

1981

RE-OF

ROSH CHODESH

It is especially appropriate that a Bar Mitzvah should take place on Rosh Chodesh, the new moon. The moon has always been the symbol of the Jews, not the sun because the moon ebbs and wanes but it always comes back. It may even seem to disappear completely because it cannot be seen for several days but it always comes back. We Jews, too, have the capacity to come back. It may seem that we, too, have been absorbed completely into a host culture only to find that although we may have absorbed some of the best points of the culture we have come back dedicated to Jewish ideals. We Jews have this capacity to renew ourselves. One of the reasons for this is also because we, like the moon, have no light of our own. We really reflect a higher light. When we Jews reflect a higher light, a higher message then we shine. After this Rosh Chodesh now we are going to blow tomorrow the Shofar. The Rabbis tell us that the Shofar has the capacity to change the Midas Hadin to Midas Harachmeem. Why should the Shofar have this capacity though since every time it is mentioned in the Torah and in the Bible it signifies the attribute of strict justice not the attribute of mercy. Baruch surrounded the city of Meroze and blew 400 Shofars to demonstrate the failure of the people of this city to send troops to help fight against the Canaanite enemy. Joshua blew the Shofar and the walls came tumbling down. Every other place in the Torah, too, when the Shofar is blown it signifies the application of strict justice. How can the Rabbis say that when we blow the Shofar it has the capacity to change strict justice to mercy? The answer that I heard from a great Rabbi is that ^{the capacity to change} it depends who blows the Shofar. If the accuser blows the Shofar then truly strict justice is called into play, but if we blow the Shofar on ourselves then the Shofar has the capacity to change strict justice to mercy. If we are self-critical, if we are not smug and complacent, if we are not self-righteous and consider ourselves a big Tzadek, if we realize that we have faults then we will have within

ourselves the capacity to renew ourselves. The Shofar will serve to change strict justice to mercy. G-d will see that we are trying to be better, we are trying to improve. Self-righteousness, smugness, complacency stops us from renewing ourselves. We Jews have survived because we have the capacity to criticize ourselves and to renew ourselves. The Kotzker Rebbe once said "I prefer an evil person who knows he is evil to a righteous person who knows he is right because that person can no longer grow". Once someone came to the Ger Rebbe and the Ger Rebbe asked him if he learned. He said, "Rebbe, I have only learned a little", to which the Ger Rebbe replied, "We have all learned just a little". None of us should ever feel that we know everything, that we are the end all of be all of everything. We are now approaching the season of Teshuva, of repentance. Repentance does not just mean meaking up for past sins. After all, what big sins did the great Rabbis do who felt such a need to do Teshuva? Did they kill anybody? Did they steal from anybody? But many of them felt very bad. They would even cry when they would say the prayer about Teshuva. Teshuva means when we do not live up to our potential, when we know we could do much more but we have not. None of us has ever lived up to our potential completely. The Rabbis teach that anyone who does not have Yiras Shomayeem but ~~he~~⁷ has Torah is compared to a treasurer who has the keys to the inner safe but not the keys to the outer safe. Unless we have the correct attitude Torah learning will not help us. Yiras Shomayeem means that we realize how far we have to do in order to fulfill our mission of imitating G-d. All of us must blow the Shofar from within. If we do so then our Torah learning will allow us to lead a full and a rich life. At this time of the approach of the High Holiday season it is important that all of us ponder on the secret of Jewish survival. It is because we not only have Torah but we also blow the inner Shofar. With these two qualities Jews will continue to survive forever.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The Torah portion Re Eh opens with the verse "See, I have given before you today a blessing and a curse". Many times it is hard to tell what is a blessing. We all know many people who have got too much too soon. They have realized their fondest dreams and they have been destroyed by them. Look at all the movie stars who have committed suicide. Recently a millionaire came to me with a terrible problem. He was lonely. He could buy or sell anyone in town but he had no friends or family because he could not keep them. His money was actually a curse, not a blessing. How can we tell if something is a blessing? In the Hebrew text we have an indication of what we mean by blessing. The Hebrew text starts off in the sentence "You see I give before you". Before you is plural. We cannot tell whether something is a blessing by whether or not it attaches us to others, whether it alienates us or allows us to come into contact with others. In this "me" generation where we want to self-actualize and self-realize there is a big paradox. The more we get into ourselves the more we become alienated while the more we attach ourselves to others the more we find ourselves. There are really three ways the Rabbis say that you can achieve a blessing. One is to achieve a goal. That's the only way in America that we conceive of happiness or blessing. We are willing to sacrifice everybody and everything in order to achieve our goals. Unfortunately, this does not lead to blessing or happiness but to despair. The other way to achieve happiness is to know that we are accepted for ourselves. Everyone wants to be loved. The third way is to bring joy to others. We cannot sacrifice our friends and our family and still be happy. Do we want a blessing? If we want a blessing then we must listen to the Commandments of G-d. We must learn to live with our family and friends. That's the main purpose of religion. We do not conceive of religion as something terrible, as a burden, as an obstacle course, as a test to tell whether or not our souls are pure. We conceive of religion

