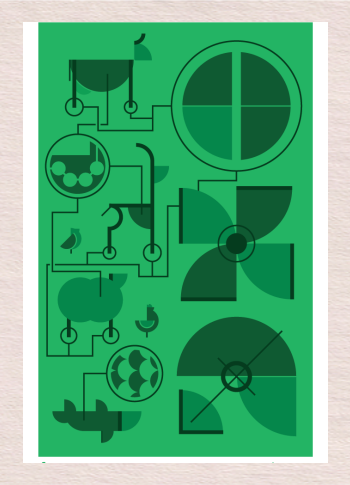
Re'eh: Devarim (Deuteronomy)

What's it all about?



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In a fiery speech, Moses reminds the Israelites that **if they fulfill God's commandments they will be blessed, but if not they will be cursed.** He then describes the laws of temple sacrifices, and warns that a false prophet must be put to death and that an idolatrous city must be destroyed.

The laws of kashrut are repeated, as is the commandment that a tenth of all produce should be eaten in Jerusalem or exchanged for money, and that in certain years the tithe should be given to the poor instead. The mitzvah of charity is discussed, as is debt forgiveness every seven years. Finally, the parsha concludes with the laws of the three pilgrimage festivals, Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

"See, I am setting before you today the formula of the blessing and curse."

Take a deeper dive

In the opening verse of this week's parsha, one word stands out: "See," Moses tells the Israelites, "I am setting before you today the formula of the blessing and curse."

Why does Moses bother telling the Israelites that he's speaking to them "today"? It's much more than just a literary flourish. It's a spiritual wake-up call, **a reminder that today is truly the day that matters most.**

The great Hassidic master Rabbi Nachman of Breslov captured this idea very well in his masterwork *Likutei Moharan*. "This," he wrote, "is an important rule in the service of God: One should focus only on today… For when a person wants to enter the service of God, it seems to him a heavy burden; he cannot possibly bear such a heavy load. However, when a person considers that he has only that day [to deal with], he will find it no burden at all. In addition, a person should not procrastinate from one day to the next, saying, 'I'll start tomorrow. Tomorrow I'll pray more attentively, and with the right enthusiasm'; and likewise for the other devotions. For a person's world consists only of the present day and moment—tomorrow is a different world entirely."

Moses's message, then, is as urgent and personal as it is grand and universal. **Each day, he reminds his people, you have a new chance to take your life in a brand new direction. Choose well, and you'll be blessed; sin, and it's curses for you.** And while it's true that each decision is likely to lead to more such decisions in kind—those who decide to keep the mitzvot are likely to grow in piety and goodness, whereas those who decide to ignore God's teachings are likely to continue to push the boundaries of wrongdoing—it's also true that each day brings with it a brand new opportunity to repent and start anew. The most important thing, then, is never to wait, and to **seize each day as what it is—an entire world.**

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