

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Re'eh/Shabbat Rosh Hodesh
August 27, 2022 *** 30 Av, 5782

Re'eh in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2272/jewish/Reeh-in-a-Nutshell.htm

“See,” says Moses to the people of Israel, “I place before you today a blessing and a curse”—the blessing that will come when they fulfill G-d’s commandments, and the curse if they abandon them. These should be proclaimed on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal when the people cross over into the Holy Land.

A Temple should be established in “the place that G-d will choose to make dwell His name there,” where the people should bring their sacrifices to Him; it is forbidden to make offerings to G-d in any other place. It is permitted to slaughter animals elsewhere, not as a sacrifice but to eat their meat; the blood (which in the Temple is poured upon the altar), however, may not be eaten.

A false prophet, or one who entices others to worship idols, should be put to death; an idolatrous city must be destroyed. The identifying signs for kosher animals and fish, and the list of non-kosher birds (first given in Leviticus 11), are repeated.

A tenth of all produce is to be eaten in Jerusalem, or else exchanged for money with which food is purchased and eaten there. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor instead. Firstborn cattle and sheep are to be offered in the Temple, and their meat eaten by the kohanim (priests).

The mitzvah of charity obligates a Jew to aid a needy fellow with a gift or loan. On the Sabbatical year (occurring every seventh year), all loans are to be forgiven. All indentured servants are to be set free after six years of service.

Our Parshah concludes with the laws of the three pilgrimage festivals—Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot—when all should go to “see and be seen” before G-d in the Holy Temple.

Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 66:1–24

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3572702/jewish/Shabbat-Rosh-Chodesh-Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This haftarah, read whenever Shabbat coincides with Rosh Chodesh, mentions how in the messianic era, every Shabbat and every Rosh Chodesh everyone will come to the Temple to worship G-d.

In this prophecy Isaiah tells us how G-d (who is too great to be fully contained in physical space, even in the Temple) pays attention to the humble G-d-fearing person, and rejects a person who does (or even intends) evil.

The prophet continues to foretell the fortune that will come upon Jerusalem (and the Jewish nation) in the time to come, and how even non-Jews will come to recognize G-d and assist in restoring the Jewish people to their land and their Temple.

The Second Tithe and Strong Society: Re'eh by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/reeh/the-second-tithe-and-strong-societies/>

Biblical Israel from the time of Joshua until the destruction of the Second Temple was a predominantly agricultural society. Accordingly, it was through agriculture that the Torah pursued its religious and social programme. It has three fundamental elements.

The first was the alleviation of poverty. For many reasons, the Torah accepts the basic principles of what we now call a market economy. But though market economics is good at creating wealth it is less good at distributing it equitably. Thus the Torah's social legislation aimed, in the words of Henry George, "to lay the foundation of a social state in which deep poverty and degrading want should be unknown." [1]

Hence the institutions that left parts of the harvest for the poor: leket, shicheha and pe'ah – fallen ears of grain, the forgotten sheaf, and the corners of the field. There was the produce of the seventh year, which belonged to no-one and everyone, and ma'aser ani – the tithe for the poor given in the third and sixth years of the seven-year cycle. Shmittah and Yovel – the seventh and fiftieth years with their release of debts, manumission of slaves, and the return of ancestral property to its original owners, restored essential elements of the economy to their default position of fairness. So the first principle was: ***no one should be desperately poor.***

The second, which included terumah and ma'aser rishon – the priestly portion and the first tithe, went to support, respectively, the Priests and the Levites. These were a religious elite within the nation in biblical times with no land of their own, whose role was to ensure that the service of God – especially in the Temple – continued at the heart of national life. They had other essential functions, among them education and the administration of justice, as teachers and judges.

The third was more personal and spiritual. There were laws such as the bringing of first-fruits to Jerusalem, and the three pilgrimage festivals – Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot – as they marked seasons in the agricultural year that had to do with driving home the lessons of gratitude and humility. They taught that the land belongs to God and we are merely His tenants and guests. The rain, the sun, and the earth itself yield their produce only because of His blessing. Without such regular reminders, societies slowly but inexorably become materialistic and self-satisfied. Rulers and elites forget that their role is to serve the people, and instead they expect the people to serve them. That is how nations at the height of their success begin their decline, unwittingly laying the ground for their defeat.

All this makes one law in our parsha – the law of the Second Tithe – hard to understand. As we noted above, in the third and sixth year of the septennial cycle, this was given to the poor. However, in the first, second, fourth, and fifth years, it was to be taken by the farmers to Jerusalem and eaten there in a state of purity

You shall eat the tithe of your grain, new wine, and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always.

