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Rabbi Yisroel Reisman – Parshas Re'eh 5774

A quick beautiful Vort regarding the Mitzvah of Tzedakah from Rav Schwab. Rav Schwab (in his Sefer Mayan Bais Hashoeva page # 416) says on the Posuk in 14:22 (עֲשֵׂר תַעֲשֶׂר) that Chazal say as it says in Masseches Shabbos 119a (20 lines from the bottom) (עֲשֵׂר תַעֲשֶׂר עֵשֶׂר בְּשִׁבְלֵי שְׁתַּתְּעֵשֶׂר) give Maaser so that you should become rich. Rav Schwab has a wonderful insight into this. He says that the Pshat in the Posuk may not be the way you understand it simply, that give money and presto Hashem is going to give you money. While that is certainly Poshut Pshat, however, Rav Schwab gives us a much more meaningful insight.

We know as the Mishna says in Pirkei Avos 4:1 (איזה הוא עשיר--השמח בחלקו). There is an Ashirus of being happy with what you have. The Gemara in Masseches Nedarim 38a (20 lines from the top) says that a Navi has to be wealthy (אמר ר' יוחנן אין הקב"ה משרה שכניתו אלא על גבור ועשיר והכס ועניו). The Rambam says that that wealth is accomplished by being (השמח בחלקו). Not every Navi will necessarily have physical wealth.

Similarly says Rav Schwab, when you give Tzedakah money you will become happier (שמח בחלקו). Not magically, not incredibly, not through a Mofes, not through a Segula. But it is human nature. When you are a giving person then you are (שמח בחלקו) then you tend to be happy with what you have. A person who is a giving person has that Teva, that nature to be a happier person. This is Rav Schwab's insight.

Incidentally, Rav Chaim Kanievsky in Derech Sicha says a similar thing. That his father said that not every time it says wealth does it mean that you are wealthy with money. The Steipler would point to his Seferim that were accepted in the world and said that is his wealth. He was a Sandek many times. A Sandek has a promise of wealth and he would say there is my wealth. There are other types of wealth.

What I would like to add is that in Rav Schwab's Sefer on the Siddur, in the Braissa which we say into Birchah Hatorah (אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהם) (בעולם הזה והקרוי תגמול לו לעולם הבא). The idea that certain things a person is rewarded in this world. Rav Schwab says something very similar. He says also that those things listed there, it is not the reward in the sense of getting paid for what you did. Rather they are things (ובקור חולים) (התקנסת אורחים) (התקנסת פלה) that are types of things that bring a person to a deeper

appreciation of what he has. (ותלמוד תורה פנגד כלים). It brings a person to an appreciation of what he has. For that he is Mekabeil Schar in this world. A beautiful insight into the Mitzvah of Tzedakah.

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Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

Seeking Him Out

Although Yerushalayim plays a significant role in our parsha, its name is conspicuously absent. Yerushalayim is the focus of the beginning of the parsha, which repeatedly teaches that once settled in Israel we must perform all mishkan service exclusively in the "one city of Hashem's choice". Similarly, Yerushalayim is established as a central anchor of our national and personal calendar at the end of the parsha, but once again, it is referred to as "the city of Hashem's choice".

Our observation is underscored with a quick review of some of the opening pesukim of the parsha: "Only to the place that Hashem will choose from among the tribes...[may you bring korbanos]" (12:5) ; "[To] the place that Hashem will choose to rest His Name...[may you bring your korbanos]" (12:11); "Only to the place that Hashem will choose from one of your tribes...[may you do the temple service]" (12:14); "Only before Hashem can you eat [kodshim] in the place that Hashem will choose..." (12:18); "When you will be far from the place that Hashem will choose..."(12:21). The pattern closes the parsha as well as we are told to gather and celebrate "in the place the place that Hashem will choose."

Convinced that "the city" was unmistakably recognized by all to be Yerushalayim by virtue of a long standing tradition born at the akeida, Rabbeinu Bachya, based on the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim, explains the expedience of the silence. He reasons that the reduced publicity would somehow deflect a battle waiting to happen between our own ancestors or against one of the indigenous nations, all of whom would not easily cede Yerushalayim to another nation nor to another shevet.

The repetition of the phrase that actually highlights the omission may best be understood, however, through a careful reading of the halachic writings of the Rambam. In Hilchos Melochim, the Rambam bases the mitzvah to build and rebuild the Beis Hamikdosh on the pasuk, "I'shichno tid'reshu - you shall seek His presence." (This is surprising as it ignores the more obvious and concrete text, "v'asu lee mikdash - and you shall make for me a sanctuary", the very pasuk that the Rambam records in Hilchos Beis Habechira as the commanding passuk of this mitzvah.)

The verb "doresh - to seek" is introduced to us as the matriarch, Rivka, fearing the loss of the pregnancy for which she prayed for well over a decade, is beset by questions that shake her to her very core (Parshas Toldos). Rivkah then sets out, "lidrosh es Hashem - to seek answers from Hashem" or at least the guidance of how to live with questions. Apparently the Rambam understood that building of the Beis Hamikdosh is a collective act of seeking out Hashem for service, prayer, forgiveness, sanctity and even answers and strength. Possibly the defining role of the Beis Hamikdosh is that it is the destination for those individuals who are seeking sanctity, the rich blessings it grants, and the profound depth found in its ambience. Much as Ellul and the Yomim Noraim (see Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 2:5 - "dirshu Hashem b'he'matz'oh") provide for us the annual enclave of inspiration, introspection, and guidance, the Beis Hamikdosh would accomplish this in ways beyond our imagination.

Perhaps we can project from this Maimondean approach that the name Yerushalayim is repeatedly omitted and replaced as "the city of Hashem's choice" to communicate to us that Yerushalayim and all that brings His presence palpably proximate must be sought long before it will be revealed. This teaching that kedusha can be earned through honest and earnest seeking can't be overstated neither as we personally engage the redemptive moments

of Ellul and Tishrei nor as we nationally experience the redemptive process of our times.

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig Trampled Laws

I The mefarshim provide multiple interpretations of the opening phrase of Parshas Ekev, "V'haya ekev tishme'un eis hamishpatim ha'eileh". The simplest interpretation is that of the Chizkuni, who explains "ekev" to mean "bishvil - because", and thus the passuk means, "because you will listen to these laws, you will receive Hashem's blessing" (D'varim 7:12).

Rashi connects the word "ekev" to "akeiv - a heel", and understands the passuk to be telling us that we will receive Hashem's blessings if we will listen to the easy mitzvos that people are prone to trample with their heels. Like Rashi, Ramban understands "ekev" to refer to "akev - a heel", but explains the heel to refer to the end, just as the beginning is called head (rosh). As such, Ramban understands the passuk to tell us that the end result of your observance will be Hashem's reward of blessing.

Ohr Hachaim notes that "v'haya", the first word of the passuk, is an expression of joy (as we see in Bereishis Raba 42:3), and offers three interpretations based on this. The first is that true joy is achieved only at the end (ekev, like the Ramban above) of observing the mitzvos. Second, the joy of Torah study, which gladdens the heart (see Tehilim 19:9) is itself the reward (as in "ekev rav - great reward", Tehilim 19:12). And lastly, the Ohr Hachaim explains that when Am Yisrael tries its best to learn and understand Torah Hashem rejoices and, as a result, the whole world is happy. The Ohr Hachaim concludes by teaching us that Torah can only be mastered by walking humbly, as one whose akeiv - heel is near his toe, i.e. who walks with small steps which represents humility.

