

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

RE'EH

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EDITORS NOTES

Can You Really See? From the archives

I am always intrigued by the people who I meet and after engaging in some theological conversation, they close in saying that, "if there really were miracles and I saw what Benai Yisrael saw in Egypt and in the desert, I guess that I would be more observant".

But the fact is that although we say that "seeing is believing", it takes more than seeing for something to truly enter the heart. There is a physical seeing and then there is a deeper emotional and spiritual seeing.

Even our forefathers who experienced the plagues, the death of the first born, the exodus, the splitting of the sea, the revelation at Sinai, the well of Miriam, the clouds and the manna falling from heaven had their moments. Imagine crossing the sea and still carrying an idol in the knapsack as some mystical insurance policy. It takes much more than miracles.

This week's portion begins with the word Re'eh, The word is a directive to see. The Malbim brings down that this usage of the word "Re'eh" is because the blessing and curse described here by Moshe are not simply promises for the future but actually a visible property which exists amongst the Jewish people. He goes on to explain that one can actually see that people who observe the Torah have a sense of accomplishment, fulfillment and spiritual growth whereas those who go against it can be seen to live mundane lives which lack such achievement or satisfaction.

But I believe that although the rest of the verse is directed in the plural, this word Re'eh is directed in the singular, because not everyone can really see. It may be in front of our face and on a physical level we see it, but it takes more than seeing with our eyes for the vision to penetrate our mind, heart and soul. And

although many people may see and experience the same object or event, they will all walk away with something different.

I am reminded of a true story that Rav Yechetzkel Levenstein told over.

As he entered a taxi in Israel, his driver noticing the rabbi, turned to strike up a conversation.

"You know, I have a very religious best friend. He wasn't always religious, in fact we were army buddies and he was as irreligious as me. After the army as most of us did then, we went off to travel and found ourselves camping in the Amazon in South America. In the middle of the night we all woke up to hear muffled screams and we saw our friend with a huge boa constrictor around his neck squeezing tighter and tighter.

"Of course we screamed at the snake and hit it with sticks but it was just going tighter around his neck. Nothing we were doing was helping and our friend was quickly losing consciousness. With nothing else we could do one of the friends shouted to him "say shema yisrael" – so with his last ounce of strength our friend said shema yisrael and all of a sudden the snake unloosened his grip and crawled away. It was a miracle!! – It struck him so deeply that when he returned home, he started learning about the Shemah, then praying every day, and then learning too. So now our friend wears a hat with a religious wife and kids in yeshivas."

"That's a great story" the Rav exclaimed "but why are you not more religious after witnessing all this?"

"Well" said the taxi driver "the miracle didn't happen to me!"

When I tell the story, people are amazed that this guy could retell this story again and again and its just a story he tells to the religious guys that come into his cab and nothing more. He saw, but he didn't see. But its not so amazing.

Do you know anyone who still smokes? I was shocked that some of the most observant guys I know still smoke and allow their children to smoke. Aside from the halachic point of view, where

Maimonides notes that a sound mind requires a sound body, and for this reason it is a religious obligation to take care of one's health and where the Shulchan Aruch brings a number of regulations enacted for health purposes and where the Talmud comments that in general, health regulations are treated with greater stringency than any other section of halacha, there is the box. One picks up a box with a clear warning label. One knows that smoking kills not only the smoker, but those around the smoker and one still smokes. How?

We can see, we can know, but unless it enters us and becomes a part of us, we're not really seeing. That was the problem of the generation that left Egypt. Their internal eyes were closed and thus they were condemned to die in the desert.

Moses tells their children, speaking to each as individuals and in speaking to them, he is speaking to us. He begs us to strive with all our abilities to really open our eyes, our hearts and our souls and to see. We need to let that vision enter us and become a part of us and change us for the better.

As we approach the month of Elul, the month of introspection and the month of change, let's open our eyes to the point where each of us can answer as the holidays approach, "Ah, now I see".

