

# מאמרי תורה – Torah Talk



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Parashat Re'eh  
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פרשת ראה  
ל' במנחם אב תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 11:26-16:17  
*Maftir* for *Rosh Chodesh: Bemidbar* (Numbers) 28:9-15

In this *parasha*, Moshe instructs *Bnei Yisrael* (the Israelites) regarding idolatry, false prophets, pure and impure foods, tithes, freeing slaves, and pilgrimage festivals.

In chapter 12, verses 8-14, the Torah addresses the importance of a central place of worship for the Jewish people, and forbids bringing sacrifices on a *bamah*, a private altar.

ח לא תעשו--כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֲנַחְנוּ עֹשִׂים פֹּה, הַיּוֹם: אִישׁ, כָּל-הַיֹּשֵׁר בְּעֵינָיו. ט  
כִּי לֹא-בָאתֶם, עַד-עֵתָה--אֶל-הַמְּנוּחָה, וְאֶל-הַנַּחֲלָה, אֲשֶׁר-ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ, נָתַן  
לָךְ. י וְעַבְרַתֶּם, אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן, וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר-ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מְנַחֵל  
אֶתְכֶם; וְהִנִּיחַ לְכֶם מִכָּל-אֲיִבֵיכֶם מִסָּבִיב, וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם-בְּטוֹחַ. יא וְהָיָה הַמָּקוֹם,  
אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בּוֹ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם--שָׁמָּה תָּבִיאוּ, אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר  
אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה אֶתְכֶם: עוֹלֹתֵיכֶם וְזִבְחֵיכֶם, מֵעֲשֹׂרְתֵיכֶם וּתְרִמַת יִדְכֶם, וְכֹל  
מִבְּחַר נְדָרֵיכֶם, אֲשֶׁר תִּדְרוּ לַה'. יב וּשְׂמַחְתֶּם, לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם--אֲתֶם  
וּבְנֵיכֶם וּבְנֹתֵיכֶם, וְעַבְדֵיכֶם וְאִמְהַתֵיכֶם; וְהָלוּי אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֵיכֶם, כִּי אֵין לוֹ  
חֶלֶק וְנַחֲלָה אִתְּכֶם. יג הַשָּׁמֶר לָךְ, פֶּן-תַּעֲלֶה עֲלֵתִיךָ, בְּכָל-מָקוֹם, אֲשֶׁר  
תִּרְאֶה. יד כִּי אִם-בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר ה', בְּאַחַד שְׁבָטֶיךָ--שָׁם, תַּעֲלֶה  
עֲלֵתִיךָ; וְשָׁם תַּעֲשֶׂה, כֹּל אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוֶּךָ.

**8** You shall not do after all that we do here this day, every person whatsoever is right in his own eyes; **9** for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which Hashem your God gives you. **10** But when you go over the Jordan, and dwell in the land which Hashem your God causes you to inherit, and Hashem gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety; **11** then it shall come to pass that the place which Hashem your God shall choose to cause the Name to dwell there, there shall you bring all that I command you: your

burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow to Hashem. **12** And you shall rejoice before Hashem your God, you, and your sons, and your daughters, and your man-servants, and your maid-servants, and the Levite that is within your gates, forasmuch as he has no portion nor inheritance with you. **13** Take heed of yourself that you do not offer your burnt-offerings in every place that you see; **14** but in the place which Hashem shall choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt-offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.

Although before the building of the *Beit Hamikdash* (the Temple), the Torah allowed the Jews to offer sacrifices on *bamot* (literally “high places”) of their choice, once the *Beit Hamikdash* was built, some 450 years after the Jews entered the Land of Israel, the Torah obligated them to come to Yerushalayim and worship only there.

Many good reasons stood behind this: sociological, anthropological, and theological. I would like to suggest a psychological explanation for the prohibition of private altars.

Human beings have two sides to their nature that are reflected in Jewish practice. We are individuals, and we are communal beings. [For a further exploration of this idea, please see *Lonely Man of Faith* by Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik.] We need our own space; we need other people. We have responsibilities to ourselves; we have responsibilities to our families, our communities, and the world. This dichotomy is reflected clearly in the Jewish traditions associated with the *Kedushah*, the most holy part of our liturgy, recited in the repetition of the *Amidah* – the Standing Prayer – which serves as the core of all of our daily services. During *Kedushah*, we should concentrate on our relationship with the Divine, and for that reason, ancient traditional sources prohibited speaking, moving around, or communicating with anyone around us in any fashion. At the same time, the *Kedushah* should not be recited except in the presence of a *minyan*, a prayer quorum of ten adults. So we, in essence, stand alone before God, but only in the presence of our community.

Jews practice their religion in a communal context. It is significantly more difficult to live in an environment with no fellow Jews around us. For the more traditionally-minded Jews, kosher supermarkets, *mikvaot* (ritual baths), and other ritual institutions are necessary. Jews across the spectrum of practice need a place of worship, at least a few times a year, and the accoutrements of a Jewish community, such as Jewish schools and Jewish places of giving, like the Federation. All Jews need to feel like at least some of the people surrounding us understand our history, our heritage, and our beliefs.

This idea is conveyed to us in the Torah's proposal that we don't each hole up in our own yard to offer sacrifices, the form of worship common at that time. At least a few times a year, the ancient Jews were required to come together in Yerushalayim to worship Hashem – to live with each other, if you will, no matter how much they liked or disliked each other, whether they got along with one another or not.

It is an important principle to keep in mind. There are not many Jews in the world. We comprise just less than 2% of the population of the United States and around 0.1% of the global population. We are statistically insignificant. We need to stick together, and to come together as a whole nation, at least on occasion, to keep our legacy alive.

Shabbat shalom.

For Discussion:

- What might it have been like to worship with the entire Jewish people in the *Beit HaMikdash*?
- Define the word “community.” What community or communities do you belong to? How are they alike? How are they different?
- What does it mean to have an individual identity and a communal identity? How are they alike? How are they different?