



# Partners Detroit

Tuesday Night Study Guide  
and Take-Home *Devar Torah*

*Re'eh*

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**Rabbi Avi Cohen**

# Partners Detroit

## Mission Statement

**T**HE Jean and Theodore Weiss Partners Detroit strives to engage, enhance and promote Jewish identity and values by offering a wide variety of meaningful programs and inspirational classes.

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**STUDENT RECENTLY ASKED ME,** “There are two major types of social systems, Democracy and Socialism. What social system does the Torah recommend?”

I answered him that the Torah’s social system is neither, as it operates on a different principle altogether.

A democracy is premised on each citizen having inalienable rights, which must be respected by others. When a person’s rights have been violated, he is entitled to seek restoration of his rights in a court of law whose job it is to ensure the rights of the citizens.

On the whole, this system works well. But matters get tricky when the rights of one person or group conflict with the rights of another person or group.

One of America’s most difficult current conflicts is between those who support the right to bear arms to protect themselves versus those who wish to limit that right based on their entitlement to feel safe in their environment. The “pro-gun” group

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**“... *HaShem* decides  
to whom He will give wealth ...”**

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points to the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which guaranties that “The right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Others, however, are fearful about their personal welfare based on the increasing number of deliberate shootings of innocent people. People don’t feel safe and claim that if it were not so easy to obtain a gun, fewer people would have them and fewer innocent people would be killed or injured. Both sides are staunch in their positions.

The Torah, however, does not prompt one to ask, “What are my *rights*, and what are my *entitlements* because of them?” Rather, the Torah defines what are a person’s *obligations and responsibilities*. Thus, a Torah person’s proper inquiry is: “*What are my obligations and responsibilities?*”

This question is predicated on the premise that a person is put on this world with the obligation and responsibility to accomplish a mission that no other can accomplish. To this end, *HaShem* endows him with everything necessary to accomplish his mission: His personality, his innate talents, his parents, teachers and friends, his assets and an infinite number of other gifts, are all the tools he must use to accomplish his mission. And he must use every one of his resources. Time is his most precious asset, as the length of time one spends on this earth is cut to the size of his mission, and he must therefore use every moment of his life to accomplish that mission.

Consider wealth: acquiring it, holding on to it, and its proper use, is one of a person’s most difficult tests. Being honest in

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business, giving enough charity, and using one's wealth to help others, contain a substantial number of challenges, as well as the many laws that instruct a person to respect others' property, and neither to take nor damage it in any way.

*HaShem* decides to whom He will give wealth, and it becomes one of a person's tools with which to serve Him. As a result, the Torah clearly does not support socialism, and its idea that wealth should be equally spread. What *HaShem* gives a person, is his to use responsibly according to the Torah's guidelines.

The owner of a very successful business, cognizant of this notion, recently told me, "It's not my business, it's *HaShem's*! I am just His worker in charge of the money, and it is my job to see that it goes to the right places."

No wonder he is successful! *HaShem* is the *best* businessperson (*—so to speak*) ever!

This question, "*What are my obligations and responsibilities?*" encompasses every aspect of one's life via the different types of relationships that he has. Our Sages divide these relationships into *three* categories:

- 1. The relationship between *a person and HaShem.***
- 2. The relationship between *a person and other people.***
- 3. The relationship between *a person and himself.***

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**“... It’s *not* about  
“What am *I* entitled to? ...”**

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Based on this, the Torah’s *social* policy is that every person ask himself, “What is *my obligation or responsibility to my fellow Jew at this time?*” Each person is obligated to look out for the welfare of his fellow to help him wherever possible, and to be sure that he doesn’t hurt him in any way. It’s *not* about, “What am *I* entitled to?”

When a person has assets, he must take responsibility to see to it that his possessions don’t harm or cause damage to others. This topic is the subject of many pages of Talmud. The burden to care for my neighbor lies upon my shoulders; it is not his burden to protect himself from me.

The laws of “*Lashon HaRa*,” evil speech, and the laws of not embarrassing another, are extensive and exhaustive. Why? Because one is obligated to respect others and is prohibited from hurting or insulting them. It is on me to be sure that I don’t do anything out of line to injure his self-respect, *not* his issue to demand his self-respect from me.

The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 20a) reports that it was a special time in Jewish history when six of Rabbi Yehudah ben *Iylai*’s students could cover themselves with one blanket.

