

joyed by someone else who didn't put the same effort into it. Once I give up the money, it's gone—I have no further say in how it will be spent (unless I want to be an insufferable control freak). This is why the rabbis taught that giving charity is equivalent to all other mitzvahs. While other mitzvahs might use a specific part of the body (*tefillin* on the hand and head, for example), charity involves giving money that we earned with our time, talent and expertise, money that we could have used for any of our human needs. Giving up our money is the closest we can come to giving up ourselves.

So, what is the maximum amount of money I should give up for charity, and what do I get in return? Jewish law is clear on the minimum and maximum recommended amounts to give to charity: not less than one-tenth and not more than one-fifth of your income. (In some situations, it may be appropriate to give more or less than these amounts; a *rav* should be consulted.)

But what I receive in return has no minimum or maximum. It is truly infinite. It is a Divine promise for success in our endeavours—success that will give us the ability to truly enjoy and make use of the bounty we are given. G-d even invites us to challenge Him with the mitzvah of charity, to see if the money we tithe is repaid. "Please, test me with this," says G-d.

The concept of *tzedakah* is especially pertinent now, when we are in the seven-week consolation period following the Jewish day of mourning on the 9th of Av. "Zion will be redeemed with justice, and its captives with charity." Giving *tzedakah* is a unique opportunity to bring holiness and blessing into every aspect of our lives, and thereby merit the ultimate redemption.

Live & Laugh

Mr & Mrs Goldberg had just got married. On their way to their honeymoon, Mr Goldberg said to his new wife, "Would you have married me if my father hadn't left me a fortune?" She replied, "Darling, I would have married you no matter who had left you a fortune."

A Special Welcome to
The Mayor of Johannesburg
Mr Herman Mashaba
and all our guests for the Young Adults Dinner.

Calendar

Shabbos Mevorchim Elul
Molad: Tuesday 10:44:15

- ◆ Shacharis 8:30 am; Shtibl 8:45 am
- ◆ Shul Brocha in the Seeff Hall.
- ◆ **Social Shabbos**
- ◆ Mincha: 5:10 pm
- ◆ Pirkei Avos: Chapter 6
- ◆ Shabbos ends: 6:22 pm
- ◆ Mincha next week 5:35 pm
- ◆ **Rosh Chodesh:** Tues 22 & Wed 23 Aug
- ◆ Shofar and Psalm 27 from Rosh Chodesh



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DATES: Mondays 21 August - 11 September 2017
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COST: R200 per person or R500 per couple sharing one Student Textbook.
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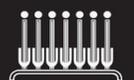
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19 Aug 2017 Parshas Re'eh 27 Menachem Av 5777

Virtue, Vice and Vision by: Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Blessings and curses. Stirring stuff from the Bible this week as Moses again cautions his congregation. The great prophet reminds them that living a life of goodness will bring them blessings while ignoring the Divine call must inexorably lead to a cursed existence.

Moses prefaces his admonition with the Hebrew word *Re'eh*, "See, or Behold." *See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse.* But why see? What is there to see? Did he show them anything at all? The Torah does not use flowery language just because it has a nice ring to it and sounds poetic. What was there to behold? Why *Re'eh*?

One answer is that how we *look* will, of itself, determine whether our lives will be blessed or cursed. How do we look at others, at ourselves? Our perspective, how we behold and see things, will result in our own lives being blessed or, G-d forbid, the opposite.

The saintly Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once chanced upon a strong, young man who was brazenly eating on Yom Kippur. The Rabbi suggested that perhaps he was feeling ill. The fellow insisted he was in the best of health. Perhaps he had forgotten that today was the holy day of fasting? "Who doesn't know that today is Yom Kippur, Rabbi?" responded the young man. Perhaps he was never taught that Jews do not eat on this day? "Every child knows that Yom Kippur is a fast day, Rabbi!" Whereupon, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak raised his eyes heavenward and said, "Master of the Universe, see how wonderful Your people are! Here is a Jew who, despite

so many opportunities, simply refuses to tell a lie!" The Berditchever was always able to look at others with a compassionate, understanding and benevolent eye.

