



Parshas Reeh

For the week ending 30 Av 5758
21 & 22 August 1998

Overview

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

Insights

TUNE IN

“See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse: The blessing that you hearken to the commandments of Hashem; and the curse, if you do not hearken to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, and you stray from the path... to follow gods of others, that you did not know.” (11:26-28)

When you listen to a symphony, your ear assembles many separate sounds and combines them into one. If you listen carefully, you can break down the sound into its components. The violins play one melody; the brass another; the woodwind another.

Really, the symphony as a symphony, as a cohesive whole, exists only in the mind of the listener. The symphony is no more than a collection of sounds. The listener has to assemble the individual sounds and *hear* the symphony. This process may be subconscious, but it is, nevertheless, active.

A picture, on the other hand, is a different matter.

When we look at a picture, we encounter an external reality which requires no assembly in the mind of the one who perceives it. True, we can *focus* on the individual elements of a picture separately; however, the picture exists as an independent *whole* in front of our eyes.

The difference between seeing and hearing is that hearing requires the assembly of the elements in the mind of the perceiver; hearing is created in the head. Seeing is receiving a complete external reality.

It wasn't always like this. Before the first man, Adam, brought sin into reality, he was able to perceive reality through the sense of hearing in the same way as through sight. When the Torah was given at Sinai, the people "saw the voices." The Sinai experience returned the entire Jewish People to the level of the First Man before his transgression.

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Parshas **Reeh** — 30 Av 5758, 21 & 22 August 1998

Take a radio dial and spin it. Disconnected sentences in many languages mixed with static assault your ear. A paradigm of the world in which we live today. A world of fragmentation; of half-sentences and non-sequiturs. We live in a world of cacophony. A world where many voices clamor for our attention.

"The blessing — that you hearken to the commandments of Hashem."

The blessing that the Torah promises us comes when we tune out all the static of this world, when we assemble in our minds the words that were first spoken at Sinai. The nature of hearing is that we must take the words of the Torah and assemble them for ourselves. *"Shema Yisrael"* — "Hear O Israel!" We must take those precious words and make them into the sounds that guide our life. That is the true blessing: To tune in to the Torah, to pick out what is essential for our lives, and to tune out the static of a world bent on materialism and selfishness.

KNIFE EDGE

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

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

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

RAGS AND RICHES

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

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

There are those whose wealth influences them for the good, and through the blessing of their wealth they come to a greater appreciation of Hashem. However, had they been poor, they would have been so occupied trying to find food that they would have forgotten their Creator. This was the case in Egypt, where *Bnei Yisrael* were so exhausted by the hard labor that they didn't listen to Moshe.

On the other hand, there are those whom wealth removes from the path of righteousness. As we have

seen often in our history, the Jewish People become successful and self-satisfied and forget Who gave them what they have. However, when a person is poor and "broken," Hashem never ignores his supplications.

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

SCHOOL FOR KINDNESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sources:

Tune In - Sfas Emes

Knife Edge - Tractate Kidushin 40, Toras Moshe

Rags And Riches - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in L'Torah U'Moadim

School For Kindness - Rabbi Zev Leff in Shiurei Binah

Haftorah Rosh Chodesh - Yishayahu 66 : 1-24

When Rosh Chodesh occurs on Shabbos, the regular Haftorah is replaced by a special Haftorah - the last chapter of the Book of Yishayahu (Isaiah). This chapter was chosen because of its penultimate verse which links Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh: "*And it shall be that, from New Moon to New Moon, and from Shabbos to Shabbos, all flesh shall come and prostrate themselves before Me, said Hashem. (66:23)*" This verse is also repeated after concluding the reading of the Haftorah.

Every New Moon is a summons to Israel to renew and rejuvenate itself. Every Shabbos is a call to show practical proof of our homage to Hashem by ceasing from *melacha* (prohibited work). But there will come a time when not only Israel will be called to offer their willing service to Hashem...

"And I will establish a distinctive sign amongst them and send refugees from them to the nations to ...Yavan, to the most distant lands that have not heard My Fame, nor have seen My Glory, and they will inform the nations of My Glory." (66:19)

Yavan/Greece is the nation charged with the task of elevating the lowly and un-refined nations through culture. But culture is not an end in itself. It is only a preliminary stage. After Yavan/Greece, it is *Shem*/the Jews who will show mankind the path to elevate itself to an awareness of what is good and true; to pay homage to what is *morally* beautiful; to lead the nations to the height of Man's calling.

The 'uniformity' in thought that rules the actions and intellect of Greece is ultimately a fulfillment of Hashem's plan. For through this love of uniformity, the nations will be united and they will finally come to perceive the 'One-ness' of the Creator.

This unified mankind will become the encircling vessel that will contain the pure *mincha* offering that is the Jewish People. Then the nations will recognize Israel's role as the priests of mankind, just as the *Levi'im* are the priests of Israel.

The realization of this goal is something absolutely certain. Then every New Moon and every Shabbos will not only bring to Israel a call for renewal of *kedusha* (holiness) of acknowledging Hashem in free-willed devotion, but all mankind will also hear and heed this call.