## Vibration – פ PEI and Parshat Re’eh

**The Holodeck**

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 experiences.

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 up 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.

**Mastery and Adversity**

Why is Data disappointed?

Of course, it is 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 give him good feedback.

Spiritually speaking, it is the same. We need the friction of a world with both blessings and curses in order to practice our responses to different experiences and master the art of life. But to do this, we need to be clear that we want to do this; we need to know what our goal is for this life we are in.

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…

**Beyond Good and Bad**

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 following behind! *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?

**Parshat Re’eh**

רְאֵ֗ה אָנֹכִ֛י נֹתֵ֥ן לִפְנֵיכֶ֖ם הַיּ֑וֹם בְּרָכָ֖ה וּקְלָלָֽה׃

*See, I set before you today blessing and curse.*

*- Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 11:26, *Parshat Re’eh*

הַיּוֹם *Hayom – Today* means now! In this moment, there is the potential for either blessing or curse; it is our choice:

אֶֽת־הַבְּרָכָ֑ה אֲשֶׁ֣ר תִּשְׁמְע֗וּ אֶל־מִצְוֺת֙

*The blessing, that you listen to the commandments.*

-11:27

There are three levels of meaning for the word *mitzvot –* “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.

This recognition of the authority of the moment is expressed by the farmer in the story in a simple way: “Maybe blessing, maybe curse – we don’t know.” Meaning, it is futile for us to expend energy judging something that is beyond our control.

There are other ways of expressing this truth. For example, we might say, “There is no use resisting what is. We must work with the moment as it appears; we must work with what we’ve got.” This would the ו *vav* approach, accepting what comes our way and not getting caught by reactivity.

Or, we might frame it in a more devotional way: “*Hashem* has given me this situation, so I trust *Hashem* and accept that this what I need to work with right now.” This would be more of a י *yod* approach.

Whichever path we walk in order to embrace the reality of whatever comes our way, the *expression* of this wisdom in words is the path of פ *pei,* the “mouth.” The path of פ *pei* is about words of teaching – the meanings of the words, but also the *sounds* of the words, the vibrational reality of things, which brings us to the second level of meaning of *mitzvah:*

The word *mitzvah* is related to the Aramaic word צותא *tzavta* which means not “to command,” but rather “to connect” or “to join together.”

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

So the sense of “listening” is a metaphor for connecting. When we say that we “hear” what someone is saying, it means that we are connecting with the speaker: “I hear you!”

So if you want to connect with the underlying blessing before you, listen deeply to the *vibration* of this moment, rather than just the surface of the situation, which we tend to judge as good or bad. This is the other side of פ *pei,* which is *listening* to the “vibration” or “feel” of the moment rather than merely judging it conceptually.

Connect with both the blessing and the curse – that’s the blessing!

Prefer the blessing and resist the curse – that’s the curse!

This principle is power behind music; music can express a vast spectrum of emotion, both sweet and bitter, and yet even within the most bitter is a sweetness when expressed in music! This is because music has the power to draw us into full embrace of whatever is being expressed. And in this embrace of the expression of music, we are deeply nourished. This is another dimension of the path of פ *pei –* that our consciousness is nourished by the vibratory sounds of *Torah* and *tefilah,* teaching and prayer.

But in order to receive this nourishment, we have to be aware of our situation:

רְאֵ֗ה אָנֹכִ֛י נֹתֵ֥ן לִפְנֵיכֶ֖ם הַיּ֑וֹם בְּרָכָ֖ה וּקְלָלָֽה׃

*Re’eh –* *See, I set before you today blessing and curse.*

רְאֵה *Re’eh –* *See*…

Just as the sense of “hearing” is a metaphor for connecting, so the sense of “seeing” is a metaphor for understanding. We “see” that something is the case: “Oh, I see now!”

What should we see?

בְּרָכָ֖ה וּקְלָלָֽה *Barakha u’klalah – blessing and curse…*

On the level of ordinary perception, blessing and curse are not optional; there will always be a spectrum of experience. It is in our *response* that we have some choice. The automatic, unconscious impulse is to be like the villagers, stuck in the “curse” of judging blessings and curses. What is the way out?

אָנֹכִ֛י נֹתֵ֥ן לִפְנֵיכֶ֖ם הַיּ֑וֹם *Anokhi notein lifneikhem hayom – I place before you today…*

Behind all the blessings and curses is the One Reality. If we want to go beyond the duality of preference and connect with the blessing of the One Presence within all things, let go of the judging mind; *listen* to the fullness of how it is, to the vibration of this moment.

When we do that, we are free. Like Commander Data, it is not a problem if the audience doesn’t laugh at our jokes. That’s how we learn! Like the farmer, we can respond to each situation as it is, without the excess drama.

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

When we free ourselves from compulsive judgment, seeing the Whole, then we know we are not something separate from the Whole. Our actions can flow from that Oneness, in service of the Whole – in service of God.

This state of “living for God” (represented by the letter צ *tzaddie*) may seem far-fetched and out of reach. Nevertheless, it is a potential within us, and we can nurture that potential by articulating it – by contemplating it, saying it, and chanting it. This is the power of פ *pei,* to articulate a stage of consciousness that is higher than we actually are, and thus help bring forth our potential into actuality.

**The Sound of Blessing**

בְּרָכָ֖ה וּקְלָלָֽה *Brakhah uklala,* blessing and curse, are ever the potentials before us. They are set before us הַיּוֹם *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, not merely to the surface of experience but to its inner vibration, there can be the realization of the blessing within the *awareness itself* that listens, the awareness that we are on the deepest level.

And through the window of this fundamental blessing of being conscious, all of the thirty-two paths can manifest, which can be represented simply by just the seven lower *sefirot: Hesed* (lovingkindness), *Gevurah* (strength), *Tiferet* (beauty, radiant presence), *Netzakh* (persistence), *Hod* (humility, gratitude), *Yesod* (joy), and *Malkhut* (presence, relationship).

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.*

- *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 12:11-12, *Parshat Re’eh*

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,* “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. The five offerings embody five of 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 committing 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…*

- 2:11-12

This is the power of sound – to bring forth all of our spiritual potential into actuality, so that it is available to us even in the midst of the storms of life. As the *Haftora* says:

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* (the five upper *sefirot*)*…*

- Isaiah 54:11

Sound delivers the most basic spiritual nourishment, but unlike food and water which must be purchased with money, spiritual nourishment 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

Spiritual 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’t *expend* our resources, it *makes available* our deepest resources.

How do we “purchase” the spiritual nourishment we need?

Sing!