

SEEING WITH OUR HEARTS

A commentary on *Parashat Re'eh*

By Rabbi Janet Darley

This *Parasha* begins with the word “see.” “See, *this day I set before your blessing and curse*” (Deuteronomy 11:26).

Seeing, or not seeing, figures in a number of passages in Torah. Abraham, almost completely ignored, the ram so bent was he on sacrificing Isaac, though sacrificing children was a prohibited act. Balaam’s donkey sees what its owner can not seem to see—G-d’s messenger with a large sword. There are also examples of mis-seeing—of seeing not reality, but fear. The majority of the spies sent to examine the land reported it to be inhabited by giants. What should we be seeing, so we might receive the blessing and not the curse?

Parashat Re'eh continues (verse 7) telling us “do not

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harden your heart” and “open your hand.” In good classic

pedagogical form, the Torah gives us the lesson and a corresponding action to reinforce the lesson. This methodology, which takes law and expands

it to a relevancy that the law alone may not have, either for the ancient Israelites or for us today, makes the lesson easier to grasp.

When we hear the term “hardened heart” it immediately echoes the story of Passover and the action of G-d “hardening” Pharaoh’s heart. But “heart hardening” is not reserved just for Pharaoh. The world is filled with hardened hearts. Almost daily, we are confronted with stories in the evening news, newspaper articles, or even direct mail that remind us of the pain that exists in the world. We hear and read these stories continually, and yet most of us go on with our lives able to successfully compartmentalize the “news” from that which genuinely affects us. In a world filled with so much tragedy, we have become used to shutting off

the ambient noise of pain and suffering. We become blind to the truth of what is happening. We don’t “see.” Every one of us is guilty of this at one time or another. Our constant challenge is to find ways to contribute to healing the world’s ills in ways that are meaningful, realistic, and appropriate.

There are two ways of seeing—one is with our eyes. We should look carefully at what is around us. But sometimes our eyes deceive us. Sometimes we need to shut our eyes and see with our hearts, with our souls, to really understand.

I am shocked and horrified at the rhetoric surrounding the desperate people fleeing war torn lands, fleeing upheaval, fleeing the death and destruction all around them. Words and headlines that paint them as swarms, as marauders, ignoring the reality that they, like us, are made in the image of G-d.

In 2016, there were 38,516 applications for asylum in the UK, Italy had over 100,000, France about twice as many as the UK. Only around 40% of UK asylum applications are accepted. We do have resettlement schemes, but just over 7,000 Syrians have been settled here through resettlement schemes in the past two years. Only 250 children came in under the Dubs amendment with another 1000 brought in to reunite with their families here.

These trips are perilous. In 2016, 5000 drowned in the Mediterranean. By April 2017, 1000 had drowned. For those who come overland, the journey is also dangerous

Why might someone want to come to Britain? They may have family members or friends here. Often they speak English, so they logically think that ultimately they will be able to rebuild their lives and use their skills here.

We of all people have to find a way to see the truth. We must see and then choose--blessing or curse. Which we get depends on the society we choose to create.

Rabbi Janet Darley came to the UK from Utah in 1989. She was a senior lecturer in economics at Kingston University before retiring to study for the rabbinate. She served South London Liberal Synagogue from 2008 until the summer of 2016. She is a Citizens UK Leader and serves on its council and executive.