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Tamuz, Reuven, and the Sense of Sight

In our mystical teachings, the five senses of man are listed as sight, hearing, smell, touch, and speech. This order is given specifically. Therefore, our most prominent sense is the sense of sight. It is like the 'firstborn' of our senses. It is also at the highest place in our body from all of our senses: it is located in the eyes, which is at the top of the head.

The month of Tamuz is represented by the tribe of Reuven, the firstborn son of Yaakov Avinu. Reuven was named so from the words "*Reu, ben*" which is mother Leah expressed upon his birth, and these words are related to the word *re'iyah*, to see. Thus, the month of Tamuz is connected with the sense of *re'iyah* (sight), and the tribe of Reuven.

A person sees the world through his eyes. The sense of sight is the sense that accompanies man wherever he goes, guiding him and directing him.

The sense of sight is linked with Reuven. Being that Reuven lost his rights to the status of *bechor* (firstborn son), the sense of sight was damaged along with this. Reuven lost the rights to the firstborn status, and it was given instead to Yosef. Reuven was originally called the '*raishis*' (beginning) of Yaakov's children, but it was taken away from him, due to the episode with moving Bilhah's bed out of Yaakov's tent; he was cursed for being too impulsive. The 'beginning' was thus ruined, and he is no longer considered the firstborn of Yaakov Avinu.

We have no comprehension of the greatness of our *Avos* (the forefathers) and their children, the *shevatim* (the 12 tribes), but what can we learn from this? It shows us what damages the sense of sight, and it shows us what causes the sense of sight to lose its 'firstborn' status from us (thus the sense of sight is no longer the initial guiding sense in man).

Chazal say that "a *dayan* (judge) does not see except that which his eyes see."^[1] There are people who go to *Beis Din* and they witness an argument erupt between the *dayanim* there, and they become terrified at this sight; they watch in horror as the heated *machlokes* (argument) takes place. But the truth is that *machlokes* amongst the wise people of *Klal Yisrael* has always been around. The Sages record that the very first *machlokes* between the sages was the argument between the sage Yoezer with Yochanan *Kohen Gadol*, regarding what the *halachah* is if one may perform *semichah* (anointing) on an animal on *Yom Tov*. Ever since then, there has been *machlokes* amongst the Sages about what the *halachah* is. [We will try to understand here the deeper meaning behind why this is so.]

The 'Right Eye' and The 'Left Eye'

We have two eyes – a right eye and a left eye. Each of them are two different lenses that view the physical world. From a deep understanding, every person contains two different 'eyes' which see different views on reality - and it is our head which connects our two eyes together and unites them to see only one view. The *sefarim hakedoshim* write that we have a 'right eye' and a 'left eye' which each see different perspectives on a situation. With most people, they see two different perspectives on things, and they do not see the same exact thing. Therefore, every person sees things differently.

It is explained that the 'right eye' sees the *hekef* (general picture) of things, while the 'left eye' sees the *peratim* (details) of things. The true perspective on things is to see the totality: to see its *hekef* and to see its *peratim* together with it. But most people are "either, or." Either a person will be the type to focus on the general picture without paying attention to details, or a person will get too focused on a particular detail of a situation and thus he misses the bigger picture.

Chazal say, "Who is wise? One who sees what will come." This is not referring to the ability of *Ruach HaKodesh* (the holy spirit); it is referring to a far simpler level. It is referring to the ability of seeing the *hekef* of a situation. A person tends to only see the moment and be in the moment, but he usually cannot see further. As a person matures spiritually, he begins to see a bigger picture that goes beyond the present moment. As an example, in regards to the timespan of Creation, the *hekef* is a timespan of 6,000 years (And in the mystical teachings, it is also brought that there will be a total of 10,000 years).

So the 'right eye' in us sees the bigger picture of things, while the 'left eye' in us sees only details, such as the current moment. The more a person matures spiritually, the more he can see from his 'right eye', which sees the bigger picture.

Reuven was punished for removing Bilhah's bed from his father Yaakov Avinu's tent. We can now have a deeper understanding of this: he was too focused on a particular detail. As the Sages state, he did this in deference to his mother's honor, for he felt that his mother Leah should not have the same status as the maidservants. Although he acted for the sake of Heaven, he could not see beyond this particular detail; he did not see the bigger picture. In his mind, though, the detail that he saw was a representation of the bigger picture. His father Yaakov saw the real bigger picture of this episode; he saw that it reflected a flaw in Reuven's nature and thus he knew that Reuven cannot be of the firstborn status.