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Perek 12, Pasook 23, includes the commandment not to eat blood. The next pasook goes on to say "lo to'chelenu (don't eat it) le'maan itav lach oo'lebanecha acharecha (so that it will be good for you and your children after you)". Why is Hashem telling us it will be good for us? Why is Hashem telling us that it will be good for us if we don't eat blood? Rashi addresses this question and notes that the Torah here is teaching us the amazing reward for a mitzvah. If the reward for staying away from eating blood, which a person has no desire for, is le'maan itav lach (that it will be good for us), how much greater will the reward be for staying away from stealing and arayot and other things that our nefesh truly does desire! Every time we hold back from something we desire to do or to look at we have to remember there is a great reward waiting for us in shamayim for this act. If the reward for an easy mitzvah is great how much greater is the reward for a difficult one!!

Re'eh - Mitzvot relevant to living in the land of Israel

- 1- Benei Israel again is told they will get beracha if they follow the mitzvot and curses if they do not. The mitzvah to destroy the Gods of the goyim, korbanot in mishkan Shilo, laws of bamot before mishkan Shilo.
- 2- Korbanot in the Beit Hamikdash. The heter to eat meat that is not brought on the mizbeyach.
- 3- Avodah Zara; a warning not to follow the avodah zara of the goyim in Israel, false prophets, one who entices you to do avodah zara, laws regarding a city of avoda zara.
- 4- Kashrout; the permitted and forbidden animals, fish, and birds, meat & milk
- 5- The halachot of maaser sheni
- 6- Canceling loans in the shemita year. The mitzvah of sedaka. Laws of a Jewish slave.
- 7- Hekdesh by a bechor animal. Pesach, Shavout and Succoth, the mitzvah to make a pilgrimage to Yerushalayim

While the first 3 parshiot in Sefer Devarim generally dealt with Moshe's rebuke of Benei Israel and advice before they entered Israel the next 3 parshiot generally deal with mitzvot and contain the bulk of the mitzvot found in Sefer Devarim. Parashat Re'eh deals with mitzvot relevant to living in the land of Israel. Parashat Shoftim deals with mitzvot related to establishing a community / society. And Parashat Ki Teseh deals with mitzvot relevant to relationships.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

**"If there shall be a destitute person among you...in any of your cities, in your land."
(Debarim 15:7)**

After a long day spent going house to house to collect charity, a beggar knocks on the door of a stately mansion. Without thinking twice, he opens the unlocked outside door and trudges in, his bare, mud-caked feet leaving clouds of dirt all over the marble floor. The incensed owner orders his servants to throw the intruder out at once, but the poor man pleads for the opportunity to say a few words.

"Each day in Baruch She'amar we praise Hashem saying, 'Blessed is He Who has mercy on earth, blessed is He Who has mercy on creatures.' We are taught to emulate the ways of Hashem." The beggar continued, "Hashem is merciful so you, too, be merciful. You are clearly emulating Hashem in having mercy on the condition of your 'earth' (the floor of your home). Now also remember the next words in the prayers, and have mercy on the creatures. Can you please give some sedakah?"

To his credit, the wealthy homeowner accepted the rebuke and gave the impoverished visitor a respectable sum of money.

With this tale, the Ben Ish Hai seeks to explain a pasuk in our parashah, "If there is among you a needy person...in your land, etc." The misvah of sedakah applies equally in and outside of Israel. Why mention the Land?

It comes to teach us a very pertinent lesson, which is as applicable today as it was when the Ben Ish Hai first stated it over a century ago.

Inordinate amounts of time and resources are spent to purchase and beautify living quarters. Architectural plans, huge sums to build, hours spent to choose colors, designs, wood floors, furniture options, and of course, the precise layout of the kitchen cabinets and countertop choices. The local locksmith is busy putting on two or even three locks on outside doors. State of the art alarm and surveillance systems installed to discourage intruders. If we are willing to show so much "mercy on earth," to expend so much money and effort on a piece of earth and a house, how much more should we be willing to spend on showing mercy toward one of our brethren. Therefore, the pasuk says to draw the right lessons from "your land" and "your cities" and don't "harden your heart or close your hand from your needy brethren!"

