

A person in a dark coat stands on a rocky, elevated terrain, looking out over a vast, hazy landscape under a dramatic sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. The foreground is filled with dark, jagged rocks.

SEEING

**PARSHAS
SHELACH**

Drasha from the author of *Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh*

Shelach – Seeing

The Spies Saw What They Wanted To See – A Grim Reality

Parshas Shelach recounts the story of the Spies who entered the land of *Eretz Yisrael*, who disagreed with each other on their account of what they saw in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Calev and Yehoshua saw the land in positive terms, because they had a “good eye” towards the land, and they spoke of the praises of the land of *Eretz Yisrael*. The other Spies, however, gave an opposite report. They spoke of a dangerous “land which consumes its inhabitants”.

Chazal revealed that as the spies were scouring the land, Hashem made a miracle for them so that the Canaanites shouldn't see them, by placing the rulers of Canaan throughout the cities. Through this, the Canaanites were distracted and they didn't see the spies. The Spies, however, interpreted what they saw as a frightening sight, a “land that consumes its inhabitants.”

The Spies also said that “we were like grasshoppers in their eyes”, claiming that there were giants in the land who could squash everyone. The Gemara says that this was false; it was an exaggeration, for they “preceded with their mouth, what they had not seen with their eyes”.¹ Only after delivering their

negative report did they also see it that way. According to another opinion in the Sages, they spoke exactly what they had seen with their eyes, and they had seen people who looked larger than them.

The members of the Spies were prominent members, carefully selected from amongst the tribes, who were originally righteous, but they each saw the land of *Eretz Yisrael* differently. Yehoshua and Calev saw it one way, and the rest of the Sages saw a totally different *Eretz Yisrael*. It wasn't just about what they said, but an entirely different reality that they saw.

Clearly, *Eretz Yisrael* is the land where the “eyes of Hashem” are on, a special place in the world where a person can receive “eyes of Hashem”, so to speak – a higher perspective, which is closer to the perspective of Hashem. That is the view which Yehoshua and Calev received, who saw the praises of *Eretz Yisrael*. *Chazal* state that “the land of Israel is the highest of all the lands”, and the deeper understanding of this is that a person can receive a higher view in *Eretz Yisrael*, more than in any other land.

We have no comprehension of the Spies, but on our own level, let us examine the soul's power of sight (*re'iyah*) – of how we see reality.

¹ *Sanhedrin 104a*

The Phases of The Power of Sight – From Child To Adult

The soul's power of sight begins in a child, as soon as Hashem opens our eyes, and in the first phase of the power of sight, a person simply sees whatever he sees. At this immature level, a person doesn't think at all about what he sees. A child has no access yet to his intellectual thinking abilities, for the most part. He sees whatever he sees, but without understanding anything about what he sees.

When he gets a little older, and he begins to understand a little, his abilities of recognition are developed. When a child begins to nurse, it acquires the sense of taste, and thereafter, a child puts everything in his mouth. This is because a child senses and understands the world through the powers of touch and taste.

Eventually, when getting older, he plays games, and then he understands the world as a game. He seeks to have fun, to play, and this is how he sees the world – one big situation of having fun. That is how sees reality.

When getting older, he begins to understand that life is not about food or games, but that there is a certain system, the way things are, which require thinking. He sees that in order to get what you want, you need to be able to think and understand. He sees that a deeper world beyond food, games and fun. There is a world of things to attain, which require certain actions to do. He has certain desires and wishes that he has, which is a more inner

world than anything what he knew from childhood.

And he will see the world according to what he desires and wishes. At the age where he begins to mature, some of these desires are good, and some are bad.

The Two Sources of Sight: The Mind and The Heart

In clearer terms, the power of sight - which is through our eyes - has two deep sources to it.

The *Raavad* writes that the eyes see through the brain. This does not mean that the brain/mind is the only source of sight. Rather, it means that according to how you think, that is how you will see.

A second source of sight is in the heart. In the side of holiness, this is described in the verse “*My heart has seen much wisdom*”, as Shlomo HaMelech said; and one of the powers of the heart is “sight”, as the Sages state in *Koheles Rabbah*.

Thus, the physical eyes are not the beginning of the sight. The source of sight begins in the thoughts of the mind, and in the heart.

