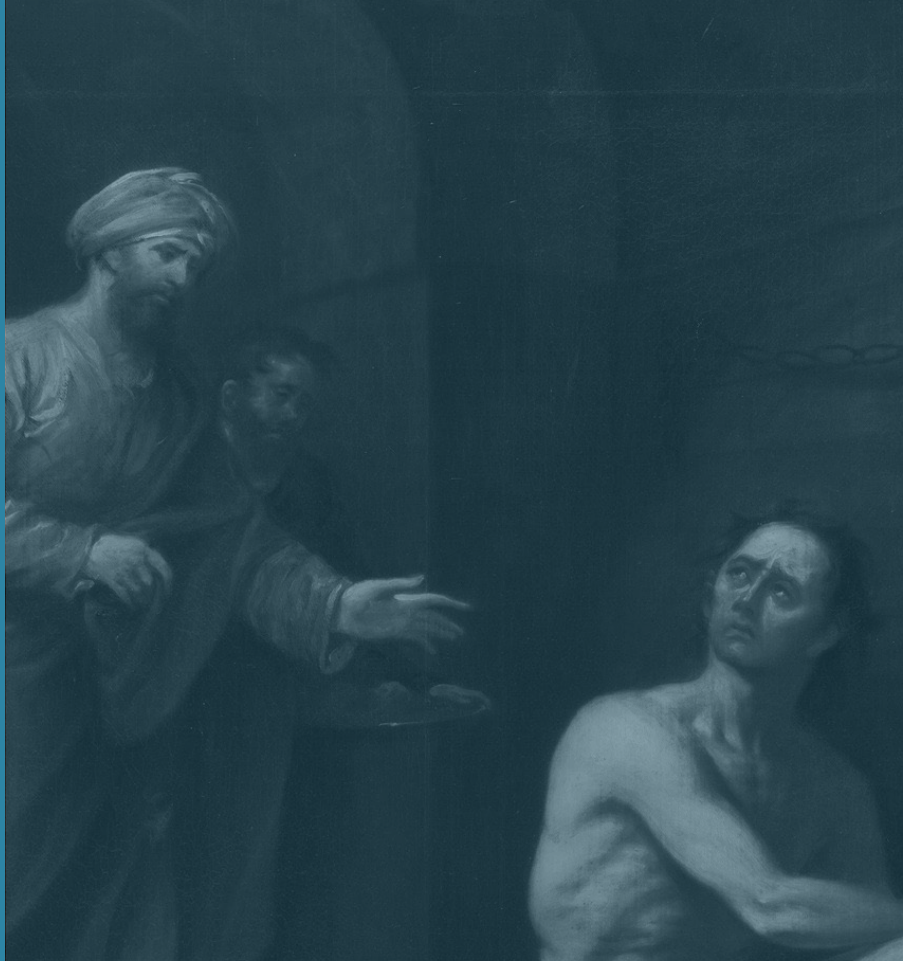


# The Bible is Not About Me, It's About Others

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*Parashat Re'eh*



## Parashat Re'eh

Shabbat Shalom. This Shabbat We read Parashat Re'eh. The opening of this week's parasha indicates a choice. The people are give the choice to think for themselves.

This possibility is given to the people – they can think and choose. This option is given to the city, to the community, to the family, and down to the individual. Anyone can think, anyone can choose.

### The Importance of Doubt

In every religion, too many issues have become absolute axioms, they must not be discussed, they must not be questioned, they must not be examined.

We must not ask questions – we must accept them as truth! And if not – we are in great trouble – we'll be gossiped about, condemned, and judged as heretics.

What is the importance of free will?

The great importance is that it invites hesitation, uncertainty, even doubt. If someone has no doubt at all, and everything is clear and known to him, such a person is usually not a good person.

Because such an approach invites absolutism and fatal zeal. Such an approach engenders human extremism, arrogance, lack of consideration, and insensitivity to others.

Our parasha offers us the opportunity to question the truth. Everything is subject to choice, there is no predetermined nature.

There is no faith that comes without the agony of doubts, tests, thorough study, and then more tests and more studies.

If we go through this torment, we will gain pure faith, modest faith, and great concern for others. Because we understand that regardless of the opinions, faith, or choice of the person at our side, the person was nevertheless created in God's image and likeness.

## **The Bible is Not About Me, It's About Others**

And indeed we find in our parasha an emphasis on caring for others, widows, orphans, converts, and simply: poor people.

Look at the holidays, which appear towards the end of the parasha. It is impossible even to celebrate the holidays properly, as a commandment, without caring for the poor, without opening the hand and the heart to foreigners, to the weak, and to the poor among us.

If we notice, the main emphasis of the Bible is not me, myself, and I. The Bible is not about me. I am not at the center of the Scriptures.

Yeshua teaches me that God is at the center of Scripture, and as a second point, my neighbor is at the center of Scripture. The entire Old and New Testaments – according to Yeshua – come down to our relationship towards God and our relationship towards others.

And to our surprise, generally our faith is not in the center of Scripture, but rather our actions, our fruit. Not what we believe in the heart, but what we do with our own two hands.

We have become accustomed to emphasizing our tenets, brushing up our doctrine, and sharpening our Bible lessons.

The true emphasis of Scripture is on doing. The execution of Scripture, the physical manifestation of faith.