This isn't always an easy task. If one is running late when he comes to shul and a sedakah collector comes by, or a housewife is busy the last few minutes before Shabbat and the man at the door sings out, "Hachnasat Kallah." Why now of all times? The Zohar says that there are times when there is a decree against a person, and Hashem, in His kindness, brings a poor person his way, so that the merit of sedaka will save him. Then the collector may very well be his rescuer. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**"You shall tithe the entire crop of your planting."
(Debarim 18:22)**

From this pasuk, we learn the misvah of separating maaser from our crops and from our money. From the way the pasuk repeats the term "tithe," the gemara learns that if one fulfills this misvah, he will become wealthy. This is a play on the word te'aser, which is similar to the word tit'asher, which means to become wealthy. In fact, the gemara says, based on a pasuk from the prophet Malachi, that even though a person is generally not allowed to test Hashem, he is allowed to test Hashem with this misvah. Hashem says, "Test me out. Give maaser and you'll see that you will become wealthy as I said."

The Hatam Sofer adds a novel interpretation based on a mishnah in Pirkei Abot. The Mishnah says, "Who is rich? He who is content with his lot." The Torah's definition of a wealthy person is not

necessarily someone who has millions or even billions, but rather it is someone who is satisfied with what he has. That is a truly rich person. So the Torah here is guaranteeing that if a person performs the misvah of maaser, he may or may not win the lottery, but Hashem will bless him with a feeling of contentment.

If we think about it, it makes perfect sense. When we give maaser or sedakah to a needy person, we should feel a level of gratitude and appreciation for what we have, and that we are on the giving end rather than on the receiving end. This applies to all aspects of life. When we give some of our time to help others, whether to teach them something, or to help them with a task that they can't accomplish on their own, or even to just give them encouragement and support when they are down and out, we should begin to realize how much blessing we have in our own lives, and thank Hashem for it. Let's make the effort to look beyond ourselves to help our fellow man, and we will not only be helping the other person, but we have Hashem's guarantee that we will be blessed as well. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Paper Cuts

Someone once quipped that we are more concerned about a paper cut on our lips than we are about a murder in Yerushalayim. This, he added, does not make us wicked, it is simply an expression of human nature.

Psychiatrists say that much of what appears to be kindness is actually taking rather than giving. People may help in order to impress others, or perhaps to relieve a guilty conscience, or simply because they feel uncomfortable when viewing suffering – and so they remove it. It may appear as if people are giving to others, when they are actually helping themselves.

In order to truly give, it is necessary to feel connected to the receiver. A link to another creates the desire to make the other happy. This is most commonly observed when a mother caringly gives to her offspring.

The way to "learn" this trait – the way to connect with others and empathize with them – is to strengthen our links to the Creator. Relating to Him, we feel small and insignificant in the big picture of time and space. We begin to feel dependence upon Him and a connection to others in the same situation – the human condition.

We are all traveling on the same boat. Your need for the Captain is the same as that of others. Although your function as a part of the crew may be a little more important than that of someone else, everyone is needed on the boat in order to serve the Captain and reach the destination safely.

Learn to treat them accordingly. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
The Real Wealth

The Torah in Parashat Re'eh presents the Misva of Ma'aser Sheni, which required farmers in Eretz Yisrael to bring one-tenth of their produce to Jerusalem and eat it there in the city. They also had the option of transferring the Kedusha of the Ma'aser Sheni onto money, and bringing the money to Jerusalem where they would use it to purchase food which they would then eat. The Torah says that the purpose of this Misva is "Lema'an Tilmad Le'yir'a Et Hashem Elokecha"—so that the people would learn Yir'at Shamayim, fear of Hashem.

