

חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

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Parashas Re'eh

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Parashas Re'eh

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I

Seeing the future through the past

רָאֵה אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה (דברים יא, כו)

"See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse."
(Devarim 11:26)

Our parashah opens with the word רָאֵה, *Re'eh*, "See!" At first glance, this seems like a straightforward imperative. Yet upon closer examination, it raises a fundamental question. What exactly are we being asked to "see"?

The Torah immediately continues, לְפָנֶיךָ, "before you," referring to the blessing and the curse that lie ahead. But how can one "see" what has not yet happened? Human beings can only see what stands before their eyes or recall what they have already experienced. This question suggests that the Torah's command to "see" may involve more than simply looking ahead. Perhaps it is instructing us to see through the lens of the past.

Interestingly, the very same letters, רָאֵה, can also be vocalized רָאָה, "he saw." Of course, the simple meaning (*peshat*) is unquestionably *Re'eh*, "See!" Nevertheless, we will explore whether the alternate reading may illuminate a deeper *derash*. In reviewing the *meforshei HaTorah*, there appears to be meaningful support for this idea.

The Ohr HaChaim

The Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh asks why the Torah begins this parashah with the language of רָאָה. He further asks: Why does it say *anochi*? Why does it speak in the singular form when the remainder of the passage is spoken in the plural form?

He explains that the singular form refers to Moshe Rabbeinu himself. Moshe is saying, in effect, "See, *anochi*." That is to say: Look to me, recognize the truth of my words. Understand that they are justified because he is uniquely qualified to say "See!" because he himself has seen.

Moshe alone has seen both worlds: the greatest heights attainable in this world, and the highest closeness to Hashem, שגלוי. לכל השגת משה בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא. He speaks not from theory but from firsthand experience.

The Ohr HaChaim certainly understands רָאָה according to its plain meaning, "See." However, one cannot help but notice that his explanation of the pasuk repeatedly revolves around what Moshe has already seen, רָאָה. So, the directive, רָאָה *Re'eh*, See, rests upon רָאָה *ra'ah*, he saw. Listen and believe Moshe when he says, "See" because he already "saw."

Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch

This idea finds significant support in the commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch. He explains that Moshe is not asking Bnei Yisrael to accept his words merely on faith or because they were taught by others.

"רָאָה, see, it is not on faith and belief in the teachings which you have to accept from others, but out of everything which you yourselves have experienced up to now and what has been recalled to your minds by the retrospective view that you have just been given..."

According to Rav Hirsch, *Re'eh* itself is an appeal to memory. Throughout Sefer Devarim, Moshe reviews forty years of

Jewish history. Before asking the nation to choose its future, he first reminds them of everything they themselves have already witnessed. They are to interpret what lies ahead through the lessons of what they have already experienced.

This beautifully reinforces our *derash*. The command *Re'eh* is grounded upon what the people have already seen, *ra'ah*.

The same idea is expressed succinctly in the familiar saying rooted in Chazal: אינו דומה שמיעה לראיה "Hearing is not comparable to seeing." What one has personally witnessed leaves a far deeper impression than what one merely hears from others. Moshe therefore appeals not only to faith, but to the nation's own lived experience.

Perhaps this also sheds light on why the Torah addresses the nation in the singular. Beyond the Ohr HaChaim's explanation that the singular refers to Moshe, one might suggest that every Jew is being addressed individually. Every person possesses a unique set of experiences of Divine providence. Moshe therefore says *Re'eh* to each individual: See and look back at what *you* have seen. Let your own experiences guide the choices that now stand before you.

The Sforno's and the Sfas Emes' approach

The Sforno explains that *Re'eh* teaches us "to look carefully and recognize that your way of life should not follow an ordinary, middle course as is the custom of most people." Now the Sforno answers the next question. Having seen all this, what conclusion should the Bnei Yisrael reach? Moshe poses two paths, with no middle road: one either lives under the yoke of Heaven or one does not. One either moves toward blessing or moves toward curse. The Torah rejects a life of spiritual mediocrity. The consequences of our good and bad choices that we have already seen in our past should guide us as we strive for spiritual growth.

The Sfas Emes (5631) develops the Sforno's insight even further. He asks: How does one ensure that he chooses blessing? He draws upon the teachings of Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa, the revered Rebbe of his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, to explain the word *lifneichem* "before you." "Rav Bunim interprets the verse וְאַלֶּהֶם הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים לְפָנֶיהֶם, 'And these are the ordinances that you shall place before them,' to mean that the Torah's values and judgments must stand before a person, taking precedence over his own desires and interests." Similarly, here, *lifneichem* teaches that before every action we must first place these two paths before ourselves and carefully consider which one accords with the will of Hashem. Every decision begins with רֹאֵה, seeing and reflecting clearly before acting.

The personal vision

In conclusion, perhaps this is the Torah's deeper message in beginning the parashah with the singular command, "Re'eh." Every Jew is personally challenged to develop this introspective vision based on his own experiences. Before every decision, we are to place the two paths *lifneichem*, before ourselves, and reflect on the acceptance of Hashem's sovereignty. When we do so sincerely and seek only to fulfill His will, Hakadosh Baruch Hu grants us the blessing of clearer vision in making the choice. In this way, the command to "see" becomes not merely an instruction to observe, but a promise that those who strive to walk in Hashem's ways will ultimately walk in the path of *berachah*.



