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Re'eh

The Politics of Freedom by Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Re'eh(Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17) The Politics of Freedom Having set out the broad principles of the covenant, Moses now turns to the details, which extend over many chapters and several parshiyot. The long review of the laws that will govern Israel in its land begin and end with Moses posing a momentous choice. Here is how he frames it in this week's parsha: See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse - the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. (Deut. 11: 26-28) And here is how he puts it at the end: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil ... I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live. (Deut. 30:15, 19) Maimonides takes these two passages as proof of our belief in freewill (Hilkhos Teshuvah 5: 3), which indeed they are. But they are more than that. They are also a political statement. The connection between individual freedom (which Maimonides is talking about) and collective choice (which Moses is talking about) is this: If humans are free then they need a free society within which to exercise that freedom.

The book of Devarim represents the first attempt in history to create a free society. Moses' vision is deeply political but in a unique way. It is not politics as the pursuit of power or the defence of interests or the preservation of class and caste. It is not politics as an expression of national glory and renown. There is no desire in Moses' words for fame, honour, expansion, empire. There is not a word of nationalism in the conventional sense. Moses does not tell the people that they are great. He tells them that they have been rebellious, they have sinned, and that their failure of faith during the episode of the spies cost them forty extra years of delay before entering the land. Moses would not have won an election. He was not that kind of leader. Instead he summons the people to humility and responsibility. We are the nation, he says in effect, that has been chosen by God for a great experiment. Can we create a society that is not Egypt, not empire, not divided into rulers and ruled? Can we stay faithful to the more-than-human hand that has guided our destinies since I first stood before Pharaoh and asked for our freedom? For if we truly believe in God - not God as a philosophical abstraction but God in whose handwriting our history has been written, God to whom we pledged allegiance at Mount Sinai, God who is our only sovereign - then we can do great things. Not great in conventional terms, but great in moral terms. For if all power, all wealth, all might belong to God, then none of these things can rightfully set us apart one from another. We are all equally precious in His sight. We have been charged by Him to feed the poor and bring the orphan and widow, the landless Levite and non-Israelite stranger, into our midst, sharing our celebrations and days of rest. We have been commanded to create a just society that honours human dignity and freedom. Moses insists on three things. First we are free. The choice is ours. Blessing or curse? Good or evil? Faithfulness or faithlessness? You decide, says Moses. Never has freedom been so starkly defined, not just for an individual but for a nation as a whole. We do not find it hard to understand that as individuals we are confronted by moral choices. Adam and Eve were. So was Cain. Choice is written into the human condition. But to be told this as a nation - this is something new. There is no defence, says Moses, in protestations of powerlessness, saying, We could not help it. We were outnumbered. We were defeated. It was the fault of our leaders or our enemies. No, says Moses, your fate is in your hands. The sovereignty of God does not take away human responsibility. To the contrary, it places it centre-stage. If you are faithful to God, says Moses, you will prevail over empires. If you are not, nothing else - not military strength nor political alliances - will help you. If you betray your unique destiny, if you worship the gods of the surrounding nations, then you will become like them. You will suffer the fate of all small nations in an age of superpowers. Don't blame others or chance or ill-fortune for your defeat. The choice is yours; the responsibility is yours alone. Second, we are collectively responsible. The phrase "All Israel are sureties for one another" is rabbinic but the idea is already present in the Torah. This too is radical. There is no "great man" theory of history in Judaism, nothing of what Carlyle called "heroes and hero-worship." The fate of Israel depends on the response of Israel, all Israel, from "the heads of your tribes, your elders and officers" to your "hewers of wood and drawers of water." This is the origin of the American phrase (which has no counterpart in the vocabulary of British politics), "We, the people." Unlike all other nations in the ancient world and most today, the people of the covenant did not believe that their destiny was determined by kings, emperors, a royal court or a governing elite. It is determined by each of us as moral agents, conjointly responsible for the common good. This is what Michael Walzer means when in his recent book *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* he calls biblical Israel an "almost democracy." Third, it is a God-centred politics. There was no word for this in the ancient world so Josephus had to coin one. He called it "theocracy." However, this word has been much abused and taken to mean what it does not, namely rule by clerics, priests. That is not what Israel was. Again an American phrase comes to

mind. Israel was "one nation under God." If any single word does justice to the vision of Deuteronomy it is not theocracy but nomocracy, "the rule of laws, not men." Biblical Israel is the first example in history of an attempt to create a free society. Not free in the modern sense of liberty of conscience. That concept was born in the seventeenth century in a Europe that had been scarred for a century by religious wars between Catholics and Protestants. Liberty of conscience is the attempt to solve the problem of how people with markedly different religious beliefs (all of them Christians, as it happened) can live peaceably with one another. That is not the problem to which biblical Israel is an answer. Instead it was an answer to the question: how can freedom and responsibility be shared equally by all? How can limits be placed on the power of rulers to turn the mass of people into slaves - not necessarily literally slaves but as a labour force to be used to build monumental buildings or engage in empire-building wars? It was the great nineteenth century historian Lord Acton who rightly saw that freedom in this sense was born in biblical Israel: The government of the Israelites was a Federation, held together by no political authority, but by the unity of race and faith, and founded, not on physical force, but on a voluntary covenant ... The throne was erected on a compact, and the king was deprived of the right of legislation among the people that recognised no lawgiver but God ... The inspired men who rose in unending succession to prophesy against the usurper and the tyrant, constantly proclaimed that the laws, which were divine, were paramount over sinful rulers ... Thus the example of the Hebrew nation laid down the parallel lines on which all freedom has been won.(1) It is a beautiful, powerful, challenging idea. If God is our only sovereign, then all human power is delegated, limited, subject to moral constraints. Jews were the first to believe that an entire nation could govern itself in freedom and equal dignity. This has nothing to do with political structures (monarchy, oligarchy, democracy - Jews have tried them all), and everything to do with collective moral responsibility. Jews never quite achieved the vision, but never ceased to be inspired by it. Moses' words still challenge us today. God has given us freedom. Let us use it to create a just, generous, gracious society. God does not do it for us but He has taught us how it is done. As Moses said: the choice is ours. NOTE 1. Lord Acton, Essays in the History of Liberty, Indianapolis, Liberty Classics, 1985, 7-8

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** ryfrand@torah.org reply-to: ryfrand@torah.org, genesis@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org
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Positive First

"But this shall you not eat from among those that bring up their cud or have completely separated split hooves: the camel, the hare, and the hyrax, for they bring up their cud, but their hooves are not split — they are unclean to you; and the pig, for it has a split hoof, but not the cud — it is unclean to you" (14:7-8)

The Torah's listing of kosher and nonkosher animals, which seems somewhat technical, contains many lessons beyond the mere details of what we may and may not eat.