How does this Misva engender Yir'at Shamayim? Why would someone achieve a keener spiritual awareness by eating a portion of his produce in Jerusalem?

The Sefer Ha'hinuch explains that this Misva brought one Yir'at Shamayim by compelling him to spend time in the holy city of Jerusalem. The person had to eat the entire tithe in Jerusalem, and thus had to spend several days, or perhaps a week or two, in the city. Jerusalem was the site of the Bet Ha'mikdash and of the Sanhedrin, which consisted of the nation's seventy-one leading sages. When visiting Jerusalem, one had the opportunity to see the service in the Mikdash, to spend time with the Kohanim, and bask in the environment of Torah and Kedusha that permeated the city. This experience had an effect. A person would not leave Jerusalem without absorbing some of the holiness of the city, and this would lead him toward higher levels of Yir'at Shamayim.

This command of Ma'aser Sheni begins with the words, "Aser Te'aser." The Talmud, in a famous passage, notes the seemingly redundant expression and explains it to mean, "Aser Bishbil She'tit'asher"—"Give a tenth in order that you will be wealthy." This is generally understood as referring to the Misva of "Ma'aser Kesafim," donating one-tenth of one's earnings to charity, in the merit of which one earns wealth. Indeed, I personally know several community members who became wealthy once they began making a point of donating one-tenth of their earnings to charity. But we can arrive at a much deeper meaning of the Gemara's comment once we realize that this Pasuk is written in reference to

Ma'aser Sheni. The Pasuk is saying that one should observe this Misva in order to acquire the real "wealth"—Yir'at Shamayim. This is the true fortune to which all of us should aspire – closeness with G-d, a keen awareness of His presence, and a desire to perform His will. We must observe the Misva of Ma'aser Sheni in order to achieve this inestimable treasure.

Although we cannot observe the actual Misva of Ma'aser Sheni nowadays, we can and must observe the general message conveyed by this Misva, by placing ourselves in an environment of Kedusha. The Misva of Ma'aser Sheni is predicated upon the basic premise that people are affected by their surroundings. We cannot delude ourselves into thinking that we can live in places without a strong Torah presence and somehow retain our connection to Torah. We are affected by our environment, and it is therefore imperative for ourselves and our children to live not in the place where we can earn the most money or enjoy the best luxuries, but in a place with a strong religious community and Torah foundation.

To its immense credit, our community has invested hundreds of millions of dollars to build a phenomenal religious infrastructure – synagogues, yeshivot, Mikvaot, adult education programs, and so on. Our parents and grandparents understood the necessity of a Torah atmosphere, that the "fortune" of Yir'at Shamayim is earned through the Misva of Ma'aser Sheni, by placing ourselves in an environment of holiness, and they worked tirelessly to create such an environment. It is crucial that we continue this legacy by continuing to avail ourselves of this infrastructure and continuing to maintain it. A person should never think that he can bring his family to some remote location and they will somehow manage to preserve their religious commitment. The "wealth" of Yir'at Shamayim requires an environment of Torah, as it is only in such an environment where we and our children can withstand the secular influences that abound and further develop our connection to Hashem and His Torah.

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Rabbi Wein LOOKING FORWARD

Though we are always filled with warmth when looking back at our personal and national lives, Judaism and Jewish life are built upon the idea that we must look forward as well.....and on a constant basis. There is much evidence, both psychological and physical, that when people have an event to look forward to, somehow they have greater powers of physical survival and mental acumen.

Simply looking forward to the occasion of a joyful family event almost automatically puts us in a better mood and renews flagging spirits and depression. It is clear that the Jewish calendar, with its commemorative and holy days is done in such a way that we are always able to look forward to events, holidays and days of historical commemoration.