If we try to understand this episode in the Torah from *seichel hayashar* (straight, human logic) alone, Reuven is definitely right. He had a very good reason for how he acted. But Yaakov saw beyond that reason; he saw a bigger picture.

The *chachamim* (the sages) are called '*einei haeidah*', eyes of the congregation, because a truly wise person sees not only the current moment, but the bigger picture that goes beyond the current moment, and he fuses the two views together. The *Gemara* says that the definition of a *chacham* is one who can answer a question on any area of Torah he is asked; so a *chacham* is one who sees the big picture. The numerical value in Hebrew of the word '*chacham*' is '*chaim*', life, for a truly wise person sees what life is all about. He sees something from its beginning to its end – "One who sees what will come."

Seeing the *hekef* (bigger picture) of things is the power of *chochmah* (wisdom); the view of *chochmah* sees an all-inclusive view which goes beyond the amassment of many details. This is also the concept behind *emunas chachamim*, believing in the Sages. In order to believe in the words of our Sages, one has to see the bigger picture of a situation. It is the power to believe that the Sages can see things

which I cannot see.

This is not a power that comes our logical and deciding power of *da'as*. It is not simply to believe in the "*Daas Torah*" of our Sages. Although that is also true, it is deeper than that. It is because the Sages see a larger view towards the Torah and towards life.

Adam HaRishon was given a light that could see from one end of the world to another; Hashem hid this light away because He saw that mankind will not know how to use this light properly, and it will be revealed in the future. This is otherwise known as the *Ohr HaGanuz* (the hidden light). But the Baal Shem Tov revealed that this hidden light was hidden away into the Torah; therefore, through learning Torah in the right way, a person is able to gain an all-inclusive view on things. Thus the meaning of a '*chacham*' (wise person) is one who receives the hidden light from the Torah he learns.

We have outlined the concept, and now we will try to draw this concept closer within reach of our souls.

The Right Eye Sees Past and Future; The Left Eye Only Sees The Present

What does it mean to see the bigger picture of things, and what does it mean to see the details?

From all of the senses, the sense of sight contains a drawback, with the fact that it cannot see except what it is directly in front of it. A person can only see what's in front of his eyes, but he cannot see behind him. By contrast, our other senses can sense both what's in front us and what's behind us. We can speak to someone who is in front of us or behind us. We can smell something that is in front or behind. We can hear and touch something that is either in front us or behind us. But we can only see what's in front of us, and we cannot see behind us.

This is because, as we brought earlier from the words of our Sages, that the sense of sight has become damaged (ever since Reuven lost his status of the firstborn). Therefore, we start out in life with an initially damaged 'sense of sight', which can only see the present moment and not beyond. Obviously, we are referring to our spiritual sense of sight, not our physical sense of sight. We are explaining the depth of our spiritual sense of sight. We start out with a limited kind of view that cannot see the bigger picture of things; the 'left eye', which only sees details.

The Gemara says that a person is apt to forget the words of Torah he learned the day before. (But the fantasies of yesterday, that he remembers...). This is an example of the 'left eye' - where a person only lives in the present moment; he does not recall past nor can he see beyond the present. He only sees what's in front of him, right now, but he cannot see 'behind' him - he doesn't see his past. He doesn't connect the present day with yesterday.

By contrast, the 'right eye' can see both yesterday as well as the morrow, within the present moment. This is the deeper meaning of "Who is wise? One who sees what will come."

The hidden light which Hashem created on the first day of Creation was a kind of view which man could use to see from one end of the world to the other. It could see both the present moment and the past and the future - within the present. It was the original sense of sight of man in its pure form: the 'right eye', which saw the totality of things.

In contrast, when Chavah laid eyes upon the *Eitz HaDaas* and desired it, she only saw what was in front of her, and she did not think about the consequences. It was her 'left eye' dominating her. When the faculty of desire dominates, a person is so immersed in the present moment that he cannot see beyond the desire. The desire continues to pull the person after it because the person is not seeing past it. He is only seeing this very moment that is taking place right now.

The 'right eye' though sees the past and the future within the present. It is aware of the statement of our Sages, "Know from where you come from...and to where you are going" even as it views the present moment.

Reuven lost his firstborn status; the deeper understanding of this, as we explained, was that he lost his 'sense of sight'. And on a larger scale, mankind in general has a damaged sense of 'sight', ever since Chavah laid eyes upon the *Eitz HaDaas* and desired it. She was immersed in her *taavah* (desire) for the *Eitz HaDaas* and she could not see beyond it; this represents the depth of the trait of *taavah*. Indulging in a *taavah* makes a person focus only on the present moment, on the *taavah* itself, and the person loses sight of his past and future.