Rav Noach Weinberg, Rosh Yeshivah of Aish HaTorah, who was directly responsible for bringing tens of thousands back to Yiddishkeit and an exponentially larger number through his students, would point out (based on a Gemara in Chullin 60b) that there is proof that an all-

knowing God wrote the Torah from the verses listing the animals that chew their cud but do not have split hooves, and the animal that has split hooves and does not chew its cud. Would a human put his credibility on the line by predicting that at no point in the future would a single animal that is not on that list be found somewhere in the world?

And indeed, some three millennia after the Torah was given, and with all the searching science has done for unknown species, not a single such animal has been found!

Aside from strengthening our faith, however, these verses also teach us a lesson in how to view, and relate to, other people.

The point of the verses listing the animals that have only one kosher sign is to teach us that they are not kosher. It would seem appropriate, then, to list the sign that causes them to be nonkosher first. Yet we see that the Torah lists them as the camel, the rabbit, and the hyrax, which chew their cud but do not have split hooves, and the pig, which has split hooves, but does not chew its cud.

Why does the Torah list the kosher signs of these animals first if the non-existent signs are the only ones we really need in order to label these animals nonkosher?

A Midrash explains that the Torah is trying to teach us that even when something is not kosher, we should find a way to mention something praiseworthy about it first. Even something as treif as chazir (pig) deserves to have its positive trait pointed out.

If the Torah does so for nonkosher animals, how much more do we have to learn to have this consideration with regard to people?

Bosses, employees, children, students, coworkers, and neighbors will invariably have some negative traits. It might be our job, from time to time, to deliver a negative message.

This Midrash is teaching us that even when we have to deliver a negative message to others — to tell them that they are "nonkosher" in some way — we should always find a way to point out their positive attributes or qualities first.

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from: Rabbi Kaganoff ymkaganoff@gmail.com reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com
 date: Sun, Aug 12, 2012 at 4:55 AM subject: fishy article for parshas re'eih attached

Parshas Re'eih is one of the two places where the Torah discusses which fishes are kosher.

A Fishy Tale (and Scale)

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: "Is there such a thing as a fish with scales that is not kosher?"

Question #2: "I live in a town without a kosher fish market. May I purchase fish fillet from a species that I know is kosher?"

Question #3: "My bubbe had a special pot that she used only to cook fish. Is there halachic significance to this fish pot?"

In this week's parsha, the Torah teaches that every fish that has fins and scales is kosher. The Mishnah (Niddah 51b) notes that all species of fish with scales also have fins. Thus, one may assume that a slice of a fish with scales is kosher, even if one sees no fins.

The Gemara (Chullin 66a) states further that a fish species that has scales at any time during its life is kosher. Therefore, a fish is kosher even if "it has no scales now, but they will grow later, or it has scales and they fall off when the fish leaves the water." Thus, sardines are kosher, even though sometimes they are caught before scales develop. Similarly, certain herrings that shed their scales upon harvest are also kosher.

The early Acharonim discuss a certain variety of fish, or, more accurately, some type of legged sea creature, called the *Stincus marinus*, that inhabited the seas near Spain and was reputed to have scales but no fins, a phenomenon that the Gemara states does not exist. The Tosafos Yom Tov, in his commentary to the Rosh (Chullin 3:67, Maadanei Yom Tov #5) records that, when he was a rav in Vienna, he was shown a specimen of this fish, which is naturally toxic; the toxins can be removed and it can (and was) used for food and medicine. Maadanei Yom Tov presents a few possible explanations why this creature does not defy the rule established by the Gemara.

Some poskim ruled that this creature is unquestionably non-kosher, and that the Gemara means that there are very few sea creatures that have scales and no fins. One may assume that a fish or other sea creature one finds with scales is kosher; however, if one knows that it has no fins it is non-kosher (Kereisi 83:3; HaKsav VeHakabalah, Vayikra 11:9). Other poskim contend that the Gemara's rule is without exception (Pri Chodosh, Yoreh Deah 83:4). In their opinion, *Stincus marinus* must have fins, but they fall off when *Stincus* is in the sea or when it is young and it is, indeed, kosher.

What is very curious is that according to our contemporary scientific data, the creature that the Maadanei Yom Tov was referring to was probably a type of lizard and not really a sea creature at all.

To summarize, one may assume that any fish one discovers with scales is kosher, and it suffices to check an unknown fish for scales in order to verify its kashrus (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 83:3).

REMOVABLE SCALES

The word used by the Torah for scales, *kaskeses*, refers to a scale that can be removed from the skin (Rama, Yoreh Deah 83:1, based on Ramban's Commentary to the Torah). Thus, fish like sturgeon, whose scales cannot be removed from the skin, are not kosher (cf. Noda BiYehudah).

SHOPPING FOR FISH IN A NON-KOSHER STORE

"I live in a town without a kosher fish market. May I purchase fish fillet from a species that I know is kosher?"

Halachically, one may use only skinned fish that was supervised from the removal of its skin until it was sealed as kosher (Avodah Zarah 39b). Once the skin has been removed, one may not use it without proper seals, because of concern that the fish is not the kosher species one thinks it is, but a similar-looking, non-kosher fish.

What if a non-Jew or a non-observant Jew guarantees that this is a kosher fish?

The halacha is that one may not rely on the non-Jew, and the product must be sealed by an observant Jew (Avodah Zarah 39b). However, there is one instance where we may rely on a non-Jew's testimony -- when he knows that he will incur financial loss for himself if he is caught being deceptive (Taz, Yoreh Deah 83:9). Therefore, if the non-Jew knows that we can independently verify his information, and that he stands to lose if we catch him cheating, we may rely on him.

However, one is usually unable to verify the information provided by the person behind the counter in a non-kosher fish market. Therefore,

since he is not afraid that we will catch him lying, one may not rely on the veracity of what he says.

The poskim of a generation ago disputed whether or not one may purchase fish without skin from a non-Jewish company that has business reasons to produce only a certain type of fish that is kosher. May one use fish from a plant without having a mashgiach check every fish? This question affects production of canned tuna or salmon. Does it require a round-the-clock mashgiach checking that every fish is kosher, or can we rely on the fact that the company has its own reasons to pack only the type of fish stated on the label?

Some poskim hold that one may rely on the company's business reasons because of the halachic principle, "uman lo marei umnaso," a professional does not damage his reputation. According to this approach, we may assume that a company would not mix a different, non-kosher species into its canning operation, because this would conflict with the company's own interests (Rav Aharon Kotler; Shu't Chelkas Yaakov 3:10). Other poskim contend that Chazal did not permit this lenience in the production of kosher fish but required full-time supervision under all circumstances (Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:8; Kisvei Rav Henkin, 2:53). Many of the major hechsherim in the United States follow the lenient opinion.