This act of conscious or even subconscious looking forward provides the fuel to help us get past the mundane challenges and problems of everyday life. This period of time, when the summer season begins to wane, and our vacation is just a recent memory, feelings of drabness and boredom would usually set in. However, since the end of summer is the introduction to the month of Elul, which in turn serves as the harbinger of the majestic month of Tishrei, certainly gives us something important to which we can and do look forward. This ability to look forward transforms otherwise dull periods of time into meaningful days.

Since the beginning of our exile almost two millennia ago, the Jewish people have looked forward to our return to the land of Israel and to the restoration of our national sovereignty. In our prayers and in our daily lives we have always reassured ourselves that somehow the time of the national restoration and the ingathering of the exiles would occur. We look forward to it with a certainty that seems completely illogical and unrealistic.

Though the nations of the world mocked us, secretly they were also aware that it could, conceivably, take place. The great Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was quoted as saying that every step that he took in the faraway snow in eastern Europe, in the early 19th century, was a step closer to Jerusalem. "Next year in Jerusalem!" was the rallying point of Jewish life and of the yearly Jewish calendar.

We may treasure the past and even attempt to preserve it, but our hopes are fixed on the future and in looking forward to actuating the prophecies regarding better times and future serenity.

Remembering past troubles and tragedies never completely inhibited us from looking forward to a successful revitalization of the Jewish people in its ancient homeland.

And this unlikely scenario of rebirth and of a new Jewish world centered on a Jewish state in the land of Israel, has occurred before our very eyes. It is the reward for looking forward even when the future seemed so dim and dark for us.

The Israeli Bureau of Statistics has recorded that the Jewish birthrate here in Israel is 3.8, far higher than the birth rate in any of the developed countries and in the rest of the Jewish world. Marriage entails a commitment and a willingness to sacrifice for the future. Having children is even more of a commitment and a greater sacrifice. Yet, both marriage and bringing children into this world are manifestations of our nature to look forward, to be able to see things and influence occurrences beyond the span of our years and lifetime.

We have never despaired of our future and we've been blessed with the ability of creating a future when none was apparent. The rabbis long ago postulated that those who look forward, are truly the wise people in the world. Jews are a people of tomorrow and possess the ability to transform the past and even the present into a more optimistic and sanguine future.

It is this ability to constantly look forward that is reflected in the secret of the survival of the Jewish people and of the miraculous events of our time. Looking forward is the key to creativity and invention, to a better world both morally and physically. We certainly have a great deal to look forward to in the coming weeks that will usher in a great good new year

Rabbi Yosef Farhi FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAND

R' Shlomo Wolbe wrote a fascinating Sefer called תולוקשה תווצמה, The seven Mitzvoth that have Equal Weight. Fulfilling each one of these seven Mitzvoth is equal to fulfilling the entire Torah, all of the 613. 1. Denying Avodah Zarah, 2. Wearing Tzitzit. 3. Shabbat. 4. Torah learning. 5. Brit Milah. 6. Tzedaka. 7. Living in Eretz Yisrael. These seven Mitzoth are important to remember, because they are the heavyweight ones.

We know that living in Eretz Yisrael has equal value to keeping all 613 from a passuk in our Parasha. Moshe relays G-d's message to His People. עֲבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבֹא לְרֶשֶׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְקַח אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נַחַן

וְיִשְׁבְּתֶם בָּהּ . לָכֵן וְיִרְשְׁתֶּם אֶתָּהּ וְיִשְׁבְּתֶם בָּהּ . For you are passing over the Jordan River to come and inherit the land that Hashem your G-d is giving you , and you shall inherit it, and you shall dwell in it. וְיִשְׁמְרֶתֶם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל-הַחֻקִּים . And you shall keep all of these statutes and laws that I am placing in front of you today. From the flow of these pesukim, our Rabbis derive that living in Eretz Yisrael is equal to keeping all of the 613. (Sifri Devarim 29, Yalkut Shimoni Devarim 885) The flow of the pesukim implies that by inheriting the land, and by dwelling in the land, you will be keeping all the Mitzvoth of the Torah.

