



Parshas Re'eh

For the week ending 27 Av 5757
29 & 30 August 1997

Overview

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem.

When the nation enters *Eretz Yisrael* they must burn down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there; *not* to a private altar. Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the *Mishkan*, but in *Eretz Yisrael* meat may be *shechted* anywhere. The categories of foods that may only be eaten in Jerusalem are listed by Moshe. He warns the nation against copying ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added or subtracted from it. If a false prophet tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot between the eyes. Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. Bnei Yisrael are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted — Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post, and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee year. The Parsha ends with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals of Pesach, Shavuos and Succos.

Insights

GURU SHMURU

“For there will arise in your midst a prophet...” (13:2)

In this week’s Parsha there is an uncanny warning about a situation that we ourselves are witnessing today. We live in an era where many Jews are a prey to the missionaries of other religions.

The Torah warns us about three ways that a person can be enticed away from Judaism:

He can be blinded by the charisma of a star, a celebrity, or a ‘guru’ who seems far-sighted. Through sheer force of personality, such a person can lure Jews away from Judaism. The Torah warns us about this form of enticement when it says *“Do not listen to the words of that prophet.”* (13:4)

Sometimes a sibling can turn a person away from Judaism: *“Judaism has nothing to offer. Look, I’m your brother. Listen to me. Why don’t you come for a weekend retreat with the ‘Master’? I promise you it will be okay. Who needs telephones anyway?”* Against this form of attack the Torah tells us *“If your brother, ... or your son or your daughter or (your) wife ...or your friend who is like your own soul should entice you secretly saying ‘Let us go and worship the gods of others ...from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth ...do not accede to him and do not listen to him...”* (13:7)

The third attack is the onslaught of peer pressure — not wanting to be out of step in the march of the masses. Fashions in ideas are as transitory as fashions in clothes. The dedicated follower of fashion is a prey to every new ‘ism’ that comes along. He’s at the mercy of the mind of the mob. Corresponding to this form of brain-washing, the Torah says *“Lawless men have emerged from your midst, and they have caused the dwellers of their city to go astray saying “Let us go and worship the gods of others...”* (13:15)

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LOOK AT ME!

“See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse...” (11:26)

When you hear a Rabbi exhorting his flock to lead more spiritual lives and spurn the “flesh-pots,” you might think: “What does *he* know about flesh-pots! Maybe if he had a Rolls Royce, he wouldn’t be so quick to reject materialism!” If anyone knew the fleshpots — it was Moshe. Moshe grew up with an Egyptian ‘gold spoon’ in his mouth. Moshe was one of the richest men in the world; a prince of Egypt. He knew what materialism was. He knew what luxury was. On the other hand, he didn’t encourage the Jewish People to embrace the spiritual path just because he hated materialism. Moshe knew better than any man that ever lived what the spiritual world has to offer. He had been up to heaven three times, a total of 120 days — 4 months amongst the angels! Moshe knew both sides of the coin as no-one before or since. In Hebrew you can read the first lines of this week’s Parsha two ways: “Look, I am placing before you...” or “Look *at me* — I am placing before you the blessing and the curse.” In other words, Moshe was saying “When you come to make your life-decisions; when you choose your path — Look at me — I’ve been in both places, and I can tell you - chose the spiritual path!”

KNIFE EDGE

“See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse...” (11:26)

Our Sages teach us that a person should constantly imagine that the whole world is in a state of precise balance — half meritorious and half culpable. He should consider that if he does just one *mitzvah*, he will tip the world’s scales of judgment to the side of credit, but if he does one *aveirah* (transgression) he will tip the scales to the negative side.... (Kidushin 40).

Consequently, the Torah tells each individual here “See!” Every single action that you do “I am putting in front of you a blessing and a curse” that *you* have the power to tip the scales in either direction....

RAGS AND RICHES

“See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse...” (11:26)

Wealth and poverty do not always have the same effect on a person.

There are those whose wealth influences them for the good, and through the blessing of their wealth they come to a

greater appreciation of Hashem. However, had they been poor, they would have been so occupied trying to find food, that they would have forgotten their Creator. This was the case in Egypt, where the Bnei Yisrael were so exhausted by the hard labor that they didn’t listen to Moshe.

On the other hand, there are those whom wealth removes from the path of righteousness, as we see so often in our history, that the Jewish people become successful and self-satisfied and forget Who gave them what they have. However, when a person is poor and “broken,” Hashem never ignores his supplications.

That’s what the verse is saying here: “See — I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse” — and don’t think that the blessing is wealth and the curse is poverty; rather everything depends on how a person deals with his riches or poverty. And whether he be rich or poor, if he turns his focus to the Torah and *mitzvos*, then whatever his status is in life he receives the blessing.

SCHOOL FOR KINDNESS

“You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting...” (14:22)

In the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the seven-year *shemittah* cycle, Jews living in *Eretz Yisrael* were instructed to separate a tenth of their crops, and bring it to Jerusalem to eat. In the third and sixth years of the cycle, that tenth was given to the poor instead.

One might ask: “Why weren’t the landowners required to first share with the poor and only subsequently to enjoy their produce in Jerusalem?”

The Rambam writes that one must give *tzedakah* with a joyous countenance and that giving with a disgruntled demeanor negates the *mitzvah*. It is not enough to do “*chesed*” (kindness), one must *love chesed*.

More than any other positive *mitzvah*, writes the Rambam, *tzedakah* is a sign of the essence of a Jew. By commanding us to bring one tenth of our crops to Jerusalem to rejoice there, Hashem taught us two vital lessons: One — that our material possessions are a present from Hashem and He can dictate how we use that material bounty. Two — that using material wealth in the way prescribed by Hashem generates feelings of joy and sanctity.

Once we have internalized these lessons in the first two years of the cycle, we can offer that bounty to the poor in the third year — not perfunctorily, but with a true love of *Chesed*.

Haftorah: Isaiah 54:11-55:55

THINGS TO COME

In this, the third Haftorah of the “seven of consolation,” the prophet Isaiah depicts a time in the future when it will be recognized that Hashem has glorified Israel, and the people will hasten to the scion of David who will lead Israel.

In this lyrical evocation of the Messianic Era, the prophet speaks of a world where protection will come openly from Hashem, and where those who hearken to Hashem

will be satisfied in abundance, whereas material efforts alone will not suffice.

Sources:

Guru Shmuru - *Avnei Ezel in Mayana Shel Torah*
Look At Me! - *Kli Yakar*
Knife Edge - *Toras Moshe*
Rags And Riches - *Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in L'Torah*
U'Moadim
School For Kindness - *Rabbi Zev Leff in Shiurei Binah*

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