

PARSHAT RE'EH

21-27 Av 5784
25-31 August 2024

Torah: Duet. 11:26-16:27
Hajf Torah: Isaiah 54:11-55:5

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms Daily
Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Pirkei Avot (6:5)

“Do not seek greatness for yourself, and do not lust for honor. More than you study, do. Desire not the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs, and faithful is your Employer (G-d) to pay you the rewards of your work.”

Jews with a Heart Condition

If you use Yiddish expressions in conversation and can tell a great Jewish joke, but you never daven; if your friends are all proudly Jewish but none of them keep kosher; if you've got Jewish-themed wall hangings in your house, but you hardly ever step foot in a shul, can you honestly be described as Jewishly engaged?

At our weekly coffee and discussion group, we somehow wandered onto the topic of performance versus feeling, theory pitted against practice. The question was whether it's enough to feel deeply, passionately, and proudly about being Jewish, while not doing all that much on a regular basis, or do you have to do mitzvahs to be counted as a full member of the tribe?

At the time I attempted to diffuse the tension by cracking the old joke that people who claim to have a 'Jewish heart,' can more properly be described as 'Jews with a heart condition,' but in truth, I was torn. Over the course of my career I've met so many truly wonderful people, who, while not observant in the classical sense, are proud and passionate about Judaism and care deeply about Jewish causes.

Contrast them with those people who don't seem to believe in anything but go through the motions out of habit or inertia. We've all met people who walk the walk and talk the talk but are hollow on the inside. Which is worse, feeling Jewish without doing, or actions devoid of belief? Of course they're both not kosher. A good Jew will mean what he says and say what he means. A sincere individual will continue working on himself until his actions and thoughts

are both in sync. But which way shows more promise?

Perhaps we can attempt to tease out a lesson from the non-kosher animals described in the Torah. There are two signs of a kosher animal: cud chewing and split hooves. Kosher animals have both, and most non-kosher ones have neither.

Chewing the cud is emblematic of belief. The food one eats becomes the stimuli that are integrated into one's consciousness; you are what you eat. The cloven hooves, by contrast, symbolize hands and feet, the deeds that one does. A truly kosher animal will possess both characteristics; actions and beliefs operating in sync in the service of G-d.

There are four non-kosher animals that possess one of the signs of kashrut without the other. The camel, hyrax, and hare chew their cud, while the pig has split hooves. Interestingly enough, we are told that the non-kosher status of the pig is not necessarily permanent. In the time of the final Redemption, pigs will begin to chew their cud and their status will change to kosher. The difference between a pig and the other three animals is that the pig has 'kosher' limbs; in contrast to the others who ruminate about doing the right thing, yet ultimately do nothing. At the present time, neither is kosher. A good Jew must think as well as do, act as well as believe. Yet, actions without intention trump belief without observance. If you do the right thing long enough, eventually you may come to believe as well, whereas one trapped in the empty fog of positive feelings, without a commensurate commitment to positive action, may well get stuck in the mire of indecision forever.

By Elisha Greenbaum

Appreciate Your Blessings

Who is wise, and who is foolish? Who is rich, and who is poor?

Who is healthy, and who is sick? Who is happy, and who is sad?

Not easy questions to answer. Everything is, of course, relative. More importantly, it all depends on our perspective. Parshat Re'eh begins with the words: "See, I give you this day a blessing and a curse." The Sages understand this to mean that how we see will determine what we see. Whether your life is a blessing or a curse can depend more on your own perspective than on the hard realities on the ground.

I think of the people of the Ukraine today. Those who are still living there and those who managed to get out with one or two suitcases in which to pack up all their life's possessions. Can we even begin to imagine the hardships they are enduring? What about our own grandparents or great-grandparents who left Eastern Europe for the shores of the New World? Many of them came with not much more than the shirts on their backs, and they had to start from scratch just to survive. In comparison, our lives are an absolute breeze. Even those of us who may be suffering financial pressures are living lives of luxury compared to them.

There is a Hebrew proverb that "the troubles of the many are half a comfort." The idea is that although times may be tough, the fact that many others are going through similar difficulties somehow eases our pain.

It reminds me of a rather curious comment made to me once by one of my congregants who began attending shul



regularly to say Kaddish after the loss of his mother.

"Rabbi, I must tell you, I am finding coming to shul very comforting."

"That's nice to hear," I responded. "Is it the serenity of the synagogue, or perhaps the power of prayer that you find comforting?"

"No," he said. "Just seeing that there are other people who have to say Kaddish too makes me feel better."

