

**Wembley Synagogue**

רָאָה

**Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Re'eh**

רָאָה אָנֹכִי יְתֹן לְפָנֶיכֶם - Behold, I have placed before you today a blessing and a curse; the blessing that you shall listen and the curse if you will not listen. (11:26) The Torah presents two options in this verse: a blessing that comes from listening to the Torah's mitzvot or a curse that comes from not listening to the Torah. It is noteworthy that these are the only two alternatives presented, that there is no middle ground between "listening" and "not listening" to the Torah. Once someone veers away slightly from "the blessing that you shall listen", he has already placed himself under "the curse if you will not listen" (Source: Sforno quoted in Ma'ayana shel Torah)

וְהִקְלָלָה אִם לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ - And the curse, if you shall not listen to the commandment of Hashem your G-d but turn aside out of the way (11:28)

Why is the threat of the curse given with an added qualification, "but turn aside out of the way," while the promise of the blessing carries no other prerequisite than "if you shall listen?" This is because Hashem regards even good intention as equal to the deed. Accordingly, even "listening" in itself without the actual performance of the good deed, is rewarded by a blessing. Evil intentions, on the other hand, are not judged as evil deeds in themselves. Therefore, the curse does not come as soon as you "do not listen" but only after you have actually "turned aside, out of the way that I command you this day." (Source: Ma'ayna Shel Torah)

The Gemara in Kiddushin 40a states that Hashem rewards a person for merely intending to do a mitzvah, but does not punish a person for intending to sin- with one exception. Idol worship is punishable for the mere intent. This endangers a novel explanation of the pesukim. Hashem says that He will bless the Jewish people for "listening" to His laws. This means that even if they listen i.e. intend to perform the mitzvot, but ultimately are not able to perform them, they will still be blessed. But the curse for "not listening" will only befall them even if they only intend to "follow gods of others", i.e. worship idols. Only that sin warrants punishment for mere intent. (Source: Tiferet Yehonasan quoted in Shabbos Delights)

הֵלֵא הַמָּה בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן - They are located on the other bank of the Jordan (11:30)

The Baal Haturim observes that Moshe had to give directions to the people so that they would know where to find the mountains where their blessings and curses would be pronounced. Throughout their sojourn in the desert, the people had been led by 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 הֵלֵא הַמָּה בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן spell out the name אהרן (Source: The Parsha Anthology)

אֲבָד תִּאבְדֹּן אֶת כָּל הַמְקוֹמוֹת - You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations that you will drive away worshipped their gods. On the high mountains and on the hills... You shall not do this to G-d, your G-d (12:2-4) Who would think that we should destroy Hashem's property just as we destroy property associated with idol worship? The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 45b) says that the *halachah* which forbids a Jew from deriving any benefit from an idol refers to one placed on top of a mountain and worshipped, but not a mountain or hill which was itself worshipped as an idol. This is derived by joining the end of one *pasuk* to the beginning of the next and reading the words "*eloheim al heharim*" as one phrase, meaning "their gods on the mountains" and not "the mountains [worshipped as] their gods."

However, even though it is permissible to have *personal* pleasure from the mountain, nevertheless, "You shall not do this to G-d your G-d" — for Hashem's purposes, such as the construction of an altar, it is forbidden to use stones chiselled out of such a mountain (see Rambam *Isurei Mizbei'ach* 4:7).

וְהַחֲסִידָה וְהַחֲסִידָה - The *chasidah*, and the *anafah* according to its kind. (14:18)

The bird is called "*chasidah*" because it does *chesed* — kindness — and shares its food with its friends. The Jerusalem Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 3:5) states that a mouse is wicked because when it sees a pile of grain it calls its friends to eat from it.

Why is the bird's act considered *chesed* — kindness — and the mouse's considered *rishut* — wickedness? The *chasidah* shares the food it gathered for herself, with friends. To share

one's *own* property with others is praiseworthy. The mouse, however, calls its friends to enjoy someone else's pile of grain. Being generous with what belongs to someone else is not kindness at all, but the reverse.

