

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARY SERIES**

*Parshas Re'eh*

September 2, 2005

*Dedicated in Loving Memory of*

**Rachel Bat Avraham Yaakov o'h'**

*May Her Neshama have an Aliyah*

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

| <i>Inside This Week's Edition</i>   | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| <b>1. Each Individual's Unique Share in Torah</b>   | <b>2</b>    |
| <b>2. The Liability of an Idolatrous City</b>   | <b>2</b>    |
| <b>3. Maintaining One's Clarity Despite the Distraction of Life</b>                         | <b>3</b>    |
| <b>4. How One Must Perceive His Mitzvah Obligation</b>                                      | <b>4</b>    |
| <b>5. Why is the Uniqueness of Moshe's Prophecy Pertinent to the Immutability of Torah?</b> | <b>5</b>    |
| <b>6. How to Secure One's Spirituality</b>  | <b>6</b>    |
| <b>7. A Jew Must Never Despair Because He is Truly Never Alone</b>                          | <b>6</b>    |

**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

If you would like to receive this Weekly Torah Commentary Series by email

Please call 212-371-9555 or email:

[info@yadavraham.org](mailto:info@yadavraham.org)

**TUNE IN TO OUR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF CLASSES**

**And over**

**11,000 online classes 24 hours a day**

## Parshas Re'eh

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

Dean

### 1. Each Individual's Unique Share in Torah

The Torah states, **"See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse."** When Moshe addressed the Jewish people in this manner he did not say "Understand what I present you today..."; rather, the Torah uses the term "See" to indicate that the blessings and curses should be understood and perceived in the most real and vivid manner – as one "sees" reality. The Commentators point out that the word "*Re'eh* – See" is written in the singular form while the verse is addressing the Jewish people (which is plural). They explain that each individual is able to comprehend and internalize reality on his own level. Thus, although Moshe is addressing the masses, each person will process his words on a personal/individual level.

We request of G'd in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) of the Shabbos and Festival prayer, "... (G'd) Give us our own portion in Your Torah..." Chofetz Chaim explains that although the Torah was given to the entire Jewish people at Sinai, each individual has his own designated portion within it. When the Torah was given at Sinai, it was not only given to those who were present but also to all of the future generations that would come into existence. Their neshamos (souls) were present at Sinai. At the Sinai event, G'd gave each individual his own unique portion of Torah. Every Jew has his own spiritual potential, which has relevance to the dimension of Torah that he can attain/achieve. Therefore, we pray to G'd that He should give us the ability and opportunity to come upon our portion, which is rightfully ours, because it was the Torah that was designated at Sinai.

The Gemara in Tractate Nidah tells us that before a child is born into existence he is taught the Torah in its entirety by an angel in utero. In the womb of the mother, the child's existence is equivalent to a spiritual setting in which he can see from one end of the world to the other. Nothing in existence is concealed from the child while developing in the womb. It is at this time that he is taught his own unique portion of Torah that was designated for

him at Sinai. We endeavor throughout our lives to recall/recoup that Torah which was taught to us by the angel.

It is important to understand that one should not evaluate his own development and success on a relative scale. Meaning, he should not regard his level of spiritual development and advancement relative to others. Rather, each individual needs to develop and achieve his own unique potential in Torah.

### 2. The Liability of an Idolatrous City

The Torah states regarding a city that has engaged in idolatry, **"...You shall smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword; lay it waste and everything that is in it, and its animals, with the edge of the sword. You shall gather together all its booty to the midst of its open square, and you shall burn in fire completely the city...to Hashem, your G'd..."** It is interesting to note that the Torah tells us that if one is engaged in idolatry and was forewarned of its liability, he is deserving of the most severe level of death penalty, which is by stoning (*skeelah*). However, when the majority of the inhabitants within a city has engaged in idol worship, the Torah states that they should be put to death by the sword. The Mishna in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that there are four levels of death penalty. The most severe is death by stoning, followed by death by fire, and then death by sword; the least of all is death by strangulation. One would think that if an individual idolater is subjected to the most stringent death penalty, because of the severity of the sin, then an entire city that engaged in idolatry, which is a public desecration of G'd's Name, should definitely be subjected to the most severe of the penalties, which is death by stoning. Why then does the Torah reduce the penalty to death by the sword?

