

Torah Portion R'eih

Shabbat beginning August 26, 2022

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Parshah R'eih begins with the instruction of a blessing and a curse upon entering the promised land. The blessings are milk and honey; the curses are disease, horror, and loss. We can put ourselves into our ancestors' perspective by thinking of the blessings and curses of climate change. Achieving the blessings requires transformations in many modes of life practices. The curses are the consequences of failure.

To be blessed by climate we must switch to renewable fuels, conserve energy, plant trees, and support leaders dedicated to those ends. Failure will bring storms, drought, sea level rise, extinctions, famines, and disease. To be blessed with the promised land, our ancestors needed to worship together, avoid alien worship practices, follow dietary rules and ceremonies as reminders, and take care of their needy, crops, and food animals.

Through our Torah-prescribed practices, Jewish law and interpretation remind us daily to consider the welfare of creation. And the reminders are not just for each of us but also for what we do together, in eating, caring for our children and food sources, and interacting within our communities. Thus, our worship teaches us ways that the warnings of science can inspire community action.