**This shiur is dedicated in memory of   
Dr. William Major z"l.**

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**In memory of Naftali Hertzke ben Mayer Eliezer v’Gitel z”l,   
Nathaniel “Harry” Leiderman   
whose 9th yarzheit fell on the 11th day of Tammuz.   
Dedicated by Ira Leiderman & Mindy Smith   
and their children Eric (currently on Ramah Seminar)   
& Cara, Englewood, NJ.**

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**In honor of the birth of our daughter, Maya Margalit,**

**שנזכה לגדלה לתורה, לחופה ולמעשים טובים**

**-David and Shifra Waxman**

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**Seeing God or Being Seen by God**

**Parashat Re'eh**

**by Rav Elyakim Krumbein**

Our parasha concludes with the mitzva of "aliya le-regel," the obligatory pilgrimage to Jerusalem three times a year. This mitzva is repeated several times throughout Chumash, each time with a similar expression - "Three times a year all your males shall be seen before the Lord your God." As in our parasha, this verse closes the discussion of the festivals in both Parashat Mishpatim and Parashat Ki-Tisa.

However, one view in Chazal points to yet another instance in Chumash where this mitzva is introduced, in a context seemingly unrelated to the festivals. Towards the end of Parashat Mishpatim, Moshe conducts the ceremony of the covenant between God and Benei Yisrael at Mount Sinai. As part of this ceremony, we are told, "He [Moshe] designated some young men among the Israelites, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed bulls as offerings of well-being to God" (Shemot 24:5). The Gemara (Chagiga 6a) presents two views as to the identity of these burnt-offerings: one opinion associates this sacrifice with the korban tamid, the daily offering brought each morning and afternoon, while the other view identifies this burnt-offering as an olat re'iya. The olat re'iya is the sacrifice required of every pilgrim to the Temple on the festivals, in accordance with the dictum, "They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed" (Devarim 16:16). The obvious question to be asked of this latter view is: how could one bring a pilgrimage offering during a time other than a festival?

Rashi, in his comments to that Gemara in Chagiga, explains the second opinion. Although this occasion was not one of the required pilgrimages to the Temple, the offering of an olat re'iya was nevertheless warranted, since this experience, too, involved re'iya (beholding):

"And they saw the God of Israel: under His feet there was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire... they beheld God, and they ate and drank." (Shemot 24:10-11)

Rashi's interpretation, however, seems quite difficult. A clear distinction exists between the "beholding" during the festivals - which involves the people's being seen by the Almighty - and that of Mount Sinai, where the people beheld God, as it were. The question, then, remains: why do Chazal relate these two sacrifices with one another?

This enigmatic passage in the Gemara calls our attention to the unusual wording of this mitzva. The verse literally reads, "... all your males shall be seen the face of God ..." - "yera'eh kol zekhurkha et penei Hashem." "Yera'eh" is in the "nifal" construction, which does not jibe with the "et" following it. Seeing the face of God would read "YIR'EH et penei Hashem," and being seen before God would read "yera'eh LIFNEI Hashem;" but what is meant by "yera'eh ... et penei Hashem" - "shall be seen the face of God?"

Similar to the events at Mount Sinai, there are other instances in Chumash when God's "face" is said to have been seen. In Parashat Vayishlach, Yaakov proclaims after his wrestling with the angel, "I have seen God face to face" (Bereishit 32:31), and later tells Esav, "For to see your face is like seeing the face of God" (33:10). This concept appears in one other context in Chumash, namely, akeidat Yitzchak: "Avraham named that site Hashem Yireh [literally, 'God will see'], whence the present saying, 'On the Mount of the Lord He/he will be seen'" (Bereishit 22:14). Here, for the first time, we find the concept of "seeing" in the context of the Temple site and, furthermore, the relationship - or perhaps play on words - between the object and subject: the one who sees and the one who is seen.

The "seeing" in the beginning of the verse - Avraham's name for the mountain, "God will see" - is clearly a reference to his earlier remark to his son, "God will see to the sheep for His burnt-offering" (22:8). Most likely, as Rav Yoel Bin-Nun posits, the verb "re'iya" in the story of the akeida denotes choosing and selecting, rather than seeing. God chooses a sacrifice - Yitzchak - and now God chooses that spot as the location for sacrifices. Thus, "Hashem Yireh" constitutes both a parallel and precedent to the term, "the place that God will choose," which appears numerous times in our parasha.

However, what is meant by the end of the verse - "whence the present saying, 'On the Mount of the Lord He/he will be seen?'" At first glance, this verse seems to prophesy about a later period, when the people will ascend the "Mount of the Lord" in order to "be seen" thereupon. (And thus the pronoun is "he," with a lower-case, referring to man.) The problem is that nowhere in this verse is the subject - the person - mentioned. Thus, it seems that the One "being seen" in this verse is none other than the Almighty Himself [= He, with a capital H, will be seen]. Indeed, this is how Rashi, as well as many other commentators, interpret the verse: "[The mountain] about which the people of all generations will say, 'On this mountain God appears to His nation.'"

This verse, then, sheds light on the grammatical enigma of our phrase, "all your males shall be seen the face of God..." This phrase implies both seeing as well as being seen. God does not only see man, but He is seen by man, as well. He reveals Himself to man, and is thus seen, here on this mountain.

If we continue along the lines of Rav Yoel Bin-Nun's approach cited above, then we may conclude that the Temple is the place for the renewal of God's choosing of His nation (we are "seen," i.e. chosen, by Him) and for our choosing of God. As such, the end of the parasha directly relates to its opening: "See, this day I set before you blessing and curse" (11:26), which seems to allude to a later verse in Sefer Devarim: "I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse, and you shall choose life" (30:15). The triennial pilgrimage to the Temple constitutes a renewal of the bond between, and mutual selection of, Am Yisrael and their Father in Heaven.

Another basis may be suggested, as well, for the peculiar expression, "be seen the face of God." The very concept of "seeing God" poses a serious theological problem, as God possesses no visible form. The expression "shall be seen the face of God" may very well expresses the hesitation of the Torah, as well as the student, with regard to the institution of pilgrimage, the sacrifices offered and the festive celebrations associated therewith. Such festivities in the "presence" of God may result in a certain irreverence towards God. Unquestionably, the experience of "They beheld God, and they ate and drank" poses great danger. The Torah therefore substitutes "yireh" - shall see God - with "yera'eh" - will be seen. Similarly, elsewhere in our parasha the Torah makes a point of entrenching within us the concept of "yir'a," fear of God, within the context of pilgrimage to the Temple: "You shall consume there in the presence of the Lord your God, in the place where He will choose to establish His Name... so that you may learn to fear the Lord your God forever" (14:23).

(Translated by David Silverberg)