Regarding those who are engaged in destroying the idolatrous city, the Torah states, **"...G'd will give you mercy and be merciful to you and multiply you..."** Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that if one were engaged in killing the inhabitants of a city and razing it, it would

evoke within those individuals the most negative characteristic of cruelty (achzorius). Thus, the Torah tells us that despite the fact that one will be involved in such a destructive act, G'd will counter its negative effects with compassion so that the individual will not become cruel.

After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe descended from the mountain and smashed the first set of Tablets containing the Ten Commandments. He then announced to the Jewish people, "Whoever is for G'd should come with me..." Immediately the tribe of Levy, which was the smallest of the tribes, joined Moshe in killing all those who were engaged in the idolatrous act of the Golden Calf. Because of Moshe's call to action and the response of the Levymim, G'd's Attribute of Justice was mitigated by the Attribute of Mercy. Had it not been for this, the entire Jewish people would have been destroyed by His wrath. Those who were not involved in the idolatrous act remained silent as Moshe and the Levites killed the idolaters in their midst. Sforno explains that by remaining silent and not interfering with Moshe and the Levites, the Jewish people merited the Mercy of G'd.

When one transgresses, one brings about a degree of spiritual diminishment/destruction. The liability/punishment, which one receives after one transgresses, is purely for the sake of spiritual rehabilitation. The degree of rehabilitation that is needed is proportional to the degree of severity of the sin. When one commits an idolatrous act, because of its severity, he is in need of the most severe level of rehabilitation, which is death by stoning. However, regarding a community that is classified as an "idolatrous city," despite the fact that idolatry was committed on a mass level and caused a public desecration of G'd's Name (Chilul Hashem), nevertheless the need for rehabilitation is to a lesser degree. The reason for this is that when the idolaters are killed and the community is destroyed, never again to be rebuilt, it is a public sanctification of G'd's Name (Kiddush Hashem). The behavior of the community is seen as so reprehensible that the city must be turned into a wasteland – never again to be rebuilt. The cause of this sanctification of G'd's Name emanates from the original desecration of G'd's Name.

The Kiddush Hashem is an aspect of the rehabilitative process that is needed by the members of the idolatrous community. Thus, their punishment is reduced from the most severe level to a lesser level.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that if one repents out of love for G'd (*teshuvah m'ahava*), then even deliberate sins are transformed into mitzvos. When one

realizes the severity of a deliberate violation, and is moved to have genuine remorse/regret, then the sin is transformed into a mitzvah. The sin itself is the cause of the penitence. This is similar to the kiddush Hashem of the destruction of the idolatrous city which is an outgrowth of the desecration of G'd's Name.

### ***3. Maintaining One's Clarity Despite the Distraction of Life***

The verse states, "**See, I present before you today...**" Is it not obvious that Moshe was addressing the people on that day? What is the significance of the "today?"

The Jewish people did not enter into the Land immediately after leaving Egypt because of the sin of the spies. To atone for their sin, they needed to wander the desert for 40 years until that generation passed away. It was only after that time that they would be able to enter the Land. During the 40-year period in the desert, the Jewish people lived within a supernatural context. G'd provided for their every need. They were nourished by the Manna – which is referred to as "the bread of heaven" and were protected by the Clouds of Glory. Every conceivable material amenity was provided for by G'd. The Jewish people were not distracted from their spiritual focus. They were thus able to mature and develop spiritually after the Sinai experience.

The Midrash tells us that if the Jewish people were to have entered the Land immediately and not wandered for 40 years in the desert, they would not have matured spiritually sufficiently to attain their necessary spiritual level. They would not have been in the presence of Moshe Rabbeinu for an additional 39 years (Moshe was to pass away before they entered the Land). Had the Jewish people entered the Land immediately they would have been denied the spiritual maturing period of the supernatural environment of the desert. Although they had experienced Sinai, they would have entered into the Land and immediately been distracted as a result of their material responsibilities. Therefore G'd caused them to be delayed in the desert in order to allow them to develop spiritually to internalize the Sinai event to such a degree that they would be able to withstand the distraction of the material responsibilities of life. Thus, when Moshe had said - "See, I present before you today..." he meant to communicate to them – "because we have not yet entered into the Promised Land, you still maintain that special clarity to be able to perceive spirituality as a reality."

