

The Power to Choose


26“See (Re’eh), I am setting before you today a blessing (b’racha) and a curse (k’lalah) – 27the blessing, if you listen (sh’ma) to the mitzvot of Adonai your God that I am commanding you today, 28but the curse, if you do not listen (sh’ma) to the mitzvot of Adonai your God, but turn from the way I am commanding you today, to go after other gods you have not known” (Deut 11:26-28)

Yah has given us free moral agency therefore we have the power to choose between a blessed life (The Blessing) or living devoid of life (living cursed). In today’s Believing world the idea that the Almighty allows us to be cursed is foreign, almost unfathomable. This week’s *Torah* Reading is *Re’eh*, which means to *“Take a closer look or to behold or observe.”* The word shares the same root as the *Hebrew Pa’al* verb *to see (Roeh)*. It is interesting that this verb and the Hebrew Word *Hineni* are both translated as *behold*. Today’s reading deals with the choices we must make in living a life dedicated to His *Torah*. These choices ultimately bring choosing life or death. In the text we are also reminded about the soon-coming fall *moadim*. We have the power to choose: *we can choose blessing/life or choose curses/death*.

The *Torah* requires that we see not only what we gain by following *Yah*, but also what we lose if we don’t. This portion is read between *Tisha b’Av* and the beginning of the High Holy Days and serves as a way to bring us from deep sorrow into the presence of *Yah* in glory and joy. It follows the instruction about obedience in last week’s portion, *Ekev*, which taught that blessings will abound to a people chosen by and obedient to *Yah*, and actually that super obedience yields super blessing. Here Moses continues with lessons about consequences of choice and of behavior and ends with holiness and service.

These lessons are given in the wilderness prior to entry into the Land of Promise. The old generation has died, and only Joshua and Caleb remain with memories of Egypt and the Exodus. Two paths are laid in front of the people. The choice is theirs. They need to see both paths. Just as we need both eyes for visual depth perception, the Israelites need to see both options for spiritual depth perception. Blessings and curses are set before the Israelites, and indeed, both are set before us today. A choice must be made. There is no middle of the road. One or the other, period. There is no confusion, no gray areas at all. We cannot *stumble* into disobedience; it is a choice, a decision, as *Yah* has given us a view, a vision, and the power to see consequences. In the reading it is evident that in order to fully live in the Land, to live the life promised by *Yah*, the Israelites had to *cross over* the Jordan River. They had to leave and go to *the other side*. We see this throughout biblical history. Indeed, the title *Hebrew* derives from a root meaning to cross over. Abraham had to cross over the Euphrates, the Israelites had to cross over the Red Sea, the disciples had to cross over the Sea of Galilee, we must cross over from old lives to new ones. We must behold *Yah*, and we must take a closer look on how He desires each of us to live.

How do these commands relate to spiritual depth perception? There is a connection between the physical and spiritual realms. Our physical lives set the stage for spiritual blessings. The English writer John Heywood (ca. 1546) wrote, *We cannot see the forest for the trees*. This applies spiritually. Are we so focused on details that we miss the bigger picture? Or, are we so intent on the future that we cannot see those things right in front of us? *Re’eh* requires that we see the forest and the trees. We must have the depth perception to really see both and how they impact each other.

 *I can see clearly now, the rain has gone, I can see all obstacles in my way. Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind. It's gonna be a bright, bright sun-shining day. It's gonna be a bright, bright sun-shining day. ♪*

We must have spiritual vision and depth perception to see clearly. Instead of asking *Do you see what I see?* we are asked: *Do you see what I (Yah) sees? Shabbat Shalom!* Let us pray...