

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Re'eh

30 Menachem Av, 5782 / Aug. 27, 2022

Vol. 14 Num. 1 (#545)

This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by the Sinuk, Herman and Mietkiewicz families
in loving memory of their aunt Clarice Sinuk, Chasia bat Baruch z"l,
whose first yahrtzeit was observed this week, on 26 Av.

In G-d We Trust?

Of all the various mitzvot and transgressions described in Parashat Re'eh, some of the most difficult ones to understand are those involving idolatry. In this week's parshah we learn of three particular cases of idolatry: a false prophet calling the people to worship foreign gods (Devarim 13:2-3), a non-prophet seducing others to commit idolatry (13:7-8), and an entire city lusting after idols (13:13-14). It is difficult to wrap our head around each of these cases.

For example, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, in *Ha'amek Davar*, is perplexed by how any of the above scenarios could even come to be. He asks (Devarim 13:2), "Regarding the entire section, how is it possible that a prophet will come and say that G-d's will is to do something that is explicitly prohibited in the Ten Commandments?"

In his answer, Rabbi Berlin explains that, indeed, converting the people to idolatry would be a difficult sell under normal circumstances. Therefore, it must be that there was some plague or disaster that made the people think that an alternative form of worship was necessary to save their lives.

This answer is understandable for the times of Tanach, when idolatry was rampant in the region. So much exposure to that world could weaken anyone's resolve in times of great need. But in the year 2022 the idea that we would turn to idolatry, under any cir-

cumstances, seems unlikely. In fact, the Gemara testifies that our desires for idolatry are no longer what they once were, describing that during the times of Nechemiah, the people fasted and prayed for three days until their desire for idolatry was lifted from them. (Sanhedrin 64a) It would seem from this passage that the desire for idolatry today is dramatically less than what existed earlier.

And yet, even though there is no longer the same desire to worship images, perhaps idolatry still exists. A 15th century Spanish sage, Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, writes in *Akeidat Yitzchak* that today we are still strongly drawn to a form of idolatry. In his discussion of the Ten Commandments in Sefer Shemot, he writes (Shemot 20), "Included within the prohibition against worshipping foreign gods is [a ban on] the thoughts and actions of amassing wealth, which becomes for them like a mighty god." Writing some 500 years ago, Rabbi Arama realized that even if we are not bowing to an idol, we may be bowing to wealth. Idolatry today is when our priority isn't in G-d and doing G-d's will, but in acquiring as much as we can, even at the expense of doing G-d's will.

A Talmudic passage (Ketuvot 68a) brings the same point. There, the Talmud quotes Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah who connects worshipping idols to refusing to give tzedakah. The Torah (Devarim 15:9) refers to a person who hides his or her eyes from a needy individual as a *beliya'al* (literally, a base

Rabbi Jared Anstandig

or useless individual). The only other time the Torah uses this term is in Devarim 13:14, when referring to an individual who entices the members of his or her city to worship idols. Noting this linguistic connection, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah argues that one who hides from the opportunity to donate to the needy, preferring instead to hold onto his or her own money, is comparable to one who worships idols.

In his commentary to that verse, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that this is far more than a linguistic connection. He writes, "To ignore such a request [for financial assistance] is equivalent to denying G-d and idolizing money." By refusing to donate to the poor, this individual is essentially turning his or her wealth into an almighty idol.

According to these sources, the desire for idolatry is unfortunately alive and well in our time. Not with actual idols, but with the prioritization of money and wealth. May we recognize this in our lives, and may we see that our most important goal is not the acquisition of wealth, but the performance of G-d's will in this world.

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Summary

In the preceding six chapters, Yeshayahu sought to convince Judea's King Achaz not to join Assyria, or the anti-Assyrian alliance of Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel. Chapter 13 begins a new segment containing rebukes to ten entities, blending punishment for them and consolation for the Jewish nation they have victimized. In Chapters 13 and 14, Yeshayahu rebukes Babylon.

