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Torah Weekly - Reeh

* TORAH WEEKLY * Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion

Summary: 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, Shavuot and Succos.

Commentaries: Look At Me! "See! I am putting in front of you today a blessing and curse...." (11:26) When one hears a Rabbi exhorting his flock to lead more spiritual lives and spurn the "flesh-pots," the thought might cross one's mind: "What does he know about flesh-pots that he can tell me how much better a spiritual life is? Maybe if he had a Rolls Royce, he wouldn't be so quick to reject materialism!" That's what Moshe is hinting at here: "See! Look at me! I was a prince in Egypt; I'm one of the richest men in the world; I know what material wealth is. On the other hand, I've ascended to spiritual

realms that no other mortal has reached. I spent 120 days speaking to Hashem "face-to-face." As a result, I now wear a veil over my face except when I teach Torah, because my face radiates a light that you can't look at! Look at me -- I know both worlds and I'm telling you -- Choose the spiritual path!"

(Adapted from the Ohr HaChaim haKadosh)

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 think 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...(Kiddushin 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.... (Toras Moshe)

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. (L'Torah U'Moadim)

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. (Adapted from Rabbi Zev Leff)

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.

Sing, My Soul! Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations. Kol Mekadesh - "Whoever Keeps Shabbos...." All Yaakov's seed will honor it (Shabbos) kol zerah Ya'akov y'chabduhu Our Sages (Talmud Yerushalmi Mesechta Demai 4:1) rule that even an ignoramus in Jewish Law, who ordinarily has no credibility when it comes to testifying whether something was tithed, is believed when he makes such a statement on Shabbos because "the awe of Shabbos envelopes him and he

tells the truth." This is a powerful lesson in the universal appreciation of the sanctity of Shabbos. Even one who is ignorant of the sublime importance of Shabbos receives a "neshama yeseira" -- an extra dimension of soul -- to absorb the awe and sanctity of this day. His only requirement is that he is of the "Yaakov's seed" who were given this precious gift.

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DRASHA PARSHAS RE'EH TOUGH LOVE by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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

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

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

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

When it refers to our own misdoing or those of a false prophet the Torah simply warns us, "do not listen" or "do not follow your heart." Yet when referring to kin the Torah offers a litany of variations on a theme of disregard. Shouldn't our own feelings need more and stronger admonitions than ideas suggested by a friend or relative? Surely a prophet who conjures awesome miracles should warrant five or six expressions of caution. In that case, all the Torah says is, "do not listen to him for Hashem is testing you." There is no talk of mercy, compassion, or concealment, as there is when the Torah talks about kin. Why?

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

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

The Torah understands the intimate affinity our people has towards its members. It only needs one or two words of warning for us not to listen to the false prophet who comes with miraculous signs and mesmerizing oratory. It only tells us, "don't listen to him" Even when discussing our own desires and infatuations it simply warns us, "do not turn after your heart."

However, when referring to kin, brothers, sisters and relatives, the Torah has a difficult mission. We tend to excuse wrong doing, cover up for misdeeds, and harmonize with our loved ones -- although the results may be terribly destructive. There are countless stories of parents who did not have the heart to restrict their children's late-night activities. Too many tales are told of the man who was ensnared by his brother-in-law's misdoing because he had not the heart to refuse his overtures to evil.

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

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Parshas Re'eh HALACHA FOR 5756 COPYRIGHT 1996 SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS RE'EH

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter... (13:7). From here we derive that a son may be intimate with his mother... (Kiddushin 80b). Physical intimacy with Blood Relatives

QUESTION: Are there any restrictions on physical contact ?hugging, kissing, touching, etc. between relatives?

DISCUSSION: Although it is well known and fully accepted that marriage between certain relatives is strictly forbidden, it is not so well known that physical contact between them is also forbidden. For the purpose of our discussion, we have divided "relatives" into three separate groups. Physical contact with members of group A is permitted; with members of group B, strictly forbidden; and with members of group C, neither strictly forbidden nor expressly permitted. Rather, in the words of the Rambam(1) and the Shulchan Aruch(2), it is "most deplorable, a prohibited (type of) action, and an act of foolishness(3)" (loose translation).

Let us now list (in no particular order) the various relatives(4) in their respective groups:

Group A - Permitted

For Men: 1. A sister under the age of 11(5). 2. A daughter. If married, see footnote(6). 3. A granddaughter(7). If married, see footnote 6. 4. A mother. 5. A grandmother.

For Women: 1. A brother under the age of 12(8). 2. A son. 3. A grandson. 4. A father. 5. A grandfather.

Group B - Strictly Forbidden

For Men: 1. An uncle's wife. 2. A niece(9) over the age of 3(10). 3. A cousin over the age of 3(11). 4. His wife's sister over the age of 3. 5. His daughter-in-law and mother in law(12). 6. His brother's wife.

For Women: 1. A aunt's husband. 2. A nephew over the age of 3(13). 3. A cousin over the age of 3. 4. Her husband's brother over the age of 9. 5. Her son-in-law and father-in law(14). 6. Her sister's husband.

Group C - A Deplorable and Foolish Act

For Men: 1. A sister over the age of 11(15). 2. An aunt over the age of 3(16).

For Women: 1. Her brother over the age of 12(17). 2. Her uncle over the age of 9(18).

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FOOTNOTES:

1 Hilchos Isurei Biah 21:6. 2 EH 21:7.

3 According to the explanation of Igros Moshe YD 2:137, the Rabbis have deemed it "deplorable" and "foolish" because it may lead to physical contact with other relatives with whom physical contact is strictly forbidden, like the ones listed in group B. See also Otzar Haposkim 21:51 who quotes Batei Kehunah as saying that it is not a strong rabbinic prohibition like other

rabbinic prohibitions, it is merely a 'Derech Zehirus Bealma'.
4 We have limited this discussion to biological relatives. See The Halacha Discussion on Parshas Vaigash concerning adopted children and step-parents.
5 EH 21:7 and Beis Shmuel 9. The age of 11 for girls and 12 for boys is based on OC 73:4.
6 Igros Moshe EH 1:60 forbids hugging and kissing a married daughter or granddaughter. In Igros Moshe EH 4:63 he questions his own ruling but nevertheless holds that it is proper to be stringent.
7 Chelkas Mechokek EH 21:10; Beis Shmuel 14 concerning a daughter's daughter. Igros Moshe EH 1:60 rules that a Baal Nefesh should not hug or kiss a son's daughter but there is no need to object to those who are lenient. Aruch Hashulchan (21:10), Tzitz Eliezer 6:40-20 and Sheorim Ha'metzuyanim B'halacha 152:16, rule that there is no difference and both are equally permissible.
8 See footnote 5. 9 Igros Moshe YD 2:137. 10 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (quoted in Shu"t Avnei Yashfei pg. 189). 11 See footnote 10. 12 Igros Moshe EH 4:63, who rules that it is prohibited Me'deoraisa. 13 See footnote 9 and 10. 14 See footnote 12. 15 Rambam and Shulchan Aruch quoted in footnote 1 and 2. The age of 11 is based on OC 73:4. 16 Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, ibid, group an older sister together with an aunt. Apparently, even a young aunt is prohibited. 17 See footnote 15. 18 See footnote 16. Physical contact with a boy under nine and a girl under 3 is permitted.

Shabbat-B'Shabbato: R'eih 5756

SHABBAT-ZOMET is an extract from SHABBAT-B'SHABBATO

FINDING THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE by Rabbi Yehudah Shaviv
After the last three Torah portions, with Moshe's lectures about the past, this week's portion has a multitude of mitzvot. While it is difficult to choose a single topic as a central theme, one phrase that is repeated often is "The place that G-d will choose." This phrase appears sixteen times. The Torah warns again and again that all sacrifices are to be brought at this site, which will be chosen by G-d, and that it is strictly forbidden for Bnei Yisrael to offer sacrifices at any other sites.

The next thing that one might expect is a description of where this holy site is, in at least as much detail as is devoted to the mountains of Gerizim and Eival. These sites, where Bnei Yisrael recite the special blessing and curses on entering the land, are described in this week's portion: "Behold, they are across the Jordan, beyond the route of the sun, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Aravah, opposite the Gilgal, near Eilonei Mamrei" [Devarim 11:30]. Look how much detail is given to pin down the site of the mountains, which are used only once, on entering the land. Contrast this with the site of sacrifices for all generations to come, which is not even described by a single word.

It is also clear that there was no oral tradition that gave the details, since we are told that two of the greatest scholars of all time had to expend a significant effort in order to find the site. "What is the meaning of the passage, 'And he (David) and Shmuel went and stayed at Nayot' [I Shmuel 19:18]? They sat at Ramah studying the attraction of the world (from the word 'noy')" [Zevachim 54b]. Rashi explains that they were trying to determine the site of the Temple, which was not clear from the Torah. The Talmud describes different suggestions that were proposed by David and Shmuel. Could it be that in spite of an oral tradition these two scholars did not know where the Temple was to be built?

It is reasonable to assume that the Torah purposefully leaves out the geographical details of the site of the Temple. The key to understanding this may be from the passage: "Only at the site that G-d chooses ... look for His site and come there" [Devarim 12:5]. According to the Sifri, "Search by the words of a prophet. Should we wait until a prophet tells us? According to the passage, 'search for His site' -- look for the site and find it, and then a prophet will confirm it."