Finally, Kli Yakar explains ekev to refer to chukim which are mitzvos whose reasons are not apparent to us. Chukim are precisely the mitzvos that people are most likely to trample with their heels because, as Rashi explains, Satan and the nations of the world tease Am Yisrael by questioning what reason there is for the chukim (Rashi Bamidbar 19:1). That cynical ridicule leads some to treat these laws lightly and trample them with a heel, so to speak.

Kli Yakar contrasts the previous passuk (7:11) which explicitly mentions both chukim and mishpatim with our passuk which reads "ekev tishme'un eis hamishpatim" and seems to omit chukim. He dispels the seeming discrepancy by explaining that the word "ekev" refers to chukim and "eis" means "with" (see, e.g., Bamidbar 25:14), and thus the passuk calls on us to listen to the chukim together with the mishpatim. This is the source for Hashem's statement reported by the medrash (Yalkut Shimoni 846) and taught again in Avos 2:1, "Be careful with a [seemingly] 'minor' (kala) mitzva as with a major one."

The Yalkut Shimoni (ibid.) cites two pesukim: "ekev rav" (Tehilim 19:12) meaning "great reward", and, "How abundant is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You, that You have made for those who rely on You, against people" (ibid 31:20). One who relies on Hashem keeps chukim even though people tease us about them. The reward is not instant but is "hidden away", as the passuk says, in Olam Haba.

II These timeless interpretations must guide us in spiritually challenging times. We must obey all of Hashem's laws, especially those that others trample upon. We must do so with joy and humility, especially when others demean and oppose us. Various gender issues are recent examples of areas wherein surrounding society demeans and opposes Hashem's laws.

"Hashem created man...male and female He created them...He said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply'" (Bereishis 1:27-28). Rashi (1:28) notes that women are to be more private than men and are exempted from the mitzva of procreation. Women are also exempted from time dependent positive

mitzvos and the mitzva of talmud Torah (Kidushin 29). Nearly forty years ago, Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l responded to what was then a new movement known as Women's Liberation (Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 4:49). Some observant women wished to project that battle onto Jewish ritual observance by doing things like wearing a talis. Rav Moshe responded that the entire Torah was given by Hashem and it is impossible to change even one detail. He suggests that a reason for women's exemption from time dependent positive mitzvos and talmud Torah is that since women are naturally more adept at raising children, which is "the most important work for Hashem and for Torah", Hashem exempted them from the time dependent positive mitzvos and the time consuming obligation of talmud Torah. This exemption applies even if lifestyles change and women are able to arrange for others to care for their children.

Rav Moshe continued to say that no battle, even one supported by the entire world, can succeed in changing the Torah, and women who fight to change the Torah's eternal and immutable laws are heretics. If a woman wears talis or tefillin as a complaint against Hashem and His Torah it is prohibited as heresy since she thinks that it is possible to change Torah law. Rav Moshe adds that women's sanctity is equal to that of men, there is no degradation of their honor in the Torah, and there is no correct reason for them to complain. He concludes by charging a rav to explain this each time the issue arises, to be strong and protest those women who refuse to listen and stubbornly adhere to wrong ideas, and to refuse to change any holy minhag.

The movement to which Rav Moshe refers, now known as feminism or egalitarianism, continues to infiltrate Orthodox Judaism. The recent ordination of women is but one example. Unfortunately this practice is viewed by at least one of its proponents as part of an attempt to change Torah laws and ideas (see Crosscurrents July 29, 2015), precisely the heresy that Rav Moshe warned against.

This phenomenon may lead to a schism within Orthodoxy. In a very recent article (Ha'aretz July 27, 2015), Israeli Orthodox scholars indicate that the beliefs of liberals are really Conservative but they publicly cling to Orthodoxy because of its identity ("lifestyle, ideology, value system, social ties") and its association with authenticity. However, the "blurring of boundaries between Conservative and Modern Orthodox Judaism" undermines the very authenticity of self-defined Modern Orthodoxy.

Chazal discouraged Torah being taught to women, especially Talmud (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 246:6). The gedolim of the twentieth century (e.g. Chofetz Chaim in Likutei Halachos, Sotah 21b) understood that directive of Chazal to not be a definitive ban on women's learning Torah but rather guidance on what approach to women's chinuch would best encourage their adherence to the mesorah. Those gedolim, guided by their yiras Shomayim as well as an absolute mastery of kol haTorah kulah, understood that in light of the weakened state of the mesorah from one generation to another in the twentieth century (ibid), talmud Torah for women was a necessity to, "implant pure faith in their hearts" (Rav Zalman Sorotzkin in Moznayim L'mishpat siman 42, etc.), and as such was entirely consistent with Chazal's mandate to provide the most productive chinuch for women.

However, in the words of a "pioneer of the religious feminist wave" cited in the aforementioned article, "What is happening today is a direct continuation of the beginning of Talmud studies for religious women in the 1980's." This candid admission must, for the genuinely Orthodox, call into question the wisdom of these studies. Although there are ample reliable sources that encourage individual women who have proper yiras Shomayim and whose motives are consistent with our mesorah to further their Torah study[1], the inclusion of Talmud in curricula for all women in Modern Orthodox schools needs to be reevaluated. While the gedolim of the twentieth century saw Torah study to be a way to keep women close to our mesorah, an egalitarian attitude has colored some women's study of Talmud and led them to embrace and advocate egalitarian ideas and practices which are unacceptable to those very gedolim.

III Women's ordination and egalitarian minyanim, the primary subjects of the aforementioned article, are part of a broader issue, "a questioning of one exclusive and absolute truth." This is the postmodern attitude that questions the Divinity (see Crosscurrents *ibid*), morality, and immutability of Torah law. Indeed, inclusivity and openness are, as their advocates concede, a response to the issues and challenges of the postmodern era. However, while Modern Orthodoxy, properly defined, is viable and possibly even desirable, postmodern/"Open" Orthodoxy seems to be an oxymoron.

The "precipitous move to the right within Modern Orthodoxy" is, in reality, a rejection of postmodernism. In fact, forty and fifty years ago even Conservative Judaism did not accept women's ordination[2], one manifestation of postmodernism.

Same-sex marriage, another postmodern cause celebre, was rejected in decades past even by Reform Judaism. At the time even they understood that homosexuality "is more than a violation of a mere legal enactment", and "runs counter to the sancta of Jewish life...To officiate at a so-called 'marriage' of two homosexuals...is a contravention of all that is respected in Jewish life"[3].

Responsible Open Orthodox rabbis concede that homosexual acts are, and will always be, prohibited by Torah law. The Ramban (Vayikra 18:22) writes that the reason for the prohibition is obvious: it is abominable and does not lead to procreation, the first Biblical command and the primary reason for marriage (Shulchan Aruch Even Hoezer 1:1). Nonetheless, the response of some Open Orthodox rabbis to the recent Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage is disappointing, to say the least. Two days after the court issued its ruling one wrote "In the modern Orthodox world, mishkav zachar is now mutar". On the day of the ruling another wrote "It is not good for man to be alone' (Bereishis 2:18). Mazel tov America". That passuk in fact describes the creation of woman to create a couple, not another man!

In Western society today Biblical law and near universal historical attitudes are viewed as outdated and immoral. Unfortunately even some Orthodox Jews who accept the prohibition against homosexuality as normative think that the Torah "got it wrong". As a result, it has become a chok, a law viewed by those people as without a clear reason, contrary to Ramban above. It is not surprising, then, that Satan, the nations of the world, and even liberal Jews trample this mitzvah with their heels and tease Orthodox Judaism which stubbornly clings to this eternal truth of Torah. Our resolve is now deserving of greater reward from Hashem, since we rely on Him against those who mock and deride us. Moreover, faithfully defending and interpreting the laws which society does not accept has a "redemptive influence.[4]"

The claim that these acts are now mutar echoes the aforementioned article's statement regarding egalitarian minyanim: "The train has left the station". What remains to be seen is the final destination of that train. Rabbis should not "throw stones at the windows", but they are duty-bound to caution that the passengers, sooner or later, will likely no longer be part of the eternal mesorah community of authentic Orthodoxy.

