

Parshas Re'eh

This week's Parsha is Re'eh. In Re'eh, Moshe, in his repetition of the Torah, reminds the Jews of the blessing and curses that will be told on Har Gerizim and Har Eival.

Rabbi Yossi Holzberg, in our Thursday night Shiur, reminded me of the Roshei Teivos of Re'eh, Rosh Chodesh Elul Higiya; that is, Rosh Chodesh Elul is upon us. The theme of preparing for the Yomim Noraim can be found in the Parsha this week.

Rashi highlights textual explanations of the wording in the first pesukim of the Parsha. Two points I would like to share from Rashi are, 1) on the words "es Habracha" Rashi explains that this is on condition that you will listen (to the terms of Hashem and the Torah). 2) The condition of receiving curses results from idol worship, which, if one serves idols, is like someone who denies the entire Torah.

For the next part of the D'var Torah to make sense, I must explain a Bracha versus a Klala. A Bracha means a blessing, but categorically this applies to a few different manifestations of a blessing. There is a colloquial blessing, such as when one greets or departs a friend and they wish them well or prosperity. There is also a Bracha as we make on food before we eat it (or, for that matter, before participating in many Mitzvos). While there is a difference

between the two, they are fundamentally the same; that is, Bracha is about drawing down G-dliness into the physical realm. In the case of a blessing on a Mitzvah, we proclaim that the physical item we are about to use is for Hashem because ultimately, our performance of a Mitzvah (as explained in Chassidus) is to draw out and draw down the G-dliness that exists inherently within it. Whether or not I make a Bracha on food doesn't change its physical status. But by not making a Bracha, I removed the opportunity for the spiritual part of that item from being revealed. But more so because I may not see a physical change at that moment, but I believe that Hashem is the sustainer. I proclaim so through a Bracha, I announce and confirm His kingship and, therefore, His rulership over me, and more so the Universe (as stated in the text of most Brachos-Elokeinu Melech Haolam). The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains here that the level of spiritual revelation is so important that we should bring it to a revealed level such that we can "see" it, as the first word of the Parsha explains. (The level of Re-iyah- seeing something is difficult to dispute and is manifest)¹.

By contrast, now we can understand why we are told that curses are brought about through idol worship, and as Rashi explicates, any (mild or severe) form of idol worship is considered to deny the whole Torah. This seems like a pretty specific explanation by Rashi, considering many other Aveiros can also be considered "koifer

¹ Because a Bracha is a conduit to draw down G-dliness, we can understand that a blessing is more than just wishing prosperity to our friend or good wishes; it is imbuing our friend with the power to receive that which he wants, be it a physical, emotional, spiritual, or otherwise level. And that

which we wish to is a blessing because it allows us to connect physically and spiritually to Hashem. But taking it one step further, a blessing may not even be something we know, and recognizing that is crucial. For example, waking up in the morning is a blessing, as we now have the power to change the world.

b'ikar." The reason can be understood in contrast to the above description of a Bracha. Any action that diminishes or otherwise prevents Hashem's manifestation through us in this realm can easily be turned to darkness (the side of what curses are, that is the opposite of drawing Hashem into this realm). Furthermore, the gods you worship are unknown to you (end of posuk 28). This is because through manifesting our Hashem, we can know Hashem, whereas any other deity (religious or otherwise) will not know us as Hashem knows us.

On Rosh Hashana and throughout the High Holidays, we say the Avinu Malkeinu, the Tefilla, where we call out "Our Father, Our King." First, Hashem is our father, one where a relationship ebbs and flows as a father's relationship is with his child. Even if the child becomes distant from his father, he can always return. Then we proclaim the second part, that Hashem is our King. Our goal as children of Hashem is to find the blessings within everything, as opposed to constantly, Chas Vishalom to the opposite.

With this explanation, we can now understand the curious chronology in the parsha follows from this first proclamation that elucidates the message of the initial statement. One may not serve the gods of other nations. The next theme of the Parsha is that you shouldn't build alters and offer sacrifices in your places (there is a specific location, and one must follow this). The Parsha spends much time telling us what we shouldn't do because it is apparent that it is easy to fall prey to "idol worship." It is not necessarily idol worship of pure form (i.e., bowing down to a stone); it is idol worship deviating us from Hashem. To remain connected to Hashem, one may independently create an altar or draw from

outside resources to connect to Hashem. One must take extreme caution or avoid this practice altogether. Because to connect to Hashem, the Torah reminds us that we must follow its edicts and procedures for optimal outcomes. All feel-good methods can still lead us astray. We are told on this same subject to offer the appropriate offering, and the section concludes 12:28, "safeguard and listen to all these matters," ...which will result in optimal outcomes for you and your children. Following this, we are warned not to be distracted by the nations (even if destroyed) around us because it is possible to be distracted by "shiny metal objects" of the nations around us that seem right and good. Because that which Hashem wants from us is in the Torah, there is no need to look elsewhere- as stated in 13:1, don't add or take away from that which we are commanded (and Rashi points out a few examples). It is easy through Hergesh- feelings that we are compelled to "make up our own Torahs." This is a real thing. Jews who seek truth outside of the Torah are compelled by the idea that the truth of how to serve Hashem somehow exists outside the Torah. The Torah tells us not to fall prey to this temptation because even this can bring about idol worship (that is, if you add something like Rashi explains, such as 5 species to the Lulav, it isn't Jewish any longer).

The next section is about a false prophet. This easily follows what was stated previously because in a "feel good Judaism," one may arise and tell you how to be through wonderous acts, a dreamer of dreams, and it may be the next "shiny metal object" to follow. The Torah tells us to be wary of this and to shun this behaviour, as it will result in deviating from Hashem. The pesukim even quotes our experience in

Egypt to know that this reality and temptation exists. Even if the guidance comes from people close to you, you must shun this behaviour². Through ignoring this behaviour, we can come closer to achieving Dveikus (cleaving), as the posuk 13:5 states. Meaning the process of genuinely accepting Berachos, and the kingship of Hashem, by following the Torah, and being aware of the temptations around us, will lead us to try cleaving of Hashem, unlike anything outside of the Torah³ because the allure of a purported person of authority can also lead us astray.

So how do we stay on the righteous path if we are to shun outside temptations constantly? The Torah tells us in the next to follow the Mitzvos, such as protecting the temple that is our body by eating the foods prescribed to us. This section in the parsha (beginning in Perek 14) reminds us that we are children, and we shouldn't act in a way that seems right (such as marking ourselves out of sadness) and that as children of Hashem (our father), there is a way to act, meaning the food we eat, and the way we act. In posuk 22 (the section we also read on the Jewish holidays) furthers how a Jew acts, that is, with charity (tithing etc.), but when it comes to bringing sacrifices, we must ensure that we don't come to our King empty-handed. And suppose we fear how to navigate our lives throughout the year. In that case, the Torah repeats the holidays, which our beacons of light sprinkled throughout the year to ensure that not a long enough time passes without us having

² The Torah states here about not knowing this type of god. Because the ideas that people may try to bring you close to, will never relate to you as our Hashem relates to us as a father does a child. (Avinu before Malkeinu). Whereas the temptations of the world will be king first, that is some idea that is

an obliged time (outside of Shabbos and the mundaneness of the week) to reconnect to Hashem. How does the Parsha conclude? that in/with happiness, we must serve Hashem (on the holidays). Rashi explains in 16:16 that the command isn't to be happy; instead, we are promised happiness (which in and of itself is a form of Bracha).

Circling back to Rosh Chodesh Elul Higiya, we can see that Parshas Re'eh is a map of connecting with Hashem, in a real way, and that our goal, especially as we approach Elul is to be reminded that Hashem is in the field (Melech the King is in the field), but Hashem is not just our King, He is our Father. The ebb and flow and temptations of the outside world are real, and the Torah lets us know this, and nevertheless, the Torah provides us with a plotted chart of how to navigate through the year and remain connected to Hashem.

Good Shabbos!

distant from us and doesn't care about us on an individual basis.

³ Those experiences are fleeting, momentary, changing, and can be outshone with another greater idea at some point in the future, unlike Torah which is Nitzchi.