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The Month of Tamuz: The Power of "Sight"

The month of Tamuz contains the especial power of *re'iyah* (sight). A hint to this is because each of 12 months is parallel to one of the 12 tribes, and the tribe represented by the month of Tamuz is Reuven, whose name comes from the words, "*Reu, ben*" ("See, that I have a son"). So the month of Tamuz is connected with *re'iyah*, with "seeing".

Let's try to understand how this is a power of the soul as well, and what we do with this power.

Inner Sight: The Heart's Power To See

The Gemara says, "A *dayan* (judge) only sees what his eyes see."^[1] A *dayan* determines a case according to how he "sees" it - meaning, according to what he feels and discerns the information. So seeing doesn't just mean to see in the plain and simple sense. It means to discern, and it involves the heart's feelings.

Our eyes can see the physical, whereas our heart can see a deeper dimension into the physical. Shlomo HaMelech said, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" The heart "sees" - it can discern things. Chazal say that "the eye sees, the heart desires, and the actions complete". It seems from this statement that sight is only with the eyes, and not with the heart. But the real understanding is that *the heart sees* from the eyes. Thus, when the heart desires that which the eyes see, it is really seeing that which the eyes see.

The Sages state, "The evil inclination rules only where the eyes see." When the eyes see something, the heart desires it and thus "sees" what the eyes are seeing. Chavah desired the *Eitz HaDaas* as soon as she saw it; the possuk says, "*And the woman saw that the tree was good for consumption.*" How did she 'see' that the tree tasted good, before she even ate it? It was because her *heart* saw the tree and thereby desired that which her eyes laid sight on.

Thus, there are two places from which we "see" in ourselves. One place is the eyes, and the other place is the heart. What does it mean that the heart can "see"? Firstly, we need to know what the nature of the heart is.

The heart is the seat of emotion in us. It is the source of both positive and negative feelings we experience: hatred, joy, sadness, etc. It is also the source of our various desires, motivations, and yearnings. But besides for this, there is another dimension to our heart: its power to "see".

What does the heart see? When a *navi* (prophet) is young, he is called a *chozeh* (seer), before he actually sees prophecies. A prophecy is an interpretation of Hashem's word, but it is a kind of vision. The prophet would see things from his heart. A prophet was at a purified internal state, where his heart could see a clear vision. The prophets reached the total level of this kind of vision (the heart's sense of sight), but each person as well can also reach it on his own level.

It is written, "*In the hands of the prophets, I appear.*" The visions of the prophets were seen through the lens of a purified kind of imagination (*dimayon*). When most people hear of this concept, they react skeptically: "Prophecy involved imagination?!" But this reaction is only possible when a person is not aware of the concept of a holy kind of imagination. The prophets saw a holy and purified kind of imagination. Since most people have not reached a level of a purified kind of imagination, most people identify imagination as nothing but fantasy. But when imagination is pure, it is the level of prophecy.

Currently, we do not possess the level of prophecy. But we are still capable of traversing the very way that the prophets took to see their prophetic visions: the power of holy imagination.

We aren't referring to the kind of imagination techniques which the secular world presents. We are speaking here about the way of our forefathers; we are trying to return to their footsteps.

The Heart Needs To Picture Information

What exactly is the power of imagination which the heart is capable of?

Our intellect can think, scrutinize, build, take apart, decide, etc. Our heart, however, cannot relate to abstract information. It must be able to receive some kind of image, and then it can work with the image to understand it. If something cannot be imagined, it can be perceived rationally, by the intellect; but it cannot pass into the heart. The heart will not register any information that has no mental picture to it. If something can be pictured, it is perceived by the heart.

Our rational intellect is aware that two plus two is four. The heart, though, can only understand this if there is a picture of this. For example, if two books are placed next to two books, the heart can perceive that there are four books. There is now a picture here being given to the "two plus two", it can be imagined and thus the heart can register it. Thus, our intellect works with the abstract, whereas the heart needs some kind of picture of the information.

