

Parshat Re'eh 5782

In this week's sedra of Re'eh we read about Bnei Yisrael being given a choice of good and evil and the consequences of that choice. The list of brachot for choosing good were read out to Bnei Yisrael on Har Grizim and the curses for choosing evil on Har Eval. (Perhaps that is the root of the word evil.)

In 1986, after making Aliya, I visited Shechem, in the Shomron, with my ulpan class. Outside of Shechem you can see these 2 mountains. (Unfortunately, if you want to do so today, you cannot do so without armed guards, but then it was relatively safe.) Har Grizim is very green on top, whereas, Har Eval is barren, testifying to the role they played in the Torah. Looking at them I couldn't help but think of the words of this week's sedra.

In fact, when Bnei Yisrael brought the bones of Yosef out of Egypt and into Israel, Shechem is where they buried him.

"And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried in Shechem, in the parcel of ground which Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of the children of Joseph." [Yehoshua, 24,32] Kever Yosef has been lying in the city of Shechem for over 3,300 years. We know that,

for at least 2,000 years, Jews have been visiting the grave to pray at the holy site. Our sages have compared its importance to that of the Machpelah Cave in Chevron, and the Beit Hamikdash.

In 1984, the yeshiva "Od Yosef Chai" opened its doors at the site. In 1994, the Oslo accords promised free access to the Kever, as well as keeping the learning and prayer services running. But, in 1996, during the Western Wall Tunnel riots, Kever Yosef was burnt and six Israeli soldiers were killed nearby. In 2000, the second intifada broke out. Kever Yosef was abandoned, burnt and utterly destroyed. In 2004, under the supervision of the IDF, visits to Kever Yosef were renewed. In 2008, proper guarding of the site was arranged, and no more desecration occurred. In 2010, Kever Yosef was renovated. The Tomb with its dome were built anew. In 2013, Kever Yosef was visited by over 20,000 people.

I cannot think of anyone who was faced with the decision between good and evil more than Yosef, whether with the temptations of Potiphar's wife or dealing with his brothers when they came down to Egypt. Consequently, burying him in Shechem sent out a very powerful message for the generations to come.