



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

2 – 3 September, 2005

29 AV, 5765

Parashat Re'eh
(Deuteronomy 11:26–16:17)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom chaverim,

Over the summer, one of my most beloved teachers, Rabbi Shmuel Avidor haCohen, left this world for the World to Come. He was best known, and greatly respected and loved, for his decades of weekly Torah commentaries on Israeli TV. He said the following about this week's portion, *Re'eh*:

"See, I set before you blessing and curse: Blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I enjoin upon you this day; and Curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God..." (Deut. 11:26-27)

'The blessings and the curses do not appear in this week's Torah portion. They are detailed at great length in the coming weeks' portions. But from this single verse, if we read it as it is written, it becomes clear that the "blessing" itself is "if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God." There is no greater blessing than this: that the people listen to the commandments of God and obey them, living at a high moral level, with no licentiousness and no criminals. Law, governance, and order are the rule. This is itself a blessing, and there is no need for any additional blessing.

The "curse", meanwhile, is, "if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God" – when the commandments are not enacted, when life is full of corruption and lawlessness, complete moral decay, emptiness, and chaos – this is itself the curse. A nation needs no other curse than the curse of life in a broken and ruined society, a life of no law and no *mitzvah*. A people detached from the word of God and God's commandments, a people with no cultural setting of life and logical framework of existence, is already cursed more than enough; and its life, a life without direction or conscience, without law and without morality and ethics, is its curse.'

"If however there is a needy person among you...you will certainly open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs." (Deut. 15:7-8)

'There was once, in the late hours of the night, a knock on the door of Rabbi Isser-Zalman Meltzer, an elder of the rabbinical leaders of Jerusalem. His wife asked, "Who is there? Who is knocking?" The Rabbi rushed to open the door saying, "When someone knocks at such a late hour, it must be an urgent matter. One must open right away without asking who it is."

And in our modern world, every door has a peephole to allow the homeowner to see who is at the door and not to open for the poor and needy, even during the daytime. In our modern world, when someone needs to borrow a little something and calls a friend, the friend hints to his little daughter to speak into the phone: "Abba isn't home. We don't know when he'll be back."

B'vracha,
Rabbi Michael
27 Av 5765

1st September, 2005