Mashal V'Nimshal - A Parable and Its Lesson

Shlomo HaMelech said, "*My heart has seen much wisdom.*" Of Shlomo HaMelech, it was also said that he "established many parables." The concept of a *mashal* (parable) speaks to the heart, for it is a way to envision the information.

Shlomo HaMelech spoke in the form of parables. Why was this necessary? What is the idea of speaking in parables? It is because when our intellect is not capable of understanding things, we need to give it some kind of wrapping, like a parable, that will help us perceive it. Our heart will visualize the information being conveyed through the parable, and then the heart can understand.

Shlomo HaMelech spoke in parables, so that the wisdom he is imparting will be perceived by our heart.

The Difference Between Hirhur (Visualization) and Re'iyah (Inner Sight)

Generally speaking, there are two ways how the heart visualizes things.

One way is through envisioning it in letters of the *Aleph Beis*. This is also called *hirhur* (visualization), which is an ability of the heart, for we find that a person can fulfill *Kerias Shema* through '*hirhur b'libo*', through thinking of the words in his heart. This is the idea behind the month of *Iyar*, which we explained in the past.[\[2\]](#)

The month of *Tamuz*, however, is about *re'iyah*, "sight". It is the idea of perceiving things in terms of parables; to draw lessons from what we observe on this world and to understand the *nimshal* (lesson) that the *mashal* is teaching. The heart fantasizes the information, which makes use of the imagination, and in that way, it can use *mashal* to reach the *nimshal*.

Imagination: A Tool

The heart imagines something, and this forms a *kli*, a spiritual 'container', to hold the information. What will enter this 'container'? A true and tangible vision (*tziyur*) can enter it and be contained in it. That is the purpose of using imagination: it is a tool that allows us to receive a great vision that will become contained in us.

Thus, if one simply remains with the fantasies alone, he lives in his imagination. The 'guided-imagery' techniques of today therefore are not using the higher purpose of imagination, and they are causing people to become immersed in fantasy. It is a way meant for people who are very ill in their souls. The true way to use the power of imagination is to always see the *nimshal* (lesson) of the *mashal* (parable) that we are processing.

Guided imagination, which has been devised by gentiles, is placing too much emphasis on the 'container' (the imagination). Imagination is but a tool we can use to receive something greater. It is a tool to receive a true vision.

The prophets reached the highest level of this, for they were essentially receiving the spiritual light of the *nimshal* contained in the *mashal* they were seeing. In the broader sense of things, man is an entirely a *mashal* (parable) of how to receive a *tzelem elokim* (image of G-d) and have it shined upon him - which is the *nimshal*.

Tziyur (Visualization) and Dimayon (Fantasy)

There are two powers related to the imagination. One is called *tziyur* (visualization) and the other is called *dimayon* (fantasy).

Dimayon is for a person to imagine something which a person cannot understand rationally. It is used a *kli* (tool) to contain the vision which we want to put into it. *Tziyur*, though, is to imagine something which the person already knows of.

Feeling Hashem: Through Holy Imagination

We must use our imagination for holiness, so that it will become a container for the *tzelem elokim* (image of G-d) or the *tzurah elyonah* (heavenly image) that we want to put into it: a spiritual vision of a reality that is palpable.

It is written, "*And I will dwell amongst them*", and the Sages explain, "In the hearts of each and every one of them." Hashem dwells in every person's heart. How can a person grasp such a thing? How are we to relate to such a thing? One of the ways that can help us understand this is through using the power of holy imagination. Through using the power of imagination for holiness (to envision spiritual realities), we build in ourselves a container that can hold onto the spiritual. That is what allows us to experience G-dliness in ourselves.

Holy Imagination Vs. Unholy Imagination

However, there is a fine line that differentiates between holy imagination and unholy imagination. When a person uses imagination as a purpose unto itself, with no greater goal in mind, than imagination is unholy. By contrast, when imagination is used as a tool to reach a greater purpose, it is holy.

How Do We Internalize?

It is written, “*For the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth.*” How, indeed, does a person change and purify his *yetzer hora* (evil inclination)? The tool we can use this is the power of holy imagination, which our heart is capable of.