We must observe the laws upon which others trample, confident of Hashem's reward in the end. We must study Torah with joy and humility, and not dare to change it or question its Divinity, morality, or immutability. Only then can we successfully pass our sacred and eternal tradition on to future generations.

[1] See the Torah Temima's citation in parshas Ekev (11:19, end of fn. 48) and Sefer Shearith Yosef, volume 2 siman 4, by Rav Shlomo Wahrman (printed in 1981). [2] Tomeikh Ka-Halakhah vol 1, Union for Traditional Judaism, 1986, cited in [3] CCAR Responsa Vol. LXXIII, 1973, pp 115-119 [4] "The Rav – Thinking Aloud on the Parsha: Sefer Bereshis: p.92 and pp.193-194, both excerpted in Crosscurrents, August 6, 2015. Copyright © 2015 by TorahWeb.org. All rights reserved.

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The Second Tithe and the Making of a Strong Society Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Biblical Israel from the time of Joshua until the destruction of the Second Temple was a predominantly agricultural society. Accordingly, it was through agriculture that the Torah pursued its religious and social programme. It has three fundamental elements.

The first was the alleviation of poverty. For many reasons the Torah accepts the basic principles of what we now call a market economy. But though market economics is good at creating wealth it is less good at distributing it equitably. Thus the Torah's social legislation aimed, in the words of Henry George, "to lay the foundation of a social state in which deep poverty and degrading want should be unknown."

Hence the institutions that left parts of the harvest for the poor: leket, shikchah and peah, fallen ears of grain, the forgotten sheaf and the corners of the field. There was the produce of the seventh year, which belonged to no-one and everyone, and maaser ani, the tithe for the poor given in the third and sixth years of the seven year cycle. Shmittah and yovel, the seventh and fiftieth years with their release of debts, manumission of slaves and the return of ancestral property to its original owners, restored essential elements of the economy to their default position of fairness. So the first principle was: no one should be desperately poor.

The second, which included terumah and maaser rishon, the priestly portion and the first tithe, went to support, respectively, the priests and the Levites. These were a religious elite within the nation in biblical times whose role was to ensure that the service of God, especially in the Temple, continued at the heart of national life. They had other essential functions, among them education and the administration of justice, as teachers and judges.

The third was more personal and spiritual. There were laws such as the bringing of first-fruits to Jerusalem, and the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot, as they marked seasons in the agricultural year, that had to do with driving home the lessons of gratitude and humility. They taught that the land belongs to God and we are merely His tenants and guests. The rain, the sun and the earth itself yield their produce only because of His blessing. Without such regular reminders, societies slowly but inexorably become materialistic and self-satisfied. Rulers and elites forget that their role is to serve the people, and instead they expect the people to serve them. That is how nations at the height of their success begin their decline, unwittingly laying the ground for their defeat.

All this makes one law in our parsha – the law of the Second Tithe – hard to understand. As we noted above, in the third and sixth year of the septennial cycle, this was given to the poor. However, in the first, second, fourth and fifth years, it was to be taken by the farmer to Jerusalem and eaten there in a state of purity:

You shall eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always. (Deut. 14: 23)

If the farmer lived at a great distance from Jerusalem, he was allowed an alternative:

You may exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the Lord your God will choose. Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. (*ibid.*, 25-26)

The problem is obvious. The second tithe did not go to poor, or to the priests and Levites, so it was not part of the first or second principle. It may have been part of the third, to remind the farmer that the land belonged to God, but this too seems unlikely. There was no declaration, as happened in the case of first-fruits, and no specific religious service, as took place on the festivals. Other than being in Jerusalem, the institution of the second tithe seemingly had no cognitive or spiritual content. What then was the logic of the second tithe?

The sages,[1] focussing on the phrase, “so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God” said that it was to encourage people to study. Staying for a while in Jerusalem while they consumed the tithe or the food bought with its monetary substitute, they would be influenced by the mood of the holy city, with its population engaged either in Divine service or sacred study.[2] This would have been much as happens today for synagogue groups that arrange study tours to Israel.

Maimonides, however, gives a completely different explanation.

The second tithe was commanded to be spent on food in Jerusalem: in this way the owner was compelled to give part of it away as charity. As he was not able to use it otherwise than by way of eating and drinking, he must have easily been induced to give it gradually away. This rule brought multitudes together in one place, and strengthened the bond of love and brotherhood among the children of men.[3]

For Maimonides, the second tithe served a social purpose. It strengthened civil society. It created bonds of connectedness and friendship among the people. It encouraged visitors to share the blessings of the harvest with others. Strangers would meet and become friends. There would be an atmosphere of camaraderie among the pilgrims. There would be a sense of shared citizenship, common belonging and collective identity. Indeed Maimonides says something similar about the festivals themselves:

The use of keeping festivals is plain. Man derives benefit from such assemblies: the emotions produced renew the attachment to religion; they lead to friendly and social intercourse among the people. [4]

The atmosphere in Jerusalem, says Maimonides, would encourage public spiritedness. Food would always be plentiful, since the fruit of trees in their fourth year, the tithe of cattle, and the corn, wine and oil of the second tithe would all have been brought there. They could not be sold; they could not be kept for the next year; therefore much would be given away in charity, especially (as the Torah specifies) to “the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow.”

Writing about America in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville found that he had to coin a new word for the phenomenon he encountered there and saw as one of the dangers in a democratic society. The word was individualism. He defined it as “a mature and calm feeling which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends,” leaving “society at large to itself.”[5] Tocqueville believed that democracy encouraged individualism. As a result, people would leave the business of the common good entirely to the government, which would become ever more powerful, eventually threatening freedom itself.

It was a brilliant insight. Two recent examples illustrate the point. The first was charted by Robert Putnam, the great Harvard sociologist, in his study of Italian towns in the 1990s.[6] During the 1970s all Italian regions were given local government on equal terms, but over the next twenty years, some prospered, others stagnated; some had effective governance and economic growth, while others were mired in corruption and underachievement. The key difference, he found, was the extent to which the regions had an active and public-spirited citizenry.

The other is the experiment, known as the “free rider game,” designed to test public spiritedness within a group. There is always a potential conflict between self interest and the common good. It is tempting to take advantage of public facilities without paying your fair share (for example, travelling on public transport without paying for a ticket: hence the term “free rider”). You then obtain the benefit without bearing a fair share of the costs. When this happens, trust is eroded and public spiritedness declines.

In the game, each of the participants is given \$10 and invited to contribute to a common pot. The money in the pot is then multiplied, say, three times, and the amount is equally divided between the players. If each contributes \$10, each will receive \$30. However, if one player chooses not to contribute anything, then if there are six players, there will be \$50 in the pot and \$150

after multiplication. Each of the players will then receive \$25, but one will now have \$35: the money from the pot plus the \$10 with which he started.

When played over several rounds, the other players soon notice that not everyone is contributing equally. The unfairness makes them all contribute less to the shared pot. The group suffers and no one gains. If, however, the other players are given the chance to punish the suspected cheat by paying a dollar to make him lose three dollars, they tend to do so. The free rider stops free-riding, and everyone benefits.

