

BALAK – VIEWING OTHERS WITH THE GOOD EYE

THE “GOOD EYE” AND “THE EVIL EYE”

Regarding *Parashas Balak*, there is a *Mishnah* of our Sages: “The students of Avraham have a good eye...whereas the students of Bilaam have an evil eye.”¹ One has the power to either have a “good eye” towards others – or to have an “evil eye” towards others.

The powers of “good eye” and “evil eye” are part of the soul’s power to “see”. There is the faculty of imaginary sight, and there is the faculty of realistic sight.

An example of imaginary sight is in the future, when Hashem will slaughter the evil inclination, where the righteous and the wicked will cry; to the righteous, the evil inclination will look like a mountain, and to the wicked, the evil inclination will look like a hair.²

Thus, the evil inclination is essentially a way to “see” through the lens of imagination.

Another kind of “seeing” is through his intellect. This is called “eyes of the intellect”. As we spoke about in *Parshas Shelach*, according to the spiritual level that a person is on, that is how he will see reality. Although there is always one single reality, each person sees it differently, depending on his level.

Getting more specific, there is a way to see from a “good eye” and, correspondingly, a way to see from the “evil eye”.

What is the source of the good eye (*ayin tova*) and bad eye (*ayin ra*)? Where do these powers of sight stem from?

1- THE BASIC LEVEL OF AYIN TOVAH
GOOD EYE – BECOMING A MORE
POSITIVE PERSON

There are several ways of how a person can gain the view of the “good eye” (*ayin*

tova). A basic use of this power is when a person trains himself to see things in a positive light, and to see the good in everything.

After all, Hashem created a universe that is entirely “good.” The depth of this is that Hashem carved out the entire Creation from His own goodness, and since there is no such thing as evil in Hashem, the entire Creation is good, in its essence.

Ever since Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas Tov V’Ra* (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), which was a mixture of good and evil, everything in Creation has become a mix of good and evil. Therefore, the world we see in front of us is a mix of good and evil, for that is what reality has become. Since that is the case, how then can a person see reality with a “good eye”? One way to gain the view of a “good eye” is, as mentioned above: To train oneself to see the good in everything.

One can slowly but surely work on becoming a more positive person, by trying to discover something positive in each thing he comes across. Even when viewing something that seems to be bad, a person can train himself to start seeing the good side in something.

THE DISADVANTAGES WITH TRYING
TO SEE THE GOOD IN EVERYTHING

That is surely a constructive kind of self-work, and it is certainly commendable to do so. However, to remain at this level is superficial. After all, even animals can be trained to do certain things. Therefore, “training” oneself to getting used to new habits and thinking patterns is only a superficial kind of growth, so we should not remain at that level. There is more inner work to be done.

There is also a stronger point to consider about this. On one hand, it is wonderful to start seeing things in a positive light and to see good in everything, but on the other hand, this might cause a person to distort reality. He will come to deny that there’s anything bad in the world, and he will only see the good in something, ignoring the reality he encounters.

Also, even when one gets used to seeing the good in everything, he doesn’t change inwardly. He has gotten used to this habitually, so it has become “second nature” to him, but his original nature hasn’t yet changed. He has simply learned how to see things differently, but in doing so, he denies reality. So while it is certainly a good thing that he has learned how to see the good in things, there is also a downside to this type of *avodah*.

Even worse, if a person gets used to only seeing the good in things and never the bad, he will train himself to deny that there is any evil in the world, and this is simply not true. Hashem created both good and evil in reality, and we must be wary of the presence of evil in this reality we live in.

If a person gets used to ignoring the evil in the world, he will become more susceptible to the evil influences in the world, because he will not be vigilant of the danger. He won’t be careful in avoiding evil, because he has gotten so used to denying the evil in the world. His spiritual situation is in danger, and he will become connected with evil.

2 – THROUGH LOVE FOR OTHERS

Here is an additional method, which we can use in order to gain the quality of viewing others with a “good eye”: The

1 *Avos 5:19*2 *Sukkah 52a*

more that a person develops a **love** for Hashem's creations, the better he will be able to view them in a positive light.

