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Understanding The Dissension Between The Brothers and Yosef

In *Parshas Vayeishev*, Yosef brings home bad reports about the brothers to his father Yosef, and later he has dreams of ruling them, whereupon the brothers come to hate him and they cannot speak to him out of their loathe for him. Yosef is on one side, with the brothers on the other side - and they had different perspectives.

There was once a *rebbe* who taught young children, who said that it's easier to explain to little children about the previous *parshiyos* in the Torah, which discuss the differences between *tzaddikim* (righteous individuals) and *reshaim* (wicked individuals). It is easier to explain how Avraham was righteous, now Yishmael was a *rasha* and how Yitzchok was a *tzaddik*, how Esav was a *rasha* and how Yaakov is the *tzaddik*. But when we learn about the *shevatim* (the tribes), the sons of Yaakov Avinu, who were all *tzaddikim*, who were all holy, it is hard to understand and explain their *machlokes* (disagreement), and the different sides which these *tzaddikim* took.

When the brothers did not talk to Yosef, there were two sides. The 12 *shevatim*, who are the roots of the 70 souls who descend from Yaakov Avinu, were not just 12 or 70 different souls, but 12 different perspectives of how to see the same reality, and they are all views that are rooted in the Torah.

Even more so, the 70 souls who descend from Yaakov Avinu, who personified the Torah, for Yaakov dwelled in the tent all day learning Torah. The 70 descendants of Yaakov are rooted in the "70 facets of understanding" in the Written Torah. Thus, the 12 sons of Yaakov, who later branched out into 70 souls, are really an offshoot of the Torah itself - Yaakov Avinu, who is considered to be "Torah" itself. The "70 facets of understanding" in the Torah are the roots of the 70 souls who descended from Yaakov.

For this reason, whenever we learn Torah, there are always many ways to understand the same verse. The world was created from the Torah, for "Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world", and since the Torah contains 70 facets of understanding to it, so are there many ways to understand the reality on this world. The reality that we see on this world is therefore not always the same perspective in all people. When Hashem looked into the Torah to create the world, He did not look at one of the ways to understand the Torah, but at all 70 ways of understanding in the Torah. Thus, the world, which was created from the Torah, can be seen with 70 different perspectives.

That is why the Sages each saw the same reality through a different perspective. "Their words, and

their words, are the words of the living G-d.”^[1] Whenever a person learns Torah, the Higher Court accepts his views, and Hashem Himself learns the words of one sage, while learning the words of another sage who has a differing view. But even more so, there are many different ways to view the same reality.

This is how we can understand the *machlokes* between Yosef and the brothers. Yosef saw the brothers eating what appeared to be a live animal, when in reality, the brothers were not committing any sin; but this was merely a result of the *machlokes* between them. The actual root of the *machlokes* between them was because they had differing views. Yosef’s blessing is that he is “above the eye”, the “evil eye” cannot affect him, meaning that he saw reality in a certain way, whereas the brothers saw reality in a different way. The *machlokes* between Yosef and the brothers was because they saw the same reality through different perspectives.

Good Eye and Evil Eye

The Gemara says, “A *dayan* (judge) does not have except what his eyes see.”^[2] When a *dayan* sees the reality correctly, he can give a true verdict, which reflects the truth as it is. That is one kind of “seeing”.

As mentioned previously, seeing the reality, as it is, can be viewed in 70 different ways, for there are “70 facets of understanding” in the Torah. However, there is also a distorted way to see things. This is called the view of the “evil eye”, (*ayin ra*), or “narrowed vision” (*tzar ayin*). This is not one of the 70 valid ways of seeing reality, but it is certainly a viewpoint that exists, in which a person sees reality through a distorted lens. When the brothers accused Yosef of slandering them, they thought he was viewing them through the lens of his “evil eye”, *chas v’shalom*.

The truth is, however, that he did not have a view of an “evil eye” towards them. Yosef’s blessing is that he is “*ben poras Yosef, oilay ayin*” – “A charming son is Yosef, above the eye.” The Sages learn that “above the eye” means that the “evil eye” cannot affect him or any of his descendants. This also means that Yosef’s vision is “above the eye”, and therefore he is above the vision of “evil eye” and he does not see reality through this negative lens.

