

Erev Shabbos Kodesh Parshas Re'i 5770

D'ei Chochmah L'nafshechah

“Let your soul know wisdom”

Parshas Re'i

From the discourses of Moreinu v'Rabeinu
the Gaon and Tzaddik Shlit'a

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***Shalosh Seudos*¹ of *Parshas R'ei* 5769**

”רֵאָה אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם הַיּוֹם, בְּרָכָה וּקְלָלָה.”

“Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse.”²

Rashi explains: “Behold, I set before you...a blessing and a curse’—Which were intoned at Mount Gerizim and Moutn Eival. ‘A blessing’—in order that you should heed.”

The Holiness of Moshe Rabbeinu

The Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh explains that the words, “Behold, I...” can be understood in a completely different way. Moshe Rabbeinu was asking the Jewish people to “behold him,” to really look at him, and see his level and holiness.

Every Jew wants to repent and achieve every good and holy thing, but the moment he looks toward others around him he falls into doubt. [When we pay too much attention to those around us, we lose our inspiration because living inspired is considered unusual.] In response, Moshe Rabbeinu says that this is an error, because a person must instead focus on the holiness of the *tzaddikim* of his generation, not just his normal acquaintances, and not even just the *tzaddikim* of his generation but the greatest *tzaddikim* of all the generations. Moshe Rabbeinu says, “Behold, I...” Behold me, look toward me, and you will be able to achieve all that you can spiritually. As the Rambam taught, every person can reach the level of Moshe Rabbeinu [in his own unique way, based on his own

¹ The lesson was delivered at the third meal of Shabbos.

² *Devarim* 11:26

potential]. Even if a person fell and sinned, he can still repent completely and become a part of the true *tzaddik*, Moshe the faithful shepherd.

Moshe Rabbeinu said to the Jewish people: ראה אנכי—the word אנכי is an acronym of the terms: יעקב, נשר, כרוב, אריה—the lion, the cherub, the eagle, and Yaakov—the essential four faces of the Divine chariot. Hashem wants that the Jewish people should have a relationship with and an ability to manifest even the most lofty spiritual concept, even something as lofty as the four faces of the Divine chariot.

The “Images” of Idolatry

Although it is clear that every single one of us longs to fear and serve Hashem and become a part of the nature of the true *tzaddik*, nevertheless the evil inclination erects obstacles to prevent our souls from achieving the goal.

The evil inclination is also known as a graven image. The Torah commands: “You shall make no idols for yourselves, neither shall you erect a graven image, or a pillar, neither shall you place any figured stone in your land to bow down to it; for I am Hashem your G-d. You shall keep My Sabbaths and revere My sanctuary: I am Hashem.”³ The *Zohar* explains that the graven images described here are the *klippah*-aspect of *Ze'ir Anpin* and *Nukvah*. [All of the lower *sefiros* or attributes in their negative manifestations.] They present the obstacles to achieving our goals and they are what confuse a person so that he cannot achieve a *yichud* through his Divine service.

Even when a person feels inspired to serve Hashem, nevertheless the *sitra achra* interrupts him and tries to tempt him away from his purpose with all sorts of nonsense. The person strays blindly after these temptations and falls into the category of a woman who suddenly received an impure flow [which interrupts her ability to form a *yichud* in holiness]. In the middle of his Torah study, his mind is suddenly filled with distracting thoughts, and the *sitra achra* plagues his every attempt to serve Hashem and confuses him. This parallels the serpent's approaching Chavah and the manner in which he seduced her into eating from the Tree of Knowledge.

³ *Vayikra* 26:1-2

The way in which we can correct this is by following the instructions of the verse itself: “Neither shall you place any figured stone in your land...” The phrase “figured stone” symbolizes the deep *kavanos* behind the ritual of *Nefilas Apayim*. When we prostrate ourselves, we are descending to the lower worlds of *Beriyah-Yetzirah-Asiyah* so that we can uplift fragments of holiness that have fallen there. Each of the fallen Divine sparks is called a stone, it is rooted in the element of earth, “For everything came from the earth.”⁴ Even the sun is rooted in the spiritual element of earth, and it parallels *klippas nogah*, and that *klippah* is the main area of human endeavor to uplift the Divine sparks. “And the spirit of G-d hovered [מרחפת] over the face of the waters”—the word מרחפת can also be read as מ״ית רפ״ח, that is it the task of the Divine image within man to go down [to the lower places known as “death”] to clarify and uplift the 288 [רפ״ח] sparks that fell into the *klippas*.