The Torah hid the details of the site, so that Bnei Yisrael would have to expend their own efforts in finding it, and only after this would they obtain confirmation from a holy source. Building a Temple which will be a meeting place for Bnei Yisrael and G-d is an action that must result from a significant

effort on the part of Yisrael.

COMMENTS ON "PIRKEI AVOT": Chapter 6: Blessings for Torah Study by Rabbi Eliezer Gur-Arieh

Just as it is required to recite a blessing before studying Torah, there may be a similar "blessing" before studying the words of our sages. This appears at the beginning of this chapter of Avot: "Our sages taught in the words of the Mishnah, blessed is He who chose them and their teachings." The second phrase is praise of the Almighty, similar to the opening phrase before the discussion of the four sons in the Pesach Hagaddah, "Blessed is the 'Makom,' He is blessed, blessed is He who gave Torah to Yisrael, He is blessed." Just as the text of the blessing of the Torah starts with a choice, "He who chose us from all the other nations," so does the blessing in this Mishnah: "He who chose them (the sages) and their teachings." The difference is that in the blessing for the Torah there is a sequence -- we were given the Torah because we were chosen -- while the blessing for the sages describes two separate choices: the sages, and their teachings. This is similar to the blessing recited before reading the weekly Haftarah: "He who chose good prophets and desired their words ..." Here again, there is a double choice: the prophets, and their faithful words.

Pirkei Avot starts with the sequence of Torah being handed down from generation to generation, from Moshe to Yehoshua and so on, and continues with what each generation added on their own. Now, in the final chapter, we are told that the Almighty affirms their words, in that he chose not only the sages themselves but also the wise advice that they gave.

However, this is not the end of the process of learning and succession from generation to generation. It is now possible to begin a renewed process of receiving Torah from Sinai. As is described by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, "Each and every day a 'bat kol' emanates from Mount Chorev to declare: Woe to the creatures because of the insult to Torah." [Mishnah 3]. Most of the Mishnayot that follow give praise to the Torah and those who study it, for Torah does not end. Torah study is a never-ending process, of continuously striving for greater and greater heights: "Whoever is always involved in Torah rises up" [Mishnah 2]. It is the combination of the Almighty, who gave the Torah, and Yisrael, who study it, that bring about the increased glory and greatness of the Torah.

B"H Torah Studies Adaptation of Likutei Sichos by Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks Chief Rabbi of Great Britain

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion
RE'EI

The following Sicha illustrates in a striking way an important truth about the nature of Chassidic thought.

Chassidut is not simply one amongst many of the branches of Jewish thinking. It is not separate from or merely supplementary to the "revealed" facet of Torah - halachic or legal reasoning. Instead, it lies at the heart of the other branches of Torah, shedding light on them all.

In this way, pursuing an apparently minor halachic problem, we may travel deeper and deeper until we arrive, unexpectedly, and yet inevitably, at a fundamental Chassidic truth.

We will address the problem concerning the law of a city led into idolatry - one of the subjects of the Sidra of Re'eh.

One difficulty that confronts us immediately is the way in which even innocent people seem to be involved in the collective guilt and punishment of the city. The other is that Rambam rules that if the city repents of its sin, this collective guilt is averted. And yet there is a principle in Judaism that repentance cannot save a man from human judgment, only from Divine retribution.

Rambam's ruling is the only exception to this principle. What grounds did he have for making it? In working towards an answer we find ourselves led ultimately to an inward truth about the Jewish soul, its unity and its spiritual power.

THE IDOLATROUS CITY

The Sidra of Re'eh contains the laws which were to apply in the Holy Land to a city tainted with idolatry:

"If you shall hear in one of your cities, which the L-rd your G-d has given you to abide there, saying: Certain men, worthless persons, are gone out from among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods which you have not known.'

"Then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently, and behold, if it be truth and the thing certain.... You shall surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword. And you shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its broad place and shall burn the city and all its spoil with fire unto the L-rd your G-d, and it shall be a heap forever; it shall not be built again."

This Sidra is always read on the Shabbat when we bless the coming month of Elul, or on the New Moon itself.

Elul, the month of Divine mercy and forgiveness, is dominated by the idea of teshuvah, "returning" to G-d and away from sin. Thus we find in Re'eh an unprecedented statement of the power and scope of teshuvah.

As a general rule, the act of repenting and "returning" to G-d affects only Divine justice, not the rulings of a human court. The principle is stated in the Talmud: "Those who were liable to karet (death by the hand of heaven)... if they repent, the Heavenly Tribunal pardons them. But those who have become liable to death by the sentence of a (human) court... even if they should repent, the Earthly Tribunal can not pardon them."

The same applies to lesser punishments: Repentance does not affect the sentence of a human court. The reason is that teshuvah is a change of heart and so it lies outside the consideration of human judges who can deal only with visible, objective fact.

Nonetheless, in the ruling of Rambam, the punishments to which a city led into idolatry is liable - the smiting of its inhabitants, the burning of its spoil - are averted if the people repent of their collective sin. This is a unique instance of repentance affecting the ruling of a human court.

Rambam's ruling has been explained by one of his commentators, the Kesef Mishneh, in this way: To become liable for the death sentence an individual must be warned that the act he is about to commit is a capital offense. But in the case of an idolatrous city, the warning about its conduct is collective, addressed to the people as a whole. Therefore the normal requirement of individual caution is not present, and therefore, repentance averts the punishment.

However this explanation seems to miss the central point. What prevents repentance from affecting a human court's verdicts has nothing to do with warning, but with the fact that men cannot see into men's hearts to know whether an expression of repentance is sincere or not. Why should this principle not apply in the present case, the idolatrous city? Why should repentance be effective in just this instance? Besides, Rambam's point is that in this case the people concerned were liable to punishment, and only afterwards won their pardon by repentance.

COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Rogotchover Rav explains Rambam's statement in a different way. According to him, Rambam does not maintain that repentance brings universal pardon; but that it changes collective guilt into individual guilt. The law of an idolatrous city involves collective liability. Even the innocent members of idol-serving families, even the property of the righteous men who live in the town, come under its penalties. But if the inhabitants repent of their deeds, they become judged as individuals.

No one who is personally innocent suffers. But the idol-worshippers are punished, and repentance does not alter their sentence.

But, again, this leaves the central difficulty unsolved. Repentance is something that happens after the act. It follows therefore that between the act and the repentance there is a period when the collective liability of the inhabitants is in force. How can a redirection of the heart, something that no human judge can assess, have the retroactive effect of mitigating a liability or softening a verdict?

THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM

What is the Scriptural basis for Rambam's ruling? The Rogotchover Rav suggests that it lies in the destruction of Sodom, the city which had been led into idolatry. Before sending His punishment G-d says, "I will go down now

and see if they have done according to the cry of it."

This cannot mean straightforwardly that an omniscient G-d needed to establish what He had heard by hearsay. Instead it has been taken to mean that G-d would see whether they had repented, and, in the reading of the Targum, "If they have repented I will not punish them." This is certainly an instance of an idolatrous city given the chance to gain pardon by repentance. But one fact which prevents it from being the precedent on which Rambam bases his views is that it happened before Sinai, before the Giving of the Torah. And there is a general principle that "we do not derive laws on the basis of events before the Giving of the Torah." Also, Sodom was punished by the Heavenly Tribunal.

A GROUP AND A COMMUNITY

There is one further difficulty in understanding the position of an idolatrous city.

There is more than one kind of death sentence in Jewish law, and there is a rule that if a man is liable to death in two different ways for two separate crimes, he is condemned to the more severe or painful of the two. But in the case of the idolatrous city, they are liable to the collective sentence of a relatively painless death; whereas each as an individual idolater would be liable to a more severe punishment (stoning). Yet the more lenient one prevails.

The problem can be put more forcefully. Until the majority of the town worships idols, the collective sin does not apply. Each idolater is guilty only of his personal wrongdoing, and hence liable to a severe death sentence. But when that last person who turns a minority into a majority commits the sin, he brings the whole town into the category of an idolatrous city, and hence to a more lenient punishment. How can this one extra act of the sinner have the effect of softening the liability which already applied to the others?

We are forced to conclude that this point - where the majority of the town becomes idol-worshippers - creates a whole new entity, a collectivity, a community of sin. It ceases to be, legally, a group comprised of individuals, and becomes instead one unity. So it is not that their individual liability is lessened at this point, but that it ceases to apply, and a new situation is created, where all are judged as one.

This is why the punishment for an idolatrous city is so extensive, applying even to innocent members of idol-worshipping families (unless they fled to another city), and to the property of the righteous minority. For although individually they may be blameless, they are nonetheless a part of the whole, the community which is judged as if it were a single entity.

And this is why Rambam is able to take as his precedent the case of Sodom, even though it occurred before Sinai. For what he wishes to derive is not a legal point but a conceptual one, namely, the difference between a group of individuals and a community. Even though this distinction has legal consequences, it is not in itself a point of law, and it may therefore be learned from events which preceded Sinai.

Finally, we can see how repentance - on the interpretation of the Rogotchover Rav - has the power to annul collective responsibility and leave only individual guilt to be punished. For teshuvah has indeed no power to affect the sentence of a human court. But we are not concerned here with a matter of law but of fact, namely, do the idolaters form a unity or are they to be treated as separate individuals? And this - which is not a question of how the law is to be applied but of which law is to be applied - can be affected by repentance. Repentance does not alter the punishment so much as change the facts of the case.

