Minchah, and will begin with Shacharis on Wednesday. The Shofar is sounded along with LeDavid at Shacharis on weekdays. LeDavid is added through Shemini Atzeres. Many Sefardim begin saying Selichos on the second day of Chodesh Elul.

The first opportunity for Kiddush Levana is next Motzaei Shabbos, September 7th. The final opportunity is late Tuesday night, September 17th at 2:38 AM EST.

As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael unfortunately continues, each person should increase reciting tehillim and performing other mitzvos as a zechus for the many Acheinu Beis Yisrael in travail and captivity as well as for the soldiers in battle.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 6

Shabbos Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Bava Basra 67 • Yerushalmi: Challah 30 • Mishnah Yomis: Bava Kama 7:4-5 • Oraysa: Next week is Succah 47b-49b.

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rabbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Shabbos Mevorchim Chodesh Elul is this Shabbos, Parashas Re'eh, August 31st.

Rosh Chodesh Elul is on Tuesday & Wednesday, September 3rd-4th.

RE'EH: The blessings for those who keep the mitzvos and the curses for those who reject them • Upon entering the land, you must accept the mitzvos upon yourself at Har Gerizim and Har Eival, and recognize their accompanying reward and punishment • Drive out the nations and destroy their gods • In a designated place [the Beis Hamikdash] you will serve Hashem • Laws of Korbanos • Do not practice idolatry • Keeping kosher • Laws of a Jewish slave • Firstborn animals • Yomim Tovim • See Taryag Weekly for the various mitzvos.

Haftarah: The haftarah (Yeshaya 54:11-55:5) relays the promise that Hashem will one day redeem us from exile. During all the years of exile He will safeguard us from the spiritual and physical oppression brought by other nations.

Parashas Re'eh: 126 Pesukim • 17 Obligations • 38 Prohibitions

1) Destroy avodah zarah. 2) Do not destroy holy items. 3) Fulfill vows for korbanos or bedek habayis on the first chag after the vow is made. 4-5) Bring korbanos to the Beis HaMikdash; do not bring korbanos elsewhere. 6) Blemished korbanos should be redeemed and purchased anew. 7-9) Do not eat Ma'aser Sheini outside of Yerushalayim. 10) Do not eat a Bechor animal outside Yerushalayim. 11) Do not eat Kodashim outside their designated

place. 12) Do not eat from a korban olah. 13) Do not eat meat of a korban before the sprinkling of its blood. 14) Do not eat Bikkurim prior to placing them in the Temple Courtyard. 15) Do not withhold the Levi'im's gifts. 16) Perform Shechitah prior to eating meat. 17) Do not eat Eiver Min Hachai (meat from a living animal). 18) Bring korbanos personally to the Mikdash. 19-20) Do not add or subtract mitzvos from the Torah. 21) Do not listen to a prophet of avodah zarah. 22-26) Do not heed or befriend a meisis (one who influences others to sin); do not absolve your hatred for him; do not save his life or defend him in judgment. 27) Do not missionize for idolatry or become missionized. 28) Review witnesses' testimony. 29-31) Burn down an idolatrous city; do not rebuild it or benefit from its spoils. 32-33) Do not cut yourself or pull out hair in grief. 34) Do not eat disqualified Kodashim. 35) Check birds for signs of kashrus. 36) Do not eat flying insects. 37) Do not eat Neveilah. 38) Separate Ma'aser Sheini. 39) Give Ma'aser Ani. 40,42) Do not collect a debt after shemittah, rather consider it dismissed. 41) Collect debt from a non-Jew promptly. 43-44) Do not withhold charity or kindness from any Jew; give charity generously and graciously. 45) Do not refrain from lending before shemittah. 46-47) Do not send away a servant or maid-servant empty handed; rather, provide them with gifts. 48-49) Do not work with a korban animal or shear its wool. 50) Do not eat chametz after midday on Erev Pesach. 51) Do not leave over meat from the korban Chagigah. 52) Do not sacrifice a korban pesach on a private Bamah. 53) V'samachta B'chagecha. 54-55) Go up for Aliyah L'regel and do not come empty handed.

For the Shabbos Table

"גַּלְכֶּה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא יְדַעְתָּם וְנִשְׁבַּדְתָּ" Let us seek foreign gods whom are foreign to us and serve them (Devarim 13:3)

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein zt"l would explain that this pasuk admonishes an idol worshiper: Aside from the gravity of the sin, a lack of focus and basic “seichel” caused him to overlook the obvious and serve a powerless idol and an entity with no real power. Man's greatness is seen in his ability to override his inclination and desires and act according to his intellect. Any deficiency in this regard is a display of animal-like behavior and a lacking in the greatness of man.

Rav Chatzkel would comment that upon beginning the month of Elul, one must contemplate the absurdity of coming before Hashem on the upcoming holiday of Rosh Hashanah to ask of him for continued blessing without contemplating and making an accounting of his deeds and activities. Only after stopping and thinking what one can offer Hashem is it possible to ask Him for a sweet new year.

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date: Aug 29, 2024, 7:14 AM

subject: Meshech Chochmah on Re'eh

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Re'eh

The Prohibition of Meat and Milk in Times of Exile

לֹא תֹאכְלוּ כֹל בְּבִלְהָא... לֹא תִבְשֹׁל גְּדִי בְחֵלֶב אִמּוֹ

You shall not eat of any carcass... you shall not cook a kid in its mother's milk (14:21)

Our verse contains the Torah's third mentioning of the prohibition of meat and milk together. Interestingly, on the first two occasions, the prohibition is stated within the context of bringing bikurim (first fruits) to the Beis Hamikdash,[1] while this third verse begins with the prohibition against eating a neveilah, i.e. an animal that has not been slaughtered correctly. Commenting on this shift, the Mechilta writes:

One might have thought that [the prohibition of meat and milk] only applies when the Beis Hamikdash exists and people are bringing bikkurim. To this end, the verse states, “Do not eat of a neveilah... do not cook a kid etc.” Just as the prohibition against neveilah applies when there is no Beis Hamikdash, so too, the prohibition against milk and meat.[2]

The Meshech Chochmah is intrigued by this comment of the Mechilta. Why is the message that meat and milk applies even when there is no Beis Hamikdash contained specifically in the third and final verse that deals with the prohibition?

Reverberations from the Sin of the Spies

The Meshech Chochmah explains that in between the first two occasions and the third, something had occurred which had enormous ramifications: the episode of the spies. As a result of the people believing the spies' negative report and crying over their fate, the Gemara states:

That night was the night of the Ninth of Av. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to them: You have cried (on this night) for nothing, I will establish for you (on it) a crying for future generations.

In other words, one of the consequences of that sin was that it was decreed that at some future time, the Beis Hamikdash would be destroyed and the Jewish people would be exiled from their land. This idea is stated explicitly in Tehillim Chap. 106[3] where, relating to that episode, it states:

וַיִּשָּׂא יְדוֹ לָקֵחַ לְהַפִּיל אוֹתָם בְּמִדְבָּר. וַיִּלְחֲפֵל יָרֵעַם בְּגוֹיִם וּלְקִרְוָתָם בְּאַרְצוֹת.

He raised up His hand (in an oath) against them to cast them down in the wilderness, and to cast down their descendants among the nations, and to scatter them among the lands.

This aspect of the punishment for the sin of the spies is not mentioned in the Chumash; possibly because it was not made known to the people at that time. Nevertheless, the notion of the people going into exile had ramifications for how the mitzvos would be presented beyond this point. Specifically, as with milk and meat, if there was room to infer that a mitzvah would not apply in exile, it now became necessary to indicate that it would. At the time the first two verses were written, exile was not an operational worry, and no such message was necessary or relevant. By the time the third verse was written, exile was already "in the air," and related halachic messages needed to be transmitted accordingly.[4]

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subject: Why the Bias Toward Israel? - Essay by Rabbi YY

The Complainer

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

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

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" (حداا), 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, sore, 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 can survey the face of the land beneath, and 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 עיניו, ולא שפנתו עין איה. תנא עומדת בבבל ורואה נבלה בארץ ישראל

Rabbi Abahu said, the Raah bird is the same as the Ayah. Why is this bird 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 learned 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 -- the very Torah name and hence the primary feature of these birds -- 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 us to never stop working

on ourselves, to challenge our conventions, to scrutinize our motives, to refine our behavior, and to make amends for our mistakes. But why is that the only thing you manage to observe?