II

From "There Shall Be No Poor" to "You Shall Surely Open Your Hand"

Parashas *Re'eh* contains one of the Torah's most extensive discussions of the mitzvah of *tzedakah*. The Torah commands:

כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיּוֹן מֵאֶחָד אֶחֱיָךְ ... לֹא תִאָּמֵץ אֶת לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֶחֱיָךְ הָאֶבְיּוֹן. כִּי פֶתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהַעֲבַט תַּעֲבִיטֵנוּ דֵּי מַחֲסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסֹר לוֹ.

If there shall be a needy person among you, one of your brethren... you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand against your needy brother. Rather, you shall surely open your hand to him, and surely lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he lacks" (Devarim 15:7-8)

The Torah emphasizes this mitzvah by repeating the expression פֶּתַח תִּפְתָּח, "you shall surely open your hand." Many commentators discuss the significance of this repetition. Before examining that phrase, however, let us review a few pesukim earlier, where the Torah presents what appears to be a different possibility for Klal Yisrael regarding poverty.

Only a few verses earlier the Torah promises:

אָפֶס כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיּוֹן, כִּי בֵרַךְ יְבָרְכֶךָ ה'...
"Nevertheless, there shall be no needy person among you, for Hashem will surely bless you..." (Devarim 15:4)

This blessing, however, is conditional:

רַק אִם שְׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁמֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת
אֶת כָּל הַמִּצְוֹת הַזֹּאת... (15:5)

If Klal Yisrael faithfully listens to the voice of Hashem and observes His mitzvos, the nation will merit a society free of poverty.

Only two verses later the Torah begins discussing what to do כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיּוֹן, "if there will be a needy person among you."

Will there be poor people, or will there not?

The Kli Yakar's resolution

The *Kli Yakar* explains that there is no contradiction. The blessing of **לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיֹן** does not necessarily mean that there will never be a needy individual. Rather, it means that poverty will not be a widespread condition within the nation. If Klal Yisrael merits Hashem's blessing through faithful observance of His mitzvos, poverty will become the rare exception rather than the norm.

Accordingly, the Torah's later description, **כִּי יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיֹן מֵאַחַד אַחֶיךָ בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ** refers to those isolated cases. An occasional *evyon* (poor person) may still exist, but only as an exception within an otherwise blessed society.

Our collective responsibility

Perhaps, we may also understand these pesukim on another level. The ideal envisioned by the Torah is **לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֶבְיֹן**. If, however, we fail to attain that ideal because we have not fully lived up to the standard of **שְׂמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה'**, then poverty inevitably appears among us.

At that point, the *evyon* is not simply someone upon whom we can perform a mitzvah. His presence also reminds us that, as a community, we have not yet realized the Torah's ideal. Hashem therefore commands: **פֶּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ**. We must provide for him, support him, and restore his dignity. In a sense, we are responsible for creating a society in which no Jew is left without means.

This idea also underscores the importance of another mitzvah: **אִם בָּסָרְךָ תִּלְוֶה אֶת עַמִּי** (Shemos 22:24). By lending money before someone falls into poverty, we prevent him from becoming an *evyon* in the first place. The highest form of

tzedakah is often preventing need before it develops.

Following Hashem's Example

The Torah's expression **פֶּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ** recalls familiar words that we recite every day in *Ashrei*: **הִי לְכָל חַי וְמַשְׁבִּיעַ לְכָל חַי**, "You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Tehillim 145). When reciting this pasuk in *Pesukei DeZimrah*, we are required to concentrate on its meaning. Every day we ask Hashem to open His hand and provide us with sustenance. We acknowledge that all sustenance and *parnassah* (livelihood) come from Him. The words **הִי לְכָל חַי וְמַשְׁבִּיעַ לְכָל חַי** teach an important lesson. A person must recognize his dependence upon Hashem and turn to Him in prayer, asking Him to provide his needs. He needs to want and be desirous of assistance (**הִי לְכָל חַי וְמַשְׁבִּיעַ לְכָל חַי**) through tefillah.

When Hashem places an *evyon* before us, He is, in effect, asking us to imitate His own conduct. Just as we ask Hashem to **פֶּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ** we are commanded to **פֶּתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ**. The needy person standing before us is not there by coincidence. As Chazal teach, **כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲרִיבִים זֶה בְּזֵה**. Whether directly or indirectly, his welfare has become our responsibility.

In conclusion, perhaps this is the deeper meaning of the Torah's double expression, **כִּי פֶתַח תִּפְתָּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ**. *Poso'ach* is the command directed to us. We must take the initiative and open our hand to another Jew. But *tiftach* hints to what follows. Once we have opened our hand, our own hands become opened by Hashem to receive His blessing. Our act of generosity transforms our hands into worthy receptacles for the fulfillment of David HaMelech's words, **פֶּתַח אֶת יָדְךָ**

ומשפיע לכל חי רצון. When we open our hands to others, Hakadosh Baruch Hu opens His hand to us. This reciprocal movement echoes the Ohr HaChaim's teaching that one who opens his hand below merits that the hidden storehouses of Heavenly abundance are opened above.