An Impure Heart Will See An Impure Reality

When the heart contains certain desires - the desires of the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) who

is “hidden” in the heart², and specifically in the “left chamber of the heart”³ - a person will then see what his heart wants to see. He will see the world through these evil desires, contained in his impaired heart.

Chazal state that “The eyes see, and the heart desires, and the actions complete.” When a person sees what he wants, he wants it more. The simple understanding of this, as implied from “the eyes see and the heart desires”, is that a person first sees something, then he desires it, which leads him to actualizing the desire. But the deeper, truer understanding is actually that the desire begins in his heart, and then this desire spreads into the eyes, and then it returns as a stronger desire in the heart, which leads a person to act upon the desire.

Therefore, a person sees reality depending on the level of his heart. If he purifies his heart, he sees a purer reality, and if his heart is impure, he sees an impure version of reality.

As long as a person does not do the inner work of purifying his heart, there are impurities that remain there; *Chazal* state that the *yetzer hora* is called by seven names, such as “Uncircumcised”, “Impure”, etc. He will see reality from this impure heart, so he will only see his own animalistic desires. His entire power of sight will be stemming from his desires.

It is not simply that he sees something improper and then he desires what he sees.

² *Sukkah 52a*

³ *sefer Tanya*

Rather, it all begins from the state of his heart. If he had a pure heart, he wouldn't see improperly in the first place. Once a person purifies his heart, he doesn't see the evil desires that others see. This does not simply mean that he has overcome his desires – it means that he will see a different world entirely than what others see.

With most people, the heart is the source of their vision, and since most people haven't purified their heart, they see what they want to see. The mental source of vision is also impaired, when a person is “bribed” by his own desires and his thinking becomes influenced by those desires that are swaying his thinking patterns. The mind then becomes subservient to the level of the heart, which is controlled by desires.

Repairing An Impure Heart

There are two ways to repair this.

One way is to gain control of the mind, and “the mind controls the heart”.⁴ There is also a way for the heart to control the mind and influence it for holiness, but this is a level reached only by those who have *ruach hakodesh* (the holy spirit).

If an impure heart rules the mind, a person's thinking patterns are controlled by his desires, like a form of bribery. He won't see correctly. Rather, he will only see whatever his heart wants to see. That is the case whenever a

⁴ *Sefer Tanya in the name of the Zohar*

person remains with an impure heart and he never works to improve it – and this is what it written, “*For the inclination of the heart of man is evil from his youth.*”

Understanding The Error of the Spies: Seeing An Impaired Reality

The Spies saw *Eretz Yisrael* as a bad place - according to one opinion in the Sages, they exaggerated their report and did not speak the truth; and according to the other opinion of the Sages, it is because they saw what they wanted to see. The heart wants certain things, which bribes the mind, and then a person sees an impaired reality. This is what happened with the Spies.

In different terms, there is a way to see from the body and a way to see from the soul. The external layer of sight, its “body”, stems from the brain, and the inner layer of sight, its “soul”, stems from the heart.

What Life Looks Like Without Purifying The Heart

Unless a person works on himself to purify his heart, a person will only see the desires of jealousy, lust, and honor. There are those who are already born with a purer heart, or with a “good heart”, so they don’t have a struggle with these desires, because they have been with a purer sense of vision. But most people are not born like this, and they have to work on themselves to purify their hearts. If they

don’t, they will see reality from their desires, and they will see only what they want to see – the impure desires that remain in their unfixed heart.

If a person works to purify his heart, he will see an elevated reality. If he doesn’t work to purify his heart and he simply tries to do the *mitzvos*, and he tries to always do the will of Hashem, and to *daven*, etc. - this will not be enough. Although all of those things are truthful and commendable to do, the problem is that he will be living with a generally erroneous perspective towards life, as long as he hasn’t worked to purify the heart. He might try to do everything he should for 10 years, 20 years, or even until the end of his life - but he will see life as nothing but a constant series of difficulties, *nisyonos*, hard situations, etc., because his vision will be tied down to the current situation he is in and he can’t see past it.

A Life of a Purified Heart: Seeing a Different Reality

In contrast, a true kind life looks very different than this. It is when a person works to purify his inner character, to purify the heart – through the means of inner work, prayer, and tears to Hashem in order to merit a “pure heart”.

If a person does merit to be given a “pure heart” from Hashem – a “pure heart” on his own level, even if it is not yet the perfected level – he will begin to see an entirely different

world, an entirely new perspective towards reality that he had never seen until now.

