

Seek God (*Re'eh*)

Among the various commandments found in *Parshat Re'eh* is the instruction that once *Bnei Yisrael* enter the land of Israel that they must destroy the Canaanite idols and their idolatrous places of worship:

‘These are the decrees and laws that you must take care to keep in the land that the Lord, God of your ancestors, has given you to possess for as long as you live on this earth. Demolish completely all the shrines where the nations you are about to dispossess served their gods: on the high mountains, on the hills, and under every leafy tree. Tear down their altars, smash their worship pillars, burn their sacred trees with fire, and cut down the statues of their gods, obliterating their names from that place.’ (*Devarim* 12:1-3)

Following this command, the Torah then compares and contrasts the culture of idolatry with the way of God:

‘Do not do such things for the Lord your God. Instead, seek the place (*leshichno tidreshu*) that the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to establish His name there to be His dwelling. There you shall go, bringing your burnt offerings, your peace offerings, your tithes, your personal contributions, your gifts in fulfilment of vows and freewill offerings, and the firstborns of your herds and flocks. There you and your families shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God, rejoicing in all your endeavours in which the Lord your God has granted blessing.’ (ibid. 12:4-7)

What this teaches us is that there is a fundamental difference between the way in which idol-worshippers relate to their idols and places of idolatry, and the way in which we are meant to seek the place of God’s dwelling.

Addressing this fundamental difference, the *Kli Yakar* (commentary to *Devarim* 12:4; see also *Divrei Shaul* on *Devarim* 12:4) explains that idol worshippers build their idols and determine which natural phenomena or locations of natural beauty should be worshiped. In so doing they express tremendous hubris as it is they, the idol worshippers, who create the idol and who determine what should be worshipped and where that worship should take place. In short, idolatry places the preferences and choices of idol-worshippers at the centre of their idolatrous worship.

In contrast, we learn from *Devarim* 12:4-5 that true worship of God involves recognizing that God is the One who determines both how and where we serve God - as opposed to us doing whatever is easiest or most convenient for us. Accordingly, living a life of holiness is all about us making the daily choice of recognizing, revering and worshipping God - however God wishes, and wherever God decides.

Nowadays, in addition to those who are actual idol worshippers, there are some Jews who claim to worship God, but who do so in a manner that is on their terms and based on their preferences. Instead of 'seeking the place' that the Lord our God chooses, they presume to be able to tell God how and where God should be worshipped. Yes, their worship looks Jewish. Still, core to their improper worship are the personal preferences and choices of their worshippers.

Ultimately, this is why it is so important to learn *Parshat Re'eh*, because it is from the commandment of 'seek the place' (*leshichno tidreshu*) that we learn that living a life of holiness is about living a humble life where we make the daily choice of recognizing, revering and worshipping God - however God wishes, and wherever God decides.

Shabbat Shalom!