**“יִרְאֵת ה' הִיא תְּתַהַלֵּל”: זֶה דִּוְרוֹ שֶׁל רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בְּרַבִּי אִילְעָאִי  
אָמְרוּ עֲלָיו עַל רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בְּרַבִּי אִילְעָאִי שֶׁהָיוּ שֶׁשָּׂה תַלְמִידִים  
מִתְכַּסִּין בְּטִלִית אַחַת וְעוֹסְקִין בַּתּוֹרָה**

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*“It is the fear of heaven that is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30):  
“This refers to the generation of Rabbi Yehudah ben Iylai.  
They said about Rabbi Yehudah ben Iylai that six of his  
students could cover themselves with one blanket and study  
the Torah.”*

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz (1902-1979) asks, “How was that possible? How could one blanket keep *six different people* warm at the same time?” He answers that this was possible because each one was concerned *only about the others*, and when he saw someone in need, he passed the blanket on to him. This person did the same, and, in this way, everyone had the blanket when he needed to be warm.

Apparently, Rabbi Yehudah ben Iylai taught his students to care *so deeply about each other* that each student was sensitive to the needs of the others and was sure to supply the blanket to them when they needed it.

This special time in our history epitomizes the Torah’s ideal for Mankind. When each person is prepared to give up his personal comfort for the sake of another, true peace can be achieved.

In Jewish communities the world over, there is a manifestation of this type of kindness going on.

This week’s *Parashah, Re’eh*, is *replete* with verses instructing us to take care of each other. *Deuteronomy* 15:7-10 says,

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פִּי יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֲבִיּוֹן מֵאֶחָד אֶחָיִךָ בְּאֶחָד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תֵאֶמֶן אֶת לִבְּךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֶחָיִךְ הָאֲבִיּוֹן כִּי פָתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֶעֱבַט תַּעֲבִיטְנוּ דֵי מַחְסָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסַר לוֹ

*“If there shall be a destitute person among you, any of your brethren in any of your cities, in the land that HaShem you G-d gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. “*

*Rather, you shall open your hand to him and you shall lend him his requirement, whatever he lacks.*

The Sages pick up on the words, **“His requirement, whatever he lacks,”** to derive from them that if a person was very wealthy and at that time was accustomed to have someone run in front of his horse to announce him, if this person were to lose his wealth, you would have to provide someone to run and announce him. This is what is meant by, “whatever he lacks.”

The Talmud (*Ketubot* 67b) tells an astounding story about Hillel the Elder.

תנו רבנן: “דֵּי מַחְסָרוֹ”: אֵתָּה מִצְוָה עָלַי לִפְרַנְסוֹ וְאֵי אֵתָּה מִצְוָה עָלַי לַעֲשׂוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִחְסַר לוֹ אִפְּלוּ סוֹס לְרִכּוֹב עָלַי וְעַבְד לְרוּץ לִפְנֵי

אִמְרוּ עָלַי עַל הַלֵּל הַזֶּקֶן שֶׁלִּקַּח לְעֵנִי בֶן טוֹבִים אֶחָד סוֹס לְרִכּוֹב עָלַי וְעַבְד לְרוּץ לִפְנֵי

פַּעַם אַחַת לֹא מִצָּא עַבְד לְרוּץ לִפְנֵי וְרוּץ לִפְנֵי שְׁלֹשָׁה מִיָּלִין

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**“... Hillel realized that  
—this crazy man really needed it...”**

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*The Sages taught. “What he lacks” . . . even a horse to ride on and a servant to run before him”. They said about Hillel the Elder that he commissioned a horse and runner for a certain person who lost his wealth. One day, there was no runner to go before the horse, so Hillel himself did it for three miles.*

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz observed that Hillel the Elder was the *greatest Sage of his time*. How could this person on the horse allow the great Rabbi to run before him like a simple servant to announce him? How could he not feel unworthy of such treatment by the greatest Jew of the generation?

Rabbi Shmuelevitz concludes that he must have been *crazy!* He had to be out of his mind to allow Hillel to run before him. Yet Hillel did it because he realized that this crazy man really needed it. What a *stellar* example of sensitivity to another’s needs.

