

**The Source of our Help:
From Charlottesville to Charlotte Amalie
Parashat Re'eh
August 18, 2017**

*Esa Aynai El HeHarim,
Ma'ayin Yavo Ezri?
Ezri, Me'im Adonai,
Oseh Shamayim Va'aretz.*

I lift up my eyes to the heavens;
what is the source of my help?
My help comes from the Wellspring of Being,
the Cosmic Connector, Unity of the Universe,
the Oneness at the Heart of the World.
My help comes from the Sculptor of All,
Creator and Commander,
Maker of Heaven and Earth.

This week alone my family floated in the waves, and bounced on a ferry,
looked down from the top of a mountain, and stared at the blue-green sea.

There is rain and sun, shadow and light, beauty and awe and amazement at
the wonders of the world. It can feel so far from strife and stress and struggle.

But here, even here... I can sit at a restaurant as every member of my
family stares down into a metal object in their palms. And so into our lives
come CNN, and MSNBC, and Fox and Friends, and Facebook and alerts and
alarms and the Internets. Nothing is far away, everything hits home, and no
bubble of Eden is safe from the toxic waste of venom and rage.

And when hatred rears its head, when things which live under logs come
out in the day, when those who use too much starch feel enough support to
take off their masks, when they show their faces to the world, wherever hatred
of any kind finds a home soon enough, soon enough, in all of history and out of
some kind of warped hysteria, soon enough fingers are pointed and

accusations aimed...at us. At our community. At some sick, distorted fantasy of the menacing, threatening, all-powerful Jews.

The argument in the far peripheral vision of public attention over the summer seemed harmless enough. Wonder Woman. Gal Gadot. Jewish. Israeli. Is she white? Are Jews white? Clearly some of us are not. But when did we many of us become white? How, and why? Really? Ridiculous! Who cares? And isn't race a social construct anyway? It isn't even biologically real!

But if you knew where to look, if you read certain outlets, you saw temperatures starting to rise. And some of those passions...weren't so innocent, after all.

It was a week, it was. And we cannot know what is yet to come. Except that soon... soon enough... there will be shade, when there should be light. Black power and white power in collision and collusion. A spectacular display of... actual matter. To even look up becomes... an act of madness. And danger. Stare at the sun when the darkness comes...and you will never see the world the same way again.

"Re'eh! See!" That imperative, that stance is the opening word, and the name, of this week's portion. See, set before us, two paths. Two. How's that, for many sides?

But where do they lead, these many sides? One is blessing, and the other curse. One is life, and the other death. Sure, there are many sides. Absolutely. *But they're not both right!* As Tevye finally came to say, and as all those in public life already should have: “there is no other hand!”

An argument, in the Talmud, about *p'shara*, and *b'tzuah*. About compromise, and accommodation. Equanimity, the middle ground, making peace, bridging gaps... this is a basic part of a civilized society, says Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha. And, I think, often he is right. Often.

But Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Yossi HaGalili argues the other side. This whole business of splitting the difference, our tendency, our instinct to say the truth lies somewhere in between? *Not always!* Sometimes there is right, and there is wrong; there is truth, and there is hate... and it is *not* the time to stand aside, or even on every side.

And next week, as the Torah turns, as the eclipse comes, there are these words, from what was Talia's Torah portion: “*tzedek, tzedek tirdof, l'ma'an tichiyeh*. Justice, justice you shall pursue, that you may live!”

Why, then, is the word repeated? Why is justice stated twice? To teach, among other explanations given, that we must pursue the just and the good, that we must stand up for our convictions no matter the cost or convenience or ease with which we might have made the whole mess go away.

My friends, this Monday, and every day, there are ways to do what we want to do. There are special lenses, there is the right form of protection... Stare at the heart of darkness and you can see what is always there, hidden in plain sight. Surrounding the sustaining warmth is a flame of fury, a blinding sight, a light so bright and so certain of itself it tears, it tears, it fears, burnt onto yards, seared into hearts, white robes billowing, pain in the unfiltered flicks of fire, danger and agony still there, still there after all these years.

