

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Re'eh – Vol. 21, Issue 42

Compiled by Ozer Alport

(אך כאשר יאכל את הצבי ואת האיל כן תאכלנו הטמא והטהור יחדו יאכלנו 12:22)

The Gemara (Chullin 16b) quotes the opinion of Rav Yishmael, who maintains that after the Mishkan was built, the only meat that Bnei Yisroel were permitted to eat for the duration of their sojourn in the wilderness was that of the sacrificial offerings, as slaughtering an animal other than for the purposes of offering it upon the Altar was punishable by spiritual excision (Vayikra 17:3-4).

In Parshas Re'eh, Moshe informed them that after Hashem broadened their borders by bringing them into the promised land of Israel, if they found themselves yearning to eat meat but living far away from the Beis HaMikdash, they would be permitted to ritually slaughter their cattle and sheep to eat their meat. Curiously, Moshe added that they should only eat the meat in the way they eat the deer and the hart. It is difficult to understand the purpose of Moshe's comparison. What message was he attempting to convey in adjuring the Jewish people to eat their beef and lamb in the same way that they eat venison?

The following story will help us understand Moshe's intentions. Many years ago, several bochurim (students) at a yeshiva in Israel for post-high-school Americans had a strong craving for food from Dougie's, a well-known restaurant in New York. Unable to wait until they returned home at the end of the year, they hatched a creative plan to satiate their longings for spicy wings, ribs, and burgers.

They realized that they did not all need to get to the restaurant to savor the succulent meat. Instead, one of them could take everyone's orders, fly to New York to pick up the food, and bring it back to the rest of the boys in Israel. If they split the price of the plane ticket among the entire group, the cost would be quite reasonable. To make it clear that the sole purpose of the trip was to procure food, they stipulated that the one who made the journey was now allowed to go home to visit his family or make any other stops. Not surprisingly, the administration of the yeshiva was quite upset when they learned what had happened.

In light of this episode, we can appreciate the Kli Yakar's answer to our question. He notes that this passage begins (Devarim 12:20) by emphasizing that it applies after Hashem expands their borders and they say, "I will eat meat." This juxtaposition teaches us that a person is only drawn to material pleasures such as meat when he is prosperous, which creates a mindset that enables him to explicitly express his gastronomic desires without feeling embarrassed by his fixation on ephemeral physical pleasure.

The next verse (Ibid., 12:21) stresses that the underlying reason for this spiritual decline is the fact that the person no longer lives near Hashem's chosen dwelling place, and the physical distance from the Shechinah results in a corresponding spiritual distance from Hashem, as manifested by the desire to eat meat solely for personal enjoyment.

Under these new circumstances, Moshe informed the people that they would indeed be permitted to eat meat as long as they slaughtered their animals in accordance with Jewish law. Even so, he cautioned them that this indulgence should not become the focus of their lives, and they should do so only intermittently. He expressed this metaphorically by telling them that they should eat the meat of their cows and sheep as they eat deer and harts.

The Kli Yakar explains that domesticated animals such as cows and sheep are readily available, so one could easily fall into the trap of eating them regularly. Wild animals, on the other hand, are much more difficult to consume, as hunting and capturing them is not always successful, and even when it is, it requires a substantial amount of time and energy and is fraught with great risk. Therefore, the Torah advises us that even though we are now allowed to eat non-sacrificial meat, we should not abuse this

privilege as the yeshiva students did. We should view it in the proper perspective by preserving it for appropriate occasions and maintaining spirituality as the primary focus of our lives.

(עשר תעשר את כל תבואת זרעך 14:22)

In Parshas Re'eh, the Torah commands us to tithe our crops. The Gemara in Taanis (9a) offers a homiletical interpretation of this mitzvah based on the similarity between the Hebrew letters “shin” and “sin,” rendering the words עשר תעשר – you shall surely tithe – as עשר בשביל שתתעשר – tithe, and you will become rich. While the literal understanding of this well-known Talmudic statement seems to present a guarantee of financial success for one who is careful to perform this mitzvah properly, Rav Shimon Schwab suggests an alternative interpretation.

The Gemara in Nedarim (38a) lists four prerequisites for prophecy – strength, wealth, wisdom, and humility. As many prophets were not rich in the traditional sense, the Rambam explains the requirement of wealth as an obligation to be happy with one's lot in life, based on the teaching of the Mishnah in Avos (4:1) איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו – the true definition of wealth is being content with one's portion.

Along these lines, Rav Schwab notes that when a person gives charity, he naturally becomes happier. This does not take place through miraculous means, but because human psychology is such that a person who gives to others appreciates his blessings and becomes content with his lot. When the Gemara promises that somebody who tithes his possessions will become wealthy, it is this form of wealth to which Chazal were referring.

Similarly, the Rema writes (Yoreh Deah 265:11) that a person should not honor the same individual as sandek more than once. He explains that serving as sandek is an exceedingly lofty honor and is compared to offering an incense offering in the Beis HaMikdash, regarding which the Gemara in Yoma (26a) relates that no Kohen was permitted to offer the incense more than once in his life. Because this service contained a special power to bring riches to whoever merited to perform it, nobody was allowed to do so a second time, to allow other Kohanim to share in this unique opportunity.

