



Parshas Re'eh

שמע קולנו

Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy

“יתגבר כארי לעמוד בבוקר לעבודת בוראו”



פרשת ראה

Re'eh VS. Hinei

Yisroel Hochman ('21)

This week's *parsha*, *Parshas Re'eh*, starts with the word *re'eh*, meaning a commandment to “see”. The *possuk* is telling the Jewish people to see the blessings and curses that will come based on whether or not they serve *Hashem* properly. The question is, why does the *Torah* opt to use the word *re'eh* in this case, as opposed to the far more common word *hinei*, meaning “behold”? Both words would serve to draw the *Bnei Yisroel's* attention, so why does the *possuk* use this unusual language?

The *Malbim* points out that the use of this word serves to inform the Jewish people that they will actually see the system described being put into action. The *possuk* here is describing the ultimate manifestation of *schar vionesh*, the Divine system of reward and punishment. The *possuk* therefore says *re'eh*, so that the Jewish people would understand that this is much more than just something that they should passively watch and be impressed by. Rather, it is something that they should actively see and recognize throughout their daily life. Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch adds to this idea by saying that not only was this something the Jewish people were going to see, but they had even already seen it. They had seen *Hashem's* system of blessings and curses, rewards and punishments, throughout their time in the *midbar* and in Egypt. By saying *re'eh*, Moshe was reminding the Jews that they had personally borne witness to the phenomenon he was describing, and thereby urging them to actively look for it in the future.

Another possible explanation for the *possuk's* use of the word *re'eh* is to emphasize that the word is in the singular form, referring only to one person. This was intended to teach the people that each person is judged by *Hashem*, and that beyond the national system of reward and punishment, there is an accounting and justice for each individual. The *Aderet Eliyahu* adds that not only is

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the word *re'eh* singular, but later in the *possuk*, the word *lifneichem* is in the plural form. This change is intended to call back the unity which *Klal Yisroel* experienced at *Har Sinai*, where they were also described in the singular form. It was at *Har Sinai* where they accepted these *mitzvos*, and the system through which they would receive these blessings or curses. The connection to *Har Sinai* may have been referenced now to remind the *Bnei Yisroel* that they accepted this system, with both its positive and negative aspects. Perhaps with these ideas in mind, we can see the importance of the word *re'eh*. The word teaches us to pay active attention to Divine justice in the world, whether on a personal or communal level. If we all pay a little closer attention to what happens around us, we will be able to perfect our actions to reflect the *bris* we made with *Hashem* at *Har Sinai*, and merit seeing the *moshiach's* arrival very soon.

The Nature of Reward and Punishment

Sammy Kolber ('19)

Parshas Re'eh is a boon of Jewish laws and tenants, containing *mitzvos* such as the *Shalosh Regalim*, *kashrus*, and *avodah zara*. However, while the majority of this *parsha* is focused on the different *mitzvos*, the *pesukim* also discuss reward and punishment:

רָאָה אֲנִי נִתֵּן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה: אֶת-הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁמְעוּן אֶל-מִצְוֹת הַאֱלֹקִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם: וְהַקְלָלָה אִם-לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּן אֶל-מִצְוֹת הַאֱלֹקִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם לְלַכֵּת אַחֲרַי אֲלֵקִים אֲחֵרִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתֶּם:

“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, if you will heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today; and the curse, if you will not heed the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn away from the way I command you this day, to follow other gods, which you did not know.” (Devarim 11:26-28)

These *pesukim* indicate that by following the laws given by Hashem, a person will be blessed, while one who does not follow his laws will be cursed. In *Midrash Devarim Rabbah*, Rabbi Eliezer explains that this implies that if a person follows Hashem’s ways, he will continue to do good deeds even without Hashem’s interference. Similarly, if a person does not follow in Hashem’s ways, they will continue to do bad deeds, even without Hashem’s interference.

In *Megillas Eichah* (3:38), there is a difference in plurality which bothers many commentators. The *possuk* says “*mipi haelyon lo seitzei haraos vihatov*” - the bads and the good, do they not come from the Most High? The *possuk* switches from “*haraos*”, the bads, in the plural form, to “*hatov*”, the good, in the singular form. The *Ha’amek Davar* explains that *Hakadosh Boruch Hu* provides us with one “good” at the beginning of our lifetimes, to incentivize us to do good. In view of this, only one good proceeds from the most High whereas retribution and suffering do not proceed from Him, but overtake man in direct relationship to his sinful acts.

