

PARSHAT RE'EH

23 - 29 Av 5785
17 - 23 August 2025

Torah: Duet. 11:26-16:17
Haftorah: Isaiah 54:11-55:5;
Samuel I 20:18; 20:42

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

Positive Mitzvah 118 Restitution for the Misuse of Holy Property

One who inadvertently benefits from holy property or Terumah must make restitution, by repaying the principal plus 25% of the value of the misused item.

Positive Mitzvah 91 Burning Leftover Sacrificial Meat

We are commanded to burn sacrificial meat that remains after the deadline for its consumption has passed.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PATH

Blessings and Curses

"Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse." - Deuteronomy 11:26.

With these words, the Torah portion of Re'eh opens. Moses is still addressing the Children of Israel as they are gathered east of the Jordan River, poised to enter the Holy Land. Moses continues:

"The blessing, that you will heed the commandments of the L-rd your G-d, which I command you today; and the curse, if you will not heed the commandments of the L-rd your G-d, but turn away from the way I command you this day, to follow other gods, which you did not know."

Moses informs the Jewish People that they can receive either tremendous blessings if they adhere to G-d's commandments or curses if they do not.

What exactly is the "turning away" that leads to "following other gods"? How can it be that a Jew would not only sin, but go so far as to deny the entire Torah? It begins with a tiny misstep, a slight veering from the right path.

Imagine a person walking through a dense forest. He turns off the path for whatever reason, intending to return. If he strays only briefly and doesn't wander too far, he will likely find his way back. But if he continues walking for a while after taking that slight turn, he will be very far from where he meant to go and will likely struggle to find his way back to the original path.

This is how a Jew can go from observing all the Mitzvahs to, G-d forbid, waking up one morning and finding himself serving idols. It all begins with one small step off of the straight and narrow.

Accelerated Journeys

My father, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, explained this idea with a contemporary application:

Once upon a time, this transition away from Mitzvah observance was a slow process. A person might stop attending one Torah class, compromise on one Torah law, or make one small change in the interpretation of a Torah teaching,

believing that he had only taken one small step off the path. The result of that one misstep, though it may take several generations, could be grandchildren or great-grandchildren who are assimilated, G-d forbid.

Why did it take so long? Because he was walking, leisurely strolling along a forest trail. But what if he had a horse and was galloping down a road? Or a car, speeding along a highway? With a faster mode of transportation, even a slight deviation from the path can quickly lead a person far away. Today, with the advances in technology that have become a part of our lives, we can very quickly cover a lot of distance and, in a short time, turn around and find that we are lost.

However, the same is true in reverse: when a person is on the road to return but is walking, then the road home is a long one. But with today's speedy technology, he can return very quickly.

Of Rebbes and Horses

One of the disciples of the Tzemach Tzedek, the third Rebbe of Chabad, had a son who abandoned Judaism. Among other things, the young man became passionate about horses and horse riding.

When the disciple asked the Rebbe what he could do to bring his son back to the ways of Torah, he was instructed to bring his son along on his next visit. The young man, however, was not interested.

Eventually, he agreed to see the Rebbe, but only if he could go on horseback and remain on his horse throughout the visit.

When they arrived, the Rebbe inquired of the young man, "Tell me, which is better, a slow horse or a fast horse?"

"Rebbe," the young man exclaimed, "obviously, a fast horse is better!"

"And why is a fast horse so much better than a slow one?" the Rebbe asked.

The young man patiently explained that a fast horse can take you from place to place with such speed that you reach your destination much faster.

"I hear you," said the Rebbe, "but what if the fast horse is going in the wrong direction? Then the speed is a disadvantage because you end up much further in the wrong direction than you would on a slow horse."

"That's true," the young man admitted. "But as soon as you realize you're going the wrong way, you can

turn around and go back in the right direction much faster."

The Rebbe looked directly at the young man and replied, "Yes, as soon as you realize it's the wrong direction. Just as soon as you realize."

The young man internalized the Rebbe's words, and, ultimately, on his fast horse, he came back.

Idol Worship 2.0

Our Sages say that the allure of pagan idol worship during the times of the First Holy Temple was so powerful that no one could resist it. It was, in fact, why that Temple was destroyed. Today, it is difficult to understand why idol worship was so appealing to our ancestors.

