Jewish Tribune – Re’eh

**Watch me and do!**

The curious thing about this week’s parsha is the very first word.

 רְאֵה אָנֹכִי נֹתֵן לִפְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה

See I set before you today, a blessing and a curse (Devorim 11, 26)

Why does the Torah use the less common phrase re’eh and not shmiah? Re’eh suggests there is something to see. Moshe Rabbeinu seems to be inviting Klal Yisroel to have a visual experience of some sort. Moreover, Moshe Rabbeinu normally uses the word shmiah, that his message can be absorbed by listening or understanding.

In fact, two weeks ago, in parshas v’aeschanan, Moshe Rabbeinu tells Klal Yisroel

כִּי לֹא רְאִיתֶם כָּל תְּמוּנָה בְּיוֹם דִּבֶּר ה' אֲלֵיכֶם בְּחֹרֵב

For you did not see any image on the day Hashem spoke to you at Chorev (Devorim 4,15)

Visual icons are rarely used in Yiddishkeit. They often border on avoda zora or some form of paganism or idol worship.

So why does the Torah use the less common phrase re’eh and not shmiah?

The Ba’al Haturim offers a very interesting interpretation.

Moshe Rabbeinu is saying רְאֵה אָנֹכִי, watch me! Look at me and take guidance from the way I live and how I behave and conduct myself.

Based on the Medrash Tanchuma (Re’eh 4), the Ba’al Haturim says:

 ראה אנכי - פירוש ממני תראו וכן תעשו

The explanation is: watch me and you do this.

Moshe Rabbeinu is not only speaking to all of Klal Yisroel but is offering guidance to his successor Yehoshua and all future leaders of the Jewish people. The Ba’al Haturim draws on the words of Gidon (Shoftim perek 4), who is leading a small armed force of volunteers. He doesn’t have time to train the three hundred men and simply tells them I am going to give you each a shofar and an earthenware jug with a burning torch inside and then:

ממני תראו וכן תעשו

Watch me and you do this.

Namely, I will blow the shofar and break the jug and then you all do the same. The noise and brightness in the middle of the night will create the necessary shock which will lead to victory.

A powerful lesson in leadership - ממני תראו וכן תעשו - watch me and you do this. Lead from the front. Don’t just issue commands but lead by example. Moshe Rabbeinu knew the difference between a boss and a leader. A boss says “Go!” and a leader says “let’s go.”

In “When the Adults Change, Everything Changes”, the author Paul Dix, discusses behavioural management in schools and offers effective strategies to improve schools and behaviour in even the unruliest students. His training programmes are used by tens of thousands of teachers worldwide every week.

In his book, he tells the following anecdote. One day, he was touring a school in the North of England when he noticed a 6-year-old walking in the corridor in a distinctive style. The boy was walking very tall, head up, chin up, chest out with a purposeful stride and his hands clasped behind his back.

Probably just an eccentric 6-year-old playing a game.

But then Mr Dix saw a class of 9-year-olds snaking through the school on their way to a PE lesson. Every child had the same posture; hands behind their back, chest out, walking tall and proud.

He asked the head teacher what this was about and was told that there had been a lot of pushing and shoving, boisterous behaviour, particularly in the corridors. Smaller children were getting hurt and the head teacher wanted to change things.

She therefore taught everyone “fantastic walking” where members of staff modelled this walk and students soon caught on. The adult model was constant and consistent, and things changed for the better.

Of course, she could have chosen to apply the same principle of consistency to a more aggressive and punitive system. She could have given out lunch time detentions for children who are seen running or pushing in the corridor. She could have plastered the corridors with “no running” posters and even have dug a cellar in the basement to house the offenders. After weeks of punishments, explosive confrontations and broken trust, the children may behave well in the corridors – when the adults happened to be watching.

This enlightened head teacher may have intuited this lesson, taught by Moshe Rabbeinu and Gidon, many centuries earlier.

Interestingly, in the IDF, these words - ממני תראו וכן תעשו (watch me and you do this). are written over the entrance to the בית ספר לקצינים – the training school for officers. The subliminal message is that to be a leader, you have to lead by example.

The Ohr Hachaim Hakodosh takes it a step further. If somebody comes and tells you that a life of ruchniyus and spiritual values is a blessing and a life of materialism is a curse, you may wonder if this is true. Has this person really experienced first class materialism? Has he driven in a Rolls Royce, or does he own a super yacht? How does he know that indulging in materialism will not satisfy a person? He’s never tasted true luxury.

The Ohr Hachaim explains, that Moshe Rabbeinu is telling Klal Yisroel, ראה אנכי פירוש אלי תראו – look at me, I grew up in the house of Pharoah in the lap of luxury. I saw and experienced the highest levels of materialism. I also spent forty days and forty nights on Har Sinai and experienced the highest form of spirituality. Just me and HKBH. I am therefore qualified to teach about this. I have seen the heights of gashmiyus and the heights of ruchniyus and I can tell you that a life of spirituality is a blessed life and a life of gold and glitter can misguide a person and be a curse.

Our parsha teaches us important and timeless lessons. We should all lead by example and ultimately, what we do has far greater impact than what we say.

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