In order to maintain a semblance of that original clarity, the Jewish people needed to be continuously engaged in Torah and Mitzvos. If one does not maintain the vividness of that spiritual reality, it will fade and one will lose the clarity that he once had. One must see/understand with absolute clarity that if he does the Will of G'd (Torah/Mitzvos) he will experience blessing. On the other hand, if one does not adhere to the principles of the Torah, he will experience curses on many levels. One can only fully appreciate the consequences of his actions if one maintains that understanding on a daily basis.

A Jew is obliged to engage in Torah study during the daytime and in the nighttime period. The Mishna in Tractate Menachos tells us that one can fill his minimal obligation with the recitation of the Shema in the morning and in the evening (the Shema is comprised of verses from the Torah). The verse states in the Book of Joshua, "The Torah should not be removed from your mouth," which indicates that one's engagement in Torah study should be on an ongoing basis. This is to ensure that despite the distraction of the material environment in which we live, we will be able to focus and advance on our spirituality.

#### ***4. How One Must Perceive His Mitzvah Obligation***

The Torah states in the Portion of Re'eh, that "Moshe said to the Jewish people, safeguard (sh'mor) and hearken to all these words that I command you..." Rashi explains that the word "sh'mor (safeguard)" is referring to the continuous study of Torah because it is only through continuous study that one is able to retain what he has learned and thus safeguard the Torah. Additionally Rashi explains "all these words that I command you..." means that one should adhere to all of the mitzvos "even the (seemingly) less severe mitzvah must be as chaviv (beloved/special) as the (seemingly) more severe one."

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Eikev, "This shall be the reward when you hearken to these ordinances and you observe and perform them; Hashem, your G'd, will safeguard for you the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your forefathers. He will love you, bless you and multiply you..." G'd says that if one meticulously observes even the mitzvos that one regards as less stringent and that are normally trampled upon, one merits the greatest level of blessing. If one does not differentiate and evaluate mitzvos before performing them, this is an indication that he is doing them only for the sake of G'd Himself and not for self-gain. The moment one begins to distinguish between mitzvos (what is more

or less important), it is clear that his motivation for fulfilling the mitzvos is related to self-interest (i.e. personal reward/punishment).

The verses cited above from the Portion of Eikev and Re'eh seem to be conveying the same concept that all mitzvos must be adhered to regardless of their value. Chazal add another dimension of understanding to how a person must approach the service of G'd regarding his performance of mitzvos. Chazal cull from the passage "all these words that I command you ..." that it is not enough to value all mitzvos as equally important but one must see the seemingly less important mitzvah as chaviv (beloved/special) as the seemingly more important one. If one performs a mitzvah because he sees it as special, his involvement with it is at another level. Thus, if all the mitzvos of the Torah are perceived as chaviv, then one will be motivated to perform them in the most meticulous manner with the greatest level of devotion.

Even if one adheres to the Torah for the sake of doing the Will of G'd, he nevertheless may be lacking in motivation if he does not see the mitzvah as special. Therefore if one sees the mitzvah as special, regardless of its value, he will never tire in its pursuit.

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato z'tl writes in his work Mesillas Yesharim (Path of the Just), that G'd created the human being with a heart that must love. The heart will either be filled with self-love or the love of G'd. If one suppresses his love of self, it is replaced with the love for G'd. However, if one only serves G'd out of obligation, rather than as a privilege, he will ultimately regress to the mode of self-interest (self love) and perform mitzvos only to further himself.

This is the reason one must continuously study and review Torah in order to appreciate and value its precepts – and to see them as special (chaviv). One can only become inspired with mitzvos when one touches upon their spiritual value and thus is able to internalize them. This is only possible through continuous Torah study. If one's approach to mitzvos is not as a result of his involvement in Torah study and continuous review, then ultimately his adherence to mitzvos will become perfunctory.

Every evening in the blessing which precedes the Shema we conclude, "For they (mitzvos) are our life and the length of our days and in them we will meditate day and night." Meaning, if one is continuously involved in Torah study (day and night) he will come to understand that the mitzvos are truly the essence of our life. It is only

when one studies the Torah that he will perceive all the mitzvos (both the less stringent and more stringent) as chaviv (beloved/special).