Indeed, "the troubles of many are half a comfort."

And another incident occurred some years ago when we were distributing jackets for underprivileged people living in the inner city without shelter or warm clothing. A generous congregant had donated several boxes of jackets and asked me to distribute them to the needy as winter was approaching. They were probably minimally damaged in one way or another, but they still could have been sold. In kindness, however, he chose to donate them to the destitute instead.

I joined forces with a number of dedicated welfare workers, and one

morning we announced that the jackets would be made available on a "first come first served" basis. Hundreds of people lined up outside and filed by, one by one, to receive their jackets.

What can I say? You think we made those poor people warm by giving them the jackets? I tell you, we were the ones left with the very warm feeling of having helped bring comfort and cheer to our fellow human beings. Their big smiles and appreciation were absolutely heartwarming.

And, boy, did that encounter give us perspective. Whatever problems we may be facing, we are absolutely affluent and privileged compared to thousands of cold, often homeless people.

I conclude by sharing a few lines I found by an unknown author. You may have come across these words before, but they are worth repeating because they certainly provide perspective.

"If you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head, and a place to sleep, you are richer than 75% of the world.

"If you have money in the bank, your wallet, and some spare change, you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy. "If you woke up this morning with more health than illness, you are more blessed than the millions of people who will not survive this week.

"If you have never experienced the danger of battle, the agony of imprisonment or torture, or the horrible pangs of starvation, you are luckier than 750 million people alive and suffering.

"If you can read this message, you are more fortunate than 3 billion people in the world who cannot read at all."

We will all be far happier and realize how much we have to be grateful for, if we know how to see the blessing, rather than the curse. By developing perspective in life, we learn how to count our blessings. Only then do we realize how truly blessed we really are, and how truly happy we can be.

"See, I give you this day a blessing..."

By Yossy Goldman

Elul: The King in the Field

As the last month of the Jewish year, Elul is traditionally a time of introspection and stocktaking - a time to review one's deeds and spiritual progress over the past year and prepare for the upcoming "Days of Awe" of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur.

As the month of Divine Mercy and Forgiveness, it is a most opportune time for Teshuvah ("return" to G-d), prayer, charity, and increased Ahavat Yisrael (love for a fellow Jew) in the quest for self-improvement and coming closer to G-d. The first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, likens the month of Elul to a time when "the King (G-d) is in the field" and, in contrast to when He

is in the royal palace, "everyone who so desires is permitted to meet Him, and he receives them all with a cheerful countenance and shows a smiling face to them all."

Specific Elul customs include the daily sounding of the shofar (ram's horn) as a call to repentance. The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, instituted the custom of reciting three additional chapters of Psalms each day, starting from the 1st of Elul until Yom Kippur (on Yom Kippur the remaining 36 chapters are recited, thereby completing the entire book of Psalms).

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Monday, August 26, 2024-22 Av, 5784

Passing of R. Mordechai ben Hillel (1298)

R. Mordechai ben Hillel was a prominent scholar who lived in Nuremberg, Germany. He authored a famous halachic compendium known as Mordechai, included in all standard printings of the Talmud. R. Mordechai, his wife, and five children were killed in the notorious Rindfleisch massacres, on 22 Menachem Av, 5058 (1298).

Wednesday, August 28, 2024-24 Av, 5784
Hasmonean Holiday (circa 100 BCE)

The Hasmoneans reinstated the rule of Jewish civil law in the Land of Israel,

replacing Hellenist secular law, and declared this day a holiday

Friday, August 30, 2024-26 Av, 5784

Passing of R. Yoel Teitelbaum (1979)

R. Yoel Teitelbaum was the founding rebbe of the Satmar Chassidic dynasty, named after the town of Satmar (or Satu Mare) in what is today northwestern Romania. After World War II, he relocated to the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, where he continued to lead his thousands of followers. He passed away on 26 Menachem Av, 5739 (1979).

Shabbat, August 31, 2024-27 Av, 5784

Passing of R. Yehoshua of Cracow (1648)

R. Yehoshua was one of the leading Polish scholars of his day and was held in great reverence by his contemporaries. He led a Talmudic academy in Cracow which attracted many noteworthy disciples (such as R. Shabtai HaKohen, the Shach). R. Yehoshua authored Maginei Shlomo, devoted to answering the difficulties raised by the Tosafist scholars against Rashi in his Talmud commentary. He also authored a collection of halachic responsa titled Pnei Yehoshua. He passed away on 27 Av in 1648.