Putting this aside for the moment, let us focus our attention on what appears to be another grammati-

cally flawed *possuk*. In the *possuk* quoted earlier, regarding the *bracha*, it says “the blessing that you will heed”, whereas for the curse, it says “and the curse, if you will not heed”. The language here is strange, since the normal approach is to give someone a reward if they complete a given task. Why does the *possuk* speak as though the *bracha* here is the task itself? The *Malbim* explains that this indicates that a reward for doing a good deed is continued obedience to the *Torah*. Through doing good deeds, a person receives the reward of the elevation and enlightenment that comes with performing an action which Hashem commanded specifically to aid his personal and spiritual growth. Therefore, the *possuk* said that we will adhere to the blessing, which is the very existence of the *mitzvos*. However, if this is the case, would it not follow that the punishment for a sin is the sin itself? Why, then, does the *possuk* imply that the curse is a result of the sin? *Rabbeinu Bachya* explains the implications of this seeming discrepancy. Regarding the reward, the *Torah* uses the word *asher*, “that”, and by the punishment, the word used is *im*, “if”. “*Im*” paints the situation as an uncertainty, implying that there is equal likelihood of our observing and not observing the *Torah*. This is at odds with our fundamental adherence to all the dictates of the Divine Law. However, this perfectly describes the situation of an *aveirah*. In other words, Man is pushed in the direction of doing *mitzvos*, and on the off chance that he does do an *aveirah*, he will be punished. The *possuk* therefore lists the precondition of “blessing” before listing the potential curse. This is evident in Rashi, who translates the word *im* to mean *al menas*, “on account of”. Although the words “if” and “on account of” appear similar, the *Gemara* explains that there is a crucial difference; “if” is a condition which is activated after the action is completed, while “on account of” applies even before the action is done.

Now the *Ha’amek Davar’s* comment falls into place. The world was created perfect and unblemished; as the *pesukim* in *Bereishis* say, *vaya’ar*

A Short Vort

Akiva Kra (21)

In this week’s *parsha*, the *possuk* says: “עָשָׂר תַּעֲשֶׂה” - “You shall set aside every year a tenth.”

Simply, this *possuk* is referring to the *ma’aser* donation, where one gives one-tenth of their money to support the *levi'im*. However, the *Gemara* (*Taanis* 9a) understands this *possuk* to be saying “*aser bishvil taasher*” - give, so that you yourself will become rich. Although the *possuk* refers to giving tithes, *Rabbeinu Yonah* teaches that this also applies to giving charity. The more charity one gives, the richer one becomes.

The lesson that “the more you give, the more you get” is a powerful one, which doesn’t only apply to money. The more friendly, sincere, courageous, or wise that one is, the more he or she will “receive” those traits from those around them. When a person spreads positive traits, they create an infinite loop of improvement. You make your surroundings better, which in turn then make you better, and so on. May we all merit to add to our surroundings, and subsequently benefit from them as well!

Elokim ki tov, and *Hashem* saw that it was good. The only time this phrase doesn't appear throughout the *pesukim* which describe creation is by the creation of Man. Sin is created by Man, while the unaltered creation of *Hashem* is inherently "*ki tov*". Applied to our *possuk*, we read as follows: "The blessing, on the account that you will heed." Man will be given the reward before the *mitzvah* has been done, while the punishment for sin comes only after. When Man sins, he influences the world negatively, pushing it farther from its original form of pureness. When he follows the *halachos* and tenants layed out in the *Torah*, he helps to return the world to the perfection that God had produced, bringing us closer to the purest form of existence, the era of *Moshiach*.

Through Sorrow and Simcha: Moshe's Final Message

Moshe Singer (20)

Sefer Devarim is, in essence, Moshe's parting speech to the Jewish people over the last few weeks of his life, reflecting on the long, winding path they had taken over many years to get to the threshold of their Promised Land. Starting with their redemption from the backbreaking labor of Egypt, this path was a tumultuous one: tears, persecution, and death are just a few of the many trials and tribulations they faced. However, despite the setting being the recounting of all of these hardships, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points out that a certain word, one that appears only once in each other book of the *Torah*, appears 12 times in the book of *Devarim*, seven of which are in *Parshas Re'eh*: *simcha*, happiness. Why? In reflecting on the harsh times passed and warning of harsher times to come, why does Moshe emphasize happiness so strongly in his parting words?

"*Simcha*" is translated as happiness, joy, or fulfillment, but it has a unique nuance that cannot be effectively translated: it is communal. Its antecedent is "we," not "I." Therefore, naturally, all the communal obligations listed in *Parshas Re'eh* are commanded to be done *bisimcha*, with communal, societal happiness in coming before God. The message Moshe is delivering with this emphasis seems counter-intuitive, but is sharp nonetheless: "You know the intense suffering your parents, and their parents, have experienced. You yourselves have experienced a life of anguish in the wilderness. You may think these are the greatest trials you will face. You're wrong. Harder trials are coming. The real test will be contentment in the face of this adversity."