The Prohibition Against *Borer*

When we know and understand that the main task of the Jewish soul is the clarification and uplifting of Divine sparks throughout the lower worlds, we are naturally faced with a question. Why are we prohibited to perform labor and leave the boundary on Shabbos if Shabbos is the highest point of the week and our *avodah*? If our whole purpose is to make *beirurim*, spiritual clarifications, why are we forbidden to select and separate one thing from another on Shabbos?

Rav Aizik Chaver, who was the student of Rav Mendel of Shklov—himself a student of the Vilna Gaon—taught that it is forbidden to make such clarifications physically on Shabbos because all of the work of raising the sparks that have fallen into the lower worlds of *BY”A* has to be done slowly and patiently. Shabbos is energized by powerful holiness that invests the actions we do with more spiritual momentum than we realize. If a person were to do the physical work of *borer* on Shabbos, he would run the risk of uplifting too many Divine sparks at once and provoke the *sitra achra*. When the *sitra achra* sees that a person is managing to extract many sparks from the *klippas*, it is

⁴ *Koheles* 3:20

aroused to interrupt the person's *yichud* just as it insinuated itself with Chavah in the Garden.

This is what is meant by, "Neither shall you place any figured stone in your land..." You shall not enter into the *avodah* of the "stone"—of *Tachanun*—unless you are within the protective framework of the focused prayer of *Nefilas Apayim*, as the Arizal explains. And this is why the only selecting we can do on Shabbos is taking the good from the good, because entering into the realm of the bad, of the *klippah* itself, on Shabbos would result in the extraction of too many Divine sparks, and it would provoke the *sitra achra*.

The verse continues, "You shall keep My Sabbaths and revere My sanctuary: I am Hashem." The sages taught that the juxtaposition implies that even the building of the sanctuary does not supersede Shabbos observance. Yet this can also be understood in a deeper way, since sacrifices were brought in the sanctuary on Shabbos [along with all of the labor necessary to their preparation]. This was possible because the entire nature of the *Beis Hamikdash* was the clarification and uplifting of Divine sparks in the most complete manner. "You shall keep My Sabbaths"—do not perform *beirurim* on Shabbos—"and revere My sanctuary"—but know that the sanctity of the *Beis Hamikdash* made it possible to perform *beirurim* at all times. [One cannot perform forbidden labor to build the sanctuary on Shabbos, but once it is built one can perform the full complement of *avodah* there, even if doing so involves *melachah*.] This is a very deep mystery.

Sanctifying the Material

Now that Elul is swiftly approaching, the Jewish people begin to remember that there are such *tzaddikim* like Moshe Rabbeinu; we begin to remember the message of, "Behold, I..." Certainly we all long to repent completely, and it is part of our nature to be drawn to all different forms of *avodah* and to want to raise up holy sparks at every turn. Yet if a person is not sufficiently the master of his own appetites, the *sitra achra* quickly overwhelms him when he descends to do the *avodah* that draws him, like a predator rising from the depths. The Arizal explained that this is only par for the course, since the

moment a person is aroused to repentance, the *sitra achra* works to confound him so that he will fall even more. The person imagines that he has failed, and it is all the more disappointing to him since he really did feel a genuine arousal to repentance. All of this is the work of the *sitra achra*.

The truth is that although one must certainly repent and achieve all of the great levels of the *tzaddikim*, nevertheless Moshe Rabbeinu continued his statement, “Behold I set before you this day a blessing and a curse.” We must work to make *beirurim*, but not in a manner that provokes the *sitra achra* and makes a blessing into a curse, that makes our *teshuvah* into a means for the evil inclination to overwhelm us. We require instead a great measure of holy awareness so that we can follow the path of *teshuvah* of “guarding My Sabbaths and revering My sanctuary”—a *teshuvah* that will last.

***Teshuvah* from Level to Level**

Yirmiyahu the prophet declared: “But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me...”⁵ The main purpose of our existence is to understand and know Hashem wherever we find ourselves. When we do this, we uplift and reveal Hashem’s presence from within the lower worlds. As the deeper works explain, “Behold, I...” We must seek out and uplift the אֱלֹהִים, the Divine “I” which is the attribute of *Malchus* by accepting upon ourselves the yoke of the kingdom of heaven. This is what is meant by “revering My sanctuary”—having an awareness of Hashem’s presence in every place.

