

August 30, 2019/29 Av 5779

Dear chevreh,

I can remember in my mid-twenties when I woke up to the fact that I was on a spiritual path in this lifetime. A path that presented challenges and opportunities for growth. I discovered this through yoga and Judaism, and each led me to a place that wasn't only about the inner world, but pointed toward ethics and responsibility to others as well.

We read in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Re'eh [See!], "Behold, I place before you today blessing and curse, blessing, that you obey the commandments of Adonai your God that I enjoin upon you this day; and curse, if you do not obey the commandments of Adonai your God but turn away from the path that I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods..." Deut.11:26-28

A curious use of phrasing in the verse is "that" versus "if" (asher vs. im): "Blessing, that you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you this day and curse if you do not obey the commandments...." Why is one used in regard to a blessing and the other in regard to a curse? Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger, in his book, Sefat Emet (see his comments on Parashat Re'eh in the abridged version translated and edited by Arthur Green, The Language of Truth), teaches that goodness exists in us in our very nature, and that 'sin' and ill intentions are incidental and passing. However, we must be the ones to follow through on our good intentions. God places these opportunities before us "this day" implying each day, even each moment.

However, the Sefat Emet (Hasidic rabbis often go by the name of their famous works) also reminds us that when righteous ones are in the process of making these choices, the yetzer ha ra, the evil inclination can appear, especially when we one is moving forward on one's path. What can seem like insurmountable mountains can appear. We are called on to continue to choose the "good", that which brings us closer to the Holy One.

Rabbi Art Green in his commentary to the Sefat Emet says, "'Righteousness' here is defined as moral courage – the ability to meet each of these situations, make the decision, and move forward to the next. This vision of life is at once endlessly challenging and endlessly exciting."

May we all hear the command to "re'eh" -see more clearly so that we can discern what the next step is on our path, and the next step, and the step after that.

I look forward to seeing you at Shabbat services this evening at 7:30 pm.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Diana