**[Joy – Parshat Re'eh](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/joy-parshat-reeh)**

Once, when the Baal Shem Tov was leading prayers in the synagogue, he took so long to finish that all the hasidim left him and went home. Later that day, they came back for the afternoon service and found him still in deep prayer. When he finished, he said to them, “When you left me alone before, you dealt me a painful separation. Let me tell you a story:

“Once there was a beautiful, multicolored bird that flew south for the winter and came to a certain kingdom. The inhabitants sighted the unusual bird nesting up high in a tree, and they brought word to the king of this magnificent creature. The king bade them to build a human ladder, one person standing on the shoulders of another, so that they could climb up to the bird and bring it down to him. But just as the last person to climb up reached the bird, the people on the bottom became impatient and walked away, causing the whole human ladder to collapse.”

There is a power in community to support our collective spiritual efforts. It is true, no person can walk another person’s path; the journey to consciousness is one that each person must walk for themselves. But still, walking the path for oneself doesn’t have to mean walking it by oneself. As each of us walks our own paths, we support each other to stay commited and connected to the teachings and the practice. Community is the foundation, the yesod of the path.

But, how it is that community functions in this foundational way? To answer that we need to look at another Baal Shem Tov story:

As Yom Kippur drew to a close, the time came say the blessing over the new moon. To say this prayer, it is necessary to actually see the moon in the sky. But, on this particular evening, the sky was overcast and the moon was not to be seen.

The Baal Shem Tov had the sense that a great calamity was coming to the Jewish people, but that he could avert the calamity, if only he could say the blessing on the new moon. He concentrated all his powers on parting the clouds so that the moon would shine through, but to no avail. Eventually he lost hope, and went into his room, grief stricken about the evils that were to come.

Meanwhile, the other hasidim who knew nothing of what the Baal Shem Tov was going through, began to sing and dance in ecstasy, so happy they were that their master had successfully led them through the Day of Atonement. As their ecstasy grew, the throng made their way into the Baal Shem Tov’s room, and they drew him into the dance. His spirits were lifted as he began to move and sing with his hasidim. Just at that moment, a hasid ran excitedly into the room to report that the moon had just become visible, and that they could now say the blessing…

In this second story, not only do we see the power of community, but we also understand the mechanism of that power: joy.

Joy, or positivity, is the deeper foundation of the path, facilitated by community. Without it, the spiritual potentials of our being are still there, but they remain un-actualized in life; they remain only potentials. This is why the sefirah of Yesod, which represents joy and connection, is the point of connection between the upper sefirot (spiritual potentials) andMalkhut, the world of time in which our lives unfold.

This foundational quality of joy is expressed in the Psalm:

עִבְדוּ אֶת יהוה בְּשמְחָה בּאוּ לְפָנָיו בִּרְנָנָה
Serve the Divine with joy; come before the Divine with joyous song…
     - Psalm 100:2

But, it is important to understand: this kind of foundational joy is not a negation of grief or sorrow; it is a way of relating with grief and sorrow. In this sense, (spiritual) joy is not an ordinary emotion; it is a quality of the consciousness that becomes aware of ordinary emotions. It is within our power to access this quality at any moment, even and especially in dark moments.

There is a hint in the parshah:

רְאֵ֗ה אָנֹכִ֛י נֹתֵ֥ן לִפְנֵיכֶ֖ם הַיּ֑וֹם בְּרָכָ֖ה וּקְלָלָֽה׃
See, I set before you today blessing and curse.

     - Deuteronomy 11:26

Brakhah uklala, blessing and curse, are ever the potentials before us. They are set before us hayom – “today” – meaning, they are not merely consequences that we’ll have to deal with later; they are inherent within this moment. Which shall we choose?

