

Re'eh 5774

BS"D Parashat Re'ai 5774

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Blessings & Curses

Devarim 11,29:

וְכִּי יָבִיאוּךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וְאָמְרוּ לְךָ הָעַמִּים הָאֵלֶּה אֵלֹהֵינוּ וְעָלִיתָ מִן-הַר גֵּרִיזִים וְשָׁמַרְתָּ הַבְּרָכָה וְעָלִיתָ מִן-הַר עֵיבָל וְשָׁמַרְתָּ הַקְּלָלָה

“And when the Lord your God brings you into the land which you inherited (from Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov), you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Eival.”

Our parasha begins with Moshe dictating to the nation the very first mitzva that they will be obligated to perform upon their immediate arrival in the Holy Land – the blessings recited when facing Mount Gerizim and the curses when facing Mount Eival – surrounding the city of Shechem.

Six tribes were to ascend Mount Gerizim and six to Mount Eival, with the Kohanim and Levi'im standing at the base of the two mountains. The Kohanim and Levi'im were to face Mount Gerizim and pronounce a blessing for one who fulfills a particular Torah commandment, to which the entire nation would respond “Amen”. Then the Kohanim and Levi'im were to face Mount Eival and pronounce a curse on one who violates that particular commandment, and the community would respond “Amen”. And so it would continue until all the Torah's laws were completed.

From the alternatives of blessing vs. curse, it appears that in HaShem's world there is no third way. There is either "drive" or "reverse," but no "neutral" state for one to enjoy a respite from the Torah's requirements. And indeed that is the reality of being a Jew; at any given moment one is either spiritually in ascent or in a spiritual down slope.

This extreme condition is the unavoidable consequence of another verse in the parasha (14,1-2):

'וְאַתְּ בְּעֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶתְּחַבֵּב... וְאַתְּ אֶתְּחַבֵּב
וְאַתְּ אֶתְּחַבֵּב וְאַתְּ אֶתְּחַבֵּב וְאַתְּ אֶתְּחַבֵּב וְאַתְּ אֶתְּחַבֵּב

You are the children of the Lord your God... for you area nation holy to the Lord your God. The Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth.

We acquire HaShem's blessings throughout the entire time that we are involved in performing a mitzva in our role as MMM – Mitzva Making Machines. But the hands of the clock retreat when we cease to function as such. In an ideal setting, even the time set aside for eating and sleeping earns quality blessings, when the intent is to maintain one's physical ability to keep the Torah. Washing hands before eating, eating with socially acceptable behavior, washing again and reciting Birkat Hamazon, all create an atmosphere of kedusha even within the mundane act of eating.

The recitation of the prayers prior to going to sleep at night transforms the semi-conscious state of sleep into a mitzva, when the intent is to maintain one's physical ability to perform the Torah.

This principle of bracha vs. klala is the invisible core issue of this week's parasha, which for the most part, deals with

our presence in Eretz Yisrael, HaShem's Holy Land and Yerushalayim, the seat of the Bet Hamikdash.

In Eretz Yisrael, the concept of "secular" ("chol") does not exist, for whatever one does contributes in some way to the advancement of the nation in the Holy Land (except, of course, one who intentionally commits a sin). In the Holy Land, the "blessing" factor is absolutely dominant over the recessive "klala" factor.

Every act performed by a Jew in chutz la'aretz – even the study of Torah in the yeshivot – is meticulously examined under the heavenly microscope to determine its spiritual value, since most of the mitzvot performed there can be compared to a person immersing himself in a mikva while holding on to a source of tuma. The Jew in chutz la'aretz is involved in building and maintaining a gentile society where there is no sanctity; whereas, here, the worker who paves a road or lays bricks for a home is involved in performing a Torah mitzva of the first order.

Isolation is our Destiny

As part of the redemption process, HaShem will bring about our isolation from the "enlightened" nations of the world to insure that we will not share in their destinies. The United States will turn its back upon us, by very soon deciding that they have had enough of the Israel-Arab conflict.

