

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 Merose 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.

RE EH 1981
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

RE EH 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

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.

RE'EH 1982
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

RE'EH 1982
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

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 patter 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.

RE'EH
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

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

RE'EH

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

PAGE TWO

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.

RE'EH 1985
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

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

from an inner feeling. It cannot be forced. That's why it does no good to put on a phonograph record and take out a bottle of liquor and say you are going to be happy. You are going to end up more depressed than before. The rabbis say that the difference between true happiness and depression is the difference between "Oh" and "Ah." Many times you start out saying "Ah" but by the next morning you say "Oh." Many times it is hard to share and do for others. You start out saying "Oh" but the next morning you say "Ah." The letters in the word "V'Sameach," itself, tell us how to be happy. The Shin stands for "Sholem," for being a whole personality who can receive love, who knows that he is needed and loved. The Mem stands for "Melech," a person feels that he is competent, that he can achieve, that he has self-worth. The last letter, the Ches, stands for "Chiuch," or smile, the capacity to bring a smile to the lips and mouths of others. It is by sharing that we achieve this happiness. Happiness comes from an inner feeling, not an outer feeling. It cannot be forced. You cannot go into a nightclub and dispel your loneliness or unhappiness. You can only do it by sharing with others, by realizing some goal, or by knowing that you are loved. Unfortunately, today many people think that all they have to do is open a bottle and put on a new dress and be happy. This is not so. I am reminded of the story they tell about a wicked king who seized a beautiful princess and took her to his palace. Later he gave her a terrible looking gown and said, "I don't care if you stand in the window. No knight will ever rescue you." Sure enough, knight after knight passed the window and none of them rescued her. She could not understand this, so she turned to the wicked king and asked, "How come no knight is rescuing me?" He told her, "No knight would rescue a damsel in dis dress." It is not the outer things that count. It is the inner things. It is by sharing that we become happy and we achieve true happiness.

RE'EH 1987
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

One of the main themes of the Torah portion Re'eh is Aliyah, is going up, having a spiritual experience. In this Torah portion we are taught the Jewish people were to go up to the place the G-d would choose, which, of course, turned out to be Jerusalem, at least three times a year, that the people, in order to have a spiritual experience, an uplifting experience, would have to live moral and just lives. Unfortunately, in our day and age there are too many people who feel they can take a shortcut to spiritual experiences. They feel that through taking drugs they can achieve a high, that they can shortcircuit the necessary hard work and discipline and effort that it takes to have a lasting spiritual experience. The whole theme of this Torah portion is a ~~spiritual experience~~^{warning}, is to be careful of shortcuts, of false prophets who tell you you can achieve spirituality without morality, that you can achieve spiritual highs without discipline, without work.

That is, of course, why in this Torah portion, too, we have the laws of kashruth enumerated, because kashruth tell us that we cannot eat anything we want, that we cannot achieve a spiritual experience through ingesting chemicals or drugs, etc. Kashruth, itself, teaches us that things which may be appropriate in one area ~~and fit and right~~^{can} when combined with other principles ~~are~~^{become} evil and lead to the highest form of treifkite. For example, eating milk and meat together is the highest form of non-kosher that there is even though milk, itself, is kosher and meat, itself, can be kosher. We know this is true in life, too, when people ~~enshrine certain~~^{take two good} principles like the Mafia ~~do~~^{to create evil from them} ~~are~~^{are} that my family must be taken care of; ~~I must do the best I can for my family~~ and I must support them in a style that will allow them to experience life in its fullest. These two concepts of love of family and wanting to support them at the highest level leads the Mafia to justify everything they do because they are doing it for their family. If they sell dope and other people become hurt and they loan

shark and other people become injured, so what? ~~You~~ ^{we} are doing it for ~~our~~ ^{our} family, and as long as ~~you~~ ^{we} are doing it for ~~our~~ ^{our} family everything is right and everything is good.

