

Yad Avraham Institute
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES

Parshas Re'eh

August 9, 2007

In Loving Memory of

Rachel Bas Avraham Yaakov, o'h

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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New York
August 9, 2007

B"H

Parshas Re'eh

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Dean

1. Love, Determining One's Direction in Life

The Torah states, **"If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream, and he will produce to you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder comes about, of which he spoke to you saying, 'Let us follow gods of others that you did not know and we shall worship them!' – do not hearken to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of a dream, for Hashem, your G'd, is testing you to know whether you love Hashem, your G'd, with all your heart and with all your soul."** Despite the fact that this person performed a miracle and predicted the future, if he speaks in the Name of G'd that the Jewish people should serve idolatry, then he has established himself as a false prophet and is liable for the death penalty. Whether one would be influenced by this individual or not is determined by one's degree of love for G'd.

The Thirteen Tenets of Jewish Belief which were compiled by Rambam states in the Sixth Tenet, "I believe with absolute faith that the words of the Prophets are true." One could think that believing in G'd, as the Omnipotent Being, would be sufficient; however, this is not the case. Believing in G'd as the All-Encompassing Being has no bearing and relevance to our existence unless G'd had communicated His Will to Man. This is basis for the Sixth Tenet.

The Seventh Tenet of Jewish belief states, "I believe with absolute faith that the prophecy of Moshe is true and that he is the father of all of Prophets – all the Prophets that preceded him as well as those who come after him." Why is it not sufficient to believe that the words of the Prophets are true as it is stated in the Sixth Tenet? If one believes in the Sixth Tenet and not the Seventh, why is he is considered a heretic?

How does one establish himself as a prophet, as a person with whom G'd has communicated? Rambam tells us that the verification process to establish a prophet is as

follows: Firstly, he must perform a supernatural act. Secondly, he must forecast the future and that event must come to fruition. The source for this criterion is the Torah. If one performs a miracle and accurately predicts the future, then he has established himself as an authentic prophet.

Sforno explains that until the Sinai event, the basis to believe that one is a prophet was through one's own evaluation of that individual. Meaning, if he had seen that person perform miracles and predict the future, it would seem that he was in fact an individual with whom G'd would communicate. This was only a presumption. Rambam states in The Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah that the basis for Moshe being G'd's prophet (spokesman) is that every Jew who was present at Sinai witnessed G'd's open communication with him. As the Rambam states, "They had heard G'd saying to Moshe – Go tell them such and such." The basis for Moshe being established as the prophet of G'd is factual because we had witnessed His communication with Moshe. However, the validation and establishment of all other prophets after Sinai is based on the criterion that is set forth by the Torah, which is the word of Moshe. Therefore any prophet, who contradicts the Word of G'd and claims that his prophecy is more authentic than Moshe's, is classified as a false prophet. The reason for this is because Moshe, being G'd's spokesman is factual and the basis for any other prophet is based on the criteria that was communicated by Moshe. Thus, if his prophecy is contradictory to the word of Moshe, he is refuting his own legitimacy as a true prophet.

Why is one's not succumbing to the prophecy that instructs him to perform an act of idolatry a test of one's love for G'd? Seemingly, if the Torah prohibits idolatry it should not even be a consideration and one should reject the prophet outright. Nevertheless the Torah tells us that unless one loves G'd with all of his heart and soul, he will succumb to the influence of the false prophet.

Even if one believes in fact that G'd may have not communicated to this individual as he claims, because of his ability to perform miracles and bring about positive results, he will be willing to accept this individual for the sake of self gain. By not rejecting and condemning the false prophet, he is demonstrating that this individual has value despite the fact that he is disgracing G'd. Thus, embracing or rejecting the false prophet is a test of one's love for G'd.

