

A CLOSER LOOK

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

See that I place before you this day a blessing and a curse... (Devarim 11:26)

IT'S A COMMON expression in probably all languages. A person can be talking to someone for a while, and all of a sudden, in order to make a point, they'll say, "Look..." as if to better grab their listener's attention, even though they already have it. They probably don't even know they said it, or even what they mean by it. It can be kind of automatic.

In general, people will start a sentence with, "Look" as a way to focus people on the point they want to make. It's a way of saying, "Pay attention to this. This is what I really mean to say, which you will also see if you look more closely at the matter."

Moshe Rabbeinu has been talking to the people non-stop since Parashas Devarim. The ENTIRE book is a one-day discussion, though we read it in 11 episodes. True, he could be saying "See!" now in this week's parsha because some people may have been losing their concentration. More than likely, he is trying to take the Jewish people deeper into the following matter.

(The following is from a chapter in an upcoming book called, "Not So Bad.")

Redemption has been hotly anticipated for almost 6,000 years—by CREATION. It EXISTS for redemption, because it cannot fulfill its reason to be until it occurs. As long as exile remains a reality, Creation hobbles through history.

Mankind too. Mankind was created into Paradise, the ORIGINAL and far more ULTIMATE version of redemption. Having been expelled LONG ago from Gan Aiden, it has been mankind's mission to return there—we were MADE for it—and can't be happy until we do.

That's why we CHEAT. It's either that or live depressed, which many do. We are wired to be happy, and when we're not, especially for extended periods of time, or for reasons we can't accept, we break down. We either give up, or find ways to fake it.

There is no greater pleasure in life FOR EVERYONE than being closely connected to God. If that sounds like religious marketing and advertising, it's only because those who have failed to grasp this, have done their VERY best to make it seem that way. This way, they can avoid the need to earn the right to return to Paradise, and make a lot of money off a lot of people who haven't.

What people also don't understand is how EVERY other pleasure in life, is just a very watered down version of the original one. The pleasure they enjoy from anything, even illicit pleasures, is the spark

of God within it with which they have interacted spiritually. Unearned, and how much more so if stolen, it can only be fleeting, resulting in an insatiable desire to have more and newer ones.

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Unfortunately for man, Creation offers many.

The first statement does not need an explanation. The second one does. It's the reason why we're still in exile, 5,778 years later, and making Creation pay for it as well. People are born, raised, and live according to the wrong idea of pleasure and fulfillment. Consequently, mankind greatly understrives, settling for far lesser forms of pleasure and quality of life.

Noach in his time understood this, but failed to impress the people of his time with it. Avraham succeeded somewhat in showing this incredible truth to his generation, but it didn't stick. Their intellectual capacity was not great enough to counter the magnetism of the sensual pleasures of the physical world.

Hopeless, at least for the time being, God turned away from the bulk of mankind. He chose instead to build a NEW nation from Avraham, one that could grow up with THE TRUTH from the beginning. Clearly the world was not going to change. Success depended upon the creation of a nation that didn't NEED to change, just improve.

Torah, given exactly 500 years after the birth of Avraham, helped with that. It provided new structure for an ancient wisdom, a guided means to an endgame known since God spoke to our first ancestor.

The fundamental difference? Clearly Torah does not shun physical pleasure AT ALL. Indeed, so MANY mitzvos inherently promote the greatest of material enjoyments.

Shabbos.

Yom Tov.

Relationships.

The list is long.

Rather, the ESSENTIAL and ETERNAL difference in approach to life that Avraham Avinu discovered, and then passed down to his son Yitzchak, who later passed it on to his son, Ya'akov, etc. was this:

Physical pleasure is not the GOAL of life. It is a wonderful BY-PRODUCT of doing the will of God.

The goal in life is doing the RIGHT thing, the GODLY thing. Our core is spiritual, so we are, in essence, spiritual. We crave spiritual success, and would know this automatically if the drives of the body, which is only clothing for the soul, weren't so "loud."

The truth is, physical pleasures are even MORE enjoyable when they are spiritually-justifiable. We can argue that point and fight against it, but we can't change it because it is the way we were MADE,

as the Torah says:

And God created man in HIS IMAGE; in the IMAGE OF GOD He created him... (Bereishis 1:27)

So there.

As the mishnah says, this world is only a corridor to the next world. It means that whatever pleasure we enjoy in this world, it pales compare to the pleasure we're in for in the World-to-Come. And THAT pleasure will be COMPLETELY spiritual.

Shabbos is kind of bridge between both worlds, the present one and the one to come. It is considered to be one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come, to indicate that one can, if they observe Shabbos in holiness, experience additional levels of spiritual pleasure from physical activities.

This is because, and this is REALLY important to know, the things we enjoy can provide varying levels of pleasure. The level of pleasure is based upon the person performing the pleasurable act, and the manner in which it is done. The more spiritually capable a person is, the more they are "permitted" to access deeper levels of pleasure.

This is both a secret and not a secret. Righteous people know this and live by it, which is why they require SO little to get SO much out of life. The rest of the world experiences it from time-to-time, when they add a spiritual element to their physical experience. But they just don't understand it well enough to apply it to their everyday lives.

Besides, they are constantly being told by the media that TRUE pleasure comes from physical pleasures WITHOUT spiritual connection. And most people are either too naive or unquestioning to realize they are being conned out of a higher quality of life. And this approach has spilled over into the Torah world as well... (More next week, b"H).