As I was writing this essay, the Greek economy was in a state of collapse. Years earlier, in 2008, an economist, Benedikt Herrmann, had tested people in different cities throughout the world to see whether there were geographical and cultural variations in the way people played the free rider game. He found that in places like Boston, Copenhagen, Bonn and Seoul, voluntary contributions to the common pot were high. They were much lower in Istanbul, Riyadh and Minsk, where the economy was less developed. But they were lowest of all in Athens, Greece. What is more, when players in Athens penalized the free riders, those penalized did not stop free-riding. Instead they took revenge by punishing their punishers.[7] Where public spiritedness is low, society fails to cohere and the economy fails to grow.

Hence the brilliance of Maimonides’ insight that the second tithe existed to create social capital, meaning bonds of trust and reciprocal altruism among the population, which came about through sharing food with strangers in the holy precincts of Jerusalem. Loving God helps make us better citizens and more generous people, thus countering the individualism that eventually makes democracies fail.

[1] Sifrei ad loc. A more extended version of this interpretation can be found in the Sefer ha-Chinnukh, command 360. [2] See also Tosafot, Baba Batra 21a, s.v. Ki MiTzion. [3] The Guide for the Perplexed III: 39. [4] Ibid, III: 46. [5] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Book II, ch. 2. [6] Putnam, Robert D., Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti. Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993. [7] Herrmann, B., C. Thoni, and S. Gachter. “Antisocial Punishment Across Societies.” Science 319.5868 (2008): 1362-367.

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info@jewishdestiny.com to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Wed, Aug 12, 2015 at 12:04 AM subject: Parshat Re'eh 5775- Rabbi Berel Wein Home Weekly Parsha RE'EH Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog RE'EH

It is interesting, at least to me, to note that in the review of the Jewish holidays of the calendar year that appears in this week's Torah reading, only the three festivals of Pesach, Succot and Shavuot are mentioned. Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are noticeable in their absence from this list of holidays. The obvious reason for their omission is that the commandment to go up to Jerusalem for the festivals did not somehow apply to these two great holy days. The emphasis that appears in our parsha is as much about ascending to Jerusalem as it is about the ritual aspects of the holidays themselves. Apparently even though the ritual aspects of the holidays are binding the world over and were to be observed even when ascending to Jerusalem was no longer a possibility in the Jewish and general world – as was the case for the many centuries of our prolonged exile – nevertheless without Jerusalem the holiday is somehow somewhat lacking. In contradistinction to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, which are holy days but not necessarily festivals of joy and thanksgiving, the three other festivals of the Jewish year connected to agriculture in the Land of Israel are specifically holidays of celebration and happiness. And if there is one central theme regarding Jerusalem and all that it represents it is one of joyful appreciation. Jerusalem, even in its destruction and shambles, was still constantly described in terms of joy and beauty. When the prophet wishes to describe the resurgence of the Jewish people and their return to the Land of Israel in great numbers, he describes that phenomenon as being “like the numbers of sheep that were in Jerusalem on its holidays.” There were a number of large cities in the Land of Israel during both First and Second Temple times. Jerusalem was certainly one of those great cities. We do not know if it was

the largest of all of the cities, population-wise, but once it was established by King David, it certainly was the most important of all cities in the country. Though it was the seat of government and the capital city of Judah/Judea, it was always more than that. It was the living representation of the connection between Heaven and earth, between God and the Jewish people. As such, its spiritual component was always as important, if not even more so, than its actual physical layout and numbered population. As such, it was inseparable, once it was established, from the cycle of the Jewish year and from the three festivals that marked it. This connection between the holidays of the Jewish calendar year and the city of Jerusalem continues even in our time. Thousands of Jews make it a point to leave their homes and travel from the far-flung corners of this world to come to Jerusalem and celebrate the festivals of the yearly calendar in the holy city. It is a testimony to the resilience and faith of the Jewish people, that we are able to see the physical Jerusalem rebuilt in our time. Slowly, the spiritual Jerusalem is also being created and that itself is a cause for rejoicing and thanksgiving. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein Subscribe to our blog via email or RSS to get more posts like this one.

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: peninim@shemayisrael.com date: Thu, Aug 13, 2015 at 8:27 PM subject: **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum** – Parshas Re'eh

See, I present before you today, a blessing and a curse. (11:26) Moshe Rabbeinu does not say a blessing or a curse; rather, he informs Klal Yisrael of the blessing and the curse that he presents before them. Apparently, everything in life - every gift - contains within it both blessing and curse. Let us take Torah for example. Clearly, it is the greatest blessing, without which we could not survive in the spiritually-hostile environment which surrounds us. If, however, a person does not approach the Torah properly, if he does not apply seichel, common sense, to understand what is being asked of him, the Torah becomes his poison. In the Talmud Yoma 72b, Chazal teach that if one merits, the Torah becomes for him an elixir of life. If he does not merit, it becomes his death potion. Wealth is a blessing - only for he who knows how to use it - when to use it - for whom to use it. Otherwise, it becomes a vehicle which promotes self-aggrandizement and alienates its owner from the reality of life, the pain of others, and the primary purpose for which he has been granted the gift of wealth.

Indeed, Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita, once remarked that a person who possesses millions of dollars can achieve wonderful things as a result of his wealth. His wealth can be the catalyst for his acquiring a sizeable portion in Olam Habba, the World to Come. When Hashem gives a person a plethora of wealth, however, He also takes from him "some" of his seichel, common sense. The thought process, the acute cognitive ability that once had been his, is sharply diminished. What the Rosh Yeshivah means (I think) is that commensurate with the wealth is a person's ability to think rationally and objectively. He must be aware that an abundance of money has a tendency to cloud one's vision, such that, before he had been able to see others, but now, he can see only himself. I believe it was Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, who commented that a mirror is actually a piece of glass with a light veneer of silver coating it. When it is not glass, it retains its transparency, allowing the person to see through it and notice others around him. Once the silver is overlaid, he sees only a reflection of himself.

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, was once on a fundraising trip on behalf of his prestigious yeshivah, Chachmei Lublin. He visited a well-to-do businessman who was infamous for his miserly attitude towards anything that did not incur financial gain for him. The Rav knocked on his door and was greeted, "Dear Rabbi, you must have the wrong address. I do not believe in charity." The Rosh Yeshivah countered, "You are mistaken. I did not come to solicit funds, but rather, to visit the sick person."

"Rebbe, who is this sick person? I know of no one in my home that is ill," was the miser's reply.

"You are wrong. Someone in this house is quite ill. You are the one that is not well," responded the Rosh Yeshivah.

"I think that you are wrong," the miser said. "I am fine, the picture of health."

The Rosh Yeshivah's tone changed somewhat as he said, "Shlomo Hamelech says, 'There is a sickening evil which I have seen under the sun: riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune' (Koheles 5:12). Yet, you claim not to be ill!"

"Rebbe," the miser replied, "the p'shat, exposition, is nice, but if the Rav wants to visit sick people, there is a hospital down the block which is filled with sick people. There the Rav can visit to his heart's content. Why bother coming to me?"

"It is very simple," explained the Rosh Yeshivah. "Chazal teach us that one who visits the sick takes away one sixtieth of his illness. Thus, if I visit someone who suffers from typhus, I will leave with one sixtieth of his typhus. Your illness is (misplaced) wealth. Nu! If I visit you, I will at least leave with one sixtieth of your wealth. Is that so bad?"