אֶֽת־הַבְּרָכָ֑ה אֲשֶׁ֣ר תִּשְׁמְע֗וּ אֶל־מִצְוֺת֙ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹֽהֵיכֶ֔ם אֲשֶׁ֧ר אָנֹכִ֛י מְצַוֶּ֥ה אֶתְכֶ֖ם הַיּֽוֹם׃
Blessing, if you listen the mitzvot of Hashem, your Divinity, that I command you today;

     - Deuteronomy 11:27

Meaning, “listen” – be aware of this moment as it appears – that is the “commandment.” In this deep listening, this being present with the reality of the moment, there can be the realization of blessing, the joy inherent within the awareness itself that listens.

And through the window of this fundamental blessing of being conscious, other spiritual qualities can manifest as well, represented by the five sefirot above Yesod: Hesed(lovingkindness), Gevurah (strength), Tiferet (beauty, radiant presence), Netzakh(persistence), and Hod (humility, gratitude).

The parshah hints at these upper sefirot as well:

וְהָיָ֣ה הַמָּק֗וֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר֩ יְהוָ֨ה אֱלֹהֵיכֶ֥ם בּוֹ֙ לְשַׁכֵּ֤ן שְׁמוֹ֙ שָׁ֔ם שָׁ֣מָּה תָבִ֔יאוּ אֵ֛ת כָּל־אֲשֶׁ֥ר אָנֹכִ֖י מְצַוֶּ֣ה אֶתְכֶ֑ם עוֹלֹתֵיכֶ֣ם וְזִבְחֵיכֶ֗ם מַעְשְׂרֹֽתֵיכֶם֙ וּתְרֻמַ֣ת יֶדְכֶ֔ם וְכֹל֙ מִבְחַ֣ר נִדְרֵיכֶ֔ם אֲשֶׁ֥ר תִּדְּר֖וּ לַֽיהוָֽה׃
And it will be that the Place that Hashem your Divinity chooses Its Name to dwell, you shall bring everything I command you – your Ascensions, your offerings, your tithes and those that you elevate with your hands, and all your choicest vows that you vow to the Divine.

     - Deuteronomy 12:11-12

וְהָיָ֣ה הַמָּק֗וֹם – V’hayah HaMakom – And it will be, the Place…

The “Place” that is chosen is the Place we are now in; in fact, the Divine and the Place are not two separate things. V’hayah, “and will be,” is in fact the Divine Name with the letters in a slightly different order, and HaMakom, The Place, is itself a Divine Name. The message is: it is always to This Place that we must bring our offerings. These five offerings embody the five spiritual qualities, represented by the sefirot:

עוֹלֹתֵיכֶ֣ם ­­– Oloteikhem – “Your Ascensions” is Tiferet, the transcendent beauty of Presence.

זִבְחֵיכֶ֗ם – Zivheikhem – “Offerings” is Hesed, the spirit of love and giving.

מַעְשְׂרֹֽתֵיכֶם֙ – Ma’sroteikhem – “Tithes” is Gevurah, the inner strength to not take only for oneself, to give up something for the sake of others.

תְרֻמַ֣ת יֶדְכֶ֔ם – T’rumat Yedkhem – “Elevated with your hands” is Hod, which means “elevating” one’s actions through humility and gratitude. And finally:

מִבְחַ֣ר נִדְרֵיכֶ֔ם – Mivhar Nidreikhem – “Choicest of your Vows” is Netzakh, which is commiting to a path and following through with consistency and vigilance.

All of these qualities are dependent on the foundation (Yesod) of joy, as the next verse expresses:

וּשְׂמַחְתֶּ֗ם לִפְנֵי֮ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹֽהֵיכֶם֒ אַתֶּ֗ם וּבְנֵיכֶם֙ וּבְנֹ֣תֵיכֶ֔ם וְעַבְדֵיכֶ֖ם וְאַמְהֹתֵיכֶ֑ם וְהַלֵּוִי֙ אֲשֶׁ֣ר בְּשַֽׁעֲרֵיכֶ֔ם כִּ֣י אֵ֥ין ל֛וֹ חֵ֥לֶק וְנַחֲלָ֖ה אִתְּכֶֽם׃
And you shall rejoice (s’makhtem) before the Hashem your Divinity with your sons and daughters, with your male and female servants, along with the Levite in your gates, for they have no portion or inheritance among you…

     - Deuteronomy 12:11-12

This is the power of community – to lift up one another, to spark the flame of joy in those who have lost connection with their own inner joy.