Our intellect is not capable of this; our intellect cannot tell our heart what to do and rationalize with it. Even if a person could live for 1000 years, his intellect would not be able to change his heart. This is because the intellect and the heart are polar opposites. The intellect rationalizes and brings proof, while the heart needs some kind of picture or vision of the information in order to be affected. The heart speaks a different language than our intellect.

For this reason, although many people know in their heads what the right thing is, their hearts remain unaffected by this knowledge. The *Ramchal* writes that if a person would know what a sin is, he would never sin. We all know what a sin is; our minds are aware of right and wrong. So why is sin so common? The *Ramchal* says that it’s because the knowledge in the mind isn’t in the heart.

How, indeed, can we internalize our mind’s knowledge into our heart? One of the ways is through the power of *hirhur* (to visualize the letters of the *Aleph Beis* of things), which we explained about in the month of *Iyar*. But another way is through *dimayon d’kedushah*, holy imagination – in which we can use our imagination as a tool to receive the spiritual.

The power of holy imagination was a power that many of the leaders of the past used. It is the heart’s power to “see”: the heart in us can see holiness. The tool and container we use for this is the vision of holiness, and the spiritual light that can enter that container is the actual spiritual vision.

The Powers of Ahavah and Yirah

There are two parts to seeing the spiritual. These are really well-known matters, and here we will attempt to understand these concepts.

The heart can “see”. What can it see? What does it envision?

As the Sages tell us, there are two *chalalim* (spaces) in the heart: the *chalal hayemini* (the right side of the heart) and the *chalal hesemali* (the left side of the heart). It is written, “*The heart of the wise is to his right, and the heart of a fool is to his left.*” A heart that is “to the right” is referring to the “right side of the heart”, and a heart that is “to the left” is referring to the “left side of the heart”.

Our *avodah* (task) on this world, simply speaking, is to bring our *yetzer tov* (good inclination) into our heart, and drive away the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) from the heart. This is true, but there is more depth to the matter.

Everything in Creation is two-sided; there are always two opposite aspects which we need to utilize in order to reach our desired purposes. There are two abilities which we can use in order to work with our heart. The Sages call them the “right side of the heart” and the “left side of the heart”; and the *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hora* are found in them. But let’s speak here about the actual different spaces of

the heart, rather than the forces present inside them.

They are really two different abilities of the heart – the “right” aspect of the heart, which is otherwise known as *ahavah* (love), and the “left” aspect of the heart, which is otherwise known as *yirah* (awe).

We have a *mitzvah* to love Hashem as well as a *mitzvah* to fear Hashem. Our heart can “see”, and we can “see” from the place of *ahavah* that is in our heart. But we can also “see” from the place of *yirah*; the word *yirah* is related to the word *re'iyah* (seeing).

What are the abilities of *ahavah* and *yirah*? It seems the *ahavah* and *yirah* is simply a *middah* (character trait), and this is true, but from the fact that the heart can “see” we learn that there is a way to “see” from the place of *ahavah* in our heart, and there is a way to “see” from the place of *yirah* in our heart. What does it mean to “see” from *ahavah*, and what does it mean to “see” from *yirah*?

Reb Yisrael Salanter would mainly use the power of *yirah*, and there was a lot less emphasis on *ahavah*. He would mainly practice envisioning thoughts that inspired *yirah*, such as imagining the fire of *Gehinnom*. This was the way of the great leaders of the *Mussar* movement. However, this is not yet the stage of purifying the heart. It is the tool to get there, but it is not yet the goal.

Thus, the method which Reb Yisrael Salanter and the *mussar* movement used was the power of *tziyur* (visualization) present in the “left side of the heart.” This was the path of *yirah*, and it is one side to the power of *tziyur* which the heart is capable of.

There are many ways to use the heart’s power of *tziyur*. If someone has a hard time imagining what *Gehinnom* is like, one of the methods written about in the *mussar sefarim* is for a person to place his hand in a physical fire, so that he can get some kind of *mashal* (parable) of what *Gehinnom* is like. In any case, the heart’s power of *tziyur* uses the “left side of the heart”.