## Yeshua Prefers Action Over Faith

One of the passages in the New Testament that has always attracted me, and has always been hugely significant, is the “Judgment of the Nations”. In Matthew 25, Yeshua sets the righteous on the right and the non-righteous, the wicked, on the left.

What does the king say? Jesus says to the righteous, “You gave me water, because I was thirsty, you fed me because I was hungry, you helped me because I was miserable.”

What is the answer of the righteous?

“Yeshua, our Lord, our king, when? When were you hungry, or thirsty, or in need? When? I helped a lot of people, but I remember them all, I made contact with each and every one, I gave personal attention to everyone. Sir, I do not remember you! Apologies, but you are confused. Maybe someone else helped you?”

The King, Yeshua, will answer and say, “Everything you did for those people and those families who needed help is 100% as if you did it personally for me. Come into your inheritance, come into the Kingdom of Heaven.”

Jesus does not mention faith here at all, but rather what people did or did not do. They helped or did not help. Period.

## The Torah is About Charity

In this week’s parasha, more than 50 commandments are mentioned. But the commandments that deal with charity are especially prominent.

*“If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them.” – Deuteronomy 15:7  
[NIV]*

The commandment "...be openhanded..." appears twice (Deuteronomy 15:8,11). The parasha continues with additional commandments which care for the poor.

Today we learn about: tithing for the poor (in every third year, the entire year's tithe goes towards the poor and those in need), the cancellation of debts, giving loans even when the seventh year approaches, and the giving of payment or some type of tithe to a slave who ends a period of slavery.

Even the commandment of "Be joyful at your festival...", in the three festivals, includes "...the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows..."

## **You Can't Take Anything With You**

In the context of charity I want to start with a story:

A few years ago a successful businessman, who was known as a rich but gracious man, died.

He occasionally donated to worthy causes and charities.

When that rich man was about to die, he entrusted his children with two closed envelopes and ordered them to open the first immediately after his death, and the second after the end of the "shiva", the Jewish time of mourning.

When the day arrived... and he passed away. The boys opened the first envelope with the father's request: "I want to be buried with my socks on."

The boys wanted to fulfill their father's last request, but the Chevra Kadisha (the Jewish burial service) insisted that according to Jewish law no man was to be buried with socks.

All their pleas, cries, and threats – and even the large bribes – did not help. And the father was buried without socks.

They all looked forward to the end of the shiva to discover the secret of the second envelope.

All the family and friends gathered and the eldest son took the envelope with trembling hands and opened it. Inside it was written:

“I know you buried me without socks. I just wanted to show you that no matter how much money and property you have in the world. When you leave it, you will not be able to take even one measly pair of socks with you...”

## We Can Choose Blessing

Yeshua taught us not to gather our treasure here, in this world, which can lose its value, can be stolen, rot, or simply disappear.

Instead, Yeshua encourages us to store up our treasure in Heaven, where our savings are guarded, where there is especially large interest – even tenfold.

This week’s parasha teaches us that the choice is ours, we can choose the blessing, we can choose to fulfill the Word of God, to carry out the commandments and execute the faith. And God’s word promises us a blessing, which is translated as peace, tranquility, security, fruitfulness, success, health, and joy in the family.

There is one verse that jumps out at me personally from the parasha. I have read it already, but I want to read it again:

*“If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.” – Deuteronomy 15:7,8 [NIV]*

The commandment here is clear, we must help the poor, the people and families in distress.

## How Netivyah Helps the Poor

I encourage you to find a charitable organization that you trust and is close to your place of residence, to participate there and lend a hand.

Also, if you are interested in helping out in Jerusalem, we help 130 families on a weekly basis. On average each family has 5 people, so we help about 650 adults and children.

Every week a representative of each family contacts us, and they receive a selection of selected fruits and vegetables, a selection of frozen products such as fish, chicken and meat, and a selection of products such as oil, rice, or even cornflakes.

In Netivyah, we have been carrying out this sacred work since 2000, 18 years of charity.

We work hand in hand with the staff of Jerusalem's welfare offices.

Our weekly Torah portion emphasizes the giving to the poor, the concern for the weak in society, the caring for those who are different from us.

## **A Tale of Two Seas – Which One Are You?**

I will end with a short story:

There are two lakes in the Land of Israel: in one, its waters are sweet and fish live there. Trees spread their branches over it and send their thirsty roots into its healthy waters. Children play along its shores, as children played in biblical times.

The Jordan River brings to this sea sparkling water that comes down from the hills. The people built their houses near its banks and the birds built their nests here, and all the animals are happy that they have settled in this place.

But the Jordan River continues to flow south, and flows into another sea. Here there is no trace of fish, no leaves, no birds singing. Heavy air hangs on the water. Man, beast, and bird do not drink from the waters of this lake.

What is the cause of this enormous difference between the two lakes, which are not that far apart?

The Jordan is not to blame, it pours its water into both lakes. The environment is not to blame, nor is the land.

The Sea of Galilee receives its water from the Jordan River, but the Sea of Galilee does not store the water for itself. For every drop that flows into it, it issues a drop from it.

The second lake stores the water coming into it with the greed of a miser. It will not give up its water. Every drop that comes to it is held onto.

The Sea of Galilee gives, and therefore it is a living sea. The second sea does not give, and we call it the “Dead Sea”.

There are two kinds of lakes in Israel, and two types of people are in the world.

Let us have a Shabbat of peace, a Shabbat filled with life, with living water.

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# **The Teachings of Messiah Yeshua *in a Jewish Context***

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