

Yad Avraham Institute
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series

Portion of Re'eh

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Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

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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.

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Re'eh

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita

Dean

1. G'd Speaks to the Jewish People and the World at Large

The Torah states, **“See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse.”** The Midrash cites a verse from Eyov, **“‘He (G'd) uncovered their ears to be receptive to rebuke...’** If they will heed the rebuke of G'd then they will live their days in goodness and their years in pleasantness. However, if they will not heed the rebuke of G'd, then they will be cast away. G'd does not bring suffering/tragedy upon a person before he has been forewarned and given the opportunity to repent. If he repents then it will be good for him. If he will not repent, then G'd will bring suffering upon him. From where do we learn that G'd first forewarns the individual before punishing him? We learn this from Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Before G'd brought the plagues upon him, He sent Moshe and Aaron to forewarn him so that he could fully appreciate the gravity of his behavior. The basis for rebuke is the Torah itself. G'd gave the Jew the directive to repent and return to the path of good. If he will do so, then it will be good for him....”

When G'd forewarns one before bringing suffering upon him? Is it only the Jewish people, does it only refer to the Jew or does it also include the nations of the world? The forewarning that is mentioned in the Midrash is not referring to the forewarning that must meet the criteria for one to be considered liable for punishment in court. (Jewish law dictates that one must be forewarned by two valid witnesses to be deserving of punishment). At one time the Jewish people had prophets who rebuked and forewarned them to correct their behavior. However, since the age of prophecy came to an end, what is the basis for the forewarning that precedes punishment? It is the Torah itself that provides the standard for the Jewish people to live by. As it states, **“If you continually hearken to My commandments that I command you today...then I will provide rain for your land in its proper time...Beware lest your heart be seduced...then the Wrath of G'd will blaze against you...”** The Torah provides sufficient rebuke in an unambiguous context. Thus, the Jew is culpable if he should transgress the Word of G'd. Since the Torah is the standard to which the Jewish people are held, it is considered the basis for their culpability if they should fail. However, the non-Jew who has no relevance

to the Torah itself, what is the basis for his admonishment to be held liable for misbehavior?

Chazal ask, **“Why did G'd give the nations of the world a prophet (Bilaam) who was as great as Moshe (in a certain context)?”** It is so that the nations of the world should not claim that the basis for their spiritual failing was because they did not have a prophet similar to Moshe to lead them and give them clarity as He had provide for the Jewish people. G'd therefore gave the nations of the world, Bilaam the prophet. If Bilaam was of a similar caliber in piety and righteousness as Moshe, it would have been a proper response to the claim of the nations. However, G'd provided them with an individual who debase and personified evil. How was he qualified to direct the nations regarding their spirituality?

The Gemara in Tractate Zevachim tells us that when G'd gave the Torah at Sinai to the Jewish people, the earth had quaked so violently that the nations of the world believed that the world was coming to an end. They came to Bilaam, their prophet, with their concern. They said to him, **“The world is coming to an end.”** Bilaam responded, **“Do you not realize that the world cannot be destroyed again by G'd after the Great Flood G'd, because made a covenant with existence that He would not destroy it.”** They replied, **“G'd only promised not to destroy the world with water. Perhaps it is being destroyed by fire.”** Bilaam said to them, **“You fools! Do you not realize that G'd is giving His strength/power to the Jewish people (which is the Torah). It is because of this monumental moment that the world is quaking.”** To this the nations of the world responded, **“G'd should bless His people with Peace”** and returned to their mundane daily lives. Regardless of Bilaam's dimension of evil, at the moment that he informed the nations of the world of what was taking place (giving of the Torah at Sinai), he fulfilled his purpose of being G'd's prophet vis-à-vis the nations of the world. Being aware that G'd had given His power to the Jewish people (the Torah itself), the nations had a choice to be moved or touched by the event and thus repent or to do nothing. They chose to do nothing. With this level of clarity, they will not have a basis for vindication at the end of time that they were never aware.

2. *Having A Glimpse into G'd's Unfathomable Ways*

The Torah states, **“When Hashem, your G'd, will cut down the nations to which you come to take possession...”** The Midrash states, “ G'd said to the Jewish people, ‘By your lives! I will wage wars on your behalf, but it will be recorded for all time that you were the ones who killed your enemies.’ The actions of G'd are not similar to the actions of a mortal king. When a mortal king goes out to war, his legions go out before him. Although it is the armies that are victorious in battle, they return and praise the king and coronate him (despite the fact that he has no relevance to their victory). In contrast, after G'd defeated the enemies of the Jewish people, He glorified them and gave them the crown. As King David writes in Psalms, ‘To Him Who smote great kings, for His Kindness endures forever....’ The Jewish people acknowledge that it was due to the enduring kindness of G'd that their enemies were defeated. Although G'd was the cause of the victory, He glorified the Jewish people by recording in His Torah **‘Moshe the servant of G'd and the Jewish people had smitten them...’**”