HaShem will always look after His people in Eretz Yisrael. Perhaps the recent find of huge natural gas deposits off Haifa is the first sign of what I have written very often: that we will be the wealthiest nation on earth.

The things which I write concerning the present and near future are not figments of my imagination but are based on

holy Jewish sources.

The essential bottom line to all of this is to **come home** and be part of the greatest ongoing miracle ever created.

I previously quoted the Yalkut Re'uveini's prediction that, in the future, HaShem will bring about the long-awaited in-gathering of His people to Eretz Yisrael. Here, they will be wealthy beyond imagination, with the wealth of the world rising from the sea at the "port of Yafo". It is therefore not surprising to learn that the new-found wealth of our beloved land has its source in the gas finds under the seabed of Jaffa.

This new-found wealth will permit us to develop the Negev, the Galil and the Golan. Electric power will be cheap and the government will have sufficient funds to better the lives of its citizens. There will be sufficient funds to complete the plans for sea water desalinization; so when HaShem punishes our neighbors by turning the Middle East into a brown region for lack of water, Eretz Yisrael will be green and lush.

And with regard to the Jews who at that time will have been permanent residents of Eretz Yisrael, in addition to wealth, HaShem will open for us the earthly Gan Eden to reveal the Torah's secrets. The Midrash continues to relate that the Jews who are brought from the galut will request to enter the earthly Gan Eden like their Israeli brothers and sisters, but HaShem will deny them entrance on the grounds that this unique spiritual experience is the exclusive right of the Jews who built and fought and were willing to die for this land.

These things are occurring very quickly. There is so little time left for free emigration from the US, so I say for the thousandth time – don't listen to your rabbis or mentors. Just leave everything – come here today – yesterday – and take part in all the brachot awaiting us in Eretz Yisrael.

The Great Secret of Our Lives

The two parshiot of Aikev and Re'eh are the paradigm of the preeminence of Eretz Yisrael in HaShem's master plan for His chosen people.

These parshiot exalt the physical qualities of the land: its diverse vegetation, the richness of the crops, its abundant rainfall, blending together to create the mitzva of offering thanks to the Almighty for His kindness in immutably dedicating this land to the Jewish people.

Even before entering the land, the Jewish people learned the details of its geography. In parashat Re'eh we find the names of its mountains, its cities and the ways to travel, so that when they entered they did so as children returning home and not as potential purchasers being shown the facility by an agent.

Now, after 2000 years of being unwanted guests at the tables of others, who would throw us scraps of bread and then raise their whips when we took the bread, we have returned to the land of our dreams and prayers. However, the reality of our lives has proven that the expectations of previous generations were grossly exaggerated. In our human, frail capacity to forecast the future or to even understand the present, we expected that after 2000 years of galut, our return home would have been one of joy and eternal pleasure – as a beloved son returning home after a very extended departure. However, HaShem mutated the expectations and hopes so that we have returned in a reality beset with conflict and self-sacrifice. Avraham Aveinu, after demonstrating his intense devotion to HaShem by his willingness to sacrifice his only son, Yitzchak, had every reason to believe that his tests were completed. However, HaShem had other ideas and forced Avraham to undergo yet one more test – the degrading bargaining with the criminal Efron Ha'chiti for the purchase of a burial site for our

mother Sarah, even though the land had been promised to Avraham.

The incomparable Avraham was able to withstand this unexpected twist of reality and come away with even stronger devotion to HaShem. But we, the frail, fallible victims of the galut have reason to believe that the Shoah would be our “akeida” – the last of our tests – and Medinat Yisrael would be the entrance to the earthly Gan Eden.

It was not to be so. For we find ourselves facing the evil machinations of not one Efron ben Tzochar, but a world filled with billions of them.

