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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT RE'AY - Part Two

Bad influences? Surely we should stay away from them, but how do we identify them? In Parshat Re'ay, we find an example of how the Torah deals with this problem, as Bnei Yisrael prepare to enter the land.

INTRODUCTION

Our previous shiur on Parshat Re'ay, discussed how "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" - emerged as its primary topic. Even though this holds true for chapters 12 and 15, chapters 13 and 14 appear to form a digression from this topic.

To illustrate how the topic of 'bad influences' is sandwiched with the topic of "ha'makom asher yivchar", the following table summarizes the main topics of the Parsha:

*** HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**

12:1-19 - Establishing the Bet ha'Mikdash as the national center
 12:20-28 - Permission for eating meat outside of that center

*** BAD INFLUENCES**

12:29-31 - Don't seek after the gods of the nations of Canaan
 13:2-6 - Don't follow the instructions of a false prophet
 13:7-12 - Don't follow a family member who may lead you astray
 13:13-19 - Ir ha'nidachat - when an entire city goes astray
 14:1-21 - Misc. dietary laws (what one cannot eat)

*** HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM**

14:22-27 - Eating "maaser sheni" (there) in years 1,2,4,& 5
 14:28-29 - Giving this "maaser" to the poor in years 3 & 6
 15:1-18 - The laws of "shmittah" for the 7th year
 15:19-23 - Bringing the 'first born' to "ha'makom asher..."
 16:1-17 - Celebrating the "shalosh regalim, ba'makom asher..."
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As you most probably have guessed by now, in our shiur we will search for a theme that ties all of these topics together.

FOUR 'BAD EXAMPLES'

To begin our shiur, we must first explain why we categorized all of the topics in chapter 13 as 'bad influences'.

Note how each topic relates to a certain warning that 'somebody else' will not lead you astray towards following other gods.

First we find a warning against following the gods of your 'non-jewish' neighbors (12:29-31). Then we are warned not to follow a charismatic leader (be he a 'prophet' or 'dreamer'), even if he performs a miracle, should he suggest that we worship a different god (13:2-6). Afterward, we are warned against following a family member or close friend who may secretly suggest that we worship a different god. Finally, as a society, we are warned not to allow an entire town to go astray; and if so, that entire town must be destroyed.

Note how we find examples of influences from:

- a) society at large, i.e. our global community
- b) our leaders, either religious or lay
- c) our family and close friends
- d) our city, i.e. our local community

These laws are followed by a lengthy list of dietary laws in 14:3-21. Note however that the reason for keeping these laws is given both at the beginning and end of this unit, in 14:2 and 14:21 - for you are an "am kadosh l'Hashem elokecha" - a designated [holy] nation for your God - hence you must separate yourselves from them.

Even though the Torah does not explain HOW these laws

accomplish this goal, we know quite well from our daily life how the laws of "kashrut" severely limit our cultural contact with people of other religions. Therefore, we find yet another example of how the laws of the Torah protect us from the influences of those who may lead us towards following other gods.

With this in mind, we must now consider the connection between this unit of 'bad influences' and the primary topic of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem".

INFLUENCES - GOOD & BAD

When we consider the purpose of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem", i.e. the establishment of the city of Yerushalayim and the Bet ha'Mikdash as the nation's vibrant cultural and religious center, we find yet another example of what will influence the society of Am Yisrael, this time from the positive aspect.

In other words, Parshat Re'ay discusses all types of influences that will shape the nature of society (as Bnei Yisrael prepare to enter the land). First and foremost, by the establishment of "ha'makom asher yivchar Hashem" and the requirement that every Jew frequent that site and eat his "maaser sheni" in Yerushalayim, we assure the proper development of Am Yisrael as an "am kadosh l'Hashem".

By warning against bad influences, the Torah attempts to make sure that the fabric of that society won't crumble.

In Parshat Shoftim, we will find additional examples of what will provide a 'good influence' upon the nation. The Torah will discuss the judicial system, the priesthood, and the various other institutions of political leadership in their ideal form.

Till then,
 shabbat shalom
 menachem