R Wolbe writes that each and every one that is mentioned as the seven have something pivotal about them and correspond to the seven תוֹשׁוּדֵק, the seven areas of holiness. The Mitzvah of Denying Avodah Zarah is the Mitzvah corresponding to your value system. Tzitzit corresponds to your memory, as the strings are meant to remind you of the 613. Shabbat corresponds to the holiness of time. Torah learning corresponds the holiness of knowledge. Milah corresponds to the holiness of desires. Tzedakah corresponds to the power of giving. And Eretz Yisrael, to the holiness of a place.

Now, there are many opinions about the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael and what it means to us. For some reason, the Rambam does not mention it as one of the 613, although he wrote, A person shall always live in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city that is all gentiles, and this is better than living out of E Yisrael, even in a city that is all Jews. Because anyone who leaves E Yisrael to go to out of E Yisrael - it is as if he is serving idols. (Shoftim, Melachim 5, 10) The Rambam seems to learn that the Mitzvah of living in E Yisrael is something that is incumbent on each and every Jew, not a mitzvah to the collective Jewish People.

The Ramban disagrees with the Rambam. He believes that living in Israel is a Mitzvah from the Torah that should be included in the 613, and it is learnt from the passuk וְיִשְׁבְּתֶם בָּהּ וְהוֹרְשְׁתֶּם אֶת הָאָרֶץ . And you (plural) shall inherit the land, and you (plural form) shall dwell in it. (Bamidbar 33; 53) The Ramban is bothered by the question why the Rambam does not mention this as a Mitzvah of the 613. And the Ramban believes that this Mitzvah is not addressed to the individual, but to Klal Yisrael, for the directive of this Mitzvah is written with the word “you”, in the plural.

There are various situations in which a person is not required to live in E Yisrael. I am not going to discuss this subject from either the halachic point of

view or the consideration of hashkafa. I am just going to point out something that meant a lot to me, and a life lesson from this Mitzvah.

R Avigdor Miller pointed to something in the blessing we make immediately before Shema each morning that seems out of place. In the blessing, we ask for success in Torah learning and thank G-d for choosing us as His Nation to give us His Torah. And then, we ask Hashem to bring us back to His Land. What is the connection between coming back to The Land and the rest of the blessing, which is talking about Torah learning?

The answer R A Miller gave was very enlightening. We want Mashiach, we want Eretz Yisrael “not to be able to eat pomegranates and dates and figs in Eretz Yisroel. We are asking for Moshiach in order to be able to sit and learn Torah successfully in Eretz Yisroel. And to learn Torah doesn't only mean to sit in front of the Gemara. It means to absorb all of the great Torah attitudes and ideals. And we want the best environment possible to grow great in. A plant has to have two things to grow. It has to have roots or a seed, and it also has to have the right environment surrounding it. Plants won't grow just in any climate. In certain climates, like in warm parts of the world, these plants will grow more successfully. Today, even if the seed is planted, we are lacking the environment. All around us is an avir of tumah. And therefore, it is very difficult today for a seed, a child, to grow successfully. However, when a person is Ashrei Yoshvei Veisecha – if he sits in the house of Hashem; whenever he has spare time, he remains long in the house of Hashem, so it's like sitting in Eretz Yisroel. Rabbi Yochanan was once told that in Bavel, there were some zekeinim who lived long. So he asked a kasha: How could they live in Bavel if it says in the Torah וְעַמְל וְבָרִי וְנַעֲמַל לֵעַבְדֵי הַשֵּׁם – if you'll serve Hashem, you'll live long al ha'adamah, you'll live long on the land in Eretz Yisroel. But in Bavel, how could they live long? So, they told him: No, the people there come early to the beis haknesses and they remain late in the beis haknesses. "Oh" he said, "Hainu d'ahani lei, that's what helped them." (Berachot 8a) The air of the beis haknesses is like Eretz Yisroel. So, if you are in a makom Torah, it's an atmosphere where you'll grow more successfully."

