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Desires Stemming From Fire-of-Earth-of-Water: Visual Desires

With the help of Hashem, we shall now discuss desires which stem from the **'fire' aspect contained in** our earth-of-water. These are desires that stem from a visual experience.

Fire is bright and gives off light; earth represents materialism, and water represents desires. Thus, if a person desires something materialistic, and the desire is also based on visualizing something, the desire is coming from 'fire' within his earth-of-earth-of-water.

When Chavah saw the fruit of the *Eitz HaDaas*, she saw that it was "desirable to the eyes." This is the first instance in the Torah in which we find that desires can be associated with seeing something that is a pleasurable visual experience.

We will go through the problem of evil desires that stem from fire-of-earth-of-water, and how we can rectify these desires, G-d willing.

Two Kinds of Enjoyable Sights

When a person sees something that is pleasurable to look at, either the person is looking at something because it is simply enjoyable to look at, or, his vision is enhancing whatever it is that he is getting enjoyment out of.

For example, the Gemara^[1] states that a blind person is never satisfied from his food, because he cannot see it. The sense of sight is a factor in how much he enjoys the pleasure of the food. Here we see that seeing the food is what makes eating the food pleasurable, where the senses of sight and taste work together to make something a pleasurable experience.

Similarly, if someone eats food in the dark, he doesn't enjoy his food that much, because the sense of sight works in tandem with the sense of taste to make it enjoyable. Therefore, taste without sight is not enjoyable.

The Gemara^[2] considers an option that it is forbidden to benefit from looking at a fruit of *orlah*^[3], because since it is forbidden to eat from *orlah*, even visual enjoyment from it is forbidden. Here we see a concept that even if you can't see the actual item of desire - you're only looking at the peel and not the fruit - still, you are getting visual pleasure out of looking at it; thus, there is a kind of desire which is coming solely from vision.

Thus, there are two kinds of pleasurable sights. There is a kind of enjoyment in which looking at the item of enjoyment enhances the pleasure of what I am enjoying, and there is also a kind of visual enjoyment in which I simply have pleasure from seeing something.

'Dragged' After The Eyes

In previous chapters, we explained that desires really stem from the tendency in man to get dragged after pleasure.

We have five physical senses. From all of the senses, the most commonly used sense is our sense of sight. *"From my flesh I see G-d."* We are always looking at something, as opposed to our other four senses, which we don't use as much as our sense of sight.

Since we are always using our sight, our sense of sight is often unrestrained. We usually do not train our eyes to be focused on something. Our eyes are always darting back and forth in whatever we see, and this leads us to getting 'dragged' after what we see.

Earlier we discussed the tendency to get 'dragged' after pleasures; here we are discussing another source for why people get dragged after their desires. Our eyes start out with an unrestrained kind of vision; when vision is never given control, it leads us to getting dragged after all kinds of visual sights. As it is written by Chavah when she saw the fruit of the Forbidden Tree of Knowledge, *"And she saw that it was desirable to the eyes."*

When this power is used for holiness, it is called *einei haseichel*, "eyes of the intellect". This is used for example when we look at our *tzitzis*, which Chazal say that it can remind us of to fear Heaven. Our thoughts can see things. "The eyes see and the heart desires" - our eyes can "see" through the lens of our thoughts, and this is a power that can be used either for evil (improper sights) or for holiness (imagining matters of holiness, such as how the blue color of *techeiles* reminds us of Heaven).

When a person gets dragged after his vision, Chazal say that "The eye sees, the heart desires, and the actions complete" - the "actions" of his body will complete the rest of the act. This is not only referring to how the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) gets aroused when a person's eyes stray after improper sights; it is also referring to how a person can simply get dragged after what he sees, in his thoughts, where he will be led to all kinds of places in his mind.

This is a power that can be used for either for good or for evil. If a person uses this power for holy imagination, such as in the case of seeing *tzitzis*, his thoughts will lead him to good, but if he lets his mind wander as he sees something that isn't holy - he will get led to all kinds of unsavory places.

Curiosity

A person might get 'dragged' towards certain places he is familiar with, but he might even get dragged to all kinds of places in the world that he was not previously familiar with. This happens when he has gotten used to the idea of getting dragged after his eyes.

When he feels like he's getting helplessly dragged after what he sees, his desire for movement will also be awakened, and then he might wish to go to all kinds of strange places in the world - simply because he has gotten used to satisfying his curiosity, by always following his eyes in whatever seems interesting.

Thus, there are two problems that are created from following one's eyes: it causes a person to get 'dragged' after what he sees, and it also opens up another evil trait of man, which is called '*sakranus*' (evil curiosity).

His curiosity will lead him to all places in the world. Once a person is curious, he might go to all kinds of places in the world just to see what's going on there, even when it isn't about enjoyment. He has simply become curious.

