

# THE "EYE" GENERATION

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

FRIDAY NIGHT:

See, I place before you today blessing and curse... (Devarim 11:26)

Though, in some circles, "talk is cheap," in the world of Torah, it is anything but. Man's G-dly side is manifested in his power of speech, and, a power it is. And, even though "It's not what you say but how you say it" can be true, usually WHAT one says makes all the difference in the world.

For example, it would have been more than sufficient for Moshe Rabbeinu to begin the above posuk without the word "see." True, even in everyday speech a person may use such a word to emphasize the need for the listener's attention. However, when the Torah employs such a technique, it usually implies something deep, and this is why many commentators spend time looking for deeper meanings of this word.

As is the mandate of "Perceptions," we're going to take a more Kabbalistic approach and talk about the eyes themselves.

There are five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. If you were to ask the average person "off the top of his head" what he thought was the most powerful of the five senses, he might answer anything but sight. After all, each of the other four provide some kind of sensual pleasure; what pleasure can one FEEL through his or her eyes.

On the other hand, each of the other four have an inherent weakness that sight does not. For example, the average person can see farther than he can hear, and faster. Smell can be confusing because of all the many smells in the air, and, depends upon the person being quite close to the source of the smell. And, when it comes to both taste and touch, neither is possible if the source of either does not come into direct contact with the person tasting or touching.

However, isn't it amazing how when two pairs of eyes lock onto each other, from as far as even twenty feet away or more, distance seems to disappear. Eyes seem to be able to "bore" into people, unlike the other of the five senses. They seem to be able to penetrate to the very depths of a person's soul, which is why they have been called "windows to the soul."

In fact, the Talmud warns:

The yetzer hara has no power except with respect to what the eyes see. (Sotah 8a)

Perhaps it has to do with the fact that the distance between the eyes and the brain is shortest of all the five senses, resulting in a stronger neuro-sensation and leaving little time to double-think what one is beholding (I made that up; is it true?). Whatever the reason, the Talmud's premise seems to be true since the beginning of mankind:

The woman SAW that the tree was good to eat, and that it was desirable to the EYES... (Bereishis 1:6)

However, this posuk only scratches the surface of the idea, as we will now discuss.

"... The third aspect is that the 'Seichel' (Mind) and the Da'as are also spoken of in terms of 'eating,' as we see in Yechezkel, 'Eat this scroll ... And He fed me that scroll ... Feed your stomach and fill your innards with this scroll ... So I ate, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth' (Yechezkel 3:1-3). Likewise, we find in Yeshayahu, 'Go, buy, and eat; go and buy wine and milk without money and without price' (Yeshayahu 55:1). We find similar examples in Chazal in, where they compared the words of Torah to water, wine, oil, and honey (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 81). Thus, the Seichel and the Da'as are also referred to in terms of eating, and the warning was also: do not contemplate or GLANCE at anything with which evil is associated. It is crucial to not LOOK at the ability of the Chitzonim themselves, to investigate them even to learn how powerful they are, so that you are not seduced after them. For, it is the nature of a person to be drawn after that which he contemplates, for, the Seichel, the thinker, and that which is being understood become one... Therefore, there is great danger in looking at and contemplate anything to which evil is attached, and, how much more so at the Chitzonim themselves; it is very precarious to follow after them, like a sheep going to the slaughter..." (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 441)

This requires some explanation.

#### SHABBOS DAY:

The previously quoted paragraph is not as foreign as it may first appear. In everyday language, you hear things like, "I need to DIGEST that idea before I act on it..." or, "I don't know if I can SWALLOW that..." and even, "Let me CHEW on that concept for a little while."

The reason is simple: our minds deal with ideas in a similar way that our bodies deal with food.

First, we examine the potential food for that which appears to be healthy to consume, and reject what appears to be unhealthy. All ideas are subjected to an initial superficial examination for their worthiness before we devote thinking time to them.

Then, we put the food into our mouths to taste it and use our teeth to break it down to aid digestion. We do the same thing with ideas when trying to evaluate their pros and cons.

Finally, once the food has been properly digested, it becomes absorbed into the bodily system, becoming "one" with the person. The same is true of ideas: once we accept them as being true, whether we are correct or not, we mentally "absorb" them and they become part of the way we

think, right or wrong; we become ONE with the concept.