Compare this to a father's love for his child; the father loves the child and therefore he ignores the child's faults, because the love covers over the faults and allows him to see past them. This is the verse, "*Upon all sins, love conceals*".³ When there is love, the love covers and conceals any of the evil in the person, enabling you to see past the evil and to view the other in a positive light. There is a deep force of love in our soul, which wants to see only the good in Creation, and to look past all the evil.

Love is the root of having a "good eye" towards others, and for this reason, a person who has the quality of a "good eye" is of the "students of Avraham Avinu", because Avraham personified the trait of *chesed* kindness, which is rooted in his great love for all of the creations. Loving others enables you to view others positively. When your soul is connected to the power to love the creations, in turn, you will want to see the good in others, as an automatic by-product of the love. Thus, a "good eye" doesn't start with simply trying to have a "good eye" towards others; it is but the result of love.

What we see from this is that a "good eye" is not simply a superficial kind of training to try to view others positively, but a kind of self-work which must originate from within. The "good eye" does not become acquired merely through habitual kinds of training, but from somewhere deep inside you, from a love, which wants to see the good in Hashem's creations.

The first method mentioned earlier, where a person tries to get used to seeing others in a positive light, is a superficial method which, if you are persistent in it, it can eventually penetrate the soul and affect you internally. This is true about any kind of external self-work. But if

you use the second method mentioned – to reveal a love for the creations, which is the inner method – the result will be that you will develop an inner kind of "good eye" towards others.

Even more so, if you connect to the good that is within you and focus on it, this in turn will cause you to see the good in the Creation around you. This is because the more you are connected to your own inward good, the more you will see good in the outside world around you.

(The same is also true vice versa – the more a person focuses on the evil parts of himself, the more negative of a view he will have towards the creations around him.)

FIGHTING THE EVIL IN OURSELVES WHILE SEEING THE GOOD IN OTHERS

This leads to us the following fundamental point.

A person contains a mixture of good and evil in him, and his *avodah* is to remove the evil and reveal the good. "*The inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth*".⁴ We must remove the evil from within us, but how? If there is always evil embedded into us, how do we have the power to remove it?

Simply speaking, we need to wage war with the evil inside us, and to keep fighting it.

However, it is too difficult for a person to fight evil at every moment of the day. A person cannot live in a state of constant fighting. If he is fighting evil all day, that means he is constantly meeting up with evil and dealing with it. That, itself, makes him connected to the evil!

That is why if a person is constantly fighting the evil in himself (and he never connects to his own good), he will usually see evil in others, and all the time. It is because he is dealing with evil all day, so naturally, he will see the evil everywhere, in everyone he meets. In contrast to this,

if one is involved with much personal self-work, he will be able to see the good in others, and he will only notice evil faults in himself, not in others.

The *avodah* of a person in acquiring a "good eye" towards others contains a deep contradiction in the soul: To never see evil/faults in others, only their good, and at the same time, to only notice the evil/faults in yourself.

Through getting used to only seeing the good in others and ignoring their faults, you can gain a "good eye" towards them (as mentioned earlier). Or, you can use the more inner method, which is to love all creations, and then you will only see good in them. The inner method, however, requires great purity of character, in order for a person to genuinely acquire a pure love for others.

3 – STOP BEING JUDGMENTAL

For this, we can mention the famous words of the Kotzker, who explained that the teaching "Do not judge your friend until you reach his place" means that you will never fully understand another person, so don't judge him. Each person is a complete world to himself, and it is impossible to see the full picture of another person. You will never fully get down to the subtleties of his character, so you cannot really judge him accurately. You just have to believe that Hashem created him a certain way, which you will never completely understand.

IN SUMMARY

When you get used to this idea, you will be able to see others with the "good eye". It will enable you to only fight the evil within you and not to deal with the evil in others, because you will only see the good in others, either because:

- (1) You have gotten used to focusing only on their positive points, or
- (2) Because you have developed a love for others, or

3 Mishlei 10:12

4 Beraishis 8:21

- (3) Because you have learned how to stop being judgmental towards others, since you are aware that you will never fully understand another person's life.

FOCUSING ON OUR GOOD

So far, we have discussed how you battle the evil in yourself, while avoiding seeing any evil in others. But as we mentioned, this is only one side of the coin. The second part of our *avodah* always is, to reveal our own good. A person must be able to see the good in himself.

