

We are Commanded to be Joyful

In this weeks reading from Parsahat Re'eh (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17*), Moshe says רָאֵה אֲנֹכִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה: meaning “*See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse.*” Moshe says the blessing comes if we “*listen and obey.*” The curse comes to those who turn aside from the way God has commanded. The blessing is for those who remain “*within*” the covenant, and the curse are for those who remain “*outside*” of the covenant. This suggests that those who turn away from God’s ways are turning away from the covenant. Those inside the covenant live inside of the Promised Land, walk according to the commands, and enjoy the blessing and protection of God. Those outside of the covenant have no part in God’s promises and do not regard God’s word as a guide for life. What does this say regarding the tribes of Reuben and Gad who requested to remain on the other side of the Jordan river? These things provide for us a good response for the reason Moshe wrote the book of Deuteronomy. Are there areas in your life that desire to remain on the other side of the Jordan River in the wilderness as opposed to the Promised Land?

In this week’s reading, remaining within the covenant is emphasized as Moshe continues to speak to the people stating over and over again, “*12:5 But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the Lord your God will choose...*” According to these scriptures, God is establishing His name in the Land and the Place (הַמְקוֹם) of His choosing. In addition, the Lord is also establishing His Name in the People of His choosing. Today, in Yeshua the Messiah, the Lord has established a place for His name in us forever.

Reading through the blessing and the curses, the question for us today is “*have we forgotten the most important aspect of the covenant according to the Torah, the commandment to be joyful unto the Lord?*” Is being joyful an important command? In Parashat Re'eh, we are told to be joyful before the Lord and in the work of our hands. This is spoken in the context of change, *12:8 ‘You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; (NASB)* we are to live with joy in the commands of God and stop complaining!

ה כי אם-אל-המקום אשר-יבחר יהוה אלהיכם מכל-שבטיכם לשום את-שמו שם לשכנו תדרשו ובאת שמה: ו והבאתם שמה עלתיכם וזבחיכם ואת מעשרותיכם ואת תרומת ידכם ונדריכם ונדבתיכם ובכרות בן-קרנם וצאנכם: ז ואכלתם-שם לפני יהוה אלהיכם ושמחתם בכל משלח ידכם אתם ובתיכם אשר ברכו יהוה אלהיך: ח לא תעשו ככל אשר אנחנו עשים פה היום איש כל-הישר בעיניו: ט כי לא-באתם עד-עתה אל-המנוחה ואל-הנחלה אשר-יהוה אלהיך נתן לך: י ועברתם את-הירדן וישבתם בארץ אשר-יהוה אלהיכם מנחיל אתכם והניח לכם מכל-איביכם מסביב וישבתם-בטח: [שני] יא והיה המקום אשר-יבחר יהוה אלהיכם בו לשפן שמו שם שמה תביאו את כל-אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם עולתיכם וזבחיכם מעשרותיכם ותרמת ידכם וכל מבחר נדריכם אשר תדרו ליהוה: יב ושמחתם לפני יהוה אלהיכם אתם ובניכם ובנותיכם ועבדיכם ואמהתיכם והלוי אשר בשעריכם כי אין לו חלק ונחלה אתכם: יג השמר לך פן-תעלה עלתיך בכל-מקום אשר תראה: יד כי אם-במקום אשר-יבחר יהוה באחד שבטיך שם תעלה עלתיך ושם תעשה כל אשר אנכי מצוה:

12:5 'But you shall seek the LORD at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. 12:6 'There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. 12:7 'There also you and your households shall eat before the Lord your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you. 12:8 'You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; 12:9 for you have not as yet come to the resting place and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. 12:10 'When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, 12:11 then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord. 12:12 'And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. 12:13 'Be careful that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every cultic place you see, 12:14 but in the place which the Lord chooses in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you. (NASB)