The Midrash continues, “Why did G'd destroy all of these nations? It is so that the Jewish people should inherit their land. They should enter into their homes and they will be filled with all goodness. Although the Jewish people wandered the desert for forty years, they should have entered into the Land immediately because G'd had said, **‘I will bring you up from the impoverishment of Egypt to a Land full of goodness.’** If this is so, why did G'd delay their entry into the Land after leaving Egypt? When the seven nations of Canaan had heard that the Jewish people were going to enter into their land they cut down all of the trees, sealed all the wells, and destroyed the houses. It was so that the Jewish people should enter to find a desolate land. G'd said, ‘If I were to bring the Jewish people into the Land immediately, they will find it in a state of desolation. I had promised them that it would have houses filled with all goodness. Thus, I will delay them in the desert for forty years.’ The Canaanites attempted to live for a while in the state of desolation that they had created; however, after they saw that the Jewish people were not meant to come, they replanted the trees, fixed the wells, and built new homes and cities. After the Canaanites had rebuilt the Land, G'd said to Moshe, ‘Why are you waiting to enter? You must take the people and enter into the Land immediately.’”

The Torah tells us that the reason the Jewish people needed to wander in the desert for forty years was due to the sin of the spies. Since the Jewish people lacked faith and believed the slanderous reports of the spies they did not merit to enter into the Land. The entire generation between the ages of 20 and 60 needed to perish in the desert over a period of forty years. If this is so, how do we reconcile the Midrash with that is written in the Torah regarding the wandering of the Jewish people for forty years?

The Torah tells us that there is a negative commandment that none of the seven nations of Canaan were permitted to remain alive. Sforno explains that since the Jewish people were delayed to enter into the Land for forty years, the nations that remained in the Land continued to sin during this period of time. Because they sinned in the holy land for an additional forty years, they had reached a level of evil that they needed to be destroyed. G'd thus commanded the Jewish people to destroy them. Had the Jewish people entered into the Land immediately, they would have not needed to kill the seven nations of Canaan.

The Jewish people were meant to enter into the Land immediately; however, because the Canaanites destroyed it and G'd's promise to enter into a Land that was filled with goodness could not be fulfilled, they needed to wander in the desert. During this period of time, G'd presented them with trials, tribulations, and spiritual challenges. If they were to succeed, they would have advanced spiritually. However, if they were to fail they would need to be rehabilitated. Since the Jewish people did indeed fail with the sin of the spies, it was deemed that the generation should perish during this time. In addition, over the forty-year period the Jewish people encamped in many locations where they remained for various lengths of time. In some locations they camped for only a number of days while in other locations they remained for several years. These locations were essential to the spiritual development and growth of the Jewish people, as explained by Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl had said in the early part of the nineteenth century that America would be the final dwelling place of the Jewish people before the ultimate redemption with the coming of Moshiach. He explains, if one were to track the migrations of the Jewish people throughout history, one would find that they had remained in certain locations for an extended period and once they left, they never returned. This is because every

location in which the Jewish people dwelled contained sparks of holiness that needed to be extracted and absorbed by the Jewish people. Once the sparks of holiness have been extracted in those locations, the Jewish people would move on to another location. Since the United States was a location in which the Jewish people had not migrated to in large numbers, it was a location that was fertile with sparks of holiness that needed to be extracted. It was similar to the locations in the desert in which the Jewish people camped as explained by Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh.

It is true that the Jewish people were promised to enter immediately into a Land of goodness; however, since they needed to be delayed because of the destruction that the Canaanites had wrought, their stay in the desert for the forty year period of time needed to be filled with spiritual opportunities and challenges until they were ready to enter into the Land.

3. Broadening One's Spiritual Horizons

The Torah states, **“When Hashem, your G'd will broaden your boundary...”** The Midrash cites a verse from Proverbs, **“A man's gift broadens his way...”** Based on what one gives of his own, G'd will broaden on his behalf (based on the principle of measure for measure). To whom does this verse refer? It is Avraham, our Patriarch. He had pursued the five kings and captured the King of Sodom. He had said to Avraham, **‘Give me the people and take for yourself the possessions (spoils).’** Avraham responded by swearing, **‘I will not take from you as much as a thread or a bootstrap...’** G'd said to Avraham, **‘Because you had sworn not to take as much as a thread or a bootstrap, I swear that I will apply this (giving) to your children.’** As King Solomon writes, **‘(G'd says) How beautiful are your paces in shoes, O daughter of the benefactor.’**