The "Holy" Preacher

I can't vouch that every detail in the following story is authentic, as I do not know the original source. But the lesson of the story is certainly true. [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, he 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 needed 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 embarrassing transgressions. He admitted that, in truth, he was far from the great tzaddik that he portrayed himself to be. He was actually morally disgraceful.

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 that created catastrophic results.

But there are those who when they look at Israel see nothing but "corpses."

In our 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. You would never guess that they are surrounded by millions of neighbors who would like to see every Jew dead, heaven forbid.

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, engaged in genocide—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>

<https://etzion.org.il/en/holidays/elul/elul-trembling-fish>

Trembling Fish

By Rabbi Moshe Taragin

August 29, 2024

"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?"

-Hillel the Elder

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."

-John Donne

On the day of his death, Moshe Rabbeinu delivered a heartfelt soliloquy. He both relived the highs and lows of the 40-year desert journey, and also warned of the impending dangers of life in Eretz Yisrael. After issuing repeated cautions, Moshe reiterated the entire body of halachot and, for this reason, Sefer Devarim is referred to as "Mishneh Torah," or Moshe's review of the Torah.

Parshat Re'eh marks the transition from Moshe's nostalgic recollections of the past to his review of the registry of mitzvot. Though Moshe addresses the entire nation in his speech, he intentionally uses a singular verb, "re'eh." This choice is significant because it directs the list of mitzvot to each individual personally, rather than to the nation as a collective, underscoring that every individual bears personal religious responsibility. In the ensuing sections, Moshe lists both personal mitzvot which govern individual lifestyles and collective national mitzvot which shape our communal experience. Most of Parshat Re'eh and Parshat Shoftim contain collective laws, whereas the concentrated list of commandments in Parshat Ki Teitzei primarily addresses individual mitzvot.

Human identity is shaped by both personal and communal experiences. Each person carries the dignity of individuality, with a life story uniquely their own. Yet we live within larger frameworks which profoundly shape who we are. We belong to families, societies, nations and historical legacies, each of which contributes to our identity. Although our individual paths may vary, we are all part of a larger whole, where personal and collective identities are deeply connected. Identity and experience are shaped by both our personal distinctiveness and our shared collective existence.

This is even more true regarding religious identity. We stand before Hashem as individuals, each commanded to fulfill His will, to strive to understand Him and to shape ourselves in His image. Yet we are also part of a larger historical collective—the Jewish people—chosen to represent Hashem in this world. Religious success depends on striking the proper balance between our personal religious journey and our national identity.

By and large, life in Israel feels more collective, whereas religious identity outside of Israel tends to be more individualistic. Living in Israel, where the Jewish experience is both organic and holistic, encourages us to think more frequently about the larger community of Israel and, by extension, the Jewish people as a whole. Outside of Israel, as it is more challenging to craft a communal identity, individual religious identity often dominates.

This contrast is vividly illustrated by the differing perspectives of Rav Soloveitchik and Rav Kook. Rav Soloveitchik delved into the fabric of an individual's relationship with Hashem, with his seminal works such as "Halakhic Man" and "Lonely Man of Faith," focusing on the solitary individual's role in religious identity. Rav Soloveitchik explored the religious "Man" and his profound encounter with the Divine Other.

In contrast, Rav Kook spoke in more collective terms about the larger entity known as "Knesset Yisrael," encompassing not only the Jews living at any given time but also the cosmic Jewish people, representing a nation of Israel which spans across history. For Olim who were raised outside of Israel and then moved to Israel, the differences between individual identity outside of Israel and collective identity in Israel are unmistakable.

Striking the balance between individual religious identity and national religious identity is always demanding, but over the next two months, it will be particularly intense. The coming week marks Rosh Chodesh Elul and the beginning of the Yomim Noraim season. These days, and especially the forty days following Elul, are designated for personal introspection, moral inventory, religious improvement and teshuva. They are times for deep soul-searching and heightened religious consciousness.

Yet this year, these days carry an entirely different weight. We approach the holidays with dread, acutely aware that each step of our journey will be overshadowed by the trauma of October 7. As the chagim unfold, the manifold layers of suffering endured by the Jewish people dominate our thoughts. We can only imagine the mix of emotions we will experience during this year's Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, wrestling with questions about how God could allow such a tragedy to occur. And, of course, no one can truly anticipate what this year's Simchat Torah will be like.

Over the past year, our experiences have been profoundly collective and national—just as they should be. We have grappled with the echoes of October 7, searching for faith and belief amidst the turmoil. We have mourned national tragedies, weeping with an entire nation which was viciously attacked in their homeland and assaulted around the world. Together, we have engaged in heroic efforts to save our land and safeguard the security of Israel. We have delved into how these events will shape our understanding of Jewish peoplehood and identity. Never have we felt so deeply connected to our Jewish heritage and history. These emotions and reflections have been overwhelmingly collective, resonating with the shared experiences of our nation.

As Elul begins, these emotions and preoccupations cannot and should not come to an end. They should infuse our prayers and permeate our deepest thoughts, reaching the darkest recesses of our soul. Yet, during this month, we are also called to embark on a personal journey of character improvement and spiritual growth. How can we ensure that the overwhelming collective thoughts of the past year do not overshadow or diminish the essential personal transformation that is expected during the Yamim Noraim?

After standing before Hashem as a collective nation for the past 11 months, how can we transition to a more intimate conversation with Him about personal growth and accountability? How can we ensure that our individual religious journey is not overshadowed by the overwhelming national crisis we face? How can we hear Hashem speak to us not merely as a nation, but as individuals? Can we recite Viduy confessions with the same passion that we have read Tehillim chapters? How can we attune ourselves to His voice amidst the echoes of our collective experience, allowing our personal dialogue with Him to emerge with clarity and depth?

There are no easy answers to this question. We must find a way to personalize October 7. Beyond our prayers for our soldiers, our hostages, our wounded and Jews around the world, it is crucial that we also make October 7 personal. Though these are large-scale events that may not seem directed at us individually, Hashem calls us to seek personal understanding and derive individual lessons from this tragedy. What kind of personal changes and improvements does this require from each of us? What adjustments in our personal lives are necessary in the wake of such a calamity? Have we truly faced and passed the test of faith to which we have all been subjected?

There is a well-known statement of the Chatam Sofer that during the month of Elul "even the fish in the sea tremble." This imagery captures the profound awe and reverence of this solemn period. The thought of trembling fish serves as a powerful jolt, shaking us from our religious complacency. If that weren't enough, the plaintive daily shofar further awakens us, urging us to introspection and spiritual renewal. As summer fades and autumn arrives, we turn inward to thoughts of human mortality and religious meaning.

This year, however, we do not need the metaphor of trembling fish to underscore the gravity and solemnity of this period. We have trembled daily for the past 11 months. During Elul, while we continue to tremble together, we must also tremble alone. To tremble for the nation around us and to tremble for the soul within us.

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from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

date: Aug 28, 2024, 3:24 PM

Rabbi Yakov Haber

Mikdash: Aspects and Aspirations

I

But only to the place which Hashem, your G-d, shall choose from all your tribes to rest His Name there; you shall inquire after His dwelling and come there (Devarim 12:5).

And the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose to rest His Name in, there you shall bring all that I am commanding you: your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the separation of your hand, and the choicest of vows which you will vow to Hashem (ibid. v. 11).

These verses appearing at the beginning of parshas Re'eh refer to the eventual choosing of a permanent Mikdash in which to offer korbanos. The selection of a central Mikdash would ban the offering of sacrifices on private bamos or altars (ibid. v. 13-14) [1]. The fact that the location of the Mikdash was not immediately revealed coupled with the Torah's commandment "I'shichno sidreshu - inquire after His dwelling" conveys the need to anxiously long for the Temple before it is built and to eagerly seek out opportunities to visit it when it does exist - ultimately encountering Hashem's Presence resting there. (See Chagiga (2a).)

Several additional sections in our parsha also present mitzvos directly or indirectly related to the Mikdash. These include the bringing of the first fruits to the sanctuary and ma'aser sheini to Jerusalem (v. 6 & 17), offering the first-born animal to the kohein to bring as a korban (ibid.), redeeming a sacrifice with a defect before consuming its meat (12:15 and Rashi), offering the korban Pesach (16:1-2, 5-7), and rejoicing before Hashem three times a year while being *oleh regel* for the festivals (16:1 ff.).