(On a deeper level, it also means that he does not differentiate between “good eye” or “evil eye”, for he is above the eye, and he has a higher vision which comes from Above, which is entirely good. This resembles the quality of Moshe Rabbeinu, of whom it is said “*A good eye is blessed*”, for he possessed a positive vision that came from Above, which only sees good.)

Daas Tov (Good Understanding) and Daas Ra (Evil Understanding)

We have so far described two kinds of vision – a way to see reality through many different viewpoints, which stems from the “70 facets of understanding” in the Torah; and a distorted view of reality, which is called *ayin ra*, “evil eye” or *tzar ayin*, “narrowed eye”, in which a person sees reality through a negative place in himself, due to his own inner evil.

When Adam ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra*, the evil *daas* entered his original, pure *daas*, and created a mixture of good and evil in man’s *daas*. When one sees reality, he is seeing through his mind, but his mind is a mixture of good and evil *daas*, so he may have a distorted perception of reality. The Sages, in contrast to this, are the “*einei haeidah*”, “eyes of the congregation”, who can see from a higher view, who can see reality from an accurate viewpoint. The Sages see from their “*daas tov*” (good and pure *daas*), whereas those who have not purified their minds sufficiently enough see through their “*daas ra*” (evil *daas*). Moshe Rabbeinu had *daas tov*, and therefore he possessed the ultimate level of the “good eye”. The less one has purified his mind, the more his vision will be

obscured from seeing a true reality.

Inner Bribery

Even more so, we find that a person's ability to see reality can be distorted through the act of taking a bribe. The Torah says that taking a bribe can sway even the minds of the wise and distort the words of the righteous. There can even be inner bribery, which stems from one's own character traits, which will sway a person's mind from seeing reality objectively. This reason (inner bribery) is why most people do not see reality accurately.

Imagination

Until now we have explained two kinds of vision - seeing the truth of reality, which can be viewed through 70 different viewpoints; and narrowed vision, which may stem from "evil eye", or from bribery, which sways his vision from seeing reality correctly.

There is also an additional kind of seeing: the imagination. This is the matter of dreams which this week's *parshah* discusses. Just as there is physical vision, so is there a power to see an inner way. The holy and accurate use of this power is called "eyes of the intellect", described by the *Chovos HaLevovos*, in which a person can "see" through his intellect. This includes all of the mental powers, such as thinking and memory. But there is also a way to see reality through the power of the imagination.

Just as a person can see through his physical eyes and through the "eyes of the intellect", so can a person "see" using the "eyes" of the imagination. When a person is awake, he will usually see using his physical eyes, and if he has purified his intellect, he will see through his "eyes of the intellect", but when a person goes to sleep - and sometimes even when he is awake - he can see through the view of the imagination.

The imagination is also a way of seeing reality. When a person is dreaming at night, he sees many different kinds of realities. They may not be total and absolute realities, but the person is still seeing certain realities, through the imagination.

In Summary

Thus, in summation, we have altogether described four ways to see reality: through physical vision, through narrowed vision (which comes from either "evil eye", or from bribery, both external and internal), through the "eyes of the intellect", and through the view of the imagination.

A Clearer Understanding of the Differing Views of the Brothers and Yosef

We can now have a better understanding of the dissension between the brothers and Yosef in this week's *parshah*. The brothers accused Yosef for his dreams, and they hated him and therefore did not talk to him. The brothers thought that Yosef is seeing reality through "**evil eye**", and that this was why Yosef was bringing home "evil reports" about them to their father.

Even more so, Yosef was having dreams about them that he would rule over them. When the brothers became aware of this, they now thought that not only is he having an "evil eye" towards them, but that he is seeing reality through the lens of his **imagination**, for he was having dreams about them. They hated him because they thought he was viewing them with an "evil eye", and their hatred for him increased because of his dreams, for now they thought that he was seeing reality through the lens of the imagination.