At first, a person only gets dragged after pleasures that are enjoyable, but after getting used to following his eyes, he will get used to getting dragged after anything that will satisfy his curiosity - even if it's not about something pleasurable. He has simply fallen into the habit of following his eyes.

Following the Eyes' Desires - The Root of Disparity

The simple understanding of the problem of following one's eyes, as we explained, is that it can get a person used to being 'dragged' after whatever is pleasing to his eyes.

We find that in Creation, it is our eyes which can cause us to have separation and disparity. When a person looks at things and his vision is unrestrained, when he follows his eyes - "The eyes see, the heart desires, and the actions complete."

Our eyes can connect us outward to others and unify us, and this is the concept behind "*ayin tovah*" (good eye), or it can cause disparity towards others in Creation, and this is the concept behind "*ayin ra*" (evil eye).

We can see this even from the physical world. When a person puts on glasses, his vision becomes more focused, and this helps him see clearer. Without glasses, his vision is unrestrained and therefore unclear.

When our eyes are unrestrained, this is the depth behind "*ayin ra*" - when we have a "bad eye", we can't "see" clearly; unrestrained vision, "*ayin ra*", causes our vision is spiritually impaired. On a deeper note, an "*ayin ra*" comes from having a "*lev ra*" (an evil heart). When a person has negative feelings and thoughts towards others, he develops an "*ayin ra*" on others, because he has developed a "*lev ra*", an evil heart.

Thus, the eyes represent disparity in Creation. In the future, Chazal say that all the *tzaddikim* will point to Hashem with their finger and say "*This is my G-d that we hoped for*" - in other words, all fingers, all points, will be pointed in one direction, and all the disparity in Creation will be unified into one point in recognition of the Creator. The redemption will also be a time in which "every eye" will be able to see the salvation, hinting to how it will unify all points of disparity.

Using The Eyes To Unify Our Vision

But this shows us how we can rectify our power of vision. Since disparity is the root of improper vision, in order to fix it, we need to go in the opposite direction, which is to use our vision in a context of **unity** (*achdus*).

The Hebrew word for eye is "*ayin*", which comes from the word "*iyun*", to think in-depth. "*Iyun*" represents how we use our "*ayin*"\eye for purposes of unity. Thus, "*iyun*" can fix our *ayin*\eye. [We will soon explain how we use this power of "*iyun*".]

When a person has evil desires, he has *taavah*, and this causes separation in the world between people. There is a rule, "*Seeking desire causes separation.*" When a person becomes egocentrically involved with fulfilling his various *taavos*\desires, this distances him from others, because he becomes self-centered in seeking his interests.

This is fixed with going in the opposite direction of *taavah*: the concept of *ahavah*, to love other Jews.

Evil *taavah*\desire is really an impaired *ahavah*\love. *Ahavah* has the same numerical value in Hebrew as *echad* (one), because love means to be at one and unified with another.

Thus, [on a deeper level], *ahavas Yisrael* is a way to fix *taavah*. The person will gain an “*ayin tovah*”, a “good eye” – a kind of vision that unifies – and thereby come to fix his state of impaired vision of his “*ayin ra*”, “evil eye.”

Using The Power of ‘Echad’ Through Visual Focus

We are referring here to the power in the soul known as “*echad*” (oneness), which is one of the deepest powers in the soul.

The deeper implications of “*echad*” are beyond the scope of this current discussion; here we are describing the external use of “*echad*”, which can be applied to all people on any level.

We can use our power of “*echad*” on a practical level by getting used to visual focus on something. Get used to focusing on any one particular thing. This advice is written by our Sages.

Getting Used To Focusing

You can’t do this all day of course, so instead set aside time (about 20, 30 or 40 minutes – for however much time you have) and train your eyes to keep focusing on something, and don’t let your eyes budge from what you are looking at.

However, this should preferably be done with looking at something holy. Seeing something holy is what mainly improves our vision. Looking at something mundane such as a table or a chair for a long amount of time is a waste of time. Even though there is nothing wrong with staring at a table or chair, still, why should you waste so much of your time, when you could have been looking at something holy?

For example, as you are *davening*, try to keep your eyes focused as you’re *davening*, for at least 30 seconds.

Your visual focus will be improved by learning how to focus on anything, but you need to utilize your time properly, therefore, choose something holy to look at. This is the first step: look at something in your house (preferably something holy, and keep focusing on it.

Keeping Your Focus

The next step is more subtle: focus on ***one point alone*** in what you are looking at, and don’t let your eyes budge from it. Try this with looking at something holy as well.

Focusing On The Letter ‘Beis’ of the Word ‘Beraishis’

The best way to work on this is by applying a concept written about by the *Vilna Gaon*: to focus on the letter *Beis* in the word *Beraishis*, specifically at the **dot** inside the letter *beis*. Keep focusing on the dot and don’t let your eyes budge from it, and try to keep your concentration in it.