It's easy to turn to God in times of tears and hard-

ship, as the Jewish people have done for a significant portion of our history. In the same vein, it is also easy to be brought together by tears and hardship. But Moshe's message is that we must stand together and come before God in times of happiness, of *simcha*, just as we did in times of sorrow. This is a message that remains relevant and important even today. The West is more affluent than any other society has ever been, and yet it still seems to find happiness elusive. One only needs to take a look around to see the signs of societal displeasure - mental disorders, drugs, and addictions betray the pervasive displeasure of people today. Why? Because, in our great affluence and pleasure, we turn the focus to ourselves. Everything becomes what I want or what I need, instead of shifting our focus to a more communal outlook - what do we, as a society, need? *Simcha*, true communal happiness, cannot exist in such a self-centered environment. A society with this type of outlook turns into a group of self-interested individuals, slowly crumbling when granted freedoms and good fortune. The only way to avoid this, Moshe pressed, is to continue to serve God even in the greatest of times, and to share those greatest of times. *Simcha*, collective joy, is the mark of a sacred group.

Choose A Side

Pitzy Shaykevich (21)

Parshas Re'eh starts off with an extreme *possuk* which sets the tone for the rest of the *parsha*: "*Re'eh Anochi nosen lifneichem hayom brachah uklalah*" - see, this day I set before you blessing and curse). In the next two *pesukim*, it becomes evident to us how intertwined *brachah* (blessing) and *klalah* (curse) are. Simply put, if one follows *Hashem's* commandments, they receive *bracha*. If one, however, turns away from the commandments, then they will receive *klalah*. If we take these *pesukim* at face value, we may come to the conclusion that there is no middle ground between *brachah* and *klalah*; either you practice the entire *Torah* perfectly, or suffer from curses. If we examine the *possuk* that explains *klalah*, it states "if you do not obey the commandments of *Hashem* your God, but turn away from the path that I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods..." In other words, by not obeying the commandments, we are going on a path that will inevitably lead us to follow other gods.

We now have two instances where there seems to be no middle path; both between *brachah* and *klalah*, and between the path of *Hashem* and the path of other gods. The *Sforno* comments that

brachah and *klalah* are two extremes, and it is our choice to decide which extreme to follow. This falls in line with the reasoning we've had so far, the "one or the other" approach. However, the *Ibn Ezra* seems to challenge this notion. The *Ibn Ezra* comments that our *brachah* comes through our observance of *Hashem's* mitzvot. The increase in *bracha* directly correlates with an increase in observance, while *klalah* inversely correlates from a decrease in observance. So it seems that according to the *Ibn Ezra*, every action is looked at in the grand scheme of things. If you did more *mitzvos* than you generally do, you are improving, and hence you will receive *brachah*. Not only does this line of reasoning not qualify you for blessing or curse solely based on one action or decision, but it also determines your eligibility for either based on your individual challenges. *Hashem* understands the troubles a weaker willed person may suffer, and determines their reward or punishment through the lens of their life decisions and circumstances.

So, while we have two different opinions about the different ways to attain *brachah* and *klalah*, it is still true that, as we said before, if you don't follow *Hashem's* commandments you will come to other gods. While the generational equivalent of "other gods" may mean secular ideology and simply a lack of god, it is still apparent that these words are true. Someone who does not observe the *mitzvos* properly will eventually experience a decline in their belief. This may explain the *Sforno's* extreme comment about these *pesukim*. If we left room for stagnation and didn't expect spiritual growth, eventually our religion would die out. That is why the *Sforno* states that we must choose one side of the other, because a non-choice (stagnation) is just as bad as, if not worse than, rejecting *Hashem's* commandments.

Public and Private Altars in Halacha, Chronology and Theology

Rabbi Mayer Schiller

"You shall not do like all that we do here today, every man what is proper in his eyes; for you will not yet have come to the resting place and the heritage that Hashem, your God, gives you; And you shall cross the Jordan and you shall settle in the land that Hashem, your God, causes you to inherit, and He will give you rest from all your enemies all around and you will dwell securely; Then it

5 Minute Lomdus

Shimi Kaufman (21)

Q. Three times throughout the *Torah*, the *possuk* says "lo sivashel gedi bichalav imo" - do not cook a goat in its mother's milk. From this *possuk*, we learn the general prohibition of *basar bichalav*, eating meat and milk together. The *Gemara* (*Chullin* 115b) tells us that the three instances of this *possuk* teach us three *issurim* relating to *basar bichalav*, namely eating it, cooking it, and getting *hana'ah* (pleasure) from it. The *Ritva*, *Rashba*, and *Gra* all write that the *issur* of cooking *basar bichalav* applies equally to red meat, which is *assur midioraisa*, and chicken meat, which is only *assur midirabanan*. However, the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros* 9:4) writes that chicken and milk is only forbidden to eat, not to cook, since our only concern is that people will come to eat *dioraisa basar bichalav*. This is an extremely strange *svara*; why does the *Rambam* hold that the *chachomim* did not make cooking chicken and milk *assur*, but only eating it?

A. *Rav Aharon Soloveitchik zatzal* made the following distinction: is the *issur* of cooking *basar bichalav* primarily the *ma'aseh bishul*, the action of cooking, or of the *yetziras hachefetz*, the fact that the mixture is cooked. In other words, is the issue that you cooked the food (an "issur *gavra*"), or that the food was cooked (an "issur *cheftza*"). There is a famous ruling from the *Nesivos Hamishpat* (234:3) that the *rabanan* cannot make a *gezeirah* (decree) making an object itself *assur*, since only the *Torah* itself has the power to declare something inherently *assur*. All the *rabanan* are able to do is declare that people are forbidden to do a certain thing. As such, we can say that the *machlokes* between the *Rambam* and the other *Rishonim* was about whether the prohibition of cooking *basar bichalav* is about the *yetziras hachefetz*, or the *ma'aseh bishul*. According to the other *Rishonim*, the *issur* is one of *ma'aseh bishul*; as such, the *rabanan* have the right to make a *gezeirah* prohibiting the cooking of chicken and milk, since they are allowed to make *gezeiros* which target people. In other words, these *Rishonim* hold that the *issur* of cooking meat and milk is not because the object is inherently *assur*, and therefore, there is nothing preventing the *rabanan* from making their own *gezeirah*. However, the *Rambam* holds that the issue with cooking *basar bichalav* is the *yetziras hachefetz*, the actual inherent nature of the forbidden mixture. Since the *rabanan* do not have the power to make objects inherently *assur*, they could not make the cooking of chicken and milk forbidden. (In both cases, the *gezeiros* of the *rabanan* must follow the same general structure as the *dioraisa* prohibition, based on the rule of *kol dirabanan ke'ein dioraisa tikkun* - every *dirabanan* is established like the *dioraisa*.)

-Source: Shiurei HaRav Baruch Pesach Mendelson, Perek Kol Habasar 103b

shall be that the place where Hashem, your God, will choose to rest His name, there you shall bring everything which I command you . . . Rather, only in that place that Hashem will choose.” (Devarim 12:8-11)

The opening *possuk* of the above excerpt has evoked the interest of many commentaries throughout the ages. What is this thing which “we do here today” which, seemingly, we may not do later? What is it that each man did that was “proper in his eyes”? Was it something good or bad?

A cursory reading of these *pesukim* might yield a sense that what should not be done later, which is still done “today,” in the *midbar*, is to bring offerings on private altars, *bamos*. This understanding, however, seems to contradict the simple meaning of *Vayikra* 17:4, where we are told that whoever does not bring a *korban* to the door of the *ohel moed* will be subject to *kares*, referring to the *Mishkan*. This is stated explicitly in a *mishna* in *Zevachim* (12:4), which states “from the erection of the *Mishkan*, *bamos* were prohibited.”

So, if *bamos* were already forbidden at this time, what is the practice still done “here today”, which would end upon entry to the Land of Israel? Rashi offers an answer from the *Sifrei* (65), that the practice being “done today” is the one that will occur after entering the Land of Israel in the fourteen years of conquering and dividing the land, during which *bamos* were allowed. However, free will offerings (*nedarim u'nedavos*) were permitted to be brought on the *bamos*, not obligatory ones. Hence, the *possuk* is condemning no one; “You should not do like all that we do here today” means that today, while we are limited to the door of the *Mishkan*, we still bring obligatory and voluntary sacrifices. Rather, once crossing the Jordan “every man what is proper in his eyes”, means that only voluntary *korbanos* on *bamos* may legitimately be offered

This interpretation of the *possuk* is rejected by the Ramban, who describes it as “an exegetical derivation based on a superfluity in the verse.” He cites and offers other explanations which are, in his view, much closer to *peshat*.

The Rashbam maintains that the phrase, “You should not do like all that we do here today,” refers to offering sacrifices not at the door of the *Mishkan*, similar to the Gentiles who offer anywhere, as mentioned earlier in the *pesukim* (12:2). The phrase, “every man what is proper in

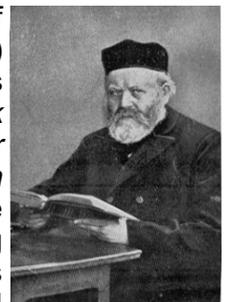
his eyes,” then refers to the movement of the *Mishkan* in the *midbar*, where the “proper” location for *korbanos* was constantly changing.

Ibn Ezra offers the same *peshat* in “proper in their eyes,” but adds the notion that it can also be referring to the “first born of the flock given to the priest” (*bechor*), which was voluntary in the *midbar* but became an obligation only after entering the Land.

However, in his conclusion, the Ramban understands this *possuk* completely differently. He first asserts that “what is proper in his eyes” is a very general reference, not to sacrifices but rather to overall religious laxity. In other words, do not be lax in the Holy Land as you are today. (As to why Moshe seems to include himself in this categorization “what we do today,” this refers to the inability to do certain *mitzvos* linked to the Land.) However, the Ramban rejects this, based on many questions, including that, according to the *Ibn Ezra*, inserting a phrase of admonishment at this point seems jarringly out of place.

The Ramban therefore offers his own unique and intriguing reading of this *possuk*. He asserts that in the *midbar*, there were no obligatory *korbanos* at all. Rather “every man would do what is proper in his own eyes” when bringing sacrifices, choosing to bring them whenever he wanted or not at all. This would cease once they were settled in the Land of Israel, when obligatory sacrifices would begin. The standard in the *midbar* was that, if someone wanted to eat meat, they had to bring it as an *oleh* or *shelamim* to the door of *Mishkan*, or else they would not be able to do so. Upon entering the land, this changed.

Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman (1843 - 1921; the Rector of the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin and author of many works on *Midrash Halachah*) asks a question on the Ramban’s explanation, based on the *possuk* (12:13) which implies that the *issur* being promulgated in this *parshah* is offering sacrifices wherever one wishes, not simply not offering sacrifices at all. However, it seems this *kashya* may be answered based on the fact that the Ramban openly says that should they choose to slaughter, it must be done “before the Tabernacle as peace offerings.” This could fit with the *possuk* which speaks of a locational prohibition.



Nonetheless, Rav Hoffman rejects the Ramban's *peshat* based on this *kashya*, and instead offers yet another explanation of "not like we do here today, rather every man what is proper in his eyes." He avers that the word "today" in the *Torah* often refers to "an imminent future event," as in "today you are passing over the Jordan" (9:1). Thus, "not doing like this to *Hashem*" refers to the then existing *issur* against *bamos*, while the "*hayom*" refers to the imminent 14 years in which *bamos* would be permitted.

Another intriguing *peshat* is offered by Rav Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Rabinowitz, a *talmid* of the *Volozhiner yeshiva* and a prominent Jewish historian.



(Rav Rabinowitz eventually came to live in Hamburg, Germany, where he authored the classic six volume work *Doros Harishonim*, which was a scholarly refutation of many non-Orthodox Jewish historians in Germany. He was also a founding member of the Agudath Israel. His influence on many Torah historians ranging from Rav Zev Yaavetz to Rav Avigdor Miller cannot be overstated.) Rav Rabinowitz states that after the beginning of the wars of conquest and granting of the lands of Sichon and Og to Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe, the *Mishkan* no longer existed. This time period was already under the permission of *bamos* of the fourteen year period. Thus, the enigmatic phrase of "according to all that we do here today, every man what is proper in his eyes," refers precisely to the time period when Moshe was speaking. It was already a period of *heter bamos* despite the nation still being in the *midbar*, and this was a practice which was not to be continued after the end of the conquest years.

An issue with this *peshat* arises from the *mishna* in *Zevachim*, cited above, which states, "from their arrival in Gilgal, *bamos* were permitted." According to Rav Rabinowitz's explanation, we must say that the phrase "arrival in Gilgal" is not literal, but instead actually began a bit before that time, after the conquering of Sichon and Og.

To summarize until this point: We are trying to understand which practice is referred to by the *possuk*, which is done later, but cannot be done today. It cannot be the *issur bamos*, for the *mishna* tells us that that was already in place in

the *midbar*. Rashi says that this refers to the rescinding of the *issur* of *bamos* during the fourteen years of conquest. Then, "every man may do what is right," meaning to bring voluntary offerings (not obligatory ones) on *bamos*. Rashbam sees this *possuk* as referring to the then movable *Mishkan* which would later stabilize. *Ibn Ezra* learns that the *possuk* is speaking about general religious negligence. Ramban offers the idea that all *korbanos* were voluntary in the *midbar*, which would change once the people entered *Eretz Yisroel*. Rav Hoffman suggests that "today" means "soon in the future", thus, alluding to the imminent *heter bamos*. And lastly, Rav Yitzchak Issac Halevi Rabinowitz views this time period, "*hayom*", as being after the dismantling of the *Mishkan*, thereby beginning the *heter bamos*.

We have only scratched the surface of this *possuk* and its halachic and historical nuances. Let us turn now briefly to the *hashkafic* component. *Bamos* were permitted in the pre-*Mishkan* days, but then became forbidden, indeed, even "hated" by *Hashem* (Devarim 16:22). The *Sifrei* (146) says this is due to them becoming a custom of the Caananites. If this is the sole rationale for the *issur*, then how can the status of *bamos* flip back and forth; permitted in the 14 years and when the *Mishkan* was at Nov and Givon but forbidden when the *Mishkan* was in Shiloh and during the era of the *Beis Hamikdash*?

The *possuk* (Devarim 12:5) commands that after *Hashem* "places His Name on a certain place" then "you shall seek out His Presence and come there." The Ramban explains this to mean that "you shall go to Him from distant lands and ask (the people) which is the road to the House of *Hashem*, and you should say, each man to his fellow, 'Come let us go up the mountain of *Hashem*, to the Temple of the God of Jacob,' (Yeshayahu 2:3). It is like the expression, 'They will seek out *Hashem*, their God. They will ask the way to *Tzion*, their faces will be turned toward it, saying come, let us be joined to *Hashem*' (Yirmiyahu 50:4 - 5).