This will not simply mean that he will begin to judge others favorably. Rather, he will see a different world entirely! To illustrate, Reb Yisrael Salanter said that a shoemaker will see shoes wherever he goes, and a carpenter sees wood wherever he goes. The more a person's view changes and it matures, he will see a deeper reality. As a result of this, his power of *bechirah* (free will) will become elevated as well. He will see past the previous obstacles and instead he will find himself with deeper, more elevated choices to make. He essentially enters a new world than before.

Compare this to the following. If a person tries to become mature when he is surrounded by children in kindergarten, he wouldn't be able to, because the surroundings don't let him. But if he goes to a place where people toil in Torah, in holiness and purity, who are completely dedicated to learning Torah, surely the surroundings elevate him.

So too, when a person leaves the view of the impure heart because he has gained purity of heart, he sees an entirely new world than before.

What The Spies Saw, and What Calev and Yehoshua Saw

The Spies all viewed the same reality, but Yehoshua and Calev saw a good *Eretz Yisrael* because [they had purified themselves

internally and thus] they received a higher view from Hashem, so they saw a more elevated reality. In contrast, the rest of the Spies, who did not purify themselves internally beforehand, saw a bad *Eretz Yisrael*.

We have no comprehension of the greatness of the Spies, but one thing is certain - they definitely saw something else than what Yehoshua and Calev saw.

Examples of Seeing A New Reality: A World of Kindness, and A World of Torah

When a person is elevated, he sees a different world entirely, and here are some examples.

When a person becomes opened to *chessed*/kindness, it is not achieved by simply learning *sefer Ahavas Chessed* and then trying to fulfill everything he learns in that *sefer*. That is also commendable, but when a person becomes opened to kindness on the level of the heart, he sees a whole new reality, in which he must help people. Until then, he had not been aware of this. Now that he is opened to kindness, he sees a world in which he must help people. He will also see his money as a way to help people with, not as a way to fulfill his desires.

He gains a perspective of "kindness" towards Creation. He sees a "world" of kindness – "*The world is built by kindness.*" One who is at this awareness towards kindness isn't taking inventory of how much reward in Gan Eden he will be getting from all this and he won't

think of the future reward that he hopes to receive for all of it on the great day of judgment in the future.

This is all the more so when it comes to seeing the world through the lens of Torah – which is the root of everything. A person can learn to see reality through the lens of Torah, where he will see an entirely different view of reality. For example, Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt”l* once saw chickens in the street, and he began thinking of what the laws of its eggs are, if its owner is liable to pay for damages if it beats something with the wind in its wings. A regular person would just look at the chickens and see chickens, but Reb Shlomo Zalman saw something else entirely. He saw the world through Torah.

This viewpoint changes one’s attitude towards the difficult of *nisyonos* as well. There are always many *nisyonos* in life, but a person can gain a higher view, where he sees a different world entirely, and then there are less *nisyonos* - for he has purified his mind and heart. This is not to say that there won’t be *nisyonos* for him at all, but they will be much less.

The More You Enter Inward, The Deeper Your View Becomes

Even more so, if a person merits to penetrate deeply into his own inner world, with the further he gets into himself, the deeper of a view he will see towards reality.

Old people see reality differently, because their perspective on life has matured. If this is the case with the material side to life, surely this is the case when a person merits to penetrate into his inner world – he will see reality very differently. He will see a world that was created for Hashem’s honor, as it says, “*For My honor, I created it.*” He will see everything in the world as either something that conceals Hashem or reveals Hashem, and nothing else other than this. This will not just be mere knowledge to him (which can be attained from studying *sefer Daas Tevunos* of the Ramchal), but it will become his actual perspective.

In Conclusion

Everyone has the free will of what kind of ‘*Eretz Yisrael*’ he will see.

A true, inner life of spiritual growth is to keep seeing a new world, a new view, which you didn’t see last time. You can see a different, deeper perspective in something that you saw a year ago, and then some time later, you can then see an entirely different perspective towards it. In this way, you don’t just remain in the same place and seeing the same old thing; you keep seeing something new in the ‘same old’ thing you saw a year ago.

Taking this path affords a person a higher kind of free will, and a person can keep taking this ability further until he eventually merits to see a world in which there is nothing but Hashem’s Presence.