Unfortunately, in America today we believe in shortcuts. We believe you can violate moral norms and things will be all right, that you can steal and cheat as long as you are not caught and it is okay. You can ~~still get ahead~~ and ~~everything is fine~~. ^{commit} ~~that~~ ^{because that} adultery strengthens marriage. We believe in all sorts of foolishness. ~~In fact, just recently I read in the paper how in upper New York State, not in New York City which people have a tendency to think is very corrupt, the bastion of Republican sobriety and respectability, that FBI conducted a sting operation in which they contacted 106 local officials and offered them bribes if they would forget about certain local rules and regulations. Of the 106, 105 took the bribe. Only one refused and he only refused because he thought the bribe was not enough. He wanted a bigger bribe. Here we see that~~ In America we feel that you can shortcircuit morality, that you can get what you want in life without having to pay the price of being honest and having integrity, etc. This is, of course, contrary to the Jewish view. The Jewish view says that in order to have a spiritual experience you must work at it. You must be honest and sincere. There is no shortcut to spirituality. There ~~is~~ ^{are} no one-shot deals ^{that can} ~~to~~ give you a lasting spiritual experience. Anything that is worthwhile in life ^{has to be} ~~you have to~~ work at. You have to work at marriage, raising children, your job, at disciplining yourself in order to achieve anything worthwhile in life. A student who refuses to study is not going to get very much out of his college classes.

We also learn there are three types of people who cannot go up to Jerusalem, who cannot have Aliyah. The rabbis explain that these three are one who is blind in one eye, one who limps, and one who cannot bring himself up to Jerusalem. They are not talking primarily about physical characteristics but spiritual characteristics. One who is blind in one eye cannot see

beyond his own self-interests, ~~that he does things only selfishly, that~~ He cannot see the total picture and see what benefits the community and institutions to which he belongs. He is only interested in furthering himself. He is "I, I, I". Of course, that leads to disastrous consequences. People who have terrible constricted vision and only do what is good for themselves without taking into account the total picture cannot ever have a spiritual experience. They are embedded in a view of life which is totally selfish. ~~Of course,~~ ^{of these} many people know ~~that~~ ^{IT TOO.}. People who have made big money through questionable business deals, at the end of their life or after they made their money, want recognition ~~many times~~, and they realize that unless they spread the wealth around, like Carnegie did with his libraries and Rockefeller did with his charities, that life does not really have any purpose, that life has ^{have} ~~really~~ ^{IS} been nothing more than selfishness. ^{an exercise in}

It is interesting to note that the word for "lie" in Hebrew is "Sheker", which ~~means that~~ ^A all the letters of the word Sheker are together at the end of the alphabet: Shin, Kuf, Raysh. When a person only sees things with one eye, when a person has only his interest at stake then he ends up with a lie, but a person who sees everything, sees the total picture, and that, of course, is what "Emes" stands for (the Aleph is the first letter of the alphabet, the Mem is the middle letter, and the Tof is the last letter), this type of person can have a spiritual experience because he is able to see the total picture, what is not only good for himself, but for his family, his community, his nation as well.

This is what is required in order to have a spiritual experience. A person who is lame also cannot have a spiritual experience. That type of person is a person who cannot discipline himself. He always does not quite make it to the class on time. He is a person who cannot discipline himself to do the tasks he has to do. He just barely passes by. He is the "D" student in college. He is the employee who does haphazard and careless work. He is a person who cannot really get what he needs out of life because such a person

limps along. He does not have the discipline and industry and energy to do a task in the right and proper way.

Then you have the person who cannot take himself up to Jerusalem, the people who manipulate others, who always try to get other people to do their work. You cannot have a religious experience vicariously. You cannot have the rabbi and cantor do it for you. You cannot expect to get anything good out of Judaism unless you practice it day in and day out. Spiritual experiences cannot come from three-day-a-week efforts, just like a person cannot run a business three days a year and become successful. He cannot become successful. His employees will rob him blind before that. Besides that, a person cannot feel the joy and happiness of religion unless he works at it constantly, unless it is a part of him. It is only in this way that it will give him the strength and hope and courage to continue. We all fail many times in life and do the wrong thing, but we can all come back if we acknowledge that we have done the wrong thing, but if we always try to rationalize and say what we did was right then, of course, we are in for trouble. That is why the rabbis say Jerusalem is the pinnacle of spirituality in our religion. Just a short thirty miles away is the Dead Sea, which is the lowest point in the world and is a symbol of the lowest physical degradation in the world. Even in that lowest point of physical degradation G-d has planted an oasis in Ein Gadi, which will allow us sufficient nourishment in order to reach the spiritual heights. None of us have to be denied a spiritual experience. We deny ourselves this spiritual experience when we either refuse to see the total picture and are totally selfish or when we refuse to discipline ourselves and refuse to do that which is necessary to achieve things in life. To be a good father, a good husband, a good citizen we have to discipline ourselves. Also, in order to have a spiritual experience we cannot rely on others to do things. We cannot manipulate, etc. We must do things ourselves. We must get involved in religion ourselves. We must do things that will bring us into a spiritual elevation. We all can do it. We all have the potentiality to do

it, but we must do it. We cannot think about it or read about it in books.