The Gemara in Tractate Chagiga explains the verse, **“How beautiful are your paces in shoes...”** to mean that when the Jewish people would ascend the Temple mount at the time of the festivals, G'd will gaze upon them and say, **“How beautiful are your paces in shoes...”** The shoes allude to the **“bootstrap”** that Avraham refused to take from the King of Sodom. The phrase, **“daughter of the benefactor”** refers to the Jewish people who are the offspring of Avraham who had given of his heart to G'd. As a result of Avraham rejecting what was rightfully his and not even taking as much as a bootstrap, G'd valued every pace of the Jewish people when they ascended the Temple mount to perform the mitzvos of the festival. His

refusal of the spoils that was rightfully his as the victor, was a sanctification of G'd's Name. Avraham's decision not to have any level of association with the king of Sodom, who was the personification of evil, was considered to be the **“gift”** that Avraham had given. It was his sacrifice for G'd. In return, he received something of unlimited eternal value.

The Midrash continues, **“Another interpretation of the verse, ‘A man's gift broadens his way...’ is referring to when the Jewish people had contributed their wealth towards the building of the Mishkan. When G'd had asked them to donate the materials that were needed for the Mishkan they immediately responded and continued to bring gifts until they were told to cease. Because of their giving in the most generous context, what did they merit? G'd broadened their boundary.”** As a result of giving in a manner that exceeds one's obligation, G'd responds measure for measure by giving the individual in an unlimited manner.

We, as Jews, are confronted continuously with trials and tribulations. We are tested on a continuous basis. Each individual is confronted with the choice to perform the mitzvah and utilize the moment as G'd intended or not. In addition, if one chooses to perform the mitzvah, he must decide with what degree of intent and meticulousness will he perform it. If one sacrifices or fully invests himself in the mitzvah, which is contrary to one's inclination, it is considered that he had given something significant. As a result, G'd will reward that individual for his performance of the mitzvah in the broadest manner.

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers tells us that the reward for a mitzvah has no relevance to the physical world. This is because the physical realm is limited and finite, while the reward for a mitzvah is unlimited. When one suppresses his inclination and performs a mitzvah, G'd rewards him in the world to come with eternal reward. In addition, G'd provides the individual many amenities in the physical world a side benefit to accommodate his spirituality. The Gemara tells us that G'd rewards the individual, in kind, minimally five hundred times the value of what the individual had given. What one receives in this world is not a portion of the eternal reward that is reserved for the world to come. G'd provides the individual with material reward to be able to continue to perform even more mitzvos without hardship to advance his spirituality. Chazal tell us that If one performs a mitzvah out of fear of G'd he will receive reward for one thousand generations. If

he performs the same mitzvah out of love for G'd, he will receive reward for two thousand generations.

4. The Culpability of the False Prophet

The Torah states regarding the false prophet, **“If there should stand up in your midst a prophet or a dreamer of a dream... he spoke to you saying, ‘Let us follow gods of others that you did not know and we shall worship them!’...He (the false prophet) shall be put to death, for he has spoken perversion against Hashem your G'd, Who takes you out of the land of Egypt, and Who redeems you from the house of slavery...”** One would think that the false prophet deserves punishment of death because he had attempted to seduce the Jewish people to engage in idolatry (similar to the “seducer”). However, the Torah tells us that the false prophet deserves to die because **“he has spoken perversion against Hashem your G'd, Who takes you out of the land of Egypt...”**

The severity of the punishment of false prophet deserves is due to the fact that he went against G'd, Who had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt. Had the false prophet persuaded a non-Jew to engage in idolatry, he would not be in violation and thus not be put to death. It is only because the false prophet had acted in a deviant manner before G'd who had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt and “redeemed them from the house of bondage.” t Rashi cites Chazal who explain **“redeemed you from the house of bondage”** to mean, “Even if G'd had only taken the you (Jewish people) out from the house of bondage (and did nothing else) it would be sufficient reason that the false prophet should be liable for death.” The Jewish people are bound to G'd and must demonstrate to Him sufficient gratitude because He had taken them out of the house of bondage. Thus, since the false prophet attempts to influence the Jewish people to turn away from G'd, they must put him to death.

In addition, the Torah states, **“... he has spoken perversion against Hashem your G'd, Who takes you out of the land of Egypt...”** Why does the exodus from Egypt have bearing on the severity of the punishment of the false prophet? Rashi cites Chazal who states, “G'd said to the Jewish people, ‘The punishment that I have wrought upon the Egyptian people (through the plagues) in this manner has never occurred before in the history of creation. It is only because they oppressed you that I reacted in this manner.’” Until this moment, G'd's Hand in creation was cloaked in nature. His Presence in existence

was not obvious. However, with the ten plagues that were brought upon Egypt He openly displayed His dominance upon creation by altering the natural order.

