

# OPEN YOUR EYES

*by Rabbi Naftali Reich*

It is the last day of Moses' life. The forty years of confinement in the desert are at an end, and the Jewish people stand poised on the banks of the Jordan River. The atmosphere is somber and subdued. Moses had just finished reciting the litany of calamities that would befall the Jewish people should they ever turn away from the Creator. Now it is time for a few words of encouragement. "Hashem did not give you an understanding heart," Moses calls out to the people, "nor eyes that see, nor ears that hear, until this very day!"

Until this very day? What can this possibly mean? The people had just spent forty years learning Torah from Moses in the desert under the most wondrous conditions. A cloud pillar had stood guard over them during the day, and a pillar of fire in the night. They had eaten manna that fell daily from heaven and drunk water from a rock that accompanied them on their from encampment to encampment. Did Moses really think that the people were oblivious to all these divine manifestations? Did he really think they had turned a blind eye and a deaf ear to everything?

There is an old Talmudic saying that "the departure of a righteous person leaves an impression. As long as the righteous person is in the city, he is its grace, its radiance and its glory. When he departs, its grace, its radiance and its glory also depart." The commentators are puzzled by the apparent redundancy. If the righteous person is the grace of city while he is in it, it goes without saying that when he departs the grace departs as well.

The answer, they explain, is that all too often we don't appreciate what we have until we have lost it. When do we realize that the righteous person is the grace of the city? When he departs and the city is suddenly graceless. That is when we recognize the value of what we once had.

In this light, we can understand what Moses was saying on the last day of his life. For forty years, the Jewish people had lived in close proximity to the greatest prophet who ever lived. He had brought them out of Egypt. He had gone up on the mountain to receive the Torah. He guided them with transcendent and inspired leadership. Most important, he devoted day after day, month after month, year after year to teaching them the concepts and nuances of the Torah.

After all this time, however, the Jewish people had, to a certain degree, come to take him for granted. They enjoyed the incredibly breathtaking privilege of having Moses as their leader and teacher, but familiarity had sapped them of their breathlessness. Only now, during the waning hours of the last day of Moses' life, did they realize the sheer grandeur of what they were about to lose.

Only now did their eyes and ears open fully.

*A young man asked a sage how to go about finding riches.*

"Would you give a leg," asked the sage, "for a bagful of diamonds?"

"Yes, I would," said the young man. "The pleasures riches bring would easily compensate for my loss of a leg."

"Come with me," said the sage, and he led him into the marketplace where a one-legged man sat leaning against a wall.

"My good fellow," said the sage, "would you give me a bagful of diamonds if I could restore your leg?"

"I would give two bagfuls," he replied, "even if I had to spend years stealing them. I would do anything to be relieved of my legless misery."

The sage turned to the young man. "Would you still make that deal?"

The young man shivered and shook his head.

"Go home," said the sage. "You don't have to seek riches. You have it already."

In our own lives, we all want to achieve, acquire and accomplish. We focus all our energies and determination on the high goals we have set for ourselves, but high goals are not easily nor quickly reached. What happens in the interim? Do we feel deprived because our goals still elude our grasp? If this is our attitude, then we are cheating ourselves of the exquisite pleasures of what we already have. Let us focus instead on all the blessings Hashem has granted us, our families, our health, the air we breathe, the glory of a summer sunset. We may discover that the most valuable riches are already in our possession. Text Copyright © 2010 by Rabbi Naftali Reich and **Torah.org**.

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