There is a rule I learnt about people and how they think. People do not think how they want to think. Their thinking is dependent on five S's. State of Mind. Structure. Social context. Story of life. Scenario. The place where you are, the scenario in which you are, are pivotal to who you are and how you think. To how

you serve G-d. To how you learn Torah, and what its words mean to you.

And this is why living in Eretz Yisrael can be so important. Because E Yisrael can be a place where religious Jews feel comfortable to live a life as religious Jews. And this is a heavy-weight Mitzvah, because where you are, your scenario, are so pivotal to what type of Jew you are, of how you believe. That is what E Y was all about. It was a place where it was easiest to serve G-d, without any distractions from the gentiles.

The Rambam writes that the greatest Rabbis would kiss the stones of E Yisrael and roll in its dirt at the border. (Melachim 5;11) As the passuk says, The Land that YHVH your G-d looks after always: the Eyes of YHVH your G-d are on it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year. (Devarim 11;12) Our Sages teach us, that someone who sins in E Yisrael - it is as if he is sinning in the Palace of The King. And someone who does a Mitzvah here, it is as if he did the Mitzvah in front of the Eyes of the King, in G-d's Palace! (Sefer HaCharedim 59)

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks On Not Being a Victim

Making a series of programmes for the BBC on morality in the twenty-first century, I felt I had to travel to Toronto to have a conversation with a man I had not met before, Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson. He has recently become an iconic intellectual for millions of young people, as well as a figure of caricature and abuse by others who should know better.[1] The vast popularity of his podcasts – hours long and formidably intellectual – suggests that he has been saying something that many people feel a need to hear and are not adequately hearing from other contemporary voices.

During our conversation there was a moment of searing intensity. Peterson was talking about his daughter Mikhaila. At the age of six, she was found to be suffering from severe polyarticular juvenile idiopathic arthritis. Thirty-seven of her joints were affected. During her childhood and teen years, she had to have a hip replacement, then an ankle replacement. She was in acute, incessant pain. Describing her ordeal, Peterson's voice was wavering on the verge of tears. Then he said:

One of the things we were very careful about and talked with her a lot about was to not allow herself to regard herself as a victim. And man, she had reason to regard herself as a victim ... [but] as soon as you

see yourself as a victim ... that breeds thoughts of anger and revenge – and that takes you to a place that's psychologically as terrible as the physiological place. And to her great credit I would say this is part of what allowed her to emerge from this because she did eventually figure out what was wrong with her, and by all appearances fix it by about 90%. It's unstable but it's way better because of the fact that she didn't allow herself to become existentially enraged by her condition ... People have every reason to construe themselves as victims. Their lives are characterised by suffering and betrayal. Those are ineradicable experiences. [The question is] what's the right attitude to take to that – anger or rejection, resentment, hostility, murderousness? That's the story of Cain and Abel, [and] that's not good. That leads to Hell.

As soon as I heard those words I understood what had led me to this man, because much of my life has been driven by the same search, though it came about in a different way. It happened because of the Holocaust survivors I came to know. They really were victims of one of the worst crimes against humanity in all of history. Yet they did not see themselves as victims. The survivors I knew, with almost superhuman courage, looked forward, built a new life for themselves, supported one another emotionally, and then, many years later, told their story, not for the sake of revisiting the past but for the sake of educating today's young people on the importance of taking responsibility for a more human and humane future.

But how is this possible? How can you be a victim and yet not see yourself as a victim without being guilty of denial, or deliberate forgetfulness, or wishful thinking?

The answer is that uniquely – this is what makes us Homo sapiens – in any given situation we can look back or we can look forward. We can ask: "Why did this happen?" That involves looking back for some cause in the past. Or we can ask, "What then shall I do?" This involves looking forward, trying to work out some future destination given that this is our starting point.

There is a massive difference between the two. I can't change the past. But I can change the future. Looking back, I see myself as an object acted on by forces largely beyond my control. Looking forward, I see myself as a subject, a choosing moral agent, deciding which path to take from here to where I want eventually to be.