THE UNITY OF THE JEWISH SOUL

Yet, we have not yet solved our problem, only shifted its emphasis.

Human judges can deal only with what they know, not with the feelings of other men's hearts. If repentance alters the facts of the case how can judges establish what are the facts, how can they distinguish real from insincere teshuvah?

We need to go deeper and understand the inner meaning of the principle that a human court can not pardon on the grounds that a guilty person has repented.

The inner reason is, that what is handed over to human jurisdiction are actions whose wrongness is independent of the heart. Therefore, subsequent remorse cannot set them right. But the wrong done by an idolatrous city is different. It is essentially related to the inner feelings of the idolaters; and so,

it is something that a change of heart can effect.

The explanation is this:

The Jewish people are capable of a special kind of unity, an essential oneness, because their souls have their source in G-d who is the ultimate Unity. And even though this is a spiritual unity, it creates in addition a physical unity: "Who is like Your people Israel, one nation on the earth? It is this unity which finds its expression in the law of an idolatrous city where the oneness of the community creates a collective liability so strong as to implicate even the property of the city.

But this seems strange. Idolatry is the very opposite of G-d's will and unity. It wraps the soul in darkness and division. How, then, can it manifest such a oneness?

But there is no paradox. It is precisely because the Jewish soul is a part of G-d that its freewill has no limits; that a Jew can move so far from his true nature as to serve idols and deny his faith. Even in this gravest of transgressions the special character of his soul and its power of oneness is manifest.

In all other wrongs that a Jew may commit and be judged by a court of fellow-Jews, there are two distinct harms that he must remedy: The wrong he has inflicted on his soul, and the damage he has caused to the world.

Repentance sets right the first; punishment, the second. The two are separate and the one cannot alter the need for the other. But the whole nature of the idolatrous town is its collective involvement which implicates even innocent inhabitants, even inanimate property.

This unity is a spiritual unity; the wrong is a spiritual wrong; and the remedy is a spiritual one - repentance. Punishment is a remedy for harm done to the world. But the "world" of the idolatrous town - neighbors, cattle, property - is entirely assimilated to the oneness of the souls of its inhabitants. It has become totally subordinate to the spirituality, even in transgression. And this is why here and only here, in a township that has ceased to be a group of individuals and become a community, that repentance even heals with regard to the jurisdiction of man.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. IX, pp. 106-114.)

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH PROJECT
(VBM)

PARSHAT HASHAVUA PARSHAT RE'AY
by Menachem Leibtag

This week's shiur is dedicated by Jeremy and Lisa Barkan: * In memory of Judy Hurwitz z"l, a champion of Torah learning for women, who died tragically this week. We share in mourning the loss and wish a refuah shelemah to the injured grandchildren. May the Hurwitz and Lindenbaum families know no further sorrow. HaMakom yenchem etchem betokh she'ar avelei Tzion v'Yerushalayim. * In memory of Ami Gregor z"l. * In memory of our grandfather, Baruch ben Hillel HaCohen Barkan z"l, whose yahrzeit is 18 Av. * In memory of our grandfather, Mendel Beer ben Moshe Aryeh z"l.

When we speak of Jerusalem, we relate two aspects:

- its geographic location
- its function as the national center of the Jewish Nation.

Surprisingly enough, Chumash never mentions its specific name nor its precise location. However, its concept - the national center of the Jewish Nation - unfolds as a fundamental theme in Sefer Dvarim.

This week, in our analysis of the CHUKIM & MISHPATIM section of the main speech of Sefer Dvarim, we discuss this theme.

INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Recall from our introductory shiur on Sefer Dvarim that the main speech of Sefer Dvarim (chaps. 5->26), containing the mitzvot which Bnei Yisrael are to keep when they enter the land (6:1), is divided into two distinct sections:

- "Ha'MITZVA" (6:4 -> 11:31)
- "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 which Bnei Yisrael must keep when setting up their nation in the Land.

These practical laws, beginning in Parshat Re'ay (12:1) and continuing until Parshat Ki-tavo (26:16), are presented in a very structured manner. Therefore, their order and presentation are significant. We begin our discussion with the first topic of this section - "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" - for it emerges as a primary theme within this section.

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 - "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem":

"THESE are the 'chukim & mishpatim' which you must observe in the LAND WHICH HASHEM IS GIVING YOU TO CONQUER... (12:1):

- * 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. (12:2-3)
- * DO NOT WORSHIP YOUR GOD IN THIS MANNER (in multiple places of worship/ read carefully! / see Further Iyun).

* Rather, at the SITE WHICH GOD WILL CHOOSE - HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM - amongst all your tribes, to establish HIS NAME there - L'SHAKEYN SHMO SHAM; -

SEEK HIS DIVINE PRESENCE and go there. "I'shichno ti'DRSHU u'ba'ta shama" (12:5)

- * THERE you must bring all of your offerings and tithes etc. Eat and rejoice there in front of your Lord... (12:6-7)

* ... 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 which I command you.... (12:8-12)

- * 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... (12:13-14)

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 which follow - to establish a central SITE IN WHICH GOD'S NAME WILL DWELL.

Thus, the primary topic of this opening parsha is Bnei Yisrael's obligation to transform Eretz Canaan into a land in which God's Name (i.e. reputation) becomes known. This 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 - HAMA KOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM L'SHAKEYN SHMO SHAM - through which this goal can be realized.

In light of our understanding of 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 only logical that the opening commandment be to RID the land from the NAME of other gods, while establishing a site in which God's NAME will become known.

A RECURRING THEME

Not only is - HAMA KOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM - repeated several times in the opening parsha (chapter 12), this phrase is mentioned some FIFTEEN 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
12:5,11,14,21	The place to bring all "korbanot"
14:23,24	The place to eat "maaser sheni"
15:20	The place to eat "bchor b'heyman"
16:2,6,7,11,15,16	The site for "aliya l'regel" on the holidays

17:8 The seat of the Supreme Court
26:2 The place to bring one's 'first fruits'

A NATIONAL CENTER

A quick glance at this table immediately shows us that this location emerges not only as a site to offer 'korbanot', but also as a National Religious Center. These mitzvot in Sefer Dvarim help 'create' 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, he must go to this site each time that he wishes to bring a voluntary offering ("korban n'dava") or is obligated to bring an atonement offering ("korban 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'heyman")! Furthermore, the Supreme Court, for all judicial and halachic judgement, is 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 does it function?

These mitzvot which are to be kept at this site, when performed properly, help shape our national character 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 we would more likely find twelve different religions rather than twelve tribes.

This center becomes more than a site to offer korbanot. It serves as a center for justice, judgement, Torah education, and culture, as well as a place of national gathering.

Not only is this site to become a national center, it also serves to enhance the spirituality of each individual, as explained in 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..." (14:22-23):

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

Clearly, the Mishkan (and later the Bet Ha'Mikdash) is to become the focal point of this national center. Even though Sefer Dvarim does not mention this explicitly, it is implicit, for the Torah commands us to bring our "korbanot" there. These are obviously the same korbanot as described in Sefer Vayikra.

Yet, the obligation to eat our "maaser sheni" at this site, which is simply produce (not an animal offering), implies that there needs to be an area surrounding the Mikdash. This site is defined by halacha as the area within the walls of the CITY which surrounds the Bet Ha'Mikdash (later to become the city of Jerusalem). Within the walls of this city one can eat his "maasrot" as well as the meat of his "shlamim" offerings.

The Torah even designates 'civil servants' who are to officiate and administer the Bet Ha'Mikdash - the "kohanim" and "leviim" - whose entire lives are dedicated to the service of God. They, together with the judges and scholars of the supreme court system, will populate 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), should create an environment which will enhance one's "yirat shamayim" - the fear of God. **RE-LIVING HAR SINAI**

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

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

[Note the similarities to Ma'amad Har Sinai.]

JERUSALEM / SEEK AND FIND

Sefer Dvarim never specifies the precise geographic location of where this site is to be, i.e. where the permanent Bet Ha'Mikdash is to be constructed. The site is only referred to as "the one which God will choose" ("HaMakom asher yivchar Hashem").

In Parshat Reay we find a very obscure hint regarding how we are to find this site:

"I'shichno ti'drshu, u'bata shama" -

"You must SEEK out the Divine Presence and go there." (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. God is found by those who SEARCH for him. Just as this principal applies on the individual level ["karov Hashem l'chol kor'av" - God is close to those who call out to Him], so too on the national level. Only when Am Yisrael as a nation, begins a serious search for God, will God show them the proper location.

The generation of Yehoshua did not succeed in establishing the permanent Mikdash after conquering the Land. Instead, they erected the temporary structure, the Mishkan, in Shilo. There it remained, quite neglected, during the entire time period of the Judges. Shilo itself was destroyed by the Philistim during the time of Eli and Shmuel. In the meantime, the Mishkan and the "aron" wandered from site to site. It was only in the time period of David and Shlomo that Bnei Yisrael actively aspired to build the Mikdash.