If your brother will entice you... secretly saying, "Let us go and worship the gods of others..." You shall not accede to him and not hearken to him; you shall not take pity on him; you shall not be compassionate to him nor conceal him. (13:7,9)

The punishment meted out to the meisis, enticer, is very serious and finds no match in the Torah. The fact that the meisis is treated so badly is a clear indication of the egregious nature of his sin. Five negative commandments concerning how we should act with the meisis are derived from the Torah's unusual directives concerning our relationship with this evil man: we may neither accede to him, nor hearken to him; we may neither have pity on him; nor show any compassion towards him; we may not conceal him. He has committed a grave sin by attempting to subvert and mislead a person from serving Hashem. He did not just say, "Go worship idols!" He said, "Let us (together) serve idols."

Throughout the Torah, we are instructed to love our fellow as we love ourselves. Yet, concerning the meisis, there is no room for compassion. Do we have any idea what is in store for those who actively mislead their fellow Jews on a constant basis? As in all things, there is a flip side, one that is quite encouraging. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, quotes Chazal who teach that Hashem's desire to bestow reward is five hundred times greater than His desire to punish. Consequently, if a meisis is considered to be the worst of the worst and, thus, is dealt with in the harshest manner - can we begin to imagine what will be the s'char, reward, for one who brings a Jew closer to Yiddishkeit? If the mere fact that one who makes even a feeble, unsuccessful attempt at misleading a Jew from Hashem incurs the most serious punishment, the mere attempt to bring a person back - even if he is not successful - must earn incredible reward!

Horav Noach Weinberg, zl, addresses those individuals who devote their lives to helping others return, but who mistakenly believe that the result is either all or nothing. The idea that the subject either becomes an observant Jew or the kiruv worker is a failure - is wrong! If a person is considered a meisis just by virtue of his failed attempt to draw a person away from Yiddishkeit - then a person who attempts to bring someone back is considered successful just for undertaking to do it. Taking the initiative to try to help a lost Jew reconnect with his roots is considered by Hashem to be one of the greatest and worthiest deeds. Our actual impact on the Jew is a fringe benefit. It is the attempt that counts.

One who is attempting to lead a Jew away from Hashem is guilty of moving the world further away from Hashem. Hurting one Jew creates a distance, since he is decreasing the awareness of Hashem in the world. Likewise, one who attempts to reach out to a Jewish brother is raising the awareness of Hashem in the world. Hashem "owes" him, and He pays His debts.

Rav Weinberg quotes the well-known Chovas Halevavos (Shaar HaBitachon 4), "A person's good deeds alone do not make him suitable for the reward in the World to Come. G-d considers him suitable only because of two factors in addition to his good deeds. First, he teaches others about the service to Hashem and guides them to do good. Second, is G-d's kindness and beneficence." In other words, Olam Habba does not just happen. One can lead a virtuous and pious life, be fully observant, ethical and moral, and, yet, Olam Habba is not a given until he earns it by teaching others, by attempting to bring other Jews into the fold. Why is this? Why should kiruv, reaching out, be a prerequisite for Olam Habba? Why is not "old fashioned" being good sufficient reason for gaining entrance?

One who is not actively trying to bring Jews back to Hashem does not really love the Almighty and His children. When someone believes in something, he wants to share this belief with others. Avraham Avinu called out in the Name of Hashem because he wanted the entire world to know and love Him as much as he did. Thus, to the extent that we love Hashem, we will reach out to others to share this love. The meis is trying to lead people from Hashem. Therefore, he is destroying the world. On the other hand, one who reaches out to bring people closer to Hashem is actually building the world.

You are children to Hashem, Your G-d - you shall not cut yourselves and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. For you are a holy people to Hashem, Your G-d. (14:1,2)

The Torah appears to be giving us a straightforward mandate: do not grieve excessively. When someone dies, his relatives should not mutilate themselves out of grief. As a holy people we do not conduct ourselves in such a manner. Chazal, however, see a different meaning for Lo siggededu. The siggededu is derived from agudah, group/gathering of people. They interpret Lo siggededu as, "Do not form factions." Hence, we learn that forming factions is prohibited. This plays itself out practically when two batei din, courts of law, are in one town; one rules in accordance with the decisions rendered by Bais Shamai, while the other supports Bais Hillel.

The two interpretations of siggededu - slashing or factionizing-- are not on the "same page." What does self-mutilation have to do with disharmony of the legal system? Since the interpretation of both - excessive grief and factionization - are connected to the same word, they must be linked at some level. The Shem MiShmuel quotes Ramban who provides us with insight into the prohibition against excessive grieving. He explains that the concept of a holy people is a promise of the eternity of the soul before G-d. A man is not lost once his mortal stay on this world comes to an end. He may not be here physically, but his soul is to be found in other good and exalted worlds, under the care of Hashem. This should be the Jew's perspective on life. The soul is placed into a human container, called the body, where it resides until the time that Hashem summons it back to the world of souls, where it will glory in His Presence. To deny this idea is to impugn the Jewish philosophy of life.

It is fundamental to Jewish thought that life continues on a spiritual plane after death and that the soul continues to live on in a higher sphere. Self-mutilation reveals a flawed level of grief, a misconceived impression concerning the deceased. It is an indication that one feels that the deceased is completely gone - forever - and that no trace of him remains at any level. While this addresses the soul, what about the body? Clearly, when one dies, his body ceases to exist. It is indeed lost forever, decomposing and returning to the dust from where it came. The bereaved who slashes himself actually mutilates his body, thereby manifesting his feelings of grief over the death of the body of the deceased. Why is this considered bad? One expresses on his own body the feelings he has about the body of the deceased.

The Shem MiShmuel explains that such action demonstrates an improper view of the body's function. The soul is our primary existence; the body is nothing more than the container, thus it is secondary to the soul. In reality, the body is not an end in itself, but, rather, it exists to facilitate the soul, so that it achieves its goals. The soul is a spiritual entity; as such, it is unable to

exist in our physical world unless it unites with the body. Therefore, while the body is certainly needed - it is not there for itself; it is needed only for the purpose of serving the soul. When a person dies, the soul soars up to its Heavenly Source. It no longer requires the services of the body. The body is buried, because it really has nowhere else to go. Whatever honor we accord the body in death is due to its position as the soul's container. One who grieves excessively, to the point of slashing his flesh, indicates a misunderstanding of the principle of the body/soul relationship. The mourner has lost focus by attributing much greater significance to the body, as though it has a purpose of its own.

Let us now return to our original question regarding the relationship between excessive grieving and factionalization within the halachic system of justice. Factions are the result of dispute and a lack of unity, in which each individual wants to have his opinion heard to the exclusion of others. For the most part, this is a result of an overactive ego - not the pursuit of truth. We must realize that, at some level, the individual neshamos, souls, of all of the Jewish people are derived from the same source, the same root. We are all part of one spiritual entity that has been somehow divided in such a manner that each living Jew has a portion/soul. Thus, as far as our spiritual identity is concerned, we are all identical.

It is only with regard to the physical dimension that our physical characteristics differ from person to person. These physical variations can (and often do) give rise to diverse attitudes and requirements, which can often manifest themselves as disputes, divisiveness and factionization. When one focuses inappropriately on the physical component of existence, the differences among people are highlighted, a situation which most often leads to controversy. In contrast is the individual who focuses on the spiritual dimension of life. He will soon see the truth of similarities among people and realize that, after all is said and done, we all stand on common ground. This appreciation will lead to unity among Jews. Chazal's connecting two seemingly dissimilar lessons to be interpreted from one pasuk is not arbitrary. It is by design, because, essentially they are intricately connected. The individual who is guilty of excessive mourning and the individual who undermines the unity of halachic jurisprudence are closely linked in their flawed outlook, which focuses on the physical aspects of life. If they would each realize what is paramount, they would both center in on the spiritual scheme of things, thus allowing them to put bereavement in its proper perspective and also to avoid the pitfalls of a disjointed legal system.

