

THEME: SIGHT; PERCEPTION

QUOTE: When you place your life in the hand of God, you begin to see His hand in everything.

PARTS OF THE BODY - EYES

Last month we saw how the Name of G-d was embedded in our skeletal frame. This month we will begin to examine the head, which would link with the first letter in the Name of G-d - the *yod*. The head is the head, the 'manager' as it were, of the bod. As well as the brain, it carries the four sensory organs of the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. This month we will focus on the eyes. The eyes are considered the most important of the four and often are compared to wisdom - the *seeing* and understanding the essence of something.

The Hebrew word for eye - *ayin* / עין - has the numerical value of 70; an important number in the Bible. Abraham was 70 when God cut the Covenant of the Pieces with him. There were 70 souls of the house of Jacob who went down to Egypt (Genesis 46). There are 70 archetypal nations of the world, for whom 70 bulls were offered as sacrifices during the week of the Festival of Sukkot. These correspond to 70 evil characteristics that epitomise the worldly nations, of which the trait of sexual immorality is considered the most widespread and damaging. The Torah, G-d's Word, is considered to have 70 facets that counteract these evil characteristics.

The *Shemah* prayer, the first learned by Jewish children and prayed at least twice a day, is prayed with the right hand covering the eyes to impress the importance of sight and how we "see" things. This past week's *parasha* - Torah portion (*Shlach Lecha*, Numbers 13:1 - 15:41), includes verse 39 in chapter 15, which is repeated in the *Shemah*: "...Remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after." The verse refers to the *tzitzit* - the tassles on the corners of a man's *tallit*, prayer shawl and *tallit katan*, a vest-like undergarment. By constantly seeing the tassles, a man is reminded to obey God's will and to be "holy to your God." Yeshua emphasised the importance of not "straying after one's eyes" in Matthew 5:28, when he said: "...I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

Another important aspect of seeing is included in the portion. The account of 'The Sin of the Ten Spies.' The Israelites are camped on the border of the Promised Land and twelve leaders, one from every tribe, were sent by Moses to scout out the Land, to "see" what it was like, and to bring back a report. After 40 days they returned and, according to their report, ten saw one thing and two saw another. What happened? The ten described 'reality' as they saw it, from a fear-filled perspective, and gave a negative report of the 'giants' the inhabited the Land and made them feel like grasshoppers. The two - Joshua and Caleb, assured the now terrified people of the goodness

of the Land and they would be able to conquer the giants because G-d had promised and was with them. Which perspective won out? Sadly, the faithless fear-based one... and, as a result, that generation continued to wander for forty years and died in the wilderness. What was their sin, which is considered to be worse than the Sin of the Golden Calf? They did not see with eyes of faith and they turned their backs on the Land G-d had promised them for generations as their sacred inheritance.

We could argue that the two were facing **reality** and were only sharing what they had seen with their own eyes. Joshua and Caleb, by the way, did not argue with them about the challenge posed by the warlike inhabitants but emphasised how the *reality* we see with our physical eyes is not necessarily the *truth* of the matter. In a wonderful commentary by David Ebenbach, called *The Artist's Torah*, he describes how, when a person is in pursuit of truth - about life, about meaning, about the universe, the Divine, often the things we discover may seem completely unrealistic! We need to see beyond the seemingly 'real.' Ebenbach quotes from scholar Earle Colman's book, *Creativity and Spirituality*, how famous Jewish artist Marc Chagall called spiritual reality unreality. To see the spiritual view, which G-d was asking the Israelites to do, means seeing and grasping the truth that is beyond the mundane reality which we see around us. In his autobiography, Marc Chagall wrote of his search for truth and G-d's unique purpose for him:

I roamed the streets, I searched, I prayed. "G-d, Thou who hides in the clouds or behind the shoemaker's house, grant that my soul may be revealed, the sorrowful soul of a stammering boy. Show me my way. I do not want to be like all the others. I want to see a new world.

Interestingly, I believe that art and creativity are gifts, tools, we have been given to better envision the reality of the spiritual realm. It began in the wilderness with the creation of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) with all its beauty and design, color and pattern, as a vision of this "new world" - the world as G-d created it to be, with His Presence dwelling among us. In fact, the Hebrew words for art - *ohmanut* - אמנות, and faith - אמונה, both have the same root אמנ, amen, which is an acronym for *El Melech Ne'eman*, which means G-d Faithful King. The truth of which is the basis of our faith!

