

Torah On One Foot

Rabbi Matthew Berger



Choose Wisely

This week's Torah portion is *Re'ei*, meaning "vision." Its core message is: Choose wisely. The ability to make moral choices is what sets us apart as human beings. Indeed the language of Jewish life is all about making choices. We actively choose whether or not to follow the mitzvot or commandments. In Reform Judaism, all of the ethical obligations are considered binding. When it comes to the ritual obligations, however, the choice is left to us. Ideally these decisions about ritual life are governed by informed choice. We can learn about different Jewish customs such as dietary law – kashrut. Then we choose whether the ritual will be meaningful in our lives.

It can be said that every modern Jew is a Jew-by-choice. In every generation, we have the ability to choose the values by which to live. Rabbi Harold Kushner writes, "Other animals are driven by instinct. Human beings have the potential to control instinct." This is the message that Moses shares with the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land of Israel. God gives us choice. We can make life a blessing or a curse. Without a doubt, the choices that lie before us can be challenging at times. Sometimes there are no easy answers. But the gift, blessing, and responsibility of free will is that we have the power to make our own choices. Our sacred task is to choose wisely.