וְאֶכְלֶתֶם-שָׂם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם ז
וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם בְּכֹל מַשְׁלַח יָדְכֶם אַתֶּם וּבְתִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר בִּרְכָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ: ח לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן
12:7 כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשִׂים פֹּה הַיּוֹם אִישׁ כָּל-הַיֹּשֵׁר בְּעֵינָיו:
‘There also you and your households shall eat before the Lord your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you. 12:8 ‘You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; (NASB) Simchat Torah, the joy of Torah, according to Parashat Re’eh, is drawn into the context of something changing. Moshe says the children of Israel are not to do according to what they think is right in their own eyes. Now, according to the Torah narrative, the congregation of Israel has been moving about in the wilderness from place to place. According to the book of Numbers, they spent the last 40 years in the wilderness and are now ready to enter the promised land. They have spent the last 40 years in the presence of the Lord God following the mitzvot that Moshe had given them, explained to them, and commanded them to follow, both now and when they enter the Promised Land. Moshe is again giving us this “*now and then*” point of view. What is it about the “*now and then*” perspective that Moshe is giving them saying to not do what seems right in their own eyes in the Promised Land? (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 12:8 ‘You shall not do at all what we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes; (NASB)?*)

The answer may be related to Moshe explaining that they are going to have to begin to take responsibility for themselves, to obey and live for the Lord. In the wilderness, they have Moshe and the presence of God (*pillar of cloud and fire*) as a constant reminder. Each man does what he thinks is right, but then is reminded daily to turn from his sin (*to perform Teshuvah*) and to seek the Lord daily. In the Land in which they are going, they will experience first hand the destructive nature of the enemy. Not only in the sense of war, but even in the times of peace, when the people will have peaceful contact with the nations, as they did in Parashat Pinchas. At this point another enemy enters in, the enemy of deception which starts with “*each man doing what ‘seems’ right in his own eyes.*” The concept here is to remember the Torah commands for the purpose of having a sure foundation upon which we may stand, so that we do not go to the left or to the right. The reason being, the enemy desires to place a lie in our hearts. If the lie takes root (*a person believes it*), this will result in the enemy shouting in the midst of God’s sanctuary similar to what

Asaph says in *Tehillim / Psalms 74:4*. This was the point and purpose of the Lord God giving Israel the Torah and the instructions on the Moedim so the people would remember what the Lord has done and at various times during the year and would turn to the Lord in Teshuvah and seek Him. This is why the Scriptures state, *12:10 'When you cross the Jordan and live in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live in security, 12:11 then it shall come about that the place in which the Lord your God will choose for His name to dwell, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution of your hand, and all your choice votive offerings which you will vow to the Lord. 12:12 'And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. (NASB)* The inheritance, the rest, the commandments, living for the Lord, and blessing, all result in the joy of the Lord in our hearts. The appointed times, the Moedim (מוֹעֲדִים) were given to be a reminder of the greatness of God, His deliverance and salvation for His people. The Moedim consist of eight appointed times:

1. **The Shabbat** - the weekly observance of Sabbath that commemorates the Lord God as the Creator of the world. According to the Sages, the Shabbat is the most important of the appointed times, even more important than Yom Kippur and the Ten Days of Awe. There are 54 weekly Sabbaths in a “*leap year*” and 50 for regular years.
2. **Pesach** (Nisan 15), also known as Passover, the reminder of the deliverance from bondage and sin.
3. **Unleavened Bread** (Nisan 15-22); note that the Counting of the Omer is first mentioned in this section of the Torah (*Vayikra / Leviticus 23:9-16*).
4. **Firstfruits** (Nisan 17), also called Reishit Katzir (*resurrection theme*)

5. **Shavuot** (Sivan 6), also known as the feast of weeks, was the moment in Time in Israel's history when first receiving the Torah. This time is also called Pentecost in the Apostolic Writings and the filling of the Holy Spirit and the Lord writing His Torah on our hearts (*Jeremiah 31*).
6. **Yom Teru'ah** (Tishri 1), also called Rosh Hashanah (*note that this is first mentioned in the Torah at Parashat Emor*).
7. **Yom Kippur** (Tishri 10) also known as the Day of Atonement, and is the time when the High Priest enters the holy of holies to make atonement for the entire nation of Israel.
8. **Sukkot** (Tishri 15-22) also called Tabernacles (*note also that this is the first time we read the commandments to dwell in a Sukkah and to wave the arba minim (the four species) in the Torah*).

