

Parshat Re'eh
A Symphony of Slight
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Class of 2017

The last few chapters in Devarim have - appropriately - been all about **listening** while Moshe is delivering his final sermon to Bnei Yisrael. Here are some quotes:

And now, O Israel, **listen** to the statutes and unto the ordinances... [Deut 4:1] וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל, **שְׁמַע** אֶל-הַחֻקִּים וְאֶל-הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים... [דברים ד:א]

Hear O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one. [Deut 6:4] **שְׁמַע**, יִשְׂרָאֵל: ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, ה' אֶחָד: [דברים ו:ד]

Hear, O Israel: you are about to pass over the Jordan on this day... [Deut 9:1] **שְׁמַע**, יִשְׂרָאֵל, אַתָּה עֹבֵר עַל-הַיַּרְדֵּן... [דברים ט:א]

So it is curious that Moshe uses a different verb to present the next part of his speech:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse. [Deut. 11:26] **רְאֵה**, אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְפָנֶיכֶם--הַיּוֹם: בְּרָכָה, וְקִלְלָה. [דברים יא:כו]

The Netivot Shalom¹ asks this question on the opening verse in Parshat Re'eh:

- Why does the Torah use the word **see**?
 It would be more logical to use: **listen** or **know**!

The Tur² offers this explanation:

The verb '**see**' is similar to what we found at the experience on Mount Sinai:

And all the people **saw** the sounds, the flames, the blast of the ram's horn and the mountain smoking; the people saw and trembled and stood from afar. [Ex. 20:14] וְכָל-הָעָם רָאִים אֶת-הַקּוֹלוֹת וְאֶת-הַלְפִידִם, וְאֶת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר, וְאֶת-הָהָר, עֹשֵׁן; וַיֵּרָא הָעָם וַיִּנְעוּ, וַיַּעֲמְדוּ מֵרָחֹק: [שמות כ:יד]

On Har Sinai, our **hearing** was heightened and elevated to the level of **seeing**.
 What does this mean?

Hearing is done linearly, in one-dimension. We hear a sound; we put it together with other sounds, which then make up a word. We put the words together and we get to a sentence, then a paragraph, a concept, a plot, a story and so on. Listening is done sequentially – not in parallel. If two people speak at once, typically one cannot understand either of them. Hearing is made up of disparate pieces of information that we may or may not put together into a larger piece.

¹ **Netivot Shalom**: Slonimer Rebbe; R' Shalom Noach Barzovsky [1911-2000]; Hasidic Rebbe & writer

² **Ba'al HaTurim**: R' Yaakov ben Asher; master Halachacist [1269-1343, Toledo]

Seeing, on the other hand, is done three-dimensionally. We take a snapshot with our eyes and see a multitude of details: color, depth, close-up, far away, straight ahead and peripheral vision. We see many tiny details yet we also integrate them into a big picture.

During the revelation on Har Sinai, God gave us the ability to **hear** the way we **see**, the ability to take in a multitude of details through our hearing and make sense of it. This is why we could hear זכור אחד ושומר בדבור אחד - “*remember and guard* at the same time”. On one level we could **hear** both words being spoken at the same moment; on another level we could assimilate those disparate pieces into the broader concept of Shabbat.

One way of understanding this is likening it to a musical symphony. Each instrument adds to the orchestration and plays a necessary role, yet the overall fusion of the music is what brings the beauty of the notes and the chords to life. There is something magical about the way the different sections blend together to create a sum that is greater than each of its parts. From the lowly triangle to the grand piano, each adds to the acoustic harmony that transcends and fills the air.

The Torah is comprised of many, many details that we **hear**. There are stories, laws, traditions and chronicles of our history. Moshe is asking us and tasking us to take a step back from all the details and see a bigger picture that will allow us to choose our path forward wisely.

Moshe has spent much time teaching the nation all the details and mitzvot strewn along their path ahead. Now he says: “There is something greater than each individual piece in the Torah! Put all these mitzvot together to **see** the whole picture so that you may choose your path towards **blessing**.”

Looking at the Torah as a symphony of mitzvot, what themes do **you** see?

Do you connect with the emphasis placed on **family** values?

Are there **ethical** or **moral** codes that speak to you?

Perhaps it is the emphasis on **community** or **social justice** that pulls you in?

Or maybe the way **chessed** (acts of kindness) are an integral part of being Jewish?

This Shabbat, let us take a step back from the details and tap into the grand symphony called Torah.



Rabbanit Bracha Jaffe served, for many years, as Community Educator and Director of Mercaz Center for Adult Education in Beth Tfiloh synagogue in Baltimore, MD. Her love of tefilla and ritual led her to be an experienced gaba'it and organizer of women's tefilla groups. She has taught many women and girls to leyn and is the voice of the JOFA Megillat Esther App. Rabbanit Bracha interned at United Orthodox Synagogue in Houston, Texas and at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale in New York. She participated in chaplaincy programs at New York Presbyterian Hospital and at a maximum security women's prison. Rabbanit Bracha is a 2017 graduate of Yeshivat Maharat, following a long career in hi-tech in Israel. She feels blessed to be following this path which nourishes and fills her soul.