The other power of *tziyur* in the heart, the “right side of the heart”, is totally different. It is to imagine something that is loving and embracing. One example of it is to try to imagine the reward in the World To Come. In *Michtav M'Elياهو*^[3], it is explained how a person can vividly see this world as a *mashal* to the reward of the World To Come, such as by trying to imagine how many drops in the ocean there are and how this mimics the magnitude of the reward that awaits a person in the World To Come. This is a loving kind of vision, not a fearful one, and it is experienced through the “right side of the heart” (also called “*kav hayamin*”, the “right line”).

In summary, we have explained the two general kinds of *tziyur* in the heart: to imagine a vision that conveys *yirah*, and to imagine a vision that conveys *ahavah*.

In recent generations, our *Gedolim* realized that people today are weaker when it comes to *yirah*; for example, most people have a hard time when trying to imagine *Gehinnom*. Therefore, the *Gedolim* wrote that we mainly have to make use of thoughts of *ahavah*, and deal less with thoughts of *yirah*. However, they never meant that *yirah* should be abandoned completely. We need both *ahavah* and *yirah*. The only question in our *avodah* is where to begin: Should we begin with *ahavah* or should we begin with *yirah*? But it is impossible to have one without the other.

Seeing Everything In Terms of Parable and Lesson

When we use the heart’s power of *tziyur*, this surely has a positive effect on our heart, and it purifies the heart to a certain extent. Yet it is not enough to connect a person to the reality of the spiritual. With the power of *tziyur* alone, a person will only live in the *mashal* of life, but he will never get to the *nimshal*. He will still remain connected to the materialism of This World.

What a person needs to do is to try to get to the *nimshal* (lesson) of the *mashal* (parable), and then he will live the ideal kind of life, in which he will be truly connected with the spiritual. When a child hears a story, he is only hearing of a *mashal*; he does not hear the *nimshal*. In every story we hear as well, it's possible that we are just hearing the *mashal* alone, without ever grasping the *nimshal*.

The Chofetz Chaim would hear an inspiring message in every event. He saw and heard events as entirely being a *mashal*, a parable, to something greater; he saw the *nimshal* of each *mashal*. He saw all of reality as a *mashal* against the backdrop of a greater reality. He realized that everything on this world can be seen as a *mashal* that leads to a *nimshal*.

The idea of this is not simply to see everything as parables and to remain there. Seeing everything as a parable is but the first step, but the second step, which is the goal, is to see the lesson behind the parable. For example, when a person sees snow, he can see it as being an example of Hashem's power. He sees the snow as a *mashal* of Hashem's power. But he has not yet reached the *nimshal* of this *mashal*. When one sees the *nimshal* behind each *mashal*, he reaches purity of heart.

But one cannot jump to the *nimshal* unless he has first seen the *mashal*; the *mashal* is needed in order to relate to the *nimshal*. *Sefer Shir HaShirim* [4] is entirely a *mashal* of a loving relationship between husband and wife, and the *nimshal* of this is the relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem. Yet many people have heard and read *Shir HaShirim*, but they never see it as a *mashal* to the *nimshal*. They are aware of the *nimshal*, but they skip over the *mashal* stage.

Everything you see on this world is all a *mashal*. If you get used to seeing the world like this, you have a tool to get the *nimshal* of each *mashal* you come across. Your eyes will see something, and your heart will see the *mashal* that is behind what you are seeing, and then your heart will search to understand what the *nimshal* is.

Hashem did not place us in Gan Eden. He placed us on this world. What do we do with everything that we see on this world? If we do not think into the reality we see before us, we never see the *mashal* of life. All we will see is the *nimshal*, and if we remain at this thoughtless stage, the *nimshal* we will see is nothing but the materialism of this world. But if we get used to seeing everything as a *mashal*, then everything we see can become a tool that we can use to connect to the spiritual.