Can you believe we are still dealing with this stuff? In 2017? Nazis, and white supremacists? The Klan?

One slice of time. One portion among many. One week in the world. What does this week's portion bring us? Sometimes we search long and hard and stretch for a word, a phrase, an idea that speaks to the moment, or the modern world at all.

But this week is a torrent. *Re'eh*: see what is taught. *Sh'ma*: hear what is being said! The portion warns against idolatry, the worship of any figure or object or ideology beyond the bounds of dignity and decency and love. Of loyalty beyond law. It rails against astrology and soothsayers, hucksters and miracle workers who – even if *part of* what they promise comes to pass, look! Open your eyes! Beware of the path they are leading you on!

It points out problems that arise from scoundrels and instigation, and it recommends careful investigation into real news and actual facts. (Seriously.

It says that. Check out Deuteronomy 13:15). It describes what is fit, what is kosher, and what is not. It speaks of blessing and curse, of bounty and blight.

Did you hear the cry of angry men? Did you hear the chants on the streets of Charlottesville? “Blood and soil, blood and soil.” *Blut und boden!* This is American? This is America? There are “fine people” there? Do you not see? Can you not hear?

Blood. This week’s portion teaches us to pour the blood of the animal out, to be careful not to consume the blood – have you ever had kosher red meat? So drained of blood... No accusation in the world could have been more absurd than the Blood Libel, the...trumped up charge that Jews of drink blood; we are the least likely people on the planet to do such a thing. For look, there it is in this week’s portion: blood *is* the life force, a power we *cannot consume*, an essence which *we are forbidden to swallow!* As an image there is no stronger rebuke of thugs and scoundrels and savages on the street, idolaters worshipping blood and land and imagined heritage over values and honor and humanity. Armed thugs, locked and loaded as some are so fond of saying, stationed staring daggers of hate just across the street from the synagogue.

The scrolls, you heard? Did you hear about the Torah scrolls in Charlottesville? They had to be taken out, removed, brought away from the building for all the threats of arson and fire to come. Fine people indeed.

In speaking of *tzedakah*, of righteous giving, of supporting those in need, the portion promises that “there will be no more needy in the land,” and, a paragraph later, that “the needs of others will never cease.”

How can it claim both? Except as a challenge to us, to face reality, and bring it closer, one step at a time, to the ideal. And it teaches that we are to give “*dai mach’s’ro lo*; that we are to give... enough to meet the needs of the other.”

One of the most interesting debates in the entire tradition is the argument over...what this means. What someone needs? Who gets to define someone else’s needs? Astonishingly enough, mostly this is read as: *they do*, not you! Support the needy... and the level of living they are accustomed to!

Surely we will study this text together, at another time. But the basic point is this: look around. See! There are *other people here!* Their needs are real. They have a claim on you. *Get over yourself. It’s not all about you!*

And again and again and again this week’s portion teaches, the Torah commands, the tradition demands: welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, protect the widow, take in the orphan, defend the vulnerable. Our tradition speaks with one voice, and on one side about this issue: the minority, the “other,” the vulnerable, the oppressed? Share and care and protect and lift up.

Hatred has no home in the heart of any decent human being, and those who cannot see, who cannot say, who cannot affirm that have no place in the midst of palace and should find no shelter in the shade of the powerful.

White power, black power, schmack power. **The whole purpose of power is not the worship of self, but to have open eyes, an open heart, and an open hand. To see, to serve, to support.**

Esa Aynai, el haR'chov....

I lift up my eyes, and look at the street.

What is the source of our help? It is said that God has no hands but ours, no legs or feet but ours. Our task... *Re'eh!* To see. To look into the eyes of another, and find there... a person. A partner. A human being. Just like you. Just like me.

Do this! Do this even now, even with the news of the week. Do this and you will find a home among the holy, hope in the midst of hatred, a flame of faith that warms without burning, a sense of the sacred found in the presence of one another.

Shabbat Shalom.