Deut. 14:23

If the farmer lived at a great distance from Jerusalem, he was allowed an alternative:

You may exchange the tithe for money. Wrap up the money in your hand, go to the place that the Lord your God will choose, and spend the money on whatever you choose: cattle, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever else you wish. Deut. 14:25-26

The problem is obvious. The second tithe did not go to poor, or to the priests and Levites, so it was not part of the first or second principle. It may have been part of the third, to remind the farmer that the land belonged to God, but this too seems unlikely. There was no declaration, as happened in the case of first-fruits, and no specific religious service, as took place on the festivals. Other than being in Jerusalem, the institution of the second tithe seemingly had no cognitive or spiritual content. What then was the logic of the second tithe?

The Sages,[2] focussing on the phrase, “so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God” said that it was to encourage people to study. Staying for a while in Jerusalem while they consumed the tithe or the food bought with its monetary substitute, they would be influenced by the mood of the holy city, with its population engaged either in Divine service or sacred study.[3] This would have been much as happens today for synagogue groups that arrange study tours to Israel.

Maimonides, however, gives a completely different explanation.

The second tithe was commanded to be spent on food in Jerusalem: in this way the owner was compelled to give part of it away as charity. As he was not able to use it otherwise than by way of eating and drinking, he must have easily been induced to give it gradually away. This rule brought multitudes together in one place, and strengthened the bond of love and brotherhood among the children of men.[4]

For Maimonides, the second tithe served a social purpose. It strengthened civil society. It created bonds of connectedness and friendship among the people. It encouraged visitors to share the blessings of the harvest with others. Strangers would meet and become friends. There would be an atmosphere of camaraderie among the pilgrims. There would be a sense of shared citizenship, common belonging, and collective identity. Indeed Maimonides says something similar about the festivals themselves:

The use of keeping festivals is plain. Man derives benefit from such assemblies: the emotions produced renew the attachment to religion; they lead to friendly and social intercourse among the people.[5]

The atmosphere in Jerusalem, says Maimonides, would encourage public spiritedness. Food would always be plentiful, since the fruit of trees in their fourth year, the tithe of cattle, and the corn, wine, and oil of the second tithe would all have been brought there. They could not be sold and they could not be kept for the next year;

therefore much would be given away in charity, especially (as the Torah specifies) to “the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow.” (Deut. 14:29)

Writing about America in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville found that he had to coin a new word for the phenomenon he encountered there and saw as one of the dangers in a democratic society. The word was individualism. He defined it as “a mature and calm feeling which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends,” leaving “society at large to itself.”[6] Tocqueville believed that democracy encouraged individualism. As a result, people would leave the business of the common good entirely to the government, which would become ever more powerful, eventually threatening freedom itself.

It was a brilliant insight. Two recent examples illustrate the point. The first was charted by Robert Putnam, the great Harvard sociologist, in his study of Italian towns in the 1990s.[7] During the 1970s all Italian regions were given local government on equal terms, but over the next twenty years, some prospered, others stagnated; some had effective governance and economic growth, while others were mired in corruption and underachievement. The key difference, he found, was the extent to which the regions had an active and public-spirited citizenry.

The other example focuses on the “free-rider” attitude. It is often tempting to take advantage of public facilities without paying your fair share (for example, travelling on public transport without paying for a ticket: hence the term “free rider”). You then obtain the benefit without bearing a fair share of the costs. When this happens, trust is eroded and public spiritedness declines. This is illustrated in an experiment known as the “free rider game,” designed to test public spiritedness within a group. We mentioned this study earlier in this year’s series, in parshat Ki Tissa.

In the game, as you may recall, each of the participants is given a certain amount of money, and then invited to contribute to a common pot, which is then multiplied and returned in equal parts to the players. So, for example, if each contributes \$10, each will receive \$30. However, if one player chooses not to contribute anything, then if there are six players, there will be \$50 in the pot and \$150 after multiplication. Each of the players will then receive \$25, but one will now have \$35: the money from the pot plus the \$10 which they originally received.

When played over several rounds, the other players soon notice that not everyone is contributing equally. The unfairness causes the others to contribute less to the shared pot. The group suffers and no one gains. If, however, the other players are given the chance to punish the suspected cheat by paying a dollar to make them forfeit three dollars, they tend to do so. The experiment demonstrates that there is always a potential conflict between self-interest and the common good. When individuals only act for themselves, the group suffers. When the free-riders stop acting selfishly, everyone benefits.

As I was writing about this in 2015, the Greek economy was in a state of collapse.

Years earlier, in 2008, an economist, Benedikt Herrmann, had tested people in different cities throughout the world to see whether there were geographical and cultural variations in the way people played the free rider game. He found that in places like Boston, Copenhagen, Bonn, and Seoul, voluntary contributions to the common pot were high. They were much lower in Istanbul, Riyadh, and Minsk, where the economy was less developed. But they were lowest of all in Athens, Greece. What is more, when players in Athens penalised the free riders, those penalised did not stop free-riding. Instead they took revenge by punishing their punishers.[8] The conclusion drawn was that where public spiritedness is low, society fails to cohere and the economy fails to grow.