How do we view the good fortune enjoyed by others? Are we happy for them, or do we look at them with begrudging envy? How do we look at ourselves and our own shortcomings? Are we objectively truthful or subjectively slanted? "He is a stingy, rotten good for nothing. Me? I am just careful about how I spend my money." "She is a bore of bores, absolutely anti-social. Me? I am a private person who just happens to enjoy staying at home." "He is as stubborn as an ox! Me? I am just determined."

Clearly, the way we look at our world and those around us will have a major impact on the way life will treat us. Quite justifiably, Moses says. *See.* For how we will see things in life will undoubtedly affect life's outcomes.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson (1880-1950) once told how when he was a young child he asked his father: why does a person have *two* eyes? The right eye, his father replied, is to be used lovingly, when looking at a fellow Jew; the left eye is to be used discerningly, when looking at sweets or other objects that are not that important in the grand scheme of things.

When I was in Yeshivah, the same building also housed a synagogue where we would often interact with the adult men who would come to the daily *minyan*. One particular gentleman, may he rest in peace, always seemed to us rather cantankerous, what you might call a grumpy old man. I cannot

remember whether he was actually a bit cross-eyed or not, but we would always refer to him as “left-eyed Sam” because he always seemed to be looking at us students with that proverbial left eye.

The Parshah that is entitled *Re'eh*, “See,” is a perennial reminder to all of us that even our vision alone can bring virtue or vice. Let us look at the world correctly and invite the blessings of G-d into our lives.

Parsha Pointers

*Re'eh: Artscroll Chumash pg 998;
Living Torah pg 925*

This week's Parsha contains no less than 55 of the 613 Biblical commandments. "I set before you a blessing and a curse. The blessing; if you obey the commandments of God...; the curse: if you do not ..." It continues with laws for the land of Israel about staying away from idol worship and paganism, including false prophets.

The source of the Chosen People concept: "You are a nation consecrated to G-d who has chosen you to be His own special nation." We are chosen for responsibility, not privilege --to act morally and to be a "light unto the nations." There are also instructions regarding permitted and forbidden foods, Tithes and Tzedakah, to be warm-hearted and open-handed, and it concludes with the three pilgrimage festivals Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

Why Do We Keep Kosher?

By Rabbi Tzvi Freeman

Question:

I have two questions regarding *kashrut* (the Torah's dietary laws). I understand that the sages explain that non-kosher animals have negative characteristics that we would absorb by eating their flesh. But many kosher animals consume non-kosher animals (i.e. kosher fish that eat non-kosher fish and sea creatures). If "we are what we eat," don't we indirectly absorb those negative elements when we eat those animals?

My second question: Many Jews insist that

kashrut is mostly based on objections to cruelty (i.e., flesh torn from a living animal is not kosher, the rigorous requirements of the *shechitah* procedure ensure that an animal is killed painlessly, etc.). Yet I understand that veal is kosher. And any animal rights activist will tell you that veal is the most cruel meat that is available: tortured calves who stand in a small pen for life being fed only milk. How can veal be kosher if *Kashrut* is about compassion towards animals?

Answer:

Before I deal with your specific questions, it is important to understand that we didn't make up the *kashrut* laws. Just like we didn't create the fish. We never claimed to have conceived them, nor to fully understand them. When Nachmanides and others provide reasons for these laws, they also make it clear that they are not getting to the bottom of it. It would be absurd to think that G-d gave us the Torah as a sort of bandage for His mistakes. "Oops! I didn't mean to put those nasty animals there! People might eat them! What do I do now?"

