



Reish

“Wisdom of Uncertainty”

Invocation Verse:

רְצוֹן יִרְאֵיו יַעֲשֶׂה וְאֶת־שׁוֹעֲתָם יִשְׁמַע וַיּוֹשִׁיעֵם
R'tzon y'reiav ya'aseh v'et shavatam yishma v'yoshieim
*The Divine fulfills the desires of those with awe;
The Divine hears their cries and saves them!*
(Psalm 145:18)

Meaning and Mystical Associations:

In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, *reish* is one of the seven “double letters” and represents the quality of wisdom, the astrological planet of Jupiter, the left nostril in the human body, and Friday in time.

Text

רַבִּי לְוִיטָס אִישׁ יִבְנֶה אוֹמֵר, מְאֹד מְאֹד הָיָה נִשְׁפָּל רוּחַ, שֶׁתְּקוּנַת אָנוּשׁ רַמָּה.
Rabbi Levitas of Yavneh said,
“Be very, very humble of spirit, for the awaited end of a person is worms.”
-Pirkei Avot 4:4

רַבִּי חֲנִינָא בֶן דּוֹסָא אוֹמֵר, כָּל שִׁירְאָת חֲטָאוֹ קוֹדֶמֶת לְחֻכָּמָתוֹ, חֻכָּמָתוֹ מִתְקַיֶּמֶת. וְכָל שֶׁחֻכָּמָתוֹ
קוֹדֶמֶת לְיִרְאָת חֲטָאוֹ, אֵין חֻכָּמָתוֹ מִתְקַיֶּמֶת. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, כָּל שֶׁמַּעֲשָׂיו מְרַבֵּין מִחֻכָּמָתוֹ, חֻכָּמָתוֹ
מִתְקַיֶּמֶת. וְכָל שֶׁחֻכָּמָתוֹ מְרַבֶּה מִמַּעֲשָׂיו, אֵין חֻכָּמָתוֹ מִתְקַיֶּמֶת:

Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa said: “Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom is enduring, but anyone whose wisdom precedes his fear of sin, his wisdom is not enduring.” He (also) used to say: “Anyone whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom is enduring, but anyone whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom is not enduring.”
-Pirkei Avot 3:11, 12

Story

When Rabbi Dov Baer, the Maggid of Metzritch was yet unknown and very poor, he and his wife often did not even have food to eat, sometimes for days at a time. The Maggid never complained, but accepted everything with simplicity. Later it happened that they had their first child. One day, when they hadn't eaten in days and the baby could no longer nurse or even cry, the Maggid let out a sigh of despair. Instantly, a Voice came from heaven and said to him, “You have lost your share in the World to Come.”

The Maggid smiled and rejoiced, giving thanks that now he could serve the Divine completely for its own sake, now that the reward had been done away with...

Kabbalah Commentary (Based on The Aleph Beit by Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh)

Reish is near the end of the *alef-bet*, but it's meaning is “beginning” or “head,” as in *Rosh Hashanah*. And just as there are four *Rosh Hashanas* – four New Years in the Jewish year, so there are four “beginnings” in the *alef-bet* as well: The ordinal beginning is *alef*, the first letter of the *alef-bet*. The phonetic beginning is *hei*, because *hei* is the pure exhalation that is behind all vocalized sounds. The visual form begins with *yod*, the “point” that begins the writing of every letter. *Reish* is the beginning in terms of meaning.

When you combine those four letters together in a certain order, you get יראה – *yirah* – “awe” or “fear.”

This all points to the verse in Psalm 112, verse 10:

רֵאשִׁית חֵכְמָה יִרְאַת יְהוָה | *Reisheet hokhmah yirat Hashem* – *The beginning of wisdom is fear/awe of the Divine.*

This is because the inner environment for wisdom and insight to arise is what is called *bitul*, or “selflessness” – meaning, the absence of ego. Ego is the opposite of “awe of the Divine,” because the ego’s normal tendency to be concerned with itself and its image is curtailed by a sense of reverence and awe before the grandeur of even fearsomeness of Reality. This awe/fear breaks ego and coarseness/insensitivity, “circumcising” the heart, in a sense.

The two letters that “fill” the letter *reish* רי are שי – *yod-shin*, spelling *yesh*, which means “somethingness.” The idea is that through *yirah*, awe/fear, our sense of being “something” which is normally associated with ego, instead becomes a vessel for true wisdom. The path to this is simultaneously recognizing our own insecurity and uncertainty, and cultivating awe and reverence for the Mystery that underlies all life.

Practice

Reish Meditation and Chant

Bring to mind the fragility and uncertainty of everything, and know that we come from the Divine and return to the Divine. Take a moment to pray, acknowledging our utter dependence on Grace.

Then, anchor this awareness with the chant:

רְצוֹן יִרְאַיוּ יַעֲשֶׂה וְאֶת־שׁוֹעֲתָם יִשְׁמַע וְיוֹשִׁיעֵם
R'tzon y'raiav ya'aseh v'et shavatam yishma v'yoshieim

Daily Practice

1. Practice the *Reish* meditation and chant the Invocation Verse.
2. Open meditation with the Ten *Sefirot* and *Sh'ma*, adding the *reish* (see the practice sheet).
3. Spend some time in silent meditation. 20 minutes is wonderful, 2 minutes is infinitely better than nothing!