If there shall be a destitute person among you... you shall not harden your heart or close your hand... rather you shall open your hand to him... you shall open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your destitute in your land. (15:7,8,11)

The Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, posits that this pasuk is intimating the proper guidelines one must maintain with regard to giving tzedakah, charity. There is a marked difference between an open hand and one in which he bends over his fingers, thereby partially closing his hand. When the hand is open and the fingers spread out/apart, the difference in physical size between each finger is apparent. When the hand is bent, however, all of the fingers are even; they all look the same.

Chazal teach that the mitzvah of tzedakah demands that a person must be reinstated to his original standing. For example, a wealthy man who had been used to riding in a horse drawn wagon should not be deprived of this amenity - despite the fact that many other people are used to getting around by the power of their own two feet. Since this poor man had been used to the lifestyle of the wealthy, we must provide for him what he is lacking. In other words, there are degrees among the poor. When we support the poor man, we are not to look only at the here and now, but rather, to look back in time, when this man had been able to sustain himself in a lifestyle of which we only dream.

This is the pasuk's message. The tzedakah that we give should be given with an open hand, acknowledging the various backgrounds of the poor who seek

our support. Just as an open hand manifests the varied lengths of the fingers, so, should our tzedakah contribution be reflective of the poor man's background. All poor men are not created equal. Some, at one point, have been quite wealthy. This should be taken into consideration.

Rashi notes the spelling of the word *aniyecha*, your poor, which in the above *pasuk* is spelled with one yud. According to the rules of grammar, *aniyecha* with two yuds refers to at least two poor men, while *aniyecha* with one yud is singular, denoting one simple poor man. Why does the Torah speak to the solitary poor, when, in fact, the halachos of tzedakah be directed toward the single *ani*, poor man?

Horav Shmuel David Walkin, zl, gives a practical explanation. We like giving to organizations, to groups, to programs, where it involves a multitude of people, who will benefit from our funds. When our money is going to help a single Jew who is in need; when the tzedakah is not exotic; when we will not receive a plaque or a double spread in the newspaper, we hesitate; we are not as forthcoming with our contribution. The Torah seeks to circumvent this problem by writing *aniyecha* with one yud, in the singular, so that we will remember that the single poor man who petitions our support is just as important as the organization which dispatches a talented fundraiser. We must consider the person in need, regardless of the lack of recognition that accompanies such giving.

Dedicated in honor of Dr. Stanley and Libby Brody May the Almighty grant you many more years of health and happiness together .

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: parshapotpourri@shemayisrael.com date: Thu, Aug 13, 2015 at 8:25 PM [Parshapotpourri] **Parsha Potpourri by Ozer Alport - Parshas Re'eh** Re'eh *anochi nosein lifneichem hayom bracha u'klala* (11:26) Rav Moshe Aharon Friedman of Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim explains that Sefer Devorim represents a process, beginning with Parshas Devorim which is read on the Shabbos before Tisha B'Av as our mourning intensifies, and concluding with Parshas V'Zos HaBeracha, which is read during the height of our rejoicing on Simchas Torah. During the three-week mourning period preceding Tisha B'Av, we read three Haftorahs that warn of impending doom, which respectively begin with the words *Divrei Yirmiyahu* (the words of Yirmiyahu), *Shim'u D'var Hashem* (hear the word of Hashem), and *Chazon Yeshayahu* (the vision of Yeshayahu). These correspond to the senses of speech, hearing, and sight, respectively. After Tisha B'Av, we begin the process of being comforted, and therefore the first three Torah portions read during this period begin with the words *Va'eschanan* (I beseeched), *V'haya eikev tishma'un* (and if you listen), and *Re'eh* (see). These three portions represent the senses of speech, hearing, and sight, respectively, and they come to rectify and comfort us for the suffering and punishments discussed in the three preceding Haftorahs.

We begin the public reading of Sefer Devorim in the month of *úûæ*, the letters of which stand for *z'man teshuvah m'mash'meish u'ba* - the time to repent is drawing closer. We continue through the month of Av, the letters of which spell *Elul ba* - Elul is coming. Parshas Re'eh is in the middle of Sefer Devorim and stands for *re'eh Elul higi'a* - see that Elul has arrived, as this Shabbos is Rosh Chodesh Elul. The Maharsha (Bechoros 8) points out that there are 21 days of mourning during the 3-week period from 17 Tammuz until Tisha B'Av, which parallel the 21 days of joy from Rosh Hashana until Shemini Atzeres, as each 21-day period represents an opportunity to draw close to Hashem, one through mourning and destruction, and the other through elevation and rejoicing.

Rav Nochum Partzovitz lamented the fact that once upon a time, people could palpably sense the arrival of Elul, whereas today Rosh Chodesh Elul is more comparable to the *yahrtzeit* of Elul, in the sense that we have a vague recollection and familiarity with the theoretical significance of this time of the year, but we have no personal connection or relationship to it. The commentators point out that the period of repentance from Rosh Chodesh

Elul until Yom Kippur consists of 40 days, which is 960 hours. Similarly, for a mikvah to be kosher, it must contain 40 *se'ah* of rainwater. Each *se'ah* is comprised of 24 *lugin* (a Talmudic liquid measurement), in which case a kosher mikvah must contain a minimum of 960 *lugin*. Just as the 40 *se'ah* of rainwater in a kosher mikvah have the ability to purify somebody who has become impure, so too the 40-day period that commences on Rosh Chodesh Elul possesses the unique ability to transform and uplift a person, no matter how far he has fallen in the previous year. At the same time, just as a mikvah which is missing even one *lug* becomes invalidated, so too if we allow even one hour of the precious period we are about to begin to go to waste, our Elul will be deficient.

As Parshas Re'eh heralds the arrival of Elul, it is not surprising to find this message about the importance of growth and change alluded to in the parsha itself. Parshas Re'eh begins by telling us that there are two paths placed before us: blessing and curse. The Vilna Gaon (Mishlei 15:24) points out that the third option, staying neutral, is curiously omitted. He explains that for a Jew, there are only two choices: going up, or going down. It is up to us to consciously and actively choose the path of growth, and if we fail to do so, it is impossible to remain standing in place, and we will by necessity fall downward. As the Maharsha teaches us, we can repent and draw close to Hashem either through blessing or through curse. However, it is far preferable to come close to Hashem on our own initiative through the path of blessing than to compel Him to shake us and wake us up from our spiritual slumber through curse. Let us resolve to fully immerse ourselves in the mikvah of Elul and to use the holy days ahead of us properly, and in that merit, may we all be written and inscribed for a good and sweet year to come.

Lo sa'asun kein l'Hashem Elokeichem (12:4) After instructing the Jewish people to break and smash the idolatrous temples and pillars which they will find in the land of Israel, the Torah warns against doing the same to Hashem. Rashi questions why a Jew would consider destroying the Temple. He explains that the Torah means to prohibit copying the immoral actions of the non-Jews which will cause the *Beis HaMikdash* to be destroyed.

Rashi also quotes the Gemora in Shabbos (120b), which derives from our verse that although it is forbidden to erase Hashem's name, it is Biblically permissible to cause it to be erased in an indirect manner. How can our verse, which the Gemora understands as prohibiting only direct action and permitting indirect causality, also be interpreted as forbidding actions which will only indirectly bring about the Temple's destruction?