The Torah continues:

הַשְּׁמֵר לָךְ פֶּן יִהְיֶה דְבָר עִם לִבְּךָ בְּלִיעַל לֵאמֹר קָרְבָה שְׁנַת הַשְּׁבַע  
שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה וְרָעָה עֵינֶךָ בְּאַחִיךָ הָאֲבִיּוֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקָרָא עֲלֶיךָ  
אֵל ה' וְהָיָה בְּךָ חֲטָא: נְתוּן תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא יִרַע לִבְּךָ בְּתִתֵּנָהּ לוֹ כִּי בְּגִלּוֹל  
הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה יִבְרַכְךָ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּכֹל מַעֲשֶׂה וּבְכֹל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ

*“Beware, lest there be a lawless thought in your heart, to say,  
“The seventh year approaches, the remission year” and you  
will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and re-  
fuse to give him—then he may appeal against you to  
HaShem and it will be a sin upon you.*

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***You shall give him, and give him again, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter, HaShem your G-d will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking.”***

What is meant by “*The Sabbatical Year that is approaching?*”  
Why would that impact someone from lending money?

On *Rosh HaShanah* of the Sabbatical Year (the *upcoming* year, 5782, is such a year), all unsecured (that is, without collateral) debts are officially cancelled. The lender *may not ask* the borrower for his money back, for the Torah has cancelled the loan. *HaShem* is warning His people: Despite the Sabbatical Year approaching, *do not hesitate* to lend a needy person money. Even though you know that the loan may get cancelled and you will lose your money, know that I will replenish your loss. You will lose nothing by lending him the money.

The verse says, “*You shall give him, and give him again.*”  
What is the meaning of the *double* giving?

The Sages explain: In the merit of your giving him this time, *HaShem* will give you the wherewithal to give him again. *HaShem* is saying, “*Trust me, I will make it up to you!*”

Another commandment in this week’s *Parashah* (*Deuteronomy* 14:22) instructs us to give a tenth of our produce to the Levite who has no source of income other than the land owners’ presents:

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**“ . . . That sounds  
—counter-intuitive! . . . ”**

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עֶשֶׂר תַּעֲשֹׂר אֶת כָּל תְּבוּאת זֶרְעֶךָ הַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה

*“You shall annually tithe, tithe, the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field.”*

The Sages ask as well about the *double* wording in the Hebrew “עֶשֶׂר תַּעֲשֹׂר”, “*Aser Te’Aser*”. To answer this, the *Midrash* (*Tanchuma, Re’eh* 18) makes a play on words (that only works in Hebrew) to explain it.

“עֶשֶׂר תַּעֲשֹׂר”:

עֶשֶׂר בְּשִׁבְלֵי שִׁתְּתַעֲשֹׂר

עֶשֶׂר כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא תִּחְסַר

“*Take a tenth* (עֶשֶׂר)”

—*so that you should become wealthy* (שִׁתְּתַעֲשֹׂר).”

*Take a tenth* (עֶשֶׂר)

—*so that you should not lack for anything* (שֶׁלֹּא תִּחְסַר).”

The Torah is teaching us that by giving a tenth of our wealth to charity, we will *become wealthy and lack for nothing*.

*Create wealth by giving away money?* That sounds *counter-intuitive!* Shouldn’t it be the *opposite*, that when you save your pennies, they accumulate to make you a wealthy person?

The answer to this riddle is found in a debate between the great Sage Rabbi Akiva and Tarnus Rufus, the Roman administrator of conquered Judea (Talmud *Bava Batra* 10a):

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**“... This is how one becomes *wealthier* through giving charity...”**

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וזו שאלה שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את רבי עקיבא:  
”אם אלקיכם אוהב עניים הוא מפני מה אינו מפרנסם?”  
אמר לו: ”כדי שניצול אנו בהן מדינה של גיהנם”

*This is the question that the evil Turnus Rufus asked Rabbi Akiva: “If your G-d loves poor people, why doesn’t He give them their sustenance?”*

*Rabbi Akiva responded. “So that we should save ourselves from Gehinom through them.”*

That is, *without poor people*, there would be *nobody to give charity to*, and we would not be able to save ourselves from death and *Gehinom*.

There are *two identical verses* in *Proverbs* (10:2; 11:4) that inform us:

**וְצַדִּיקָה תִּצִיל מִמּוֹת**

*“And charity saves from death.”*

*One* is to tell you that charity saves from *death*, and the *other* is to teach you that it saves from the *difficult judgment of Gehinom*.

*HaShem* loves the poor, yet withholds their sustenance so that those with money will have with whom to perform the *Mitzvah* of *Tzedakah*, “charity”.

In other words, *HaShem* provides the needy with their sustenance through the excess that He gives to the wealthy. Since they must give a tenth of their earnings to the poor, they act as *HaShem’s* agents to give the poor people their food.