The prophecy against Babylon begins with a declaration that G-d is summoning warriors to punish them, and they should be afraid. Babylon is likened to a woman in labour, experiencing panicked, spasmodic tremors. (13:1-8) The stars, sun and moon will be darkened, civilization smashed, and the heavens and earth shaken. (13:9-13) Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (13:11) suggests that the cosmic scope reflects the fact that Persia's conquest of Babylon will also affect many other nations.

Yeshayahu describes a mass of merciless marauders, attacking even children and women, and leaving Babylon in ruins. (13:14-18) These would turn out to be the Persians, but the text names Medea as an invader. This is part of a biblical tendency, seen in Daniel 6, to identify them as partners with the Persians. Yeshayahu then repeats his pre-

diction of the utter devastation of Babylon. (13:19-22) Rashi, citing Seder Olam 28, says this second presentation describes the Persian role.

On a positive note, Yeshayahu turns to the Jews and pledges that salvation is coming for us. We will return to our land, supported by former foes, and others will even join us! (14:1-2) Per Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra and Don Isaac Abarbanel, this refers to our return for the second Beit haMikdash. Rashi and Radak suggest that it also predicts the time of Mashiach.

Yeshayahu then describes the Jews mocking their fallen foe. Babylon is described as elevating itself – a tall tree, perched atop a cloud, even a star – and G-d fells the tree, places them in the depths, and casts them upon the ground. G-d stands above them; Babylon is dead, and there is no heir. (14:3-23)

Finally, Yeshayahu summarizes the fall of Babylon – and he also invokes the fall of Assyria. Rashi and Ibn Ezra explain that just as G-d's plan regarding Assyria will come true in the time of King Chizkiyahu, the plan for Babylon will come true as well. (14:24-27) [But see Sanhedrin 94b.]

Yeshayahu then addresses a different

foe: the Philistines. Starting with King David's era, we ruled the Philistines for generations. However, upon the death of King Uziyahu the Philistines thought to ally themselves with Syria and the northern Israelite kingdom and so escape Judean control. [See Yeshayahu 9:11 and Divrei haYamim II 28:18.] Yeshayahu warns them that King Chizkiyahu will be dangerous for them. (14:28-32)

Insight

The image of Babylon as a woman in labour (13:7-8) may be read on two levels. On one level, it's about pain, pitch-perfect in its description of Babylonian panic, their muscles going limp and then clenching. On another level, it's about birth – the birth of the second Temple, brought closer by the fall of Babylon.

Both images are supported by the *shalsholet* note on Babylon's panic in 13:8. The cycles in the musical note may simply reflect the clench-and-release of labour. But on a deeper level, this note predicts the birth of the second Beit haMikdash. There are only three *shalsholet* notes in the Prophets and Writings – here, in Amos 1:2 and in Ezra 5:15. In all three cases, it relates to Divine wrath upon our foes and the arrival of rebirth.

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Siddur Insights: L'Dovid Hashem Ori

From the beginning of Elul until Simchat Torah, the practice among the majority of the Jewish world is to say, once or twice each day, Tehillim 27 - "L'Dovid Hashem ori v'yish'i." (*Mishneh Berurah* 581:2)

This practice is first recorded in *Shem Tov Katan*, written by the Kabbalist Rabbi Binyamin Beinosh HaKohen in the beginning of the 18th century. There he mentions that one who reads this chapter from the beginning of Elul until Simchat Torah will be able to cancel any bad decree that was set upon him, he will have a good year and he will live his life fully and happily.

However, at one time there was a controversy about reciting this chapter in Elul, because this minhag is also recorded in *Chemdat HaYamim*, a book that some say was written by a disciple of the false Messiah Shabbtai Tzvi. Therefore, some communities don't say this chapter at all.

