

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

August 6-12, 2023
19-25 Av, 5783

Torah Reading:
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 or have them 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).

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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

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 Yitzchakraised 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 *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

Why Didn't G-d Specify the Location of the Holy Temple?

See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse . . . (Deuteronomy 11:26)

When the Torah proclaims that G-d is the source of both the blessing and the curse, this can be understood as G-d telling us not to complain, and to just accept all curses and suffering as coming from Him. On a deeper level, the Torah is presenting us with a more complex understanding of the nature of suffering: that all things, the blessings *and* the curses, derive equally from Him, and are thus all positive; the blessing as a revealed kindness, and the curse as an opportunity for us to transform evil into an opportunity for blessing.

The era directly following the passing of Rebbe DovBer, the Maggid of Mezeritch, was terrible for the Jews. After a long period of benign neglect, the government began to promulgate many new anti-Semitic decrees. Additionally, to add insult to injury, a number of plagues and natural disasters struck the local

communities.

At about that time, one of the Maggid's principal disciples had a dream in which his departed mentor appeared to him. The disciple asked his master to explain an apparent anomaly. Departed tzaddikim (righteous people) are described as having more power to affect nature after their passing than they had while still mortal. Why, then, he asked, did all those calamities, that the rebbe's prayers had averted while he was still alive, resume upon his passing?

Rabbi DovBer explained. "While in this world, I recognized evil as such and prayed to G-d to save us, and thank G-d my prayers were often answered. Now I reside in the world of truth, and from my new perspective I divine the rationale of the Divine. I now see how everything G-d visits on the world, even that which is apparently negative, is in reality part of G-d's celestial plans for our ultimate good.

"You, however, who are alive and still perceive the iniquity implicit in human suffering—you should pray to G-d, and ward off the evil."

My understanding of this classic Chassidic story is twofold. Primarily, G-d is good, and wishes only well for His creations, as we would appreciate were we on the requisite spiritual level. From our perspective, however, evil is evil, and suffering still hurts. And because of who we are, and what we see, it is our job to stand up for those in need, comfort those in pain, and cry out to G-d to demand and pray that He find a less painful way to run His world.

If we could accept this apparent dichotomy, accept the knocks without losing hope, and work towards a present where even the apparent is pleasant, then we will surely merit to see that everything we receive is truly a gift from Above.

By Rabbi Elisha Greenbaum

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, August 6, 2023 --- 19 Av, 5783

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 7, 2023 --- 20 Av, 5783

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 8, 2023 --- 21 Av, 5783

Passing of R. Chaim Brisker (1918)

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

Wednesday, August 9, 2023 --- 22 Av, 5783

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 (see entry for 7 Iyar), on 22 Menachem Av, 5058 (1298).

Friday, August 11, 2023 --- 24 Av, 5783

Hasmonean Holiday (circa 100 BCE)

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