

## **This is my Dvar torah.**

Today I will read Deuteronomy, that is Devarim Chapter 14 verse 22 to verse 29 and Chapter 15 verse 1 to verse 18.

First of all I would like to especially thank my mother Anya and morah Janet for helping me immensely with my dvar torah and for helping me with my preparation for my bnai-mitzvah and everyone else who has helped me. There are many different aspects that I could talk about with this Torah portion, but I am going to reflect on what the Israelites did back in the time of the Torah, and then what we could do now.

So I want to start with verse 27 of Chapter 14, which you can find in the booklet.

This verse talks about how you should not neglect the Levites, who were the descendants of the tribe of Levi who served in the Temple along with the Kohanim, or priests. The Levites were musicians, gate keepers, guardians, Temple officials, judges and they were exceedingly privileged, but because of that they were treated and seen differently for doing more important and special tasks like sacrifices and rituals.

Then in 14:29 the verse instructs that you should share with the Levites, the strangers, the widows and the fatherless who live within your settlement.

For past times that was good but what can we do for our time?

We are much more advanced in technology and science, and we have many more resources to help others.

But the might and corruption in our society has made us become increasingly greedy and selfish.

When the ancient Israelites were tithing 1/10th of their harvest and cattle, and not keeping slaves in perpetuity, then it was seen as very progressive. Today we believe that slavery is wrong, but

we still tithe, giving 10% or more to tzedakah (charity). It is a commandment, and it is not optional.

But what amount of progress could we achieve for our time?

In Ukraine the people are getting a lot of help but it is not nearly enough, because people are still dying, scared and still in danger of losing things they love and their loved ones.

The Israelites in their time gave the Levites, the fatherless, the widows and strangers a part of their harvest so that they could help those who needed help.

In a way, if this world was selfless and perfect Ukraine would not have bombs and blood on its soil. It is our job as Jews and as humans for that matter to help any other human in need. It doesn't matter at all what your nationality, skin color, sexuality, body type, gender or anything else that causes society to think that you don't fit in is. We all came from the same place, and whether it's God or you believe in something else, everyone should be treated equally.

We could send cars to the forest with food to help Ukrainians to get to safety and help them stay healthy.

Every border could be open, everyone with extra food or space in their house could lend it to Ukrainians if they can, because we can do all of this and more. Sadly we are not all doing so.

Chapter 15 verse 10 talks about giving readily and God will bless you in return for it.

I think this part is really important, because we should give readily too whether we get a return for it or not.

The great Jewish philosopher Maimonides, who lived over 800 years ago, created a ladder of tzedakah. His list is as follows, starting with the lowest rung of the ladder:

Level 8 — The donor gives unwillingly.

Level 7 — The donor gives less than he should but does so cheerfully.

Level 6 — The donor gives after being asked.

Level 5 — The donor gives without being asked.

Level 4 — The recipient knows the donor, but the donor does not know the recipient.

Level 3 — The donor knows the recipient, but the recipient does not know the donor.

Level 2 — Neither the donor nor the recipient knows the other.

Level 1 — This is the highest level: The donor helps the recipient to become self-supporting either with a loan or employment or training.

But many people do not give readily. If we look back then giving 1 tenth of your crop, or 10% of your wealth, is what the Torah is commanding us. That is what we can do for our time.

I should not have to be asking these questions.

These acts of unfairness, pain and suffering should not be happening now, but this is how it has gone in the past and the present. But does it have to be that way?

People could try and think of ourselves as Jews, that our ancestors were all once slaves. We remember this at this festival of Pesach. They all have been through war, and we are here because people helped us and God helped us.

And Ukraine needs God and people to help them.

We could help and we should help. We were once the ones in need and now there are others in need, and we must help them! Just as the Torah teaches and as others have helped us.

Thank you for listening, and I hope you all take something away from this.