The Ramban then goes on to emphasize that the word "*lishichno*", to dwell there, refers to the *Shechinah*, which dwells, so to speak, in the *Mikdash*. Thus, it is not simply that *Hashem* comes to hate the *bamos* due to their use by the non-Jews. Rather, once there is the concentration of *Shechinah* in the *Mikdash*, or even in the *Mishkan* in the *midbar* or Shiloh, we must go there with others to seek the closeness of the

Shechinah. The *bamos* allowed for an individual to worship *Hashem*, but that was a far cry from seeking His Presence with others and being enveloped by it.

The Cananites, unaware of the realities of *Shechinah* closeness, continued to use private altars. This became hated by *Hashem*, because it was a denial of the closeness He offered mankind in the Temple.

This may also be the reason for those who maintain (*Yerushalmi Chagigah* 1:1) that *aliyah liregel* (pilgrimage to the *Beis Hamikdash*) is not limited to when the Temple was standing. Even today, according to this opinion, the *Shechinah* closeness is still present there. Of course, to lessening degrees, this may be sought and experienced in our *shuls* and *batei midrashim* as well.

Author's Note: Some of the sources cited in this article were first presented to me in a shiur given by Rabbi Shelomoh Danziger, my tenth grade rebbi in Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, during the 1966-1967 school year.

Diversity Training

Shimi Kaufman (21)

The structure of *Parshas Re'eh* is extremely sporadic, jumping from one topic to another with little in the way of explanation or transition. The third *aliyah* discusses the righteous justice which must be dispensed to members of *Klal Yisroel* who have turned to *avodah zara*. The *Torah* describes a *meisis*, someone who tries to persuade others to serve *avodah zara*, and explicitly warns us to have no mercy on him, as well as an *ir hanidachas*, an idolatrous city which must be completely eradicated. The *possuk* is unambiguous that there can be no space for blasphemy in the nation of *Bnei Yisroel*. However, the *pesukim* then take a sharp turn, as the *possuk* (*Devarim* 14:1) says "*banim atem laHashem Elokeichem; lo siggodidu vilo sasimu karchah bein eineichem lameis*" - you are sons to *Hashem* your God; you should not cut or place a bald spot between your eyes over a dead body. This entire *possuk* seems to be a complete non sequitur; what does this have to do with the destruction of *avodah zara*? In addition to this, the structure of the *possuk* itself is odd. What does the first part of the *possuk*, that we are sons of *Hashem*, have to do with the second, that one should not cut themselves in mourning over a death? The *Ba'al Haturim* cryptically comments

that there are twelve words in this *possuk*, corresponding to the twelve *shevatim* of *Bnei Yisroel*, who are all called sons of *Hashem*. What does this have to do with anything discussed in this *possuk*?

The *Gemara* (*Yevamos* 13b) tells us that the prohibition of *lo siggodidu* (do not cut) can also refer to creating "*agudos agudos*", different factions, within *Klal Yisroel*. Practically, this means that one should not ignore the established customs of the place he is in in a public manner (for example, saying *tachanun* when the *minhag* of the *shul* is not to.) The Rambam (*Hilchos Avodah Zara* 12:14) explains that the reason for this prohibition is to limit *machlokes* and needless dispute amongst the members of *Klal Yisroel*. Rather than act outside of the accepted custom and stir controversy, the *Torah* instructs us to follow the established customs of the given place.

According to this explanation, it is perfectly understandable why the *possuk* would begin with "*banim atem laHashem Elokeichem*" (you are sons to *Hashem*, your God). Within the *possuk* itself, we are reminded that all Jews, no matter where they come from, are sons of *Hashem*. What does it mean to be a son of *Hashem*? We read daily in *krias shema* "*vishantem libanecha*" - and you shall teach [*Torah*] to your sons. Rashi (*Devarim* 6:7) comments that "sons" in this context refers to students. In order to prove that students can be called "sons", Rashi quotes this *possuk* from this week's *parsha*, that we are sons of *Hashem*! It therefore emerges that our status as "sons" of *Hashem* comes from our being His "students", having accepted the *Torah* from Him. Thus, what this *possuk* is telling us is that all sections of *Klal Yisroel* are sons of *Hashem*, who accepted the *Torah* and adhere to it to the best of their ability. Because of this, we are instructed not to actively disregard the *minhagim* of the place we are in, since they are also valid expressions of *Torah* coming from other "sons of God"! We are not permitted to assume that our particular sect or division of Orthodoxy is superior or more correct than another, and we therefore cannot impose our customs onto other communities.