These are supposed to be times of memorial, of joy, and of remembering the mighty deliverance and salvation of God. The Septuagint states, according to *Tehillim / Psalms 74*, that the enemy boasts in the midst of the Moedim (Feasts) for the purpose of lifting themselves up to take credit for their oppression of Israel. The enemy is self glorifying. They erect a standard for signs in the sanctuary providing for us an illustration of conquering and establishing their name in the holy place as opposed to establishing the name of the Lord in the holy place of God. If we allow the enemy to place a lie in our hearts, if we give in to sin, or set up idols in our hearts (*Ezekiel 14*), this is the same as establishing the name of the enemy as opposed to the name of God in the holy place of our hearts.

Asaph in *Tehillim / Psalms 74* states the enemy cuts, smashes, destroys, and burns what is the Lords (*74:5-7*), and they determine in their hearts to completely subdue the people of God. Asaph continues stating, *74:9 We do not see our signs; There is no longer any prophet, Nor is there any among us who knows how long. (NASB)* and then asks the Lord, *74:10 How long, O God, will the adversary revile, And the enemy spurn Your name forever? (NASB)* These things happening appear to be a sign to Asaph that the Lord has removed his hand that holds back the enemy from doing these things (*74:11*). This brings up an interesting observation

about the rabbis in their understanding of time and the deliverance that God sends for His people.

The rabbinic understanding of time is not as a linear sequence of events as we understand the meaning of time being measured linearly or progressively. The Jewish thinking tends to regard time as circular in the sense that moving forward requires the hand of the Lord to overcome sin, its consequences, and the enemy, which then brings God's deliverance and salvation. This is a recurring theme, in a circular sense, throughout the weeks, months, and years of one's life. As we learn, we grow, we repent, we turn, and we draw nearer to the Lord, we find this pattern happening throughout our lives and relationship with God. This understanding of time is taken from the Hebrew language itself. Some of the sages note that the Hebrew word for "*years (a long period of time)*" shanah (שָׁנָה) shares the same root as both the words for "*to study, to repeat, to review*" (שָׁנָה) and "*to be changed, to be altered, to be switched*" (שִׁנָּה). As a result, the idea of the "*Jewish year*" implies an ongoing "*repetition*" (Mishnah, מְשֻׁנָּה) or a continuing "*review*" of the key prophetic events of God's redeeming history as the people are reliving in their present experiences. This concept comes out from the events of the Patriarchal fathers saying that the lives of the fathers function as parables that may be applied to us as expressed in the phrase מַעֲשֵׂה אֲבוֹת סִמָּן לְבָנִים (ma'aseh avot siman lebanim): "*The deeds of the fathers are signs for the children.*" The idea then is that the Jewish year repeats itself thematically, but it also changes from year to year as we progress closer to the coming Day of Redemption. Our understanding of the Lord, His ways (*according to the Torah*), our lives, and our relationship with God, are also a continuing progression in the forward direction if we are spending time in the Scriptures and in prayer. Therefore, there is a tension that is formed in the understanding of the time-line of history, a push-pull relationship that is occurring that is circular, we sin, we repent, we turn from sin, and deliverance comes, where the Lord God is involved in the process of moving our hearts towards repentance and return.