One's degree of love of G'd will determine whether he is able to go beyond his own needs. The more one appreciates and understands that he is a continuous beneficiary of G'd's Kindness, will cause him to establish G'd as the priority in his life. Ramchal writes in his work Path of the Just (Mesilas Yesharim), "G'd created man with a heart that must love. If one fills his heart with love for G'd then there is no room for any other love. However, if it is not, then it will be consumed with self love." Therefore, by recognizing and reflecting upon G'd's continuous concern for our welfare and existence, one will be motivated to do His Will and thus be protected from sin.

2. *The Jewish People, G'd's Children*

The Torah states, "**Moshe said to the Jewish people, 'You are children to Hashem, your G'd – you shall not lacerate yourself and you shall not make a bald spot between your eyes for a dead person. For you are a holy people to Hashem, your G'd, and Hashem has chosen you for Himself to be a treasured people, from among all the peoples on the face of the earth.'**" In some societies, people lacerate themselves and pull the hair out of their heads when grieving for their dead. The Torah prohibits this type of behavior for a Jew. The Torah explains that the reason the Jew is not permitted to behave in this manner is because the Jewish people are firstly G'd's Children and secondly they are a "holy people to Hashem..."

Sforno explains, "It is not appropriate for one to show extreme worry and pain for a loved one who passes away regardless of what the person had provided to him because there is another one who is of greater importance and value - and who is the basis of all good, which is G'd Himself" Thus, Moshe says to the Jewish people, "**You are G'd's Children**" to indicate that since our relationship with G'd is the equivalent of a father to a child, there is no basis for worry. Grieving at an extreme level for one's deceased would be contradictory to this fact. Regardless of one's loss, G'd never abandons a Jew. Just as a parent

loves his child more than the child could ever love his parent, Moshe is communicating to the Jewish people that G'd values us as His Children. Lacerating oneself or pulling out one's hair is an expression that all hope is lost. This type of behavior would be considered a denial of the special relationship between G'd and the Jew.

Sforno continues that when Moshe states that the Jewish people are holy to G'd he means to say that although one's grieving over his own predicament would be considered a lack of faith; however, grieving for the departed one, because he is no longer alive, would be permitted. Moshe tells the Jewish people that this is a misconception of truth because the soul of the Jew lives on eternally – benefiting from G'd on the most advanced level. As the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, "One moment of spiritual bliss in the world to come is more than the entire life of this world." Therefore to grieve to the point of lacerating oneself would be considered a rejection of this belief.

King David writes, "Do not have faith in nobleman nor on a human being." Although it is proper for one to be thankful and show appreciation to one's benefactor, he is not permitted to have faith in him. It is because the benefactor is only the conduit to transmit G'd's blessing. One must only have faith in G'd Himself. Regardless of how special the one who passed away was, we must understand that it is only G'd who provides blessing and opportunity. Thus, the Jew must never despair because G'd is always with him.

The Gemara in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that the Jewish people were faced with a serious drought. The elders of Israel approached Chonie HaMagil, who had a special and intimate relationship with G'd, to beseech Him for rain. Chonie dug a circular depression and stood within it. He said, "G'd we need rain." Immediately small droplets of rain began to fall. Seeing that this drizzle was not sufficient for their needs, Chonie stated, "G'd, do You think that these droplets will solve our problem? We need substantial rain!" Immediately the skies opened and the rain began to fall in torrents. When Chonie saw this, he said, "G'd, I did not ask for a deluge. Give us rains of blessing." The rain began to fall at a sufficient level. After this exchange with G'd, Chonie HaMagil received a message from Reb Shimon Ben Shetach (one of the leading Sages of the Jewish people and the head of the Sanhedrin (High Court of Israel)) stating, "If you were not Chonie, we would have excommunicated you for speaking to G'd in such an inappropriate manner. However, since your relationship with Him is as that of a son to his father you will not be excommunicated." A child, because of the nature of the relationship with his father, can speak to him

in the most informal manner without it being considered a disrespect.

Moshe said to the Jewish people, **“You are G’d’s children.”** A Jew’s relationship with G’d is no different than a child’s relationship to a father. However, this level of relationship only can be drawn upon when one lives in conformity with Torah. G’d’s love for every Jew is no less than that of a father to a child. Therefore the Jew can call upon the intimate relationship which exists between himself and G’d – similar to Chonie.