Rather, the Torah came first, and the world was designed to follow. Something like this: The Creator desired a world where we creatures would have a choice to connect with Him or go on our own messy way. He conceived of us as creatures who consume food, and that would be one of the areas where we would have this choice. If so, there are going to have to be animals that He doesn't want us to eat and animals that we may eat.

Whenever we eat something with mindfulness of our Creator and Divine purpose, our act of eating acts as a connection to Above. The energy we receive from that food itself becomes elevated into that higher purpose.

On the other hand, if we just eat that food because we are hungry, with no inner intent, we and the food remain just another chunk of this fragmented world.

That's how it works with kosher food. If it is of

the sort of food that the Creator doesn't want us to eat, then the nature of that food is such that it can never be elevated by eating. No matter what we do, it remains stuck within this world, and shleps us down with it.

Some of these animals reflect this spiritual negativity in their actual nature and behavior. So Nachmanides speaks of the negative character traits imbibed with the flesh of non-kosher species. In many cases, what is not healthy for the soul is also clearly not healthy for the body, as well. So we have nutritionists confirming that a kosher diet is more healthy. Nice dividends, but not the underlying factor.

As for cruelty to animals, this is something expressly forbidden by the Torah.

In a case where there is direct human benefit, we are permitted to take an animal's life. Even then, it must be done as compassionately as possible.

Nevertheless, the prohibition of cruelty towards animals and the laws of kosher slaughter are two separate realms. Just because the slaughter of the animal was deemed kosher doesn't mean it was not raised or slaughtered in a cruel way. A proper, kosher slaughter should be done with minimal suffering to the animal—indeed the laws of *shechitah* and the traditional methods greatly facilitate this. In some cases, however, there is a need today for correction of this issue, as many have already realized.

The Most for the Least

By Chaya Shuchat

The final project in my calculus class was to write an essay about the real-world application of some concept we had learned in the course.

I liked that. What better way to integrate my learning than to think about its implications in everyday life?

I didn't have to think far. I wrote about my favorite function, the maxima-minima.

The maxima-minima function is used to solve problems like: What is the lowest price I should charge for an item to make the maximum profit? What is the fastest I can drive my car and still achieve the best gas mileage? When building a house, what are the ideal dimensions to use the least possible amount of building materials?

Problems like these so perfectly encapsulate the basic dilemma of life. Every decision involves a trade-off of some sort. I must give up something that I want in order to get something else. Speed versus efficiency. Safety versus convenience. Quality versus quantity. Short-term pleasure versus long-term health. We make these decisions consciously or unconsciously dozens of times per day, whenever we choose how to allocate our time, money or other resources. What is the least I must give up to get the most of what I want?

In this week's Torah portion, we find the mitzvah of *asser te'aser*, literally translated as “Tithe you shall tithe,” referring to the obligation to set aside a tenth of our earnings for charity. Since the word for “tithing,” *asser*, has the same root as “wealthy,” *ashir*, the Talmud interprets this verse as “Tithe in order that you shall become wealthy.”

Now, that sure defies all the laws of calculus and economics! If I give up a tenth of my earnings to charity, then obviously there is a tenth less for me—a tenth less for me to invest or to spend on any of my needs.

But the true value of money depends on so many variables that we can neither predict nor control. Will my investments succeed or fail? Will I derive satisfaction from my earnings, or will my money go toward medical bills, legal expenses or other aggravations? Even if I have enough money to enjoy the tangible pleasures of life—a nice car, fine dining, vacations—will I have enough of the intangibles, such as strong relationships and meaningful goals, to make it all seem worthwhile?

What am I really giving up by tithing? I think what we are most afraid of is not giving up our money but giving up control. When I choose to buy a car, I can do research; I can even plug in my maxima-minima functions to find the best possible car at the lowest possible price within my budget. Once I buy the car, I can trade it in, sell it or upgrade it, and I can buy insurance to offset any possible loss or damage.

But giving *tzedakah*, charity, has no such guarantee. I am giving up something that I earned through the sweat of my own brow, to be en-

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