**Inner Child – REISH ר and *Parshat Nitzavim***

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There’s a story that Rabbi Zevi Hirsh of Rymanov once complained to his teacher, Rabbi Menachem Mendel, that whenever he prayed, he saw fiery letters flash before his eyes.

“Ah – these are the mystical *kavanot* (contemplations) of our sacred master, Rabbi Isaac Luria,” replied Rabbi Mendel. “What cause do you have to complain?”

“But I just want to pray in a simple way, from my heart! I don’t need these mystical visions!” answered the disciple.

“What you have in mind is a very high level,” said Rabbi Mendel. “This is the level of having mystical experience, and then simply praying like a little child.”

While all the paths reveal the many intricacies of spirituality, the path of *reish* is the recognition that we are in the Presence of something that is infinitely beyond anything the mind can comprehend. The paths give us a map, but ר *reish* reminds us that the map is not the Territory, and that the appropriate attitude to have towards the Territory is always awe, always “beginner’s mind.” The path of ר *reish* is knowing that Reality is beyond what we can possibly think in our heads.

*Reish* ר actually means “head” (*rosh,* as in *Rosh Hashanah*) and also means “beginning,” as in the opening line of the Torah:

בְּרֵאשִׁ֖ית בָּרָ֣א אֱלֹהִ֑ים אֵ֥ת הַשָּׁמַ֖יִם וְאֵ֥ת הָאָֽרֶץ׃

*In the beginning (*Be**Reish**eet*) of Elohim creating heaven and earth…*

*Rosh Hashanah* is the “head” of the year, bringing the meanings of “head” and “beginning” together. There are actually four *Rosh Hashana*s – four “New Years” in the Jewish year, corresponding to four different letters in the *alef-bet* which all represent different kinds of “beginnings.”

The ordinal beginning is א *alef,* which is the first letter of the *alef-bet.* The phonetic beginning is ה *hei,* because ה *hei* is the pure exhalation, the breath that is behind all vocalized sounds.The visual form of every letter begins

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with י *yod,* the “point” that is formed when the pen first touches the parchment in the writing of every letter. *Reish* ר is actually “beginning” in its meaning.When you combine these four letters together in a certain order, you get: יראה *yirah –* which means something like “awe,” “respect,” or “fear.”

“Fear” is a bit misleading, as *yirah* is not a negative thing like “terror,” which can be paralyzing, but is rather an inspiring and motivating force. *Yirah* is more like “awe” and “respect,” the recognition of our vulnerability and the need for attentiveness and care, as in the way a mountain climber must be careful and attentive in their craft because of the danger involved. *Yirah* is knowing that we are in the Presence of the Divine, leading us to take seriously the needs of the moment; it is seeing this moment as “commandment.”

ס֥וֹף דָּבָ֖ר הַכֹּ֣ל נִשְׁמָ֑ע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִ֤ים יְרָא֙ וְאֶת־מִצְוֺתָ֣יו שְׁמ֔וֹר כִּי־זֶ֖ה כׇּל־הָאָדָֽם׃

*The end of the matter, when all is heard: Be in awe of the Divine and guard Its commandments, for this is the whole person.*

כִּ֚י אֶת־כׇּל־מַֽעֲשֶׂ֔ה הָאֱלֹהִ֛ים יָבִ֥א בְמִשְׁפָּ֖ט עַ֣ל כׇּל־נֶעְלָ֑ם אִם־ט֖וֹב וְאִם־רָֽע׃

ס֥וֹף דָּבָ֖ר הַכֹּ֣ל נִשְׁמָ֑ע אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִ֤ים יְרָא֙ וְאֶת־מִצְוֺתָ֣יו שְׁמ֔וֹר כִּי־זֶ֖ה כׇּל־הָאָדָֽם׃

*For all the works of the Divine are brought in judgment for all that is hidden, be it good or bad. The end of the matter, when all is heard: Be in awe of the Divine and guard Its commandments, for this is the whole person.*

- *Kohelet* (Ecclesiates) 12:13,14

Rabbi Moshe of Kobryn taught on this passage, “Whenever we come to the ‘end’ of anything, we will always hear this one maxim: *Et HaElohim y’ra –* ‘Be in *yirah* for the Divine.’ This is the Whole – there is not one thing in all the world that doesn’t teach us how to have *yirah;* all is *mitzvah…*”

All is *mitzvah –* there is no aspect of life in which we are not participating in an incomprehensible miracle; to take this moment seriously is to step up to what this moment “asks” of us – it is to receive this moment from the hands of God, and finding the commandment within it.