If the Jew truly understood the nature of the relationship between himself and G’d, then he would behave differently. He would have a natural trust and confidence in G’d and consequently would want to adhere to His Will whole-heartedly. One only has difficulty in adhering to His Will when he does not understand the nature of the relationship. When G’d took the Jewish people as His kingly, priestly and holy Nation, he communicated to us how special we truly are to Him. As a parent loves a child so too does G’d loves us – His people. Regardless of our understanding of His ways, we must be cognizant of this reality.

3. *Spiritual Fallout*

The Torah states, **“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations that are driving away worshiped their gods...You shall break apart their altars; you shall smash their pillars; and their sacred trees shall you burn in the fire; their carved images you shall cut down; and you shall obliterate their names from that place. You shall not do this to Hashem your G’d...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “It is forbidden for one to obliterate the Name of G’d. If one were to do so, he would be in violation of the negative commandment: ‘You shall not do this to Hashem your G’d’ One who removes or damages one of the stones of the Altar or the Sanctuary, would also be in violation of this negative commandment.”

Rashi cites Sifree, “Reb Yishmael says, ‘Is it even to be considered that the Jew would dismantle the Altar of G’d? But rather, the Torah is telling us not to emulate the ways of the gentile. Because your sins will ultimately cause the destruction of the Temple of your forefathers.’”

Ramban writes that it seems that Reb Yishmael’s explanation of the verse **“You shall not do this to Hashem your G’d”** is an aggadic understanding of the negative commandment. Ramban cites Sifree, “Raban

Gamliel says that **‘You shall not do this to Hashem your G’d’** is referring to the prohibition of obliterating the Name of G’d.” Ramban explains that in fact there is no argument between the position of Reb Yishmael and Raban Gamliel, rather Reb Yishmael’s words are an elucidation of Raban Gamliel’s position. If one obliterates any the Names of G’d it is as if he is destroying the Sanctuary. Obliterating or desecrating the Name of G’d is no less destructive than the removal of stones from the Altar or Sanctuary. Therefore if the Jew should disgrace the Name of G’d, through obliteration, it will ultimately lead to the destruction of the Temple. The Jew must revere, respect, and glorify the Presence of G’d by treating his Name with the proper respect and honor.

We find in the introduction to Midrash Eichah that when Titus (the Roman Emperor) destroyed the Temple, he prided himself that he destroyed the House of G’d. When Titus was gloating over his victory, a heavenly voice said to him, “You fool! The only reason you were able to destroy the Temple was because G’d’s Presence had left the Temple Mount. You were only destroying stones and wood. It is the equivalent of grinding flour that had already been ground.” Because of the sins of the Jewish people the Divine Presence had departed from the Temple Mount. At that moment, the Temple was no longer the House of G’d, rather it was the equivalent of a pile of stones. G’d is present in our midst only when His Name is sanctified. Therefore, the Jew who does not behave within the context of Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of G’d’s Name) and desecrates His Name, causes the destruction of the Temple of G’d. This is the prohibition of **“You shall not do this to Hashem your G’d.”**

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains on an allusionary level that **“You shall obliterate their names from that place...”** is referring to the spiritual conflict between good and evil. We as physical beings are only privy to see the physical world around us. However, the only reason the physical world has any value, is because it has a spiritual counterpart that is associated with it, which gives it value and potency.

