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5785 Re'eh
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**focusing on understanding Jewish
relevancy to our lives by studying text
most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour
each week, friendships are forged between
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has proven to be effective at reclaiming the
rich
legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and
guidance
for many who have, until now, lacked
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participating so that we may grow
together as
a community.**

תשפ"ה Reeh

A 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 others must respect. A person whose rights have been violated is entitled to seek their restoration in a court of law whose job it is to ensure the rights of its 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 constitutional 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 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 feel unsafe 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 perspective flows from the premise that every person is created 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, *viz*, his personality, his innate talents, his parents, teachers and friends, his assets, and an infinite number of other gifts, 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 properly using it, is one of a person's most difficult tests. Being honest in business, giving enough charity, and expending 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 to 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 responsibility to use 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, and (3) the relationship between a person and himself.

What is one's obligation to himself and how does he fulfill it? The Torah (Deuteronomy 30:19) tells us the secret.

הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נִתְּנִי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבַחֲרַתְּ בַחַיִּים לְמַעַן תַּחֲיֶה אֶתְּךָ וְזָרְעֶךָ
*Hashem says, "I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse; **and you shall choose life**, so that you will live and so shall your offspring."*

What life shall one choose? The Seforno explains it in two words - Eternal life.

(יט) ובחרת בחיים. **בחיי עד**

One's obligation is to fulfill his mission in this world. That is, to use his G-d given gifts and talents to fulfill Hashem's prescription – keeping the Torah and the Mitzvot – to attain eternal life.

With this, one satisfies his obligation to Hashem as well, because it is for this purpose alone – that one acquire eternal life for himself – that Hashem has placed him in this world. By making oneself worthy of Hashem's reward, he is achieving Hashem's purpose for having put him here.

That's the easy part. Doing the mitzvot between man and himself and man and Hashem comes naturally to a person. What "separates the men from the boys" is a person's obligation between himself and others. These require much thought and wherewithal to perfect. The Torah is replete with scenarios – exercises – through which a person can practice and perfect himself in this area.

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 must 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?"

A person with assets must take responsibility to see to it that his possessions cause no harm or damage to others, a topic that 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. I must be sure to do nothing out of line to injure his self-respect; it is 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 Iloye's students could cover themselves with one blanket.

יראת ה' היא תתהלל זה דורו של רבי יהודה ברבי אילעאי אמרו עליו על רבי יהודה ברבי אילעאי שהיו ששה תלמידים מתכסין בטלית אחת ועוסקין בתורה

"This refers to the generation of Rabbi Yehudah ben Iloye. They said about Rabbi Yehudah ben Iloye that six of his students could cover themselves with one blanket and study the Torah."

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz זצ"ל (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 who did the same; and in this way, everyone had the blanket when he needed to be warm. Apparently,

Rabbi Yehuda ben Iloye 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. Indeed, in Jewish communities the world over, there is currently occurring a manifestation of this type of kindness.

This week's parsha Reeh is replete with verses instructing us to take care of each other. Chapter 15:7-10 says,

ז) כִּי יְהִי בְךָ אֶבְיוֹן מֵאֶחָד אַחֶיךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְדוּד אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לֹא תֹאמַץ אֶת לְבַבְךָ וְלֹא תִקְפֹּץ אֶת יָדְךָ מֵאֶחָיִךְ הָאֶבְיוֹן.

ח) כִּי פָתַח תִּפְתַּח אֶת יָדְךָ לוֹ וְהֵעֵבֵט תֵּעֲבִיטְנוּ דֵי מַחְסְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יַחְסֵר לוֹ

7) 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.

*8) 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 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, the community would have to provide someone to run and announce him. This is what is meant by “whatever he lacks.”

In that regard, the Talmud (Ketubot 67b) tells an astounding story about the great Hillel the Elder.