Here are two reasons to recite this chapter in particular in the month of Elul:

- 1) Rabbi Ephraim Zalman Margaliyot (*Mateh Ephraim* 581:5) says it is because of a midrash that explains the first verse of the chapter in the following way: "G-d is my light' on Rosh Hashanah, and 'my saviour' on Yom Kippur... 'He will hide me in His Succah on a terrible day' on Succot."
- 2) Rabbi Shemuel Yaakov Rubinstein (*She'erit Menachem*, Chodesh Elul) explains that it is because of the verse, "One thing I ask of Hashem, only that do I seek: to live in the

house of Hashem, all the days of my life." (27:4) Although we are approaching the judgement days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and naturally we would ask Hashem for personal needs like health and livelihood, we need to emphasize to ourselves that all of these necessities are not the purpose of life but rather is only the medium through which to reach our purpose in life, the only request of King David - living in the house of Hashem all the days of our lives.

It is popular to note King David's language in 27:4, requesting to "live in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to gaze upon Hashem and to visit his temple." As [Rabbi Asher Weiss](#) notes, in the beginning King David asks to live in the house of Hashem, which sounds permanent, and in the end, he asks to visit the temple, which sounds temporary. Perhaps the goal is to reside permanently close to Hashem, to constantly be in Hashem's house, davening and learning. However, the nature of the human being is that if he is in the same place all the time, he loses his excitement and enthusiasm. Therefore we ask to live in the house of Hashem with the feeling that we are only visiting, because a visitor always feels excitement and enthusiasm in this new place. We wish to feel like visitors, being excited, fresh and enthusiastic in our avodat Hashem.

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Biography

Rabbi Re'em HaCohen

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Rabbi Re'em HaCohen (b. 1957) is a Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Hesder Otniel, as well as the Rabbi of the community of Otniel. He is married to Noa and has nine children. He previously taught at Yeshivat Or Etzion and Yeshivat Shvut Yisrael. His father, Yedaya, was one of the founders of Yeshivat Har Etzion, and his mother Dena was the head of Midreshet Emuna. He is named for his great grandfather, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai, using the first letter of these three words to construct his name. He grew up in Shaarei Chesed, and he frequently spent time in Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach's home when he was younger.

Rabbi Re'em is part of a rabbinic family. His oldest brother is Major-General Gershon HaCohen, a senior IDF officer. His brother, Rabbi Elyashiv HaCohen, is Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Beit Shmuel, another brother Rabbi Aviya HaCohen teaches at Yeshivat Tekoa, and a third brother, Rabbi Chayim HaCohen, is head of the Beit Yatir Mechina (pre-army program).

Rabbi Re'em was a student of Rabbis Aryeh Bina and David Fuchs in the Netiv Meir Yeshiva High School, and a leading student of Rabbis Aharon Lichtenstein and Yehuda Amital at Yeshivat Har Etzion. Though he is clearly influenced by their methodologies of Torah study, including the former's "Brisker approach", his own approach includes a heavy emphasis on Kabbalistic and Chassidic teachings, including those of Rav Kook, the Rabbis of Chabad, the Ramchal, and the Rama of Fano.

He served as an officer in the tank corps in the IDF and was a candidate for Chief Rabbi of the IDF. He serves as a judge on the Torah essay contest of the Mifal Ha-Payis (the national lottery). He is a prolific author, having written many books and articles spanning Talmud, Halachah, Prayer, and Jewish Thought. He won the Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook Prize for Torah writing in 2020. He has three volumes of responsa, *Badei Ha'Aron*. The volume on shemita issues is available on Sefaria.org.

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Torah and Translation

Is Eating Shemita Produce a Mitzvah?

Rabbi Re'em haCohen, Badei ha'Aron Sheviit 12

Translated by Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Preface: One may use shemita olive oil as fuel in a lamp. On the other hand, one may not use ritually pure terumah or maaser sheni olive oil as fuel in a lamp. Terumah is a tithe given to kohanim annually. Maaser sheni is a tithe separated from Israeli produce in four years out of every seven, and eaten only in Jerusalem.

לענ"ד הפער בין קדושת שביעית לקדושת מעשר שני יכול להסביר לנו את כל הסוגיה כולה. מסתבר שחומרת תרומה ומעשר שני משביעית לעניין הדלקת הנר נובעת מהפער המעשי שבין הדינים. תרומה ומעשר שני הם חלק מצומצם מהיבול השנתי שחלה עליהם קדושה, ואילו פירות שביעית הם כל היבול וכל מרחב החיים ואכילתם היא עצם הוויית השביעית.