Rav Aharon Kotler answers that the Medrash (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 3:6) refers to the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash* as the grinding of already ground flour. In other words, although our enemies carried out the actual destruction of the Temple's physical edifice, in reality its spiritual beauty and splendor had already been removed due to the sinful paths that the Jews followed. Had this not been the case, the non-Jewish army would have had no power over the place where Hashem's presence dwelled. When Rashi interprets the verse as an admonition against following non-Jewish practices and causing the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, he isn't referring to indirect causality, which is permitted according to the Gemora in Shabbos. Rather, just as the Gemora forbids directly erasing Hashem's name, Rashi is teaching us that our sins and immoral choices directly destroy Hashem's Temple.

Ki yih'yeh b'cha evyon me'echad achecha ... lo s'ameitz es l'vav'cha v'lo sikpotz es yad'cha me'achicha haevyon ki pasoch tiftach es yad'cha lo (15:7-8) The Torah exhorts us to be compassionate toward the poor, commanding us not to close our hand to the destitute, but rather to open it. This statement seems redundant. If it is forbidden to close our hand to the poor, doesn't it go without saying that we are required to open it? What is the Torah trying to teach us by emphasizing this point?

The Vilna Gaon explains that although a person is obligated to give tzedakah, he is not supposed to disburse it equally to each poor person. There are laws governing to whom one must give precedence when

distributing charity, such as family members or people in his community, and the needs of each pauper must be assessed when determining how much to give them.

The Torah alludes to the requirement to take these considerations into account when giving tzedakah. When a person closes his hand and looks at his fingers, they all appear equal in length. Opening one's hand reveals that this is not the case, as each finger is a different size. The Torah already commanded us to be merciful to our needy brethren. Our verse takes for granted that we will help meet their needs and is not coming to repeat this point. Rather, it comes to teach that the manner in which we do so should not be one in which we indiscriminately give equal amounts to each beggar, as symbolized by a closed hand. Instead, we should open our hands and realize that each poor person's needs as well as our obligation to him aren't the same, and we should disburse our charity accordingly.

<http://5tjt.com/parshas-reay-an-overview/>

Parshas Re'ay – An Overview

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman

This Sidra has 20 Parshios

1. Choosing – Moshe tells us see that I placed before you a blessing and a curse. If we choose to follow Hashem's path we will be blessed. If we choose not to listen to His Mitzvos we will be cursed. The word "See" is singular; and the word "you" is plural. The Kli Yakar explains that one individual can influence everyone to a particular path. Such is the power of one person! A Hitler y'mach shmo influenced all of Germany to be Nazis. A Churchill influenced the British to fight them. This is a remarkable lesson.

2. Unity in Worship – Moshe tells us to surely destroy all the Avodah Zarah in the land and not to worship Hashem the way the nations in Eretz Yisroel l'havdil worship their gods. We offer Korbanos only in the place that Hashem will choose. Why the double language Abaid t'abdun – you shall surely destroy? Rashi explains that when it comes to such vile evil as Avodah Zarah- it is not enough to destroy it, but to uproot it and steps must be taken to ensure that it not rise again. The Torah warns us against "merely mowing the lawn" with Avodah Zarah. This lesson is contemporary as well, and surely applies to countenancing murderers and terrorists within our midst too.

3. Meat not from a Korban – Moshe tells us that Hashem widens our borders and we will desire to eat meat we may do so in the manner that Hashem has taught us. The Kli Yakar points out that desire and the need for consumption only comes when we have a broadening of belongings. In other words, more belongings and material acquisitions breeds a greater desire for more. This is a lesson in providing for ourselves self-imposed limitations.

4. Worshipping Hashem with Avodah Zarah – The Torah warns us against utilizing foreign ideas in our worship of Hashem. Why is there a need to warn us, is this not obvious? Perhaps we can observe from here that the appeal of modern culture and the street is extremely strong and could warp our very method of thought.

5. The False Prophet – The verses tell us that if the words of a false prophet come out true and he tells you to follow other gods do not listen to him. The Ramban explains that some people have prophet-like powers (Koach Nevi'i) by virtue of extra insight into knowledge, even though they are not prophets. They do not know where this comes from and attribute it to prophecy. The lesson is that we should not be overly enamored by seemingly unimpeccable knowledge and insights – there are natural explanations for it.

6. A Maisis – Avodah Zarah Missionary – The punishment for someone who attempts to convert others to Avodah Zarah is that he is put to death by the very people he tried to influence. Rav Pam zt"l pointed out that this is a serious punishment for someone who was woefully unsuccessful. The very person that he tried to influence turned against him – yet the punishment is so severe. Rav Pam explains that when someone is involved in outreach – even if he is unsuccessful, imagine how much more so is the reward!

7. An Ir HaNidachas – A City of Avodah Zarah. The Torah tells us to destroy it if it is in one of the cities that Hashem gives us. No mention is made of Eretz Yisroel. There is a debate between the Netziv (Yes) and the Vilna Gaon (No) as to whether this applies outside of Eretz Yisroel or not. Perhaps, according to the Vilna Gaon the Torah was purposely vague here as to how to darshen the verses in order to create doubt about we should interact with such a city outside of Israel and thus stay away from them. If so, we see that the Torah uses all sorts of methods, including purposeful vagaries, to ensure our adherence to Torah. We should learn to emulate this as parents and teachers in teaching.

8. Responsibilities of a Chosen People – The verses begin with the realization that we are Hashem's children. The Ibn Ezra and other Rishonim point out that the realization that we are loved – even more so than children, will inspire us to careful adherence to Hashem's Mitzvos which are ultimately for our good. This notion needs to be stressed more regularly. Realizing how and the extent of our being loved is crucial in leading the proper Torah life. This needs to be stressed.

9. Forbidden Animals

10. Fish and other Water Creatures

11. Birds. Hashem forbade the consumption of many animals, fish, and birds. The Ramban explains that there is a koach haTumah – a negative spiritual energy that descends upon a Jew who consumes the foods that the Torah forbade. This negative energy prevents us from thriving in Torah as well as in cleaving to Hashem. The laws of Kashrus are the flag of the Jewish people. Just as it is wrong to desecrate the American flag, it is wrong to desecrate the Jewish flag. People who were raised in a place where the values of America are not stressed, do not understand this. They should still respect the flag. Jews who were raised in a place where the values of Judaism are not stressed should likewise respect the Jewish flag.

12. Maaser Shaini

13. Maaser Ani – We switch to Maaser Ani on the 3rd and 6th years. The values of Maaser Ani is to teach us to help people, while the value of Maaser Shaini is to connect to Hashem in Yerushalayim. Rab SZ Revach explains that the Maaser years overlap in that at times we must remove one from the previous crop and the other from the current. This teaches us the importance of ensuring that we always retain both values.

14. The Shmitta Year – The Mitzvah of Shmita includes forgiving a loan to your brother. The Sefer HaChinuch explains that the purpose of this Mitzvah is to introduce into our souls the qualities of giving, of generosity, and of faith in Hashem. Forgiving a loan also assists us in staying far away from theft and robbery. While the introduction of the pruzbul (a workaround that enables loans to be collected even in Shmita) may have been necessary to ensure the economic viability of our system, it is still very important to imbue these values on perhaps some of our outstanding loans.

15. Charity- The pasuk introduces the Mitzvos of charity with the words "If there will be within you a poor person." – The Alshich explains that the word – b'cha WITHIN YOU is used here to tell you that Hashem sent the poor to you for YOUR BENEFIT. This is a lesson not to forget and to ensure that you never send them away empty-handed for your own benefit.