The *sefarim hakedoshim* write that the entire Creation is contained in *Sefer Beraishis*, and to be more specific, the entire Creation is contained in the story of Creation, which is *Parshas Beraishis*. To be even more specific, the entire Creation is contained in the word “*Beraishis*”, in the letter *beis* of the word *Beraishis* - in the dot itself that is inside the letter *beis* of *Beraishis*. This is an amazing method brought in the works of our earlier Rabbis.

When you start to do this, you will probably not feel how this is affecting you and changing you. However, you will discover that it definitely helps you concentrate better on the words of the Gemara. So you will definitely see improvement in your power of focus, as long as you continue to work on this. (Just bear in mind that improving your visual focus is not all there is to *Avodas Hashem*!)

Mental and Visual Focus At Once

We will emphasize that the way to work on this is by using both your **physical vision**, as well as your **thoughts**, to remain focused on something.

This is a deep concept. We need to make use of both abilities at once. If you are looking at something but your thoughts are elsewhere, it won't work.

Most people, in fact, have this problem of not staying focused with their thoughts as they focus with their vision. It's not that simple to have your thoughts connected to what you see – it's actually a deep ability that you need to work hard on to acquire.

Guarding Our Eyes From Improper Sights

When you get used to focusing, your vision becomes more unified and focused, and you will find that your *shemiras einayim* (guarding one's eyes) as you walk in the street will be improved as well. You will find it easier to avoid improper sights and remain focused on a point as you walk in the street. (Part of this discussion is called developing the power of *atziras einayim*, to close the eyes, in order to avoid looking after what the eye desires; this is a different point, and we will discuss it later.)

This method of getting used to focusing, of course, will not get rid of one's desires. You will still feel desires and you will still feel yourself getting dragged after pleasurable sights, but the fact that you have gotten used to focusing on a point will still greatly weaken the desire you have towards looking at something, and it is thus a very helpful ability to make use of.

For example, if you go onto a bus and there are improper sights, you can focus your eyes on a certain point and keep looking at it for the entire ride.

If you have worked on getting used to focus when you were in your house, such as we described earlier, you will find that even as you walk in the street, you are able to avoid improper sights better, because your eyes can easily focus on something else you see. Of course, the best thing is "to think in learning", but even if you can't get yourself to always think in learning when you walk in the street, you can still avoid improper sights, by remaining focused on a point.

This is a deep power in the soul. If someone doesn't try to develop his power of focus as he is in his house, he will find the words here to be very strange. But if you have gotten used to it, you will find these ideas to be absolutely essential to your *Avodas Hashem* in every day of your life.

This concept of focus is the basis of how we fix the desires stemming from our vision, and in the next chapter we will hopefully expand upon this point, but this is the basic point which we will build upon.

Summary

To summarize, get used to focusing on something your house, preferably something holy. This should be done when you have quiet.

Then focus your vision on a point within what you are looking at, and keep focusing on it (and the best way to apply this method is to focus on the dot inside the letter *beis* of the word *Beraishis*, as we

mentioned). When you walk in the street, or when you find yourself surrounded with improper sights, train your eyes to remain focused on any one point.

We are currently living in a world that is enveloped in unrestrained sights. We are surrounded by all kinds of desires that tempt our eyes (stemming from all the active elements of Creation - fire, water, and wind). But by getting used to focusing on something in your own house, you will find that it is easier to walk in the street and prevent the eyes from straying after improper sights.

The Higher Level of Focus

The more you work on this, you can reach an even deeper level, in which you can have your eyes totally open as you walk in the street, yet you don't even see anything in the street.

Rav Elya Lopian zt"l gave *shiurim* in Yeshivas Kfar Chassidim, and once he remarked that even though he is looking at everyone with eyes wide open, he doesn't see a thing. Someone asked him how this is possible, and he responded that it took a lot of time to develop; it's not a simple idea to work on. According to what we have explained here, we can understand how he was able to work on this.

Visual focus helps you remain focused not only when it comes to the physical world; it improves your inner world as well. The goal of acquiring this art of visual focus is not simply about how you can become more focused; the point is that by improving our external layer of vision - through focus - we will have an easier time entering our inner layer of our vision, to remain focused on our inner vision, which will help us remain connected to our inner, spiritual world even as we are surrounded by all kinds of sights that appeal to the eye.

In the next chapter, if we merit it, we will continue to discuss how we can rectify visual desires.

[1] Yoma 74a

[2] Bava Kamma 101, Meilah 20a

[3] Trees in Eretz Yisrael during the first three years of growth are subject to laws of sanctity (*orlah*) and they are forbidden to be eaten or benefitted from.

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