

IMPROVING OUR EYESIGHT

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Hebrew word re'eih, which serves as the title of this week's Torah reading, has many layers of meaning attached to it. In its simplest understanding it means "see." There are English translations of the word that have expanded the definition of the word to mean "behold." In truth, the Torah demands of us more than simply eye vision. We are challenged to see the physically unseeable and to deal with abstractions of thought and policy and make them real.

So re'eih is as much a state of mind and contemplation as it is one of actual eyesight. That is why the Torah states that we should somehow see and behold possible blessings and curses in our future - successes and failures. The human eye cannot discern blessings or curses. What sometimes appears to be a wonderful idea, a great blessing, a most correct policy may, in fact, turn out to be a cursed disaster.

And the opposite is also true. An event or idea that appeared to be a negative may yet be most positive in the future. King David makes us aware of this in his famous verse, "The stone that was rejected by the builders initially has now become the corner stone itself."

So when the Torah bids us "re'eih" - see the future, so to speak, it cannot expect us to do so wisely and intelligently unless it supplies us with corrective lenses that will enable us to do so. And as the Torah itself reiterates time and again, it is the observance of Torah laws and a fealty to God that enables us to visualize the blessings that await us and the pitfalls that await those who deviate from tradition and Jewish values.

For a long period of its history the Jewish people had the advantage of having prophets who saw the future, the right and wrong, the good and the bad, for them. But we must note that the Jewish people frittered away this gift simply by ignoring what the prophets had to say. As the prophet states: "And I made your young men prophets but you ordered them to desist from prophesying."

It is common in human nature to stumble along sightless rather than to glimpse the future good. Truly seeing the future imposes obligation and a change in lifestyle and behavior patterns that one is loath to fulfill. And, since it is also very difficult for humans to admit past or present error, the chances for unpleasant happenings in the future because of improper present behavior and policies are omnipresent.

The entire book of Dvarim is essentially devoted to this issue - the sad consequences of bad behavior and how this affects future generations. Moshe's frustration is almost palpable in his

warnings to Israel. If there was ever anyone who could see and behold it was Moshe, the greatest of all prophets.

Every parent is aware of this sad frustration when one is aware of an erroneous decision by a child but is powerless to prevent its occurrence and its consequences. We can only hope that the eyesight of our generation will improve.

Shabat shalom,

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com