We must do it ourselves.

I am reminded of the story of a minister in a small town who was very bombastic. He went into a variety store owned by a town member who was not very religious. The minister picked up some item and brought it to the owner. He noticed it cost 50 cents. He had forgotten his wallet at home so he said to the owner, "I would invite you to hear me preach, but I don't think I have any 50 cent sermons." The owner replied, "That's okay, I'll come twice." We can never achieve a religious experience vicariously. We have to work at it. To all of us is vouchsafed a spiritual experience. We all can attain it, but we must be willing to see the total picture, to apply ourselves with diligence, energy and self-discipline, and we must be willing to do it ourselves and not lay it upon someone else. If we are willing to do these things all of us have been assured that we will get a religious experience.

RE'EH 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Re'eh we learn how each of us is given a choice how we are to live. The Torah portion opens with the words, "See, I am giving before you today a blessing and a curse." Each of us is to live our life and make it a blessing. It is very difficult in life many times to know what is a blessing and what is a curse. It all depends upon us, how we live our lives. In fact, in the very first sentence we seem to have a grammatical anomaly. It says, "Re'eh - you see" in the singular. Then it says, "I am giving before you" in the plural. The rabbis all ask, why does it start out in the singular but end in the plural? The only way really in life to have a blessing is to be connected to others. Unless we are connected to others it is very difficult in life to live a blessed life. We end up alienated, lonely, frustrated, and we want to lash out and hurt others.

In America we have a peculiar ideal. It is the ideal of the roaming, lonely cowboy. For some reason we seem to feel that the best life, the blessed life is the one in which you have no responsibilities whatsoever, in which you are free to do anything you want whenever you want, that you are not tied to anybody or anything, that you can go when you want, do what you want, whenever you want. Unfortunately, this is not a very fulfilling life style. It runs throughout all of American literature, but the truth of the matter is that it has a flip side, and that flip side is crime. In the old west in the United States 10% of many towns were killed every year and not by Indians or plague but by murder. The flip side of this lonely, roaming, self-contained life style is terrible anger. We see this in Houston today and throughout the United States where crime is growing at an alarming rate. We see where people feel that they only have to please themselves and do what they want for themselves whenever they want. Unfortunately, they also feel cut off from society. They do not feel that anybody appreciates

RE'EH 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE TWO

them. They do not feel they are needed and wanted and, therefore, they feel they can go and do anything they want to anybody else no matter how terrible it is because they feel hurt inside that nobody appreciates them. Crime in Houston is terrible as it is throughout the United States. Five thousand people in the United States are murdered each year and that is a terrible figure. There are many parts of Houston which are much more dangerous to walk in than in Israel even in the midst of the Intifadah. Just close by at 610 and Stella Link there have been hundreds of murders throughout the past years because of the Colombian drug cartel who have their Houston headquarters there. In life we must be connected to others. Unless we are connected to others we are going to feel depressed and lonely.

This is probably why in this Torah portion we learn something very interesting. We learn it says, "When you will incite you your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, etc. to do something evil." The rabbis all ask, why does it say the son of your mother? What about the son of your father? They answer and say that the reason why many times your brother will try to incite you to do evil things and do evil things himself is because he has not had a nurturing mother. Psychologists will tell us that many times youngsters lash out in crime because they have a personality disorder. They have not been properly bonded to their mother. Each of us is subjected to all sorts of negative influences, but we are able to contain our criminal impulses because we have an integrated personality, but there are many people who have never had the real love of a mother. They have never really bonded to their parents and family and, because of that, they do not have any sense of responsibility. When they get angry they feel they can lash out at everyone and do terrible things. In fact, Winston Churchill was raised in such a family and he was bedeviled all his life with very great and deep depressions. His father died at an early

RE'EH 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE THREE

age and his mother, who was an AMERICAN heiress, did not really care much for him. She cared more for her lovers and parties and high societies, so Churchill was really neglected as a youth. He did very poorly in school. It was only because of family pull that he got into Sandhurst, and then when he came out of Sandhurst he actually went to South Africa to get killed. Many of the reckless, adventurous things he did he did really in order to get killed because his life was so unbearable. Later he learned how to control his personality but throughout his life he suffered from very deep depressions and his personal relations especially with his staff were none too good.

