

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 David 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.

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Ruvane & Stephanie Vilinsky in memory of Tzvi Ben Yakov & Shimon Ben Pinchus z"l**

ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה

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

Hashem employs the singular form "re'eh" to emphasize that although the Torah is given to the public, it is each individual Jew's responsibility to fulfil the whole of it.

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra explains Moshe's speaking to Bnei Yisrael in the singular form "re'eh" to stress the fact that amending the public depends on the amendment of the individual first. The Torah thus turns to the people and says: "if you want to be in a proper society, go out and correct yourself!" Consequently, the word "re'eh" stipulates – look and understand that every deed that you do, be it a good or bad deed, will bring to the world either a blessing or a curse!

והקללה אם לא תשמעו אל מצות ה' אלקיכם וסרתם מן הדרך

"And the curse; if you do not hearken to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, and you stray from the path..." (11:28)

Why is the threat of the curse given with an added qualification of "...but turn aside out of the way," while the promise of the blessing carries no other prerequisite than "if you shall hearken?" Since Hashem regards even the good intentions as equal to the deed, even "hearkening" in itself, without the actual performance of the good deed, is rewarded by a blessing. Evil intentions, however, are not judged as evil deeds in themselves. Therefore, the curse does not come as soon as you "do not hearken," but only after you have actually "turned aside, out of the way which I commanded you this day."
(Be'er Mayim Chaim)

כי פתח תפתח את ידך לו

"Rather, you shall open your hand to him..." (15:8)

The Chafetz Chaim was not at all comfortable with introducing changes in the traditional customs of our people and was very critical of towns and cities that required the poor to apply for help from the community fund and forbade them from knocking on doors. He commented: "How will these people educate their children in the mitzvah of tzedakah?"

When speaking of those who make the sum total of their Yiddishkeit just one mitzvah – the mitzvah of tzedakah – he once commented that gentiles, too, give tzedakah. Did Hashem have to choose the Jewish People out of all the other nations because of the mitzvah of tzedakah?

Tzedakah is only one of the many mitzvot that every Jew must fulfill!
(Chafetz Chaim)

נתון תתן...כי בגלל הדבר הזה יברכך ה' אלקיך בכל מעשיך

“You shall surely give...because for this thing Hashem will bless you in all your work...” (15:10)

Rashi comments even a hundred times. The question arises: Is it better to give 1,000 gold pieces to one poor man or 1,000 gold pieces to 1,000 poor people. The *Rambam* replies that it is better to distribute 1,000 gold pieces to 1,000 poor people. Giving a one-time donation happens once. But when a person gives a thousand times, the person grows accustomed to the act of giving until it becomes a habit. An individual then has no regrets and when he gives and will do so with joy and generosity.

(*Otzar Chaim*)

ושמחת בחגך

“And you shall rejoice on your festival...” (16:14)

In the Torah, two verses mention the *simcha* imperative on the holiday of *Sukkot*: “You shall make yourself the Festival of *Sukkot* for seven days, when you gather in the produce from your threshing floor and your vat. And you shall rejoice in your Festival...” (16:13-14) and “You shall rejoice before you G-d for a seven-day period” (*Vayikra* 23:40). Why are there two separate verses to legislate the same *mitzvah*?

The phrase in the first verse, “*V’Samachta B’chagecha*,” refers to the specifics of the *mitzvah* as discussed in the *Gemara*: the obligation to eat meat, drink wine, wear *Yom Tov* finery, and distribute treats to children (*Pesachim* 109a). This *mitzvah* reflects the circumstances of the Jew in the land of Israel during Biblical times. His grain silo, his wine cellar and his olive press were full. He and his family would have plentiful provisions for the coming year. His rejoicing and gratitude to G-d were instinctive, thus the use of the second person possessive: “*And you shall rejoice in your Festival.*” The holiday is indeed his. The distinctive American holiday of Thanksgiving is modeled after *Sukkot*. It encompasses this spontaneous rejoicing as well: the instinctive gratitude upon experiencing plenty.

(*Rav Soloveitchik*)

וכל בניך למודי ה' ורב שלום בניך

“And all your children will be students of Hashem, and abundant will be your children’s peace...” (Haftarah *Re’eh*: *Yeshayahu* 54:13)

According to our Sages, Jerusalem was destroyed because “*they neglected the education of school children* (*Shabbat* 119). The people did not take the time to study the Law with their children. Another reason for the fall of Jerusalem was that its inhabitants harbored feelings of hatred for one another without just cause (*Yoma* 9). Therefore, when G-d wishes to comfort His people and to assure them of redemption, He promises that the evils which brought about the destruction of Jerusalem will be eliminated. “*All your children will be students of Hashem,*” we are promised. All the children in Israel will study the Law, and “*abundant will be your children’s peace,*” where peace and harmony shall prevail in your midst.

(*Rabbi Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai*)

SHABBAT SHALOM!

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