This is what the Leshem means above, and, just as one cannot spit out poison they have already consumed (especially if they don't know it is poison), a person has difficulty separating himself from bad ideas if he has already developed an intellectual relationship to them. And, the Leshem is both teaching and warning, that happens the moment your eyes behold something, as was the case with Adam HaRishon.

This is the answer to one of the most troubling questions of all time: How could Adam HaRishon, who had no internal yetzer hara yet, and, who was on such a phenomenally high spiritual level at the time, break such a simple command and eat from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil?

The answer, of course, is he didn't.

In other words, explains the Leshem in one of the most powerful divrei Torah of all history, all Adam did on that very high level and without his yetzer hara was LOOK at the tree, for, at the time, it was the only place in all of creation that possessed potential evil. He did so, says the Leshem, to conquer that remaining evil in creation, for purely altruistic reasons, and become a partner with G-d in perfecting creation.

However, what he had not anticipated was how powerful the evil (Chitzonim) was, how weak he had been at the time (he had not earned his greatness, but had been created with it), and how quickly he could be dragged down by them through VISUALLY investigating them. Quite innocently, an undesired connection to evil was made "through his eyes," and the relationship dragged Adam down to a level where eating from the tree became an INEVITABLE result.

And it all began with the sense of sight. This is the deeper meaning of what the Talmud means:

The yetzer hara has no power except with respect to what the eyes see. (Sotah 8a)

For, the eyes alone, of all the senses, have the power to make a distant relationship become a close one, and when evil is the object of that vision, one can find themselves in a visually precious position, as the prophet Yeshayahu warns...

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

... And shuts his eyes from seeing evil. (Yeshayahu 33:15)

The following Talmudic passage emphasizes how much we must endeavor to protect our eyes from that which can lead to sin. Parenthetical comments are my own.

Rebi Yochanan said in the name of Rebi Banna: In all matters, partners...

(In the ownership of a courtyard.)

... can prevent one another, except for laundering.

(In other words, even though most activities in a jointly-owned courtyard must have the approval all the partners in the courtyard, according to Torah law, a woman can do her laundry there even if the joint-owner(s) do not agree to it.)

For, it is not the way of a Jewish woman to become disgraced through laundering.

(As Rashi explains, since washing down by the river bed necessitates that a woman remove her shoes and expose parts of her body that, for modesty reasons, ought to remain covered in public, it is considered disgraceful for a woman to have to do her laundry in such a wide-open public domain as opposed to the privacy, or, at least, partial-privacy of her personal courtyard.)

"And shuts his eyes from seeing evil" (Yeshayahu 33:15) -- Rebi Chiya bar Avva said that this refers to one who does not look at women while they are laundering (by the river). What is the case?

(Rashi explains the question: The fact that the posuk praises such a person if he shuts his eyes implies that if he doesn't, he is neither righteous nor evil. However, that is not the case, as the Talmud now spells out.)

If there was another way (to walk), then he is evil...

(Even if he does close his eyes, Rashi says, he is still called "evil" just for putting himself in the position to sin by walking in a place where he knows women are forced to stand immodestly.)

If there was no other way (to pass), then he had no choice...

(And, there is a well known concept in Jewish law: The Torah forgives the forcee. That is, if he happened to momentarily glance at a women washing her clothes by the river bed, having no other way to walk, and see her immodestly dressed the Torah does not hold him responsible. Therefore, why does the posuk from Yeshayahu praise such a person and make it seem like he should close his eyes even in such a case? Therefore, the Talmud answers:)

In truth, he had not choice (but to walk that way), and even still, he should force himself (to look away). (Bava Basra 57b)

And, not just as a function of modesty, but, for protection from sin. For, EVERYONE knows only too well how deep an impression something makes on our psyche once we see it. It may be hard to remember an actual smell after the source of the smell has been removed, to continue to hear that which no longer makes a noise, to taste that which has long left our mouths, or, to feel that which is beyond our touch.

However, even a short glance is like taking a "snap shot" with our minds, and, even years later, we can still see on the "screens" of our imaginations images that, perhaps, should have been long forgotten. A short glance can result in an instantaneous relationship, for better or for worse, longer

lasting, perhaps, than any that may be built with the other senses.