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as bringing a blessing in our lives. So many people misconstrue what religion is all about. It reminds me of the story they tell about a Sunday School class in Texas. The teacher asks one of the students, "Where was King David born?" He said, "I think in Kilgore". The teacher said, "What?" "Oh, I think maybe it was Lufkin". "What?" "Maybe Nacadoches", at which point the teacher said, "Don't you know King David was born in Palestine?" The students said, "Gee, I knew it was someplace in East Texas". That unfortunately is the way many people conceive of religion. They do not realize it is meant to give blessing to you life, to be happy because you learn how to live with your family and friends. You learn how to achieve your goals without destroying others or yourself.

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Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Re'eh we start out by saying, "See, I give before you today a blessing and a curse". It says "see" in the singular and "before you" in the plural. The Rabbis say that each of us is to see for ourselves. Each of us is to make our own determinations in life. We are to keep our eyes open. We are to have no illusions. Each one of us should try to see the truth that G-d gave before each of us. "You" is plural because to every one of us G-d gives a blessing and a curse. The Hebrew letter "oo" can mean and or or. Here the Rabbis explain that it means and. Each of us are given not a blessing or a curse, but we are given a blessing and a curse, that we can change anything G-d gives us and we can make it either a blessing or a curse. Many times difficult obstacles in our path turn out to be a blessing and not a curse. We all know stories about athletes who, because of some childhood disease, were able to achieve great things. It is difficult to know what will eventually be a blessing or a curse. We can tell this only by the results. Mount Abel and Griseem were right next to one another. One was barren and one was luxurious. That was the difference, of course, between just looking at trappings and looking at reality. Many times people are fooled because of slogans. If something has a good name it must be good. We should, though, look beyond the surface and see whether things are being produced that are correct. The Rabbis comment that it says we are to Shemor, to remember the Sabbath and it also says Shemor Amalek and they ask why. This same word is used and the answer they give is because it is important that you observe, that you see what the results are. Amalek's way ends in destruction and death. The Sabbath may, at first glance, seem ridiculous, but it leads to blessing and happiness. The PLO has enshrined themselves with all sorts of slogans as liberators and leftists which give the illusion of being for the right and the good, but when it gets right down to it, they have been acting in South Lebanon like a group of thugs, of Mafiaists. It is important that we not be led by externals, by illusions, but that we always look at the truth. The story about a teacher who walked into her classroom and found a puddle right in front of the blackboard. She turned to the students and said, "Someone had an accident. The accident is not so bad, but the person should have wiped it up. On my desk are some tissues. We will

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all put our heads on the table so nobody should be embarrassed. The child who is responsible should come forward and wipe up the puddle." Everyone put their heads on the desks. The pattering of little footsteps was heard going to the blackboard and then returning. Everyone lifted up his head and they saw there was a second puddle there and a phrase on the blackboard "the phantom strikes again". This, unfortunately, is what happens. Our illusions are not solved by putting our heads down and many times get worse.