Perhaps this also sheds light on the beautiful custom practiced in many Sephardic and *Edot HaMizrach* communities. When reciting the verse פותח את ידך, they open their hands toward Heaven, expressing complete dependence upon Hashem as the Source of all sustenance. According to the Ben Ish

Chai, this posture symbolizes one's readiness to receive the Divine *shefa* that flows from Above. Seen in this light, the custom beautifully complements the Torah's command. First, we fulfill פתח את ידך לו by opening our hands to those in need. Then, with those very same hands, we stand before Hashem and recite פותח את ידך, our hands now open to receive His blessing. The hands that have become instruments of giving become worthy vessels for receiving. In this way, the physical gesture itself vividly illustrates the reciprocal relationship between human generosity and Divine abundance.

Maharal Tzintz ב-י-ל-א ואמו

PEARLS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE GAON FROM PLOTZK

The reward for mitzvos even before they are performed

In this week's parashah it says:

את הברכה, אשר תשמעו אל מצות ה' אלקיכם... והקללה, אם לא תשמעו אל מצות ה' אלקיכם, וסרתם מן הדרך אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום...

"The blessing: that you will heed the mitzvos of Hashem your G-d... "And the curse: if you do not heed the mitzvos of Hashem your G-d, and you turn away from the path that I command you today..." (Devarim 11:27-28).

Rabbeinu, the Maharal Tzintz, points out a glaring difference between the blessing and the curse. Concerning the blessing, the Torah says, "that you will heed" the mitzvos of Hashem and it does not say that you will "do." Concerning the curse, however, the Torah says, "if you do not heed... and you turn away from the path." Here, the Torah mentions not only their failure to heed Hashem but also the actual commission of the transgression by failing to observe His mitzvos. This distinction requires explanation.

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Let us first introduce some well-known principles concerning reward and punishment. Chazal teach: "Hakadosh Baruch Hu credits a good intention as a deed, but He does not credit an evil intention as a deed" (*Kiddushin* 40a). This means that a person is rewarded for a good intention even if it was never realized through action, whereas for an evil intention, Hakadosh Baruch Hu does not punish a person if it was never carried out. But the Gemara adds that there is one exception to this: *avodah zarah*. In this case, Hakadosh Baruch Hu punishes even for the intention alone, as it says: *למען תפוש את בית ישראל בלבים, אשר נזרו מעלי בגלוליהם*: "So that I may seize the House of Israel for what is in their hearts, because they have all become estranged from Me through their idols" (*Yechezkel* 14:5). This is all well known.

Seemingly, it would appear from this that unlike other transgressions, an intention to commit *avodah zarah* parallels an intention to perform a mitzvah in that just as a person is rewarded for the intention to fulfill a mitzvah, so is he punished for the intention to commit *avodah zarah*.

Rabbeinu explains, however, that this is not so. Since the measure of goodness is far greater than the measure of punishment, there is an enormous difference between the intention to perform a mitzvah and the intention to commit *avodah zarah*. If it is revealed and known before Hakadosh Baruch Hu that a person will desire to perform a mitzvah in the future, He rewards the person in advance, even before the person has listened to Hashem's command. Rashi explains in *Shemos*: "Regarding your question as to what merit the Jewish people possess that they should be taken out of Mitzrayim, I have something great in mind for this deliverance: they are destined to receive the Torah upon this mountain at the end of three months" (Rashi, *Shemos* 3:12). In other words, Bnei Yisrael left Egypt in the merit of their future acceptance of the Torah. They received a reward in advance for something they would do in the future.

However, with a transgression, the opposite is true. Even in the case of *avodah zarah*, in which a person is punished for the desire and intention alone, Hakadosh Baruch Hu does not punish him in advance for what he will do in the future. Only after the person actually entertains the sinful thought does Hakadosh Baruch Hu credit it as a deed.

This, then, is the meaning of the *pesukim*: The blessing is given because it is revealed and known before Hashem that *אשר תשמעו* "you will heed," in the future. That alone is sufficient to deserve the blessing. The curse, however, applies only *אם לא תשמעו...* "if you do not heed... and you turn away from the path." Only when they actually turn from the path and entertain the thought of *avodah zarah*, *ללכת לעבוד אלהים אחרים* "To follow other gods", only then does the curse become applicable.

There are therefore two differences in the wording of the *pesukim*. Concerning the blessing, the Torah uses the word *אשר* "that," referring to what will occur in the

future. Also, it does not say "and you will walk upon the path," because they have not yet done so. By contrast, concerning the curse, the Torah uses the word אם "if," meaning only if the transgression actually occurs, and it also says וְסַרְתָּם מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ "and you turn away from the path," because even though the future is known before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, no curse will take effect in advance, as long as they have not actually turned from the path. That much greater is the measure of goodness.

In His great love, Hashem pays our wages in advance!



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