תנו רבנן די מחסורו אתה מצווה עליו לפרנסו ואי אתה מצווה עליו לעשרו
אשר יחסר לו אפילו סוס לרכוב עליו ועבד לרוץ לפניו אמרו עליו על הלל הזקן שלקח

לעני בן טובים אחד סוס לרכוב עליו ועבד לרוץ לפניו פעם אחת לא מצא עבד לרוץ לפניו ורוץ לפניו שלשה מילין

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 so for three miles.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz זצ"ל 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:

(ט) הַשְּׁמֵר לָךְ פֶּן יְהִיֶּה דְבָר עִם לְבָבְךָ בְּלִיעֵל לְאֹמֶר קָרְבָה שְׁנַת הַשְּׁבַע שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה וְרָעָה עֵינֶיךָ בְּאָחִיךָ הָאֲבִיוֹן וְלֹא תִתֵּן לוֹ וְקָרָא עָלֶיךָ אֶל יְדוּד וְהָיָה בְּךָ חָטָא
(י) נָתַתָּן תִּתֵּן לוֹ וְלֹא יִרַע לְבָבְךָ בְּתִתְּךָ לוֹ כִּי בְּגִלְלֵי הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה יְבָרְכֶךָ יְדוּד אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בְּכָל מַעֲשֶׂה וּבְכָל מְשָׁלַח יָדְךָ

9) Beware, lest there be a lawless thought in your heart, saying, "The seventh year approaches, the remission year and you will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and refuse to give him – then he may appeal against you to Hashem and it will be a sin upon you.

10) 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 who was lending money?

On Rosh Hashanah of the seventh (Sabbatical) year, the Torah mandates the cancellation of all unsecured (that is, uncollateralized) debts. The lender may not ask the borrower for his money back, the Torah having cancelled the loan. (The borrower should pay back the loan anyway, but he is not a thief if he doesn't.) 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 next verse says, ***“You shall give him, and give him again.”*** What is the meaning of the double giving? The Sages explain that in the merit of your giving him this time, Hashem will give you the wherewithal to give him again. Hashem is saying, “Trust me, and I will make it up to you!”

Another commandment in this week's parsha instructs us to give a tenth of our produce to the Levite who has no source of income other than the land owners' presents.

כב) עֵשֶׂר תַעֲשֶׂר אֶת כָּל תְּבוּאֹת זְרַעְךָ הַיֵּצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה

22) You shall annually tithe the entire crop of your planting, the produce of the field.

The Sages ask as well about the double wording in the Hebrew עֵשֶׂר תַעֲשֶׂר - *aser te'aser*. To answer this, the Midrash (Tanchuma Reeh 18) makes a play on words (that only works in Hebrew) to explain it.

יח) עֵשֶׂר תַעֲשֶׂר עֵשֶׂר בְּשִׁבִיל שֶׁתַעֲשֶׂר עֵשֶׂר כְּדִי שֶׁלֹא תִחְסַר

Take a tenth so that you should become wealthy. Take a tenth so that you should not lack for anything.

The Torah is teaching us that by giving a tenth of our wealth to charity, we will become wealthy and lack nothing. Create wealth by giving away money? That sounds a bit 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 Turnus Rufus, a Roman general:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף י/א
וזו שאלה שאל טורנוסרופוס הרשע את ר"ע אם אלקיכם אוהב עניים הוא מפני מה
אינו מפרנסם?
א"ל 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 Gehinam through them."*

That is, without poor people, there would be nobody to whom to give charity, and we would be unable to save ourselves from death and *Gehinam*.

Two identical verses in Proverbs (10:2, 11:4) inform us

וְצִדְקָה תִצְּלֵל מִמָּוֶת

2) And charity saves from death.

One verse tells us that charity saves from death, and the other teaches that it saves us from the difficult judgment of *Gehinam*.

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. 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 Yisroel Meir Hakohen Kagan, זצ"ל, explains how giving a tenth of one's earnings to the poor makes a person wealthier.

Because the wealthy person must give 10% of his income to the poor, Hashem has provided him with extra money to dispense. So, in reality, for every \$100.00 that Hashem gives him, only \$90.00 of it is for *him*, and the other \$10.00 is for him to give to charity. If he doesn't give the poor person his \$10.00, Hashem has to find someone else to give it to him. So, Hashem then looks for someone who is a reliable and trustworthy executor and who always makes sure to give the extra 10% to the poor. When Hashem finds that person, He doubles his money, so that now he will give \$20. to the needy and make up for the person who failed to give his tenth. 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.