הבנה זאת מבארת מדוע אין לראות את ציווי התורה "לאכלה" כמצוות עשה חיובית לאכול את הפירות, שכן מדובר כאן בציווי של הוויית קדושה, שהרי אי אפשר להניח שכל יבול הארץ יאכל. אמנם הווייה זאת מקבלת ביטוי מעשי בכל האיסורים השונים בדרך של "לאו הבא מכלל עשה". זאת בשונה מהפרשה של תרומות מעשרות קורבנות וכד', שהם קדושה ספציפית שחלה על פירות מסוימים.

העדר המצווה אינו מקטין את מעלת אכילת פירות שביעית, אלא מעלה את אכילת הפירות להווייה כללית של אכילה משבת הארץ. בשנים רגילות יש צורך לקדש פירות מסוימים, ואילו השביעית היא המפגש של קדושת הזמן עם קדושת המקום ומשום כך היא מעלה את ארץ ישראל כולה לבחינת גן עדן, שהאדם זוכה לאכול משולחן גבוה לא בתור מצווה אלא בתור הווייה של קדושה.

הערה: יתכן ורעיון זה, שיש קדושה שמתייחסת למרחב חיים שלם, מתאים גם לשיטתו העקרונית של הרמב"ן במצוות התורה "קדושים תהיו" שגם את המצוות שאנו מצווים צריך לעשות בקדושה ולא רק במעשים ממוקדים...

In my humble opinion, the difference between the sanctity of *shemita* and the sanctity of *maaser sheni* can explain the entire issue. It makes sense [to suggest] that the stringency of *terumah* and *maaser sheni* over that of *shemita* concerning using them as fuel for lamps stems from the practical gap between the laws. *Terumah* and *maaser sheni* are a limited part of the annual crop, upon which holiness rests, whereas for the produce of *shemita*, they are the entire crop. The whole expanse of life and eating it is the very essence of the seventh year.

This understanding explains why the Torah's commandment to "eat" [*shemita* produce] should not be seen as an obligatory commandment to eat the fruits, since what is being discussed is [only] a commandment of holy existence, since it is impossible to assume that the entire crop of the land will be eaten. In truth, this existence gains practical expression through all the various prohibitions [which result from protecting that sanctity] as "prohibition that emerges from inference of a positive commandment." This is different from the separation of *terumah*, *maaser* tithes, sacrifices, and the like which are a specific holiness that take effect on certain produce.

The absence of a mitzvah [of eating *shemita* produce] does not diminish the value of eating *shemita* produce, but elevates eating that produce to a holistic experience of eating from the Sabbath of the land. In normal years, there is a need to sanctify certain fruits, while the seventh year is the meeting of the sanctity of time with the sanctity of space, and for that reason it elevates the entire Land of Israel to an aspect of the Garden of Eden, where man is privileged to eat from the Table of G-d, not as a commandment but as part of an existence of holiness.

Footnote: It is possible that this idea, that there is holiness that relates to an entire area of life, also corresponds to the Ramban's fundamental approach to the Torah's commandment of "You shall be holy," that even the commandments that we are commanded in should be done in holiness, and not only [limited] in focused actions...

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6:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Women's Shiur, Clanton Park (women)

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Sunday August 28

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

9:15 AM Idan Rakovsky, The Torah of Rav Shagar, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university) *not this week*

Monday August 29

7:30 PM Prielle & Idan Rakovsky, Song of the Week, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklysong> *not this week*

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Getting Ready for Tishrei, Shomrai Shabbos (men)

Tuesday August 30

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Wisdom of King Solomon, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men) *not this week*

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men) *not this week*

Wednesday August 31

6:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Avodah Zarah, Shaarei Shomayim

After maariv R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park

Thursday September 1

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 25), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women) *not this week*

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Gemara Beitzah, email ymanntorontotorah.com for rotating location

Friday September 2

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 *advanced*
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