The Haftora hints as well at the renewal of spirit available through Yesod:
עֲנִיָּ֥ה סֹעֲרָ֖ה לֹ֣א נֻחָ֑מָה הִנֵּ֨ה אָנֹכִ֜י מַרְבִּ֤יץ בַּפּוּךְ֙ אֲבָנַ֔יִךְ וִיסַדְתִּ֖יךְ בַּסַּפִּירִֽים׃
Afflicted, storm-tossed, uncomforted one, behold! I will lay your floor stones upon pearl(Malkhut) and make your foundations (y’sad’ti, Yesod) with sapphires (five sefirot) …

     - Isaiah 54:11

Joy is the basic spiritual nourishment, but unlike food and water which must be purchased with money, joy is purchased with something else:

ה֤וֹי כָּל־צָמֵא֙ לְכ֣וּ לַמַּ֔יִם וַאֲשֶׁ֥ר אֵֽין־ל֖וֹ כָּ֑סֶף לְכ֤וּ שִׁבְרוּ֙ וֶֽאֱכֹ֔לוּ וּלְכ֣וּ שִׁבְר֗וּ בְּלוֹא־כֶ֛סֶף וּבְל֥וֹא מְחִ֖יר יַ֥יִן וְחָלָֽב׃
Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water, even if you have no money; come, buy food and eat; buy food without money, wine and milk without cost.

     - Isaiah 55:1

This nourishment is still “bought,” but not with “money,” not with “cost” – meaning, unlike when we purchase with money, we don’t lose anything. Joy still must be purchased – meaning, there is an effort to be made, there is a path to walk. But this effort doesn’texpend our resources, it makes available our deepest resources.

What must we do to purchase joy?

Just smile…

***More on Re'eh***

[**Seeing the Whole – Parshat Re'eh**
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/seeing-the-whole-parshat-reeh)
 רְאֵ֗ה אָנֹכִ֛י נֹתֵ֥ן לִפְנֵיכֶ֖ם הַיּ֑וֹם בְּרָכָ֖ה וּקְלָלָֽה
*“See, I set before you today blessing and curse”*
(Deuteronomy 11:26)

This is the message to us in every moment: life is both blessing and curse, pleasure and pain, sweetness and bitterness, fullness and loss.

אֶֽת־הַבְּרָכָ֑ה אֲשֶׁ֣ר תִּשְׁמְע֗וּ אֶל־מִצְות֙ ... אֲשֶׁ֧ר אָנֹכִ֛י מְצַוֶּ֥ה אֶתְכֶ֖ם הַיּֽוֹם וְהַקְּלָלָ֗ה אִם־לֹ֤א תִשְׁמְעוּ֙
*“Blessing, if you listen to the mitzvot … that I command you today, and curse, if you do not listen…”*

Both blessing and curse are ever-present features of outer experience. Nevertheless, there is an inner potential for *either* blessing *or*curse in how we *relate*to our outer experience:

*“If you listen… today”* – that is, if you can be present with both blessing and curse, receiving it as *mitzvah, as commandment,*and surrendering to the truth of your actual experience, then you can notice: beyond the sorrow and joy, there is a blessedness that comes from simple openness to the moment – a blessedness which is awareness itself, which is knowing yourself *as* this awareness. Then, even the curses are like blessings, because through awareness of the curses, you can come to know yourself as blessedness.

*“And curse, if you do not listen” –*that is, if we don’t receive the present moment as it is, with its mixture of blessing and curse, we forfeit the deeper blessedness which is our birthright and our nature.

