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בשבת



אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
RE'EH

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

INSPIRED BY PEERS

Parshas Re'eh starts with the words, "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse."¹ Understood simply, the word "See," is a matter of expression, a way for *Moshe Rabbeinu* to draw attention to the words that he is about to utter.

However, the Torah is very specific with the choice of language, and no word is extra or unnecessary. Knowing this, what lesson does the Torah have in mind with this particular word?

The Ohr Hachaim² (Reb Chaim ibn Attar, 1696-1743) offers a novel explanation regarding the reading of this *passuk*. He says that one can read the first two words, "ראה אנכי," together, effectively meaning, "Take a look at me." *Moshe Rabbeinu* was saying, "Take a good look at me. See what a human being can become. Don't compare yourself to those who are not as accomplished, compare yourself to me! Do you think that my life was any different than yours? The only difference is our choices, and every person has the potential to be like me."³

Too often we don't realize our own potential. When faced with the prospect of greatness, we may think that it is beyond us. And that is assuming we think about it at all!

However, when we see someone we considered a peer, and suddenly they are doing great things, it can shatter the imagery we have of ourselves. "Look at that! So-and-so is rising to great heights; maybe I can do the same as well!"

We have great potential! We need to allow ourselves the ability to dream — maybe it truly isn't beyond us to be great? Isn't the possibility of growing closer to Hashem, a greater understanding of Torah, and a better performance of the *mitzvos* worth a try?

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Comparing ourselves to other people is an inherently dangerous activity. It is so easy to fall into the trap of jealousy, frustration, or unhappiness.

How do we use others' successes to inspire ourselves, and avoid using comparisons which will bring us down?

The key may very well lie in our expectations. If we expect and assume that we should be equal or better than others, when we fall short, or life doesn't go the way we imagined that it should, we get frustrated, upset and unhappy.

However, if we discard these assumptions, and approach our life as a clean slate, then we can use trial and error to discern what works for us, and what will help us grow closer to Hashem.

Being open minded about our own talents and skills prevents us from getting down. Perhaps others are indeed better skilled in a particular area, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't attempt to grow. And if it doesn't work out, we can tell ourselves that at least we tried, and found out for ourselves. And if it does work out, all the better!

1 *Devarim* 11:26

2 *ibid.* s.v. ראה אנכי

3 *Rambam*, Laws of Repentance 5:2

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Studying the Mussar teachings of Chazal found in Aggadata and Midrashim is the best method of conquering the scourge of arrogance and haughtiness. - Vilna Gaon, *Even Shleima* 2:5

RISE TO THE OCCASION

"Do you ever sleep?" Yehoshua* asked incredulously.

Tzvi just smiled and shrugged. "Of course I do. I just get up early. And go to sleep late. There's a lot to do!"

"I know, I just don't know how you do it," Yehoshua said, shaking his head. "You have a full-time job, are a consultant for non-profits, give *shiurim*, write articles, and are also a husband and father. I just don't know..."

Tzvi nodded. "I'll tell you, it wasn't always this way. If you really want to know, I'll give you a bit of history. When I was younger, I had a terrible time getting up in the morning. Alarm clocks, friends, parents, nothing would wake me. And even when I was able to wake up, I'd simply turn over and go back to bed.

"As I got older, I knew that I needed to break this habit, but nothing was working. I had gotten married, and if anything, the problem had gotten worse.

"One day, I was speaking to a close friend of mine, and he mentioned in passing that he had gotten up at 5:00 a.m.! When I asked him about it, he said he regularly gets up that early. 'I find it easier to learn at that time. The world is quiet, it's just me and my thoughts,' he had said. I was shocked, to put it lightly. I couldn't get that conversation out of my head. I had heard about Torah giants who get up that early to learn, but a friend of mine? Incredible!

"That day, I decided that I want to do the same. I went to sleep earlier than I usually did, and set my alarm for five o'clock. And indeed, I woke up, I was excited, and I learned early in the morning.

"And do you know what? It was terrible! Yes, it was nice learning so early in the morning, but the rest of my day was terrible! I realized that it was too much for me, I just couldn't do it.

Yehoshua smiled, listening. "So, how does that explain how you do it now?"

"I'm getting there! Like I said, I couldn't do it, it was too much. I didn't realize it at the time, but there was a very positive effect from this story. The myth of my difficulty in getting up on time was shattered. Yes, I wasn't able to get up at that early, but if my friend could get up at five, couldn't I get up at seven?

"It took many years, a few children, and other responsibilities, but over time, I've been able to get up earlier and earlier, and I still go to sleep pretty late. Now, I'll tell you, it's not for everyone, and for some people it's downright unhealthy. But no one should say that it's impossible — if I can do it, anyone can."

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- *Reb Yehuda Hanasi* attributed his greatness to the fact that he followed in the ways of Reb Meir. He adds that had he truly understood what Reb Meir felt to be important, he would have been that much greater.¹
- One will grow more by being the lowest amongst great peers than by being the greatest amongst lesser peers.²

1 *Kli Yakar* on *Shemos* 33:18 s.v. ויאמר הראני

2 *Medrash Shmuel* on *Avos* 4:15 s.v. הוי מקדים