

Parshas Re'eh – Naaman Adler

ל' מנחם אב תשע"ח – 11th August 2018 – שבת פ'ראה - יום א' דר"ח אלול תשע"ח

This week's parsha contains a warning not to forsake the poor person, additionally there is a separate prohibition not to neglect the Levites. It says „Be sure not to neglect the Levite as long as you live in your land “ (Devorim 12:19). Rather, the Levites should be given their donations as per the halochos (Chinuch Mitzvo 490, Rambam Sefer Hamitzvos Lo Taase 229). The Rambam explains additionally, that one is to rejoice with the Levi at the Regel. Indeed, a similar statement is brought in the Acharonim (see Mishna Berura end of Hilchos Yom Tov) regarding Yom Tov nowadays. Joy without the poor is merely joy of the belly.

The above-quoted verse adds a prohibition to the positive commandment (Rashi). The Sifri (ad loc) points out that the commandment applies “as long as you live on the land”. The words “as long as you live” come to include even Shemito years. Why would one have thought differently? Why should there be no special command to look financially after the Levites during the years of Shemito? The Sifri continues that “on the land” comes to teach, that as long as the other tribes have an inheritance in the Land of Israel, they are obligated in supporting the Levites. In the Golus, that unfortunately is no longer the case, as the Tribes do not have their own land in E. Yisroel, therefore, this law does not apply anymore. Therefore, when in the Shemito year the distinction between the Levite and the other tribes fell away – possibly then we would have thought that there is no law of “not neglecting the Levite” the same way this law is not applicable in the Exile. Therefore, we need a specific verse to teach us that the law remains in force.

The Rambam and the Sefer Hachinuch famously explain the exemption of the Levites from agricultural work and army service as a Chesed of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. As He chose us as His nation so that everyone who see Klal Yisroel will realize that we are the Chosen Nation. In His wisdom He instructed the Tribe of Levi to be involved in knowing Hakodosh Boruch Hu from youngest age. The Leviim are fully involved in learning, being supported only by God through the donations they receive. Indeed, those who want to be like the Leviim can do so, however, being supported by G-d.

The view of the Rambam on receiving charity for learning is already known (Perush Hamishno on Avos IV:5, and several places in Yad). It is interesting to note, that the Rambam in his Perush on the Mishna (Avos IV:5 towards the end) mentions that Torah scholars received by our Sages special limited privileges in business. They are the first to sell their products on the market, they are exempt from certain taxes, they can also ask someone to do business for them with their money or produce, etc... (however, see Shulchon Oruch and commentaries how nowadays Torah scholars do not have most of the privileges in business mentioned by Chazal).

The Rambam continues that this is similar to the Leviim receiving their donations from the other tribes. The understanding is that Torah scholars as well as Leviim receive their support as per the decree of the Torah (either through a verse or through Chazal).