

Torah Weekly

August 9-15, 2020
19-25 Av, 5780

Torah: Re'eh: Deuteronomy
11:26 - 16:17
Haftarah: Isaiah 54:11 - 55:5

PARSHAT RE'EH

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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 Berdichev 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 Berdichever 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. The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (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 *minyán*. 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 Why Didn't G-d Specify the Location of the Holy Temple?* Preparing the Jewish people for their entry into the Promised Land, Moses paints a harmonious picture of one place where all will gather to celebrate and serve G-d: "And you shall cross the Jordan and settle in the land the L-rd, your G-d, is giving you as an inheritance... And it will be, that the place the L-rd, your G-d, will choose in which to establish His Name there you shall bring all that I am commanding you: Your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the separation by your hand, and the choice of vows which you will vow to the L-rd. And you shall rejoice before the L-rd, your G-d you and your sons and your daughters and your menservants and your maidservants, and the Levite who is within your cities." (Deuteronomy 12:10-12) The pilgrim festivals are central to this portion. The Torah commands us how and with whom to celebrate, but there is a glaring omission: although mentioned more than 10 times in the parshah, "the place the L-rd your G-d will choose" is left unnamed. Moses spent 40 years teaching Torah and passing on the mitzvot with intricate detail. He transmitted the highly detailed laws of the sacrifices, including everything from which types of animals may be used to the

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location on the Temple where the animals should be offered. Yet the place where all this would happen is undisclosed. Why did Moses keep the location of the spiritual capital a secret? Why does the name of the city where the Holy Temple will be built remain a mystery? Maimonides suggests three possibilities:

If the surrounding nations would know the future site of the Holy Temple, they would fortify the place with their strongest armies in an effort to stymie Jewish worship there.

If the current residents of the Temple Mount would realize the spiritual significance the place has to the Jewish people, they would do all they could to destroy and deface it.

The third reason (which Maimonides favors as the “strongest”) is that the Temple mount is in the portion of Judah and Benjamin. If the other tribes would know that it would not be in their portion, they would begin to quarrel over that spot, each one wishing to host G-d in their own territory. G-d solved this problem by only revealing His chosen location after Israel was ruled by a king who would be able to maintain peace even as some tribes were elevated over others. (Guide to the Perplexed, 3:45)

A more spiritual answer can be found in the verse where the phrase “the place the L-rd, your G-d, will choose” is used for the first time:

“But only to the place which the L-rd, your G-d, shall choose from all your tribes, to set His Name there; you shall seek His presence and come there.” (Ibid. 12:5)

“You shall seek His presence,” says the Torah. G-d will choose Jerusalem only after the people themselves choose a place they feel is appropriate for His home. Only the Jew, who is part and parcel of the physical reality, can create a permanent dwelling place for G-d in this physical world. Only after King David chose the site of Jerusalem, did G-d, through the prophet, agree with the choice, establishing Jerusalem, and the Temple Mountain, as the spiritual capital of the world. The holiness of every place G-d chose for Divine revelation was temporary. The physical location of Mount Sinai, for example, did not retain its holiness. The one place chosen by humans (who did not wait for a sign from on high, but fulfilled the command to “seek His presence”) was the place that achieved permanent and everlasting holiness.

What is the lesson for us? To become the person we want to be, we cannot wait for inspiration from above. Inspiration alone will not change us for the better, unless we choose to get involved, to become a partner, to contribute to the effort, to do our part to “seek His presence.” G-d will choose to send you Divine inspiration and success, but it will have a permanent effect only after you do your part in building your spiritual Jerusalem. *Inspired by the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Likutei Sichot vol. 30 p. 120. By Rabbi Menachem Feldman*

Sunday, August 9, 2020 --- 19 Av, 5780

Passing of Rabbi Yaakov Culi (1732)

Born in Jerusalem in 1689 (5449?), Yaakov Culi moved to Constantinople, Turkey, where he found adequate facilities and financial backing to publish the scholarly output of his learned grandfather, Rabbi Moses ibn Habib, including classics such as *Get Pashut* and *Ezrat Nashim*.

The brilliant young scholar quickly came to the attention of the chief rabbi of Constantinople, Yehuda Rosanes, the undisputed leader of Sephardic Jewry at the time, and he was appointed to the *beth din* (rabbinical court).

Upon the passing of Rosanes, Rabbi Yaakov edited and published his late teacher’s writings with his own additional glosses: *Mishneh Lamelech* on Maimonides’s *Mishneh Torah* and *Perishat Derachim*.

Toward the end of his own short life, Rabbi Culi began work on the *Mea’am Loez*, a compendium of rabbinic lore and commentary on all books of Scriptures. He wrote in Ladino, then the common language of the Sephardic diaspora.

Unfortunately, he never completed his project and passed away on 19th Av, 5492 (1732), having only completed the book *Genesis* and most of *Exodus*. However, subsequent scholars used his extensive notes to finish the work. Popular to this day, the *Mea’am Loez* has been translated into many languages, including Hebrew, English, and even Arabic.

Monday, August 10, 2020 --- 20 Av, 5780

Zohar Published (1558)

First printing of the *Zohar*, the fundamental work of the Kabbalah (Jewish esoteric and mystical teachings), authored by the Talmudic sage, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai.

Passing of R. Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1944)

Av 20 is the *yahrtzeit* (anniversary of the passing) of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson (1878-1944), in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak was Chief Rabbi of Yekaterinoslav (currently Dnepropetrovsk), and was arrested and exiled to Kazakhstan by the Stalinist regime as a result of his work to preserve Jewish life in the Soviet Union.

Tuesday, August 11, 2020 --- 21 Av, 5780

Passing of R. Chaim Brisker (1918)

Passing of Rabbi Chaim Soloveichik of Brisk (1853-1918), outstanding Talmudic scholar and Jewish leader.

Wednesday, August 12, 2020 --- 22 Av, 5780

Passing of R. Mordechai ben Hillel (1298)

R. Mordechai ben Hillel was a prominent scholar who lived in Nuremberg, Germany. He authored a famous halachic compendium known as *Mordechai*, included in all standard printings of the Talmud. R. Mordechai, his wife, and five children were killed in the notorious Rindfleisch massacres on 22 Menachem Av, 5058 (1298).

Friday, August 14, 2020 --- 24 Av, 5780

Hasmonean Holiday (circa 100 BCE)

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