When David became king, one of his first acts was to gather the nation in order to bring the "aron" (the holy ark) to the capital city. Note carefully how David describes his plan 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'yemei 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 Dvarim 12:5]

David Ha'melech notes that during the generation of Shaul, the "aron" was neglected at the national level. To King David, bringing the "aron" to Yerushalayim is the highest national priority. After the "aron" finally settles in his capital city, David's next request is to build a permanent house for the "aron", i.e. the Bet Ha'Mikdash:

"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!" (II Shmuel 7:1-2)

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

Even though the Temple itself is only built by his son Shlomo (a topic for a separate shiur), it's precise site is designated in David's own lifetime (see I Divrei Ha'yamim 22:1 and context.) At that time, Har Ha'Moriah, the site of "Akeidat Yitzchak", was chosen to be the permanent location of the Temple for all times (see II Divrei Ha'yamim 3:1 and ibid).

JERUSALEM TODAY

According to the guidelines of Sefer Dvarim, 'Jerusalem' is destined to become more than just the city which houses the Temple. Ideally, Jerusalem should become the National Cultural and Religious Center of the Jewish people, including all the qualities required by Sefer Dvarim. 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"

(Zecharya 8:3).

"For out of Zion will come forth Torah and the word of the Lord

from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

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

shabbat shalom
menachem

FURTHER IYUN

A. The mitzvot recorded in Parshat Mishpatim also reflect the situation at Ma'amad Har Sinai, prior to Chet Ha'egel. 1. Find similarities between Parshat Mishpatim and Reay in regard to the Mikdash and the type of conquest. [If you are stuck, try 23:14-19, 23:22-24, 23:28 - also 20:21-22] 2. Compare these psukim carefully to Dvarim chap 12, and chap 16.

B. Although 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 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?

C. "LO TA'ASUN KEYN L'HASHEM ELOKEICHEM"

DO NOT WORSHIP YOUR GOD IN THIS MANNER (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 "psbat" 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 "psbat". The second is a Midrash Halacha. Do these two pirushim contradict each other, or can both be correct. Use your answer to explain the nature of Midrashei Halacha.

D. BACK TO SEFER BREISHIT

Note the use of the word "MAKOM" in Parshat Ha'akeyda (Br. chapter 22/ see psukim 2,3,4,9,14) and by Yaakov's Dream in Bet-el (Br. chapter 28/ see psukim 11->22!). 1. Which of these two sites finally become the site of the Mikdash? 2. Do you think the extensive use of this word in these two parshiot, and it use in Parshat Reay, are reflected in Chazal's understanding that they are referring to the same location?

E. MIKRA BIKURIM - THE FINALE

Note that the final mitzvah (or almost the last mitzvah) of the chukim & mishpatim section again focuses on HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM - the mitzvah to bring "bikurim" there, and recite the proclamation of "arami oved avi" (see 26:1-10). 1. Does this parsha belong in Parshat Ki-tavo, or do you think that it would be more fitting to Parshat Reay?

In your answer relate to the parsha of maaser sheni in Reay (14:22-29) and viduuy maaser in 26:12-15 (right after bikurim)! 2. Why do think it was chosen to conclude the main speech? [Note that chapter 26:16-19 is the conclusion of this speech/ see 27:1] 3. Relate your answer to the purpose of this speech, and the content of "mikra bikurim".

Relate your answer to "brit bein ha'btarim" (Breishit 15), and Dvarim 11:22-25.

F. THE MISHKAN AND SEFER DVARIM

It is rather puzzling that the Mishkan, which is mentioned so often in Shmot, Vayikra, and Bamidbar, finds no mention at all in Sefer Dvarim. This absence, so striking, led many bible critics to suggest (chas v'shalom) that the author of Shmot could not be the author of Dvarim! Based on this week's shiur, one could suggest the following answer.

As we explained in the previous shiurim, Sefer Dvarim is NOT a repeat nor a summary of Chumash. Rather, it contains those mitzvot which were given to Moshe Rabeinu to convey to Bnei Yisrael at Ma'amad Har Sinai,

immediately after the Ten Commandments. These mitzvot form a 'guidebook' for Bnei Yisrael to follow as they enter the Promised Land.

These mitzvot do include the establishment of a National Center, the site of the permanent Mikdash. Now, had Bnei Yisrael not sinned at Har Sinai, there would have been no need at all to build the TEMPORARY Mishkan. Rather, the PERMANENT Mikdash could have been constructed almost immediately, as soon as the conquest of the Land was complete. According to this ideal scenario, Bnei Yisrael would have continued their journey to Eretz Yisrael immediately after receiving the 'luchot' at Har Sinai (see Shmot 23:20-24:12). As the conquest of the Land should have taken only a short time, there would have been no need to build a temporary sanctuary in the Land at all. Construction of the permanent Mikdash, "ba'makom asher yivchar Hashem" could have commenced almost immediately.

Recall now that the mitzvot of the main speech in Sefer Dvarim were given at Ma'amad Har Sinai, PRIOR to Chet Ha'egel. Therefore, they reflect this ideal scenario of 'the permanent Mikdash' as described above. Although these mitzvot are only being recorded forty years later, they still reflect this ideal. As the new generation is now preparing to cross the Jordan and conquer the Land (see 12:10-11), they are receiving the mitzvot in the same manner as the previous generation had received them at Har Sinai.

Therefore, there is no need for Dvarim to mention the Mishkan, i.e. the temporary structure. Dvarim focuses on conquering the land and setting up its institutions according to the ideal scenario.

1. Relate this discussion to the "machloket" concerning whether the commandment to build the "Mishkan" (Parshiot Trumah/ Tzaveh) was given PRIOR to Chet Ha'egel (Ramban) or afterward (Rashi). [See previous shiur on Parshat Trumah which explained this machloket.]. ffffffff

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The parsha begins with Moshe's articulation of the choice and challenge facing each member of Klal Yisroel, "See, I place before you today blessing and curse." Moshe then adds, "The blessing, that you will listen to the commands of Hashem your G-d...and the curse, if you will not listen to the commands of Hashem your G-d." These words are not only simple cause and effect, if you listen, then you will be blessed, but literal, explain Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch and the Ohr Hachaim. Moshe Rabbeinu is defining the blessing as Torah observance, and the curse as abandonment of Torah values.

Moreover, Moshe's message contains much more than definitions of blessing and curse. By using the word Re'eih- See- Moshe informs us of our capacity to perceive his words as a visual reality. Seeing is believing. We can learn a Torah concept and see it's blessing, and we can hear an opinion contrary to Torah and sense it's inherent curse, as if the blessing and curse were unfolding before our eyes.

"Who is a wise man?" the Talmud tells us, "one who can see the future." Why does one actually have to see the future to be wise? Wouldn't knowing the future be just as enlightening?

Rav Mordechai Gifter, shlit"a, explains. A man is deciding whether or not to take his umbrella with him as he leaves his house. He knows that the forecast is for rain. He looks out the window and sees that it is dark and overcast, but not yet raining, and the thought of carrying around an umbrella, coupled with the memory of all the umbrellas he's left on trains deters him from taking one. Nevertheless, if he walks outside and sees a few drops of rain on the front steps, he will go back inside and fetch the umbrella. Visual perception makes all the difference.

Many times we can predict the future, but if we can't visualize it we won't act upon that knowledge. Moshe tells us Re'eih, we are capable of this level of perception when equating blessing and curse with acceptance and rejection of a Torah way of life.

A beautiful illustration of this is found in the verses, "You are children of Hashem your G-d; do not cut yourselves and do not make a bald spot between your eyes for the dead." The first part of this verse provides the rationale for the second part, the prohibition against self-mutilation. Can one be so devastated by the loss of a loved one, so filled with a sense of abandonment and dread for the future that he is driven to mutilate himself?

Certainly one might. However, when one lives with a visual perception of Hashem as a loving parent, both to him and the deceased, he could not harm himself.

How blessed is one who sees his relationship with Hashem in such a way. What a blessing it is to feel such comfort, trust and security at the most despairing moments of life.

Later in the Parsha we are commanded to tithe our produce. Our Sages tell us, "Aseir bishvil shetisasheir- Tithe so that you will become wealthy." This wealth, explains Rav Shimon Schwab, zt"l, based on a comment by the Rambam, follows the mishnah in Avos : "Who is wealthy? He who is content with his lot." By giving to others through tithing, one develops a contentment that is the blessing of true wealth.

Many of us look for berachos from tzaddikim. That certainly has it's place and value. But let us remember that the ultimate beracha is available to us by listening to the Torah, observing it's mitzvos and living by it's values. We also have the ability to see the inherent blessing even in the Torah's most esoteric concepts. The key is, "that you will listen." Rabbi Elchonon Zohn Rabbi Zohn is Rabbi of Congregation Sons of Israel -Ahavath Achim, Middle Village, N.Y. and Director of the Chevra Kadisha of Queens. Go To Next

From: "dmgreen@skynet.net" To:"dvartorah@torah.org"

Parshas Re'eh

Please pray that Yehuda Ben Bailah Rus, Chaim Yaakov Nachmiel ben Soro Dubba and Yerachmiel ben Chava Sora Devora have a refuah shelaimah - a speedy and full recovery.

You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field, year by year. (Devorim 14:22)

The Talmud (Shabbos 119 a), based on the wording of this Posuk, this biblical sentence, that one who tithes WILL become rich. (The Hebrew word for tithing is "Maaser" the root of the word is Ayin Sin Raish. The root of the noun Rich is also Ayin Shin Raish. Therefore, since the wording of the Posuk is ASeR t'ASeR the word is repeated the Talmud sees the hint that one who tithes will become rich.)

