

RED ALERT! R'EI

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DIVREI TORAH

- “See (singular), I am giving to you (all, plural) today a Blessing and a Curse” (11:26). Many commentators write about the change in person. Why does Hashem address Himself at first to each individual Jew and then immediately refer to them as a collective group? The Vilna Gaon states that each person should see himself as pivotal: being able to tip the scales of good and bad for the entire nation. He should view himself as essential in the bigger picture when Hashem judges the collective nation of Israel. The Chatam Sofer also hits upon this point: See, each individual should realize his importance in the broader view. Each day, a person has to decide and choose how he should conduct himself. In Pirkei Avot (2:5), Hillel the Elder said: Don’t be so sure of yourself until the day you die.” Hillel cautions each person not to rely on your past; you have to confront your temptation each day. The road to a Blessing and the road to a Curse are in front of us each day of our lives. We decide each day anew.
- Moshe emphasizes the necessity of ridding Canaan of all its idolatry: the idols themselves and the apparatus

associated with the worship of idols. After fighting with Canaanites, it is necessary to expel them from Canaan. Bnei Yisrael will live in their cities and homes, and then confront the task of destroying whatever exists that was involved with idol worship. The fear was that Jews would become influenced by the idol worship of the non-Jews or any vestiges of their religion that would be left behind. Unfortunately it didn’t happen the way that was planned. The Canaanites were defeated, but the Jews were not able to expel them from the Land. The Canaanites remained and continued their idol worship. And they influenced the Jewish people to accept their idolatry. When the Greeks invaded and conquered Eretz Yisrael, many Jews became Hellenized. Yes, some Jews were able to remain strong in their Jewish faith. Consistently throughout our history, outsiders were able to win over many Jews, including in America.

- I mentioned recently about why Hashem does not name Yerushalayim as the capital city, home of the Holy Temple. The source to my previous comments was the the Rambam’s Guide for the Perplexed 3:45. The special place was known to Avraham who foresaw it in prophecy as Mt. Moriya. And it was known to Moshe who referred to it as the place where Hashem will choose. The Rambam

gives three reasons why the Torah is not specific in identifying the place: The non-Jews would fight over possession of the hilltop. Secondly the non-Jews might want to destroy the place entirely. And thirdly, and most importantly, that if mentioned, the Jewish tribes would fight over who gets it in their possession. I would add that when King David asked to identify it, it was presented to him as a riddle. He was told that the Holy Temple would straddle the border between two tribes. King David had to determine that it would be in the tribal section of Binyamin, straddling the border with the tribe of Yehuda.

- The details concerning Mitzvot are sacred. Just as one does not add a detail to a work of Mozart or to a painting by Van Gogh, so too do we not embellish or detract from a divine Mitzva. Twice in the Torah does the Torah state this prohibition. The first time is in D'varim 4:2, when Moshe tells us not to add or subtract from any Mitzva. And now in this Parsha, Moshe repeats the prohibition within the context of imitating religious rituals of other people. The Netziv wrote a Responsum to a Rav in the United States. The question was about a celebration involving the inauguration of a new Sefer Torah. During the festivities, it is common practice to take out the existing Torahs from the Ark and allow them

to receive the new Torah by dancing with them all. The questioner was taken aback by taking out the Torahs to dance and not to read from one of them. He was asking why shouldn't we read from one of them. It was a festive occasion on a Sunday morning. The Netziv wrote it would be inappropriate to read from the Torah on a Sunday because it was a Christian practice to publicly worship on Sunday morning. It would be adding to the Mitzva by imitating a non-Jewish ritual.

- Our Sages teach us that we are not permitted to erase the name of Hashem, which includes all seven names that are used in the Torah: the YUD-HEI-VAV-HEI name, Ado-nai, Ei-l, Elo-ah, Elo-him, Shad-dai, and Tziva-ot. The Rogachobi Gaon, Rabbi Yosef Rozin, conducted himself in a stringent fashion in this matter. Whereas people normally wrote Baruch HaShem atop a written paper, he would not do it, for fear of violating this law. In contrast to this, the Gerer Rebbe would write B"H on every sheet he wrote, to justify that this was not a violation. Years ago, I got into the habit of writing BS"D which stands for "With the help of Heaven" atop my written sheets. I wished to avoid the whole matter and yet acknowledge that this was an issue.

- The Torah states that we should not

cut ourselves... because of a dead person. This was a common practice in the non-Jewish world at that time. The Ramban commented that the Torah did not prohibit one from crying at the time of experiencing the loss of a loved one. This is a natural and normal reaction. When the two sons of Aharon died during the festive celebration of the inauguration of the Mishkan, he was complimented by exhibiting control when Aharon was silent when confronted with his monumental loss. There the Ramban wrote that Aharon was quiet, but was crying over his loss. An excessive mournful response would be inappropriate, but crying is expected and normal. Human beings need to express our emotions; this is positive and normal. At a Shiva visit decades ago, I was visiting a friend who lost his single, 37 year old brother. Everyone was crying when a 7 year old nephew asked poignantly: why are you crying. My father taught me that all that Hashem does is good. So why are you crying when Hashem took away Uncle Yitzchak. His father immediately responded "I am not crying because Hashem took Uncle Yitzchak. I am crying because I will miss Uncle Yitzchak."