For example, the verse states regarding the exodus from Egypt, **“They saw Egypt traveling behind them.”** If the Torah was referring to the Egyptian army that was pursuing the Jewish people, it should have referred to them in the plural (i.e. Egyptians). Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the verse is referring to the archangel of Egypt that was pursuing the Jewish people. Ultimately when the archangel of Egypt was incapacitated/destroyed, the Egyptian people no longer exist. The physical world is only a reflection of its spiritual counterpart.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh continues that the way evil is obliterated in the world is by incapacitating and destroying the spiritual forces that correspond to that evil. When the Torah commands us to “obliterate their names (of idolatry)” it is in fact referring to the ability of the Jew to destroy the spiritual counterparts of evil by acting within the context of the Torah. When the Jew increases and intensifies his good deeds, he will be able to destroy the evil that is obvious and concealed in the world (the power of satan). When the Jew sanctifies G'd's Name he intensifies the power of holiness and purity in the world – thus weakening and dispelling the evil forces from existence. However, when the Jew transgresses and violates the Torah, he empowers the nether forces/evil and undermines the Altar of G'd.

If the nations of the world are able to subjugate the Jewish people, it is only because the impurity that exists in the world is on an overwhelming level- thus subordinating the forces of holiness. The only way the situation can be changed is to increase one's qualitative mitzvah observance and Torah study to empower the holy forces.

4. Honing One's Moral and Ethical Standard

The Torah states, “**Moshe said to the Jewish people, ‘Safeguard (sh'mor) and hearken to all these words that I command you... when you do what is good and right in the eyes of Hashem, your G'd.’**” Rashi cites Sifree who explains, “The term ‘safeguard (sh'mor)’ is referring to the continuous study of Torah. Unless one studies Torah and reviews what he has learned, it will not be actualized. When the Torah states, ‘**all these words...**’ it is communicating that one should value the (seemingly) less important mitzvah as beloved/precious as the more severe mitzvah.” Sifree could have said that one should adhere to the less important mitzvah as to the more important mitzvah. Rather Sifree emphasizes that the lesser mitzvah must be valued as special as the more important mitzvah.

The verse concludes, “**...when you do what is good and right in the eyes of Hashem, your G'd.**” Sifse Chachamim explains that this is referring to laws of “barmetzrah”. If one wishes to sell a property that is adjacent to his neighbor's, he should give the right of first refusal to his neighbor, because it is the correct thing to do. It is easier for one to manage one's holdings if they are adjacent to one another, rather than being elsewhere. One could believe that as an owner, one has the right to transfer

ownership to whomever he chooses. Nevertheless, the Torah tells us the he must do “what is good and right in the eyes of G'd.”

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia relates to us an incident involving an Amora (an elucidator of the Mishna). He had hired porters to carry his barrels of wine. While the porters transported the barrels, they broke them due to their negligence. Seeing that they had caused him a financial loss, the Amora confiscated their coats as collateral and withheld their wages. The porters summoned the Amora to appear before the court (Din Torah), claiming their wages and their belongings. The judge ruled that the Amora needed to return their belongings and pay their wages. His claim against his employees is a separate issue that needs to go before the court at another time. The Amora was taken aback by the decision of the court. He could not understand that after being victimized and incurring a loss that he should be responsible to pay their wages. He shared his amazement with the presiding judge/rabbi. The judge responded that it is true that an ordinary person would not be subject to this verdict; however, because of his status as a Torah sage, it is the correct decision. As it is stated, “you must do what is good and right in the eyes of G'd.” This decision was not based on the concern of misperception that would cause a desecration of G'd's Name. Rather, the Gemara is clear and emphatic that is only because one should do what is right and proper in the eyes of G'd.

Why does the Torah juxtapose the obligation of doing what is good and proper in the eyes of G'd to the study of Torah and observance of mitzvos? The basis for establishing the standard for ethical and moral behavior is common societal values and sensitivities. However, if one is seriously engaged in Torah study and performance of mitzvos, he will have a level of clarity that will cause him to appreciate and understand what is ethical and moral on an intrinsic level. One only has a true sense of proper behavior when he studies Torah and retains what he had learned. By being spiritualized and conditioned to do the Will of G'd through the continuous involvement in Torah, one will develop a natural sense of what is acceptable and what is objectionable. It is interesting that King David writes in Psalms, “The dictates of G'd are straight/proper, they bring joy to the heart...” The only way one has relevance to relate to what is proper (straight) and good is through the advanced level of Torah retention.

