

(Dvar Torah continued from front page...)

idolatry and construct in its place both a Temple AND a model society. And so chapter 15 come to remind us that human possession is not absolute. Every seventh year, the *Shmita* year, land that is sold - often to pay debts - is returned to its original owner. We can acquire land, but only temporarily; all is eventually reset according to God's will. Could there be a more potent symbol of the relativity and superficiality of ownership? The not-so-subtle message is that Israel may conquer the land, but it is ultimately God's - and it is God's will that justice and equity take precedence over "the market."

We see throughout Devarim/Deuteronomy, and Parashat Re'eh in particular, that power is never absolute - it is coupled with, and limited by, responsibility. God says in 15:6 that Israel will become wealthy, and that wealth will give them power: "When Hashem your God, will have blessed you as He spoke to you; then you'll lend to many nations but you won't borrow; and you'll dominate many nations; but they won't dominate you." But lest this power cause Israel to grow arrogant and corrupt, verse 6 is immediately followed by a commandment of compassion in verses 7-8: "When there will be an indigent one among you from one of your brothers within one of your gates in the land that Hashem, your God, has given you, you should not fortify your heart and should not shut your hand from your brother who is indigent. But you should open your hand to him and shall lend him enough for his shortage."

For a land, a society, to be livable, neither power cannot be dissociated from compassion, nor ownership from justice and equity. Ethics is the foundation on which Israel's conquest rests, not a choice left to the whims of future rulers. As I read Parashat Re'eh from the land of Israel, I can only hope we learn from our holy Text that our mastery over this land was never an end in itself, but rather that we are commanded to *live in it* in the highest sense, as a people summoned to open both its heart and its hands.

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TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Re'eh

Shabbat Rosh Hodesh

August 11, 2018 | 30 Av 5778

Annual | Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17 (Etz Hayim p. 1061-1084; Hertz p. 799-818)
 Triennial | Deuteronomy 12:29-14:29 (Etz Hayim p. 1068-1076; Hertz p. 804-811)
 Maftir | Numbers 28:9-15 (Etz Hayim p. 1219-1223; Hertz p. 944-947)
 Haftarah | Isaiah 66:1-24 (Etz Hayim p. 1085-1087; Hertz p. 818-819)

D'var Torah:

Sophie Bigot-Goldblum, Conservative Yeshiva Student & Lishma Fellow

To many, Devarim/Deuteronomy does not appear the most engaging book of the Torah. It is too often reduced to a succession of dry laws whose intricacies seldom resonate in our day and age. But seen another way, the parashah is a thrilling and radical story of a nation being born and acquiring an identity, not through the conquest of a foreign land, but by placing itself in a covenant with a transcendent power. And via this covenant, the divine authority not only commands this nation regarding ritual and other forms of divine service, but also bestows upon them a set of rules regulating interpersonal relationships. Those rules, as we will see, are infused with moral values that constitute a pre-modern code of ethics.

In the very beginning of our parashah we read: "Because you're crossing the Jordan to come to *take possession* of the land that Hashem, your God, is giving you; and you should *take possession* of it *and live in it*" (Devarim 11:31). What seems at first to be unnecessary phrases and repetitions is actually a deep wisdom that many modern day governments have trouble learning - namely that conquering territory is not the same as holding it, and holding it is not the same as making it a livable home.

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But God's goal for Israel is that we live and flourish in the land. And so, we are commanded not only to destroy, but also to build - to tear down the false idols of

D'var Haftarah:

Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

This Shabbat is the third of seven Shabbatot of consolation which follow Tisha b'Av (Shiva d'Nehamta). Normally, the haftarot for these Shabbatot are set and represent the earliest known fixed haftarot in the tradition. (See Pesikta d'Rav Kahana) This Shabbat, however, we have a conflict since it is also Shabbat Rosh Hodesh which has its own fixed haftarah. How is this liturgical conflict to be resolved? On this question, see what I wrote a number of years ago – <http://www.uscj.org.il/commentaries/reeh-5772/>

As I noted there, the Ashkenazi tradition chose to read the haftarah for Shabbat Rosh Hodesh this Shabbat. In part, this choice was probably made because this chapter in Isaiah shares a similar message to the other haftarot for this period – God's resounding participation in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation as well as its recognition by the nations. The universal enthusiasm for this idea is captured in this verse: "And out of all the nations, said the Lord, they shall bring all your brothers on horses, in chariots and drays, on mules and dromedaries, to Jerusalem My holy mountain as an offering to the Lord – just as the Israelites bring an offering in a pure vessel to the House of the Lord." (verse 20)

Let's take this verse apart. This verse paints a picture of the nations of the world bringing the Jewish exiles from all over the world to Jerusalem as if they were a Temple offering. The later part of this verse notes what is special about the Israelites' Temple offerings. They were brought in a "kli tahor – a pure vessel" to "beit HaShem – to the House of the Lord". This analogy is hard to imagine and therefore it is not surprising that some rabbinic sages took the later part of this verse in another direction: "[Said] Rabbi Pinhas in the name of Rabbi Hoshaya: 'One who prays in the Beit Knesset (House of Assembly – a synagogue) it is as if s/he offered a pure minha offering. How do we know this? [It is written:] 'Just as the Israelites bring an offering in a pure vessel to the House of the Lord.'" (Yerushalmi Berachot 5:18d)

This teaching comes in the midst of a discussion over the worth of praying as an individual versus as part of a community. Rabbi Hoshaya comes down strongly on the side of praying in community and brings the verse from the haftarah to prove it. This emphasis should not be surprising. This very idea is tied to the idea emphasized in this verse as a whole. Redemption is coming home to be a part of a greater whole. It is about thinking about something beyond self. It is a matter of creating an ideal community to which others might

want to belong. This goes for a prayer community. This goes for nation building. This is the Jewish inspiration to which Isaiah wants all of us to aspire.

Parashat Re'eh Self-Study

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

This parashah is full of various topics that touch the life as it will be conducted once we enter the land and have a central religious/cultic place of practice for both public and private events.

- 1) Moshe says that he puts before us the blessings, if we follow God's Mitzvot, and the curses, if we ignore the Mitzvot. They will be presented in the land on the mountains of Grizim and Eibal near Sh'chem (11:26-30). Why do you think that such a ceremony should take place in the land and not now, before entering (and while Moshe is with us)?
- 2) We are instructed to destroy idol worshipping locations 'on mountain tops and under leafy trees' (12:2). Why do you think that those sort of places were chosen for worship?
- 3) If we wish to eat meat that is not part of a sacrifice, we may do so, as long as we do not eat the blood 'for the blood is the life' (12:23). What is the message that the Torah might want us to learn by forbidding us to eat blood?
- 4) Both laws pertaining to forbidden mourning practices and to forbidden (and permissible) animals to be eaten are concluded with the phrase 'for you are a holy nation to the LORD your God' (14:1-21). What do these laws have in common? How do you think that practicing them makes one 'holy'? (What does it mean to be *Kadosh* – holy?)
- 5) When a slave is set free, the master is told to give him gifts from grain, wine, and livestock (15:13-14). What would be the logic of giving the slave gifts?! The master might argue that he is already granting the slave freedom and has paid for him when he was initially purchased! What would you answer the master?

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