

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Re'eh
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Re'eh – be strong not to eat the blood!

In this week's Parsha of Re'eh, Moshe discusses the Torah's permission to eat the meat of kosher animals.

*“...you may slaughter from your cattle and your flock, which Hashem has given you, **as I have commanded you**, and you may eat in your cities, according to your heart's every desire.”* (Parshat Re'eh, Sefer Devarim 12:20)

Incidentally, this pasuk contains a proof for the Divine source of the Oral Torah. We are instructed to slaughter our animals **as Hashem has commanded us**. But nowhere in the written Torah do we see any such commandment or any explanation of what this means. We are required to look to the Oral Torah for the details as to how to perform proper slaughtering of kosher animals for consumption (shechita).

Moshe then provides Bnei Yisrael with a warning:

*“However, **be strong** not to eat the blood, for the blood is the soul, and you shall not eat the soul with the meat”* (Parshat Re'eh, Sefer Devarim 12:23)

This warning to 'be strong' seems to be an anomaly. Most people are naturally repulsed by the idea of consuming blood. Thus, one may presume that avoiding the consumption of blood should be one of the easier commandments to keep. (It's a bit like being commanded to enjoy our meals on Shabbat – most people don't struggle with that mitzva!) So why does Moshe warn us to **be strong** in relation to this mitzvah?

In his commentary, Rashi provides us with two possible answers. First, Rashi brings Rabbi Yehudah who teaches that in those days, it was common to consume blood. Therefore, unlike nowadays Bnei Yisrael had to be specifically warned to be vigilant in this area.

Rashi's second approach is based on our understanding that most people dislike blood and that this is an easy mitzvah to fulfil. Rashi cites Rabbi Shimon ben Azzai who explains that this seemingly superfluous warning teaches us a very powerful lesson in relation to our approach to Divine service. The Torah is warning us to take care and be strong to fulfil this **simple** mitzva. From this we should learn how much more so we need to take care and strengthen ourselves when it comes to those mitzvot that are harder to keep, or more contrary to human nature.

We need to remember that all mitzvot we keep are Divine Commandments and that we have the privilege of serving the Creator of the Universe. This should be the underlying reason why we take our mitzva performance very seriously and make sure that we are serving Hashem in the best way possible and with the purest of intentions.

There is another lesson that we can learn from this approach. Many of the mitzvot are so easy and natural to perform, that we may not even notice that we are performing a mitzva. For instance, when we buy meat from the butcher we usually just take it for granted that the blood has been removed and the meat is more appetising. But this is a wasted opportunity. If we

stopped for a moment and consciously thought about the fact that eating blood is prohibited and that having it removed ensures it is kosher, we add additional kavana (intention) to our mitzva. Whenever we perform an easy mitzva, Moshe's warning to 'be strong' reminds us to put in extra effort to perform it with the right kavana. We should make the effort to remember that we are doing it for Hashem. If we pause and mentally review our underlying intention we can enhance our Divine service.

In contrast, when we are involved in a mitzva that is more difficult for us to perform, we can strengthen ourselves by reminding ourselves that kal v'chomer the reward will be even greater. This thought can help us to stir ourselves to put in the extra effort needed.

One night, Rachel's late mother appeared to her in a dream. She told Rachel that Rachel's sister was giving her so much pleasure and nachas. The next morning Rachel called her sister to find out what she was doing that was so wonderful. Rachel's sister told her that whenever she had to do something for her family that she found particularly difficult to do (like the ironing, cleaning up after kids, dealing with tantrums etc) she would offer up a little prayer. She would say "This is very hard for me to do. But I will do it anyway for the good of my family and the extra effort that I am putting in should be in the merit of my mother". This extra kavana was having an enormous positive impact in the spiritual world.¹

We can suggest another approach to our question of why Moshe warned us to be strong not to consume blood. Often, the mere fact that something is forbidden can make it more appealing. There is a well-known saying that originated from Shlomo Hamelech: "forbidden waters taste sweet"². Shlomo Hamelech was revealing a deep understanding of human psychology. Human nature is such that one does not like one's freedom to be restricted. Seeking out something forbidden breaks boundaries and increases excitement. However, one will often regret the action after it is done. We need to be aware of this phenomenon and strengthen ourselves so that we are not tempted to run after futile, empty pleasures simply because they are forbidden.

Let's try something this week:

1. When doing an easy mitzva – remember that we are still doing it l'shem shamayim, for Hashem's sake. Let's try to do our easy mitzvot with the purest of intentions.
2. When performing a more difficult mitzva, remember that the extra effort will give us extra reward. Consider devoting the mitzva in the merit of someone else, such as a deceased relative.
3. Remember that even though forbidden waters may taste sweet, the sweetness is short-lived and futile. We should strengthen ourselves to be aware of human frailties and avoid such pitfalls.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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¹ I heard this story many years ago but unfortunately I cannot recall the source. If anyone can send though the source, I would greatly appreciate it.

² Mishlai 9:17. A more accurate translation is: "stolen water is sweet".