

TORAH THOUGHTS – FREEDOM OF CHOICE

This week's Torah portion, *Re'eh*, opens with a stark choice. "See I set before you this day blessing and curse: blessing if you follow the commandments of the Lord your God ... and curse if you do not follow ... the Lord your God and turn away from the path ... and (choose to) follow other gods ..." (Deuteronomy 11:26-28) Throughout the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses urged the people to *choose* to observe the *mitzvot*. Perhaps he feared that the Israelites, who were so stubborn, would make poor decisions.

Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." I think this was also Moses' parting message to the Israelites. Although they suffered in Egypt, and they struggled in the desert for forty long years, they could still choose life. Not a life of regrets and thirst for vengeance, but rather a life of love, of celebration, and one in the presence of God. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote, "Choice focuses us on a future we can change, liberating us from being held captive by our resentments, and summoning us to what Emmanuel Levinas called *Difficile Liberte*, 'difficult freedom.'"

The Holocaust survivors in our midst certainly have the right to complain, yet most that I know do not act that way. Their suffering does not define them – in fact the survivors I know are smart, engaging and overall content people.

This Sunday is the first day of the Hebrew month *Elul*, only one month before Rosh Hashanah. It is a time of introspection as we approach the New Year and consider how to improve our lives and how to help others. In this spirit, I ask that each of us reflect on the choices we make. May we be inspired by the many survivors and other brave individuals, who choose optimism despite their struggles. Let's choose wisely.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Pont