This may be the explanation of the *Ba'al Haturim's* enigmatic comment that this *possuk* hints to the twelve *shevatim*. Rav Yisroel Reismann *shlit"a* has pointed out that the division of *Klal Yisroel* into different sects is our natural state; we are meant to be divided into different groups, each with the same goals and beliefs, but with

different methods and approaches. Each *shevet* was unique in its approach to *avodas Hashem*, and that uniqueness was exactly what made each *shevet* necessary to the establishment of *Klal Yisroel*. Thus, this *possuk* hints to us that we should not assume our method of serving *Hashem* is superior to another, since different ways of serving God are what make *Bnei Yisroel*, *Bnei Yisroel*. Every section of *Klal Yisroel* is "sons of God", just as each of the *shevatim* were. It is therefore inappropriate to cause unseemly infighting based on a mistaken premise of personal superiority.

However, one should not be misled into thinking that this concept implies tolerance of viewpoints which distort fundamental aspects of *Yiddishkeit*. In order to stress this, the *pesukim* first detail just how severe the *Torah* considers idolatry and heresy to be, explaining how we should deal with people whose views place them outside the boundaries of normative Judaism (broadly defined as adherence to *halacha* as codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* and commentaries, and belief in the Rambam's 13 *Ikarei Emunah*). Only once the *Torah* stressed this point could it begin to instruct us on respecting other *hashkofos*. Judaism does not recognize free speech; the *Torah* instructs us to be extremely harsh in dealing with people who do not align with the basic beliefs of *To-*

rah Judaism. Our unity and acceptance of different methods of *avodas Hashem* does not preclude the denial of heresy. And, conversely, our rejection of *hashkofos* which preach ideals foreign to classical Judaism does not preclude our acceptance of different customs and ideals within our ranks.

In describing the destruction of *avodah zara* at the beginning of the *parsha*, the *possuk* (*Devarim* 12:4) states "*lo sa'asun kein laHashem Elokeichem*" - you shall not do this to *Hashem*, your God. Rashi quotes a puzzling statement from Rabbi Yishmael, who asked "is it possible that a Jew would ever destroy parts of the *Beis Hamikdash* as we are commanded to do to the temples of idolatry? Rather, this *possuk* should be interpreted as instructing us not to act in a manner which causes the *Beis Hamikdash* to be destroyed." Causing the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* is akin to treating *Hashem* in the same manner that we are instructed to treat *avodah zara*. It is well known that the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed due to *sina'as chinam*, baseless hatred. Chazal tell us (*Yerushalmi Yoma* 1:1) that if the *Beis Hamikdash* is not rebuilt in a given generation, it is as if that generation destroyed it themselves. It is a sharp irony that our treatment of other sects of Judaism as "idolatry" perpetuates our destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, a sin which the *possuk* itself says is like treating *Ha-*

Parsha Puzzlers

Submit your answers to shemakoleinu@yuhsb.org along with your name and cell phone number to be entered into a raffle at the end of the summer!

1 answer = 1 entry!

(Hint: Use the commentaries in the Mekraos Gedolos Chumashim, along with the Toldos Aharon on the side to find relevant Gemaras and Midrashim)

1. Why did Moshe repeat the commandment not to add or detract from the *mitzvos* in this *parsha* (*Devarim* 13:2) if he already said it earlier (*Devarim* 4:2)?
2. Why does Moshe only mention the *Shalosh Regalim* in this *parsha*, and not the holidays of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*?
3. The *haftorah* compares *Torah* to water, wine, and milk (*Yeshayahu* 55:1). What is symbolized by each of these three comparisons?

Halacha Corner: Shabbos Mevarchim

- On *Shabbos mevarchim* one should hear the *gabbi* announce the *molad*, but one can still say *Yehi Ratzon* if he did not hear it.
- The *minhag* is to stand during the recitation of the *Yehi Ratzon*.
- On most *shabbosim mevarchim*, the *tefillah Av Harachamim* is not recited.
- Some are *noheg* to say "*Bizchus Tefilas Rav*" at the end of *Yehi Ratzon* since the source of the *Yehi Ratzon* is Rav's *tefillah* on *Brachos* 18a

Gedolim Glimpse: Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato

Meir Morell (22)

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707-1746), more commonly known by his acronym "Ramchal", was born in 1707 in the Jewish ghetto of Padua, Italy, to Yacob Vita and Diamante Luzzatto. He received a classical Jewish and Italian education, showing a love for literature at a young age.

He may have attended the University of Padua, and certainly associated with a group of students there, who were known to dabble in mysticism and alchemy. With his vast knowledge of religious lore, the arts, and science, he quickly became the dominant figure in that group.