Perhaps we can suggest that whereas last week's Torah reading, parshas Eikev, places a major emphasis on the spiritual and physical aspects of Eretz Yisrael,[2] our parsha focuses on the even more intensely sanctified areas of Yerushalayim and the Mikdash. (See Keilim 1:6 ff.) Much has been written about the interrelationship of kedushas Eretz Yisrael and kedushas haMikdash. Here, we focus on several aspects of the uniqueness of the Mikdash[3].

At first glance, Rambam and Ramban dispute the central purpose of the Mikdash. Ramban (beginning of Teruma) explains that the Mishkan and later the Mikdash was a continuation of the Divine revelation of Sinai.

Specifically, the luchos and the sefer Torah housed in the aron were of course the content of the revelation of Sinai; the gold of the keruvim represented the great fire of the Sinai experience[4]. The revelation of the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu continued at the Mishkan (see Vayikra 1:1 and Rashi there). True, a major aspect of the avodas haMishkan consisted of the offering of korbanos, but, for Ramban, this seemingly was secondary not primary.

By contrast, Rambam (Hilchos Beis Habechira 1:1) seemingly highlights the bringing of korbanos as the *raison d'être* of the sanctuary. In his words:

It is a positive commandment to construct a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices to be offered within. We [must] celebrate there three times a year...[5]

This debate seems to be further underscored by the fact that Rambam includes the construction of all of the klei haMikdash in the one general commandment of building the Mikdash (see Sefer Hamitzvos, Asei 20). By contrast, Ramban (gloss to Asei 33) maintains that the mitzvah of forming

each kli is included in the commandment to perform the particular avoda unique to that vessel. For example, the mitzvah to build the shulchan is included in the mitzvah to place the lechem hapanim on it. Since the aron kodesh does not have a particular service associated with it, its construction, in his view, is indeed counted as a separate mitzvah. By highlighting the unique, separate commandment to build the Holy Ark, Ramban further underscores his thesis that the main thrust of the Mikdash was the continuation of the Sinai experience. Rambam who does not count the building of the aron as a separate commandment seems to have a different understanding of the purpose of the Mikdash.

However, a careful reading of Rambam leads to the conclusion that he also views the aron's role as absolutely fundamental. Rambam carefully outlines the construction of each kli of the Mikdash (Beis Habechira 1:18-3:18) but says nothing about the construction of the aron although he describes its placement (ibid. 4:1). The simple explanation for this distinction might be based on the fact that the aron of Moshe's time traditionally will never permanently be lost; consequently, there is no need to describe its construction. By contrast, the other keilim might indeed be lost or otherwise defiled and might need to be replaced.[6] But another Rambam would remain cryptic even if we accept this explanation. The Talmud (Yoma 53b) quotes a debate as to what happened to the aron at the end of the first Temple period. One opinion is that it was exiled to Babylon; another states that it was hidden directly underneath the Kodesh Kadashim. The Rambam rules in accordance with the latter view (ibid.). Why does the Rambam deem it necessary to rule concerning this matter which is seemingly only a matter of Jewish history? Rav Y. D. Soloveitchik zt"l explains that the Rambam views the aron binkomo (in its place) as a crucial component of the very definition of Mikdash. However, the halachic tradition states, according to the aforementioned latter opinion, that there are two places for the aron: above and below the ground. Whereas in normal times its proper place is above ground in the kodesh kadashim, in dangerous times, where there was fear of enemy forces seizing the aron, its proper place was geographically in the same location but vertically under it. This approach also helps explain more fundamentally why the Rambam omits the construction of the aron even though he describes that of all the rest of the keilim. The other vessels are spiritual furniture in the Mikdash; the aron is part and parcel of the very definition of Mikdash. When the Torah commands "v'asu li Mikdash," it, in effect, is charging bnei Yisrael to create a place for the aron on which Hashem's Shechina will rest, continuing ma'amad har Sinai as Ramban states. In that Mikdash, defined by the aron, various keilim have to be constructed, all described in turn by Rambam. Thus, when Rambam writes "It is a positive commandment to construct a House for G-d, prepared for sacrifices..." by the phrase, "House of G-d," he means that house containing the aron which defines its purpose - to house the Torah and, because of that, the Shechina. It is at that location that we serve Hashem with the various korban offerings. Thus, Rambam's and Ramban's respective positions can be viewed as essentially similar.

II

The additional prayer of *nacheim* is recited traditionally only at mincha of Tisha B'av, the day designated to mourn the destruction of the Mikdash specifically and, more generally, all of Jewish tragedy which is viewed as an extension of the former destruction. The Rosh challenges this custom to recite *nacheim* only at mincha rather than at all the prayers (see Beis Yosef 557). Ritva (ibid.) explains why, even though, in his view, the "*nacheim*" prayer should be recited in all the tefilos of Tisha B'Av, the prayer should be introduced with the word *nacheim* (have mercy) at ma'ariv and shacharis; only at mincha should it begin with *nacheim* (console). The reason he offers, somewhat cryptically, is that the morning of Tisha B'av is similar to the period of *mi shemeiso mutal lefanav*, or the time after death but before burial. Only toward evening, at mincha time, when the Mikdash was set aflame by our enemies, does the period similar to burial begin. Nechama, comfort, is only offered after burial; similarly, the word *nacheim* is only relevant after the "burial" of the Mikdash[7]. Rav Chanoch Sanhedrai shlit"a [8] shared a deeper understanding of the words of Ritva. Before the physical

destruction of the Mikdash, Hashem's Shechina, the "soul" of the Mikdash, had already left it. This is directly parallel to the process of death defined as the exit of the soul from the body, yetzias haneshama. Only the "body" of the Mikdash was still there. Its physical destruction toward evening was parallel to burial; hence, that is the time for nechama.

Many sources indicate that the eventual rebuilding of the Mikdash and, indeed, of all of Eretz Yisrael will follow a reverse order from that of their destruction. First, the physical edifice, the body, will be reconstructed. Only then will the neshama, the Shechina or, in the case of Eretz Yisrael, all spiritual matters, return in their fullest capacity. See the footnote for some sources on these concepts.[9]

Elsewhere, we have elaborated on the crucial avoda of longing for the building of the Mikdash and how Hashem sometimes will bring about massive unrest among the Jewish people until we do so.[10] May the seven weeks of comfort we are currently in leading up the High Holiday season together with our realization of how much is missing when Hashem's Or Panim (radiating countenance) does not fully shine upon us as it did in the days of the Temple lead to ever increasing longing for this most-central feature of our Divine service!

[1] See Rashi on the first passuk who explains that of the two verses the former refers to Mishkan Shilo - which, although lasting several hundred years, was destined to be replaced - whereas the latter pertains to the permanent sanctuary in Jerusalem. [2] See The Fruits of Eretz Yisrael: Outer and Inner Dimensions for further elaboration on this theme. [3] Most of what is presented here is based on shiurim I was privileged to hear from mori v'Rabi Rav Hershel Schachter shlita. Any errors in presentation are my own. [4] See also The Mishkan, Har Sinai, Torah and Eretz Yisrael for further elaboration upon this theme. [5] Translation courtesy of Chabad.org from the Rabbi Eliyahu Touger edition of Mishne Torah. [6] See Ramban (gloss to Asei 33) as to why this explanation is unsatisfying. [7] This would also explain the common Ashkenazic custom mentioned by Rosh to say the nacheim prayer only at mincha. [8] A dayan in Ramat Beit Shemesh. [9] Concerning the Mikdash see Aruch Laneir (Sukka 41a); concerning Eretz Yisrael see Megila (17b-18a) and Rav Kook's "Hamispeid BiYerushalayim" on the need for mashiach ben Yosef and mashiach ben David. [10] See Thoughts on Shavuot, Corona and Coronation. © 2024 by TorahWeb Foundation. All Rights Reserved

Making Poverty History (Re'eh)

The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org>

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Making Poverty History

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ztl

RE'EH

Listen to these stories. Behind them lies an extraordinary insight into the nature of Jewish ethics:

Story 1. Rabbi Abba used to bind money in his scarf, sling it on his back, and place it at the disposal of the poor. (Ketubot 67b)

Story 2. Mar Ukba had a poor man in his neighbourhood into whose door socket he used to throw four coins every day. Once the poor man thought, "I will go and see who does me this kindness." That day Mar Ukba stayed late at the house of study, and his wife was coming home with him. As soon as the poor man saw them moving the door [to leave the coins] he ran out after them, but they fled from him and hid. Why did they do this? Because it was taught: One should throw himself into a fiery furnace rather than publicly put his neighbour to shame. (Ketubot 67b)

Story 3. When Rabbi Jonah saw a member of a good family who had lost his money and was ashamed to accept charity, he would go and say to him, "I have heard that an inheritance has come your way in a city across the sea. So here is an article of some value. Sell it and use the proceeds. When you are more affluent, you will repay me." As soon as the man took it, Rabbi Jonah would say, "It's yours to keep as a gift." (Vayikra Rabbah 34:1)

These stories are all deeply connected to the mitzvah of tzedakah, whose source is in this week's parsha:

If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.