The Heart Sees Reality

Thus, the abilities of *tziyur* and *dimayon* which are in our heart are both representing one *avodah* we have on this world. Our heart's ability of *tziyur* (or *dimayon*) can conjure realities we have never seen, and we have explained that there are two kinds of holy imagination which accomplish this: thoughts of *yirah* [i.e. imagining *Gehinnom*], and thoughts of *ahavah* [i.e. imagining the reward in the World To Come].

This is the inner essence that is behind the heart's power to "see". The depth of it is because our heart is capable of grasping reality. Our eyes see things objectively, but our heart sees the reality behind what we see; it sees into the inner dimension of what we are physically seeing.

A Life Ruled By Fantasies

Everyone has the power to imagine. Most people only know of it from the fantasies of dreams, and many people fantasize during the day as well; in fact, many people are immersed in imaginative thoughts during the day, ruled completely by their imagination; some more and some less. The problem with this is not the fact that people are immersed in fantasy. The problem is that it negatively affects the heart.

When imagination dominates a person, the heart will imagine various fantasies, and it will not imagine spiritual realities. It will be the kind of heart of which it is said, “The eyes see, and the heart desires” – the heart will fantasize about unholy and evil thoughts. As the Sages say, “If a person wants one hundred, he will want two hundred.” Everything physical that we see will then turn on the imagination, and then our heart will do nothing else except fantasize of various, worthless desires.

It’s even possible that a person’s head is immersed in thoughts of Torah, yet his heart is immersed in childish fantasies. Just because a person isn’t consciously aware of this doesn’t mean that it is not the case. A person can have a highly developed intellect yet his heart still remains at the level of a child. As long as a person has not yet worked to purify his heart, his heart lives in various fantasies.

This is the depth of the contradiction between our intellect and our heart. It is not simply because the heart doesn’t feel the knowledge present in the intellect. That is also true. But it is a much deeper contradiction. It is because the heart’s role is to grasp reality, whereas the intellect knows rationally what the right thing is, but it doesn’t grasp that knowledge as a reality; what results from contradiction [when it is left unresolved]? The heart is left with nothing but fantasies.

Fantasy dominates over any person who has not had enough involvement with a Torah scholar to learn from, even if the person has learned a lot of Torah in his life. When the heart is left unchanged as it is, it will desire what the eyes see, and it will fantasize over worthless pursuits. The *Sforno* says that the desire to eat from the *Eitz HaDaas* was essentially the power of imagination.

Not only will the heart desire and fantasize about things that are not good – it will completely immerse a person in a pursuit of fantasy. The person will live a fantasy kind of life, and he will never live reality. Reb Yisrael Salanter wrote of the woes of imagination: “Man roams around freely in his imagination.” This is because when the heart remains at its initial and immature state, it fantasizes.

But if a person learns how to see the *mashal* of each thing, and he also searches to understand the *nimshal*, he lives in the reality, and he leaves imagination behind.

In Conclusion

Thus, the depth of our *avodah* on this world is not simply so that we should “*purify our hearts, to serve You in truth.*” That is what we should aim for, but it does not define our actual *avodah*. Our actual *avodah* is to leave imagination, and enter into reality - namely, the ability to palpably feel Hashem as an existing reality.

Why is it that a person doesn’t feel Hashem as a reality in his life? It is not because his heart isn’t pure; it is because his heart is living in fantasies. When a person leaves fantasy behind, he can then feel the most simple reality that exists: Hashem’s presence. The more a person leaves behind fantasy, the more he will feel Hashem - in his heart.

When a person sees all of life as a *mashal*, and he searches to get to the *nimshal* of the *mashal* – he is the person who will reach the Creator.[\[5\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) *Sanhedrin 6a*

[\[2\]](#) See ***Essence of Rosh Chodesh #02 _Iyar _Thought and Visualization***

[3] Michtav M'Elياهو Vol. I, 1

[4] Song of Songs

[5] For more on the concept of seeing life as 'mashal v'nimshal' (a parable and its lesson), see **Getting To Know Your Home_012_The Lesson of Marriage.**

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