

(Dvar Torah continued from the front page...)

13:2, 7). Turn away, wipe out their very presence from your life. Cancel them.

This chapter is so deeply concerned with neutralizing distractions that Moshe offers six different actions in quick succession as a remedy to this sort of interference: “**Follow** only Adonai your God, and **revere** God; **observe** God’s commandments, and **heed** God’s orders; **worship** God, and **cleave** to God” (Deut. 13:5-6). These verbs together convey a sense of urgency, a need to act when temptation is greatest. They culminate in a word more unique to this moment: *t’dabb’kun*, “stick to God.” Or in Onkelos’s Aramaic, *tit’kar’vun*: “keep God close [in mind].” Moshe is not worried that we will, in the absence of his steadfast leadership, make the immoral decision to take on the practices of our enemies. He knows we want to do what is right. His concern is not that we will choose the wrong path out of callousness, but that we will forget our path out of spiritual myopia.

The image of Ulysses resonates here: the hero, fundamentally committed to returning home to Ithaca, knew of the Sirens’ power to entice travelers from their course. So he tied himself up and ordered his closest shipmates not to untie him no matter how much he pleads. *Parashat Re’eh* is Moshe’s plea that Israel tie themselves to the mast of Torah. It is our guidance for how to weather the storm of influence that constantly pulls us from our dreams.

This is no doubt what the Hassidic master R’ Yaakov Yosef of Polonne had in mind when he reinterpreted the *parashah’s* opening verse. He knew it was unnecessary for Moshe to remind Israel not to choose the curse. When God says “I have put before you blessing and curse” (Deut. 11:26), curse is simply the word used for “forgetting your way.” It is called a curse because it is the opposite of a blessing, which is what happens when you remember your values (Toledot Yaakov Yosef, *Re’eh* 45).

From the youngest to the oldest, never is there an age when we are unencumbered by the burden of discernment: which school, which job, which house; leap or stay where you are. This is all the more real for us in a continuously historic epoch in which inconstancy is our only constant. How do we maintain our focus in the midst of the noise around us? How do we make sure we are on the right path when there are so many doors opening loudly everywhere we turn? Don’t mistake the answer’s simplicity for ease of execution. **Walk** your path, **revere** it, **observe**, **heed**, and **act**. Then **stick** to it, keep your goals **close**, and don’t let even your most trusted voices lead you astray.

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# TORAH SPARKS

## Re’eh

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Annual I (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17) Etz Hayyim, p. 1061  
Triennial I (Deuteronomy 11:26-12:28) Etz Hayyim, p. 1085  
Haftarah I (Isaiah 54:11-55:5) Etz Hayyim, p. 1061

**Finding, and Following, Your North**, *Rabbi Rami Schwartzer, Founder of the [Den Collective](#) in Washington, DC.*

Finding, and Following, Your North *Stick with it. Stay the course.* Much of the ink of Torah has dried over the directive of loyalty to God and Torah. The Torah has already directed us to be careful not to follow the lustful urges of our hearts and eyes (Num. 15:39), or the practices and ways of other nations (Lev. 18:3). This week we are reminded over an entire chapter to follow God and Torah, but the nature of this command differs subtly from what we have seen before.

*Parashat Re’eh* presents a Moshe in particular anxiety over the upcoming transition of leadership. Having already advised the people not to turn away towards the idolatry of outsiders or the idolatrous inclinations of our inner urges he now warns about danger of a more insidious kind: good advice from a reputable or trusted source: “When a prophet or dream-diviner pops up in your midst and gives you a sign or strong evidence...[or] when your sibling — your mother’s own child — or your son or daughter, your own loving partner or your closest friend tempts you in secret, saying ‘come, let us show devotion to other Gods’” ... (Deut.