Hence the brilliance of Maimonides' insight that the second tithe existed to create social capital, meaning bonds of trust and reciprocal altruism among the population, which came about through sharing food with strangers in the holy precincts of Jerusalem. Loving God helps make us better citizens and more generous people, thus countering the individualism that eventually makes democracies fail. [1] "Moses: Apostle of Freedom" (address first delivered to the Young Men's Hebrew Association of San Francisco, June 1878). [2] Sifrei ad loc. A more extended version of this interpretation can be found in the Sefer ha-Chinnuch, command 360. [3] See also Tosafot, Baba Batra 21a, s.v. Ki MiTzion. [4] The Guide for the Perplexed III:39. [5] Ibid, III:46.

[6] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Book II, ch. 2. [7] Putnam, Robert D., Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti. Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993. [8] B. Herrmann, C. Thoni, and S. Gachter, "Antisocial Punishment Across Societies." Science 319.5868 (2008): 1362-367.

Dangerous Idols in Ancient Israel and Contemporary American by Rabbi Barry H. Block

<https://truah.org/resources/dangerous-idols-in-ancient-israel-and-contemporary-america/>

As the Israelites prepare to cross the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land, Moses instructs them:

"You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshiped their gods...Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the images of their gods, obliterating their name from that site" (Deuteronomy 12:2-3).

The commandment seems awfully harsh, even unforgivably disrespectful to other people's faith. However, as Rabbi Ariel Naveh writes in The Social Justice Torah Commentary (p. 295),

"The purpose of the destruction... is to establish the land as the sacred and true birthright of the Israelites, but it is also to establish the necessary rites of worship and practice in order for that birthright to be continued. Worshiping idols, statues, and altars like the peoples who inhabited the land prior to the Israelites' arrival would be anathema; a new precedent must be established...[F]or that precedent to hold, all

remnants of the previous means of worship must be rooted out, desecrated, and fully destroyed.”

In our own country, in the aftermath of the Civil War, the United States occupied the defeated South and imposed a new racial order on the former Confederacy.

Reconstruction, though, was short-lived. Soon, new iterations of enslavement, in the form of peonage and convict leasing, took hold. Jim Crow and lynching reinforced a racial hierarchy that persists even today, nearly sixty years after civil rights became the law of the land.

Brent Staples of the New York Times recently wrote that President Woodrow Wilson and his administration “paid homage to the icons of white supremacy when they named military bases for the Confederate traitors who had waged war on this country with the aim of keeping Black people in chains. This gesture of federal fealty ratified the ‘Southern way of life’ at a time when Black people were being hanged, shot and burned alive before cheering crowds all over the Confederacy.”

Unlike Moses’s band of freed slaves — commanded to destroy the graven images they found in their new land, lest they lead them, too, into idolatry — the Civil War’s victors built and venerated monuments to the enslavers and to the enslavement that Union blood was copiously spilt to defeat.

At the Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally of 2017 and at the Capitol insurrection of January 6, 2021, Confederate and Nazi insignia were flown side-by-side with American flags, as if symbols of white supremacy and genocide were patriotic. A few minutes’ drive from my house, the Arkansas Capitol grounds are home to multiple Confederate monuments. Those same grounds house no memorial to all who were tortured to death in this state as enslaved laborers or as victims of lynching.

In 1913, the year that President Wilson was inaugurated, Julian Carr, a benefactor of “Silent Sam,” a Confederate monument erected on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, acclaimed the statue as a testament to those who had given their lives for “the welfare of the Anglo Saxon race.” The statue both celebrated and fomented racist violence, just as Confederate and Nazi symbols did in Charlottesville in 2017 and at our nation’s Capitol in 2021.

Deuteronomy’s words are difficult to read. We do not celebrate the destruction of other people’s holy sites. Nonetheless, Moses had it right: Establishing a just society, as the Holy One commands, requires rooting out the symbols of evil. As Rabbi Naveh concludes, “We must destroy and annihilate not just the statues of old, but also the despicable mindset they represent. Only then will we as a society hopefully warrant the everlasting name promised to us in generations past.”

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[The Meaning of Repetition, Repetition by David Zev Moster](http://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-meaning-of-repetition-repetition/)
<http://www.jtsa.edu/torah/the-meaning-of-repetition-repetition/>

When it comes to reading the Tanakh, much is lost in translation, so even a bit of knowledge of Biblical Hebrew can go a long way. Here is one grammatical insight into this week's parashah, Parashat Re'eh.

