

פרשת ראה

ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה

“See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse” (11:26)

The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva 9:1 questions the promise of a material reward for fulfilling the Torah and mitzvos as promised in the beginning of our parsha. After all, we know that the reward for mitzvos is reserved for the World to Come. The Rambam explains that when a person follows the ways of the Torah with joy, Hashem blesses him by giving him wealth, peace and comfort so that he can dedicate all of his time to the continued study of Torah and performance of mitzvos. Hashem removes the distractions that would prevent him from spending all of his time on loftier pursuits. Thus, the material prosperity is not a reward in and of itself. Rather, it is a means to accomplish even more Torah and even more mitzvos without getting bogged down with mundane concerns. This, says the Rambam, is the same reason behind our yearning for Moshiach. When Moshiach comes, the nations will no longer harm us and we will have our own land. We will be free from political concerns and material concerns. We will be able to dedicate our time to Torah and other spiritual goals. There will be nothing to keep us from doing that which we truly want to spend our time with. This is the meaning of the physical wealth and success promised to those who listen to the words of the Torah and this is also why we anticipate the arrival of Moshiach every single day.

השמר לך פן תעזב את הלוי כל ימך על אדמתך

“Take heed to yourself that you not forget the Levi all your days on your land” (12:19)

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 450) explains the reason why we are commanded not to abandon the tribe of Levi. Hashem knows that the key to the continuation of the Jewish people is Torah education. A good education system is necessary so that future generations learn Torah and form the next link in the chain which connects us all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu who heard the Torah from Hashem on Har Sinai. However, we cannot rely on people volunteering for the task of educating the next generation. Therefore, Hashem set aside the tribe of Levi as a family of educators whose task was to teach Torah to the people. In order to ensure that they were able to fulfill these responsibilities without having to worry about their physical wellbeing, Hashem commanded everyone to participate in the financial support of the Leviyim. In this way, they would never have to worry about working the fields or doing business. They would be free to spend every moment teaching Torah. At the same time, those who support them and enable them to spread the word of Hashem share their reward in the World to Come. This mitzvah is the basis for the concept of Kollel where certain people commit to spend their time learning and teaching Torah while other commit to support them and thereby gain a share of the reward for the study of Torah.

כי ירחיב ה' אלקיך את גבולך כאשר דבר לך ואמרת אכלה בשר כי תאוו נפשך לאכל בשר בכל אות נפשך תאכל בשר

“When Hashem, your G-d, shall enlarge your border, as He has promised you, and you shall say: I will eat meat - because your soul desires to eat meat - you may eat meat as all the desire of your soul” (12:20)

The midrash quotes Mishlei 18:16 which says, "A man's gift widens for him, and brings him before great men." This posuk uses the same expression of "widen" as the posuk in our parsha. The midrash proves the veracity of the statement in Mishlei with the following story. The sages used to visit many cities to collect money to support Torah scholars. One man they used to frequent was Abba Yudan, a philanthropist from Antioch. One year, Abba Yudan lost nearly everything that he had. When he heard that the sages had arrived in Antioch, he hid in his house because he was ashamed to meet the sages, whom he would be forced to send away empty-handed. When his wife saw that her husband had not left the house in two days, she asked him what was wrong. After he explained his embarrassment, she told him that at least they still had one field. He should sell half of that property and give the money to the sages. He did just that and gave the sages five gold coins. When he gave his gift, he asked the sages to pray on his behalf that he should prosper in the merit of his charity. The next year, Abba Yudan's fortunes turned around when he was plowing in the half of a field that he had left and the plow struck a buried treasure

containing riches beyond his imagination. He became even wealthier than he had been in the first place. When the sages returned to Antioch the following year, Abba Yudan greeted them and gave them one thousand gold coins. He expressed his thanks for their prayers, which had clearly been effective. The sages told him that his gift was the most important of all the gifts that they had received because he had sacrificed more than anyone else. As such, his name had been on top of the list of donors for the previous year, even above those who had given more money, and all the great men and seen his name and learned of his greatness. This story shows the truth of the promise of the posuk, "A man's gift widens for him, and brings him before great men."

עשר תעשר את כל תבואת זרעך היצא השדה שנה שנה

"Tithe, you shall tithe all the produce of your seed, that which is brought forth in the field year by year" (14:22)

Why does the Torah use the repetitive expression "Tithe, you shall tithe" in this posuk? R' Dovid Feinstein answers if a person gives maaser, his reward is that in the future he will be able to give maaser again. He will be alive, healthy and have enough wealth to enable him to give generously once again. One mitzvah leads to another. For a person to ensure the continuation of his wealth and good fortune, Hashem asks that he set aside a tenth of his earnings for Hashem's purposes. This is the best guarantee that a person can get.

כי יהיה בך אביון מאחד אחיך באחד שעריך בארצך אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך לא תאמץ את לבבך ולא תקפץ את ירך מאחריך האביון

"If there shall be a destitute person among you, any of your brethren in any of your cities, in the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother" (15:7)

The Vilna Gaon has a unique interpretation of the Torah's command not to close one's hand toward the poor person. Despite the fact that each finger on a person's hand is a different length, when one closes his hand, all his fingers appear to be the same length. The Torah is commanding us not to treat poor people like the fingers of a closed hands. We are not to treat everyone equally. Every pauper has to be supported according to his individual needs and we should not "close our hands" to poor people and assume that they can all live on a certain standard. The halacha dictates that one is required to give a poor person enough so that he can return to the type of lifestyle that he was used to before he was reduced to begging. Regardless, a beggar should never be left empty-handed. Obviously one should be careful regarding to whom he gives, but it is not proper to launch a full-scale investigation. If one waits to investigate before giving, he may lose the opportunity to do the mitzvah. Being generous also benefits us in the long run because Hashem treats us the way that we treat others. When we are generous to others without looking into all their personal details, Hashem will be kind to us without looking into our less desirable qualities.