



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

RE'EH / ראה

A SPIRITUAL VACATION

DISTRIBUTION DATE:

TUESDAY AUGUST 7, 2007 / כ"ג מנחם אב תשס"ז

PARSHA:

RE'EH / ראה

SERMON TITLE:

A SPIRITUAL VACATION

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Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

רי מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman אה who loved and supported Torah learning.



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Parshat Re'ei opens with the words of G-d, "I have placed before you today a blessing and a curse." The Rebbe explains that it is impossible for anything truly bad to issue from G-d. Sometimes, however, things look like a curse to us. Yet, if we were to look deeper we would find that everything is in fact a blessing.

In that case I bring to your attention an issue that has been on our collective Jewish mind for over a year now: the Second Lebanon War. It was a mission that failed miserably on all fronts. a) We didn't free the captive soldiers. b) We didn't stop the missiles from falling on our cities. C) Hezbollah is still in full force on our borders.

Though that war seems completely bad it cannot be so for it also issues from G-d who is essentially good. We must therefore find the good in this joke of a war.

In this week's parsha G-d warns against offering sacrifices anywhere other than Jerusalem, once the people have settled in Israel. If you want to bring a sacrifice you must travel all the way to Jerusalem.

That is not the only mitzvah which *must* be done *only* in Jerusalem. Our parsha also discusses the mitzvah of visiting Jerusalem on the Festivals. We also read about the mitzvah of *ma'aser*, tithing our produce. These tithed portions had to be brought to Jerusalem.

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The *Shulchan Aruch* tells that we postpone our prayers for rain in the fall for fifteen days to give every last Jew enough time to make it home dry. That means that the furthest trip to Jerusalem takes a full month – two weeks each way! Why does the Torah obligate Jews to travel such a long distance to perform mitzvos? We could accomplish so much in the time "wasted" traveling to Jerusalem. Why not build a small Temple in every community? We have synagogues in every community. Serving G-d would be so much more convenient!

I'll answer with a question: It is now August and many of us will be going on vacation. Why do we have to go through the horror of packing all of our stuff, schlepping all of our bags to the airport, waiting on line for tickets then waiting on line for security and finally waiting on line to board the plane usually only to find out that your flight has been delayed three or four hours. Then, when we finally get to our "final destination" we move into a tiny hotel room with uncomfortable beds where you wake up in middle of the night with such a backache and in the morning with such a headache! In the end, we return home so exhausted that we need a vacation from our vacation!

Wouldn't it be so much smarter just to stay home? Unplug the phone and the computer, hang up an "out for lunch" sign on the front door, turn on your sound effects machine that gives you the ocean or the rain forest and sleep in your own comfortable bed, wake up to your favorite breakfast, drink a coffee in you favorite chair and call a taxi to take you to your favorite mall. Besides costing probably a quarter the price, wouldn't this be much more relaxing?

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Of course not! Which man can offer his wife a two week vacation at home and expect to survive it!

The purpose of a vacation is to rejuvenate, to shake yourself out of your routine in order to return to it later with renewed energy and vigor. You can't do that if you're in the same familiar places. In order to truly get "out of the box" you must leave all that is familiar and throw yourself into to the chaos of vacation! You must get away from your home and yourself.

The same applies, in some ways, to Judaism. In Tanya the Alter Rebbe deals with the problem of the "routine Jews".

When a person is raised in a certain way he eventually will go through the motions automatically. Just as there are people who mechanically brush their teeth every morning, there are people who put on Tefillin and pray every morning, out of habit. These actions have both been engrained in the daily routine and are now completely devoid of intent.

This is why the Torah obligates Jews to travel to Jerusalem three times a year. G-d knows the hearts of men and knows that we need to be shaken out of our routine every now and then. For, in order to truly renew our connection with Him we absolutely must leave our homes, our synagogues and the dried out shell of our old routine selves. It is the only way we remained Jews, for otherwise the whole mitzvos thing would have become a terrible burden.



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This is the reason for Chassidim traveling to the Rebbe year after year for so many years. For in order to truly arouse a new spiritual fire one must get out of his rut and "wander" to the home of his Rebbe. It is as the Mishna in Avot states, "Be exiled to a place of Torah".

The great Chasid R' Itche Masmid once wrote to his friend and colleague Rabbi Yisroel Jacobson who was then living in America, "It is my opinion that the time has come for you to visit the Rebbe (who was at that time still in Europe), for it has been ten years since you've been to see him. For when you saw the Rebbe on his visit to the US doesn't count. *Tzu a Rebbe darf men foren. One must travel to see his Rebbe!*"

So, I think we've found the good in the failed war. The army has been shaken out of its routine. We've been shown that we're not quite ready to fight a war and only good can come out from that!

Of course we must take a personal lesson from all this.

We must always strive to break out of our Jewish routine. The very first time you came to *shul* was indeed an awakening but now you must keep moving forward. You must make sure that your Yiddishkeit is not being subject to "routine".

Many Jews travel to Israel for their awakening. A Chassid visits the Ohel. But even if you're not traveling anywhere you must find ways of keeping your Judaism fresh. Take an action that will shock not only your family but will be a pleasant surprise for you as well.

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