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## D'var Haftarah: God's Promise of Hope

Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, From the Archives

The nation stood at a moment of great trepidation and insecurity. The Babylonians had exiled most of its citizens. Those remaining in Judea were disheartened, their homeland devastated. The people were desperate for hope. God's message, in the latter part of the book of Isaiah, was meant to meet this religious challenge. His message was dramatic. It raised the ante of God's promises to a new level, providing people with the requisite hope to meet the demands which faced them in order to rebuild the nation.

This is the message which God, metaphorically, offered free of charge: "Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water, even if you have no money; come buy food and eat; buy food without money, wine and milk without cost." (55:1) The implications of this message were spelled out a few lines later. In the past, God had made a covenant with the nation through its king. David, king of Israel, was guaranteed his royal line in perpetuity. This promise gave the Davidic line its strength to continue to lead the nation. (See 2 Sam. 7:16) Isaiah, in his message, changed the focus of this covenant: "Incline your ear and come to Me; Hearken and you shall be revived, and I shall make with you an everlasting covenant, the enduring loyalty promised to David." (55:3) The strength of the Davidic covenant was transferred from the monarchy to the entire nation, in lieu of the fall of the monarchy at Babylonian hands. (Psalm 89 reflects the religious angst caused by this event. See, in particular verse 39-46)

The transfer of God's political covenant from the monarchy to the people as a whole represented a radical move toward the democratization of God's promise. The people as a whole now served as God's medium for carrying out His mission in the world. This change coincided with similar changes in the religious realm. (See Isaiah ch. 56) (Prof. Shalom Paul, Isaiah 40-66, Mikra L'Yisrael, pp. 393-395.

What are we to make of these radical changes? The theological changes represented here illustrate certain reevaluations necessitated by the destruction of the First Temple and decimation of Judean national life caused by the seventy years of Babylonian exile. Since the monarchy no longer existed, the people took over the role of the monarchy as the harbingers of God's will. They, therefore, needed God's encouragement to carry forward His mission. This transformation ultimately distinguished Judaism from other religions. It planted the seed that transformed Judaism into a religion where all of its members are players, where every individual bears responsibility and is an active participant in carrying out God's will.

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## The Jewish Line of Poverty?

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

### **Text: Devarim 15:7-11**

*(7) Should there be a pauper (Evyon) among you, from one of your brothers within one of your gates in your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart and clench your hand against your brother the pauper. (8) But you shall surely open your hand to him and surely lend to him enough for his want that he has... (10) You shall surely give to him... for by virtue of this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your doings and in all that your hand reaches. (11) For the pauper will not cease from the midst of the land... you shall surely open your hand to your brother, to your poor, and to your pauper, in your land.*

- Location is stressed at the opening and closing of this passage. What is its relevance to our handling of people in financial need?
- 'Your hand' is mentioned 4 times in this section. What images are associated with our hands in this case?
- The person in need is referred to as 'your brother'. Why?
- How are we supposed to give the person (v.8) and how much should we give? Do you agree with this?
- We are promised a blessing in all our doings in return for observing this Mitzvah. How do you think that this blessing from God will manifest itself?

### **Commentary: Rashi, Devarim 15:7**

***Should there be a pauper (Evyon)** – [Evyon means] A person who desires things -the desiring person has priority. (This is a literal translation of the comment)*

- How does Rashi (following rabbinic writings) understand the term Evyon (pauper)?
- Here seems to be one definition of 'the line of poverty'. How does Rashi define it? What element beyond financial make up this definition? How, if at all, is this aspect addressed when we give tzedakah?

### **Commentary: Ibn Ezra, Devarim 15:11**

***To your brother** – The closest to you. **And to your poor** – your family's poor, and the pauper of your land/city takes precedent over the pauper from another place.*

- What is the order of giving assistance? (Rashi addresses the issue in 15:7).
- The need to address this issue suggests that it is not naturally followed. Why might someone prefer to give to a cause far away? Why would one not give to those closest to them?

**For further study: Maimonides, Gifts for the Poor chapter 10 – the 8 levels of Tzedakah.**

We welcome your comments: [torahsparks@uscj.org](mailto:torahsparks@uscj.org)