At an early age, he began a thorough study of the Hebrew language and of poetic composition. He wrote epithalamia (poems celebrating a marriage) and elegies (poems lamenting the dead). In his youth, Rabbi Luzzatto also essayed dramatic poetry, writing his first Biblical drama, "*Shimshon Uphelistim*," (of which only fragments have been preserved, in another work of his), at the age of 17. This first work was followed by the "*Leshon Limmudim*," a discussion of Hebrew style with a new theory of Hebrew versification, in which the author demonstrated his thorough knowledge of classical rhetoric. In the same year or somewhat later, Rabbi Luzzatto wrote his allegorical festival drama "*Migdal 'Oz*" (or "*Tummas Yesharim*"), on the occasion of the marriage of his friend Yisrael Benyamin Bassani. This four-act play, which shows Latin and Italian as well as Biblical influence, illustrates the victory of justice over iniquity. Rabbi Luzzatto's early creative works recall the smoothness and vigor of the Torah, compared to the insipid and exaggerated style of his contemporaries.

The turning point in Ramchal's life came at the age of twenty, when he claimed to have received direct instruction from an angel (known as a *maggid*). While stories of such encounters with celestial entities were not unknown in kabbalistic circles, it was unheard of for someone of such a young age. His peers were fascinated by his written accounts of these "Divine lessons", but the leading Italian rabbinical authorities were highly suspicious and threatened to excommunicate him, on account of lingering suspicion of kabbalists from the messianic preachings of Shabsai Tzvi. His accounts of these encounters with the angel only added to these suspicions, as they were misinterpreted to describe a messianic drama with himself and his friends as major players.

After threats of excommunication and many arguments, Rabbi Luzzatto finally came to an understanding with the leading Italian rabbis, which included him pledging not to write the *maggid's* lessons or teach mysticism. In 1735, Ramchal left Italy for Amsterdam, believing that in the more liberal environment there, he would be able to pursue his mystical interests. Passing through Germany, he appealed to the local rabbinical authorities to protect him from the threats of the Italian rabbis. They refused, and forced him to sign a document stating that all the teachings of the *maggid* were false.

When Rabbi Luzzatto finally reached Amsterdam, he was able to pursue his *Kabbalah* studies relatively unhindered. Earning a living as a diamond cutter, he continued writing, but refused to teach. It was in this period that he wrote his magnum opus, the *Mesillas Yesharim* (1740). The book presents a step-by-step process by which every person can overcome the inclination to sin, and eventually reach ethical and spiritual levels comparable to those of the *nevi'im*. This work in particular gained widespread popularity, with one of the foremost *Torah* Sages of the era, the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) stating that the first ten chapters did not contain a single superfluous word. Another prominent work of his, *Derech Hashem*, is a concise work on the core theology of Judaism. The same concepts are discussed in brief in a smaller book called *Maamar Ha'ikarim*. Ramchal also wrote *Da'as Tevunos* and *Derech Tevunos* while in Amsterdam. *Da'as Tevunos* presents itself as the missing link between rationality and *Kabbalah*, a dialogue between the intellect and the soul. On the other hand, *Derech Tevunos* introduces the logic which structures debates in the *Gemara* as a means to understanding the world.

Ramchal also wrote poetry and drama. Although most of it is seemingly secular, some scholars claim to have identified mystical undertones in this body of work as well. His writing is strongly influenced by the Jewish poets of Spain and by contemporary Italian authors. The *chazzan* of the Sephardic synagogue in Amsterdam, Avraham Caceres, worked with Rabbi Luzzatto to set several of his poems to music.

Frustrated by his inability to teach *Kabbalah*, Luzzatto left Amsterdam for the Holy Land in 1743, settling in Akko. Three years later, he and his family died in a plague. He died on 26 Iyar 5506. Though it is accepted by scholars that his tomb is in Kafr Yasif, where some assume to have identified it, his burial place is traditionally said to be near the Tanna Rabbi Akiva in Teveria.

Rabbi Luzzatto's original shul in Akko was destroyed by the city's Bedouin ruler, Zahir al-Umar, in 1758, who built a mosque on top of it. In its place, the Jews of Akko received a small building north of the mosque, which still functions as a shul and bears Ramchal's name.

A century after his death, Rabbi Luzzatto was rediscovered by the *mussar* movement, which adopted his ethical works. The leader of the movement, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883), placed the *Mesillas Yesharim* at the heart of the *mussar* curriculum of the major *yeshivos* of Eastern Europe. Ramchal authored 47 *seforim*, not including many writings which were lost to time.

Parsha Summary

Moshe continues to instruct the Jewish people on how they should act when entering the land, instructing them to eradicate all forms of *avodah zara* in the land. He also warns them not to make personal altars (*bamos*) on which to bring *korbanos*, instead taking all of them to the *Beis Hamikdash*. This is because *korbanos* are meant to be an act of self-sacrifice, not one of self-indulgence. In this vein, Moshe instructs the people regarding an *ir hanidachas*, a city of idol-worshippers, which must be completely destroyed and burned. The rest of the *parsha* is devoted to *mitzvos* which make us unique and separate from the nations of the world: *kashrus*, *maaser*, *shemittah*, *pidyon bechor*, and the *shalosh regalim*, as well as others. This is intended to drive home the message that the Jewish people are inherently different from the nations of the world.

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