עָשֵׂר תְּעָשֵׂר - You shall tithe (14:22)

The verse instructs us to give a tenth to charity. Some may think that giving charity is not mandatory, that it is a nice thing to do and that one who refuses to do so is not a bad person. The opposite of עָשֵׂר is רָשָׁע (wicked) (Source: R' Dovid Feinstein)

There is a *Midrash* which links this *pasuk* (14:22) to the *pasuk*, "*Im hasemol ve'eiminah ve'im hayamin ve'asme'ilah*" — "If you go left then I will go right, and if you go right then I will go left" (*Bereishit* 13:8). What is the connection between these two *pesukim*? In the *alef-beit*, the *shin* and the *sin* are identical except for the position of the dot on the top. If the dot is placed on the right side, it is read as a "*shin*" and if the dot is placed on the left it is read as a "*sin*." Thus, when the letter *shin* is placed between the letters *ayin* and *reish*, if the dot on top is on the right, it spells the word *asheir* "rich" and if the dot is placed above on the left, it spells the word *aseir* "a tithe." In a play on the words "*aseir te'aseir*" — "you shall tithe" — the *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 9a) says, "*Aseir bishevil shetitasheir*" — "Give '*ma'aseir*' — 'a tithe' and Hashem will reciprocate by making you '*asheir*' — 'rich.'" The *Midrash*, in quoting the *pasuk* "*Im hasemol ve'eiminah ve'im hayamin ve'asme'ilah*," is alluding to this thought. It is telling us that, "*im hasemol*" — if a person will read the word with the dot on the left side — "*aseir*" — "give a tithe" — then "*ve'eiminah*" — Hashem will put the dot on the right side and the person will merit "*te'asheir*" — "to become rich." However, "*ve'im hayamin*" — if one puts the dot on the right side and thinks that "*asheir*" — one becomes richer by keeping it all for one's self and not giving *tzedakah* to the needy, then, G-d forbid, "*ve'asme'ilah*" — Hashem will put the dot on the left side and decree that "*te'aseir*" — the formerly rich person will remain with only a tithe of his wealth. (Source: *Vedibarta Bam*)

לֹא תִאַמְצָן אֶת לִבְךָ - You shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. (15:7) The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 29b) equates a miser to a mouse lying on a pile of coins. What is the meaning of this comparison?

When a mouse lies upon flour it feels comfortable and has food to nibble on. When it lies on loaves of bread or stalks of wheat, although it is not comfortable, at least it enjoys eating. A mouse lying upon coins is both uncomfortable and hungry. Thus, our sages are telling us that a miser, like a mouse lying on a pile of coins, renders his wealth useless since it benefits neither himself nor anyone else.

וְנָתַן תְּתִיב לּוֹ - You shall surely give him... for in return for this matter, G-d, your G-d, will bless you." (15:10) The *Gemara* (*Bava Batra* 11a) tells us a story about Binyamin *HaTzaddik*, who was a supervisor of the charity fund. One day a woman came to him in a year of scarcity, and said to him: 'Rabbi, assist me.' He replied, 'I swear, there is not a penny in the charity fund.' She said, 'Rabbi, if you do not assist me, a woman and her seven children will perish.' He then assisted her out of his own pocket. Some time afterwards he became dangerously ill. The angels addressed Hashem saying: "Sovereign of the Universe, You had said that he who preserves one soul of Israel is considered as if he had preserved the whole world; shall then Binyamin *HaTzaddik* who had preserved a woman and her seven children die at so early an age? Immediately his sentence was torn up. It has been taught that twenty-two years were added to his life. Why was he granted *twenty-two* additional years of life? The *Gemara* (*ibid.* 9b) says that for giving *tzedakah* to a poor man one receives six blessings and for saying a comforting word which helps him endure his unfortunate situation, one receives an additional five blessings (see *Tosafot* *ibid.*). A blessing from Heaven is a *zechut* — a source of merit — which is chalked up on one's account. Consequently, Binyamin *HaTzaddik*, who helped the unfortunate woman and her seven children financially and undoubtedly offered words of encouragement, earned eighty eight *berachot*, which is eighty eight *zechutim* — merits. The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 20b) says that a *zechut* can extend a person's life for three months. Thus, for the eighty-eight merits he acquired by helping this unfortunate family, he gained two hundred and sixty-four months of life, which add up to exactly twenty-two years.

### Shabbat Shalom



**Shabbat starts 8.00pm**



**Shabbat ends: 9.24pm**

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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