- Moshe reviews the kashrut laws of identifying which animals, fish, and poultry are kosher and which are not. But it was not a simple process. Here the Torah will actually name ten

kosher animals, besides repeating to us the symbols of kashrut for each. For all that the Torah does to be explicit in teaching us what we need to know, then why are we not able to clearly understand the identity of each animal and bird. We also have problems in identifying each fish. Is the giraffe really kosher? It depends: is it the Zemer that is mentioned in 14:5? When my wife and I were in Santiago, Chile, we saw a strange fish. It looked like a big ugly eel. The Chilean Jewish community sent it to Israel and to Rabbi Heinemann in Baltimore. Both sources agreed that it truly was a kosher fish. (I wouldn't eat it: too ugly!). But here we are in the 21st century and still not able to clearly identify what the Torah states. Take a look at the Artscroll Chumash. They do not translate these animals into English because they admit that we are not sure.

- MIDRASH. D'varim Rabba 4:5. The Rabbis say: You find occasions when a man listened to his wife and lost thereby, and when a man listened to his wife and profited thereby. For example, Adam listened to his wife and lost thereby. Adam listened to his wife and ate the forbidden fruit. Rabbi Yitzchak said: This is compared to a king who said to his servant: "Do not taste any food until I return from my bath. The king's wife said to the servant: Taste the dish so that the king will not need to add salt or

sauce. The king returned and saw his servant smacking his lips. The servant said that the king's wife gave it to him. The king exclaimed: And you listened to my wife instead of listening to me! And Adam was punished. The case of a man who profited by listening to his wife was Avraham who listened to his wife when she proposed he marry an additional wife when she was barren. And Avraham also listened to his wife when she told him to expel Yishmael (with Hashem's orders).

Questions by RED

From the text

1. On which mountains will the B'rachot be said? And the Curses? (11:29)
2. What must be done to places of idol worship? (12:2)
3. What kosher signs are there for a) animals, b) fish, and c) birds? (ch. 14)
4. What special sacrifices are brought on Pesach? (16:1-6)
5. What special Mitzva do we have on Yom Tov?

From Rashi

6. Why did Hashem create a miracle to cross the Jordan River? (11:31)
7. How were Bnei Yisrael allowed to eat meat in the desert? (12:20)

8. Why would Hashem allow a false prophet to perform a miracle? (13:2)

9. Why are the verbs for giving Tz'daka written twice in the verse? As in NATON TITEIN? (15:10)

10. The Torah states that Bnei Yisrael left Egypt at night (16:1). But they left at midday the next day. Explain.

From the Rabbis

11. What forms of Ma'aser are given in the 7 years of a Sh'mita cycle?

12. What is the only type of bird that is called a TZIPOR in Hebrew? (Ha'amek Davar)

13. Why is there no mention of Rosh HaShana or Yom Kippur in the list of holidays at the end of this Parsha? (Ramban)

Midrash

14. What is the common trait of a forbidden animal and bird?

Haftara - Yishayahu

15. Why will non-Jewish nations come to praise Israel?

Relationships

- a) Basmat - Yishmael
- b) Avraham - Midiyan
- c) Nachshon - Elazar
- d) Boaz - Oved
- e) Levi - Yocheved

ANSWERS

1. B'rachot on Mt. G'rizim. Curses on Mt. Eival.
2. They must be destroyed.
3. a) animals must have split hooves and chew their cud. b) Fish must have fins and scales. c) birds must not be on the non-kosher list in the Torah.
4. The Pesach sacrifice and the Chagiga.
5. Simcha
6. To give a sign to Bnei Yisrael that as they will cross the River easily, so they will be able to conquer Canaan with ease.
7. Only if they brought a Sh'lamim (peace offering) sacrifice, then they could eat that meat.
8. To test Bnei Yisrael if they would follow him.
9. To tell us that we should repeatedly give to a person, even if they ask repeatedly.
10. Pharaoh gave them permission to leave during the night before.
11. Years 1, 2, 4, and 5: Ma'aser Rishon and Sheini. Years 3 and 6: Ma'aser Rishon and Ma'aser, Ani (to the poor). Year 7: no Ma'aser.
12. A kosher bird.
13. There is no pilgrimage to Yerushalayim for those two holidays.

14. They are all predators, scavengers, or cruel.

15. Because Hashem glorified Israel, during Messianic times.

Relationships

- a) Daughter & Father
- b) Father & Son (from Ketura)
- c) Uncle & Nephew
- d) Father & Son
- e) Father & Daughter