Re'Eh 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

The central theme of the Torah portion, Re'eh, is making sure that the Jewish people only had one Temple in one place that G-d would designate. We were to bring there all our sacrifices and tithes and free will offerings, etc. This Torah portion emphasizes over and over again that the Jewish people were not allowed to have private altars or to have a sacrificial service performed in any other place except the place which G-d had chosen. Later we know that this became Jerusalem. There are many reasons given for this. The Rambam states that G-d wanted to make sure that the sacrificial system did not get out of hand. After all, when you have excitement and blood and special rites people's darker passions can be aroused and all sorts of licentious rites can occur. This is, of course, what happened in paganism. This even happens today in other parts of the world when questions of life and death and frenzy get mixed up with religion. The sacrificial rite was to be kept holy and pure and be very limited. Today there are still religions which speak about sacrifice and flesh and blood and wafers and wine turning into a real human being. However, there are other reasons that are given. There are really two different types of religion. There is a religion which is based on space and a religion which is based on time. A religion which is based on sacred space says that the ideals of the religion really cannot be practiced in the world, but there is one small space where they can be practiced and they should be practiced. This sacred space is different than the rest of the world. Those who serve in the act differ from everybody else and they have special rules. When a person comes into sacred space he, himself, acts differently. It is as if he goes to heaven. A person goes to sacred space to see how things should be, to get inspiration to take away with him into the real world. He knows that the ideals espoused in the sacred space cannot be implemented in the real world, but they are beautiful ideals and maybe a few of the things he can apply, but in any event he knows that when he leaves this world he will see these ideals implemented in heaven. Sacred space is a little touch of heaven now.

Therefore, when people come into sacred space they are usually passive. G-d's representatives talk to them and bring them into an altogether different world. The religion which is based on time is different. It says that ideals can be implemented in the real world. It says that man's passions just have to be balanced. There is sacred time. Man is both the creator and the meditator. On Shabbos we are supposed to sit back and enjoy the fruits of the labor. When man destroys the balance between meditation and creation then he is in trouble. A religion of time has houses of worship which do not try to bring a person up to heaven. They instead try to bring G-d down to earth. They are there to give a person encouragement and strength in order to implement the ideals of the religion he knows should be implemented. This religion exists in the world in time. A religion of space is above time. We all know how Christianity says that we are to turn the other cheek, but the worst wars that were ever fought were between Christian nations, the First World War, the Second World War. Everybody in our society knows that turning the other cheek is not an ideal for this world. These ideals are not meant to be implemented. We go to sacred space to hear about them but not to implement them. Those who wanted to change Judaism's service, etc. usually confused a religion of space with a religion of time. Jews do not understand a religion of space and usually when a synagogue is turned into a religion of space the people deserted by droves. Even a synagogue whose main thrust is not to give a person a taste of heaven but just to give him courage to go out and implement Jewish ideals is sometimes deserted by many people either because they no longer believe in Jewish ideals or believe they can get their strength from other sources, psychiatrics, politics, etc. What then, you ask me, was the Temple in Jerusalem? It was a symbol of Judaism. Judaism existed before it and existed after it. In fact, today the people who are most opposed to the rebuilding of the Temple would be the rabbis. Today there is a big sign saying

that religious Jews should not go on the Temple mount. This perturbs nationalistic Jews. The rabbis are concerned with ritual purity and impurity, etc. Of course, if a big earthquake would come and destroy the mosque, maybe some would change, but although we pray for the Temple it is not necessary to Jewish life. We Jews, though, need places of worship which give us encouragement and hope and determination and a feeling of strength to implement Jewish ideals in the world. I am reminded of the story they tell of a woman and husband who came to Shul. At Kiddush the woman said to her husband, "Did you see the stain on the Rabbi's Tallis?" He replied, "No." She said, "Did you see Mrs. Goldberg looked so sad?" He answered, "No." She said, "Did you see Mrs. Frufel's beautiful suit?" He replied again, "No." She said, "Why didn't you see these things?" He answered, "I dozed off." She said, "A lot of good Shul does you." Shul, of course, is not meant to cause us to look down on our neighbors or to give us a taste of heaven, but to give us the strength and encouragement to go out and make this world a better place.

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Summer is drawing to an end. School is about to begin and once again we are poised ready to plunge into a whole host of fall activities. Before we do, though, I think it would be wise if we would pause for a moment and consider what activities we are going to participate in this fall and why. In this coming week's Torah portion, Re'eh, we come across a very peculiar kind of tithe, the so-called second tithe. It was called the second tithe to differentiate it from the tithe which was used to maintain the Levites. This second tithe was in reality no tithe at all. Tithing is usually thought of as with giving what is yours to others. This second tithe was given to no one. It was consumed by the individual himself. Every year, with the exception of 2 years out of 7, a person was supposed to take 10% of his earnings and spend them on food and drink before the Lord in Jerusalem. This is indeed strange. Why should G-d care how we spend our money after we have given charity and especially where we spend it? The answer, I believe, to this question has a great relevancy to our own day. Most Jews believe that religion is something that is relegated to special occasions (weddings, bar/bat mitzvahs, etc.) or times (Yom Kippur, Pesach, etc.) They do not conceive of religion touching their lives at other times, or if it does only in the most personal and private of ways. The second tithe, though, teaches us that this is not so. Religion is not just a private matter or something relegated to a few occasions but something that should cause people to be drawn together. It should cause people to seek each other's company and want to work and feast together. The people were commanded to go up to Jerusalem to the Holy City and under its aegis to celebrate, be drawn closer together. Too many today view the shul as a place to fulfill their occasional religious needs and its affairs as just money making gimmicks. They fail to realize that one of the main goals of religion is not only to draw man closer to G-d but

