

August 23, 2014

RE'EH - See

We are pressured on every side to conform to our society. Go to school and get good grades. Get an iPhone and post selfies. Get a car, get a job, get a wife, get a life – not necessarily in that order. Today's *parashah*, *Re'eh*, begins rather ominously with the phrase, "See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse." Sure, it would be great to get the blessings without the curses, and the choice is entirely in our own hands. *Parshat Re'eh* speaks with great joy of the three pilgrimage festivals of the Jewish calendar. On *Pesach*, *Shavuot*, and *Sukkot*, the *Torah* tells us, "all of your males shall appear before the Holy One," (blessed be He), "but they shall not come empty-handed." In most cases, the *Torah* tells us what sacrifices were required, like an ox, a sheep, or a goat. However, in this injunction that we are not to appear empty-handed, there seems to be some leeway. The text says that we are to give according to our own gifts, and that our gifts are to reflect *HaShem's* blessing. It seems to make sense that if we are giving a gift, we are to give it with joy. Sometimes when we see a worthy cause, we would like to give generously. But if our gifts are to reflect *HaShem's* blessing, we should stay within our means. Although the prophet Malachi says that we cannot out-give *HaShem*, if we go beyond our financial capacities, we might not be so joyful in our giving. Imagine how staying within our means would affect the way we celebrate a *bar mitzvah* or a wedding. But maybe there is something more profound than just keeping an eye on our bank-book.

To celebrate in God's presence, we must not selfishly focus only on our own joy. Sharing our joy with others and contributing to the repair of this broken world is truly a step toward finding the joy in giving. What if we could somehow direct our joyous triumphs into occasions when we could heal wounds, right wrongs, or contribute to some communal cause. When we bring an offering according to how God has blessed us, we recognize that human individuality is a reflection of divine love and bounty. The greatness of *HaShem* is not reflected in the numbing conformity that our society would like us to adopt, but in the stunning diversity of human character, interest, and talents that we possess. *HaShem* made each of us as individuals. We are unique, distinctive, and special in His eyes. God does not want us to appear before Him empty-handed, but what we bring should reflect our unique gifts and personalities if it is to reflect God's blessing.

Hebrew : Deuteronomy 16:16-17

English: Deuteronomy 16:16-17

Haftarah: Isaiah 54:11-13

B'rit Chadashah: John 7:37-40