What led to the disappearance of this overwhelming desire for idolatry? The Talmud relates that the Sages - reasoning that the risk of idol worship outweighed the benefit of avoiding it - requested that G-d remove the temptation from the world, and G-d agreed.

What do we have today in its place? The phenomenon of money worship - the overwhelming desire for "success."

Like the guy who said, "My wife and I got divorced for religious reasons: she worships money, and I don't have any!"

Today, the quest for wealth can lead us to stray from the path of Torah, with an insatiable desire for more and more becoming an obstacle to serving G-d.

In truth, our money is one of the three main elements with which we are meant to love and serve G-d. In Va'etchanan, the portion we read a few weeks back, Moses instructed the Jewish people (in what later became a part of the pivotal Shema prayer), *"And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might."*

Serving G-d with "all your might" means serving G-d with all your means. A person invests maximum effort and energy - indeed, all their might - into plotting and planning, working and sweating, to make a living. Thus, money is a very dear and necessary possession. There is nothing greater than taking that hard-earned money and using it to serve G-d.

Give and Get



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Much of the portion of Re'eh is devoted to detailing how we serve G-d with our money, particularly through charity and tithing. The Mitzvah of tithing - setting aside ten percent of one's profits for charity - followed the seven-year agricultural cycle of the Sabbatical years. With the seventh year being a year of rest, each cycle had six years of earning. In years 1, 2, 4, and 5, ten percent of every farmer's produce had to be brought to Jerusalem and eaten there, and in years 3 and 6, ten percent of the yield had to be given to the poor. And in all years, ten percent was given to the Levite, and a portion was given to the Kohen, the priest.

While the obligation to tithe does not apply to produce grown outside the Land of Israel, the practice of tithing still applies to monetary profits.

Tithe, says G-d. Give charity. Giving is the best way to get.

G-d says, "Aser ti'aser" - "You shall surely tithe all the seed crop that the field gives forth." Since the root word Aser, which means "tithe," can be read as Asher, "rich," the Sages interpret "Aser ti'asher" to mean, "Tithe in order to become rich." Give charity so that you will be wealthy! And while we are not meant to do Mitzvahs for the sake of reward, when it comes to charity, G-d tells us to do just that.

"Test me on this!" says G-d.

Give charity with the express intention of becoming wealthy. G-d will fulfill His promise.

Paid On Commission

Hearing that we must give at least ten percent of our earnings to charity might seem burdensome. Of course, charity is admirable, and we are happy to give. But to give away ten dollars of every hundred we make? That might feel like too much.

A certain rabbi was once addressing a gathering of salespeople, aiming to motivate them to give charity. "Everyone in this room gets paid on commission," he began. "What's your commission rate?"

The salespeople responded with rates of 25%, 40%, and 50%. One was even getting 60%.

"G-d offers the best commission rate ever," exclaimed the rabbi. "He gives us 90% commission. All He wants for the company is 10%!"

The Unwitting Levite

The Midrash tells the story of a wealthy man who owned a field that reliably produced a thousand tons of produce each year. In accordance with the Torah's commandment to tithe, he would set aside 100 tons annually. As he lay on his deathbed, he summoned his son and gave him these final instructions: "My son, this field which I am leaving to you produces a thousand tons every year. Be sure to continue tithing 100 tons, just as I have throughout my life." Shortly after giving this advice, he passed away.

After his father's death, the son inherited the field, which indeed produced the expected 1,000 tons in the first year. Faithfully, he set aside the 100 tons for tithing. However, in the second year, his accountant began pestering him. "This is too much to give away," he advised. Maybe you should reduce it a little."

The son decided not to tithe that year. To his surprise and disappointment, the following year, the field produced only 100 tons - just ten percent of its usual yield. He had thought he was saving money, but instead, he discovered that withholding the tithe had led to a significant loss.

The dejected son came to the synagogue, and to his surprise, the rabbi prepared a Kiddush in his honor. "Rabbi!" he exclaimed, "My family is in financial ruin, and you're making a Kiddush?! Are you mocking us?"

"G-d forbid," replied the rabbi. "We're celebrating. You used to be a very wealthy man - now you have become a Levite! You used to keep ninety percent and give ten percent to the Levite; now G-d is keeping the ninety percent, and you're getting ten."

