

Good morning everyone and Shabbat shalom.

Before I start talking about this week's Parsha, I first want to give you a little back story about Moshe and B'nai Israel. After B'nai Israel came out of Egypt they had one goal in mind: To make it to the land of Israel. They wandered in the desert for forty long years, never stopping. Well, B'nai Israel are about to make it make it to Israel, but before they can enter Moshe stops them to tell them a bunch of rules. That brings us to this week's parsha, parashat Re'eh. Among other things Moshe teaches B'nai Israel about

\*\*Different Jewish dietary laws, called Kashrut

\*\*Shmita (a sabbatical or time off) year that happens every seven years, where you let your land rest and free your slaves and forgive any debt.

And

\*\*the Shalosh Regalim (the Three Pilgrimage festivals), which include Pesach, commemorating the Exodus from Egypt, Shavuot, celebrating the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and Sukkot, RE-LIVE-ING the travels in the desert.

But wait, WHY did Moshe think these things were important to tell B'nai Israel? WHY did Moshe think it was im-por-tant to talk about what food we should eat and HOW to take care of your land, and WHO to invite to your holidays? Why were THESE the things that he wanted to teach? They seem so random. After all B'nai Israel were about to settle in the land of Israel and start a new life. Think about it---, they've been walking around in the desert for 40 years and they are about to get to their destination- the Land of Israel- when *all of a sudden* G-d has Moses lay down a bunch of rules. It's like if your parents get you an amazing Lego set for your birthday, let you see it, but then spend 15 hours telling you why the sky appears to be the color blue, and DON'T let you open the Lego set!

**But it TURNS OUT, Moshe wasn't just teaching about all the rules, but was really giving B'nai Israel a deeper lesson, too.**

SO WHAT was God *REALLY* trying to teach people??

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As I already mentioned, Moshe discusses the obligation to forgive any debt in the Shmita year. (quote) *'For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: Open your hands to the poor and needy kin in your land'*. In other words, we shouldn't stop lending money to the needy in the years BEFORE the Shmitah, *even though* the debts must be forgiven in the Shmitah and may not be paid back.

Another aspect of the Shmitah year is the freeing of slaves. When a slave is freed, the owner is obligated to provide them with essential needs, including food, wine, and sheep from their flock, to help them transition from the dependency of slave life to the responsibility of living independently.

The Torah reminds us that (quote) *'You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and God redeemed you; therefore, I command you regarding this matter today.'* This means, we should remember that we were once slaves and how bad it was for **US**, and that we should be sympathetic to anyone in the same situation.

Next Moshe talks about the Three Pil-grim-age Festivals. When explaining about Shavuot, Moshe instructs us to be joyful (quote) *'You shall rejoice before God - you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your maidservant, the Levite who is in your cities, the convert, the orphan and the widow who are among you.'*

Sim-i-lar-ly, regarding Sukkot, Moshe also emphasizes that we should invite others to our celebrations, ESPECIALLY those who are unable to provide for themselves, and be kind to everyone no matter what.

Now, you may be starting to understand what Moshe is trying to get at ... but to make it a little more clear, I want to explain a little bit about the Kashrut laws.

While the Torah allows us to eat meat, there are limitations, (quote) *'Only be strong to not eat blood - for the blood, it is the life - and you shall not eat the LIFE, with the meat.'* For this reason, kosher meat is salted, to MAXIMIZE the removal of the blood. According to Sefer Hachinuch (a 13<sup>th</sup> century book that explains all of the six hundred and thirteen commandments), there are two separate commandments included in this verse:

One, is to NOT eat the blood of an animal. The OTHER is to NOT eat a limb of an animal while it is still alive. The author reasons that this is to prevent us from being cruel and inhumane.

The RamBAN, Rabbi Moshe Ben Nachman, a 13th century Spanish commentator mentions a similar idea from the parsha in connection with Kashrut. He quotes 'לֹא־תִבְשֹׁל גְּדִי בְּחֵלֶב אִמּוֹ' 'You shall not boil a goat in its mother's milk.' The RamBAN says 'God prohibited it because we are to be holy in the way we eat ... that we not become cruel and inhumane' ... by milking the mother and cooking the goat in the very thing that was meant to give it life.

So far, we've heard that we need to be kind to the poor, include everyone in our celebrations and that we must be caring to animals. Knowing that, I return to the question that I posed earlier, WHAT is the Moshe trying to teach us with all of these instructions? It seems to me, that what Moshe is trying to get at, is that we must be compassionate, and caring, to every living creature (human AND animal) that we encounter. We must care about the poor, the stranger, the widow, the orphan and also animals. We must be kind to EVERYONE who is vulnerable.

So, the next time you're walking and see someone experiencing homelessness, you should look UNDER the layers of their unfortunate situation and see what you can do to help. You can offer them food, give them a little money, or even just share a warm smile.

And the next time you are at work or in school or at a party and see someone standing alone, you should be welcoming and kind. Talk to them and say **Hi**. Make them feel a part of the community you should share your happiness, and include them.

This is what it means when the Torah teaches,

**וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת-יְדֶיךָ מֵאֶחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן:**

Don't close your hand to the needy.

Open your heart to the needy kin in your land.

*--We must not harden our hearts.--*

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So yes, when I first read this part of the story, I was wondering how all of these seemingly separate things are connected?

I wondered how on earth can the laws on how to eat food, forgiving debt, freeing your slaves, the pil-gri-mage festivals and making food available to the poor ALL BE connected?

But it turns out that all along, Moshe was just teaching us to be compassionate, caring and kind because at the end of the day, we are all humans, and we need to show a loving heart to everyone.

Thank you so much and

**Shabbat Shalom!!**