This push-pull dualism follows through in our understanding of the Messiah. For example, in Yeshua's first coming, he came as our "*Suffering Servant*" and lived "*proverbially*" in fulfillment of the Moedim which foreshadowed his reason and purpose for coming, to make atone-

ment for our sins in his blood. In His second coming, he will come as the conquering King. As a result of these things, the Moedim offer us both a remembering of the past, which leads to a hopeful future expectation of the redemption of God. For example, in Pesach meal, in the Seder, we express the reality of Yeshua as the world's "*Lamb of God*," just as we commemorate (remember) the deliverance the Lord provides in the proper time, and look forward to the fall holidays in expectation of His rule and reign as our King. The idea of the "*cycles*" of time, or the "*circular patterns of time and history*" suggests that one day we are going to be with the Lord, a time which was foreknown and understood as the Garden of Eden, the glory of heaven. With the hope of the circular nature of history and the Lord returning to His people, Asaph said in *Tehillim / Psalms 74:12* *Yet God is my king from of old, Who works deeds of deliverance in the midst of the earth. (NASB)* calling upon the Torah in remembrance, of the dividing of the sea (74:13), subduing the great creatures of the sea (74:14), and the great world wide flood (74:15). He proclaims the Lord is in control of all things (74:16), all of these things are drawn into contrast to the enemy who is small compared to these things (74:17-18). He asks the Lord not to deliver the helpless to the beast (74:19) and to consider the covenant (74:20) and do not let the oppressed be dishonored (74:21).

According to Parashat Re'eh, we are commanded to be joyful, but that is not always an easy task based upon life's circumstances. Is it possible to always be happy? Is there a difference between being happy as opposed to being joyful? According to the dictionary, "*Happiness*" is defined as "*Feeling pleasure / feeling or showing pleasure, contentment, or joy.*" "*Joy*" is defined as "*great happiness, feelings of great happiness or pleasure, especially of an elevated or spiritual kind 2) something that brings happiness.*" According to the definition of happiness and joy, both are intimately connected, one cannot be had without the other. The command to be joyful in the Lord, according to the Torah, is coupled with terrible things happening if we are not joyful in Him according to Parashat Ki Tavo in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 28:45-50*.

Devarim / Deuteronomy 28:45-50

28:45 'So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the Lord your God by keeping His com-

mandments and His statutes which He commanded you. 28:46 'They shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever. 28:47 'Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; 28:48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you. 28:49 'The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, 28:50 a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. (NASB)

Moshe says “*Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things.*” The significance of the joy the Torah is speaking of is with regard to our giving credit to the Lord for all that we have which includes the good and the bad times. The Apostle James said in *James 1:1-9* the following:

James 1:1-9

1:1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 1:3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 1:4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 1:6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 1:7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 1:8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 1:9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; (NASB)

James begins with the hortative words: *πᾶσαν χάραν ἠγάπησασθε* esteem it complete joy, *πᾶσα χάρα*, where “*complete joy*” suggests “*nothing but joy*,” which catches the meaning *עם כל השמחה להיות שמח האחים שלי*, “With all joy be rejoicing my brethren,” which corresponds to the Torah portion *וְשִׂמְחֶתֶם בְּכֹל מַשְׁלַח יְדְכֶם אֲתֶם וּבְתִיכֶם אֲשֶׁר בִּרְכָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ rejoice in all your undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you*. James may have been thinking on Parashat Re’eh when he wrote to the people to consider it joy when encountering trials (1:2) because this produces the testing of our faith (1:3) which is a direct parallel to what Moshe said to Israel, *Devarim / Deuteronomy 8:2 Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. (NIV)* With these things in mind, we are called to obey the Lord with joy.

This week’s Torah portion, Parashat Re’eh, speaks of being joyful in the Lord, in His word (commands), and in our lives, by the work of our hands to recognize that He is the one who gives us all things. This week’s portion provides us with a greater understanding of James’ exhortation. We are to remain faithful in our walk with our Father in heaven and Yeshua the Messiah, no matter the circumstances. The Tanach (OT) is not simply a history book to be read, but according to the Apostles, the prophets, Moshe, and Yeshua, we are to remember the Lord God in heaven and His mighty deeds with joy and thanksgiving. In doing this, we are living according to the will of our Father in heaven. (*Matthew 7*).