We have a choice: we can either give 10% and keep 90%, or vice versa. The choice is ours.

"Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse."

Let's choose the right path. And may the merit of our Mitzvahs - especially our charity - hasten the

arrival of our righteous Moshiach, speedily in our days. Amen.

*By Rabbi Yehoshua B. Gordon OBM
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RE'EH IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Re'eh," means "See," and it is found in Deuteronomy 11:26.

"See," says Moses to the people of Israel, "I place before you today a blessing and a curse" - the blessing that will come when they fulfill G-d's commandments, and the curse if they abandon them. These should be proclaimed on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal when the people cross over into the Holy Land.

A Temple should be established in "the place that G-d will choose to make dwell His name there," where the people should bring their sacrifices to Him; it is forbidden to make offerings to G-d in any other place. It is permitted to slaughter animals elsewhere, not as a sacrifice but to eat their meat; the blood (which in the Temple is poured upon the altar), however, may not be eaten.

A false prophet, or one who entices others to worship idols, should be put to death; an idolatrous city must be destroyed. The identifying signs for Kosher animals and fish, and the list of non-Kosher birds (first given in Leviticus 11), are repeated.

A tenth of all produce is to be eaten in Jerusalem, or else exchanged for money with which food is purchased and eaten there. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor instead. Firstborn cattle and sheep are to be offered in the Temple, and their meat eaten by the Kohanim (priests).

The Mitzvah of charity obligates a Jew to aid a needy fellow with a gift or loan. On the Sabbatical year (occurring every seventh year), all loans are to be forgiven. All indentured servants are to be set free after six years of service.

Our Parshah concludes with the laws of the three pilgrimage festivals - Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot - when all should go to "see and be seen" before G-d in the Holy Temple.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Wednesday, 26 Av 5785 - 20 August 2025

Passing of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1979)

Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum was the founding rebbe of the Satmar Chassidic dynasty, named after the town of Satmar (or Satu Mare) in what is today northwestern Romania. After World War II, he relocated to the Williamsburg neighborhood of Brooklyn, where he continued to lead his thousands of followers. He passed away on 26 Av, 5739 (1979).

Thursday, 27 Av 5785 - 21 August 2025

Passing of Rabbi Yehoshua of Cracow (1648)

Rabbi Yehoshua was one of the leading Polish scholars of his day, and was held in great reverence by his contemporaries. He led a Talmudic academy in Cracow which attracted many noteworthy disciples.

Rabbi Yehoshua authored Maginei Shlomo, devoted to answering the difficulties raised by the Tosafist scholars against Rashi in his Talmud

commentary. He also authored a collection of Halachic responsa titled Pnei Yehoshua (not to be confused with the Talmudic commentary of the same name authored by his great-grandson, Rabbi Yaakov Yehoshua).

Friday, 28 Av 5785 - 22 August 2025

Passing of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin (1894)

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (known by his acronym, the Netziv) led the famed Volozhin yeshiva for almost forty years. He authored numerous works, including Ha'amek Davar, Ha'amek She'eilah, Meromei Sadeh, and a collection of halachic responsa titled Meishiv Davar. He passed away on 28 Av 5654 (1894).

Shabbat, 29 Av 5785 - 23 August 2025

Flight from Liadi (1812)

On this date in 5572 (1812), the first Chabad Rebbe Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, who supported and aided the Czar's army during the

Napoleonic wars, was forced to flee his hometown from Napoleon's forces which were advancing through White Russia in their push toward Moscow. After five months of wanderings, he arrived in the town of Pyena. There he fell ill and, weakened by the tribulations of his flight and the harsh Russian winter, passed away on the 24th of Tevet, 5573 (1812).

Passing of the Skulener Rebbe (1982)

Rabbi Eliezer Zusia Portugal (5658-5742, or 1898-1982), the Skulener Rebbe, is best known for his superhuman efforts to rescue and support Jewish orphans and refugees in Eastern Europe before, during, and after World War II. He immigrated to the United States in 5720 (1960), after imprisonment in Romania and international efforts to secure his release. He was renowned for his lengthy prayers and the beautiful tunes he composed.