The first step in the process of genuine repentance is simplicity, as Rebbe Nachman said many times.⁶ One must be wary of stoking the heart into a state of burnout, because an overabundance of oil will quench the flame altogether. One must instead focus on extracting one spark after the other—not in the way of *ribui ohr* or over-fervor that leads to burnout—because many people fail to understand that *Malchus* can only be uplifted from level to level, gradually. At first, *Malchus* is in a state of spiritual immaturity or *katnus*, and so one must enter into *avodas Hashem* in a manner consistent

⁵ *Yirmiyahu* 9:23

⁶ *Likutei Moharan* I:49

with one's actual spiritual level. "Neither shall you go up steps to My altar, that your nakedness not be uncovered upon it."⁷ You shall not try to race up the levels of *avodah* quickly—rather, they must be traversed ever so slowly, from level to level. Even though we must be filled with a longing to reach all of the highest levels—even to the level of Moshe Rabbeinu—nevertheless we must follow the path of *teshuvah* step-by-step, from level to level, and avoid the pitfall of the "figured stone."

The Mittler Rebbe of Lubavitch, son of the Baal HaTanya, taught that the main element of a person's *avodah* is rising from level to level constantly, from the world of *Asiyah* to the world of *Yetzirah*, and from the world of *Yetzirah* to the world of *Beriyah*, and from the world of *Beriyah* to the world of *Atzilus*. The Maggid of Mezeritch similarly said in the name of the Baal Shem Tov that this is the meaning of the words of the *Zohar*: "The matter depends upon *Atikah*."⁸ Spiritual development depends entirely upon *Atikah*—upon the process of gradually moving [העֲתִיקָה] one's position from world to world in a gradual way.

Rav Menachem Azariah MiPano taught that although one must always approach the King through some form of garment since one cannot look at Him without any veil, nevertheless the garment must constantly change as one rises in the realms of *dveikus*. The garments are always there; the only difference is their degree of fineness. We have the garments of *Asiyah*, the garments of *Yetzirah*, and those of *Beriyah*. One must always be in the habit of rising from level to level and world to world, and one must start at the beginning because without the *avodah* of the lower level, one cannot reach that of the higher levels. People make a mistake when they forget the significance of the *avodah* of the world of *Asiyah*. As the Maggid of Kozhnitz taught in the name of Rav Aharon HaGadol of Karlin, the world of *Asiyah* parallels the order of the letters forming words. Without them, it is impossible to ascend to any level of *avodah* whatsoever.

The Holiness of the Letters

⁷ *Shemos* 20:22

⁸ *Zohar, Parshas B'shalach*

The most elementary level of approaching *dveikus* is through the letters of Torah study and prayer themselves, since Hashem enclothes Himself in countless garments until He is actually en clothed by the holy letters that we can read black on white. Even though this garment is relatively coarse, nevertheless we must begin by seeking *dveikus* at this level. We must contemplate them in the manner of accepting upon ourselves the yoke of heaven—this is the *avodah* of bearing the yoke of Torah and prayer expressed through the letters. One must begin with this *avodah* and never leave off from it. Having entered into it, one can then rise to the next level of feeling love and awe of Hashem. The world of *Asiyah* is associated with action, which the world of *Yetzirah* is associated with speech. The world of *Beriyah* is associated with thought, and the ultimate level is that one comes to feel the light of Hashem's *yichud* in accordance with one's level. Yet even at this exalted level, one must never leave off the "simple" work of *dveikus* through the letters of Torah and prayer, which is the fundamental nature of the world of *Asiyah*.

This level is not only the garment of the letters, but also the garment of all of material reality. One must look at the world and remember that there is no reality but Hashem, and one's perception of reality must be nullified before one's awareness of Hashem's overwhelming presence. This awareness allows a person to transcend the material plane.

We find this idea discussed by Rav Nosson of Breslov, when he interprets the verse, "You are children to Hashem your G-d; you shall not cut yourselves [over the dead]..."⁹ He writes, "Because you are Hashem's children, you must know that it is not appropriate to mortify your flesh in undue distress over death and burial. Even this is good, because it allows the soul to be repaired. So too, when a person enters into the *avodah* of prayer, he must rise above all of the matters of the material world and not allow himself to be unduly distressed over anything, even over matters of suffering and death, G-d forbid. If he will do this, he will merit to live in Hashem's light and really experience what it means to be a child of Hashem. When one stands to pray, he must

⁹ *Devarim* 14:1

forget about everything, and only think of Hashem alone and bind himself to the letters of Hashem's Torah and prayers. He must forget himself and all that he lacks. Even though it is certainly true that he must pray for his needs, nevertheless when he first enters into prayer he must strip himself of all worldly thoughts and only focus on the words of the prayer themselves."¹⁰