וְסַרְתֶּ֣ם מִן־הַדֶּ֔רֶךְ אֲשֶׁ֧ר אָנֹכִ֛י מְצַוֶּ֥ה אֶתְכֶ֖ם הַיּ֑וֹם
“*but turn away from the path that I command you today…”*

The path is always present before us, if we would turn toward it rather than resist it.

לָלֶ֗כֶת אַחֲרֵ֛י אֱלֹהִ֥ים אֲחֵרִ֖ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר לֹֽא־יְדַעְתֶּֽם –
*“and run after other gods, whom you have not known...”*

When we turn away from the present moment, “running” in our minds after the blessings we want, or running away from the curses we don’t want, we sacrifice the Real for the imaginary, worshiping the idols of thought and ignoring ever-present Reality. Then, even the blessings can be like curses – taken for granted, missed meetings with Reality.

*So, embrace life as it is:* blessing and curse, pleasure and pain, sweetness and bitterness, fullness and loss, and uncover the deeper blessedness of Being – the blessedness which is not at all separate from the vast openness of awareness that you are:

וְשָׂמַחְתָּ֞ לִפְנֵ֣י ׀ יְהוָ֣ה אֱלֹהֶ֗יךָ
*“And you shall rejoice before Reality, your own Divinity…”*

[**The Finger – Parshat Re'eh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-finger-parshat-reeh)

One time, when my wife's parents were visiting, we went out for a big family dinner. After we ordered, we waited and waited for the food to come, but nothing came. After about a half hour or so, the family started to get restless and irritated. Eventually one of us called the waiter over to ask what's going on.

"Yes, I'm so sorry!" said the waiter, "We're having a hard time in the kitchen, but it's coming soon, I promise!"

This happened over and over – he kept saying it was coming soon, it's about to come out, but it never came out. Finally, he came over again: "I'm so sorry – The chef chopped his finger off by accident, but I promise you the food is coming out in like two minutes – I promise!"

Oh my God! How horrible! But we kept waiting; ten minutes go by, fifteen minutes go by, still nothing. Finally our five-year-old girl says, "Do you think he chopped off his other finger?"

We've all had experiences like this, waiting and waiting for something. There's some expectation that's not getting fulfilled, and a feeling of irritation arises. Then, for most of us, there is a kind of inner separation occurs, a "turning away" from whatever the  experience is, a "dis-ease" with the reality of the moment. I might describe it as the opposite of relaxing into a hot tub. It's the opposite of being really tired and lying down and drifting to sleep. It's the opposite of enjoying the moment. There's a dis-ease, a resistance, a sense of judgment that happens almost automatically in the presence of discomfort.

But, it's possible for discomfort to arise and *not* make the decision to disconnect. But to do that, we have to make another decision: to simply come close to the feeling that we're having – to be *karov.*

Then, miraculously, the discomfort becomes less significant, and the more significant thing is simply the *energy of consciousness that's taking the form of the discomfort;*because underneath the discomfort is your own life energy. It's your own consciousness.

Yes, consciousness can take the shape of irritation due to some expectation that's not being met. But when you come close to it – when you say, "Okay, I'm going to be *Karov* – intimate – with this feeling," then it's just as if you were to relax into a hot tub. That's the that's the profound shift.

To do this, it doesn't take much intellect; you just decide to do it. But there are also ways of thinking that can help us be *karov.* One way is summed up in the phrase, *"Gam zu l'tovah- This is also for the good*."

Once there was a king who had a trusted minister, and the minister would be with the king all the time and give him good advice.

One day, when the king was chopping some vegetables, he accidentally cut his finger really deeply with a knife. "Oh, how could I do that? I was paying such close attention!"

He calls his minister: "Can you explain to me how I did this? It seemed like the knife jumped out of my hand!"

*"Gam zu l'tovah–* this too is for the good!" said the minister.

"What do you mean?" yelled the king. "How could you say g*am zu l'tovah?* You're out of here! Send this guy to the dungeon!"

So the minister gets thrown in the dungeon. *"Gam zu l'tovah,"* the minister said again.