And don't think that the person who kept the \$10 earmarked for the poor will derive any benefit from the extra money that he kept. Because he was only entitled to \$90, he will lose the extra \$10 somewhere along the way. It is impossible for a person to have one iota more than what Hashem has prescribed for him.

Although it is generally forbidden to test Hashem, in the matter of charity Hashem has given us that right. The prophet Malachi (3:10) says:

י הָבִיאוּ אֶת כָּל הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל בֵּית הָאוֹצָר וְיִהְיֶה טֶרֶף בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֻנּוּנֵי נָא בְּזֹאת אָמַר יְדוּד
צְבָקוֹת אִם לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְבּוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרִיקֹתִי לָכֶם בְּרֶכֶה עַד בְּלִי דִי

10) 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 how 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 counterintuitive idea flies in the face of conventional thinking, that a person is the source of his own income and that his job and his financial prowess are responsible for his financial success. It is as clear as day to see. He goes to work in the morning, does his job, and gets paid at the end of the week.

The Torah teaches us otherwise. In the portion that we read last week, Ekev, (Deuteronomy 8:17,18) it says.

(יז) וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ כֹּחִי וְעַצְמִי יָדִי עָשָׂה לִי אֵת הַחֵיל הַזֶּה
(יח) וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת יְדֹוֹד אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הִנְתֵּן לְךָ כֹּחַ לַעֲשׂוֹת חַיִּיל

17) And you may say in your heart, "My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!" 18) Then you shall remember Hashem, it was He who gave you strength to make wealth ..."

The Targum (Aramaic translation of the Torah by Onkelos) adds a deeper dimension to this verse.

(יח) ותהוון דכירין ית יי אלקבון ארום הוא דיהב לבון עצה למקני ניבסין

And you should remember that Hashem is the One who gives you the advice to acquire wealth.

Yes, you are making the decisions and calling the shots really well. But Who is putting those brilliant ideas into your head? Hashem! And, sometimes, Hashem may put the wrong business ideas into a person's

head, and he will make one bad decision after the other until he loses everything that he has.

In the world at large, a person sees himself as the source of his earnings. Therefore, since his wealth is the product of his own hard work, his 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 Torah teaches us that Hashem provides a person’s livelihood, and it is Hashem Who has decides how much one will earn per year. For some reason, Hashem has decided that I should have money and that the poor fellow should not. It is not his fault that he is poor any more than it is my fault for being rich. It is Hashem’s call, and He can switch it around any time He wishes.

The Talmud (Beitza 16a) teaches us that a person’s wages for the new calendar year are determined from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur.

תני רב תחליפא כל מזונותיו של אדם קצובים לו מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים
אחיה דרבנאי חוזאה

Rav Tachlifa the brother of Ravnai from Choza said: All the sustenance that a person will receive this year is determined from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur.

This statement is very compelling. It teaches us that no matter how hard a person works, ultimately, he will remain with the same amount of money that Hashem determined that he should have on Rosh Hashana. A person decided that he wants to earn more money this year, and he put in many extra hours of work, and instead of earning \$200,000, he earned \$300,000. Unfortunately, he lost \$100,000 along the way through various mishaps. He thinks, “Whew, it’s a good thing I put in all that extra work! Had I not, I would have wound up with only \$100,000 this year!” The reality is, he would have had the same \$200,000 because he would

not have had to lose the extra hundred grand that he wasn't supposed to have.

Another place in this week's parsha where Hashem urges us to take care of the needy and downtrodden is in the commandment to rejoice on the Sukkot holiday.

The verse says (Deuteronomy 16:14):

יִדְּ וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּחֻגֵּי אֶתֶּה וּבְנֶךְ וּבִתֶּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וְהַלְוִי וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוּם וְהָאֵלְמָנָה
אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ

14) *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:

רש"י על דברים פרק טז פסוק יא
יא) והלוי והגר והיתום והאלמנה - ארבעה שלי כנגד ארבעה שלך בנך ובתך
ועבדך ואמתך 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.** 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 parsha 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.