

Pardes Hannah 5787 Theme for the High Holidays
Gal einai ve-abita niflaa'ot, “Open my eyes that I may see wonders.” ([Ps. 119:18](#))

As the Days of Awe of 5787 approach, it is hard for me to believe that this is the 33rd year of Pardes Hannah. If last year was the year of **LeV** (in gematria, 32), the year of the beating, open **heart**, this year in gematria is **LaG** (as in **LaG B'Omer**), 33, or as I prefer to write it, **GaL**, the year of **Seeing Anew**. Our theme for the High Holidays builds on this connection between 32 and 33, between **LeV** and **GaL**. For as the Hasidic master, the Zvi Elimelekh of Dynov teaches, the Open Heart, the **LeV tov**, opens a portal to **Deep Seeing**, as in the verse גַּל-עֵינַי וְאֶבְיטָה נִפְלְאוֹת ([Ps. 119:18](#)) *Gal einai ve-abita nifla'ot*, “Open my eyes that I may see wonders.” For when the heart is open, one sees *differently*.

As we enter the New Year, we might ask: How can we see the everyday and familiar with new eyes? (Perhaps it is by spending time with a toddler and seeing things, at ground level, that we no longer notice. Perhaps it is when we talk with another who sees the world from a different perspective. Perhaps it is what we notice only when we are ill or have recovered from illness. Or when we climb a mountain and gaze, or when we swim underwater. Or: When we see a starfield on a dark dark night. Or look at backlit trees, leaves shifting colors in the special light of early fall. When we slow down or speed up; when we chant into silence, meditate or davven—those moments when consciousness shifts, when particle becomes wave, when our molecules mix and are rearranged.) Or perhaps simply, when we draw a familiar object upside down... In short, when we pay attention—or better, cultivate attentiveness. It's in our lineage.

Moses, Moshe Rabbeinu, saw anew when he unexpectedly came upon the Burning Bush; when he realized that the Burning Bush (counter to all expectations) was not consumed. When his vision sunk ever deeper, first seeing the Fire, then the Angel, then God as YHWH—the One who Is-Was-Will Be all at once. Our hasidic masters reread the accompanying verse שֶׁלֹא-תַעֲלִיךָ מַעַל רַגְלֶיךָ ([Exodus 3:5](#)), “Remove the sandals, *na'alekha*, from your feet” as “Remove that which encloses or imprisons you (*na'al*) from *raglekha*, from your way of walking in the world.” The verse continues: “for the ground on which you stand is holy ground.” As the kabbalists explain: There is no place devoid of the divine. *Leit attar panui minei*. And as Gandhi noted, when you wear leather shoes all the time, the world becomes a leather-covered place.

Heschel called this ability to be surprised, to see anew, “radical amazement.” To see with “eyes made for wonder.” At such moments of amazement and connection, gratitude often springs to our lips. And we find ourselves offering blessing, sacred words that connect (1) our seeing, (2) the local object of our seeing, and (3) the ultimate source of all life—in a circuit of awe and thanksgiving.

Maybe another name for this Deep Seeing is Waking, Waking Up. Reb Zalman tells the story about his daughter Shalvi, who, when she was about 7 years old, asked: “Abba, when you're asleep you can wake up, right? And when you're awake, can you wake up even more?” Out of the mouths of young ‘uns...(cf. Psalm 8:3).

Shalvi's question reminds me of *Birkhot ha-Shahar*, the early morning blessings. One of the first blessings we traditionally recite, when we first open our eyes is פָּקֵה עֵינַי, thanking the Holy Breathing Spirit, for “opening the eyes of the ‘blind’” or unsighted. But not two minutes later few we add הַמַּעֲבִיר שְׁנָה מֵעֵינַי וְתוֹנוּמָה מֵעַפְעָפִי, thanking God for “removing sleep from our eyes and slumber from our eyelids.” Why recite the second bracha, which might seem extraneous? I

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suggest: to remind us that the work of removing film from our eyes is ongoing. May we find ways to see more deeply, more creatively, to continually “wake up more.”

That said, I don't want to be naïve. Seeing more deeply, holding *what is*, can be painful, even agonizing. We see our friends suffering, we experience heartbreak in love, we watch the news. In prayer, we stethoscopically hear the cry at the heart of the world, as well as the unfettered joy. Another aspect of *Gal einai ve-abita*, is to see multiplicity, to learn how to hold **complexity** with resilience and grace. (None of us have been immune from multi-layered seeing, in the wake of October 7 and the Gaza War. And from that other Israel-Palestine “war” that burns here at home, in our families and communities, and maybe in our own hearts.)

As the midrash tells us, at Sinai, when our consciousness was expanded, we were able to behold *ha-kol be-vat ahat*, everything at once- “life and death, affliction and healing.” At key moments, we are called upon to practice this complex, nuanced seeing, knowing full well that there may be moments when we need to *turn away*: that we can't always stand face to face with What Is. That there are moments when we need to retreat, close our eyes and rest. (Even Moses at the Bush says, אֶסְרֶה-נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת-הַמַּרְאֶה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה—let me **turn aside** that I may see—or absorb, not straight on, but from an angle—this marvelous sight.) For insight often happens in the quiet moments, in the pauses, when we “collect rather than dissipate time.” (Heschel). So, I offer up a prayer, for the ability to continually rebalance, to find moments of respite and rest, to experience deep and joyous Shabbatot—when we disentangle from daily life, and “see” with our *neshamah yeterah*, our “Sabbath soul.” So that when we re-enter the world, the world that so needs our healing, it is with renewed possibility. And yes, with eyes made for wonder.

It's an act of sacred oscillation, of surfing the [ratzo va-shov, the divine ebb and flow](#).

In conclusion, a khap, a vort, a quick Hasidic “word”—a repeat from last year. Why not, it's a practice, something you can do time and again. It's not TikTok, or something “branded” as new.! Nahman of Breslov, the great Hasidic teacher, pondered the verse from Song of Songs 5:2, קוֹל דּוּדֵי דּוֹפֵק “Hark, my beloved is knocking [dofeq] at the door”—noting that the word dofeq can mean not only knocking, but pulsing. “Listen! (he said) The divine beloved is pulsing (dofeq) within me.” God coursing through our embodied being, each moment anew.

Let's try this now as a practice, something I learned from Reb Zalman, of blessed memory.

I invite you to place your fingers on a pulse point (I like the carotid artery, but the wrist also works.) Feel that pulse coursing through you, the Beloved knocking. Stay with it for a few beats. Now, if you are with a loved one or someone who is game, and it feels comfortable, let the other guide your hand towards their pulse point, while you guide your friend's hand to yours. Breathe quietly, feeling both your pulse and theirs. (I can almost hear the pulsing with my fingers...)

Know this pulsing is also there, right now, in our friends, our neighbors, our adversaries, in our dogs and cats, in a myriad life forms, for the earth is breathing, pulsing, ebbing and flowing, in a great wheel of Turning.

When you are ready—slowly, softly open your eyes...and see.

שנה טובה ומתוקה-Leshanah tovah tikatevu. May new life be inscribed in our hearts,
In gratitude, Reb Elliot