WHITEFISH SALAD

According to the lenient opinions cited, could one allow a company to produce whitefish salad without a mashgiach? After all, whitefish is a kosher fish.

This is disputed by contemporary poskim. Some contend that this is prohibited even according to the lenient opinion cited above, since the company can mix small amounts of less expensive non-kosher fish into the whitefish salad without it being discerned. Other poskim maintain that it suffices to spot-check that no non-kosher fish is in the factory, since the company's professional reputation is at stake.

WHAT IF SOMEONE LIVES IN AN AREA WITHOUT A KOSHER FISH MARKET?

How can someone purchase fresh fish if he lives in an area that does not yet have a kosher fish market? Since he may not rely on the fishmonger's assurances, must he forgo purchasing of fresh fish?

There is a perfectly acceptable halachic solution. One should go to the fish store, find a fish that still has its skin on and identify the scales. One should then provide the store with one's own knife and supervise the fish's filleting.

WHY MUST HE BRING HIS OWN KNIFE?

The fish store knives usually have a thin layer of grease from other, possibly non-kosher, fish (see Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 96:5). One cannot assume that the store cleans the knife between fish to the extent halacha requires to guarantee that it is totally clean (ibid.).

In the rare instance that the shop is reticent in allowing the use of private knives, then one should supervise the cleaning of the knives, making sure that they are scraped extremely clean. Standard cleaning does not guarantee that the grease has been removed from the knife (see Pri Megadim, Yoreh Deah 91:Mishbetzos Zahav:1; Pischei Teshuvah 91:1,3; Chavos Daas 91:1,4).

SALMON STORY

Salmon is a very healthy fish, high in omega oils. It is also a kosher species.

Many years ago, I attended a conference of rabbonim where a highly respected posek stated that one may assume that salmon fillet is always kosher, even without its skin. He explained that salmon meat's red or pink color does not exist in any non-kosher fish species. Therefore, he contended that one may safely assume that red or pink colored fish is kosher.

I did some research on this subject. There is a basis to this statement, but it is not as simple as had been presented at the time. Indeed, there are several non-kosher fish, including some varieties of shark and catfish

that have a pink pigment. However, there are distinct shades of red and reddish pink that are only known to belong to salmon and to certain varieties of trout that are also kosher. Without training, one should not rely on determining the kashrus of a certain fish based only on its hue.

Nevertheless, I am not sure that one is permitted to rely on this information. Note the following:

I recently read an article comparing the environmental benefits of commercially sold Pacific salmon to those of Atlantic salmon. Pacific salmon are wild fish that roam the oceans and pick up their red or pink color from their natural diet that includes red crustaceans. (The fact that a fish consumes non-kosher creatures does not affect its kashrus.) However, commercially sold Atlantic salmon, the source for fillets and steaks, are bred in fish farms that populate the coasts of the Atlantic Ocean and its inlets. (Atlantic salmon is no longer harvested directly from the sea because of decreasing wild populations.) The food eaten by these fish does not make their flesh pink. To give the fish their trademark hue, the farmers add colorant to their diet.

It seems that any fish wandering into these farms and sharing the salmon's diet would also develop pink flesh, which would destroy the theory that every pink fish must be kosher. Indeed, the fish could be non-kosher but have devoured significant amounts of red color.

After further research, I discovered another reason why salmon and trout have a distinctive color not found among other deep sea fishes. When most sea creatures eat colored crustaceans, the excess pigment is stored in their skin. Only salmon and trout store the color in their flesh. Thus, some rabbonim maintain that fish with the distinctive salmon color must be kosher, since only salmon and trout are able to convert their food's coloring to a pigment in their flesh. Until we have such evidence, if the fish looks like salmon, swims like salmon, and smells like salmon we will assume that it is salmon.

However, a research scientist I spoke to dismissed this argument contending that it is virtually impossible to prove that no other fish has the ability to store excess pigment in its flesh. To do this, one would have to conduct research on every fish variety worldwide, which is an impossible task. Halachic authorities have contended to me that in the thousands of years of halachic literature, no mention is made of red flesh as a siman kashrus. Therefore, we have no halachic evidence upon which to build such a heter.

OTHER CANNERY ISSUES

Are there any other potential kashrus issues with canned fish?

Fish factories often produce non-kosher products that would render the tuna or salmon non-kosher. Additionally, even if the factory cans only kosher fish, it might use non-kosher ingredients. Most fish is processed in oil, which can be non-kosher or produced on non-kosher equipment.

There is also a discussion among contemporary poskim as to whether canned tuna or salmon is prohibited because of bishul akum, food cooked by a non-Jew. Explaining this complicated subject will be left for a different article.

What other halachos pertain to fish?

FISH AND MEAT

Chazal advise that consuming fish and meat together is harmful to one's health (Pesachim 76a). To avoid swallowing fish and meat together, one should eat and drink something between eating fish and meat, in order to clean the mouth from residual particles (Rama to Yoreh Deah 116:3). Sefardim are more stringent and follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, who rules that one must wash one's hands and mouth carefully between eating fish and meat (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 116:3).

Question: "I have never noticed anyone getting sick from eating fish and meat together. Furthermore, the American Medical Association does not consider this harmful. Does this affect halacha in any way?"

Some prominent poskim contend that although mixing fish and meat was unhealthy in the days of Chazal, today the nature of the world has

changed and it is no longer unhealthy (Magen Avraham 173:1). This concept is referred to as "nishtaneh hateva," that nature has altered since the days of Chazal (see Tosafos, Moed Katan 11a; Niddah 3a). Others contend that Chazal were concerned only about a specific type of fish that is dangerous to mix with meat, and that their concern does not extend to other varieties (Shu't Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #101).

Other poskim rule that one should still not eat fish and meat together since Chazal may have been aware of a medical issue unknown to modern medicine (see Shu't Shevus Yaakov 3:70; Shu't Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #101). The accepted practice is to be stringent (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 116:3).

SCHNAPPS AFTER THE FISH

Chassidim have a minhag to drink schnapps after fish. Does this practice have a halachic source?

Indeed it does. Some poskim cite that it is dangerous to drink water immediately after fish (Tosafos, Moed Katan 11a; quoted by Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 116:10; another source one could possibly quote for this minhag is a Shla, quoted in Darkei Teshuvah 116:31, who implies that one should drink a beverage after fish, but not water). In earlier generations, there were not too many beverages available; often water, wine, and schnapps were the only choices. Thus, when wine was expensive, and one did not want to drink water after fish, schnapps was the most practical alternative. I suspect that this is the origin of washing down fish with schnapps (see Shaar HaTziyun 174:46). Today, a wine connoisseur can substitute white wine and a teetotaler, juice, for the same purpose. (Someone asked me whether one can use soda or reconstituted juice for this purpose, since both are predominantly water. To this date, I have found no halachic discussion about this shaylah.)

THE FISH POT

Question: "My bubbe had a special pot that she used only to cook fish. Is there halachic significance to this fish pot?"

Although most poskim contend that there is no halachic or safety problem with cooking fish in a fleishig pot, some poskim are stringent (Taz, Yoreh Deah 95:3; Shu't Shevus Yaakov 3:70). Based on this concern, many people have a family custom to cook fish only in a pot that they never use for meat. However, the common practice is to allow the cooking of fish in meat pots. Many only use a pot that did not cook meat in the last 24 hours.

FISH AND MILK

Based on certain halachic sources, some people, most commonly diverse Sefardim of North African origin, have the practice not to mix fish and milk products together (Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 87:9). This is important for an Ashkenazi to know when he invites Sefardi guests for a milchig meal.

WORCESTERSHIRE SAUCE ON MY FISH

People often ask the following question: "Some steak sauces or Worcestershire sauces have anchovies or other fish products among their ingredients. I have noticed that some hechsherim place a notation next to their hechsher symbol identifying that these items contain fish, whereas sometimes they do not. Is this an oversight?"

Poskim dispute whether any admixture of fish and meat is dangerous, or whether it is dangerous only if there is enough fish and meat to taste both (see Taz, Yoreh Deah 116:2; Pischei Teshuvah 116:3; Darkei Teshuvah 116:21). Thus, many poskim permit eating a small amount of fish mixed into a meat product. For this reason, and because of the above-mentioned opinion of the Magen Avraham that mixed fish and meat is no longer dangerous since nature has changed, many poskim allow eating a small amount of fish mixed into a meat dish (Shu't Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #101; Pischei Teshuvah 116:3). Upon this basis, some hechsherim do not require listing fish on the hechsher sign on the label when the fish constitutes less than a sixtieth of the product.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 97:3) points out that Klal Yisroel is compared to fish. Just like fish, who are completely surrounded by water,

rise excitedly to the surface at the first drops of rain to drink fresh water, so too Jews, although surrounded by Torah, run enthusiastically to hear a new chiddush of Torah, “drinking” it thirstily as if this were their first opportunity to learn. May we indeed live up to our reputation!

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netziv@torah.org date: Thu, Aug 16, 2012 at 7:05 PM
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Netziv: Davar B'Ito

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Reeh Segulos, Kosher and Not 1

If there should arise in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream, and he will provide you with a sign or a wonder. If the sign or wonder comes about which he spoke to you, saying, “Let us follow other gods that you did not know, and we shall worship them!” Do not listen to the words of the prophet or the dreamer of a dream, for Hashem your G-d is testing you to know whether you love Hashem your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul. Hashem your G-d you shall follow and Him shall you fear. His commandments you shall observe and to His voice you shall listen. Him you shall serve and to Him you shall cleave.

Two principal approaches explain these pesukim. According to one of them, that of R. Akiva, the false navi does not work any miracles in the name of some false deity. Rather, he legitimately earned the distinction of prophet (or the lesser level of experiencing some sort of a prophetic experience in the form of a dream) at some earlier time. At some previous occasion or occasions, he had spoken in the Name of Hashem, and established his bona fides by predicting and producing a miraculous occurrence. Now, however, he brings a very different message, urging people to serve a false object of veneration.

R. Akiva’s approach makes the miracle-worker status of the false prophet easier to deal with. The false prophet is not endowed with some special, mysterious power that he can manipulate to his own advantage, including to “prove” to his audience that he should be followed, no matter what he says. We do not have to explain to ourselves how it is that Hashem provides a charlatan with the power to work miracles in order to bolster his claim that another god be served. His miracle-working was limited to the time he served Hashem alone!

This advantage, however, comes at a price. If he performs no miracles in the name of idolatry, why is deciding whether or not to listen to him such a great test? There is nothing to distinguish him from any other preacher of a different faith! Furthermore, the entire premise of this parshah seems ludicrous. Why would anyone listen to a claim that Hashem Himself instructs people to worship another god, when the prohibition to do so was incorporated in the Ten Commandments! Finally, what is the point of the last pasuk, urging us to follow, fear, serve and cling to Hashem? Do they comprise the essence of rejecting the idolatry proposed by the false prophet?

The key to this parshah is understanding that the navi sheker does not come to the Jewish community and prod the people into idolatrous practice. His pitch is more subtle – and more nefarious.

From time to time, the community will find itself in crisis. Some dread disease comes upon them, or any one of many conceivable threats. People see their lives and the lives of their loved ones hanging in the balance. The air is thick with desperation; desperate people clutch at straws and less for a chance to live.

The navi sheker enters such a scene. He eggs them on. “See here. You can trust me. Did I not perform wondrous things in the past? I have a plan that can save your lives! We face a difficult challenge. It happens to be – and don’t ask me why! – that serving god X in a particular manner happens to be particularly effective in dealing with our problem. What choice do we have but to try it? If we don’t, we may not live to talk about it.”

When people stare death in the face, they do not necessarily become smarter. To the contrary, they are likely to make foolish decisions based on faulty judgment. In ordinary times, people would find an invitation to flirt with avodah zarah contemptible. When a limited nod to an avodah zarah is presented as a life-preserver, however, it stands a much better chance of being accepted.

The sense of our pesukim, therefore, goes something like this: “If there should arise in your midst a prophet” who provided a sign in the past that came true and established him as a credentialed prophet, he may now seek to use his prior success to argue that he still retains his standing as a faithful messenger of Hashem. He may abuse this trust by saying, “Let us follow other gods that you did not know, and we shall worship them.” Pointing out that you “did not know these gods” is a kind way of saying that you will be vulnerable to his argument because you lack sufficient experience with those gods to be able to properly discredit his claim.

How are you expected to deal with such a situation? You should realize that you are being subjected to a test of your love of Hashem. Rather than look for a quick-fix of your predicament in some nonsense peddled by the false prophet, you should understand that there are legitimate ways in which you can better your standing before Hashem:

“Hashem your G-d you shall follow” – meaning, you should walk behind Him in full faith and confidence.

“His commandments you shall observe” – look carefully at the activities of the afflicted or endangered area. Are its citizens fully compliant with the demands of halacha? Mend the breaches in the fence of the law! Shore up commitment to details of what Hashem asks of us.

“And to His voice you shall listen” – by seeing to it that there are a cadre of people involved fully in learning Torah. Torah study is an effective defense against all the battles of this world.

“Him you shall serve” – through people fully devoted to avodas Hashem, like the ten batlanim of every tzibbur.

“To Him you shall cleave.” – as Chazal say, by marrying off one’s daughter to a talmid chacham. Even though this generally holds true, it is even more important in times of danger, when we seek special merit.

Thus, what our pesukim really speak about is resisting the sometimes strong temptation to seek refuge in forbidden, dangerous and false “segulos,” and substituting tried and true ones.

1. Based on Haamek Davar, Devarim 13:2-5

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from: Destiny Foundation/**Rabbi Berel Wein**
info@jewishdestiny.com via rabiwein.ccsend.com reply-to:
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Rabbi Berel Wein - Parshat Re'eih 5772

Home Weekly Parsha RE'EIH
RE'EIH

In this week’s parsha the Torah continues with the theme that runs through the previous parshiyot of Dvarim, that we are always faced with stark choices in life – either blessings or curses, good or evil. The words

of the Torah seemingly offer little option for middle ground on these basic issues of belief and behavior. Yet, we are all aware that the events in life are rarely, if ever, all or nothing, one hundred percent blessing or curse. In fact, Jewish tradition and teachings instruct us that hidden in tragedy there is always a glimmer of hope and goodness, and that all joy and happiness contains within it the taste of the bittersweet.

Jewish philosophy and theology has taught us that evil somehow has a place in God's good and benign world. We are faced with the problem of why the Torah addresses these matters without nuance, in such a harsh way which seemingly brooks no compromise, without a hint of a middle ground. After all, the Torah is not a debating society where one is forced to take an extreme uncompromising stand in order to focus the issue being discussed more sharply and definitively. Many rabbinic scholars of previous generations have maintained that it is only in our imperfect, post Temple period that we are to search for good in evil and temper our joy with feelings of seriousness and even sadness. But in the ideal and idyllic world, where the Divine Spirit is a palpable entity, the choices are really stark and the divisions are 100 percent to zero. Far be it from me to not accept the opinion of these great scholars of Israel. However I wish to interject a somewhat different thought into this matter. This parsha begins with the word re'eih – see. As all of us are well aware, there are stages in life that we can see well only with the aid of corrective lenses. Without that correction, we can easily make grave mistakes trying to read and see what appears before us. If we have to read small print, such as looking up a number in the Jerusalem telephone directly – it is almost impossible without the aid of corrective lenses. Well, this situation is not limited to the physical world, of just our actual eyesight, but it applies equally to our spiritual world of Torah observance and personal morality. Many times we think we are behaving righteously when we are in fact behaving badly because we are not seeing the matter correctly. We are not wearing our corrective lenses, with the benefit of halacha, history, good common sense and a Jewish value system that should govern our lives. Without this advantage, we see blessings and curses, good and evil, all blurry and undefined before our eyes. The Torah wishes us to see clearly - to instinctively be able to recognize what is the blessing in our life and what is not. The Torah itself has been kind enough to provide us with the necessary corrective lenses to see clearly and accurately. These lenses consist of observance of Torah and its commandments and loyalty to Jewish values and traditions. Shabat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein Subscribe to our blog via email or RSS to get more posts like this one.

Posted in: Weekly Parsha by Rabbi Berel Wein

from **Rabbi Aron Tendler** ravaron@torah.org reply-to ravaron+@torah.org to parsha-summary@torah.org date Mon, Aug 22, 2011 at 6:05 PM subject Parsha Summary - Parshas Reeh Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading: Parshas Reeh Note: The Shabbos Torah Reading is divided into 7 sections. Each section is called an Aliya [literally: Go up] since for each Aliya, one person "goes up" to make a bracha [blessing] on the Torah Reading.

1st and 2nd Aliyot: Moshe instructs the Chosen People to eradicate any remnant of idolatry and strengthen all aspects of service to G-d. All offerings must be brought to the "Chosen" place, the Bais Hamikdash, so that worship is an act of humility and selflessness, rather than a self-indulging "need". An even greater danger to our uniqueness is the innate desire to compromise and assimilate Torah values with other forms of worship. (the Chanukah bush syndrome)

3rd and 4th Aliyot: Moshe forewarned the Jews against incorporating any pagan practices, and against the false prophet, idolatrous missionaries, and the Ir Hanidachas - the Apostate City. These must be destroyed along with their material belongings. When using the world in

accordance with the wishes of the Creator, we declare the existence of a Creator who has a divine purpose for creating the material world. When we misuse the physical in the service of "gods who are not G-d", we negate the Creator's purpose for creating the universe. Therefore, they and all their belongings must be destroyed.

5th, 6th, and 7th Aliyot: The remainder of the Parsha, details those Mitzvos that set us apart from all other nations: Kashrus; Maasros - Tithes; the Shmitah - sabbatical year; the laws regarding lending money; the Eved Ivri - a Jew who is a slave; the consecration of the first born animal, and a review of the main Yomim Tovim - holidays: Pesach, Shavouth, and Succoth.

Rav S.R. Hirsch points out that Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are not reviewed in Sefer Divarim because there were no changes in the practices of those Yomim Tovim when living in the desert or living in Eretz Yisroel. (Intro. to Divarim)

Summary of The Haftorah: Haftorah Re'eh Isaiah 54:11 - 55:5

This week's Haftorah is the third Haftorah of Consolation. Yishayuhu Hanavi described the utopian times of Mashiach when the veiling values of societal assumptions and norm will be lifted and the reality of our absolute dependency on Hashem will be realized and accepted. Money and other assumed values and goals will be replaced by the currency of Avodas Hashem and Yiras Shamayim. G-d will be recognized by all as the only Provider of sustenance in contrast to our present assumed self-sufficiency and independence. The words of Yishayuhu offer us hope in knowing that closeness to Hashem and the end of Galus is up to us. All we have to do is trust the beginning words of the Parsha: "The Blessing: that you should listen to the commandments of Hashem..."

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Rabbi Tendler is also the author of the Rabbis-Notebook class.

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network shemalist@shemayisrael.com to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date: Thu, Aug 16, 2012 at 10:46 AM subject:

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Reeh PARSHAS RE'EH Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. (11:26) One of the basic tenets of Judaism is that man is equipped with the ability to discern between good and bad, right and wrong. He is also equipped with the capacity to choose right over wrong, good over evil. Contrary to popular opinion, man is not destined to do bad, to veer to the wrong side of the truth. If he does so, it is purely of his own volition, not due to a predetermined GPS within his psyche that always steers him to do evil. The Torah says, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse." Towards the end of Sefer Devarim (30:19), we are admonished to "Choose life!" All of this makes sense. Hashem wants us to make the correct and proper choices. There is, however, more to it. Our choices not only have an effect on us personally, but the choice of the individual Jew to do good affects the entire world.

We begin our day with a number of blessings, one of which is, Asher nossan la'sechvi vinah l'havchin bein yom u'bein loylah; "Who gave the heart (lit. rooster) the wisdom/understanding to discern between the day and night." The Sfias Emes cites his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, who explains that the light of day is a reference to the spiritual and the opportunity to grow closer to Hashem; while the night, represented by darkness, alludes to the material dimension which can bring man to sin. In the blessing, we pay gratitude to the Almighty for granting us the power to distinguish between the two. The Sfias Emes adds that, while continued sin desensitizes a person, distorting his projected image of evil, Hashem constantly renews man's consciousness, thus enabling him to once again choose correctly. This is the meaning of the daily blessing, acknowledging one's renewed blessing - every day.

Having said this, why does man not intuitively choose a life of blessing? Why would one want a life of curse? Indeed, why do so many presumably intelligent people, who consider themselves by today's standards to be frum, observant people, often make the "wrong" choices for their lives? The Sfias Emes explains that choosing a life of blessing is possible only if one is a true ben-Torah, one who views life and living through the spectrum of Torah. Blessing and curse are defined by the Torah - not by contemporary society.

Sfias Emes cites the Midrash that supports this idea. "Behold! I have set before you today a blessing and a curse." What is written above? 'If you will keep (guard) all of this mitzvah' (Devarim 11:22). What is the meaning of this mitzvah? Rabbi Levi says it's Krias Shema. The Rabbanan say it's Shabbos." Another explanation: man's soul and the Torah are compared to a candle, as it is written, 'The candle of Hashem is man's soul' (Mishlei 6:23). Hashem says, 'My candle is in your hand; and your candle is in Mine. If you guard My candle I will guard yours, but, if you extinguish My candle, I will extinguish yours, as well.'" Three concepts in this Midrash must be explained: What is meant by, "Hashem's candle is in our hands"? Why are Shabbos and Shema, in particular, those mitzvos that engender blessing or curse?

Sfias Emes explains that Hashem renews Creation daily. The flow of renewal, however, is dependent on Klal Yisrael. This is intimated by the pasuk, "I set before you a blessing and a curse." Klal Yisrael receives the flow of blessing in accordance with their preparation. It then flows to the rest of the world through the Jewish People. If Klal Yisrael is lax in their preparation, if their attitude is left wanting, the spiritual flow of blessing will parallel the preparation, such that the entire world will suffer.

Chazal compare this spiritual flow to a candle. Every Jew carries Hashem's candle through the dark night represented by This World. His hands cup the flame, preventing it from becoming extinguished. His daily prayers and blessings are like the oil that enables the candle to glow.

The pasuk teaches that the blessing and curses were placed lifneichem, before Klal Yisrael as a collective group. There are certain mitzvos which unite our people. Sanctifying the Shabbos is one of them. In Nusach Sfar, we recite the Raza d'Shabbos as part of the K'gavna prayer: "Raza d'Shabbos, the secret of Shabbos... b'raza d'Echad, the secret of unity." The Shema prayer calls upon the entire Jewish nation to unify Hashem. These mitzvos have unique status in serving as catalysts for uniting Klal Yisrael, thereby bringing the spiritual flow of blessing to the world.

This idea is alluded to by Yirmiyahu HaNavi: Shimu v'haazinu al tigbahu, "Listen and pay attention, do not 'rise up'" (Yirmiyahu 13:15). Chazal question the phrase, "Do not rise up." They explain that it is an admonishment not to prevent the spiritual flow of blessing from entering the world.

Now, to put it all together: The Jewish People were created to attest to the fact that Hashem creates the world anew each day. This idea disputes those who contend that, while Hashem might have created the world, He abandoned it a long time ago. Hashem is prepared to renew the fire,

lightning and thunder that personified the Revelation with one condition: We must be attuned to listen to it. David HaMelech says, Shimah ami va'adeabeira, "Listen My People, and I will speak" (Tehillim 50:7). Regrettably, no one is prepared to listen. Chazal teach that B'chol yom va'yom Bas Kol yotzais mei'Har Chorev; "Each day a Heavenly voice emanates from Mount Chorev, declaring, 'Oy la'hem labriyos mei'elbonah shel Torah, Woe to Creation for the disgrace of the Torah!'" (Pirkei Avos 6:2). This means that the Heavenly voice is waiting to be heard, but, regrettably, we "raise ourselves up" and prevent spiritual flow from entering the world.

Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah or, "For the mitzvos are a candle and the Torah is the light." By fulfilling mitzvos, we awaken the world's spiritual potential. Like candles, mitzvos illuminate each seemingly physical act and connect it to the Creator. The Midrash's allegory of Hashem allowing us to hold the candle is a metaphor which shows that each Jew is personally responsible to enlighten a certain aspect of spirituality. He must do it himself - no one else. Until he strengthens himself to do so, that point which is his personal responsibility remains incarcerated in a dark prison. The parshah commences with the word, Re'eh! "See!" By choosing life, we connect to that exclusive point and are actually able to see the blessings. In conclusion: The choice of a Jew to do good has ramifications for the entire world. When we work in harmony with the entire Klal Yisrael, such as, shemiras Shabbos, kabollas ol Malchus Shomayim, observing Shabbos and collectively accepting the yoke of Heaven on ourselves, we unify ourselves and unify Hashem. This is the secret of Shabbos and the Shema Yisrael: Yichud haBorei, the unity of the Creator. We have Hashem's "candle" - His Torah and mitzvos - in our hands; He has our neshamos, souls, in His hands. It is tit for tat. When we observe the mitzvos, the Torah illuminates our lives, granting us the ability to see. Thus, Hashem allows the flow of blessing to reach our neshamos. We "see"; we "choose"; we "live."

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse. (11:26)

When one peruses Jewish history, it is apparent that the pendulum of Jewish fortune swings to extremes. We have been blessed with either incredible prosperity or drastic misfortune. Even concerning the individual, one is either highly successful, very observant, or, sadly, the extreme opposite. While it may not be obvious to the casual observer, if one were to cogently look at life, he would see that, for the Jew, life is either about ceaseless blessing or unbearable curse. Even with regard to sin, the Torah relates in the parsha of Krias Shema: Heshamru la'chem pen yifteh levavechem - v'sartem, va'avaditem elohim acheirim, "Beware for yourselves, lest your heart be seduced - and you will turn astray and serve gods of others" (Devarim 11:16). There is no in-between road. One is either totally subservient to Hashem or he is an idol-worshipper.

In the opening Rashi to Sefer Mishlei, the quintessential commentator, Rebbe of Klal Yisrael, writes that the title of the Sefer Mishlei, translated as Proverbs, refers to various literary devices used to render the subject matter more comprehensible. Hence, the Torah is allegorized as an islah tovah, good woman, and avodas kochavim, idol-worship, as an islah zonah, a harlot. While this is a wonderful commentary on the status of the Jewish woman, one wonders at the extreme: one is either an islah tovah or an islah zonah. The precipice that divides the two, I think, is, pen yifteh levavechem, "lest your heart be seduced." Once the heart has been swayed, then everything goes; the downward descent plummets one at a mind-boggling speed, to the point of v'sartem va'avaditem elohim acheirim, "You will turn astray and serve gods of others." Is there no middle road? Is one either "good" or "very bad"? If so, why?

The answer to this question is simple: We are different. In a famous comment to the first pasuk of our Parsha, "Behold! I set before you this day a blessing and a curse," Sforno writes: "Look and see that your affairs (as a nation) will never be, al ofan beinoni, of an average nature, as is the case with other nations. For today I set before you either blessing or curse: two extremes. Blessing implies success even beyond

that which is sufficient, and curse implies such deficiency that attainment even of requirements is out of reach. Both of these are before you to attain, according to what you choose."

We are not like everyone else. Mediocrity is not intrinsic to our system. We are either on "top" - or on the "bottom." Does it have to be this way? Would it be so bad if our lives and fortunes would mirror that of the nations of the world? Is something wrong with living a stable, average existence?

This question was intimated by none other than Eisav ha'rasha, when he asked, "I am going to die, and so what is the birthright (worth) to me?" (Bereishis 25:32). Rashi explains: Eisav asked Yaakov Avinu, "What is the nature of the Temple service which is performed by a b'chor, firstborn?" Yaakov replied, "Many warnings and punishments and death penalties are associated with it!" Eisav responded, "So who needs it? I would die through it!" In other words, Eisav asked Yaakov, "Why would anyone in his right mind seek a position which can destroy him at the slightest hint of error?" It really is not a bad question - for someone like Eisav!

Horav Yeruchum Levovitz, zl, derives a fundamental principle from this dialogue between the two famous brothers. "This issue occurs on every level. Corresponding to the greatness of the spiritual level is the detriment of loss." The greater and more sublime the spiritual level, the more the lack is in its absence. The Kohen has unique responsibilities which demand a greater level of Divine service than that which is demanded of the average Jew. Thus, if he fails, he is subject to a much harsher punishment. It goes with the territory.

The question arises: Who needs it all? Rav Yeruchum asks, "Is exalted spirituality with its potential for tremendous reward better for man, or does the fear of terrible punishment and personal degradation, which are the result of failure, outweigh the benefits?" In other words: Would one not want to forego the opportunity for the reward due to the ominous gloom associated with failure?

The Jews went through this decision following the Revelation. In Sefer Devarim (5:21,24) Moshe Rabbeinu recounts how the people were so overawed by the mysterium tremendum of the Revelation that they requested that Moshe do the "talking," that he convey the mitzvos to them. Apparently, the clarity of truth experienced by the people upon hearing the mitzvos first-hand from the Almighty was too much for them. It engendered great responsibility, awesome obligation, something which they were not sure they could live up to. While their rejection of this unprecedented opportunity aggrieved Moshe, Hashem said, "They did well." He praised them for taking the easy way out. The question that now confronts us is: How did the nation act in a different manner than Eisav? They saw heavy punishment; he saw the same. He opted out; they did the same. Yet, Hashem agreed with them. Why?

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, explains that essentially Chazal have previously engaged in the debate. Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel argued for two-and a half years concerning whether it was better to have been created or not to have been created. The conclusion was: Better it would have been had man not been created. However, ex post facto, let him scrutinize his deeds and act appropriately. Once again, was Eisav that far off the mark?

Rav Miller distinguishes between the forms of yiraah, fear: yiraas ha'onesh, fear of punishment; and yiraas ha'Romemus, fear of awe, the reverence stemming from a deep and abiding love founded in an acknowledgment of the truth. He cites the Avnei Nezer who explains that Yitzchak Avinu personified fear which originates from love. Man loves Hashem so much that he fears that some distance might come between them. The difference between these two forms of fear is what results. One who loves does not hate. One who fears retribution, who fears future punishment, however, is filled with an emotion that can degenerate into resentment.

One who serves Hashem merely out of fear of punishment is encouraged not to take on added responsibility, for, instead of sensing the privilege of his behavior, he will constantly obsess over the negative consequences if he were to err. This is the approach which Eisav took. He was being realistic. Too many obligations and extra tasks, would destroy him. The less the better - and get it over with.

When Klal Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, they were elevated to such a sublime level that they were totally divorced from physicality. As Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler writes: "They ascended to a place that is beyond the capacity of any human to attain through his own exertion." Yet, despite all of this, they wanted to hear from Moshe, rather than from Hashem. How could they fear death if they had just experienced a parting of the soul from the body? The answer is that their fear was not of death. They did not concern themselves with mortality, with the corporeal end. After having achieved such incredible closeness with Hashem, they feared lest they be unable to sustain this relationship. There was a fear stemming from a love that is beyond the level of appreciation. Their love was the result of total devotion and ultimate closeness.

This same fear generated by love was the impetus which catalyzed the dispute between Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel. After counting the number of prohibitive mitzvos (365) versus the number of positive commandments (248), they decided that the opportunities available to actually draw close to Hashem were outnumbered by the different dangers from which one might guard himself. Their conclusion was that since man is fearful that sin would isolate him from the desired closeness with Hashem that he would want to achieve, that negativity would numb the warmth that he yearned for so passionately, it was better for man to have never been created. It would have been far better that man never have been placed in a situation in which he might sever the most significant relationship that could exist.

We return to the beginning of our Parsha in which Klal Yisrael is presented with two opposing extremes. They are being told that being mediocre serves quite well for the nations of the world, but is not an option for them. It is either/or - nothing in the middle. When we stood at the foot of Har Sinai and accepted the Torah, we entered a new league of humanity, a new epoch in our existence. We were elevated above the rest of humanity, and, consequently, we are unable to live on the same plane. Indeed, it is specifically our lofty plateau, with its newly-incurred obligations, that poses the greatest challenge for us. If we fail to succeed, it will be our downfall.

The question is: Do we need all this? Is it desirable for man to strive to lofty heights if he thereby risks plummeting to the depths? This is not a new question. Rav Yeruchum cites the Mesillas Yescharim, who refers to those individuals who refuse to elevate themselves due to their fear of falling - as fools. They would rather remain oblivious to a life of Torah, pulsating beauty and spiritual wealth. They would rather live a life of mediocrity, content with merely avoiding punishment. Only someone who appreciates the inestimable value of Torah will gladly commit himself to it, regardless of the difficulties and possible punishments for failure such a commitment engenders. This person's love transcends the challenges.

Those who foolishly repudiate this lifestyle - settling instead, first for mediocrity, then for total spiritual oblivion - use fear of negative consequences as a crutch, as an excuse. Veritably, it all stems from their attachment to a life of materialism.