Ebenbach also quotes the well-known poet and author Saul Bellow (whose novel *Seize the Day* popularised the *Carpe Diem* saying, and whose novel *Henderson the Rain King* is a perennial favorite) who said, in his 1976 Nobel Prize winning acceptance speech:

Only art penetrates what pride, passion, intelligence and habit erect on la sides - the seeming reality of this world. There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality [Chagall's new word?] is always sending us hints which, without art, we can't receive.

We need to be *visionaries*. What does that mean? To be a visionary means, not ignoring the reality of what we see around us, but perceiving things that are not there - yet! It means standing with Caleb and Joshua against the fear and pessimistic proclamations and rather to proclaim the truth of what we can envision - that which is written and promised in the Word of our Creator.

HOW DO WE SEE?

There are many idioms associated with seeing, for example, "There are none so blind as those who *will* not see." There is a danger in choosing to see only that which we want to see, as opposed to the reality of what actually is there. Our perception of things can be distorted by, for example, the desire to be right and to not admit to ignorance, or a mistaken understanding of the facts. The Torah also underscores in the case of making a judgment, "And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right" (Exodus 23:8). There are many forms of 'bribery' - peer pressure, desire to be popular and accepted, or to be seen as important. If we succumb to these we can make unfair and unsound judgments and end up calling bad good and good bad.

The Sages of Israel describe the reality of a Good Eye - *ayin tov* (עין טוב), and an Evil Eye - *ayin rah* (עין רע). Proverbs 22:9 tells us, "Whoever has a good eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor." Abraham is the prime example of one with a good eye for he intently watched out for those whom he could help and always tried to see the good in others. Balaam is an example of one with an evil eye - someone who always looks for fault, is willing to accept bribes, and is jealous of another's goods or status. One with a good eye *gives*, while one with an evil eye *takes* and the latter is never satisfied with what he has; he is driven by greed.

In order to combat the presence of the 'evil eye' - from evil thoughts about others, from jealousy and covetousness, and all forms of negative thinking, our focus must be on God's Word, which is Truth. We need to shift our gaze from the materialism and influence of the 'kingdom of the world' - *Olam HaZeh* around us and remain focussed on the Kingdom of God and *Olam HaBa* - the World to Come. That doesn't mean, as the popular saying goes, that one must be so heavenly minded that one is no earthly good! It means that we need to train our eyes to see the Presence of God and the signs of His provision in this world, even while we know that this is but an all too brief transition to the eternal world to come.

The eyes of our Father in Heaven always are upon His children; and upon those who are searching for Him. "The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God" (Psalm 14:2). Psalm 145:15-16 also tells us how, "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing." He is the prime Giver, the perfect *Ayin Tov*, Good Eye. We need to see and understand that all our provision comes from God. When we do we will have an attitude of complete trust in Him for all our daily needs. We will learn to see His hand clearly and will be able to respond in heartfelt gratitude without ever taking it for granted.

The prophet Isaiah gives a beautiful, joyful promise to those who are watchmen and women, watching for God, in 52:8, “The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion.” Seeing ‘eye to eye’ means being in perfect agreement. Coming to an intimate knowledge of God through His Word, and having one’s will in harmony with His; being ‘one’ with, just as Yeshua was with the Father. As we see when he prayed to the Father for his disciples before his arrest in John 17: 17-24,

Sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth. As You sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world....The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and You in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent me and loved them even as You loved me.

The prophet Habakkuk tells us that after Messiah is enthroned in Zion, ruling over God’s Kingdom, “...the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (2:14). Until then, let us pray...

Abba, Father, our desire is to “see eye to eye” with You. Help us to surrender our lives more fully into Your Hand and to begin to see Your hand more clearly in all things. Thank You for Your faithful provision. We pray that you will continue to sustain us and strengthen us in all You call us to do. May we continue to grow in knowledge of You, and to become more and more the people You created us to be; each one unique and in Your image.

Help us to study and gain deeper knowledge of Your Word that we may stand securely on it and proclaim is Truth without worry of being led astray. Our trust is in You Abba. Thank You that You hear us when we call to You. You see our hearts and know our love for You and for Your son and Messiah. Let us keep our gaze upon You and Your amazing wonders even in this world; and may our inner focus be on the glory and reality of the World to Come. For Your Holy Name’s sake! Amen.