Both are legitimate ways of thinking, but one leads to resentment, bitterness, rage and a desire for revenge. The other leads to challenge, courage, strength of will and self-control. That for me is what Mikhaila Peterson and the Holocaust survivors represent: the triumph of choice over fate.

Jordan Peterson came to his philosophy through his own and his father's battles with depression and his daughter's battle with her physical condition. Jews came to it through the life-changing teachings of Moses, especially in the book of Deuteronomy. They are epitomised in the opening verses of our parsha.

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; and the curse, if you do not heed the commandments of the Lord your God, but stray from the way I am commanding you today ... (Deut. 11:26-28)

Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses keeps saying: don't think your future will be determined by forces outside your control. You are indeed surrounded by forces outside your control, but what matters is how you choose. Everything else will follow from that. Choose the good and good things will happen to you. Choose the bad, and eventually you will suffer. Bad choices create bad people who create bad societies, and in such societies, in the fullness of time, liberty is lost. I cannot make that choice for you.

The choice, he says again and again, is yours alone: you as an individual, second person singular, and you as a people, second person plural. The result was that remarkably, Jews did not see themselves as victims. A key figure here, centuries after Moses, was Jeremiah. Jeremiah kept warning the people that the strength of a country does not depend on the strength of its army but on the strength of its society. Is there justice? Is there compassion? Are people concerned about the welfare of others or only about their own? Is there corruption in high places?

Do religious leaders overlook the moral failings of their people, believing that all you have to do is perform the Temple rituals and all will be well: God will save us from our enemies? Jeremiah kept saying, in so many words, that God will not save us from our enemies until we save ourselves from our own lesser selves.

When disaster came – the destruction of the Temple – Jeremiah made one of the most important assertions in all history. He did not see the Babylonian conquest as the defeat of Israel and its God. He saw it as the defeat of Israel by its God. And

this proved to be the salvaging of hope. God is still there, he was saying. Return to Him and He will return to you. Don't define yourself as a victim of the Babylonians. Define yourself as a free moral agent, capable of choosing a better future.

Jews paid an enormous psychological price for seeing history the way they did. "Because of our sins we were exiled from our land," we say repeatedly in our prayers. We refuse to define ourselves as the victims of anyone else, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, fate, the inexorability of history, original sin, unconscious drives, blind evolution, genetic determinism or the inevitable consequences of the struggle for power. We blame ourselves: "Because of our sins."

That is a heavy burden of guilt, unbearable were it not for our faith in Divine forgiveness. But the alternative is heavier still, namely, to define ourselves as victims, asking not, "What did we do wrong?" but "Who did this to us?"

"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse." That was Moses' insistent message in the last month of his life. There is always a choice. As Viktor Frankl said, even in Auschwitz there was one freedom they could not take away from us: the freedom to choose how to respond. Victimhood focuses us on a past we can't change. Choice focuses us on a future we can change, liberating us from being held captive by our resentments, and summoning us to what Emmanuel Levinas called *Difficile Liberte*, "difficult freedom."

There really are victims in this world, and none of us should minimise their experiences. But in most cases (admittedly, not all) the most important thing we can do is help them recover their sense of agency. This is never easy, but is essential if they are not to drown in their own learned helplessness. No one should ever blame a victim. But neither should any of us encourage a victim to stay a victim. It took immense courage for Mikhaila Peterson and the Holocaust survivors to rise above their victimhood, but what a victory they won for human freedom, dignity and responsibility.

Hence the life changing idea: Never define yourself as a victim. You cannot change your past but you can change your future. There is always a choice, and by exercising the strength to choose, we can rise above fate.

[1] The fact that he has been accused of being an anti-Semite makes me deeply ashamed of those who said this. There is enough real antisemitism in the world today for us to focus on the real thing, and not portray as an enemy a man who is a friend