The commentaries ask, normally any reference to affluence is one mentioning the evils and pitfalls of wealth. The Sefer Mishlay/ Book of Proverbs is replete with the evils of wealth.

I think one may ask another question and that is there are many righteous people who tithe and are not affluent. How does this Talmudic statement reconcile with the facts as we see them?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab Z"L gave two wonderful answers for this.

King David in Psalms tells us (49:17-18) Do not be concerned when another becomes wealthy, or when the honor of his house multiplies. (For) When he dies he will not take it with him. (A person does not take his wealth with him when he dies.)

The Talmud in Bava Basra (11a) relates that during the famine years King Munvaz opened his storage houses and gave away his money to support the poor people of his nation. When his family complained that he was "Squandering" the wealth his ancestors left for him. King Munvaz said, "My ancestors stored their treasure below and I store mine above. My ancestors stored their wealth where they can be stolen, I stored my wealth where they are untouchable. My Ancestors stored their wealth for their descendants whereas I stored my wealth for myself." In simple terms King Munvaz understood that the money spent on doing a Mitzvah is not lost. On the contrary, that money is truly safe for all of eternity.

With this we can understand the talmudic explanation of the Posuk. When one tithes and does what he is supposed to do with his money, then his "wealth" is stored in the heaven as a reward for using his money properly. That is the true wealth that a person should aspire to. To use one's money properly one does not lose his money, on the contrary that is the ONLY "money" we truly have stored away for that day when we enter the world to come and give final accounting for our actions.

Rabbi Schwab offers another answer. Rabbi Yochanon in Nedarim (38a) said: The spirit of G-d's prophecy ONLY rests upon one who is strong, wealthy and wise. From this Talmudic saying it is apparent that wealth IS an advantage and a something to be desired. What wealth is being referred to

that is so great? (As opposed to the wealth that is denigrated in Proverbs.)

In Pirkey Avos the Mishna says, Who is wealthy? One who is satisfied with his portion. Satisfaction with that which G-d has given us is the wealth that is laudatory and is considered a good Middah, a good character trait. It is this trait of being satisfied with one's lot that is the prerequisite for prophecy.

If this is the case then this truly compliments the concept of tithing. When one can be satisfied with what he was given by G-d, and understands that by giving 10% away to the poor he will not be missing anything. That is the true lesson of Maaser, tithing, and thus a satisfied person is a truly wealthy person. Therefore, the Talmud teaches us, Do you want to become truly wealthy? The only certain, and guaranteed way is to learn to be satisfied with what one has. How does one achieve this satisfaction? By giving away one tenth of one's crops one learns to be satisfied and eventually will become truly wealthy.

Thanks

Joe Goldstein EXT 444

If a train station is a place where trains stop then what is a work station?

Green Pieces Home of wonderful craft items

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* PG LifeLine - Re'eh

Please pray for the speedy healing of Masha Miriam bas Basya, Tziporah Chaya Sarah bas Basya, Alta Chana Baila bas Basya, Menashe Avigdor ben Rivka, Sarit bas Esther, Yonason haCohen ben Rochel Leah, Eliyahu ben Chana, Esther Miriam bas Alizah Geulah, Zvi Yehuda ben Chaya Esther, Chaim Yaakov Nachmiel Ben Sarah Dabah, Zalman ben Chaya, Shlomo ben Esther, Sara Riva bas Chana, Reuvain Ben Faygah, Devorah Bas Sarah Rivka, Chana bas Chava, Mordechai ben Chana, Mordechai ben Faygah.

"When HaShem your G-d has cut off the nations from before you, those whom you are going there to inherit, and you succeed them and dwell in their land; guard yourself lest you be trapped into following them, after they are destroyed from before you, to ask, 'how did these nations serve their gods? I will do the same.' You shall not do this to Hashem your G-d..." [12:29-31]
The Torah tells us that we are not to follow idolatrous practices. The Ramban [Nachmonides] says in his commentary that this passage is not talking about idol worship - but about using the methods used to serve idols, to serve G-d. In general, we may look at the laws of idol worship, and congratulate ourselves on how well we're doing. Though I might have trouble with other commandments, I really can't recall bowing down to a statue, or serving up an offering to one!

But in the eyes of our Sages, there are many other practices that have the "scent" of idolatry, even if they aren't the real thing:

"Anyone who looks away from giving charity, is as if he served idols" [Talmud Kesubos 68a]. What is their proof? Our parsha! The Torah says, "guard yourself lest there be a lowly thing within your heart..." [15:9], and earlier, "men have gone out, lowly persons from among you, and have drawn the inhabitants of their city to idolatry" [13:14]. Just like the latter case is discussing idolatry, so too the former.

And there are other cases, such as "anyone who has the trait of haughtiness, is as if he served idols" [Talmud Sota 4b], and "Anyone who mocks the holidays, is as if he served idols" [Talmud Pesachim 118a].

What do these three have in common? A rejection of G-d's influence on our lives, our connection to G-d. Obviously, one who mocks the holidays is rejecting these "remembrances of our departure from Egypt," the time when G-d established His eternal relationship with the Jewish people. One who fails to give charity expresses his belief that he has earned his money, and he can keep it - ignoring the truth that success is never guaranteed, and depends entirely upon G-d, Who has commanded us to give His money to others. Finally, one who is haughty and proud cannot have a full recognition of G-d; if he realized how small he was in comparison, how could he be so proud?

So what do we learn from this? That when we lose sight of G-d, and place too much emphasis on our own, human accomplishments, that may not be idolatry - but it's certainly a human in the wrong direction.

Why did I think about this, this week? Actually, it's related to current events, which I usually avoid discussing here. The Lifeline usually isn't a controversial piece (and I hope it isn't this time; I hope you agree). But I was really bothered by recent news, and recent articles.

How should we react to the following: We find a child with a special skill. We encourage him or her to develop that skill, by practicing for several hours each day. We may even place the child in a special school in order that more hours can be spent on practice. Is this a good thing?

Maybe so - it depends on the skill. If a child is a musical protege and loves music, then even if he (or she) will not be the next Yitzchak Perlman, he will still enjoy playing an instrument, generating music for a lifetime. We can debate whether it's worthwhile, but who knows how the child might benefit from the skill and discipline acquired?

But what if we insist that all the training is to perfect the body for a few days of competition? And all the training is not in order to find and develop one's true potential, but in order to demonstrate one's superiority to the others - by winning? And what if we work the child to the point of injury - and beyond - in order to win?

Obviously, that's insane. Obviously, we should condemn this abuse. Obviously, we should... applaud with the full volume of international hysteria every few years. Welcome to the Olympics.

I need to put in an important disclaimer here. I do not mean to criticize the young athletes who have trained since early childhood. It's not their fault. The system, the coaches, and the parents - are ill.

How did I hear about this? [Promise - I didn't watch the Olympics.] Because a local Jewish journal ran an article on Kerri Strug, who ensured a gold medal for the U.S. Women's gymnastics team. How? By performing a terrific vault on a severely injured leg - further damaging her leg in the process. She accepted the gold medal wearing a cast, and will quite possibly never vault again. Yet the tenor of the article was "didn't this Jewish girl do a wonderful thing?"

No. I mean, yes she did something truly admirable, demonstrating real selflessness and dedication. But something is truly wrong with a system that called upon her to do something quite so insane. Because she succeeded, she's worth \$10-15 million in endorsements (no exaggeration). Had she collapsed a second earlier, she would have been "worth" much less in the eyes of the advertisers, perhaps not enough even to pay for the surgery to repair her leg.

And when I spoke with others about this, and read a few more articles, I discovered stories about other athletes, so badly injured that they were forced out of sports altogether - long before reaching their day in the lights.

I could not help but recall the Medrash about the Tower of Bavel (Babel). The Medrash says that the people were so involved with the building that if a brick fell, they cried - but if a person fell and was killed, they didn't cry. To them, the building was far more important than the people. What is important in the Olympics? Physical fitness? Sportsmanship? People doing their best? Or winning the gold medal - at any cost - leaving the losers in tears?

Now in comparison, how should we react to those individuals who are so dedicated to Torah, Judaism, G-d and the Jewish people, that they study Torah for ten hours (or more) each day? Do we see mainstream Jewish journals celebrating the growth of day schools and advanced Talmudic institutes, which are ensuring the Jewish future while attaching their students to that which is of Eternal value? Or are we treated to articles by Jewish "leaders" who call these schools useless?

Fortunately - I hope - we know better. We know what is destructive, and we also know what has eternal value. We know who we truly admire - those who work to acquire Torah and Jewish learning, for "it is a tree of life to those who grasp it."

--- My thanks to my teacher, Rabbi Moshe Silberberg shlit"a, for helping me to formulate this week's Dvar Torah.

Good Shabbos, Rabbi Yaakov Menken

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TZEDAKAH [=CHARITY] -- THE SUREST PROTECTION

Be careful to tithe ("Asser Te'asser" -- lit., "tithe, you shall tithe") all the produce of your seeds that comes out of the field every year.
(Devarim 14:22)

R. Yochanan said: What is meant by the double expression "Tithe you shall tithe"? It should be read as "Tithe ('Asser) so that you will become rich ('Titassher)'..."

R. Yochanan's nephew asked him, "How do you know that tithing makes one rich?" He replied, "Go and try it, and you will see for yourself!" "But," the nephew protested, "is one permitted to put Hashem to a test?"

