

Date: 22 Av 5786 (August 5, 2026)

Torah Portion: Re'eh

Topic: The Sword and the Scroll, Part 2

The Midrash then presents a second interpretation of Yirmiyahu's words. "Listen" to the Torah, and "give ear" continually to its instruction. But what does **"do not be haughty"** mean in this reading? It means, **"Do not prevent goodness from entering the world."** This striking statement reveals that sin affects far more than the individual sinner. Whenever a person rejects the Torah, he obstructs the channels through which YHWH desires to pour blessing upon His creation. Obedience allows divine goodness to flow freely, while rebellion hinders it.

To support this interpretation, the Midrash turns to the prophet Yeshayahu: **"If you are willing and obey, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword, for the mouth of YHWH has spoken"** (Isa. 1:19–20).

Here blessing and curse stand side by side, just as they do in Deuteronomy. Obedience opens the way to goodness, while rebellion brings judgment. Yet the Midrash notices something unusual. If the reward is the enjoyment of the land's abundance, should not the punishment simply be famine or drought? Why does Yeshayahu suddenly introduce **the sword**? The Sages answer with a vivid image. They teach that when the Torah was given at Sinai, **the scroll and the sword descended from heaven intertwined**. YHWH declared to Yisrael: *If you live according to what is written in this scroll, you will be delivered from this sword. But if you abandon what is written in this scroll, you will fall by this sword.*

The symbolism is profound. The scroll represents covenant, wisdom, life, and fellowship with YHWH. The sword represents judgment, separation, and death. They are inseparably connected. Every movement toward the scroll is a movement away from the sword. Every step away from the scroll draws one nearer to destruction. Blessing and curse are therefore not arbitrary rewards and punishments but the natural consequences of whether one embraces or rejects the life that YHWH offers.

The Alter of Kelm expands this imagery with remarkable spiritual insight. Human beings consist of both body and soul, united for only a brief season in this world. One who lives solely for the desires of the flesh experiences the slow advance of death over life. Though he believes himself fully alive, each passing day quietly diminishes the number of days remaining to him. From the moment of birth, the sword has already begun its silent work. Time itself becomes the servant of mortality. Every sunrise shortens earthly life until, at last, the soul departs and the body returns to the dust.

Yet the person who embraces the Torah lives according to an entirely different reality. The Sages teach that while an infant is in the womb, an angel teaches him the entire Torah, granting him a glimpse of eternal life before birth. At birth, that knowledge is hidden, yet its impression remains engraved upon the soul. The purpose of earthly life is not to acquire something entirely new but to recover what the soul once knew in the presence of YHWH.

Every page of Torah studied, every mitzvah performed, every sincere act of repentance, every victory over the evil inclination restores another portion of that eternal inheritance. Character is refined. The image of Elohim becomes clearer. Ordinary days are transformed into everlasting treasure. Time is no longer merely passing away; it is being redeemed. The faithful do not simply count their days—they sanctify them.

In this way, the passage of time itself is transformed. For those who pursue only worldly gain, each day represents one day less to live. But for those who walk in the Torah, each day becomes another stone added to an eternal dwelling. Their deeds accompany them into the World to Come. What appears temporary becomes everlasting because it has been filled with the life of YHWH.

This understanding brings us back to Moshe's opening declaration: **"See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse."** The blessing is far more than material prosperity, and the curse is far more than earthly hardship. The true choice lies between two fundamentally different ways of living. One path is marked by pride, self-sufficiency, and the gradual triumph of the sword. The other is characterized by humility, attentive obedience, and the life found in the scroll of Torah.

A Daily Bread

בייה

The message of the Midrash remains as urgent today as it was in the days of Moshe. The scroll and the sword still stand intertwined before every generation. Whoever loosens his grip upon the Torah inevitably finds himself beneath the shadow of the sword. But whoever clings to the Torah lays hold of the Tree of Life. As the scroll is embraced, the sword retreats. Such a person discovers that blessing is not merely a future reward awaiting him in the World to Come, but a present reality—the joy of walking with YHWH, whose eternal words transform fleeting days into an everlasting inheritance.

Shalom.