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also to draw him closer to other men. This can only be done if a man or woman is willing to bring his whole being into the synagogue, his feasting as well as his troubles. The shul must be a place where people like to go and where they are drawn closer to each other as well as G-d.

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In the Torah portion Re'eh we have emphasized over and over again the importance of giving charity. It is interesting to note that when they mention giving charity, they use a double expression "Noson Teetain" or "Hanaik Taneek" or "Ptoach Tiftach." "Give you should give" and "grant you should grant" or "open you should open your hand." The rabbis ask, why is it that these double expressions are used for giving charity? What's more, throughout this Torah portion the one word that predominates is "V'Somachto - you shall be happy." Charity has two different aspects. Usually, in our society only one of them is recognized. We do not realize that there are two distinct parts to giving charity. The primary purpose is to help the poor. They do not care how the money is raised. All they want is to be helped, and as long as the money is not raised illegally, it is not our business to care too much how the money is raised either. There are some people who come and tell me they do not want to give charity because they do not like all these affairs that are run. They do not like honoring people. Let the person being honored give the money without being honored. All these affairs are just running after Kovod. These people are wrong. The primary purpose of giving charity is to help the poor and it does not make any difference how we raise the money as long as it is legal. The Mafia, which reputedly gives a lot of money to charity, does the wrong thing and the money should be rejected. You cannot take illgotten gains and cleanse them by giving money. Once, but not in this city, it happened that a man approached the shul I was with and offered to give the shul \$100,000 if they gave a dinner for him. I fought it because the man had all the gambling houses and houses of ill repute in town. I won, but I was not popular with people, but you cannot raise money by honoring people whose money was gotten through illegal activities. The primary purpose, though, of raising money is to help the poor and as long as the money is raised legally, that should be our primary concern. Those people who do not want to give because they do not like the way the money was raised are wrong. Giving charity, though, has a secondary aspect, and that is, what does it do to the person who gives

it? Throughout this Torah portion we learn how "You shall be happy" and it mentions "You should be happy before the Lord your G-d, you and your children and your servants and the Levi who is in your gates because he does not have a share with you." The way a person becomes happy is by sharing. The Levites did not have a source of income like Israel. They were denied land. They were given 48 cities instead of land. They were to be the teachers, the religious leaders of Israel. The Torah purposely did not allow them to have land because eventually if the clergy is allowed to have land, within a short period of time they will have all the land. People, out of religious impulses, will give land to the church when they die, and in the course of a few hundred years, the church will own everything. This is what happened in Europe before the Reformation, and this is the reason the Reformation occurred in England. The church owned all the best land. This also happened in China many times, and before Haile Sellase was overthrown in Ethiopia the same thing happened in that country. The Torah wanted to make sure that the religious institutions of the country remained religious and did not become landlords. Landlords act the same whether they are laity or clergy, and the church, instead of being a source of comfort and hope to the poor, became its oppressor. The Levites, therefore, had to be taken care of. The people were told always to remember them, never to forget them, and throughout this Torah portion we learn that you are to be happy with the Levites. You are to share what you have with others, that this is the secret of happiness. When a person gives with a full heart charity has the capacity to enrich and make our lives happy. In ancient Israel they had to give 25% of their income away even before they paid taxes: 10% went to the Levites, 10% to the second tithe for the poor or to take up to Jerusalem, and another 5% for other gifts. The importance of sharing in order to achieve happiness is brought home, too, by the second tithe. It really was not what we normally consider a tithe, at least before the seven years. You had to take up 10% of your crop or its money equivalent up to Jerusalem and eat it there. There was no way you could consume all this amount unless you shared with the poor, your friends and relatives. Happiness must spring