What was the truth? As mentioned earlier, Yosef was really “above” the eye, so he was not seeing reality through a perspective of “evil eye” or through a perspective of imagination, but from an entirely different lens of vision.

How A Distorted View of Reality Is Created

The Vilna Gaon says that when a person sleeps and he dreams, the intellect weakens and the imagination is dominant. This is the case with most people. What happens, as a result? The imagination and intellect are fused together in dreams, and the person will see reality in his dreams through a mixture of imagination and intellect.

From the time a person is born, he does not have the inner vision of “eyes of the intellect”. All he has is physical vision, and he will usually also have a strong ability to imagine. Children sleep a lot, and the deeper reason for this is because children are seeing reality through their imagination, which is linked with sleep. Since sleep causes a dominance of the imagination, and children imagine a lot, therefore, they sleep more.

When a person gets older and matures, he develops the ability of “eyes of the intellect”, each person on his own level, and slowly his imagination is weakened, thus he is able to stay more awake. But in one’s younger years, he mainly sees through imagination, and only very minimally through his intellect. Therefore, even his physical eyes may be seeing through imagination!

We can see that a child will think he has seen something, when in reality he has not really seen it. It is only his imagination which has seen it. When a person gets older and matures, his imagination weakens. However, since a person is used to imagining things since he was young, this habit does not go away completely. A person will continue to imagine things even as he is fully awake, even while his intellect and physical vision is functioning, and therefore his vision will be a fusion of physical vision, intellect, and imagination. That means that a person is usually seeing the reality in front of him through a combination of physical vision, intellect, and imagination.

We have briefly explained the powers of vision and the ways in which how we see reality. We have no comprehension of the greatness of the brothers and Yosef - we are simply trying to understand the powers of vision that are in the soul, the means by which a person sees reality.

How Are We Seeing Reality?

Now let us ask ourselves: Do we see reality as it really is? Are we seeing reality through any of the 70 valid ways to see it, or are we perhaps seeing what we want to see, because we have taken a bribe? Are we externally bribed? Are we internally bribed? Are we seeing reality through our intellect, or are we seeing reality through our imagination?

How Imagination Affects The Way We See Reality

If a person has a superficial perspective, he will think that whatever he sees is the reality. He is confident that he sees reality as it is. But when a person lives inwardly, he is aware that there are different ways to see reality, and there exist distorted perspectives towards reality. He knows that it’s possible for one to fantasize what the reality is.

Many people are clear they have seen something, but they have only imagined it. This happens all the time with children, where the imagination dominates. But even mature adults may imagine what they see, and they will say that they have clearly seen something, when in reality, that is now what they have seen.

The Sages said that this is what happened with the Spies who entered the land of Eretz Yisrael to see if it was safe for the people to enter: "They said with their mouths that which they did not see with their eyes." This does not mean that they did not see anything dangerous. But there was some exaggeration in what they were seeing.

When most people say over what they have seen or heard, it is usually not precise. It is not exactly what they have seen or heard. Someone with a negative trait of habitual lying will totally fabricate a story, but most people are simply seeing or hearing through their imagination, and that is why they see or hear an exaggerated or distorted view of reality. They are ready to testify and swear that they have seen or heard a certain thing, and they are confident that they know what has taken place, when the simple reality contradicts what they have seen or heard.

This is all because a person is born with a nature to imagine, and he has gotten used to the habit of imagining when he was a child, and unless he has worked to clarify his perception, this habit of imagining remains, and it will distort what he sees. The imagination will be escorting his intellect wherever he goes, and it will distort what his intellect sees.

When Hashem wanted to minimize the size of the moon, He offered the moon of choosing to serve both by day and by night. In terms of the soul, the imagination, which is mainly dominant by night, is also "serving" by day, when the intellect is supposed to be dominant. That is why people do not see reality as it is, simply speaking. It is because their imagination is active even during the day; this is the reason that distorts the vision of most people.

Imagination and Sin

At a more evil level, the imagination is used as a way to fantasize about committing an act of sin. "The eyes see, the heart desires, and the tools of the actions complete." When the eyes see something and a person desires it and lusts after it, this is the imagination.