Ramban in his commentary in the Portion of Bo explains the reason G'd changed His profile of involvement with existence regarding the redemption process from Egypt was for the purpose that the world and the Jewish people should recognize that He is the Omnipotent Being. As the Torah states regarding the plagues, **“It is so that Egypt shall know that I am G'd (at various levels)...”** G'd wanted to reveal to the world that He did not give control of existence to the hosts of heaven after He had Created the world. But rather, G'd Wills, Dictates, and Determines every aspect of existence as the time of Creation. The revealed miracles were intended to demonstrate and exhibit that G'd was never detached from existence but always was and will be the One to determine how existence manifests itself. It is to convey that nothing exists outside of His Will. The false prophet by attempting to seduce the people to engage in idolatry undermines G'd's intent of the redemption from Egypt through revealed miracles.

The Gemara in Tractate Chulin that when a sorcerer engages in witchcraft he disrupts G'd's heavenly retinue of angels regarding the function of existence. It is because of the seriousness of the sorcerer's behavior that he deserves to be put to death.

The Jewish people need to be dedicated and beholden to G'd because He had taken them out of the house of bondage. They should be even more appreciative of G'd because of the manner in which He had brought about their redemption. It was in a manner to give them an exceptional level of clarity of G'd's relationship to existence that should endure until the end of time. It is because the false prophet attempted to undermine and negate these past events, he deserves to die.

5. Internalizing G'd as Our Father

The Torah states, **“(Moshe said to the Jewish people) 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.”** Rashi in his commentary explains, “One is forbidden to lacerate himself or pull out his hair as an expression of grief for the dead. Because you (the Jewish people) are G'd's children you must appear in a pleasant and proper state. You should not be lacerated or be seen with bald spots.” The Torah

continues **“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.”**

Sforno explains, “It is not appropriate for one to show extreme worry and pain because of the loved one who passed away, because there is another relative who is of greater honor and stature and all hope of good. Regardless of the loss, you still have your Father, Who is the eternal G’d.” The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells us that there are three partners in every human being, the father, the mother who contribute to the physicality of the child, and G’d who provides the soul of the child, which is his essence. Even if one were to lose the physical and material support of one’s parent or one’s closest relative, G’d as the eternal Father to provide whatever is necessary.

Sforno continues, “As it states, **‘You are G’d’s Children.’** You have no reason to be pained exceedingly for the loss to the loved one who died because the Torah states, **‘For you are a holy people to Hashem...’** destined for the world to come, in which one moment of that world has greater value than the entire pleasure and benefit of the physical world.” The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states that this world is only a corridor that leads to great banquet hall of the world to come. Jewish belief dictates that after one passes away the soul passes on to an eternal spiritual world, which is the ultimate objective of physical life. One must believe that the one who has passed away has moved on to an eternal spiritual world. Regarding the one who remains alive, one must understand that he personally has not been abandoned, but rather G’d his Father, will support and secure him.

When the Jew passes on to the world to come, his predicament in that spiritual world will depend on the choices he had made during his lifetime. If they were in conformance with the Torah or to the contrary. The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah states, “The one who prepares before the Shabbos will eat on Shabbos; however the one who does not prepare before Shabbos will not eat on Shabbos.” If one invested his life properly in the physical world as a Jew should and lived by all the precepts of the Torah, he will reap endless reward in the world to come.

The Torah tells us that G’d is the Father of orphans. Although a child may not have any parents, due to their passing, G’d through His infinite Kindness and Mercy will care and provide for that child as a Father.

The Torah tells us that before Moshe passed away, Moshe said to the Jewish people, **“The Rock (G’d) is perfect....He is the faithful G’d, without inequity...”** Reb Yisroel Salanter z’tl asks, “If He is faithful it is superfluous to say that He is without inequity. Yet the Torah tells us that He is without inequity. Why is this not superfluous?” He explains this with an allegory. There was a man who was convicted for a murder and was sentenced to be put to death. His wife came before the judge to plead for mercy. She said, “If my husband is put to death, I will have no husband and my children will become orphans and be raised without a father. In addition, he owns a factory that employs many workers who will be displaced if he is killed. Many families will go without a livelihood.” The judge replied, “All that you said may be true, but human justice demands that the guilty party must forfeit his life for the crime he committed. Although this justice is not perfect; nevertheless, this is the nature of human justice. However, G’d’s Justice is without inequity. Every individual who is affected by the verdict is taken into account. Thus, the verdict is rendered. If any individual who affected by the verdict should not be affected (as G’d intended) it will render the verdict as annulled.”

G’d’s Judgment is perfect. When an individual passes away, everyone who will be affected by his loss will be affected in a manner exactly as G’d intends for him to be affected. Therefore, one must believe and understand that He is the True and Righteous Judge. The Jewish people are considered to be G’d’s children. As Moshe said to them, “Just as a father disciplines a child (for the best interest of the child), so too does G’d punish His people out of love for them in order to set them on the proper path.”