## 5. *Why is the Uniqueness of Moshe's Prophecy Pertinent to the Immutability of Torah?*

The *Yud-Gimel Ikrei Emunah* (Thirteen Tenets of Jewish Belief) outlines the fundamental principles of Jewish belief. The Sixth Tenet states, "I believe with absolute faith that the words of the Prophets are true." One could think that believing in G'd would be sufficient; however, this is not the case. Believing in G'd as the Creator and Omnipotent Being has no relevance to our existence unless G'd had communicated His Will to Man. This is basis for the Sixth Tenet – that the words of the Prophets are true.

The Seventh Tenet of Jewish belief states, "I believe with absolute faith that the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu 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? Why in addition to that Tenet must one believe that Moshe was the greatest of all the Prophets who had preceded him and who would follow him? If one accepts the Sixth Tenet and not the Seventh, he is considered a heretic. Why would it not be sufficient only to believe that the Prophecy of Moshe is true – thus establishing the authenticity of Torah?

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 as G'd's spokesman 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 of G'd.

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 tells the Jews (in the Name of G'd as a prophet) that they should serve idolatry, then he has established himself as a false prophet. He is definitely not speaking in the Name of G'd. The only reason the false prophet had the ability to perform the miracle and predict the future was because G'd endowed him with that ability in order to test the Jewish people. The basis for identifying this person as a false prophet is that Moshe Rabbeinu (who is synonymous with the Word of G'd) had established this fact to be so. If this individual had already established himself as a true prophet (through performing the miracle and predicting the future) then why does Moshe's position supersede his in the claim that G'd communicated to him that the Jewish people should serve idolatry? How does one determine who is more correct?

Rambam states in *Hilchos Yisodei HaTorah* (The Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah) the basis for Moshe being the prophet of G'd is because every Jew who was present at Sinai witnessed G'd's open communication with Moshe. 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). Whereas the validation and establishment of all other prophets is based on the criterion that is set forth by the Torah, which is the word of Moshe. Therefore any prophet, who contradicts Moshe's position regarding the Word of G'd and claims that Moshe's communication is false and his own is authentic, he is a false prophet. The reason for this is because initially this individual was only established as a prophet based on the criteria set forth by the Torah, which is the prophecy of Moshe. Thus, if he contests the validity of Moshe's prophecy, there is no longer a basis to establish him as a prophet.

We can now understand the Seventh Tenet, which infers that it is not enough to believe in the authenticity of Moshe's prophecy but one must also believe that he was "the father of all Prophets - those who preceded him and those who follow him." Only then is the authenticity of the Torah established and remains uncontested and immutable.

The Torah itself, which is the word of Moshe is not predicated on inference, presumption or extrapolation, but rather it is based on hard fact because our ancestors stood at Sinai and witnessed the open communication between G'd and Moshe – thus establishing him as His spokesman and prophet.

## 6. *How to Secure One's Spirituality*

The Torah tells us that in order for the Jewish people to inherit the Land of Israel and dwell in it safely, they must first obliterate all the idolatry and its locations from the Land. Dovid HaMelech (King David) tells us in Psalms, "Remove yourself from evil and (then) do good." Meaning, that succeeding in a spiritual endeavor is predicated on the removal of the wrong which is the antithesis of spirituality. One cannot grow spiritually when he is straddling both sides of the fence of good and evil. One must first remove himself from evil and only then can he move forward and do good.

Moshe explains in the Name of G'd that in order for the Jews to inherit the Land, they must first eliminate all traces of idolatry and then establish themselves in the service of G'd. At the time of the completion of a Tractate (Siyum), Kaddish is recited, which is similar to a mourner's Kaddish. It concludes, "We will reestablish the city of Jerusalem and establish His (G'd's) Sanctuary in it and we will uproot all false (idolatrous) worship from the Land and return the service of heaven to its location..." One cannot build a secure structure on a weak foundation. If the foundation is faulty and defective then ultimately the structure will not last. In order to establish a secure foundation, the Torah tells us that we must first eliminate the evil before we can build the good.

One may enjoy and derive benefit from studying Torah and praying to G'd. However, if he simultaneously behaves in a manner that is not consistent with the Torah that he has studied, it will ultimately undermine the effect of all his spiritual involvements. Consequently, the value of his mitzvah observance is reduced. In order to be fully affected by involvement in Torah observance, one must abide by its dictates and continuously strive to advance his spirituality by doing more good.