אַתֶּ֨ם נִצָּבִ֤ים הַיּוֹם֙ כֻּלְּכֶ֔ם לִפְנֵ֖י יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֵיכֶ֑ם רָאשֵׁיכֶ֣ם שִׁבְטֵיכֶ֗ם זִקְנֵיכֶם֙ וְשֹׁ֣טְרֵיכֶ֔ם כֹּ֖ל

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אִ֥ישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃

*You stand this day, all of you, before Hashem your Divinity—your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, every person of Israel…*

לְעָבְרְךָ֗ בִּבְרִ֛ית יְהוָ֥ה אֱלֹהֶ֖יךָ וּבְאָלָת֑וֹ אֲשֶׁר֙ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֔יךָ כֹּרֵ֥ת עִמְּךָ֖ הַיּֽוֹם׃

*…to enter into the covenant (BRIT) of Hashem your Divinity, and with its oaths (ALAH) which Hashem your Divinity seals with you this day…*

- *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 29:9, 11

אלה – *ALAH* is an interesting word; it can mean “oath,” but also “curse,” as well as “to lament” or “mourn.” One way to understand these meanings is that there will be suffering, a “curse” if we violate our oath, causing us then to lament and mourn.

But on a deeper level, these meanings point to the recognition that although life certainly brings us lamenting and mourning (as expressed in the letter נ *nun*), we should nevertheless dedicate ourselves to the Divine (צ *tzaddi*) and to the work of affirming the sacred (ק *koof*), through practice (*Netzakh*) and lovingkindness (*Hesed*).

Actually, we need not end there with *Hesed;* in truth, we could include all the paths and connect them to *yirah* and to ר *reish,* which is why *reish* and *yirah* are called the “Whole.”

אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִ֤ים יְרָא֙ וְאֶת־מִצְוֺתָ֣יו שְׁמ֔וֹר כִּי־זֶ֖ה כׇּל־הָאָדָֽם׃

*The end of the matter, when all is heard: Be in awe of the Divine and guard Its commandments, for this is the whole person.*

Another meaning of אלה *Alah,* “oath” is that when you slightly change the vowels, you get *eleh* – “these.”

The Zohar says that the word *eleh* (“these”) refers to the ten *sefirot*, which can be incorrectly interpreted to be separate deities. This is the psychological tendency to fixate on parts of Reality and not see the Whole. To this, *Kohelet* responds:

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רָאִ֙יתִי֙ אֶת־כׇּל־הַֽמַּעֲשִׂ֔ים שֶֽׁנַּעֲשׂ֖וּ תַּ֣חַת הַשָּׁ֑מֶשׁ וְהִנֵּ֥ה הַכֹּ֛ל הֶ֖בֶל וּרְע֥וּת רֽוּחַ׃

*I observed all the happenings beneath the sun, and I found that all is futile and pursuitof wind!*

- *Kohelet* (Ecclesiates) 1:14

All forms are temporary and ultimately unsatisfying; we should not make forms into gods, but rather focus on the Eternal Reality from which everything comes and to which everything eventually returns. As a remedy for this idolatrous tendency, the Zohar recommends a practice of inquiry in which one constantly asks the question, מי *mi?* meaning, “who?”

Through the asking of “who,” we can come to realize the inner identity of all “these” different forces – *eleh* combines with *mi,* and becomes *Elohim,* and “these” are revealed to be part of the One Reality. This is *yirah,* the path of *reish –* the recognition of the Divine miracle that is now present. This is the opposite of living from ego, which is psychological identification with separateness. It means living in loving service of the One, which is presently manifest *in* and *as* all beings.

But to do this, we need to make the effort; we must make an *ALAH* (oath) to know that *ELEH* (these) are really *ELOHIM* (One Reality that includes all plurality), and remember that when we forget this and worship the *ELEH* instead, this will only create more *ALAH* (suffering) for ourselves.

This is the essence of *teshuvah,* the primary spiritual movement of this time of *Elul –* returning to the One that is ever-present, and to bring forth this awareness in our words and deeds, in *yirat Hashem –* awe of the Divine.