

Parshas Re'eh – Mr Mark Wakefield *(reprint)*

כ"ז מנחם אב תשע"ד – 22 August 2014 – שבת פ'ראה

Moshe Rabeinu continues to give his farewell speech in this week's Sedra (11: 26-28). He speaks of the blessing and curse that he presents on G-d's behalf to the Children of Israel before leaving them. Whilst on many levels, the conditions upon which the blessing and curse depend are self-explanatory and disturbingly vivid, as recounted in Parashat Ki Tavo, several difficulties can be seen with the opening words of this week's Sedra.

Firstly, it seems strange that the word Re'eh itself is written in the singular when the following verses are in the plural form. Whilst pondering over the word Re'eh, it is not immediately apparent why the specific word Re'eh, 'behold', is used. Furthermore, the Pasuk says that the reward for the observance of Mizvot is in this world, but the Gemara in Tractate Kidushin (39b) clearly states "There is no reward in this world"?

Two beautiful explanations are given for the use of the singular, 'Re'eh'. The Ibn Ezra says that Moshe is talking to each and every individual, the Torah is intended for and incumbent upon every Israelite both for reward, and chas vechalila, for punishment when it is deserved. The use of the singular is very fitting therefore, since Moshe was conveying his message to the Bnei Yisrael collectively, but also to each individual specifically. The great Chasam Sofer also brings his own interpretation based on the Gemara in Kidushin (40b), which states, that both the world and individual can be in a state of, "half innocent and half guilty". The Chasam Sofer takes this to mean that both the individual and the whole world are dependent on each and every Mitzva. If one observes a specific Mitzva, he brings the blessings described in depth throughout Devarim both to himself and the whole Bnei Yisrael; unfortunately, the converse also holds true. When Moshe speaks he is telling each and every Israelite ... "Behold (you individually) that I give you (as a result of your actions) a blessing and a curse (to the whole nation – plural)". If indeed the Mitzvot are carried out and reward is earned, how is it possible that a spiritual merit can translate into material gain, as the verse seems to say? The Rambam, in his inimitable style, offers an explanation for this difficulty. Rather than the torah meaning that worldly gains are the ultimate prize for the observance of G-d's commandments, it tells us that if we conduct our life in accordance with Hashem's will we will receive further opportunities to perform mitzvot and thereby accumulate more merit in the world to come. As the sages of great renown have said in Gemara Shabbat (119a), "Give your tithe so that you will become rich".

Although this explains why Re'eh is singular and how the verse can allege there is reward for keeping the Mitzvot in this world, the choice of expression 'Re'eh', remains unclear. What is there to behold that would give an indication of either the blessing or the curse of which he speaks? The Malbim gives reasoning behind the use of sight, as a means of describing the nature of the blessing and the curse. The world as we see it is a simple illustration of the elevated nature of the Torah and those who cling strongly to its teachings. The nations of the world struggle with moral inversion and a debased society, but on the verge of entering the Promised Land, Moses implores the Bnei Yisrael to look around, and appreciate the beauty of the world under the wings of the Torah.

When Moshe conveys the message of the blessing and curse, the underlying message is to look at the world around us for evidence of how the Torah manifests itself upon the pious, as we see in Proverbs (3:17) "Her [The Torah's] highways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peaceful". At the same time a lack of Torah affects the nations of the world negatively, as the Gemara in Gittin (13a) puts it, "A slave (to his evil inclination) likes lawlessness". May we all have the opportunity to see the glory of the Torah and the light that it shines upon its paths of justice and truth, and may we earn more merit and thereby secure a place in the eternal world to come – speedily in our days.