Therefore, for us to derive the maximum benefit from our Torah observance we must continuously, qualitatively, upgrade our spirituality through the elimination of the wrong – thus adhering to the words of Dovid HaMelech in Psalms, "Remove yourself from evil and then do good."

## 7. *A Jew Must Never Despair Because He is Truly Never Alone*

The Torah states, "You are children to Hashem, your G'd – you shall not cut 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 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 because there is another relative who is of greater importance and value - and who is the basis of all good (G'd)." Thus Moshe says to the Jewish people, "You are G'd's Children" to indicate that since He is our eternal Father there is no basis for worry. Grieving at an extreme level for the 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, the Torah is teaching us that G'd values us as His Children. If a Jew were to lacerate himself or pull the hair from his head to express his grief for a beloved relative, this behavior would indicate that he is in a hopeless state with nowhere to turn. This would be considered a denial of the special relationship between G'd and himself.

One's expression of extreme grief in the form of laceration etc. is a rejection of a basic tenet of Jewish belief that when a person passes away, his spirituality, which is his essence, is eternal. Therefore a person who grieves in this extreme manner not only denies G'd's special relationship with the Jew, but also denies the eternity of the soul. Thus, it is a Negative Commandment to express one's grief in this manner.

The Torah tells us that Sarah, our Matriarch, gave her maidservant Hagar (the daughter of Pharaoh) to Avraham (her husband) to beget him children. Many years after the birth of Ishmael, Sarah asked Avraham to drive Hagar and her son from their home. G'd said to Avraham, "Whatever Sarah tells you - heed her word." After they were driven into the desert, the Torah tells us that Hagar "strayed on the way." Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that "straying" is referring to the fact that Hagar had returned to the idolatry of her father's home.

A great Torah Sage once asked "How do Chazal see from the words "strayed on the way" that Hagar returned to the idolatry of her father's home?" Seemingly the Torah is only telling us that Hagar was wandering in the desert and she had lost her way. The Torah Sage

answered that Chazal understand that “straying” could only mean returning to idolatry because a Jew who is connected to G’d is never lost. A Jew never “strays” aimlessly because he always has G’d to whom he can turn, just as a son turns to a father. If the Torah uses this term it is a clear indication that Hagar returned to idolatry and thus severed her relationship with G’d. If a Jew understands and internalizes that all that he has is given to him (including his own existence) by G’d, regardless of his sense of being alone, he is not alone.

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. Therefore we must always understand and appreciate that we are the Children of G’d. As a parent loves a child so too does G’d loves us – His people. Regardless of what we experience in life, G’d is always providing for us.

**YAD AVRAHAM DAILY CLASS SCHEDULE**

***Energize your day...  
... with a solid morning of Torah study***

**Monday Through Friday**

|                |                                |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| 5:50- 6:00 am  | Chumash with Rashi             |
| 6:00- 6:15 am  | Pirkei Avos                    |
| 6:15- 6:30 am  | Mishna Berurah                 |
| 6:30- 7:25 am  | Halacha                        |
| 6:30 -6:45 am  | Mussar                         |
| 6:45 -7:25 am  | Talmud—Tractate Avodah Zorah   |
| 7:25 - 8:20 am | Davening Followed by Breakfast |
| 8:20 - 8:45 am | Mishna                         |
| 9:00 -10:00 am | Daf Yomi                       |

2:00pm Mincha

**Special Weekday Classes**

**Monday**

11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Pesachim**  
Location: Shandholt 488 Madison Avenue  
Between E.51<sup>st</sup> and E.52<sup>st</sup>

**Tuesday**

12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**  
Location: Yad Avraham

**Wednesday**

11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

1:00—2:00 pm Derech **Hashem**  
Location: Yad Avraham

**Thursday**

10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**  
Location: Yad Avraham

12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
Enter on 54<sup>th</sup> Street

**TUNE IN ON THE INTERNET FOR LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST OF  
TORAH CLASSES**

[WWW.YADAVRAHAM.ORG](http://WWW.YADAVRAHAM.ORG)

**Over 11,000 Torah classes 24 hours a day**