Deut. 15:7-8

Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.

Deut. 15:10-11

What we have here is a unique and still remarkable programme for the elimination of poverty.

The first extraordinary fact about the laws of tzedakah as articulated in the Oral Tradition is the concept itself. Tzedakah does not mean "charity". We see this immediately in the form of a law inconceivable in any other moral system:

Someone who does not wish to give tzedakah or to give less than is appropriate may be compelled to do so by a Jewish court of law.

Maimonides, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 7:10

Charity is always voluntary. Tzedakah is compulsory. Therefore tzedakah does not mean charity. The nearest English equivalent is social justice.

The second is the principle evident in the three stories above. Poverty in Judaism is conceived not merely in material terms: the poor lack the means of sustenance. It is also conceived in psychological terms. Poverty humiliates. It robs people of dignity. It makes them dependent on others – thus depriving them of independence which the Torah sees as essential to self-respect.

This deep psychological insight is eloquently expressed in the third paragraph of the Grace after Meals:

Please, O Lord our God, do not make us dependent on the gifts or loans of other people, but only on Your full, open, holy, and generous hand so that we may suffer neither shame nor humiliation for ever and all time.

As a result, Jewish law focuses not only on how much we must give but also on the manner in which we do so. Ideally the donor should not know to whom he or she is giving (story 1), nor the recipient know from whom he or she is receiving (story 2). The third story exemplifies another principle:

If a poor person does not want to accept tzedakah, we should practise a form of [benign] deception and give it to him under the guise of a loan.

Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 7:9

Maimonides sums up the general principle thus:

Whoever gives charity to the poor with bad grace and averted eyes has lost all the merit of his action even though he gives him a thousand gold pieces. He should give with good grace and with joy and should sympathise with them in his plight, as it is said, 'Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?' (Job 30:25)

Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 10:4

This is the logic behind two laws that are otherwise inexplicable. The first is: Even a poor person who is dependent on tzedakah is obliged to give tzedakah.

Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 7:5

The law seems absurd. Why should we give money to the poor so that they may give to the poor? It makes sense only on this assumption, that giving is essential to human dignity and tzedakah is the obligation to ensure that everyone has that dignity.

The second is this famous ruling of Maimonides:

The highest degree of charity, exceeded by none, is when a person assists a poor Jew by providing him with a gift or a loan or by accepting him into a business partnership or by helping him find employment – in a word by putting him in a situation where he can dispense with other people's aid.

Laws of Gifts to the Poor, 10:7

Giving someone a job or making him your partner would not normally be considered charity at all. It costs you nothing. But this further serves to show that tzedakah does not mean charity. It means giving people the means to

live a dignified life, and within the Jewish value system any form of employment is more dignified than dependence. We have in this ruling of Maimonides in the 12th century the principle that Muhammad Yunus rediscovered in our time, and for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize: the idea of micro-loans enabling poor people to start small businesses. It is a very powerful idea.

In contradistinction to many other religious systems, Judaism refused to romanticise poverty or anaesthetise its pain. Faith is not what Karl Marx called "the opium of the people." The rabbis refused to see poverty as a blessed state, an affliction to be born with acceptance and grace. Instead, the rabbis called it "a kind of death" and "worse than fifty plagues". They said, "Nothing is harder to bear than poverty, because he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling and upon whom all the curses of Deuteronomy have descended. If all other troubles were placed one side and poverty on the other, poverty would outweigh them all."

Maimonides went to the heart of the matter when he said:

The well-being of the soul can only be obtained after that of the body has been secured.

The Guide for the Perplexed, 3:27

Poverty is not a noble state. You cannot reach spiritual heights if you have no food to eat, no roof over your head, if you lack access to medical attention, or if you are beset by financial worries. I know of no saner approach to poverty, welfare, and social justice than that of Judaism. Unsurpassed in its time, it remains the benchmark of a decent society to this day.

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Rav Moshe Tzvi Weinberg

Reeh Shamor Vshamata - Nesivas Shalom

Parshas Reeh

5774

we start to get back our hearing and our seeing.

Bein hemitzarim haftaros- navi was telling us listen to Hashem (shimu dvar Hashem), learn how to listen,

See Hashem (Chazon yeshayahu),

Reeh begins with seeing and hearing

First pasuk – Reeh anochi nosen lifneichem bracha veklala

Getting back to point where hearing and seeing is correct

Big bracha- when a person can hear properly

Ability to listen in right way special

R Shlomo Zalman Auerbach

When it says if you listen you will be blessed and if you don't listen you'll be cursed, we normally understand its based on your conduct. If you do mitzvos reward and if not, No. Rav Shlomo Zalman says its even more basic than that. **If you're even willing to listen, you are blessed. Ppl who don't even want to hear the dvar Hashem. So scared of poss implications of what listening to Torah might mean, they run in other direction. The bracha is even being receptive to listening.**

The **nesivos shalom** describes a higher madrega of longing to hear the dvar hashem. Even more than presents itself naturally. 12:28 in Devarim: Shamor vShamarta ais kol hedevarim asher anochi metzavecha lmaan yitav lecha ulevanecha acharecha ad olam ki taaseh hatov vehayashar beinei hashem elokecha. Why the double lashon? Guard it and listen. Also out of order. Make more sense to say hear it and then guard what you just listened to. Its like naaseh vnishma. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh raises this question. Nesivas shalom brings an answer from avodas yisrael, koshnitzer magid. Shamor can mean to guard but it also can mean to long for and look forward to something. Like vaviv shamar es hadavar. Yaakov knew the nevuah would be fulfilled. And he longed for it. Yaakov rebukes Yosef but

Internally knows the dream will come true, he's looking forward, metzapeh for the dreams So shamor vshamata means that we should long for it and listen. Should want to hear Hashem. Seek it out

If serve Hashem as eved, hope is do the minimum required. Only what is asked. He doesn't long for more responsibilities. But serving from ahava, acting like banim atem lhashem elokeichem (which is in parshas reeh) means we think when will another mitzva come my way. How can I do a drop more? Seek out opportunities to serve Hashem. Like Pesach sheini. Jews begging Hashem - give us a mitzva- we don't want to lose out. Only people who serve Hashem with ahava say this. Like King David says in tehilim "laasos retzoncha chafatzti". Longing for opportunities. Nothing he enjoys more than having another task of Hashem's to fulfill. No greater pleasure.

That is perish of shamor shamaata

Gemara in makos, 10, that describes attitude of Moshe Rabbeinu

"Ohev kesef lo yisba kesef". Ppl always want more money. Have 1 mil, want 2. (Medrash in Koehles). Gemara in makos says this pasuk refers to Moshe Ranbeinu. A person who loves mitzvos is never satisfied with mitzvos. Moshe knew he wasn't going in to Eretz Yisrael and knew that needed all 6 arei miklat to be set up in order for them to be functional.

Setting up the 3 outside of Israel is futile. And yet gemara says from here we see how much moshe loves mitzvos. A mitzva comes my way, even if it can't function, will not be a complete fulfillment of that mitzva, I want to do it.

And this is what is meant in parshas veschanan "vzos Hatorah Asher sam Mosh lifnei bnai Yisrael" which comes in the middle of the story of the arei miklat. R moshe says look one pasuk before that. Az yavdil moshe.

Mitzva ba lyadi vakaymena. I have to do what I can. May not be fully functioning or really work as ir miklat. Doesn't matter. Step in right direction. Do what we can. Seek out mitzvos and have desire to do more. This is the great thing Moshe taught.

Rav moshe soleveitchik of Switzerland says in Sefer called vехаish moshe: Dayan in brisk Rav simcha Zelig would not say "lemalei pgimas halevana" that we look forward to the day when the sun and moon are the same, because he said this would cause there to be one less mitzva and he would not want to miss out on saying kiddush levana. Seeking out mitzvos.

