



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT RE'EH

The Power of a Single Gaze

Parshat Re'eh begins with a fundamental principle of Jewish faith: "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse" (Deut. 11:26).

The command can be seen as striking and potentially polarizing. Moreover, Moshe is talking to the entire klal yisrael. Why is the Torah using the singular form, "Re'eh" ("See!"), rather than the plural, "Re'u"?

The *Sforno Hakadosh* explains that the choice between a life of blessing and its opposite is not a collective decision, but rather deeply personal. Each individual must open their own eyes and make their own choice. No one can see for you.

But the message goes deeper than just free will. The word "Re'eh" implies more than just a choice; it implies a perspective of seeing the whole world. Hashem is not just saying, "Choose between two paths." He is saying, "See this world that I have created for you. See that I have placed both the potential for blessing and the potential for curse within it. Your first and most crucial task is to see correctly."

Life is full of challenges that can feel like curses. These challenges can be presented in financial hardship, illness, and conflict. It is easy to become so focused on the difficulty that we fail to see the blessing hidden within it. The Kotzker Rebbe taught that the world is a mirror; it reflects the face you show it.

If you look for the curse, you will find it. But if you train your eyes to look for the blessing, then the opportunity for growth, the kindness of a neighbor, the strength you didn't know you had, will emerge as well.

A wise man once said the meaning of "bracha" in Artsrollian would be "blessing," but this is not the entire story. The word bracha may be translated as "blessing," yet the root of the word is shared with the root of the word "breicha" - a pool of water. It represents an overflowing abundance. In contrast, the word "klala," which we readily translate to mean curse, comes from a root meaning "to make light" or "insignificant." The blessing and the curse, then, are not necessarily different circumstances, but two vastly different ways of seeing the same circumstance. It is not a one-time decision, but a lifelong choice of perspective.

One afternoon, a poor man nervously entered the Paris office of the famed philanthropist, Baron Edmond de Rothschild. The Baron was overwhelmed, buried in papers detailing matters of international finance.

The man stammered, explaining that he needed funds to marry off his daughter. Without looking up, the Baron dismissed him with a wave of his hand, "I'm too busy today. Come back another time." The man left, his shoulders slumped in dejection.

Moments later, the Baron put down his pen. He couldn't concentrate. The image of the man's crestfallen face haunted him. He realized that in his haste, he had violated a core principle from that week's parsha, Re'eh: "You shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your needy brother." He had seen the man's poverty as an interruption, a nuisance—a curse on his busy schedule. Now, he had to see it differently.

Leaving his urgent business behind, the Baron grabbed his coat and rushed out into the streets of Paris. He searched for hours, asking passersby if they had seen the man he had turned away. Finally, as dusk began to fall, he spotted him sitting on a bench, the picture of despair.

The Baron rushed over, breathless. "Please, you must forgive me," he pleaded. "I was wrong to send you away." He took out his checkbook and wrote a sum far greater than the man would have ever dared to ask for.

But in this moment, the baron gave the pauper something more valuable than money. He restored the man's dignity. The restored dignity gave the pauper a new, transformative perspective, which was more beneficial than just money. As for the baron, his choice in perspective shift was also. In that moment, the Baron made the choice Parshat Re'eh places before every one of us. He had first chosen the "curse" of a hardened heart, but then, through a conscious act of seeing, he chose the "blessing" of an open hand.

The parsha is called Re'eh because everything depends on our perspective. When we choose to see the world through a lens of faith and optimism, we don't just change our perspective; we change our whole reality. We actively choose to draw down Hashem's blessing into our lives, transforming the potential into actuality. The blessing and the curse are always before us. The choice of the Torah is: What do you choose to see?

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"Your job is not to judge. Your job is not to figure out if someone deserves something. Your job is to lift the fallen, restore the broken, and heal the hurting."