According to Deuteronomy 14:22, Israelite farmers must tithe the produce of their field שָׁנָה שָׁנָה, shanah shanah, which at first glance means "year, year." Later in the parashah, Deuteronomy 15:20, we are told that firstborn animals shall be eaten at God's chosen place שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה, shanah veshanah, which apparently means "a year in a year." What does the repetition mean in these two verses?

In Biblical Hebrew, repetition conveys a sense of plurality often translated as "every," "each," or "any." Joseph resisted the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife יוֹם יוֹם, yom yom, "every day" (Genesis 39:10). Samson awoke from his sleep thinking he would again break free from Delilah as he had done כָּפַעַם בְּכַפַּעַם, kefa'am befa'am, "each time" (Judges 16:20). We are told that אִישׁ אִישׁ, 'ish 'ish, "any man" who curses his parents shall be put to death (Leviticus 20:19).

Returning to our parashah, what do the phrases שָׁנָה שָׁנָה, shanah shanah, and שָׁנָה בְּשָׁנָה, shanah veshanah convey? They mean the Israelites were supposed to visit God's place "every year." This phrase has a similar meaning to לְדֹר דֹּר, ledor dor, in Exodus 3:15, in which God reveals his name to Moses "for every generation." As the years and generations pass, God is still waiting to be served.

If we look closely, sometimes we find syllables repeating themselves within a single word. This has a slightly different nuance. Instead of meaning "every," "each," or "any," this type of repetition occurs when a great plurality is to be imagined. The תַּלְ-תַּל-יִם, taltallim, "locks of hair" in Song of Songs 5:11 convey a full head of hair with bountiful locks; עַקְל-קַל-קַל-קַל-וֹת, 'akalkallot, "twisted" in Judges 5:6 suggests a road with frequent turns; עַפְּ-עַפְּ-י, 'af'appay, "my eyelids" in Psalm 132:4 connotes blinking repeatedly; the name דַּרְ-דַּר, dardar, "thistle" of Genesis 3:18 warns of its many thorns; and the גַּלְ-גַּל-יָו, galgillav, chariot "wheels" in Isaiah 5:28 implies spinning round and round.

With this knowledge we can better understand a noun in the second half of the parashah:

אֶת־זֶה תֹאכְלוּ מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם כֹּל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ סִנְפִיר וְקִשְׁקֶשֶׁת תֹאכְלוּ:

This you all shall eat from everything in the water: everything that has fins and scales you all shall eat. (Deut. 14:9)

Whereas the plurality of שָׁנָה שָׁנָה, shanah shanah, means "every year," the repetition of קִשְׁ-קִשׁ in קִשְׁקֶשֶׁת, kaskeset, conveys the hundreds, if not thousands of individual scales on each fish. The repetitive form suggests abundance.

Looking beyond the parashah, repetition can be found in some of the most well-known verses in the Tanakh. For example, the angels surrounding God are described in Isaiah as follows:

וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וְאָמַר קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כְּלֵי־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ:

And each one called to another "kadosh kadosh kadosh" is the Lord of Hosts, his honor fills the entire world! (Isa. 6:3)

What does kadosh kadosh kadosh mean? Most translations have something like “holy, holy, holy!” but our approach adds new meaning to the repetition, rendering it “holy in every way” or “infinitely holy.” This happens to be the understanding of the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, which adds that God is “holy” in the heavens, “holy” on the earth, and “holy” for all eternity. God is holy in every conceivable way.

In next week’s parashah we will read that judges must be fair and righteous:

צֶדֶק צֶדֶק תִּרְדֹּף לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה וְיִרְשָׁתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ:

Pursue tzedek tzedek so that you may live and possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you (Deut. 16:20)

What does tzedek tzedek mean? Some translations have “justice, justice,” but our approach suggests “every type of justice.” Justice for the rich and the poor. Justice for your friend and your foe. As it turns out, this is the approach of the King James Bible, which translates tzedek tzedek as “that which is altogether just.” The way to say “altogether” in Biblical Hebrew is to repeat.

Repetition is so uncommon in the English language it is underlined in red in Microsoft Word. This is not the case in Biblical Hebrew. As we have seen, some of the most familiar and influential verses contain repetition, and our approach can be applied to each and every one. All you have to do is repeat, repeat. (*David Zev Moster is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Bible at JTS*)

Yahrtzeits

Rabbi Lisa Vernon remembers her grandfather Arthur J. Vernon on Sat. Aug.27
Merna Most remembers her sister-in-law Florence Most on Sun. Aug. 28 (Elul 1).
Cynthia Schwartz remembers her mother Elaine Schwartz on Thur. Sept. 1. (Elul 5).
Ilisia Kissner remembers her uncle Hyman Rosenblum on Fri. Sept. 2 (Elul 6).