Longing for mitzvos.

So the nesivas shalom says now we understand the pasuk in veschanan: utzedaka tiyeh lanu ki nishmor laasos. When you guard to do. Nishmor - a longing. Burning passion to do what Hahsem wants. What's the great merit? To do mitzvos is expected of us? It's the longing. That's the tzedaka. The great merit. Seeking out opportunities. True mitzva is obligation, not any great merit, Im lamadeta Torah harbeh al tachzik Tova leatzmecha ki lekach natzarta (pirkei avos) That's our job. Tzedaka is burning desire. Longing for mitzvos.

Every month of the year corresponds to a different arrangement of Hashem's name (12 diff ways to arrange Hashem's name). Shem Hashem for Elul is heh heh vav Yud. Each arrangement is alluded to in pasuk. Elul is alluded to in pasuk utzedaka tiyeh lanu laasos. Last letter of last 4 words. This pasuk teaches us secret of Elul. This is the avoda of Elul. Trying to get to closeness to HKBH of ani Lodi vdodi li. Emerge from awkward rshp with HKBH from Bain hameitzarim and now we can say we are madly in love with Hashem. Ani ldodi, I am to Hashem like one who only desires to do His will. Greatest pleasure. Don't limit miyivos. Ratzah HKBH lezakos.

Hashem loves us and gave us many mitzvos and we love doing them. All we want. If we understood the sweetness and intoxicating love that is felt in those words we could get drunk on this. Expresses such a deep connection. All he cares about is us. And all we care about is him. Ani ldodi starts when I can declare to Hashem I want more mitzvos. Longing for mitzvos. Not like an eved. When we express our longing to be close to Hahsem, he responds with vdodi li. Like it says in Toras Avos: we say on Yamim noraim: hayom yaamid bamishpat Kol yetzurai olamim. Im kbanim im kaavadim. Etc. that's what we are being judged on. Are we sons are slaves? How do we view ourselves? Do we serve Hashem with love or are we like slaves? If we turn to Hahsem and declare ourselves his children and we

become servants of Hahsem through love not fear, Hahsem will treat us same way. Kedushas Levi quotes many times, Hahsem tzilcha- how we act to Hahsem, he will act. If we act with love, he will act with love. If we act out of fear, he will have cold relationship with us. When we nurture the father son relationship we are judged that way. Lifnim meshuras Hadin. Im kvanim im kaavadim. We choose our judgment. How do we want to relate to Hashem and his mitzvos. Want to be an eved? Or a son.

Yesod haavoda - first of slonimer rebbes: one second of teshuva meahava is greater than 100 fasts. Better one moment where we say we are Hashem's sons than 100 fasts. Once we change that relationship, the whole scale of judgment is changed. This is the avoda of Chodesh Elul. To awaken feelings of nishmor laasos. Serving Hashem out of love. Demand mitzvos.

All of our aveiros can be transformed to mitzvos.

St hard to achieve. Burden on ourselves. Only if ani ldodi do we get vdodi li. Gemara in Shabbos 104: habah letaher msayin oso. If we seek holiness or purity, Hahsem will help but we must initiate. HKBH says shuvu Elai veashuva Aleichem. But its hard so we say to Hahsem hashiveinu Hahsem ayleycha vnashuva. Help us out. Bring us back. So st we can start with Dodi li.

St by recognizing how much Hahsem loves us, we can come to loving Him. R Akiva eiger - mitzva to love Hashem. How can there be a mitzva regarding an emotion? How can we demand such a thing. So Rav Akiva Eiger says the mitzva is really to understand how much Hashem loves us. If you know that, memaila you will love Him. So can start with dodi li. Sefer Hachassidus (rebbe of Belz) every night by Maariv right before we are mekabel ol malchus shamayim, we say habochoer amo Yisrael bahava. Once we understand the degree of how much Hashem selected us, then we can say Shema Yisrael. That's how we would come to love Hashem. Challenge to waken even for a moment this ahava.

If we don't choose that, and come to Yom Hadin as an eved, judges as eved. Lose Midas harachamim. Spend month trying to get to this level. One sincere moment.

R Avigdor miller - 10 steps to greatness - one step- say out loud Hashem I love you.

Mishnah Berura - hilchos tefilin, siman 25, seif Katan 14- supposed to wear tefilin when u say Shema. So who does not, gemara says is meid sheker batzmo because he says ukeashartem and he doesn't do it. And it's written in Sefer charedim, from this we learn that when you say vahavta es Hahsem elokecha, have to really mean it otherwise you are being meid against yourself. Don't lie. Achieve a sincere moment of Ahavas Hashem.

And this is why the pasuk says lmaam yitav lecha u levanecha acharecha ad olam- why mention children? Bc if we make ourselves like children, Hashem says he will provide for us, and our children and grandchildren. Midah kneged Midah. And make sure the Ahava He has is like a Father, grandfather.

And this is why the pasuk ends ki taaseh hayashar vehatov bainecha hashem elokecha. What does that mean? Not just willing to do mitzvah. Ask ourselves are we doing it in a way that makes hashem proud? Examole of child who begrudgingly takes out the trash. This is cont of shamor vshmata, if we really are jews who serve Him from love, we will recognize that hahsem gave us mitzvos because He loves us. Rabbeinu Yonah says "anochi hashem elokecha asher hotzaisicha meeretz mitzrayim". Why does Hashem tie in his introduction with yetzias mitzrayim? Why not creation of world? Hashem took us out of mitzrayim because He loved us. So when Hahsem is abot to give us Mitzvos (10 dibros and 613 mitzvos) those are also borne out of love. Mitzvos are not to punish us. All comes from His love. When we achieve this level of avdus, serve Hashem with Ahavah, we will constantly ask ourselves, is this the way Hashem wanted it to be? With a heavy feeling that I want it to be over? Quotes from Yesod Havodah (Slonimer): Parshas shmini: Vhasair hachatas darosh darash Moshe vhinch saraf. After Aharon's children died, question about korbonos of the day. Darosh darash Moshe about the korbonos, should it be eaten, be burned and Aharon said if I eat the chatas on the day my children died, would that be right in the eyes of Hashem? And moshe listened and it was good in his eyes. Yesod Havodah

explains Aharon has a major chidush. R Tzadok points out first time you say torah shel baal peh logic in torah shebichtav. Aharon created svara. Darosh darash allusion to torah she baal peh. Aharon has svara. But chidush here was that aharon did not say this is what torah says, this is what halacha is. Another aspect of analysis. Is this what Hashem wants? Is it good in his eyes? And Moshe says that is a good way to look at things. So yes, first we must look to see what the torah says and what halacha is. But then have to cheshbon if this is good in Hashem's eyes. That is serving Hahsem with Ahava. Targum Onkelos on Yirmiyahu 19: Ubanu es bamos habaal lisrof es bnaihem laish olos lbaal asher lo tzivisi vlo dibarti vlo alsa al libi. Says Targum: lo tzivisi- never commended in Torah, lo dibarti- not in neviim, vlo alsa al libi- its not my ratzon. And mepharshim say you have to ask this question. After we figure out whether st if min hatorah, miderabbanan then must ask, is this good in the eyes of Hahsem. Is this what Hahsem intended? Is this the way the mitzvah was intended?

Am I doing the mitzvah meahava?

Famous story of Rav Leibele Eiger [heard from Rav Eitan Feiner!] and saw in Nachalas Tzvi, Rav Tzvi Pinter: when Rav Leibele was exploring chassidus, went to different cities. Came to certain city. Was there for Rosh Hashanah, beautiful, decided to stay for Yom Kippur. After shachris commotion, moving tables, asks so next to him what is going on? The man replied Kiddush! Rav Leibele said, its Yom Kippur! The man said yeah but it's a long day. We'll make some lchaims - it'll help for musaph. But its yom kippur! Kares! And the man is not listening. Starts citing gemaras in yoma. And they are setting up Kiddush in the shul! Its no joke. Quotes shulchan aruch! No one stopping. Starts quoting Zohar. And as the shot glasses are rising in the air, Rav Leibele Eiger gives a klop on the shenter in front of all these chassidim who are about to violate Yom Kippur and he screams HKBH says No!!!!!! and the Chasidim look at him and say, now you get it! We can quote sources all day long. And there is TSBP and TSBC but also third dimension. Is it pleasing in my eyes. Is this what HKBH wants. Is it also al libi as Targum Onkelos says.