We find in *halachah* that there are certain sights which are forbidden to stare at. For example, it is forbidden to stare at the rainbow. If one does so, he is spiritually damaging his eyes by laying his physical eyes on it. However, there is also a concept of damaging one's eyes on a more inner level: when a person fantasizes about what he sees and he is pulled after his vision. Ever since the sin of Adam with the *Eitz HaDaas*, man initially sees an incomplete and disparate picture of something, and his imagination can lull him after this disparate view that he sees. Man initially sees things now based on how desirable it is to his eyes, reminiscent of the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*.

"Who is a wise person? One who sees what will come." A truly wise person sees the beginning, middle and end of the picture. Thus he is able to be drawn after the inner essence of life.

Changing Our Perspective

The view from the 'right eye', the ability to see the bigger picture of things and see beyond the present moment, is essentially the view that comes from our pure and higher *seichel* (intellect).

An example of this would be if a person on his wedding day can remind himself of his day of death. (There is indeed a *minhag* by some people to remind themselves of death on the day of their wedding). It is an example of having a totally different view towards life; to be in the moment yet not to become too caught up in it, so that a person is still aware of the larger picture of life even as he's in the moment.

The Sages state that at the time where the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is present, there is no mention of the *yetzer tov*.^[2] This can also be explained in terms of the 'right eye' and the 'left eye'. When a person is stuck in the vision of his 'left eye', he cannot see beyond the fragmented pieces of reality that lay before him. What is our task when we are faced with improper desires and sights? Our task is not simply that we must try to overcome the difficult temptation. Rather, our task is to gain a new view towards the situation; to leave the view of our left 'eye' and instead see it through our 'right eye.' If we accomplish that transition, our difficulties with temptation will become greatly weakened. The change of perspective will give us entirely new strength to deal with it.

When a person only sees through his 'left eye', all he sees is the desire of his eyes, and there is no way for him to succeed in overcoming the desire and to stop lusting after his eyes. What is really needed is a change of perspective towards the situation, and then the person will have a much easier time with the struggle.

Compare this to a child who has developed the bad habit of overeating. The parents tell him, "Stop eating already!!" but he continues to eat and eat, because he doesn't know how to control himself. But if they tell him, "This snack has been set aside specifically for Shabbos", then the child understands that he cannot eat it, for it is specially set aside for Shabbos. He has a change of perspective towards the food now, so he doesn't touch it.

When a person fails at his *nisyonos* (difficulties) with temptation and lust, the true perspective is not to feel “I just couldn’t withstand the temptation...I failed....”; rather the perspective needs to change entirely.

The *Gemara* says that if a person is coming towards an immodest sight and there is an alternative route to take, he should take the alternative path; but the *Gemara* says that even if he takes the alternative path, it is still very difficult for him to avoid the immodest sight, because the temptation is very strong. What, indeed, is the ‘path’ that a person must take? It is for a person to acquire a change of perspective towards the situation.

So, how does a person acquire a change of perspective? It is through looking into the Torah. The Torah gives a person a new perspective entirely towards life; through viewing the situation through the lens of Torah – through an all-inclusive view that sees beyond the current moment.

Leaving The Narrowed View of the ‘Left Eye’

Every person has many failures and difficult tests on this world. Usually a person begins to seriously deal with his problems only when the problems become very extreme. A person is usually complacent with his issues, and he only gets nervous when the issues become extreme. Compare this to a person who hears about a fire. He is relatively calm when he hears the news. Then if he hears that the fire is getting near his house, now he begins to worry.

Another example: a person hears that another person has become ill, yet he remains calm, and he doesn’t think that maybe it can happen to him too. He thinks, “Only other people get sick. These things don’t happen to someone like me....”

It is like the verse, “*Seeking desire, breeds separation.*” When a person lives apart from others and he never empathizes with others’ pain, he thinks “I am okay, *Baruch Hashem*. As for others, *rachmana litzlan* (may Hashem have mercy on them)...” And then if he himself receives the very same *nisayon* which he thought only happens to other people, he reacts with negativity: “This is so not fair! Life is so difficult!”

This is all the view from the ‘left eye’. The ‘left eye’ immerses a person into a self-absorbed kind of existence. In contrast, the view from the ‘right eye’, the view of the wise, is the view that can bring a person to get to where must get to.