The Steipler regularly served as sandek at circumcisions, yet he was not materially wealthy by traditional standards. When asked about this apparent discrepancy, the Steipler would point to the numerous well-received seforim that he authored and his world-renowned son Rav Chaim, and explain that wealth comes in many forms, not all of which involve money and physical possessions.

עניה סערה לא נחמה הנה אנכי מרביץ בפור אבניך ויסדתיך בספירים ושמתי כדכד שמשתיך ושעריך לאבני אקדח וכל גבולך לאבני חפץ (ישעי' 54:11-12 – הפטרה)

The Haftorah for Parshas Re'eh is the third of the seven Haftorahs read after Tisha B'Av that contain messages of comfort, and it begins, “Afflicted, storm-tossed one, who has not been consoled: Behold, I will set down gems as your floor stones and lay your foundation with sapphires. I will make your windows of rubies and your gates of garnets, and your entire boundary of precious stones.” Hashem informs us that after all the affliction and travails that we have endured, He will comfort us by placing valuable stones and precious gems in our foundations, floors, and windows.

The Gemara (Bava Basra 75a) records that upon hearing Rav Yochanan expound upon this topic, one of his students wondered how Hashem can find pearls and gems large enough to create walls and windows. The Gemara concludes that this student was killed as punishment for his disbelief in the words of our sages. The Haftorah's message of consolation and the related story recounted in the Gemara are difficult to understand. What is the significance of buildings made of valuable jewels, and what was the underlying cause of the student's skepticism?

In his sefer Iyun Tefillah (pg. 364-5), Rav Shimon Schwab discusses the nature of these precious stones, and he explains that each gem is a Jewish prayer for Moshiach and the ultimate redemption. Every time that we beseech Hashem to rescue us from this bitter exile, our prayer adds to the rubies and sapphires of the eventual rebuilding of Yerushalayim.

Similarly, at the end of Parshas Mishpatim, the Torah records (Shemos 24:9-10) that Hashem appeared at Mount Sinai with sapphire brickwork under His feet. What were these sapphires? The prayers of the Jewish people for redemption from Egypt. When Rav Yochanan's student heard this idea, he incredulously wondered how it is possible that our prayers possess the ability to rebuild the Beis HaMikdash, and it was for the grave, unforgivable offense of questioning the potency of heartfelt Jewish prayers that he was deserving of the death penalty.

On a deeper level, Rav Yisroel Reisman adds that these supposedly "precious" stones – rubies, sapphires, and pearls – actually possess no inherent worth. Intrinsically, they are all useless rocks. The only reason that they are prized and desirable is that we have mentally decided to ascribe value to them because many people enjoy wearing them as jewelry.

The concept of prayer works similarly. Merely uttering words cannot change anything; the power of prayer comes from the mental concentration and fervor that we invest in our pleas. Therefore, Hashem approaches the storm-tossed and seemingly inconsolable Jewish nation and informs them that He will personally console them through promises of ruby windows. How does this message cheer us up? Is our yearning for Moshiach due to our desire for ruby windows?

Rav Reisman explains that the consolation is the knowledge that every prayer and every sigh that we utter in exile has value and ascends to Heaven, where they are transformed into precious stones that come together to form the foundation and structure of the ultimate rebuilding of Yerushalayim, may it be speedily in our days.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources that discuss them):

- 1) The Torah warns us in Parshas Re'eh (Devarim 13:2-6) not to be persuaded by a false navi (prophet) to abandon Hashem. Which four people in the Torah are referred to as a navi? (Parsha Challenge)
- 2) The Torah prescribes a harsh punishment in the case of one's maternal brother who attempts to entice him to worship idolatry (13:7-11). Why does the verse specifically refer to a maternal brother more than to a paternal brother? (Daas Z'keinim, Paneiach Raza)

Answers to Points to Ponder:

1) In Parshas Vayeira (Bereishis 20:7), Hashem commanded Avimelech to return Sorah to Avrohom, adding that Avrohom was a prophet who would pray on his behalf. In Parshas Vaeira (Shemos 7:1), Hashem told Moshe that He had made him a master over Pharaoh, and his brother Aharon would be his navi (spokesman). After the men finished singing Shiras Hayam (the Song at the Sea) in Parshas Beshalach, Miriam the prophet took a drum in her hand and led the women in song and dance (Ibid., 15:20). After Moshe's death in Parshas V'zos HaBeracha, the Torah testifies (Devarim 34:10) that there has never arisen a navi like Moshe, to whom Hashem spoke face to face.

2) The **Daas Z'keinim** and **Paneiach Raza** explain that maternal brothers are more likely to love one another because they were born from the same womb, and therefore the Torah warns that it is forbidden to listen even to such a close and beloved relative. Additionally, paternal brothers are more likely to be jealous and distant from one another because they must split their father's inheritance between them, which is not a concern with maternal brothers, as women generally do not inherit possessions and therefore do not typically have large estates to bequeath.