R. Yochanan answered, "I have a tradition from R. Hoshayah that in this one case it is permitted to test Hashem, as it says (Malachi 3: 10), 'Bring all your tithes to the storage house, and test me by this -- see if I do not open up the windows of the heavens and pour out upon you endless blessings!'"

(Taanit 9a)

Rav Yochanan, based on two verses in the Scriptures, asserts that proper tithing bears with it the promise of monetary success. The verse in our Parasha in which this concept is alluded to is specifically referring to the *obligational* tithing of *agricultural* produce that was grown in Israel (-See Shabbat 119a). Nevertheless, the Sages in various places reaffirm this promise of wealth as a dividend of any type of charity or gift to the poor. When someone gives charity, he is guaranteed to be repayed even more than the amount he gave (see Tosafot ad loc.). What is it that prompted R. Yochanan to interpret the phrase "Asser Te'asser" in this way, which necessitates changing the letter "Sin" into a letter "Shin"? Is he really suggesting to change the Massoretic reading of the verse? In general, such emendations, even when they are purely homiletical in nature, are suggested by some compelling textual inference (see Parasha-Page of Ki Tetze, 5755).

Rabbenu Chananel (commentary ad loc.) explains the logic behind Rav Yochanan's reading. Rav Yochanan did not derive his idea that "charity enriches" by changing the diacritical markings into "Titassher". Rather, he is bothered by the double expression of "Asser Te'asser" (lit., "tithe, you shall tithe"). In explanation, Rav Yochanan suggests that the extra word was meant to imply that when a person gives one tithe, he will be rewarded with the opportunity to give additional tithes -- that is, he will be blessed with increased prosperity. (Such interpretations of double verbs are not uncommon -- see Rashi on last week's Parasha -Devarim 11:13- and Bava Metzia 32a -YB.) Rav Yochanan *expressed* this idea by transposing the characters of the verse with other, similar ones, producing the pun "Tithe so that you will 'Titassher' [=become rich]." He did not *derive* the thought, though, through that transposition.

II

In any case, the concept that giving charity invokes the oncoming of wealth can be used to explain a passage from the Gemara (Bava Kamma 17a, based on Hosea 10:12): "The word 'Sowing' in scriptures can sometimes be understood to mean 'giving charity.'" What is the connection between sowing and charity that could suggest such an interchanging of meaning between the two words? Perhaps the answer is that in both cases a small amount of one's possessions is ostensibly "thrown away" and "wasted," only to produce an eventual yield of many more times the original outlay. The theme that charity is represented by "sowing" is found elsewhere in the words of Chazal [our Sages]. In Bereishit 26:12 we read: "Yitzchak sowed in the land of the Philistines and he obtained that year [a yield of] one hundred times, for Hashem blessed him." The tract of land that Yitzchak cultivated was estimated to be able to produce "x" bushels of grain, and instead it produced "100x." But why did Yitzchak assess the expected yield of the field in the first place? Rashi (quoting Midrash Rabba) explains that this was done in order to know how much the tithe of that produce would come out to be. Another Midrash elaborates on this theme:

Why did "Yitzchak sow" -- by himself? [Did he not have many servants that could have done this labor for him, as the following verse states?]

The verse should be understood as follows: Yitzchak "sowed" the *produce* of his fields, by tithing it and giving charity to the poor! (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, beginning of Chap. 33)

According to this Midrash, the second half of the verse -- "he obtained a yield of one hundred times" -- corroborates Rav Yochanan's thesis. Yitzchak's charity was rewarded by Hashem in kind, with increased prosperity and bounty. His *spiritual* sowing was the cause of his unusual success.

This is also the meaning of a verse in Hoshea (10:12), which "Sow for yourselves 'Tzedaka' [=charity], and you will reap [Hashem's] kindness." This verse is another reaffirmation of Rav Yochanan's theme: "Sow charity by giving to others, and *you* will receive charity from Hashem in return."

A beautiful allusion to this idea is suggested by the famous Kabbalist, Rav Menachem Azarya of Pano (Ma'amar Chikkur Din, Part 3, Chap. 20). In Shabbos 104a the Gemara uses a code system known as At-Bash, whereby each letter, according to its order in the alphabet, is interchanged with the letter in the corresponding place starting from the other side of the alphabet. Thus the first letter (Aleph) becomes the last (Tav), Bet becomes Shin, etc. The tradition of the sages tells us that secrets of the Torah and the Hebrew language can sometimes be brought to light by transposing letters according to the At-Bash system. Rav Menachem Azarya ("The Rama," for short) of Pano points out that the word "Tzedakah" -- Tzadi, Dalet, Kuf, Heh -- when transposed into its At-Bash equivalent comes out to be the exact same word spelled backwards -- Heh, Kuf, Dalet, Tzadi! This may be meant to demonstrate that whatever charity a person gives is bound to return to him in the opposite direction, as "charity" from Hashem!

III

Tosafot (Taanit 9a), however, seems to suggest a different approach as to what prompted Rav Yochanan to interpret the verse in our Parasha the way he did. According to Tosafot, the key word in the verse is "*all* the produce of your seeds." Tosafot, it seems, read the verse as follows: "If you give your tithes you will be able to tithe *all* of your produce the *following year*." Your fields will not produce less in the future than they did in the past. The implication of this reading is that in order to *remain* rich, you must take care to tithe properly. Tosafot (ibid.) in fact quotes Midrashim to the effect that if a person does *not* tithe his produce, his field will end up producing only "that which comes out of the field every year" in tithes -- that is, he will collect a yield of only ten percent of what the field used to produce. (NOTE: My reading of Tosafot is far from explicit in his words. It is my own interpretation of Tosafot's implicit intent -MK)

This theme -- that not only will giving charity increase a person's wealth, but withholding charity will cause the *loss* of wealth, is also mentioned a number of times in the words of Chazal.

In Ketubot 66b a popular saying of the people of Jerusalem is recorded: "The way to 'salt' (= preserve) your money is to diminish it (=give charity)."

In Betzah 15b the Gemara says, "Rav Yochanan... said: If someone wants to ensure that his property will remain his, let him plant an 'Adar' (lit., a type of cedar tree). What is an 'Adar'? As it says in Tehillim (93:4): 'Hashem is mighty ('Addir') on high.'" Rabbenu Chananel explains that the Gemara means to interpret Rav Yochanan's "Adar" as a pun. He didn't mean that we should plant cedars, but that we should "plant" our money with the Mighty One on high ("Addir"). Giving charity is like depositing your money in a celestial bank, where it is safe from worldly burglars or accidents. When one engages in charity-giving, it is considered as if he has given his money to the Mighty One on high to keep for him, as it says (Tehillim 85:12) "Charity ('Tzedek') peers out from the heavens." (See also Bava Batra 10a.)

IV

Beyond granting monetary success and protecting a person's possessions, giving Tzedakah even protects a person's life. In Mishlei (10:2; 11:4) we read, "Tzedakah saves from death." The Gemara (Bava Batra 10a) explains that Tzedakah saves a person from two kinds of death: from "death" (i.e., non-participation) in the world to come, and from dying an unnatural death. In Shabbat 156b the Gemara extends the power of Tzedakah to preventing (that is, postponing) death altogether. (See the Gemara in Shabbat ibid., which records a number of true stories that illustrate this fact.)

It is for this reason that the Gemara (Rosh Hahsanah 16b) tells us that before Rosh Hashanah a person should give charity. Charity, the Gemara tells

us, is one of the three things that have the power to change an evil heavenly decree concerning a person's fate. Even if it has been decreed upon a person to pass away during the coming year, giving charity may change that decree and extend his life.

Perhaps this is what the Gemara means in Sanhedrin 35a when it says, "If a fast day is declared and Tzedakah is not given on that very day, it is as if innocent blood had been shed." Why should the withholding of charity be compared to bloodshed (see Rashi ad loc.)? According to what we have said, we may suggest the following explanation. A fast day called for by the prevailing rabbinic authorities is usually declared in the face of a current or imminent disaster. If a catastrophic heavenly decree is indeed in store for the fasters, then by not giving Tzedakah to prolong their own lives that are at stake, it is as if they have shed blood -- their own blood.

In Bava Batra 10a we learn that Rav Elazar used to set aside a small amount of money for charity before his prayers. The explanation for this practice is perhaps also based on this same theme. A person asks his Creator for health and long years to use for the service of Hashem, when he prays. In order for these prayers to be fully effective, a person must complement them with the life-giving effects of Tzedaka.

V

We know that when Hashem grants man a reward or punishment He does it according to the principle of Midda Keneged Middah -- there is always some sort of correspondence between the deed done and the recompense given (Sanhedrin 90a; see Parasha Page, Tisha B'av 5755). There is an obvious connection between giving Tzedakah and obtaining wealth -- both have to do with the transferral of money. But what is the relationship between lengthening one's expected lifetime and the giving of charity? Perhaps the answer to this is that, as the Gemara says:

"Poverty is comparable to death itself, as it says (Shmot 4:19), 'The people who had sought your life are now dead.' We know that they were still alive, and only lost their power and influence. This indicates that one who has lost his money is considered as dead." (Nedarim 7b)

If losing one's money is tantamount (in some sense) to death, then it follows that giving a poor person money is tantamount to granting him life. Now we can understand very well that an appropriate reward for Tzedakah is the lengthening of the giver's life in return! This thought is actually expressed almost explicitly in the Midrash:

"Charity saves from death." This shows that a person is granted reward in accordance with the good deed that he did. A person, by giving Tzedakah, intends to ensure that the poor man should live and not die. Therefore Hashem sees to it that that the benefactor should also live and not die.

(Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Zuta, Ch. 1)

If so, perhaps we may extend this train of thought to lend new support to Rav Yochanan's derivation from the verse in our Parasha. Charity saves from "death", not only by adding years to the giver's life, but also by ensuring that a person's wealth will remain with him, thereby protecting him from the "death" of suffering poverty!

Let us see to it that we take care to tithe our income regularly, in order that we may preserve both our money and ourselves!

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MESSAGE FROM THE HAFTORAH PARSHAS RE'EH

Yeshaya 54,11 This week's haftorah directs its focus towards Zion and presents her illustrious future in the time of the Jewish redemption. In the haftorah, we discover that after all the warm comforting words said to the Jewish people Zion still refused to be consoled. The prophet Yeshaya directs his words towards Zion and says in the name of Hashem, "You afflicted, stormy city who has not been comforted, behold I will lay your floors with precious stones and set your foundation with sapphire stones." (54:11) In truth, the Jewish people have already returned to the land of Israel but Zion remained unconsoled. The thousands of years that Zion lay in ruins needed to be accounted for. In the past, she had been accustomed to being the center of the world, the most beautiful sight on earth. But that wonderful respect, dignity and appreciation was taken away from her and has been withheld for such an extended period of time. Instead of her

previous splendor and glory she continuously faced shame, degradation and times of despair. Zion therefore responded to Hashem and requested compensation and consolation for her long forsaken life.

Hashem granted her request and told Zion that He would restore her tenfold to her original glory. In addition, Hashem pledged to establish Zion such a desirable city that even her floors and walls would be constructed from precious jewels and stones. Her physical beauty will transcend any existing structure and the city will literally sparkle and glisten. Every moment spent in Zion will be an unforgettable experience and everyone will be irresistibly attracted to her splendor and glory.

The prophet adds a special dimension to this glorious era and says, "And all of your children will be students of Hashem and much peace will be amongst them." (54:13) The clarity of Torah knowledge will be so readily accessible that all of the children of Zion will be regarded students of Hashem Himself. Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (Yeshaya 479) expound upon this

verse and reveal that the confusion and diversity amongst the Jewish people are the result of the present system of learning. Until the era of Mashiach one must rely upon human beings with their limited intellectual capacities to transmit the Torah from teacher to student. But in the times of Mashiach all of the children of Zion will be privileged to study Torah from the original source, Hashem Himself. The clarity that will result from such study will produce an indescribable degree of peace and harmony, everyone following the same perfect path of observance.

The prophet then directs his words to the nations of the world and says, "All who are thirsty go and drink, even without pay; go and acquire wine and milk." (55:1) Chazal (Yalkut ad loc.) explain that the water stated here refers to Torah knowledge and the wine and milk refer to spiritual sustenance. The Radak develops this and says that the revelations of Hashem in the time of Mashiach will produce an indescribable thirst for knowledge. The nations of the world will be so impressed by Hashem's miracles and revelations that they will flock to Zion to study the word of Hashem. This will produce the ultimate fulfillment of the prophetic words, "For from Zion will go forth Torah." Once again Zion will be the center of Torah for the world. But this time the Torah will be appreciated even by the nations of the world who will recognize it as the absolute truth. Even the nations will experience Torah as their true source of life and will search for it as one searches for his bread and water.

And to complete the picture, Yeshaya foretells, "Behold nations that never knew you will run and become your servants because the glory of Hashem shines upon you (55:5) With this, Zion will finally be consoled. She has been promised to return to her original splendor. She has been promised to become the most desirable spot on the face of the earth. Her students will be privileged to study directly from Hashem. She'll serve as the center of Torah for the entire world, nations of the world included. And finally she'll even attract the nations to flock to her and display total subservience to the glory of Hashem which will permanently rest in her midst. Her lonely forsaken life is over forever and in its place she will now enjoy the glorious future of being the most desirable site on earth.

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel, Rosh Kollel (Dean) Kollel Toras Chesed of Skokie

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Selected, translated and arranged by Rabbi Dov Rabinowitz

"Behold, I place before you today a blessing and a curse." (11,26)

The Chasam Sofer comments that we should notice that (the possuk) begins with the singular form "re'e" (behold) and ends "lifneichem" (before you), (which is) in the plural form.

It seems that this hints at what our Sages said (Kiddushin 40a) "A person should always consider the whole world to be (balanced,) half virtuous and half evil. (If) he does one mitzvah, he tips the whole world to the side of merit, (and if he commits) one transgression, he tips the whole world to the side of liability."

In the light of this (we understand that the Torah) tells every single individual "you (singular) behold, (consider) in your mind that I place before you (plural) - the entire world - a blessing and a curse," for the

situation is balanced in the scale pans of the judgment of HaShem.

"The blessing, if you will listen . . . and the curse, if you will not listen . . ." (11, 27 & 28) Behold, with the trifling transgression of this individual, he tips the whole world (towards) idol worship, "false (literally other) gods, whom you do not know." (11,28)

For the scale was balanced, and you have (made it to) tip. Behold and scrutinize this!

"The blessing, if you will listen . . . and the curse, if you will not listen . . ." (11, 27 & 28)

The Baal HaTurim notes that it says "es" (an optional Hebrew form preceding the definite object DR) with the blessing; ("es" is written "alef" "sav", the first and last letters of the Hebrew alef -beis DR) from "alef" through to "sav" from "If you will walk in My ways . . ." (VaYikra 26,3) ("Im" - if begins with "alef" DR) until "I will (enable) you to walk tall." (VaYikra 26,13) ("Komemius" - tall or upright, ends with the letter "sav." These psukim - 3 to 13 - constitute the parsha of the blessings in Parshas Bechukosai DR.)

And with the curse, (it goes) from "vav" to "hei," from "And if you do not listen . . ." (VaYikra 26,14) ("Ve'im" - and if - begins with the letter "vav" DR) until "through the agency (literally hand) of Moshe" (VaYikra 26,46) ("Moshe" ends with the letter "hei." These psukim - 14 to 46 - constitute the parsha of the curses in Parshas Bechukosai DR.) For this reason it says "VeHaKlalah" - and the curse ("VeHaKlalah" begins with the letters "vav" "hei" DR).

"You are children of HaShem your G-d. Do not cut your flesh, and do not put a bald (area) between your eyes for a deceased (person). For you are a sacred nation to HaShem your G-d, and HaShem selected you to be His chosen nation . . ." (14, 1 & 2)

The Netziv (Emek Davar) explains: The Torah gives two reasons for the prohibition of cutting one's flesh with an instrument, and (making a) bald area by hand, for a dead (person).

Firstly, "For you are a sacred nation" that is, set apart for (the sake of) The One Above. And therefore (you) must know that any suffering and adverse

occurrence, may the Merciful One save us, is (really) the will of HaShem, for His glory, may He be blessed, or to atone for the transgression of the person (literally living being), which is also the glory of HaShem and His will.

And it is appropriate that one who is set apart for (the sake of) HaShem should nullify his (own) suffering before the Will of HaShem. However weeping and mourning, in the measure which the Torah prescribes, is the Will of HaShem, (in order) to give honor to the dead person; (in fact) the honor of the deceased takes precedence over all the mitzvos of the Torah, and mourning is an aspect of the honor of the deceased.

However, to do an act which will leave an imprint (in the future), beyond the (period of) time which the Torah established (for mourning,) no longer contributes to the honor of the deceased; rather, it is a display of (personal) grief, and it is not proper for (one who is) sanctified for (the sake of) HaShem to do thus.

This constitutes a reason from our position (that we should not do these things).

Another reason (is that) "HaShem selected you" (so) that all (the individuals) who come serve HaShem from all the nations, should join and congregate with you . . . and for this reason, it is not respectful to Him, may He be blessed, before the nations of the world that His chosen people should be disfigured and made bald.

This is the reason that that (in our possuk, which charges all of Klal) Yisroel, it is written "between your eyes" (which refers to the middle of the front of the hair DR) (which is) the place which is (most) visible to another (literally every) person, even though the prohibition (applies) to the whole of the head (even for someone who is not a Cohen DR), just as (we find that) it does with Cohanim. (VaYikra 21,5)

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Parshat Re'eh Guest Rabbi: Rabbi Yaacov Lerner Young Israel of Great Neck

The Permanent Address

The Parsha of Re'eh commands us (D'varim 12:5), "But only to the place that HaShem, your G-d, has chosen from all of your tribes to cause His Name to be there, seek out His Shechina and go to that place." The Rambam (Maimonides) sees in those words the source for one of the 248 positive commandments in the Torah. At the beginning of Hilchot Melachim, Rambam writes that Bnei Yisrael were commanded to observe three mitzvot upon their entry into Eretz Yisrael: to appoint a King, to do battle with Amalek and "to build the Beit HaMikdash as it says seek out His Shechina and go to that place'."