We see this pattern repeated throughout the United States where in many instances today children do not have families. They do not have mother to take care of them. They do not have nurturing, bonding relationships which allows their personality to form so they can withstand the terrible impulses that rage within each of us so that they do not have the personality formation which allows them to contain their anger and their sense of frustration and loneliness. Children 14, 13, and even 10 are killing. There is a boy in Pennsylvania recently who was arrested for killing his brother. He is only 10 years old, and I believe they are going to try him as an adult. It is a terrible situation. I can tell you, too, that in Jewish families also children are not the way they used to be. I held a pulpit before in a congregation where almost everybody had a Ph.D., and most the women too had a masters and Ph.D.'s. Many of these families were the worst families imaginable. They were the worst parents. The children really hated their parents because their parents made them feel that they were not needed or wanted and were probably just an accident anyway. They did not give their children time. As soon as school was over they sent the children to summer camp. They were never home when their children came

RE'EH 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE FOUR

home from school. They did not have time to talk with them or be involved with their activities. Oh, they were well treated. They had nurses and housekeepers and babysitters and they were given the best of everything, but they were not given their parents' love and their parents' time, and many of them did things on purpose to hurt their parents and to hurt others because they were so lonely and cut off. They were not connected one to another. It is very important that we be connected one to another if we are to handle the terrible problems of life. If you want to grow up to be a blessing, if you want to be a blessing, then you have to be connected to others.

This, of course, is what almost all the great spiritual traditions of all faiths tell us, especially of our faith. That is basically what the Kaballah is all about, teaching us how we are all part of a greater unity, how our contributions are important, that if our contributions would be missing then the universe would be diminished, but many people feel outside of everything. They feel, as Kafka put it, like a cockroach. They do not feel part of life at all, and, therefore, they feel justified in lashing out and hurting others. This is a terrible situation. That is why Jewish mothers, who have been much maligned lately, did such a great thing. It is only thanks to them that we have Jewish achievement. Jewish children had no problem knowing who they were. They did not have to spend years finding out who they were. They did not have an identity crisis. What's more, they did not have all these other problems of integrating their personality, which gets in the way of studying. Recently I had several people come to me who had terrible problems in school. The main reason is they could not concentrate because they had to deal with all these other problems. Their personality was not formed the way it should be so that they could confront life. Jewish children

RE'EH 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE FIVE

used to achieve a lot because they had the inner security and bonding with their family which allowed them to accomplish great things. That is why it is so important to have good mothers and good fathers. In Judaism and it is true biologically that the main task of a woman is to have children and the main task of a man is to support these children. Of course, we can do other things, but psychologically a woman needs to be a mother and a man needs to have a family. It has been proved statistically that men who do not have families, men who are not married, do not live as long as men who are married, and women who do not have children, who cannot have children later suffer from psychological problems.

People need to be attached one to another in order to feel life's blessings. It is true that it is difficult to be attached to others. It is true that there are frustrations, but there are more frustrations, more anger, if you are not attached to others. It makes you feel useless. You do not feel needed. You feel extraneous. You do not feel appreciated. A mother was once asked who had 12 children where she found time to raise the 12 children. She said, "Well, one child took all my time, and I figured if I had more it would not take any more time than that." We all salute the mothers of our community. It is the mothers of our community who are making it possible for us to have children who know how to handle their own problems, who know how to be a blessing to each other and to others. It is very important that we recognize those who give of themselves, who are always there ready to help, who not only are raising children for themselves but also for the community, because these children bring back and give to the community many things that the community needs. Most of the Jewish achievements are directly attributable to mothers. It was the mothers who helped form the child's personality so the child can contain their impulses, so that the child then can be a blessing

RE'EH 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky
PAGE SIX

to himself and to others.

I am reminded of the story about two women who met at the park. One had 3 children and the other could not have any children. She looked at the woman who had children and said, "I would give ten years of my life to have a child." The other one said, "Well, that is about what it takes, ten years." We salute the mothers in our community. May they continue to be good mothers so they produce children who are a blessing to themselves and to others.