16. The Eved Ivri – The Torah tells us to provide for the Eved Ivri with Haanaka – cattle, sheep, and what Hashem has blessed you with – when he is about to be set free. The Midrash Lekach Tov explains that this assistance is whether or not you have seen success from his work from you. The implication is that if we have seen success from his work, we should give him even more. Our great Rabbis have said that we should treat employees following the same blueprint as the Eved Ivri. Behaving in such a manner not only fulfills Hashem's will – it improves our nature as well.

17. First Born Animals – The Pasuk tells us that one may not consume the blood of the firstborn animal – rather it should be poured upon the ground like water. The Gemorah (Chullin 83a) derives from here that there is no Mitzvah of Kisui HaDam on domesticated animals – only upon birds and upon Chayos – undomesticated animals. Why the difference? Rav Malka of

Carmiel cites a remarkable answer. The bird and the chaya prefer to cast their lot only with Hashem and always try to escape the dominion of man. Their blood must be covered because of the profound nature of their reliance upon G-d. The domesticated animal has severed its Bitachon in Hashem and prefers to cast its lot with man alone. Its blood can be cast upon the earth like water. Contemplating this idea can significantly improve our Emunah and Bitachon in Hashem.

18. Pesach – The Psukim previously had discussed the exodus from Egypt and the sanctification of the first born animals. Now the Psukim tell us of the Mitzvah of guarding the month of Aviv – which emans to ensure that this month will always come out in the spring (through adding an extra month every so often to make up for the 11 day discrepancy between 12 lunar months and the solar year). The Psukim then tell of the Mitzvah of keeping Passover. The Tzror HaMor explains that this Mitzvah of guarding the month is given to us specifically because in this month the great redemption happened as well as the sanctification of the firstborn. We show appreciation even to inanimate and abstract things such as a month – to develop ourselves in appreciative human beings who recognize good and show hakaras hatov. This is a fundamental of the Torah way of life.

19. Shavuos – The Torah tells us to observe Shavuos and remember that we were once slaves in Egypt and should therefore observe these Mitzvos. The Chezkuni asks why Shavuos is the only Yom Tov where this is mentioned. He answers that since there are no other holiday specific activities to Shavuos – there is a concern that we will be lax and not observe the Mitzvah of going up to Yerushalayim. The Pasuk thus reminds us that we were slaves in Mitzrayim unable to be happy – therefore we must do it. We see from here that when we are not actively engaged, there is a chance of slacking off. The Torah teaches us to address these possibilities whenever there the issue of non-engagement arises. This is an important lesson.

20. Sukkos – The Torah tells us to celebrate Sukkos for seven days and to make the holiday joyous. The Baal HaTurim asks why the command to make the holiday joyous was not stated in regard to Passover. He answers that at this point, a person's crops are still in the field and it is not known whether they will be stricken. Thus, the command to be joyous would be hampered by the underlying anxiety. The Torah here is teaching us that we must be subtly sensitive to people's situations, particularly as it concerns anxieties. Rather than demanding adherence to a near impossible requirement, the Torah realized our limitations and did not write the obligation of Simcha. The biblical obligation for Simcha does exist (See Tosfos Chagiga 8a), however, but the Torah realized that some will be unable to fulfill it, and thus did not mention it specifically.

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from: Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald <ezbuchwald@njop.org> reply-to: ezbuchwald@njop.org date: Mon, Aug 10, 2015 at 5:38 PM subject: Weekly Torah Message from Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald
Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald
August 10, 2015 -- 25 Av The Torah message is written weekly by the Director of NJOP. We hope you enjoy it.

Re'eh 5775-2015 "The Prohibition of Eating the Limb of a Live Animal"
by **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald**

This week's parasha, parashat Re'eh, contains 55 mitzvot-17 positive and 38 negative commandments. It is ranked third in the number of mitzvot contained in a weekly Torah portion.

In Deuteronomy 12:20, the Torah enumerates the laws concerning the slaughter of animals for food, which is followed by a warning against the consumption of blood. In Deuteronomy 12:23, the Torah states, **רַק הַדָּם לֹא תִשְׂרֹף**, **אֲכַל הַדָּם כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַחַיִּים**, **וְלֹא תֹאכַל הַחַיִּים עִם הַבָּשָׂר**. Only be strong not to eat the blood-for the blood, it is the life-and you shall not eat the life with the meat. **Rashi** notes that, in **Sifre 76**, Rabbi Yehuda concludes that since Moses had to warn the people to be strong, it must have been a very common practice for people to eat blood in those days. Ben Azzai, however, considers this to

be a general exhortation to the people underscoring the importance for Jews to strengthen themselves in the performance of mitzvot. Ben Azzai comes to this conclusion by reasoning that if Moses had to warn the people about avoiding the consumption of blood, which is so repugnant, how much more must the people strengthen their resolve to avoid forbidden activities that are truly tempting.

Rashi concludes, that the words at the end of the verse, "And you shall not eat the soul with the meat," is a negative commandment, warning the people of the prohibition of **אָכַר מִן הַחַיִּים** "Ay'vehr min ha'chai," against eating a limb that was detached from an animal that was alive. "Not eating the soul with the meat," means that one may not eat the meat while the soul is still in it. The prohibition of "Ay'vehr min ha'chai," eating the limb that was detached from a living animal, is one of the seven cardinal commandments known as the "Noahide Laws," which were given to all humanity in the times of Noah. These seven commandments, derived from the verses in Genesis 9:1-17, are traditionally enumerated as: 1. Prohibition of idol worship; 2. Against blaspheming G-d; 3. Against murder; 4. Against incest and adultery; 5. Against stealing; 6. Against eating a live animal; 7. Establishing courts of law and legal systems, to ensure civil order.

The Noahide prohibition of eating an animal's limb while it is still alive is derived from the verse in Genesis 9:4, **אֶךְ בָּשָׂר בְּנִפְשׁוֹ דָמוֹ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ**, but flesh with its soul, its blood you shall not eat.

These seven laws, considered the fundamental common standards of human behavior, were given to humankind on the heels of the great flood in Noah's time, when humans and animals were entirely corrupt in G-d's eyes.

According to tradition, there is a difference between the prohibitions that pertain to Jews with regard to eating the limb of a live animal and those that apply to non-Jews. Jews are only prohibited to eat limbs of a live kosher animal, while the gentile prohibition applies to all animals. (Of course, Jews are forbidden to eat all non-Kosher animals whether alive or dead!)

The **Sefer Ha'Chinuch** states that one is not permitted to eat a limb torn from a living animal because of the exceeding cruelty involved. One who cuts off a piece of flesh or tears a limb off of a living animal and eats that flesh or limb, is punishable with lashes.

The Sefer Ha'Chinuch declares boldly that eating an animal's limb while it is still alive is the greatest cruelty in the world. He advises that those who wish to develop positive moral characteristics must first eschew the evil ones. Those who practice positive practices will cling to such practices and perforce behave in moral and ethical ways.

Almost all the commentators agree with the reasoning of the Sefer Ha'Chinuch, and explain that the purpose of the prohibition of eating the limb of an animal while it is still alive, is to assure that humankind will refrain from any act of unspeakable cruelty and inhumanity to animals. **Maimonides** adds that eating a living animal was a popular heathen practice that must not be imitated by Jews.

The great commentator, **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch** states that, "Just as you are not to consume the blood in which the soul has its foremost representative, so you are not to eat the meat at a time when the soul is still in connection with it, in which the [animal's] joint you are taking for consumption is still under the mastery of the soul."

Thousands of years before the idea of not causing undue pain to animals was introduced to the Western world, the Torah warned Jews, and even non-Jews, about eating a limb torn from a living animal because of the exceeding cruelty involved.

May you be blessed.