To those whose heart invokes them to attach themselves to a life of spiritual blessing, but who, in the back of their minds, tremble with trepidation at the possibility of retribution, Rav Yeruchum offers the following advice, which I feel should be a Jew's mantra and source of pride - especially when he sees a world around him ensconced in materialistic pursuit and hedonism. To paraphrase the Mashgiach:

"When a person sees a horse or any other animal, does man really envy the animal's freedom? Beasts do not shoulder the burden of a livelihood, their sustenance is available everywhere. Living a life of constant gratification and recreation, animals have no worries. However, no fool or simpleton would ever desire to be a horse! Ultimately with all of the difficulties and burdens it involves, man knows that the greatest satisfaction and pleasure is to be a man!"

You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations that you are driving away worshipped their gods... You shall not do so to Hashem, your G-d. (12:2,4)

Rashi quotes the Sifrei, which offers a homiletic rendering of this pasuk. "Does it enter one's mind that the Jews would shatter their Altars?" What, then, does the Torah mean when it writes, "You shall not do this to Hashem, your G-d?" We would never do to our holy places what we are being commanded to do to the shrines of the idol worshippers. "Rabbi Yishmael taught that Jews should be careful not to commit sins that will cause them to be exiled and their holy places destroyed." What are these sins? Why would anyone sin in the bais ha'medrash? This admonition is not directed to the lowest of the low, but to the "cr?me de cr?me," the individuals who attend the bais ha'medrash.

Horav Matis Blum, Shlita, cites the Sefer Chassidim which teaches us a frightening lesson. Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChassid writes, "If you see the house that once belonged to a tzaddik, righteous person, or a shul, which is now destroyed or inhabited by wicked people, you should know that (it is because) Jewish people had previously lived there in a disgraceful manner." In his commentary to Sefer Chassidim, the Mekor Chesed cites Chazal in the Talmud Megilla 28b, who state that, "A shul in which mundane calculations (business) is conducted, in the end, will one day serve as a morgue for a meis mitzvah, corpse who has no family to bury him." "Likewise, a shul or bais ha'medrash in which kalus rosh, levity, is commonplace, in the end, will fall into the hands of gentiles." Indeed, the "uncircumcised ones" (gentiles) never practiced degradation and disgrace in the House of G-d, unless it had first been preceded by Jews who did the same. Last, the gentiles do nothing evil to the Jewish people unless the Jews have acted in such a manner among themselves."

We derive a powerful lesson from the Pietist's homily. Whatever befalls us is a direct consequence of our own doing. When we mistreat a fellow Jew; when our shuls become nothing more than an extension of Starbucks; when our davening is, at best, an endeavor which we must endure; when the shul politics are as underhanded and evil as in the secular political arena, then we are guilty of destroying Hashem's Altar. We set the stage for the gentile demolition crew to enter our Sanctuary to do what they want with it. After all, we have already denuded it of its sanctity. The goyim will just finish the job.

You shall surely tithe the entire crop of your planting... And you shall eat it before Hashem, your G-d. (14:22,23)

Rashi comments that the pasuk is referring to Maaser Sheini, the second tithe. It cannot be addressing Maaser Rishon, the first tithe, because that tithe was given to the Levi. Thus, when the Torah writes that the fruits of the present tithe may be eaten in any place, it obviously must be a different Maaser. In pasuk 27, the Torah writes, "And the Levi who is in your cities, do not forsake him, for he does not have a portion or inheritance with you." Rashi comments, "Do not forsake him by refraining from giving him the first tithe." This statement appears enigmatic and misplaced. Why, in the midst of teaching about Maaser Sheini, does the Torah interrupt with an admonition not to abandon the Levi?

Horav Moshe Tzvi Nahariyah, zl, explains that the Torah delves into the mind of people. By reminding us of our responsibility towards the Levi specifically while addressing the laws concerning Maaser Sheini, the Torah is alluding to a problem which might arise resulting from a person's faulty misconception. Chazal teach us that Maaser Sheini is a catalyst for a burgeoning of one's Torah learning. The escalation and

intensification of one's attachment to Torah are the result of spending quality time in Yerushalayim waiting to consume his Maaser Sheini. Imagine a person coming up to Yerushalayim with his wagonload of fruit or its exchange in cash. He must eat the Maaser Sheini or its derivative in Yerushalayim while waiting. During the time spent in the Holy City, he will certainly come in contact with great men of spiritual stature, scholars whose erudition in every area of Torah is unparalleled. He will hear lectures from prominent speakers on just about any Torah topic of his choice. During his short sojourn in Yerushalayim, as he is experiencing unparalleled spiritual fulfillment, he makes the acquaintance of an outstanding Torah scholar, whose breadth of knowledge is encyclopedic, whose oratory is spellbinding, whose piety is awe-inspiring - and this man is a Levi! Suddenly, a "wonderful" idea creeps into his mind: Why not use this Levi as the recipient of his Maaser Rishon fund? True, the Levi back at home is a fine, upstanding person. He is even fairly knowledgeable in Torah, but in comparison this Yerushalmi Levi is simply out of his league. He is not on the same page. A "nice guy," but he does not compare to the Levi in Yerushalayim! From now on, I will lend all of my support to the Leviim of Yerushalayim. They are the real thing!

It does not take acute brilliance to sense the tremendous harm that will result from such an "admirable" attitude. Clearly, the man means well, but he is forgetting about the Levi who has spent his life in the trenches, in the small towns and outlying Jewish communities - not because this is what he necessarily wanted, but because this is what was available. Then there are those who chose to practice their profession specifically out-of-town, out of reach, so that they could be of assistance to those Jews who were themselves distant from the Torah centers that are replete with an abundance of scholars. In the end, the Levi will move on, leave the small out-of-town community to join one of the more flourishing Torah communities.

Thus, the Torah reminds us not to forget and abandon the Levi who is in our town. He needs our help, support and encouragement.

Va'ani Tefillah Chemlah gedolah v'yiseirah chomalta aleinu, You have shown us great and overwhelming compassion.

In his Kedushas Levi, Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m'Berditchov, questions the word yiseirah, commonly translated as extra, overwhelming, more than necessary. We know that Hashem is perfect. Thus, everything that He does reflects the essence of perfection. Nothing that Hashem does is extra. Perfect is not ancillary. It needs no appending, as it is perfect from its original source. Whatever Hashem creates or causes to occur is specific and unique. How does the word yiseirah fit in? Givaat Shaul quotes Chazal in the Talmud Shabbos 151a, "Anyone who is compassionate with people, will merit that Heaven will be compassionate with him."

What we do for others, Hashem will do for us. His compassion is much greater than anything we show to another fellow. We, by our very nature, view every little act of mercy as something great and special. Hashem, however, is boundless; His compassion is unrestricted. It is yiseirah, more/greater, than anything we could ever do.

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