

Parashat Re'eh 5773 (2013)

Dear Chavraya,

I learned much from our little grandson, Leo, this week. His gentle way of being in the world, his gleeful delight at simple things, his curiosity and wonder, his constant sense of discovery all helped me to see the world through the freshest of eyes and to experience a depth of connection unencumbered by the acquired barriers of distaste and discomfort. A little child led me to a rare place of knowing and wholeness, truly of holiness.

As we sat over breakfast one morning, Leo was sitting playing on the floor. We turned to the sound of his laugh and saw him waving, the fingers of his little hand opening and closing as he watched a large ant scurry past him. It was a sound of pure delight, a creature so much smaller than him that could move so quickly. Leo got himself up and toddled after the ant into the next room, as we peered after him in amazement. And once again he began to wave, this time with a touch of sadness as the ant disappeared into a small hole at the edge of the floor. I was filled with a sense of awe and gratitude for the gift of that moment and its teaching. I cry as I think of the little one waving after the ant. How much we have to relearn about perspective and the interconnection of life, of the power of innocence to overcome cynicism and alienation. The summer infusion of ants is hardly welcome, but yet they are just creatures on this earth as we are. I admit to being one who tries not to kill them, though not always succeeding in my resolve, often sweeping them onto a dustpan and bringing them outside. I felt reaffirmed in this effort by Leo and his innate connection to these smallest of creatures.

One afternoon, we went for a seaside walk with Leo on Deer Island, the little child often leading, scampering with exuberance. Deer Island is at the tip of the peninsula that forms Winthrop, the town where I grew up. In my teens, I often sailed past the island, then a foreboding and forbidding place that housed the broken souls of those incarcerated in the gray stone prison that stood amidst such beauty. Today, Deer Island is a model of things done right, of things made whole. There is a sewage treatment plant at the very end of the island that reclaims and recycles waste. We walked along the miles of trails that wend along the shore, up hill and down, through meadows of flowers and grasses, Boston Harbor on one side, the open ocean on the other. I carried a small folding magnifying glass around my neck, one that my mother, may her memory be a blessing, had given me many years ago. She always carried such a magnifying glass, always stopping along the way of woods and wetlands to show us the miracle of the little worlds we so easily miss.

There is a photograph on my desk of my mom with youngest daughter Tzvia at about two years old, together examining the bark on the trunk of a great tree. And now there is another photograph beside it that Tzvia took as we hiked that day with Leo. I am kneeling amidst the grasses on a hillside. Leo is standing at full height, leaning back into me, snuggled against my chest. He is peering through the magnifying glass from my mom, as I hold it to his eye with one hand and hold a stem of Queen Anne's Lace with the other. I am not sure just what he could see, but he is so intent in his gaze that I believe he did see, at least in his own way, the intricate web of life as reflected in the delicate weave of a common flower. Whether or not he was looking just right to see it with his eye, in the purity of his heart and through the intuitive lens of a child's way of knowing, his gaze reminds that such is the way we are meant to see and be, delicate lines of connection with each other and the world all around.

It is all contained in the first word of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Re'eh/See!* It is about seeing the world and its needs and choosing accordingly, to affirm or deny the way of connection among all. How can we see the beauty of creation and dare destroy? How can we receive the blessings of earth and sky and water, of a child's laughter, of heart's love and longing and not offer blessing in return? *Re'eh/See! I am setting before you today blessing and curse.* As God renews creation every day, we are given the opportunity to make new choices every day, to choose the way of goodness, the way of blessing, to be God's partners in the renewal of creation and its fragile flowering toward fullness.

A magnifying glass has become a spiritual tool for me, a sacred ritual item that helps us to see the entire universe in the smallest of worlds, and how exquisitely beautiful and just how fragile the lines of connection that join all life as one. I realized many years ago that the acronym formed from the letters of my Hebrew names, *resh, aleph, hey*, for Rabbi Avigdor Hillel is *Re'eh/See!* To look and to see, and so to remind, is the calling and gift that I received from my mother. And now I learn from little Leo to see ever more deeply and to be aware of connections I might otherwise avoid, even to wave to passing ants as they scurry about their business. I think of the prophet Isaiah as his words came to be for me this week, "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them...."

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor