

## Parshat Re'eh

### Trust: A Blessing or a Curse

#### Rabbi Alana Suskin - Advanced Kollel: Executive Ordination Class of 2020

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Everybody knows how in Charles Schulz's classic comic, Peanuts, Lucy van Pelt pulls the football away from Charlie Brown over and over again. An online count came up with 52 times that Lucy frustrated poor Charlie Brown. It's no surprise that this tiny, dark, comic saga has become the paradigm of misplaced trust in others.

In Parshat Re'eh, we are warned against being led astray by two different kinds of people. The first is a prophet or a dreamer of dreams who offers a sign or miracle.

כִּי־יִקְרֹא בְּקִרְבְּךָ נְבִיא או חֵלֶם חֵלוֹם וַיִּתֶּן אֵלֶיךָ אוֹת או מוֹפֵת:

If there appears among you a prophet or a dream-diviner, who gives you a sign or a portent (Devarim 13:2)

It is not too difficult these days to understand this warning. We have surely seen over the last few years how easy it is for people to accept the words of a charismatic leader and be led astray into doing vile things. And it's clear that this theme is a popular one in regards to this parsha.

The second warning, though, seems to get much less attention:

כִּי יִסִּיתְךָ אָחִיךָ בֶן־אִמְךָ או־בִּנְךָ או־בִּתְּךָ או אִשְׁתְּ חֵיקְךָ או רֵעֵךְ אֲשֶׁר כָּנַפְשְׁךָ...

If your brother, your own mother's son or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your closest friend entices you... (Devarim 13:7)

While it is relatively easy to inveigh against a public figure who might theoretically lead one to do wrong, it's much more difficult to convince people not to trust those who are close to us by blood or affection.

Human beings are built to love and trust one another. The ability to do so is one of the primary reasons for our success as a species, and the closer we are to another person, the less likely it is that we will be willing to distrust them. And even should we, deep down, have suspicions that something isn't right, no one wants to believe that the person they love is doing something wrong.

And yet, everyone whose face shows up in the news is loved by someone. Each tax evader, each perjurer, every embezzler, is loved by someone; stories of cheating and betrayal are the backbone of an entire genre of magazines. Every person knows someone whose spouse was discovered to be sneaking around.

The Kedushat Levi, the 18th Century Hasidic master, Rabbi Levi of Berditchev, examines the opening verse of our parsha:

רְאֵה אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה:

See! I have placed before you this day blessing and curse. (Devarim 11:26)

He explains that the word *re'eh* refers to examining evidence in order to achieve clarity.

The Kedushat Levi wants us to understand that each of us needs to have our eyes fully open even with those we love. Here the Torah is distinguishing between different things that appear close to each other, so that we can know which are a blessing and which a curse. In this case, between people who are trustworthy, and those who are not.

The legendary author and cultural commentator Christopher Hitchens once said, "Trust is not the same as faith. A friend is someone you trust. Putting faith in anyone is a mistake."

Parshat Re'eh puts this in stark terms: we can have faith in God, who never fails, but humans, however much we love them, cannot be relied upon implicitly. There is no human about whom you can say "I trust this person no matter what because I know they will never betray me." Even a person who truly loves you and means well is fallible and can betray you, whether on purpose or inadvertently. It is dangerous to have faith in a human being, whether because people believe themselves to be hard to fool, or have moments of selfishness, or don't know the entire situation, or will attend to their own needs and put their own desires first, or simply because humans make mistakes.

When we set aside our moral compass or our common sense out of love for family or friends, it endangers us as individuals and leaves us open to betrayal. When we set aside our values to follow a leader who tells us what we want to hear, it endangers all of us. Human trust in others is essential, but cannot be unlimited. The blessing is when our loved ones or our leaders are indeed trustworthy. The curse is not when they fail us, but when we allow ourselves to be blinded and led astray.



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