So as we come to chodesh Elul and attainment of Ani Ldodi Vdodi li, hopefully we can initiate. If not let's think about ldodi li, how much Hahsem loves us and then it will be that much easier to get to ani ldodi. Lets realize whole judgment of Yamim Noraim is im kbanim im kaavadim. That's how we are being judged. Do we want to be a ben or an eved? And the way we express this as we get our vision back and ears back is shamor vshmata, not just to be zoche to brachah of being willing to listen, as Rav Shlomo Zalman said, which itself is a bracha, many people can't even hear but to be people who are shomer mitzvos, like vaviv shamar es hadavar. Seeking mitzvos in connection to HKBH and may we all be zoche to a beautiful din.

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

date: Aug 29, 2024, 3:32 AM

subject: **Rav Kook on Re'eih:** Searching for the Temple Site

Re'eih: Searching for the Temple Site Surprisingly, the Torah never spells out exactly where the Temple is to be built. Rather we are instructed to build the Beit HaMikdash "in the place that God will choose":

"Only to the place that the Eternal your God will choose from all your tribes to set His Name — there you shall seek His dwelling place, and go there." (Deut. 12:5)

Where is this place "that God will choose"? What does it mean that we should "seek out His dwelling place"?

The Hidden Location

The Sages explained that the Torah is commanding us, under the guidance of a prophet, to discover where the Beit HaMikdash should be built. King David undertook the search for this holy site with the help of the prophet Samuel.

Why didn't the Torah explicitly state the location where to build the Temple? Moses certainly knew that the Akeidah took place on Mount Moriah in

Jerusalem, and he knew that Abraham had prophesied that this would be the site of the Beit HaMikdash (see Gen. 22:14 and Rashi ad loc.)

Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed III: 45) suggested that Moses wisely chose not to mention Jerusalem explicitly. Had he done so, the non-Jewish nations would have realized Jerusalem's paramount importance to the Jewish people and would have fought fiercely to prevent it from falling into Israel's hands.

Even worse, knowledge of Jerusalem's significance could have led to infighting among the tribes. Each tribe would want the Beit HaMikdash to be located in its territory. The result could have been an ugly conflict, similar to Korach's rebellion against Aaron's appointment to the position of High Priest.

Maimonides reasoned that this is why the Torah commands that a king be appointed before building the Beit HaMikdash. This way the Temple's location would be determined by a strong central government, thus avoiding inter-tribal conflict and rivalry.

"Between His Shoulders"

In any case, David did not know where the Beit HaMikdash was to be built. According to the Talmud (Zevachim 54b), his initial choice fell on Ein Eitam, a spring located to the south of Jerusalem. Ein Eitam appeared to be an obvious choice since it is the highest point in the entire region. This corresponds to the Torah's description that "You shall rise and ascend to the place that the Eternal your God will choose" (Deut. 17:8).

However, David subsequently considered a second verse that alludes to the Temple's location. At the end of his life, Moses described the place of God's Divine Presence as "dwelling between his shoulders" (Deut. 33:12). What does this mean?

This allegory suggests that the Temple's location was not meant to be at the highest point, but a little below it, just as the shoulders are below the head. Accordingly, David decided that Jerusalem, located at a lower altitude than Ein Eitam, was the site where the Beit HaMikdash was meant to be built. Doeg, head of the High Court, disagreed with David. He supported the original choice of Ein Eitam as the place to build the Temple. The Sages noted that Doeg's jealousy of David was due to the latter's success in discovering the Temple's true location.

The story of David's search for the site of the Beit HaMikdash is alluded to in one of David's "Songs of Ascent." Psalm 132 opens with a plea: "Remember David for all his trouble" (132:1). What was this trying labor that David felt was a special merit, a significant life achievement for which he wanted to be remembered?

The psalm continues by recounting David's relentless efforts to locate the place of the Temple. David vowed:

"I will not enter the tent of my house, nor will I go up to the bed that was spread for me. I will not give sleep to my eyes, nor rest to my eyelids — until I find God's place, the dwellings of the Mighty One of Jacob." (Psalms 132: 3-5)

David and Doeg What was the crux of the dispute between David and Doeg? Doeg reasoned that the most suitable site for the Temple is the highest point in Jerusalem, reflecting his belief that the spiritual greatness of the Temple should only be accessible to the select few, those who are able to truly grasp the purest levels of enlightenment — the kohanim and the spiritual elite.

David, on the other hand, understood that the Temple and its holiness need to be the inheritance of the entire people of Israel. The kohanim are not privy to special knowledge; they are merely agents who influence and uplift the people with the Temple's holiness. The entire nation of Israel is described as a "kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6).

The Waters of Ein Eitam

Even though Ein Eitam was never sanctified, it still retained a special connection to the Beit HaMikdash, as its springs supplied water for the Beit HaMikdash. The Talmud relates that on Yom Kippur, the High Priest would immerse himself in a mikveh on the roof of the Beit HaParvah chamber in the Temple complex. In order for the water to reach this roof, which was 23 cubits higher than the ground floor of the Temple courtyard, water was

diverted from the Ein Eitam springs, which were also located at this altitude.

Rav Kook explained that there exists a special connection between Ein Eitam and the High Priest's purification on Yom Kippur. While the Beit HaMikdash itself needs to be accessible to all, the purification of the High Priest must emanate from the highest possible source. Yom Kippur's unique purity and power of atonement originate in the loftiest realms, corresponding to the elevated springs of Ein Eitam.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Shemu'ot HaRe'iyah (Beha'alotecha), quoted in Peninei HaRe'iyah, pp. 273-274, 350-351. Shemonah Kevatzim I:745)

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subject: Hamaayan - Accounting

Hamaayan By Shlomo Katz

Parshas Reeh Accounting

BS"D Volume 38, No. 46 27 Av 5784 August 31, 2024

Sponsored by Nathan and Rikki Lewin in memory of his father Harav Yitzchak ben Harav Aharon Lewin a"h (28 Av); Micheline and David Peller, in memory of their daughter Zipporah a"h bat David 'שיח; Rabbi Sanford H. Shudnow and family in memory of his mother Mrs. Rose Herman Shudnow (Rahel bat Shefsil v'Sarah a"h – 2 Elul); Brian and Chaya Rozen on the yahrzeit of her father Moshe Yosef ben Meir Hakohen a"h (26 Av)

R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager z"l (1916-2012; **Vizhnitzer Rebbe**) writes regarding the upcoming month of Elul: It is well-known that R' Shalom of Belz z"l (1771-1855; R' Shalom Rokeach, first Belzer Rebbe) interprets "Elul" as being related to the Aramaic root "Aleph-lamed-lamed," which means "to reconnoiter" (see Onkelos to Bemidbar 13:2). That is the foundation of the coming month, leading-up to the upcoming Days of Awe. One must "reconnoiter" the recesses of his soul. "The heart knows its own bitterness," in the words of Mishlei (14:10). [In other words, every person can discover what he or she needs to correct, and he or she is better-suited than anyone else to do so.]

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe continues: The accounting that a person must do relates to more than the sins he committed. One also should examine whether his enjoyment of worldly matters is being done to fulfill his pleasures, or for the sake of Heaven. The Mitzvah of Shofar, which awakens us, calls upon us to analyze whether we sleep for the sake of Heaven. And, the Mitzvah to refrain from eating and drinking on Yom Kippur calls upon us to analyze whether we eat and drink for the sake of Heaven. However, Elul is the time to prepare for those accountings.

He adds: We read in our Parashah (12:8), "You shall not do everything that we do here today, every man what is proper in his eyes." The Gematria of the Hebrew words for "You shall not do" equals the Gematria of "Sha'ah Talmud" / "an hour of Torah study" (adding 2 to the latter, for the number of words). The Gematria of the Hebrew word for "everything" equals the Gematria of "Chessed" / acts of kindness (adding 3 to the former, for the number of letters, and 1 to the latter, representing the 1 word). "Today," says the Zohar, refers to Rosh Hashanah. The preparations for that big day, our verse teaches, are Torah study and acts of kindness. (Yeshuot Moshe)

"You are children to Hashem, your Elokim . . ." (14:1)

R' David Chai Abuchatzteira shlita (former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Nahariyah, Israel; now a Chassidic rebbe in that city) writes: R' Elimelech of Lizhensk z"l (1717-1787; early Chassidic Rebbe) relates a parable about a father and son who were traveling a long distance through a forest. Many exotic fruits and berries were growing on the trees and shrubs to the sides of the path, and the father was afraid that his son would become so distracted by them that he would wander off and become lost. Therefore, the father told his son, "Every few minutes, you should call out to me so that I can save you from wandering too far."