We certainly have a lot of evil to remove from ourselves. We must remove the evil character traits, as well as any personal agendas and ulterior, self-serving motivations; those are all called “illnesses” of the soul. But our main focus should be on our good. As proof, the main *mitzvah* [for a man] is Torah study, which is the involvement of the mind in the ultimate “good” there is, for “there is no good except Torah.”⁵

TORAH LEARNING, OR AVODAH (SELF-WORK)?

There are those who feel that their main *avodah* in life is to fight the evil within them, to work on matters of personal *avodah* – with less focus on Torah learning. They learn Torah too, but they place the main emphasis on matters of personal *avodah*, with less emphasis on improving their Torah learning. Let us see how this is a mistaken attitude.

What is the main aspect of life? Is it Torah learning, or personal *avodah*?

If the main point of our life should be spent on personal *avodah*, a person would be contending all day with evil forces. When the focus is mainly on “*avodah*” and not on Torah learning,

such a person, even while he is learning Torah, is only learning it for the sake of purifying himself from his evil inclination. Although *Chazal* state that Torah learning is the remedy for the *yetzer hora* (the evil inclination),⁶ this is not the main purpose of Torah study.

(On a more subtle note, there are some souls who do have this *avodah* to mainly use Torah study as a way to overcome their *yetzer hora* [but generally speaking, this is not the case with most people]).

The truthful approach to take is that the main part of life should be spent on focusing on the “good” (Torah learning), as opposed to placing more of an emphasis on purging ourselves from the “evil” (fixing our character and purifying our inner motivations). Therefore, our main work in life is with Torah study, which is the “good” of life. That is where we need to mainly connect our souls to. “*And in His Torah he delves, day and night.*”⁷ The Torah is referred to as the “good” in the verse, “*For a good purchase I have given to you.*”⁸

Even more so, the ultimate level of connecting to “good” is to connect our soul to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, Who is entirely good [Who is found through Torah study].

Thus, the main part of our life should be to connect to the “good” of life, with less of an emphasis on contending with all of the forces of evil. In the end of the day, we have a *yetzer hora* (evil inclination), and therefore we certainly have an *avodah* to remove evil. But the main emphasis of our *avodah* on this world is with focusing on the “good” that is here – which is each person's Torah learning.

THE “GOOD EYE” - THE POWER OF MOSHE RABBEINU

The Sages state the verse “*A good eye, he shall be blessed*” is referring to Moshe Rabbeinu.⁹ Why is Moshe the epitome of the “good eye”? There are many explanations, but along the lines of our discussion, it is because Moshe was utterly connected to the Torah, and to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, through the Torah. The Torah is epitomized as “good”, and the ultimate good is *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*; since Moshe reached the highest level of connecting to the “good” of life, he epitomized the quality of the “good eye”.

The more that a person connects his soul to Torah, and to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, the more he will acquire the “good eye”, because his soul will be in a place of “good”.

From Avraham *Avinu*, who perfected the trait of kindness/love, we received the power to love others, from the depths of the soul. But after we were given the Torah, we received an even deeper level, which was through Moshe: to experience a dimension where everything is completely good.

Even in the current time we live in, where the world is a terribly disturbing mixture of good and evil together, it is still possible for us to experience a point where everything is good: being immersed in Torah study.

IN CONCLUSION

When one learns Torah, during that time, he is removed from this lowly, depraved world, and it is a time where he can “see” the World To Come, even as he lives in This World, as the Sages describe: “*Your world [to come] can be seen in your life.*”¹⁰

5 *Avodah Zarah* 19b
 6 *Kiddushin* 30b, *Succah* 52a
 7 *Tehillim* 1:2
 8 *Mishlei* 4:2
 9 *Tosafos Bava Kamma* 92b
 10 *Berachos* 17a

A GOOD MUSSAR SEFER FOR OUR GENERATION

QUESTION: Is there a particular mussar sefer which is suitable for our generation to learn?

ANSWER: Every person is different when it comes to which sefarim are best for them to learn, but a good example of a mussar sefer for our generation are the sefarim of Rav Shimshon Pincus [*i.e. the Nefesh Shimshon series, the series of Sichos HaGaon Rav Shimshon Pincus, and sefer She'arim B'Tefillah*].

