

Parshat Re'eh

Gesher Newsletter

5:33 PM Candle Lighting

6:31 PM Shabbos Ends

29 Av 5785

22 - 23 August 2025

Black pudding. An Irish delicacy originating in the 15th century. This one-of-a-kind masterpiece of a dish utilises blood of a variety of animals as its main ingredient. Served hot or cold, for breakfast or dinner, it has the distinct look of a liquorice black sausage. Loved by so many globally, the black pudding has now become the icon of the World Black Pudding Throwing Contest. You'll be pleased to know that since the game's establishment in 1980, two Australians have secured first place!

If you're confused or even disgusted by the Irish's off-pudding (pun intended) love for bloody breakfasts, don't worry - Rashi is too.

“רַק חֲזָק לִבְלִתִּי אֲכֹל הַדָּם” – Only: exercise strength in not eating the blood...”

The Torah quite explicitly prohibits black pudding, but Rashi is confused by the seemingly superfluous words, “רַק חֲזָק”. No other commandment in the Torah urges us to make a special effort to avoid sin. So why does refraining from the consumption of blood demand such explicit reinforcement?

To explain these words, Rashi cites two oddly conflicting opinions - that of Rabbi Yehuda and that of Rabbi Shimon.

Rabbi Yehuda states, “prior to the giving of the Torah, the Israelites craved blood”, so to combat their desire, God told them to be strong in their resolve to not eat it.

Rabbi Shimon paints a different picture. He argues that the average working-class person, like you and I, is revolted by blood (how did you feel learning about black pudding?). By exercising strong effort to keep an easy commandment, one you would likely fulfil anyway, “how much more so is it necessary to make great efforts in keeping the other commandments.”

While these opinions may seem to conflict each other, there is a key interplay between them that reveals a valuable lesson.

Making a positive change in one's life, whether introducing a new good habit or breaking a bad one, is a notoriously difficult feat. During the first few days, one's mind is completely occupied by the craving to slip into old ways. But with time the cravings begin to fade until they are barely present. Then something truly magical happens. One starts to relish in their new routine. Now, a challenge that seemed impossible to achieve prior, is more reachable than ever before.

There's a reason Rashi cites the differing opinions of both Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon in his commentary. Rabbi Yehuda is referring to the initial struggle of self-improvement. The Jews at Sinai craved blood. The daunting commandment required extra willpower to fulfil. But eventually, with enough persistence, they arrived at the level of Rabbi Shimon's lesson. They had become not only naturally disgusted by blood, but actively excited to tackle the more demanding commandments.

If the Jews can triumph over their odd appetite, we too can triumph over our bad habits, allowing us to climb higher and higher heights, relishing in our upwards journey.

Shabbat Shalom and enjoy your blood-free Cholent!
Shua Meyer and Yudi Wonder

Parshas Hashavuah Summaries

Parshas Re'eh

R' Gidon Moskow

- **126 Pesukim - 55 Mitzvos (17 positive and 38 negative)**

Rishon (Perek 11, pesukim 26-32; Perek 12, pesukim 1-10)

- Moshe set before Bnei Yisrael a blessing and a curse. He explained that the blessing came if they listened to the mitzvos of Hashem, and the curse came if they turned away and followed other gods. The blessing would be placed on Har Gerizim and the curse on Har Eival, across the Yarden, near Shechem. Moshe reminded them that they were crossing the Yarden to inherit the land which Hashem was giving them, emphasizing that they were commanded to keep all of Hashem's mitzvos in the land.
- Moshe commanded them to destroy all the places where the nations served their gods, tear down their altars and obliterate their idols and the names of foreign gods.
- They were commanded to bring offerings only in the place that Hashem would choose as a dwelling for His Name, bringing there their burnt-offerings, sacrifices, tithes, firstborn animals, vows, donations, and freewill-offerings. Moshe assured them that Hashem will give them rest from all their enemies and they will dwell securely in the land.

Sheni (Perek 12, pesukim 11-28)

- Moshe said that Bnei Yisrael were to bring all offerings, tithes, contributions, vows, donations, and the firstborn of cattle and sheep to the place that Hashem would choose to rest His Name. They were to rejoice before Hashem with their families, including servants, Levites, and all who lived among them. They were warned not to offer burnt offerings in any place they wished, but only in the chosen place of Hashem. However, they were permitted to slaughter animals for meat in any of their gates, according to Hashem's blessing, as long as they poured the blood on the ground like water. They were told that they could eat meat freely, but they were not to consume the blood since the blood is the life of the animal and consuming it would bring guilt.
- Moshe explained that they only eat certain tithes of food, firstborn cattle and flocks and vow offerings in the place that Hashem chooses and warned them not to forsake the Levite.
- When Hashem would expand their borders, they were allowed to eat meat whenever they desired, as long as they followed Hashem's rules, not eating blood.
- All consecrated offerings, vows, and holy items were to be taken only to the chosen place of Hashem, offering burnt offerings, pouring the blood on the altar and eating the meat.
- Moshe emphasised that they must listen carefully to Hashem's commands, so that it would go well with them and their children forever.

