

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה

“See, I give before you today a blessing and a curse...” (11:26)

The *Vilna Gaon* points out that the Torah uses the present tense – נתן – rather than the past tense – נתתי. Man should never think that his choice to follow the good path “freezes” him in that mode, and neither should he think that if he chooses evil, he is set in that mode for life with no option for return. The Torah teaches us that the choice between good and evil exists at all times. It *is* given to you, not it *was* given to you.

Man must never say to himself, “I never can rectify all of the evil that I have done,” or “I cannot possibly atone for all of the sins that I committed.” At every moment in life, the choice to do good *is given* to man. One who repents is considered to be like a newborn child, provided that he has indeed repented and abandoned sin. (*Torah Anthology*)

הלא המה בעבר הירדן

“They are located on the other bank of the Jordan.” (11:30)

Ba'al HaTurim observes that *Moshe* had to give directions to the people so that they would know where to find the mountains where the blessings and curses would be pronounced. Throughout their sojourn in the desert, the people had been led by the Clouds of Glory. These clouds had appeared in the merit of *Aharon* and disappeared when he died. Interestingly, the letters at the end of the words הלא המה בעבר הירדן spell out the name אהרן. (*Ba'al HaTurim*)

והניח לכם מכל איביכם מסביב וישבתם בטח

“And He will give you rest from all your enemies all around, and you will dwell securely.” (12:10)

The *Gelilei Zahav* comments that while these two phrases, referring to rest from one's enemies and security, may appear redundant, in truth they are not. Resting from one's enemies, rather than being synonymous with dwelling in safety, is a *result* of the latter. If we dwell securely, harmoniously, and respectfully with our fellow Jews, we will have nothing to fear from the enemies around us. Our sages tell us that if the Jewish nation would live in harmony, no other nation could rise against us. (*Kol Dodi*)

“After G-d, your L-rd, you shall go...” (13:5)

The *Chafetz Chaim* once asked *Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter of Ger* the following question: Why does the verse state “*acharei*” – after – a term that implies separation and distance? Are we not instructed to cleave to G-d and try to be as *close* to Him as possible?

The *Alter* answered that the more that one recognizes G-d’s greatness and his own worthiness, the more he realizes how far he is from G-d. Only after recognizing the initial distance that separates him from G-d can anyone even start to come “closer.” (*Chafetz Chaim*)

פתח תפתח את ידך לאחיר לעניך ולאבינך בארצך

“You shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your destitute in your Land.” (15:11)

The need for repeating this thought (see v. 8) may be understood in light of what the Talmud teaches: poverty is one of three things which in excess can make a person lose his mind and his awareness of Hashem (*Eruvin* 41b).

The *Medrash* tells us that when the *Satan* was allowed to confront and challenge *Iyov*, he asked him whether he preferred physical ordeals or poverty. *Iyov* replied that he would prefer to take upon himself all the ordeals in the world, but not poverty. He feared poverty might cause him to lose his faith in G-d. (*Yalkut*)

Rosh Chodesh Elul

On the second day of *Rosh Chodesh*, which is the first day of *Elul*, it is customary to blow the *shofar* after *Shacharit*. This practice was instituted in remembrance of the *shofar* blasts that we sounded on *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, when *Moshe* ascended *Har Sinai* to receive the second *luchot*. The *shofar* was sounded so that the people should not miscalculate the date of his ascent and come to sin as they did with the Golden Calf, by the first *luchot*. It is sounded after *Shacharit* the entire month of *Elul* in order to arouse people to repent before the Days of Judgment.

(*Rabbi Dovid Feinstein*)

SHABBAT SHALOM!

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