The imagination is called "*medameh*" in Hebrew, from the word "Dumah", which is the name of the angel that oversees Gehinnom – in other words, a person who is being controlled by his imagination will be controlled by the passions of the *yetzer hora*, which leads to *Gehinnom*. The commandment of the Torah not to stray after the eyes and the heart is not simply a matter of guarding the eyes. Sin mainly comes from dreams at night, which is the domain of the imagination. It is essentially a state where one's intellect is subjugated to his imagination. That is why most people are susceptible to the forces of *tumah* (spiritual contamination) – it is because they are subjugated by the imagination.

There are also a small percentage of people who have the vision of "evil eye", though not as evil as the "evil eye" of the wicked Bilaam, who had *daas ra*, an evil *daas* that was a twisted form of "*daas elyon*" (higher knowledge), which most people do not reach. Most people are simply seeing through their imagination, whereas Bilaam could see reality, albeit through his "evil eye". The "evil eye" is a way of seeing reality, and although it is a negative trait, it is still a view of reality; but the imagination is a distortion of the reality. (In subtler terms, "evil eye" is at the core of distorted vision, and imagination is the external layer of it.)

Leaving Behind Distorted Vision - Through Exertion In Torah

When a person has exertion in Torah, which is called "*tov*", "good", a person leaves behind imagination, narrowed vision, and evil eye, and enters into reality.

The Torah was given through Moshe, and Moshe possessed the trait of "good eye", as the Sages state. When one leaves behind the distorted way of seeing things and he can see reality as it is, he can then begin to understand the differing views of the brothers versus Yosef. One can then see that

were different ways to understand the same reality, and that they were all valid ways. This is also true about all arguments between the Sages, which were all holy, of which it is said, "Their words, and their words, are the words of the living G-d."

The arguments that take place between most people, though, are essentially an argument between two views of imagination. A higher form of argument is "the argument between Moshe and Bilaam" - the view of the "good eye" versus the "evil eye". The arguments of the Sages, though, are all differing ways to see the same reality, and they are all seeing reality from the lens of the Torah, and there are 70 valid ways of seeing reality - all rooted in the Torah.

Understanding Machlokes (Arguments) Between Our Sages

In every *machlokes* we find ourselves in, we need to check how we are viewing the reality. If it is a *machlokes* between the Sages of the Torah, we need to see this as different ways to see reality, which each stem from the holy wisdom of the Torah. This does not apply to the results of the *machlokes*, but to the very root and beginning point of a *machlokes* between Sages: each of the Sages can see reality in a different way, because there are "70 facets of understanding" in the Torah, and hence there are 70 valid ways to see reality, based on Torah wisdom (as explained earlier).

Of course, there are people who intentionally start a *machlokes* simply for the sake of proving that he's right, and we do mean this type of *machlokes*. Here we are speaking about a *machlokes* which has a valid starting point, where one is seeing reality in the first place. The only question to wonder about is: In what way am I seeing reality? One needs to examine this and see if he is viewing reality through either the imagination, or from narrowed vision, or from true vision, which sees the reality as it is.

On a higher level, a person sees reality through the wisdom of the Torah. The more a person exerts himself in Torah, the better he can see reality.

In Conclusion: Preparing For Chanukah By "Seeing" Reality Accurately

This is also a way to prepare for the coming days of Chanukah.

On Chanukah, the *halachah* is that "We may not use the Chanukah lights, except to see them." In order to "see" properly, we need to clarify the way we are seeing things, and to keep clarifying it, until we reach the spiritual light that radiates during this time of the year^[3], which is also called a "flame that rises on its own" - the root of all vision, which is *chochmah*, wisdom. That is the depth of the lighting of the *menorah* - to "see" through a place of wisdom, rooted in the Torah. That is the depth of "seeing" the lights of the *menorah*, on Chanukah.

^[1] Gittin 6b

^[2] Sanhedrin 6b

^[3] Editor's Note: Refer to *Sfas Emes (Chanukah)*, and *Kedushas Levi - Chanukah*.

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