

Parshas Re'eh

This week's Parsha Re'eh uses a verb to describe knowing. To learn and know something, you can take in information through hearing and/or seeing. Seeing is a higher level than hearing, because hearing about an event or situation requires conjuring the experience or image, whereas if you see something, i.e., witness it, you can know it intimately. When the Parsha begins with seeing, we know that Hashem is telling us that what we are about to know is so intimate to us and can be known as one sees. Within seeing, there is the physical act of seeing something with your eyes, and there is "viewing" something through a narrative interpretation. That is, if you "see truth," does it mean you witness truth through an actual physical act, or can you know the truth by hearing it and then having a framework and a lens through which you interpret your environment, and therefore see and know it? In Chassidus, hearing and seeing are two categories through which we can know Hashem. Seeing, because it is factually known, is the way in which we learn to love Hashem and the Torah through Ahava, whereas if it's heard, it derives from how we know Hashem through fear. When this week's Parsha begins by asking us to "see," the Torah is telling us to know Hashem through love. Seeing has Halachic implications, as described in the Gemara in Pesachim 59b, where, because of intent, two people can witness, i.e., see

the same thing but have entirely different outcomes. Drawing on this, when the Torah tells us to "see" in this week's Parsha, there is no specific event described; rather, each of us, on our level, must know the Torah and love of Hashem by looking, something we can individually achieve. Now, since every person, even two people seeing the same thing, can have different interpretations, we ought to train ourselves so that we end up seeing the truth and the right way. That is validated in the next Posuk, which says that the blessing is that Hashem gave us Torah and Mitzvos, whereas the curse is that if we don't listen, we will be in a lonely world if we turn to "other gods". The Posuk doesn't say false gods; it says other, that is, we focus on something that 'rules' us and has dominion over us. Because it has dominion, in light of Hashem it is false, but it is a real challenge. Colloquially, the term idolize is often used: when a person has faith in something or someone outside of Hashem and attributes power to that entity or person, they have brought in "other gods," and the result will be loneliness. We see this often with people who give praise and hope and have faith in politicians and leadership, not by divine design, but rather in a physical and earthly way, and people will blind themselves to uncomfortable truths that the person or entity is fallible, because they make them like a god. In this way, they will come to know that they are alone

and not cared for, as Hashem does for His nation¹.

The first Rashi seems to interpret the opening pesukim straightforwardly; that is, see what I told you on Har Gerizim and Har Eival. Similarly, the blessing you will receive is conditional on listening; by fulfilling these conditions, you will receive blessings, and, heaven forbid, the opposite, curses. The Alter Rebbe in Tanya suggests otherwise when he describes the process of the Benoni (for example, chapters 11-13), stating that since one ought to yearn for Hashem and achieve conquest of one's evil inclination, Hashem will help with that, and since light overpowers darkness, even when the evil inclination speaks up, the good (with Hashem's help) overpowers it and doesn't allow the evil inclination to conquer the "small city" (i.e. the person). Since one ought to serve Hashem out of Ahava, love, to accomplish this, one can follow the edicts of Tanya and understand that it begins with seeing what Hashem presented to us, that is, Torah and Mitzvos, and the blessing of being chosen to have these tools and entrusted with this path of existence. Furthermore, one can achieve this 'sight' by learning and knowing how to look at the Torah, recognizing that it is the blessing and the

method by which one conquers one's evil inclination, and achieves a life penetrated by, filled with, and viewed through Torah and Mitzvos, and not, heaven forbid, the opposite.

Continuing the theme of finding Bereishis in the repetition of the Torah, the beginning of the Parsha offers a choice between good and evil. This choice and balance were evident in Yakov and Esav, who, as twins, were theoretically equal. In fact, Yitzchak favoured Esav, whereas Rivka favoured Yakov. Since Esav had power over Yakov, Yakov did not take for granted that Esav couldn't be the progenitor of the Jews. Not until Yakov conquered Esav's angel did Esav realize he was defeated. That is, Yakov's spiritual rulership over the powers of evil meant that Yakov could be redefined as Yisrael (where he was named), that is, Li Rosh, or Sar El (to me is my head, the prince of Hashem, power over angels); that is, he was able to shine light over darkness, good over evil, and, as we see in this Parsha, the blessing over the curse. Chassidus delves into the meaning of the difference between Yakov and Yisrael (the names of the same person denote two levels of spiritual attainment). Yakov was able to clothe himself in Esav's/Nimrod's clothes and deceive the world around him to be a

¹ How often in today's political climate do authors and people blind themselves of the fallibility of the leadership they agree with, whether on the right or the left of the political spectrum. Hashem is

perfect, humans are not. Yet people's willful blindness is because they make these leaders to be divine, and will twist

spiritual light, and receive the blessings of Yitzchak. Whereas Yisrael, whom we are called, is the pure, loftier version of our service and connection to Hashem. Notwithstanding, this constant battle of choice is what the Alter Rebbe guides us towards, and the Parsha does as well. Rabbi Yossi Holzberg, in our weekly Parsha Shiur, pointed out that Re'eh, spelled Raish Aleph Hay, stands for Rosh Chodeh- Elul- Higiya; that is, the time of Elul (the final month of the year) is upon us. The Parsha reminds us that to serve Hashem, we can see this, and the blessing that it is to have Torah and Mitzvos (out of all the nations of the world), and we ought to serve Hashem entirely out of love. As Elul stands for Ani Ledodi V'Dodi Li, I am to my beloved, and my beloved is to me. Hashem loves each one of us, and we love Him; Re'eh is a chance to see that and know that. The Parsha concludes with a reminder of the holidays, as that is another sign that Hashem loves us, as He provides constant opportunity throughout the year to reconnect, because that is what Hashem wants from us, and we from Him. The other Mitzvos in the Torah are connected to serving Hashem out of love, such as the type of food we are allowed to eat, using the physical elements of the world to sustain our body and nourish it properly so that our holy Godly soul can conquer our animal soul. Similarly, the Mesiras Nefesh of giving Tzedaka, to help another person, is a method by which, once we are in the service of Hashem, we

learn to go beyond what is called on us to do, and make sacrifices. Finally, the Elohim acherim (other gods) connects to not listening to false prophets. There are people who will make sense, be clear, and seem right, and humans will follow blindly and willfully go along with a narrative, which puts faith in the domain of fallible humans, i.e. other gods. We must not do that, and remain faithful to Hashem in heaven, and the tools on this earth are tools and limited, unlike the kingship and rulership of the King of Kings.

We are at the final stages of exile, and as the Rebbe said, Mashiach is here; we must open our eyes. That means that for Parsheos like Re'eh, we can interpret what opening our eyes and seeing Mashiach means. Every opportunity we have in our time on earth is to do better, make things better, and teach our minds and bodies to go beyond the confines of the physical domain, and to learn and teach Torah, which is the blessing, the power, and everything that sets us free. This must not only happen on an individual level, but we are also ready to accept this redemption on a global level; that is where the truth is seen by all those who are shown, with the coming of Mashiach now.

Good Shabbos