WHAT IS A GOOD NIGGUN TO LISTEN TO?

QUESTION: What is considered a good niggun to listen to?

ANSWER: Any niggun that was composed by a tzaddik from generations ago. Even if it is sung by someone from today, as long as it was composed by a tzaddik, it's better to listen to. Even better than this is to listen to a tzaddik singing a song; it's hard to find such a tape, but it is available.

The older the music is, the closer to holiness it is. In more recent times, the niggunim of Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro zt"l are considered to be the best songs to listen to. Rav Wolbe zt"l said that these songs are extremely holy. There is no music on it, however, just words. You can hear them on Kol HaLashon. You can also buy the songs of Rav Baruch Ber Levovitz zt"l in the sefarim stores which are from many years ago. These are very holy niggunim.

SHIDDUCHIM – GOOD GIRL WITH INTERNET

QUESTION: If a boy and girl are dating and they are compatible in their ruchniyus, but the girl owns a laptop with filtered (*Net-Free*) internet which she uses for her learning and for work, is this a reason for the boy to say no the shidduch?

ANSWER: You need to find out well why she owns a laptop, which sites she is able to connect with, and the level [*amount of time*] of how much she uses it. Find out also if she uses it only for work or beyond work purposes. And, find out if she is aware at all of the dangers [*of owning an internet-capable laptop even though it's filtered*].

SHIDDUCHIM – IF THE BOY SMOKES

QUESTION: If a certain bochur is reputed to have a good heart and has yiras shomayim but he smokes, is that a reason to reject him in a shidduch?

ANSWER: If there is nothing else you are concerned about him, then this [*smoking*] is not something to be concerned about.

UNDERSTANDING THE EVIL WITHIN

QUESTION: [*The Rav has explained that*] there are three parts in our soul: a part that is totally good and pure, a part that is a mixture of good and evil, and a part that is completely evil. What is the part in ourselves that is completely evil? Is this the yetzer hora (*the evil inclination*)?

ANSWER: Study the sefer Tanya, chapters 2-7, who explains at length about the soul and its general design. To give a brief description, the actual essence of the soul is one piece, but it divides into two parts – our intellect and our character traits. Upon that, there are three “garments” of the soul: thought, speech, and action. The “G-dly soul” (*nefesh Elohis*) of a Jew is entirely good, whereas the “animal soul” (*nefesh habehaimis*) is called kelipas noga, which refers to permissible actions [*which are neither evil nor holy*]. The soul of a gentile consists of the three impure kelipos (*li. “shells”*). When a Jew sins, chas v'shalom, he is connecting his soul to the three impure kelipos. However, it is merely a connection to the evil. Besides for this, there are also “evil” character traits which

can be manifest in a Jew's soul, but those character traits are only “evil” because there is a lack of balance in the Jew's soul. When one's soul is imbalanced, the result will be any of the “evil” character traits. However, it is nothing but an imbalance in the soul's abilities, because there is never any intrinsic evil in a Jew's soul.

QUESTIONS ON LEARNING CHASSIDUS

QUESTION: Is it true that Chassidus was only founded for people who were unlearned in Torah?

ANSWER: No. The pnimiyus of Chassidus is t'mimus. On one hand, this is good for those unlearned in Torah, who have more t'mimus. But it is also for very big Talmidei Chachomim to attain the light of t'mimus and emunah peshutah, and thereby attain great wisdom in Torah, because it is written that chochmah (*wisdom*) comes from a higher source, from ayin.

QUESTION: Which sefarim are the pnimiyus of Chassidus (*besides for sefer Tanya*)?

ANSWER: The pnimiyus of Chassidus is discussed in sefer Tanya, which is describing the Binah within the Radla, and also in the sefarim of Bresslov, which is the Chochmah within the Radla. The Chassidus taught in Poland is the Va"K (*6 Sefiros*) which are also called the “7 lower Sefiros within Atik” which is “clothed in Arich Anpin”.

QUESTION: Are these sefarim only for certain types of Chassidim, or are they also for anyone who wants to go in the way of Chassidus?

ANSWER

Each person has to look for what's appropriate to his personal soul root. Chassidus is not for any certain “type”. This concept that there are certain “types” [*of Jews*] is a superficial mentality.