If one were to observe ethical and moral conduct of leading Torah sages, one would be taken aback and amazed at their seemingly innovative/revolutionary level of selfless kindness. It is only due and attributed to their

own spiritualization, which causes an absolute sense of right and wrong. This profound sense of what is proper is not rooted in societal norms and preferences, but rather it is bound to the Divine ethical and moral code.

The more one engages in qualitative Torah study and mitzvah observance, one will gain greater sensitivities to deal with one's fellow.

5. *Man's Innate Handicap* (from Eikev)

The Torah states, **“Moshe said to the Jewish people, ‘You shall remember Hashem, your G’d, because He is the One who gives you the ability to succeed to establish His Covenant on this day...’”** Ramban explains, “It was known that the Jewish people were powerful warriors. As we find Yehudah is compared to the lion and Benyamin is compared to the wolf. Yet the kings of Canaan, were still mightier than the Jewish people. If one were to think for a moment that his strength and the might of his hand brought about all of his success, he must remember that it is only because G’d had Willed all that he has. One does not determine the degree of his own success whatsoever. The Jewish people understood with absolute clarity that they could not leave Egypt and destroy Pharaoh and his army without G’d’s Assistance. Without G’d’s continuous involvement in their lives, the Jewish people would not have been able to survive the 40-year trek in the desert. Their survival had nothing to do with their own ability or initiative. If one forgets G’d, then the individual will become vulnerable and ultimately be destroyed because all those who abandon G’d will be consumed.”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh writes, “One must continuously reflect upon all of the goodness that he receives from G’d. If one is conscious of this then he will recognize G’d’s ongoing Providence. The first strategy of the evil inclination is to cause one to forget this fact. If one does not feel that he is a beneficiary of G’d’s Kindness then he will be destined for destruction.” If one feels an indebtedness to G’d because all of his successes are attributed to Him, then he will not be lead astray by the evil inclination.

Chazal tell us that Adam’s level of clarity was so unique that he was able to see from one end of the world to the other. Meaning, he was not denied any degree of awareness. With such an exceptional level of clarity, how was he able to transgress the Word of G’d by eating from the Tree of Knowledge? Evidently, he needed to delude himself into denying the Omnipotence of G’d at the

moment of his transgression. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states, “Adam was a heretic.” Adam was the handiwork of G’d Himself. The only way he could have transgressed against his Maker was to deny His existence at the moment of his transgression. Thus, he was classified as a heretic.

Before Adam ate of the Tree, he was an eternal being with unlimited capacity. However, after sinning, he became limited/finite in his physical existence as well as in his level of clarity. He was no longer able to see from one end of the world to the other. He forfeited his clarity when he became a mortal. Because Adam chose to deny G’d, despite his level of clarity, G’d punished him by withdrawing that special ability – measure for measure. Consequently, man became limited and subject to confusion caused by a lack of clarity.

In order to counteract this limitation, the Torah tells us **“You shall remember Hashem, your G’d....”** By having the ongoing cognizance that one is the beneficiary of G’d’s Kindness, one will not come to sin because of his sense of indebtedness to Him.

The Torah states at the beginning of the Book of Vayikra regarding the bringing of a sacrifice, “A man (adam) who brings an offering to G’d...” The Torah usually uses the term “ish (man) when it refers to a person rather than “adam.” What is the Torah communicating to us by using the term adam in this context. Ohr HaChaim Ha Kadosh cites the Midrash, which tells us that although one is able to bring a sacrifice to atone for his inadvertent sin, Adam was not able to do so because his sin was deliberate. Because of his level of clarity, he had no relevance to inadvertent sin. However all humanity, who descend from Adam are tainted by the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, and thus no longer have his level of clarity. Therefore the concept of inadvertency has relevance to every human being.

One must maintain an ongoing cognizance that G’d is the Creator and that we are the beneficiaries of His Kindness. It is by sensing this continuous indebtedness that one is able to retain a semblance of clarity, which safeguards us from sin.