A little while later, the king went on a hunt with his hunting companions. Suddenly, he catches a glimpse of a deer and starts swiftly chasing after it, going deep into the forest, away from all the other companions. The deer gets away, and the king is left all alone, lost in the forrest. Eventually he gets tired, so he ties up his horse, sits under a tree and dozes off.

A little while later, he hears some kind of weird sound. He wakes up to find a huge lion sniffing him. He doesn't know what to do. He's terrified! The lion's throat is growling as he sniffs. Suddenly, the lion draws back his head, makes a face and runs away.

"I can't believe it!" the king says to himself. He calls out for his companions. Eventually they find him, and they all return to the palace.

"I'll have to call back my minister from the dungeon to ask about this!"

So he calls back the minister and tells the whole story. The minister says, "Yes of course!*Gam zu l'tovah!* That's why you cut your finger. Just as you are the king, and when we serve you food it should always be unblemished, so too the king of the beasts wants unblemished food. When the lion realized you had this cut on your finger, he thought you were not fit for the king of the beasts, and so he left."

The King was impressed. "Very good!" he replied. "But what's so *gam zu l'tovah* about you getting thrown in the dungeon?"

"Well," said the minister, "of course you know that I'm always with you no matter what you're doing. So if you hadn't thrown me in the dungeon, I would have been with you hunting, and I would have been there with you under that tree. Since I don't have a cut of my finger, I would have gotten eaten by the lion!"

Can we frame the moment so that we can see the ultimate goodness that will come from unpleasant experiences? Can we relax into whatever the moment brings, so we can be unified with it, so we can be *karov?* In other words, can we choose happiness over misery?

This week's reading is *Parshat Re'eh. Re'eh* means "see,"  which is is a metaphor for understanding, for "getting it" – like in English, when someone says, "Oh I *see."*

*“Re’eh anokhi notein lifneikhem hayom brakha uklalah-*
*"See- I place before you today blessing and curse.”*

Right now, there is this choice: blessing or curse. And what are the conditions for blessing or curse? It says it right there:

*Et habrakhah asher tishma’u el mitzvot- The blessing- that you listen!*

Very interesting. If you want blessing, then *tishma’u –* listen! Meaning: be fully present, be*karov,* with the fullness of your experience right now...

[**The Holodeck- Parshat Re'eh**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/torah-of-awakening-teachings-408656/the-holodeck-parshat-reeh)

Back in the early nineties, there was an episode of *Star Trek The Next Generation,* in which Commander Data was attempting to learn the meaning of humor. Data was an android, so he had trouble understanding certain human characteristics such as humor and other emotions.

To practice his humor, he goes into the “Holodeck”- a place on the ship that creates virtual realities. The “Holodeck” gives him a comedy club scene with an audience, and Data gets on the stage to practice his stand up routine.

At first, Data is pleased because the audience roars with laughter at his jokes. But after some time, Data notices something is fishy. He begins to deliberately say things that are not funny at all, but the audience still laughs. Data realizes that the Holodeck computer is simply making the audience laugh at whatever he says. Disappointed, Data leaves the stage.

Now, why is Data disappointed?

Of course, it’s because his goal is not to simply experience an audience laughing at him. His goal is to get funnier. To do that, he needs a realistic, critical audience to get good feedback.

Spiritually speaking, it’s the same. We need the friction of a world with both blessings and curses in order to master the art of life.

What is your goal in this life?

If your goal is only for the world to give you what you want, you had better get a Holodeck. Then you can program it to do whatever you want it to do.

But if your goal is to *master this life,* then the world is perfectly calibrated for helping you do that!

And what does it mean to “master this life?”

There was once a farmer named *Moishe,* who owned many horses. But, after a series of unfortunate incidents, he lost all of his animals except for one old horse. One day, his last horse escaped, leaving *Moishe* with nothing.

The villagers came to console him: *“Oy Moishe,* we are so sorry. What great sin could you have committed to bring this curse upon yourself?”