This, says R' Elimelech, is the purpose of prayer. Rashi z"l writes (in his commentary to Bereishit 30:8) that the name of Yaakov's son Naftali comes

from the root that means “connection.” Targum Onkelos says that that name comes from the same root as “Tefilah.” Putting these together, it appears that the purpose of Tefilah / prayer is connection—i.e., we call out to Hashem several times a day so that we will not become too distracted by the pleasures of this world and become lost. (Sha’arei Tefilah p.1)

“And you shall eat before Hashem, your Elokim, in the place that He will choose to rest His Name—the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, and the firstborn of your cattle and your flocks, so that you will learn to revere Hashem, your Elokim, all the days.” (14:23)

R’ Chaim Friedlander z”l (1923-1986; Mashgiach Ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) writes: The Bet Hamikdash was the place where one could seek and find Yir’at Shamayim / reverence for Heaven (i.e., Hashem). There, one could literally sense the presence of the Shechinah, thanks to the ten miracles that occurred there on a regular basis (see Avot ch.5). This is why the Torah decreed that a person should take a (second) tenth of his produce, known as Ma’aser Sheni / the second tithe, and eat it in Yerushalayim, so that while he was there he could observe the immense holiness and see the service performed by the Kohanim and be inspired thereby to revere Hashem.

R’ Friedlander notes further: The possibility for inspiration was not limited to the Bet Hamikdash; it was present in all of Yerushalayim. After all, Ma’aser Sheni, of which our verse speaks, was not eaten in the Temple; it could be eaten anywhere within the walls of Yerushalayim. The key, says our verse, is that one’s intention be to “eat before Hashem,” not merely to fill one’s stomach. (Siftei Chaim, Mo’adim III p.320, 344)

A related thought:

R’ Avraham Shalom Lipschitz-Halberstam shlita (Stropkover Rebbe in Yerushalayim) observed: The idea of Kohanim standing around in the Temple courtyard eating meat from the Korbanot sounds, at first, to be very uncouth. However, when done for the sake of Heaven, it elevates the eater to a very high level, as reflected in the fact that the Hebrew words “מאכל” (food) and “מלאך” (angel) have the same letters. (Heard from the Stropkover Rebbe)

“However, there shall be no destitute among you; rather Hashem, will surely bless you in the Land that Hashem, your Elokim, will give you as an inheritance, to possess it.” (15:4)

The Gemara (Shabbat 104a) relates that some small children came to the Yeshiva and expounded on the significance of the letters of the Aleph-Bet in a way that “even in the days of Yehoshua bin Nun—i.e., the successor to Moshe Rabbeinu—such things were not said.” [Until here from the Gemara] Why is Yehoshua singled out in this Gemara? **R’ Meir Margulies** z”l (1707-1790; rabbi of Ostrog, Ukraine; one of the earliest disciples of the Ba’al Shem Tov) explains: One of the expositions that these children made was that the letters Gimel and Dalet (גד) together represent a “Gomel Dalim” / “one who gives to the poor.” (Not only do these two words begin with the letters Gimel and Dalet, respectively, they are phonetically similar to the names of those letters.) The children said, “Why does the letter Gimel (ג) look like a person running after the Dalet? Because the Gomel / giver should run after the Dal / pauper. Why does the letter Dalet (ד) have its back turned toward the letter Gimel? Because the giver should respect the privacy and dignity of the recipient.”

R’ Margulies continues: We read about the days of Yehoshua bin Nun (Yehoshua 21:43), “Nothing of all the good things that Hashem had spoken to the House of Yisrael was lacking; everything came to pass.” This, writes R’ Margulies, presumably includes our verse: “There shall be no destitute among you.” It follows that in the days of Yehoshua bin Nun there were no paupers, so there was no need for a “Gomel Dalim,” which is why the exposition made by these children could not have been made in the days of Yehoshua bin Nun. (Yachin U’Bo’az ch.3)

“Three times a year all your males should appear before Hashem, your Elokim, in the place that He will choose—on the Festival of Matzot, the

Festival of Shavuot, and the Festival of Sukkot; and one shall not appear before Hashem empty-handed.” (16:16)

The Gemara (Pesachim 3b) relates a story from which it is clear that the sage Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah did not ascend to Yerushalayim for Pesach. The Tosafot ask why he did not do so, and they offer several possible answers. One of those answers is that Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah did not own land and therefore was exempt from this Mitzvah. The Gemara (Pesachim 8b) derives that one who does not own land is exempt from ascending to Yerushalayim for the festivals from the verse (Shmot 34:24), “No man will covet your land when you go up to appear before Hashem, your Elokim, three times a year”—implying that only someone who could have a fear that someone will covet his land is obligated to ascend.

R’ Aharon Lewin z”l Hy”d (the **Reisher Rav**; killed in the Holocaust) cites R’ Eliyahu z”l (1720-1797; the Vilna Gaon) as noting that Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah described himself (Sanhedrin 92b) as being a descendant of the dead that Yechezkel resurrected, the so-called “Dry Bones.” According to our Sages, the Dry Bones belonged to members of the tribe of Ephraim who had left Egypt before the Exodus and were killed in the desert. It follows that Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteirah would have no share in the Land, for his ancestors did not experience the Exodus and were not present when the Land was divided. (Ha’drash Ve’ha’iyun)

Teshuvah Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z”l (1210-1263; Spain) writes: Know and understand, for this is a great principle—It is true that the righteous sometimes sin, as it is written (Kohelet 7:20), “For there is no person on earth so wholly righteous that he [always] does good and never sins.” However, the righteous subdue their Yetzer Ha’ra / evil inclination a hundred times, and if they succumb to sin once, they do not repeat that sin because they become despicable in their own eyes and repent. But if one does not take care to avoid a known sin and does not take it upon himself to protect himself from it, then, although it may be one of the lesser transgressions, and although he may take care to avoid all other transgressions of the Torah, the Sages refer to him (Chullin 4b) as an “apostate in respect to one thing.” It is as if a servant would say, “Master, I will do all that you tell me except one thing.” Concerning this it is said (Devarim 27:26), “Cursed is he who does not to uphold the words of the Torah to do them,” i.e., he does not take upon himself the fulfillment of all the words of the Torah from beginning to end. **Rabbeinu Yonah** continues: Know also, that if one repeats a sin ten times, though he is careful in relation to all other transgressions, he is regarded as having committed distinct transgressions. If it is a sin that carries the punishment of lashes, he would receive lashes for each instance of the sin as if he had eaten multiple types of non-kosher things. We see in our generation, Rabbeinu Yonah writes, that there are those who are not careful with a particular transgression because it has become permissible to them—for example, taking oaths in vain, cursing one’s neighbor or oneself with the Name of G-d, taking G-d’s Name in vain, saying G-d’s Name in an unclean place or when one’s hands are unclean, ignoring the poor, Lashon Ha’ra, baseless hatred, haughtiness, gazing at improper sights, and, above all, neglect of Torah study. (Sha’arei Teshuvah 1:6-8)

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Is Gelatin Kosher?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Introduction:

Parshas Re’eih discusses at length many of the laws of kashrus. In the contemporary world, many kashrus issues concern gelatin, a product unfamiliar to those of us who are not chemists, food technologists or kashrus professionals.

To the biochemist, gelatin is studied in organic chemistry. To the food technologist, it is an ingredient with a wide range of applications. To the nutritionist, gelatin is an incomplete protein. To a manufacturer, it spells tremendous profit. To the kashrus supervisor, it can present a potential nightmare. It is available in a kosher variety, but another form might be treif min haTorah. Whether the gelatin that is available in kosher form is considered

fleishig or pareve will depend on which posek you ask. And then there is gelatin that is certainly kosher and pareve.

Let us begin with a bit of an explanation of what gelatin is. What is gelatin?

Gelatin, which is usually odorless, translucent, and almost colorless is derived from collagen extracted and processed from the connective tissue and skins of animal body parts, particularly the bones and hide of pigs, cattle and fish.