Shlishi (Perek 12, pesukim 29-31; Perek 13, pesukim 1-19)

- Moshe warned that when Hashem cut off the nations from before Bnei Yisrael and they inherited their land, they must not be ensnared by the nations' practices. They were cautioned not to inquire about how the nations served their gods, lest they imitate them. Moshe said that the abominable practices of those nations are forbidden to Bnei Yisrael. He commanded that Bnei Yisrael were to keep and perform all that Hashem commanded, without adding or subtracting.
- Moshe warned that if a prophet or dreamer arises and gives a sign or wonder that comes true, but then told them to follow other gods, they must not listen. Hashem is testing them to know if they love Him with all their heart and soul. They are to follow Hashem, fear Him, keep His mitzvos, serve Him, and cleave to Him. That false prophet or dreamer is to be put to death.
- If a close relative or friend enticed one secretly to serve other gods, Bnei Yisrael were not to listen, pity, or protect him. Instead, that person was to be stoned to death.
- If a city was reported to have been led astray to serve other gods, the people were to investigate thoroughly. If the report was confirmed, the city was to be struck down by the sword, its inhabitants and livestock destroyed. All the spoils of the city were to be gathered into the town square and burned completely as an offering to Hashem. The city was never to be rebuilt. Nothing from that city was to be kept for personal gain. Hashem would then turn from His anger, show mercy, and give Bnei Yisrael compassion and blessing as He had sworn.

Revii (Perek 14, pesukim 1-21)

- Moshe reminded Bnei Yisrael that they are children of Hashem. They are forbidden to make cuts in their flesh or shave between their eyes for the dead, since they were a holy people chosen by Hashem to be His treasured nation.
- Bnei Yisrael are commanded not to eat anything abominable. Moshe lists the kosher land animals: those that both chew their cud and have split hooves. The camel, hare, and hyrax chew cud but did not have split hooves, whilst the pig has split hooves but does not chew its cud.
- Bnei Yisrael are permitted to eat fish that have both fins and scales.
- Birds that are considered unclean, including the eagle, vulture, raven, ostrich, owl, seagull, hawk, heron, cormorant, stork, hoopoe, and bat are not to be consumed. All clean birds not on the prohibited list are allowed to be eaten.
- An animal that dies on its own (neveilah) may not be eaten, but may be given or sold to a stranger.
- The command to not cook a young goat in its mother's milk is brought (Prohibition of meat & milk).

Chamishi (Perek 14, pesukim 22-29)

- Moshe commanded Bnei Yisrael to tithe all the produce of their fields each year. They were to eat the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, and the firstborn of their cattle and sheep, before Hashem in the chosen place. If the journey to the chosen place is too long and carrying the tithes is difficult, they are permitted to convert them into money and take the money to the chosen place, and spend it on whatever food they desired, and rejoice there before Hashem with their household.
- Do not neglect the Levite in their towns, since he had no inheritance or portion of land.
- At the end of every three years, they are to bring out the full tithe of their produce and store in their cities. This tithe was to be given to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, so that they could eat and be satisfied.

Shishi (Perek 15, pesukim 1-18)

- Bnei Yisrael are children of Hashem (Banim laHashem) therefore they must not make gashes or bald spots in mourning for the dead, as done by nations.
- You are a holy nation (Am Kadosh), chosen by Hashem, special above all the nations of the earth.
- A list of animals, fish, and birds that may not be eaten is brought:
 - Beheimos (land animals): Only those with split hooves and that chew their cud may be eaten. Forbidden animals with only one sign are brought. These are the camel, hyrax, hare and pig.

- Only those fish with fins and scales may be eaten; all others are forbidden.
- A list of forbidden species of birds is given.
- General rule: Pure species are permitted; tamei species are forbidden.

Shevii (Perek 15, pesukim 19-23; Perek 16, Pasuk 1-17)

- Moshe commanded that every firstborn male of the herd and flock was to be sanctified to Hashem. The firstborn ox was not to be worked, and the firstborn sheep was not to be shorn. These animals were to be eaten before Hashem, year by year, in the chosen place, by the owner and his household. If a firstborn animal had a blemish, it was not to be sacrificed to Hashem. Instead, it could be eaten within the gates, by both the ritually pure and impure alike. However, its blood was not to be eaten and had to be poured out on the ground like water.
- Moshe commanded them to keep the month of Aviv (Nisan) and observe Pesach for Hashem, because in that month Hashem brought them out of Egypt by night. They are to slaughter the Pesach-offering from the flock or herd in the place Hashem would choose. They are to eat it with matzah and bitter herbs, not with chametz. No leaven may be seen in the land for seven days, and none of the meat from the offering is to remain overnight. The Pesach-offering is slaughtered only at the place Hashem would choose. It must be roasted and eaten that night. For six days matzah is eaten, and on the seventh day there is to be an assembly for Hashem, with no work performed.
- The mitzvah is brought to count seven weeks from when the sickle was put to the standing grain and then observe the Festival of Shavuot. We are told to rejoice before Hashem at the place Hashem will choose. Remember that we were slaves in Egypt and observe these statutes carefully.
- The Festival of Sukkot is celebrated for seven days, after gathering in the produce of the threshing floor and winepress. We are told to rejoice on the festival for seven days before Hashem in the chosen place, because Hashem would bless us and all our produce and work.
- Moshe commanded that three times a year, on Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, all males are to appear before Hashem in the chosen place. The command is to not appear empty-handed, but each brings a gift according to the blessing Hashem has given them.