*Moishe* replied, “Maybe curse, maybe blessing. We don’t know.”

Later that week, just before *Shabbos,* the horse returned- with an entire herd of wild horses! *Moishe’s* son was able to move all the wild horses into their fenced field. Instantly, *Moishe* was a rich man.

The villagers returned: *“Oy Moishe!* What a blessing! Surely you have done some great *mitzvah* to deserve such a reward!”

*Moishe* just said, “Maybe a blessing, maybe a curse! Who knows?”

After *Shabbos, Moishe’s* son began the task of breaking in the wild horses. While he was working a particularly feisty one, he was thrown and broke his leg.

Again the villagers came: *“Oy Moishe,* I guess those horses were not such a blessing after all! Now your only son is worthless! How will you get any work done? How could you have brought such a curse upon yourself?”

*Moishe* simply replied, “Well, we really don’t know… maybe it’s a curse, maybe it’s a blessing.”

The next day, some Russian soldiers came through the village, drafting all the young Jewish men into the army. But, *Moishe’s* son was spared on account of his broken leg.

Again the villagers came- *“Oy Moishe! Hashem* has surely blessed you by causing your son to break his leg!”

Where does it end?

Mastering life means getting free from the impulse to constantly judge everything.

Of course, it’s natural, and to a certain degree necessary, to judge. But if you are constantly blown around by the shifting winds of circumstance, compulsively judging everything that happens as either a blessing or a curse, isn’t that itself a curse?

This week’s reading begins with the words:

*“Re’eh anokhi notein lifneikhem hayom brakha uklalah-*
*"See- I place before you today blessing and curse.”*

“Today”- meaning *now-* there is the potential for either blessing or curse.

How to choose the blessing?

It goes on to say,

*“Et habrakhah asher tishma’u el mitzvot-*
*"The blessing- that you listen to the commandments.”*

There are three levels of meaning here in the word *“mitzvot”*or “commandments.”

First, this moment in which we find ourselves is itself a “commandment.” Meaning, it is what it is. It has authority. We surrender to this moment or we struggle in vain. This moment has already become what it is!

The second level of meaning is that *“mitzvah”*is related to the Aramaic word *“tzavta”* which means not “to command”, but “to connect”.

How do you connect deeply with someone? By listening to them!

So the image of “listening” to the *"mitzvah"* is a metaphor for connecting. When we “hear” what someone is saying, it means that we deeply connect with the speaker-*“I really hear you, man!”*

So if you want blessing and not curse, connect with *hayom-* this moment- be present to what is, regardless of whether it seems like a blessing or a curse to your mind or your heart.

Accept the blessing and the curse- that’s the blessing!
Prefer the blessing and not the curse- that’s the curse!

But in order to do that, you have to be aware of your situation:

*“Re’eh- See- I place before you today blessing and curse.”*

The sense of “hearing” is a metaphor for connecting, while the sense of “seeing” is a metaphor for understanding. We “see” that something is the case- *“Oh, I see now!”*

The automatic, unconscious impulse is to be like the villagers, stuck in the curse of judging blessings and curses. It’s only natural!

But to go beyond that, you need to be aware: Simply listen to the fullness of how it is. Let go of the judging mind.

Once you do that, you are free. Like Commander Data, you will be happy if the audience is not laughing at your jokes. That’s how you learn. Like the farmer, you will respond to each situation as it is, without the excess drama.

And that brings us to the third meaning of *“mitzvot”-*the plain meaning of “God’s commandments.”

When you free yourself from compulsive judgment, seeing the Whole, then you know you are not something separate from the Whole. Your actions flow from that Oneness, in service of the Whole- in service of God. Then, all your actions are truly *mitzvot-*acts of service to the One.

On this *Shabbat Re’eh,* the "Sabbath of Seeing," may we all “see” our Divine potential in this moment, to “hear” the Divine Voice *as*this moment, and to *do* blessing for each other moment by moment, uniting heaven and earth one step at a time.

Good Shabbos!
-b yosef