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This is a *win-win* situation. The *poor person* receives his allocation, and the *wealthy person* has the *Mitzvah* of supporting a poor person through his charity.

With this information, the *Chofetz Chaim*, Rabbi Yisrael Meir *HaKohen* Kagan ל"צ, explains how giving a tenth of one's earnings to the poor makes a person *wealthier*.

Because *HaShem* is 'relying' on the wealthy to give a tenth of his income to the poor, in reality, for every \$100 that a wealthy person receives, only \$90 of it is for him, and the other \$10 is for him to give to charity.

If he *doesn't* give the poor person his \$10, *HaShem* has to find someone else to give it to him. So, *HaShem* then looks for a reliable and trustworthy executor who gives a poor person the extra money that *HaShem* gives him for charity.

When *HaShem* chooses the person who gives a tenth of his income to charity, *HaShem doubles* his money. So now, instead of receiving \$100, he will receive \$200, \$180 for him, and \$20 for the needy. Because the number of people giving a tenth of their earnings to charity is so small, *HaShem* has to repeatedly use the same reliable people. This is how one becomes wealthier through giving charity.

*By the way*, don't think that the person who kept the \$10 earmarked for the poor *keeps* that extra money. Because he was only entitled to \$90, he will lose the extra \$10 somewhere along the way.

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*HaShem* has even given us the right to *test Him out* in this. The prophet Malachi (3:10) says:

הָבִיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל בֵּית הָאוֹצָר וְיִהְיֶה טָרֶף בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֻנּוּנַי  
נָא בְּזֹאת אָמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת אִם לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְבּוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם  
וְהִרִיקְתִּי לָכֶם בְּרָכָה עַד בְּלִי דַי

*“Bring all your tithes into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house, and put Me to the test with that, says HaShem, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you blessing immeasurable.*

*HaShem* promises that we will see His blessing as a result of our tithing. This is a way we can strengthen our trust in *HaShem*: Test Him! *Start giving a tenth of your earnings* (properly calculated) and see if things don’t get better! But, to work, it must be a *full tenth*.

This concept is predicated on the concept that *HaShem* provides a person’s livelihood and that *HaShem* has decided how much one will earn during the year.

In the world at large, on the other hand, a person sees his earnings as the product of his own hard work, so the common attitude is, “I worked so hard for my money, why should I give some of it to someone else? Let him go to work and earn his money just like I did!”

The Talmud (*Beitzah* 16a) teaches us that a person’s wages for the year are determined from *Rosh HaShanah* to *Yom Kippur*.

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תני רב תחליפא אחוה דרבנאי חוזהא :  
'כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים'

*“Rav Tachlifa, the brother of Ravnai of Choza’a, said: ‘All the sustenance that a person will receive this year is determined from Rosh HaShanah until Yom Kippur.’”*

Another place in this week’s *Parashah* where *HaShem* urges us to take care of the needy and downtrodden is in the commandment to rejoice on the *Sukot* holiday.

The verse (*Deuteronomy* 16:14) says:

וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּחֹגְךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוּם  
וְהָאֱלֻמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ

*“You shall rejoice on your festival—you, your son, your daughter, your servant, your maidservant, the Levite, the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow who are in your cities.”*

Rashi’s comment on this verse is *stunning*:

”וְאִמָּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוּם וְהָאֱלֻמְנָה”  
—ארבעה שלי כנגד ארבעה שלך  
”וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ”  
—אם אתה משמח את שלי, אני משמח את שלך

*“My four (“The Levite, proselyte, orphan, and widow”) correspond to your four (“Your son, daughter, slave, and maidservant”). If you gladden the hearts of my four—I will gladden the hearts of your four.”*

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*HaShem* is the father of the orphan and the protector of the widow, because they have no one else to fend for them. Once again, *HaShem* is urging us to take care of His children, and He promises us the greatest blessing for doing so.

Besides these verses in this week's *Parashah* dealing with taking care of our brothers, *many others* are scattered throughout the Torah. Again and again, *HaShem* encourages us to take care of the needy. They are our responsibility. Again, the Torah speaks only about *responsibility*—not *rights*. It is about what *I must do for you*, not what *you should be doing for me*.

The Torah's concern for the poor and needy is *extraordinary*.

**THIS IS THE HALLMARK** of our Torah, and *HaShem*, Who wrote it. This is Jewish “*social policy*.” It is all about helping the other person in any way that we can.