And, that is why Moshe Rabbeinu began with the word, "See," for, embedded in that single word is the secret to binding to blessing, and, avoiding curse. Western society, which continues to feed (read: bombard) innocent (and not-so-innocent) eyes with illicit images daily, would do VERY well to learn the lesson.

#### MELAVE MALKAH: Olam HaBah-World-to-Come-And Order Of Ascension

Before discussing what is obviously an extremely Kabbalistic topic, we must begin with a series of introductions. For, just as This World is only a 'corridor' to the World-to-Come (Pirkei Avos 4:16), so have been all of these discussions up until now been a corridor to this one about eternal reward.

Evidently, it is possible for a person to remain on the level of Pshat in This World for an entire lifetime. Whether in everyday life or in Torah learning, people can remain on levels of understanding that do not go as deeply as they could, or ought to.

However, that is only in This World, and because of the yetzer hara and hester panim. It is the yetzer hara that allows us to fear the unknown, or to be just too lazy to research it, being 'comfortable' on presently accessible levels; it is the 'hiding of G-d's face' that fools us into believing there is no urgency to tread the deepest and most holy levels of Torah learning.

That will all change, of course, in Yemos HaMoshiach, once G-d reveals Himself more and the yetzer hara, by definition, must end its existence. Bad habits will cease and love for Torah growth will increase, and, movement in the direction of Techiyas HaMeisim and Olam HaBah will be synonymous with intellectually relating to Sod (Kabbalah). They will be one and the same thing.

In simple layman's terms, what is the World-to-Come?

It will be eternal pleasure.

What will be the source of that eternal pleasure?

(Once, a beginner asked me, "Will we play basketball there?" When I told him, no, he shook his head and said, "How boring...")

G-d. Somehow you will be able to 'feel' G-d, and, in doing so, you will have the sensation (a borrowed term from everyday life in the mundane world of This World) of more pleasure than you have ever had, no matter how good your life has been until then, and can ever imagine having.

Relateable? Perhaps a little, perhaps not at all.

So, before trying to make that idea more tangible (huh!), which may take eternity to do so (but we'll try to keep it shorter), let's first discuss some of the more technical details, such as, who gets to go?

1. Who Goes To The World To Come? (Much of the following material comes from "The Big Picture:

### Thirty-Six Sessions To Intellectual & Spiritual Clarity")

The mystery of the World-to-Come goes beyond just our understanding of what it is, and where it is. Even judgments to do with the World-to-Come are a function of Kavshei Rachmanah-Mysteries of G-d, a level of understanding too lofty for us to discern and relate to.

Therefore, though a Bais Din, a Jewish court of law, may decide issues of life and death and even carry out capital punishment, it cannot decide a person's fate in the World-to-Come. Eternal reward and punishment are a function of Heavenly calculations to sublime for man, in his present state, to understand.

Hence, the Talmud can conclude:

The Dorshei Reshumos used to say: Everyone goes to the World-to-Come, even Doeg Edomi, Achitophel, Yeravam ben Nevat, Achav, Menashe, Gechazi... (Sanhedrin 104b)

-that is, even people we would have assumed would never make it to the World-to-Come.

This means that every Jew, no matter how far he strays, will end up in the World-to-Come. However, if that is in fact the case, then what does the Talmud mean when it writes:

Jews who transgress with their bodies and non-Jews who sin with their bodies go down to Gehinnom for 12 months, after which time their bodies are destroyed and their souls burnt, and the winds scatter and turn their ashes under the souls of the righteous ... But as for minim, mesoros, and epikorsim who deny Torah or resurrection, who separate themselves from the community, or those who terrorize the living, or who transgress and cause others to transgress, as did Yeravam son of Nevat and his "friends"-they descend to Gehinnom and are judged there from generation to generation, as it says, "They shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against Me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched." (Yeshayahu 66:24). Even after Gehinnom is destroyed, they will not be consumed ... (Rosh Hashanah 17a) and, The fire that The Holy One, Blessed is He, created on the second day [of creation] will never be extinguished, as it says, "They shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men who have transgressed against Me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched." (Yeshayahu 66:24). (Pesachim 54a)

From the above two statements, it seems that there is a limit to how evil a Jew can become before he loses his portion in the World-to-Come. On the contrary, it seems as if not every Jew goes to the World-to-Come in the end. What, if any, is the resolution of these two points of view?

That will be the topic of next week's essay.

Have a great Shabbos,  
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