So we all timidly ask HaShem “Why?” With no reply from the shamayim.

But that is not entirely true, because the very absence of a direct, clear and specific response implies that the answer is present in the information that HaShem has already provided us.

I, therefore, submit that the secret of our present lives is to be found in a single “innocent” verse in parashat Aikev (Devorim 6:13) with a little help from the Gemara.

וַיִּירָאוּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ-יְהוָה יָחִיד

You shall fear (be in awe of) the Lord your God

The Gemara (Pesachim 22b) relates that the great Tana Rabbi Shimon HaAmsoni, and others say it was Rabbi Nechemia Ha'amsoni, interpreted the written Torah on the premise that the Hebrew word “et” teaches that in addition to what is stated specifically in the pasuk, there is an additional element which is included.

The rabbi was successful in ascertaining the implied elements from the beginning of the Torah until he reached the above

pasuk that requires one to fear God. At this point, the rabbi, in great frustration, announced to his students that it is clear from this pasuk that the basic premise that “et” comes to imply an additional element in the pasuk is erroneous, because there is nothing in the world that one must fear as he fears HaShem. And if “et” comes to imply another element, it would mean that HaShem is not the ultimate because there is another which one must fear – and this is heresy.

This was the rabbi’s position until he met the great Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva restored Rabbi Shimon’s premise, when Rabbi Akiva told him that the word “et” comes to teach that one must fear a talmid chacham just as one fears HaShem himself.

This is the matter as recorded in the Gemara.

There are two obvious difficulties with this episode.

1- The very notion that one must fear a talmid chacham as he does the Almighty himself is offensive to the Jewish mind, so how did Rabbi Akiva suggest it?

2- Rabbi Shimon Ha’Amsuni was the expert in the “et” word and not Rabbi Akiva, so how did it come about that R. Akiva was able to ascertain the intention of “et” while R. Shimon was unable to?

The RamBam (Hilchot Dai’ot 2:2) states that the preferred way for a person is moderation; not to be an angry person nor too forgiving, not to be a spend thrift nor a miser. However, one who suffers from a character fault must act in the opposite extreme for a period of time in order to uproot the negative tendency within him, and thereafter return to a moderate lifestyle.

The Gemara (Pesachim 49b) relates that the great Rabbi Avika suffered from a major character fault – hatred of talmidai chachamim. Now in light of the RamBam’s teaching that a ba’al teshuva must be extreme to the other side of his fault, we can

understand that Rabbi Akiva had to place talmidai chachamim on the same pedestal as the Almighty Himself for a period of time until he uprooted the evil inclination in his heart.

Rabbi Akiva found the dispensation to uplift the status of a human being to that of the Creator in terms of fear and respect in the word "et" that appears in the verse dealing with the fear of God. Rabbi Shimon, who was a God-fearing man his whole life and one who always respected talmidai chachamin, did not think for a moment that a situation could arise when a talmid chacham is feared and awed as God Himself.

From here we conclude that in the period of time set aside for a sinner to be in the teshuva process, he must act in the extreme opposite of what his fault was until the time that it becomes entirely neutralized.

Herein lies the great secret of our lives, in this, and perhaps, in the coming generations. Two thousand years ago, we acted in ways that violated our right to live in God's Holy Land, and we were exiled. After 2000 years of realizing the great loss that we suffered when having to leave the Holy Land, HaShem provided us with the opportunity to do national teshuva and prove that we are indeed worthy of the Holy Land once again.

The tests are many and varied: military, economic, social and religious. But the ultimate test of our loyalty to HaShem and His Holy Land will come about when all the nations of the world will point an accusing finger at the Medina and say, as stated in the first Rashi in the Torah, "You have stolen the Holy Land!"

At this point, many will escape the difficulties by not coming here or among those who are here many will leave. However, there will be those who will answer the world and state proudly, "This is the land the Creator gave to us!"

Where will you be on that appointed day?

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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