As the Baal Shem Tov taught, every person must know that the letters of Torah and prayer are heavenly chambers, and there are in every letter—how much more so in every word—entire spiritual worlds. One can enter into these letters and mental states until one feels the actual light of this letter, and one can enter even further and feel the love and awe within that letter, and to the *bitul* within that letter, and to bind oneself to the Divine light that it is in that letter. And one can rise higher and higher until one reaches Hashem's essence itself, as it were, that reposes within that letter. All of this exists within every single letter of Torah and prayer—levels and levels of *yichudim* that reach all the way to the Infinite One. This is the main upward movement one must seek—to rise from light to light, from one state of awareness to the next, from letter to letter—to enter the *avodah* of *Asiyah* and follow the pathway of higher and higher *dveikus*.

Even so, one must be sure not to jump levels or abandon the path of simplicity, because this provokes the *sitra achra*. The Komarna Rebbe taught that true *dveikus* completely destroys all of the *klippas* and rectifies one's soul through all of its former incarnations going all the way back to Adam HaRishon. Because it is so important, the *sitra achra* lies in wait for the person who tries to get ahead of himself in his *avodah*. For this reason, it is crucial to go slowly from level to level, not in the way of *ribui ohr*.

The Avodah of Shabbos

The *tzaddikim*, on the other hand, can make all of the necessary *beirurim* quickly because they have sanctified themselves to a great degree. Since they have achieved the

¹⁰ *Likutei Halachos, Birchos HaShachar 3*

level of, “revering My sanctuary,” they hold within themselves the power of, “guarding My Sabbaths.” Just as it was possible to perform certain labors within the confines of the sanctuary on Shabbos, so too can the *tzaddikim* make many *beirurim* at once and even on Shabbos. Because they are in a constant state of awareness of Hashem’s presence through the letters of Torah and prayer, their *avodah* burns away all of the *klippas* as they rise quickly from level to level. Inasmuch as a person is holding at the level of the “sanctuary” [of being the master of his appetites], to that degree will he also be able to follow the path of the *tzaddikim* and make *beirurim* swiftly. But if he is not, he must be careful to move gradually.

During this month of Elul we must learn to be “experts at running”—to rise to the level of the greatest of *tzaddikim* through full repentance—and at the same time we must be “experts at returning”—to move slowly and gradually in accordance with our level, so that the *sitra achra* does not cause us to fall.

After learning all of this we can remain with a question: How is it possible then that on Pesach night all of the *mochin* are drawn down at once and we merit to rise to an especially high level of *mochin d'gadlus*? This seems impossible, since we have learned that one can only safely rise from level to level slowly, and not all at once. However, when we drink the four cups of wine, we enter into the mystery of *Atikah*. Since our table embodies the holiness of the sanctuary, we can rise quickly from level to level like the *tzaddikim* and make all of the necessary *beirurim* in a rush.

We have to understand this two-sided process to be able to enter into the *avodah* of Elul, which as the Arizal taught is the double-pathway of *teshuvah*: to be an expert at running, and an expert at returning.¹¹

The Secret of *Ma'aser*

“You shall surely tithe all the increase of your seed, that which is brought forth in the field year by year. And you shall eat before Hashem your G-d, in the

¹¹ *Likutei Moharan* I:6

place which He shall choose to cause His name to dwell there, the tithe of your corn, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock; that you may learn to fear Hashem your G-d always.”¹²

“You shall surely tithe all the increase of your seed...year by year”—the twelve months of the year parallel the twelve permutations of the *Shem HaVaYaH*, the twelve *gevulei alachson* or double-directionals that emerge from *Ze'ir Anpin* which correspond to the twelve tribes of the Jewish people. [There are six cardinal directions—east, west, north, south, up, and down—and they are doubled because the Divine light both emerges and returns to them in “lines.”] All of this is meant to indicate to us that the Torah expands outward to a great degree, and when a person wants to repent he must learn to take it slowly. The sages taught that when a person comes to the *beis medrash* and he wants to begin to learn, we tell him, “study two laws today and two laws tomorrow.” It is impossible to learn it all at once—it will be a *ribui ohr*. This is the real *teshuvah* of Elul: to take it slowly but steadily, in the aspect of, “learn two laws today and two laws tomorrow.”

