Points to Ponder

Re’eh 5781

**רְאֵ֗ה אָֽנֹכִ֛י נֹתֵ֥ן לִפְנֵיכֶ֖ם הַיּ֑וֹם בְּרָכָ֖ה וּקְלָלָֽה Behold I set before you today a Beracha and a Klala (11:26) - Rav Schachter Shlita** would remind us that the Torah is formulating the principles of Bechira Chofshis here. (This was in contrast to much of today’s psychology that argues that behavior and choice is predetermined which he would remind us is an idea that is not in line with Torah thought). Rav Schachter added that when the Rambam formulated this most significant principle in *Hilchos Teshuva* (at the beginning of chapter 5) instead of referring to freedom of will as *bechira chofshis*, as it is commonly referred to, he calls it "*reshus*". In one of his *drashas* for *aseres yemei teshuva*, Rav Soloveitchk suggested that perhaps the Rambam meant to bring out the following idea: in modern Hebrew we refer to the elections as "*bechirot*". At election time, we are presented with a fixed set of candidates (or parties) and we choose from among them. Man, however, not only has "*bechira chofshis*" to choose from among the various options which are presented to him, but he even has "*reshus*", i.e. the ability to choose a path in life which was never even presented to him as an option. Therefore, even people brought up in a totally non-observant family and in an anti-Torah society also have the ability to choose - similar to *yesh me'ayin* - to be observant.

**וְאֹת֥וֹ תַֽעֲבֹ֖דוּ And serve Him (13:5) - Rashi** explains that we are to serve Hashem in his Mikdash. **Ramban** (in VaEschanan 6:13) says we can serve Hashem in His Torah and in His Mikdash. What is Avoda in Mikdash? It refers to Korbanos. And Avodah in Torah? To learn Torah. **Rav Elya Svei ztl.** added that like a servant whose only purpose in existence is to do the will of his master, we can serve Hashem best by being entrenched in learning through connection to Hashem totally.

**נֵֽלְכָ֗ה וְנַֽעַבְדָה֙ אֱלֹהִ֣ים אֲחֵרִ֔ים אֲשֶׁר֙ לֹ֣א יָדַ֔עְתָּ  Other Gods whom you do not know (13:7)** - Why do we constantly highlight the idea that these are “other Gods whom we do not know”? **Chasam Sofer** explains that this conveys the message that in every generation there will always be new ideologies that are antagonistic to Torah but will claim that they have something new to offer whereby they try to entice and recruit people to their ideology but each one fails. **Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski ztl.** added that this teaches us that one may not be gullible. Sometimes we are so wishful for the simple, effortless bliss that leads one to latch onto every fad that comes into practice. If the Chiddush is brand new and never heard of before, it is probably not ok.

**כִּ֣י עַ֤ם קָדוֹשׁ֙ אַתָּ֔ה You are a holy nation unto Hashem (14:21)** - The **Sifrei** notes that one should not permit something that others forbid when in their presence. Sifrei explains that this is because you are a holy nation -- so as long as you are with others who are stringent strive for the Kedusha. **Rav Wolbe ztl.** explains that when one is in the presence of those of those who are more scrupulous it should arouse in him a desire to emulate them at least for the time you are in their presence.

**לְמַ֣עַן תִּלְמַ֗ד לְיִרְאָ֛ה So that you will learn to fear Hashem all of your days (14:23)** - The purpose of Maaser Sheni where a second tithe is taken in the 1st, 2nd, 4th & 5th years of the Shmittah cycle is somewhat debated by the Meforshim. The **Ramban** explains that the purpose is, as stated, “So that he should learn to fear Hashem,” because the national teachers are prevalent there to teach him. The **Hadar Z’keinim** continues that the hope was that people might even stay after the *chagim* to learn more. **Rav Yosef Carmel Shlita** adds that going to Yerushalayim is not just about bringing *korbanot* but also about taking a break in the daily activities to grow from spiritual and emotional perspectives in a holy place with holy people. This is a wise use of the significant tithe of the produce. Today as well, one of the important jobs of “Torah professionals” is to be concerned with the emotional health of their students/congregants and see to it that we make sure that everyone comes through Torah experiences inspired.

**וְשָֽׂמַחְתָּ֞ לִפְנֵ֣י ה אֱלֹהֶ֗יךָ And you shall rejoice before Hashem (16:11) - Rashi** cites the Midrash that Hashem says if you bring joy to “My” four, he will bring simcha to yours. His 4 include the Levi, Ger, Yasom and Almana while ours include children and staff. **Rav Yaakov Bender Shlita** notes that this teaches us that it is not enough to invite guests or give Tzedaka, we need to make the recipients feel part of the Yom Tov experience.

**Haftara:**

**בִּצְדָקָ֖ה תִּכּוֹנָ֑נִי  Establish yourself through righteousness (Yeshayahu 54:14) - Rav Dovid Feinstein ztl.** noted that charity and righteous acts to those less fortunate will be the foundation of Am Yisrael’s reestablishment on the land. Some of these acts include the forgiving of loans in the Shmittah year, consistent giving of Tzedaka and giving Maaser as discussed in the Parasha.