The Sages state that “all of the world has the status of a blind man, until Hashem comes and opens up the eyes.” Everyone must understand that he is like a blind person who cannot see properly. (This is referring to our inner sight, not our physical sense of sight.) When a person really feels in his heart how true this is, he will then seek how to come out of his narrowed perspective, and receive a new way to view situations.

“Woe is to the creations, who see and do not know what they are seeing.” This is referring to people who remain at the view of their ‘left eye’.

It is indeed a challenging *avodah* (task) upon us to develop our ‘right eye’. But for this, we are given an entire lifetime to work on this; an average lifespan of 70 years. We are given an entire lifetime to work on drawing ourselves closer to gain the view that is *einei haeidah*, ‘eyes of the congregation’.

Here is an example. Whenever the Chofetz Chaim felt that he needed to strengthen himself and improve, he would look to strengthen his *emunah*, by reviewing the story of *Beraishis*. (Yes, even our *Gedolim* had ups and downs in their *ruchniyus*, and they needed to strengthen themselves). The depth of this was because whenever a person has a struggle or difficulty, he should remember where

he comes from. When a person simply remembers his beginning, this itself can be a remedy to his problems.

All of our great forefathers, sages, and leaders of the past had difficult lives. But they saw life through the lens of their 'right eye', thus they saw the bigger picture of things, and that was how they got through life. They saw past their private existence and were aware of the bigger picture of Creation that goes beyond oneself.

This does mean to say that all of a person's problems are coming from a previous *gilgul* (incarnation). We are trying to explain a far deeper perspective than blaming it on a past *gilgul*. We are speaking about a perspective that comes from the power of *emunah*.

Hashem says, "*I am the First, and I am the Last.*" This describes our *emunah*. With *emunah*, we can see the path of things from beginning until end. And ultimately, the beginning and end of each thing is Hashem.

To illustrate, Rav Dessler would say that at a wedding, the boys dance so much and are very joyous, because they are immersed in the present moment and they aren't thinking about the totality of life. He saw a wedding much differently. On a similar note, many people think that the world begins with them and ends with them.

Gaining The View From The 'Right Eye'

These words are not mere ideas. It is a way to view life.

To practically actualize this concept, get used to thinking into the beginning and end of each thing, and realize that everything begins and ends with Hashem. When you get up in the morning, think: "What is the beginning of the world? The fact that "*Hashem is One, and His Name is one*". What will be at the end of the world? "*On that day, Hashem will be One and His Name will be one.*"

This is what it means to get used to the view of our 'right eye', to the hidden light of Creation which saw from one of the world to the other. What does it mean that the hidden light could see from one of the world to another? Did it mean that a person could see the entire universe all at once? It means that a person was able to always see the beginning of creation and the end of creation: Hashem.

The Complete View: Bigger Picture and The Details Together

In actuality, we were given both a 'right eye' and a 'left eye', so we need to make use of both. We need a 'right eye' because we need to see the bigger picture of things, but we also need a 'left eye' which can see details. We need to fuse both perspectives together.

If a person only sees the general picture of things, he never sees details, and this is obviously detrimental. If a person only sees details and he never sees the bigger picture, he will think that a particular detail *is* the bigger picture of things; this resembles a person who is mentally deranged. Yet if a person tries to only see the bigger picture of things without seeing the details, he lives a delusional kind of existence.

We need both the right eye and the left eye; we need to see both the *hekef* (bigger picture) and the *peratim* (details). A wise person sees a situation through both of these lenses; he is aware of the general picture of the situation as well as the details, and he knows how to avoid getting caught up in either one of these views.

This is what it means to possess "*einei haeidah*", "eyes of the congregation" - it means to see the all-

inclusive view on things. Not only did the wise sages of the past see the general picture of what was going on in their own generation, but they were able to connect all the details together and see how it formed the general picture.

May Hashem give us the strength to acquire the perspective that comes from both seeing the general picture of things as well as seeing the details, and to be able to combine these two views together: as one of the sages prayed, “That we see the qualities of our friends, and not their faults” - to view Creation through a true lens.^[3]

^[1] Sanhedrin 6a

^[2] Nedarim 32a

^[3] For more on this topic, see ***Tefillah #0117 - The Big Picture and The Details***; and see also ***Getting To Know Your Thoughts***, chapters 06-09.

Source: <https://bilvavi.net/english/essence-month-005-tamuz-two-eyes-see>