Even Moshe Rabbeinu and all of the *tzaddikim* followed this pathway. The Chasam Sofer explained that it was only because they were always connected to the *Shechinah* that the *Shechinah* helped them achieve much more than is normally possible. They merited to transcend space and time in their *avodah* because of their bond with the *Shechinah*. This is what is meant by, “You shall surely tithe...year by year.” Even though everything only happens in its own good time, nevertheless all of the twelve permutations of the *Shem HaVaYaH* are all rooted in the single Name itself. “Behold, I...” We must keep our focus on the level of Moshe Rabbeinu who illuminates the point of the *Shechinah* for us, and then we will be able to move quickly without falling into error.

This is the nature of *ma'aser*, the tithing of the tenth-portion, because the tenth-portion alludes to *Malchus* and the *Shechinah*. It is this “tenth-portion” that has the power to rectify all of the produce of the entire year. Keeping our focus on the *Shechinah* and

¹² *Devarim* 14:22-23

the simple level of accepting the yoke of heaven ensures that the remainder of our *avodah* will be as it should.

No matter how far we follow the twelve double-directionals outward, to the great length and breadth of Torah and *avodah*, as long as we always return to this point of simplicity and the structure of the letters themselves, we will receive all of the heavenly assistance that we require to ascend safely.

This is also the inner meaning of the mitzvah for the wealthy to give charity to the poor. “For Hashem your G-d has blessed you because of this thing...”¹³ The wealthy represents the person who merits to attain higher levels of Divine awareness through his *avodah*. He must always go back and “give credit where credit is due”—to the “poor man,” or the simpler level of the *avodah* of *Asiyah*. And the Torah testifies that it is in the merit of always remaining connected to the fundamental level that one rises at all to higher states.

This is why we find that the *tzaddikim* who merit to achieve the highest levels in *avodah* are the most careful at the level of observance of *mitzvos* at the simple and practical level. All of the higher levels are built upon the solidity of the foundation. Because their foundation is strong, Hashem rewards them with “great wealth.” This is what is meant by the phrase *Kesser Malchus*, the “Crown of Kingship.” To reach the level of *Kesser*, one must simultaneously be strong at the lowermost level of *Malchus*.

With the arrival of Elul, every Jew is filled with trepidation. It extends “from the beginning of the year”—because all year long we were told that Moshiach would arrive this year—“to the end of the year”—when we see that the year has nearly passed and even though we anticipate his arrival daily, we still see that almost the entire year has passed and we are still in exile. If only we had merited to repent fully, perhaps things would be different, since Moshiach will only come when we repent. And we certainly know that we have what to repent about! Our only option, then, is to draw close to the true *tzaddikim* and follow their pathway to *teshuvah*. We must make efforts in small

¹³ *Devarim* 15:10

matters and avoid falling into the pitfall of *ribui ohr*, and we will eventually find our way to the higher things for which we are destined. If we will bind ourselves to the *Shechinah*, we will find out what it means that, “even if they are not prophets, they are the children of prophets.” Even if we are small and simple, nevertheless our genuine efforts will yield blessed fruits.

“Let Your Soul Know Wisdom”

All that we have learned is alluded to in the verse: דעה חכמה לנפשך והיא כתר לראשך—“Let your soul (*nefesh*) know (*d'ei*) wisdom (*Chochmah*), and it will be a crown (*Kesser*) for your head.”¹⁴ The level of *nefesh* is the will, and the will is the expression of the *Ein Sof*, the “light of the Jewish heart on fire for Hashem burns all the way to the *Ein Sof*.”¹⁵ We must bind the *Shechinah* which is rooted in *Chochmah* and which is “within limits” to our *nefesh*, to our desire for Hashem that burns without limit. We must combine the two facets of *avodah*, of “running” and “returning”—then we will reach the heights of *Kesser*—a “Crown to your head.”

“Guard your holy Shabbos”—take care in the manner in which you make your *beirurim*—“Guard your holy *mitzvos*”—and in the merit of the level of the mitzvah of the *Beis Hamikdash*, you will be able to eventually also make *beirurim* on Shabbos.

May Hashem make us worthy of the two Sabbaths of our *parshah*—“And you shall guard my Sabbaths”—the two consecutive Sabbaths that we will properly observe and be immediately redeemed. May we soon see the arrival of our righteous redeemer in mercy. Amen.

Translated and Adapted by Rav Micha Golshevsky.

¹⁴ From the *Shabbos zemer* “*D’ror Yikrah*,” based on *Mishlei* 24:14.

¹⁵ *Likutei Moharan* I:49