

Date: 21 Av 5786 (August 4, 2026)

Torah Portion: Re'eh

Topic: The Sword and the Scroll, Part 1

It is written, **“See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse”** (Deut. 11:26). At first glance, Moshe appears to set before Yisrael two opposite paths, leaving them to choose either blessing or curse. Yet the Torah presents this choice as something immediate and personal. YHWH does not say that these paths will someday be placed before His people; He says, **“today.”** Every generation, and indeed every day, stands before the same decision. The choice is not merely between prosperity and adversity, but between a life ordered by the voice of YHWH and a life governed by human pride and self-will. To illuminate this truth, the Midrash connects Moshe's words with the prophet Yirmiyahu: **“Listen and give ear; do not be haughty, for YHWH has spoken”** (Jer. 13:15).

The Midrash immediately asks two thoughtful questions. First, what exactly are the people commanded to “listen” to? The prophet simply says, “Listen and give ear,” without identifying the object of their attention. Second, why is the warning against pride placed alongside the command to listen? If the concern were merely disobedience, we would expect the prophet to say, “Do not reject My words.” Instead, he warns, **“Do not be haughty.”** Why should arrogance be presented as the opposite of listening?

The Midrash answers both questions with a single explanation. The command is to **listen to the words of Torah.** To hear the Torah is more than allowing its words to enter one's ears. In the language of Scripture, hearing implies receiving, obeying, and yielding oneself to what YHWH has spoken. The opposite of such hearing is not deafness but pride. A proud heart refuses to bow before divine wisdom because it already considers itself wise. It no longer seeks instruction, for it believes it has little left to learn. Thus, haughtiness becomes the greatest obstacle to receiving the Torah.

This insight reaches beyond outward behavior into the inner life of the soul. Pride convinces a person that his own understanding is sufficient. Instead of submitting to the commandments of YHWH, he begins measuring the Torah by his own opinions. Honor, wealth, influence, and personal ambition slowly replace the pursuit of righteousness. Such a heart may continue to read the Torah, but it no longer allows the Torah to read and transform the heart. Listening ceases because humility has disappeared.

Maharzu develops the Midrash even further. He explains that the warning concerns not only whether one studies Torah, but **how** one studies it. A student who approaches Torah with arrogance will ultimately fail to retain what he learns. Divine wisdom cannot permanently dwell within a heart filled with self-importance. The Sages repeatedly teach that Torah resembles water: just as water flows to the lowest place, so the wisdom of Heaven rests upon the humble. Humility, therefore, is not merely a desirable virtue; it is the vessel that receives divine truth.

This understanding sheds light on the Hebrew expression **אַל-תִּגְבַּהּ (al-tigbahu)**, literally, **“do not exalt yourselves.”** The Midrash paraphrases it as **“do not speak haughtily,”** echoing Hannah's song: **“Do not multiply words of arrogance; let no insolence proceed from your mouth”** (1 Sam. 2:3). Pride first reveals itself through speech. A person who constantly exalts himself, dismisses correction, or speaks with contempt toward others demonstrates that he has ceased listening to YHWH. The tongue often exposes what the heart has already embraced.

The prophet concludes his warning with the words, **“for YHWH has spoken.”** Throughout the prophetic writings this expression commonly authenticates the prophet's message. Yet the Midrash notes that this exact expression appears uniquely in this context within the Book of Yirmiyahu. It therefore suggests another meaning. Rather than merely affirming the authority of Yirmiyahu's words, it points back to truths already declared by YHWH through earlier prophets and sages. Pride had long been condemned by Heaven. Shlomo declared, **“Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to YHWH”** (Prov. 16:5). Yeshayahu likewise warned against the arrogance of man. Yirmiyahu is therefore recalling an ancient principle rather than introducing a new doctrine. The Torah has always taught that humility is the doorway to blessing.

Shalom.