



**ALEPH  
INSTITUTE**  
No One Alone,  
No One Forgotten.

# TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

13 - 19 August, 2017

21 - 27 Av, 5777

**Torah:**

Deuteronomy 11:26 - 16:17

**Haftorah:**

Isaiah 54:11 - 55:5

## ■ GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

Aleph offers free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll, it is available to all prisons.

## ■ ROSH HASHANAH, YOM KIPPUR SUKKOT

*The high holidays are weeks away! Make the necessary arrangements with your Rabbi and institutional chaplain, to ensure you are able to celebrate.*

## ■ TORAH STUDIES

*Aleph offers many Judaic topics for study. Aleph Institute will provide the material and courses. Please write for more information.*

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## VIRTUE, VICE AND VISION

Blessings and curses. Stirring stuff from the Bible this week as Moses again cautions his congregation. The great prophet reminds them that living a life of goodness will bring them blessings while ignoring the Divine call must inexorably lead to a cursed existence.

Moses prefaces his admonition with the Hebrew word Re'eh, "See." See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. But why "see"? What is there to see? Did he show them anything at all? The Torah does not use flowery language just because it has a nice ring to it and sounds poetic. What was there to behold? Why Re'eh?

One answer is that how we look will, in itself, determine whether our lives will be blessed or cursed. How do we look at others, at ourselves? Our perspective, how we behold and see things, will result in our own lives being blessed or, G-d forbid, the opposite.

The saintly Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once chanced upon a strong, young man who was brazenly eating on Yom Kippur. The Rabbi suggested that perhaps he was feeling ill. The fellow insisted he was in the best of health. Perhaps he had forgotten that

today was the holy day of fasting? "Who doesn't know that today is Yom Kippur?" responded the young man. Perhaps he was never taught that Jews do not eat on this day? "Every child knows that Yom Kippur is a fast day, Rabbi!" Whereupon Rabbi Levi Yitzchak raised his eyes heavenward and said, "Master of the Universe, see how wonderful Your people are! Here is a Jew who, despite everything, refuses to tell a lie!" The Berditchever was always able to look at others with a compassionate, understanding and benevolent eye.

How do we view the good fortune enjoyed by others? Are we happy for them, or do we look at them with begrudging envy? How do we look at ourselves and our own shortcomings? Are we objectively truthful or subjectively slanted? "He is a stingy, rotten good for nothing. Me? I am just careful about how I spend my money." "She is a bore of bores, anti-social. Me? I just happen to enjoy staying at home." "He is as stubborn as an ox! Me? I am a determined person."

Clearly, the manner in which we look at our world and those around us will have a major impact on the way life will treat us. Quite justifiably, Moses says, "See." For how we see things in life will undoubtedly affect life's outcomes.

## Parshat Re'eh

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880-1950), once told how when he was a young child he asked his father: "Why does a person have two eyes?" "The right eye," his father replied, "is to be used lovingly, when looking at a fellow Jew; the left eye is to be used discerningly, when looking at sweets or other objects that are not that important in the grand scheme of things."

(When I was in yeshivah, the same building also housed a synagogue where we would often interact with the adult men who would come to the daily minyan. One particular gentleman, may he rest in peace, always seemed to us rather cantankerous, what you might call a grumpy old man. I cannot remember whether he was actually a bit cross-eyed or not, but we referred to him as "left-eyed Sam" because he always seemed to be looking at us students with that proverbial left eye.)

The Parshah that is entitled Re'eh, "See," is a perennial reminder to all of us that even our vision can bring virtue or vice. Let us look at the world correctly and invite the blessings of G-d into our lives.

*By Rabbi Yossy Goldman*

## RE'EH - SEE

Re'eh means "See!" as in the opening verse of our Torah

reading: “See! I am placing before you today a blessing and a curse.”

What, exactly, is the Torah demanding in asking us to “see” G-d’s blessings and curses?

Broadly speaking, a person’s observance of the precepts of Judaism could fall into one of three categories:

**Plain obedience.** At this level, a person is willing to observe the precepts of the Torah because he is aware of a higher authority. However, his observance is not inspired by an understanding or appreciation of the Torah; he simply “accepts the yoke of heaven.”

**Intellectual appreciation.** A higher level is where a person not only observes the precepts of the Torah out of deference to a higher authority, but also has an intellectual appreciation of the importance of observing the precepts, and understands the rewards that mitzvah-observance brings.

However, even this person has not yet reached perfection. For intellectual conviction alone—while immensely powerful—still leaves room to explore other avenues, so it does not represent an absolute commitment.

Thus, the highest level of mitzvah observance is:

**Vision.** At this level, one does not merely appreciate the value of keeping the Torah’s precepts, one sees it. Meaning that the necessity and positive results of observing the mitzvahs become as clear and self-evident as seeing a physical object with one’s eyes.

And it is this third level which our Torah commands—and spiritually empowers—every Jew to reach, with the words: “See! I am placing before you today a blessing and a curse.” (Based on the Rebbe’s talk on Shabbat Re’eh 5743 - 1983).

## Blowing of the Shofar

Wednesday August 23rd begins the Jewish month of Elul.

The month of Elul is a month of preparation for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. That’s why Jews blow the shofar (almost) every day of the month.

The optimum shofar-blowing time is in the morning. However we may still blow the shofar any time before sundown.

We blow the shofar every day other than Shabbat, starting from Elul 1 and ending on Elul 28. We do not blow on Elul 29, the day before Rosh Hashanah.

If your institution does not have a shofar, please advise us at Aleph Institute, we will send one to the Institution.

## WHAT IS A JEWISH BIRTHDAY?

Establishing a “Jewish calendar” was the first mitzvah (commandment) the Jewish nation received from G-d. This unique calendar is based on the lunar month, but is occasionally adjusted so that it remains synchronized with the solar year and its seasons.

Your Jewish birthday has dual significance: a) According to Jewish tradition, your mazal (good fortune) is dominant on your birthday. b) As a nation we celebrate those dates when special events that affected our destiny occurred, a.k.a. holidays. As individuals we celebrate those dates that have personal significance—and what is more significant than your birth? It is when the Creator said, “Here, I am giving you a body, a soul, and a divine mission. I have absolute trust in your ability to pull through for Me.”

In 1988, the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, inaugurated a “Jewish Birthday Campaign.” He asked that we all utilize this most special day of our lives to its utmost. A day to recommit to the mission that G-d entrusted to us—bettering and sanctifying ourselves and the world around us.

### *In Jewish History*

***Wednesday, 24 Av, 5777 - August 16, 2017***

**Hasmonean Holiday (circa 100 BCE)**

The Hasmoneans reinstated the rule of Jewish civil law, replacing Hellenist secular law, and declared this day a holiday.

***Friday, 26 Av, 5777 - August 18, 2017***

**Tzemach Tzedek Departs Petersburg (1843)**

In 1843, the Interior Ministry of the Czarist government convened a rabbinical conference in the Russian capital of Petersburg, to the end of imposing changes in Jewish communal life and religious practice. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866, known as the “Tzemach Tzedek” after his Halachic works by that name) was invited; as a primary figure in the leadership of Russian Jewry, his compliance was required to lend legitimacy to the government’s proposed “reforms”. In the course of the conference, the Tzemach Tzedek was placed under arrest no less than 22 (!) times for his refusal to cooperate. When he finally departed Petersburg on the 26th of Av, he had successfully prevented the government’s disruption of traditional Jewish life.