Collagen is an incomplete protein containing most of the essential amino acids, but missing the amino acid tryptophan and with insufficient quantities of several of the others to be a complete protein. In other words, no one can rely exclusively on gelatin for their protein source. In today's world, the most common sources for gelatin are pigskin and beef hides, although it is also manufactured from fish scales and skins.

Gelatin includes many similar compounds with specific qualities and characteristics. Sometimes, the source of gelatin can be determined by chemical testing. The raw materials from which gelatin is derived are prepared by various curing, acid, and alkali processes employed to extract the collagen. The different processes may have great effect on the properties of the final gelatin products, as does the original source of the collagen. In other words, gelatin is not a specific chemical compound but a raw material. Gelatin is usually stored and shipped as a powder. When it is used, significant amounts of water are added. Gelatin absorbs five to ten times its weight in water and forms a gel. Gelatin is probably the most popularly used gelling agent in food, beverages, candies, capsules, etc. Among the many food products that often use gelatin are puddings, candies, ice cream, sour cream, yogurt, soups, broths, sauces, flavors, vitamins and marshmallows. It is also used to remove the pulp or sediment from wines and juices.

P'tcha Boiling animal feet or fish bones also extracts collagen. This is what produces the gelatinous, fatty layer when making p'tcha. "Vegetable gelatin" There is no such thing as vegetarian or vegan gelatin, although there are vegan gelatinous substances, such as carrageen, agar, pectin, arrowroot, guar gum, and xanthan gum. The latter are all derived or processed from vegetable sources, but their use, in general, is more limited than that of gelatin. Although there are literally hundreds of varieties of gelatin, from a kashrus perspective, there are five different categories. I will list them from the most kosher to the least.

I. Fish gelatin Gelatin can be manufactured from a wide variety of fish sources, some of them kosher but many of them non-kosher. Contrary to popular opinion, this gelatin was known hundreds of years ago and is discussed in teshuvos from early acharonim. However, since modern gelatin manufacture used other, non-fish sources that produce a more versatile product, the modern gelatin industry did not produce gelatin from fish until a few decades ago. This gelatin does require proper kosher supervision and certification for a variety of reasons, including guaranteeing that it is derived exclusively from kosher fishes, that only kosher equipment and raw materials are used, etc. Today fish gelatin is readily available and is used, although it is a tiny percentage of the gelatin market.

II. Beef gelatin from kosher slaughtered animals Gelatin produced from beef bones and hides of animals that were properly shechted and kashered. As mentioned above for fish gelatin, these products require kosher certification. There is a question whether this product is fleishig or can be considered pareve. The primary reason why this beef-based product might be considered pareve is because it is not produced from the meat of the animal, but from parts that are not usually considered edible. There is also the possibility that, once the gelatin is used in the finished product, it is bateil, and that therefore the finished product is ruled pareve. Those who are interested in researching the details of the halachic rulings on this subject are referred to Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:37; Shu't Mishnas Rabbi Aharon 1:16.

III. Beef gelatin but not kosher salted A third, interesting product is a gelatin made from shechted animals, as described above, but that was not kashered, meaning the bones were not soaked and salted to remove the blood. Instead, the blood was removed chemically during the processing of the gelatin. To the best of my knowledge beef gelatin from shechted animals that are soaked and salted is currently not an available product.

IV Beef bone gelatin Of course, gelatin is produced from non-kosher-slaughtered beef bone and hide. This variety of gelatin generated the most halachic literature, since several major halachic authorities ruled that this product is kosher, notwithstanding its origin from a treif animal. Many products labeled as "kosher gelatin" products, which are not treated today as kosher by most kashrus organizations, are based on this heter. The halachic reasoning in this case can be simplified, without going through all the sources and literature on the topic,

thanks to a brilliant analysis of Rav Aharon Kotler (Shu't Mishnas Rabbi Aharon, 1:17). Some sources in Chazal indicate that there is no Torah prohibition in consuming non-edible parts of an animal that was not shechted. Why is this permitted?

A. Is it because these parts of the animal are not included in the Torah's prohibition of eating meat from a treif animal? B. Or is it because, although the Torah prohibits eating such animal parts, consumption of inedible items is not considered eating? Although this might seem like doubletalk, it is not. Rav Aharon notes the halacha of an inedible product subsequently processed into an edible one depends on these two ways of understanding this issue. And this is exactly what happens in the processing of gelatin. If argument A is correct, inedible collagen sources were never included in the Torah's prohibition. Thus, if indeed it is true that the gelatin was manufactured exclusively from parts of the animal that are usually not considered food, the finished, now edible, product is indeed kosher. However, if the Torah's heter is that consuming items that are not normally treated as food is not considered eating, once the collagen is rendered into an edible product, consuming the resultant gelatin is prohibited.

After a lengthy analysis of the halachic sources, Rav Aharon Kotler himself concludes that rule B is the correct conclusion, although he recognizes that many prominent authorities did not understand the topic the way he did. Upon this basis, we can understand why many prominent authorities permitted the consumption of gelatin from non-kosher bovine animals, but why this heter is no longer commonly accepted.

V. Porcine gelatin A common source of gelatin in contemporary manufacture is from pork skin, bone and other offal. Most halachic authorities did not consider this product to be kosher for a variety of reasons, including that the most common source material, pigskin, is considered edible food according to halacha. (In fact, it is fried into a high-cholesterol snack food often marketed as a tastier alternative to potato chips.) Nevertheless, there have been several prominent rabbonim who ruled that this gelatin is kosher based on the following reasons: - In the process of removing the collagen from its source, the skins and other offal are subjected to strong acid and other treatments that render them inedible. - Gelatin itself has no taste, and therefore it is not included in the Torah's prohibition. This argument is a bit specious, because industry experts and consumers will tell you that gelatin does have a mild taste. - In today's world, the source material for gelatin is not usually considered food on its own. The majority of accepted halachic authorities do not accept these arguments and consider porcine gelatin to be non-kosher. Nevertheless, one still finds today some products that are labeled as "kosher gelatin" based on these analyses. The official position of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate to this day is to allow products with porcine gelatin, but they must be carefully labeled that they are kosher only by those who have accepted the heter to consume gelatin. In other words, when purchasing "kosher gelatin," a consumer may have no way of knowing which type of gelatin he is purchasing. The consumer is relying on the hechsher's standard. If the hechsher accepts only types I or II, the gelatin will be accepted by all rabbinic authorities.

Conclusion

In the "good old days" of the European shtetl, kashrus was completely the province of the local rav, who oversaw the local shochatim and was available to answer any questions that occurred regarding kashering meat, accidental mixing of dairy and meat products, production of local wines, etc. Most raw materials were readily identifiable and, if any kashrus issues surfaced, the local rav was the source of the answer. How different is today's world in which raw materials can be sourced from literally any place on the planet, processed in numerous other locations, and the final product manufactured in a different continent. For example, gelatin is manufactured literally anywhere around the world. As a result, we need to have access to a rav who is an impressive talmid chacham, and, in addition, either he or we need access to a highly knowledgeable kashrus expert or agency.

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.

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 HaMikdash [Temple] was to become the focal point of this national center - for the simple reason that Devarim commands us to bring our "korbanot" there. [These are obviously the same korbanot as described in Sefer Vayikra.]

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

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

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

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

"...when you will go up [to this site] to eat your maser sheni, you will see the priests officiating and the levites singing... and the Sanhedrin sitting in judgment and teaching laws..., and thus learn [from them] how to fear your God." (14:23, see also 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 "baMakom 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 HaMikdash was built in Yerushalayim. In fact, in Divrei ha'yamim we are informed that Shlomo ha'melech built the Bet haMikdash 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 haMikdash in Yerushalayim.

HOLY GROUND OR HOLY PURPOSE

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

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

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

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

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

JERUSALEM / SEEK AND FIND

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

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

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

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

The generation of Yehoshua, despite their military conquests, did not succeed in establishing the permanent Mikdash (after conquering the Land). Instead, they erected the temporary Mishkan in Shilo. There it remained, quite neglected, during the entire time period of the Judges. After the city of Shilo was destroyed by the 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

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 aobject 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 resepective temptation, we are also commanded to focus our approach in a way which is the opposite of the usually desired direction:

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

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

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

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

----- SUMMARY

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

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

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

Chapter 14 begins with this powerful banner statement

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Midrash Halakhah states:

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

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

VI. SONS AND BROTHERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Tzedakah (15:7-11).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

VII. POSTSCRIPT PESACH AND LECHEM 'ONI

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

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

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

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

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

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