As we know, the style of the Rambam in writing his Sefer Mishnah Torah was to be painstaking careful with his words and especially his formulation of the 613 mitzvot. Given this fact, there is an apparent contradiction between what the Rambam says in Hilchot Melachim and what he writes in another place in Mishnah Torah, his main section for the discussion of the laws governing the Beit HaMikdash, Hilchot Beit HaBechira. There he formulates the mitzvah "to construct the House of G-d where we can offer sacrifices to Him and celebrate with Him there three times a year." As the textual source for this commandment, the Rambam cites not the pasuk in Parshat Re'eh as we might have expected but rather a well known pasuk from Parshat Terumah. It says in Sh'mot (25:8) "Make a Sanctuary for Me that I might dwell in your midst." Why does the Rambam quote two different sources as the basis for a single mitzvah?

The Brisker Rav, Rav Velvel Soloveitchik, ZT"L, responds to this problem by stating that there are two separate and distinct aspects regarding the mitzvah to build the Beit HaMikdash. The first relates to construction. We are commanded to build a Sanctuary for HaShem, an edifice that is worthy of being called a "House of G-d" and where He can take up residence in our lower world. This dimension of the mitzvah has nothing to do with what is today considered a prime factor in real estate and construction - location. The proof is that the mitzvah was first given when Bnai Yisrael were in the Sinai wilderness, wandering around from place to place. Still in all, they were commanded to erect the Mishkan at each of their stops and in all of these many different locations it served as a Beit HaShem.

According to the Brisker Rav, however, the time did come later on when location became not just important but critical. When HaShem, through the Prophet Gad, indicated to Dovid HaMelech that the threshing floor of Aravna in Yerushalayim was the chosen spot, that became the location to the exclusion of all other places. There and only there could the permanent Beit HaMikdash be erected. Furthermore, sacrifices could never again be offered on an altar constructed anywhere else but at that place. This is the reason why the Rambam cites the source from our Parsha of Re'eh in Hilchot Melachim - where he discusses not merely the mitzvah of constructing a Temple, but the permanent Temple in Eretz Yisrael. "Only in that place which HaShem has chosen to put His name there, seek His Shechina and go there."

There are indeed two aspects to the mitzvah of the Beit HaMikdash: building the structure and recognizing the Kedushat Makom - the holiness of the place upon which the edifice stands. For the past 2,000 years, since the destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash, our enemies have been able to deny us the merit of fulfilling the aspect of building a House of G-d. How important it is, however, that we remain cognizant of the fact that the other aspect of this mitzvah remains viable for us even today. As the Rambam states in Hilchot Beit Habaichira "the Shechina never leaves that place." Every time we daven at the

Kotel, every time we talk about the everlasting holiness of Yerushalayim, we reaffirm this concept. The Shechina remains in our holy city of Jerusalem forever for that is HaShem's chosen place for His permanent address.

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Rabbi Moshe Shulman

ACTIONS SHAPE CHARACTER

"Hake take et yoshvei ha'ir ha'hi lefi charev... ve'natan lecha rachamim ve'richamecha" (Deut. 13:15,18) "Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly... And [G-d] shall give you mercy, and shall be merciful to you..."

What a strange juxtaposition! The Torah's formula for how we are to deal with idolatry is quite harsh; understandably so, for idolatry in the ancient world was as immoral as it was heretical, fraught with human sacrifice, immorality and licentiousness. We can understand the Torah's insistence on the obliteration of idolatry from within our midst: uve'arta ha'ra mi'kirbecha, "You shall destroy the evil from your midst." But in the same breadth to talk about how G-d will give us MERCY?! Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind. True. Sometimes you have to act forcefully. That is unfortunate. But to describe that as merciful - is that not insensitive?

Answered the Chafetz Chaim: We have to understand what the Torah is saying. It is true that the Torah often demands of us the execution of harsh punishment. It is true that the Torah requires the death penalty for many crimes. The Torah requires that we act harshly against the city of idolaters. BUT, says the Chafetz Chaim, the Torah is also sensitive to the fact that human beings are deeply affected by their own actions. What we do and how we behave shape our character, for good and for bad. What would become of a nation so instructed to deal with idolatry? What character traits would be embellished upon their psyche and their soul? That, says the Chafetz Chaim, is why the Torah promises that the Almighty Himself will compensate for this action with an abundance of mercy, to balance out our souls, so to speak. Divine Providence will be necessary to insure that Israel does not become inherently morally deficient because of the need to exact judgement and punishment.

What is amazing here is the psychological insight into man's psyche - the understanding that the real way to change man's character is through his deeds. You've heard the expression "we are what we eat". To the Torah - we are what we DO! Our deeds and actions have an incredible ability to impact on the character and soul of an individual.

Sometimes we have to go to war. That is part of life. But G-d forbid that war turn us into murderers. When we return home from battle, we must relearn how to be merciful and kind, ve'natan lecha rachamim ve'richamecha. From here till the end of the Parsha, all the Mitzvoth detailed focus on the notion of kindness, love, and caring: tithing, aser te'aser (ibid. 14:22), charity, patoach tiftach lo (ibid. 15:8), or lending money even before the Shmittah year (ibid. 15:9). Even the prohibition of meat and milk has a context which reminds us of the morality and ethics of our behaviour: not to eat a kid in its mothers milk.

Says the Torah: "You shall slaughter the animals (before eating of them) as I have commanded you." (Deut. 12:2) Comment our Sages: "Does the Almighty care if one slaughters an animal from the front of the neck or the back of the neck? The Torah was given only to forge (the character) of human beings." (Gen. Raba, 44)

Every Mitzvah we perform impacts on who and what we are. Every transgression weighs upon our soul!

Ultimately the goal of Torah is to make us better, more spiritual human beings, able to utilise our intellect and our souls to elevate mankind above his animalistic tendencies. Ultimately, the Torah wants us to be better more faithful spiritual people. But the formula for reaching that goal is not by analyzing what makes a better human being, what makes a more spiritual world, but by doing it!

A person is ill - and the doctor prescribes anti-biotics. Will a person get better simply by saying "I understand the theory of anti-biotics. I have studied the concept. It is enough to BELIEVE in the anti-biotics, I don't actually have to take the medicine. After all, its the belief and the faith that counts!"

Maimonides writes, in his introduction to Ethics of our Fathers, that the Torah is a prescription for the illnesses of the soul. Every Mitzvah reinforces and strengthens the soul.

That's the notion the Torah is trying to combat. It's not the "thought that counts". It's the Mitzvah that counts.

Shabbos is a testimony to G-d who created the world. If I believe in G-d who created the world, I don't have to keep Shabbos, right? On the contrary!

Believing in G-d is only the first step. What the Torah demands is the kind of trust, of love, of commitment and relationship that comes only by living out that trust. That one day a week - when a person is about to demonstrate his mastery over nature and the world, and refrains from doing so - when they hold themselves back - that is when they are truly internalising what faith in G-d is all about.

You cannot teach a blind man the colors of a rainbow by describing them. It has to be experienced. Torah is the colors of the world. Blind faith, without the Mitzvoth that go with it, is a black and white picture. It is missing the essence of what Torah is.

Upon the verse we opened with our Sages further comment: kol hamerachem al ha'briyot me'rachamim alav min hashamayim (Shabbat 151) "One who has mercy upon creatures, will be shown mercy from Heaven." Superficially, this means that the reward for our mercy is the Almighty's mercy. More profoundly, however, this means that if we act in a manner consistent with the characteristic of caring, love, and mercy, we will become more caring loving merciful people. We will then be, by our very essence, more deserving of the Almighty's mercy.

We cannot just express our belief in G-d - we have to live by the implications of that faith. We cannot just express our belief in morality and kindness, we have to open our homes to others, care for the sick and the elderly, love the widow and the orphan, give charity to the poor. These are not "concepts". They are a prescription. The medicine has to be ingested, not just understood. The Netziv of Volozhin once sent some people out to the neighbouring towns to collect charity for the Yeshiva. After their first city, they said: "why should we have to trouble all these people. Let's put the money on a lottery. If the Almighty wants us to win, the numbers will follow." So they decided on a number, and split up. One went to the Synagogue to pray, the other - to buy the lottery. But at the last minute, the one who went to buy the ticket decided to change the number! He made a quick Gematriya calculation, and chose 2118 instead of 2117. But his partner was still praying for 2118! The lottery ended on 2118, and the money was lost. Devastated, the boys returned to the Netziv who said: "You see, it's not the collection of the final amount that is important. Every Jew needs to have a share in the Mitzvah of Torah. If you would have won the lottery, the Yeshiva would have had the funds, but the people of Israel would have lost the Mitzvah of Tzedakah, and the understanding of the importance of supporting Torah." They had to go out again and collect the money.

Today we blessed the new month of Ellul, the preparation month for Rosh Hashana. Traditionally, Ellul is a month for heightened sensitivity, extra care in Mitzvoth and Halacha, a little bit more than the rest of the year. The question has been raised: who are we fooling? Can we fool the Almighty into thinking that we can be better one month a year and make up for a whole year? No. The answer is what we really are doing is trying to exercise our souls a little bit more eagerly. We are pushing that extra five minutes on the treadmill of spirituality. We are trying to impress not upon the Almighty but upon our own souls the importance of Torah and Mitzvoth. With that extra effort, our Rosh Hashana will indeed be a more spiritual experience, for we will have become more sanctified people.

Ki am Kadosh ata la'Hashem Elokecha (Deut. 14:2)
May this Ellul lead to a more spiritual year for all of us.
