



TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHTS FOR LIFE

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

PARSHAS VAYERA

THE ART OF LOOKING

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Part I. Calculated Looking

Studying Avraham's Biography

When we want to study the life of Avraham Avinu, one of the first things we notice is that there is very much that the Torah does not tell us about his biography; there are so many days, so many incidents, so many stories in the life of our first father about which not one word is said. The truth is that the first seventy years of his life — very formative years — are a blank. When does Avraham first come into the Chumash? When he's seventy-five years old and Hashem tells him, "*Lech lecha* — Go to the land of Canaan" (Bereishis 12:1). Up till then, we're told nothing.

He didn't have any interesting biography until then? We know some of the traditions; how he was arrested and was thrown into the fire pit (Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer 26). He had to run away and he was hiding in the thickets of the jungle. We know the story of how he broke his father's idols (Bereishis Rabbah 38:13). But the Torah says nothing about it.

Even after he comes into Eretz Canaan, as much as the Torah does say, it's still very little. A small incident here, an encounter there, but otherwise nothing. And that's because the Torah is not a

biography — it's a teaching book. And therefore, when the Torah chooses to tell us something, we have to understand that it's very important. It's there to teach us about Avraham's way of living.

One Episode, A Whole Life

Now, I want to explain that because it's an important principle for learning Chumash, especially the stories of our Avos. It's something that many people, even *bnei Torah*, don't understand. When you read something in the Torah, something that happened or some phenomenon that's described in the Torah, you should know beforehand that very many of such instances which look like incidental details are actually rules that explain the lives of the great men in our history. When it states in the Torah a certain thing about a certain person, we shouldn't think the Torah is telling it just because that's what happened in that moment. In most cases, the Torah is telling us *this is the way that person lived*.

And so, if Avraham is described as praying for Sedom — a *parsha b'arichus* about how he begged and bargained with Hakadosh Baruch Hu with *mesiras nefesh*; he was afraid to bargain so much with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and he begged for forgiveness, and despite everything he stubbornly

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persisted in praying for Sedom — so you see here that Avraham was a man of prayer for other people. That's what he always did.

The Consummate Host

Another example: It's not said in the Torah what Avraham did every day. But in one place it does tell us, and that explains everything. If the Chumash says a story and included in the story is that Avraham was sitting at the opening of his tent and waiting for guests, *pshat* is that this is what he did every day; he could always be found at the gate of his tent looking for guests.

It means that the Torah is teaching us here not a snippet of Avraham's biography — it's telling us who Avraham was. Avraham, he's the model forever, for all generations, of *hachnasas orchim*, of kindness to strangers; how he spared no expense and no effort. How he urged his wife — his wife was a princess! — and he told her, "Hurry up! Do this and do that." And Sarah hurried. And his servants hurried. And he slaughtered cattle. Big expensive cattle! They didn't have any refrigerators in those days and he slaughtered cows for the three plain guests. He didn't know they were *malachim*! And so now we know what Avraham and his family were always doing.

Creating a Bio

That's a guideline of Torah. **לִמְדוּ סֵתוּם מִן הַמְּפֹרָשׁ** — you learn what's not explained from that which is explained (Yoma 59a). If the righteous are described as doing a certain good thing, it wasn't just one time; you have to understand that's what he was always doing. And that fills in a very big part of the biography.

But not only so that we should understand that Avraham Avinu was a *machnis orach* in general or a man of prayer in general. We have to also pay close attention to the *details* the Torah tells us because with those details we can fill in an even greater deal about the biography of our first progenitor. And not just because it's a curious thing that we want to know about him — we're not interested in the color

of Avraham's beard or if his teeth were crooked or straight. It's because the way he lived, the details, is intended as a model for us.

Looking and Seeing

And so we begin. It says in this week's *sedrah* that Avraham was sitting by the entrance of his tent and **וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא** — he lifted up his eyes and he saw three travelers coming on the road (Bereishis 18:2). Now, the question is, these seem to be superfluous words; why does it say, "He lifted up his eyes and then he saw"? He saw, that's all. That's how we would think to say it.

So, the Alter of Slabodka, *zichrono livracha*, said like this: Avraham wasn't a man who looked impulsively; he had trained himself in the art of looking — we'll talk soon about why. And so first he had to consider, "I'm seeking guests and it's been a while since I took a look at the road. So now is the time to take another look." And so he commanded his eyes to look up at the road and focus in the direction where he thought there might be travelers. That's, **וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא**, to pick up your eyes.

And even after that, he had to tell his eyes, "See!" It was two separate deeds. First **וַיִּשָּׂא**, he lifted his head to look, and then **וַיֵּרָא** means another act; he made a decision that he should *focus*, that he should see what's in front of him.

Otherwise, even if his eyes were looking in that direction, he wouldn't see. Sometimes there's a man looking at you, a storekeeper, and you see he's looking through you. It's a trick he learned by practice. You talk to him in the store, let's say, but he's not seeing you. His mind is not on you. He's thinking only about his merchandise, about dollar bills and so he's looking through you. But suppose you can explain to him that *you* are the dollar bills, then suddenly he focuses, and he sees *you* another way. Oh ho, *now* he sees you. You become a big dollar bill to him.

Avraham's Art

It's an art. Avraham Avinu wasn't snapping his camera every second. He was able to direct his eyes in a certain direction and not see too much. Only when he decided, then he saw. So first it was וַיִּשָּׂא – he lifted up his eyes, he opened the shutter, and then a second decision, וַיֵּרָא – he saw; it means he decided to see.

That's how the Alter explains. He aimed, he focused, and then click, he saw. There were two separate decisions, two conscious actions. And this the Torah chooses to tell us because we should understand how our first father lived. It's written in the Torah as a model for us, a way of looking that we should be ambitious to emulate.

Cham's Art

Now, some people follow the wrong models. Because the same principle we said before of לִמְדוֹ? קְטוֹם מִן הַמִּפְרָשׁ is true of the wicked, too. If a wicked person is described as doing a certain thing, you must understand it wasn't just one time. The Torah is teaching that this was his permanent practice. He always did it, not just once.

And so when it says, וַיֵּרָא חָם – Cham took a look (Bereishis 9:22), you have to understand it that way. When his father became inebriated and he was lying uncovered, so it says, "Cham took a look." Now, that's superfluous in the Torah. It could just say, "Cham went and told his brothers that their father was uncovered." Why does the Torah say, "Cham saw"?

The answer is: Cham was a looker. That's what it means. He was a man who looked where he didn't have to look. He was always on the lookout for things that he shouldn't see. And that's why he got into trouble and gained a curse for his seed forever; because he never trained himself in the art of looking. If Cham had trained properly, he wouldn't have seen it. What's his business looking into his father's bedroom? What are you sticking your big nose in? That tells us a lot about Cham.

The Sin of Window Shopping

It tells you about anyone. When you walk down the street with somebody, you can tell something about him if his eyes are always straying to upstairs windows. What business do you have looking into the windows of houses that you pass by? It's a bad habit. You don't look where you're not expected to look.

The sidewalk, the cement – that's the best place to look! Unless you want to examine the trees and the shrubs. Or the clouds. But windows of houses? It's none of your business what's inside the windows. Hakadosh Baruch Hu is not satisfied with you. It's none of your business what's doing in that man's house. When you have to go someplace, do you have to look at what's doing on all sides? Oh no. It's a criticism of a man if he has a habit of looking.

Dangerous Roofs

It's an important subject. The Gemara says, אַל תִּרְבֶּה בִּגְגוֹת – Don't have a custom of spending time on roofs (Pesachim 113a). Don't walk on roofs. Keep away from roofs – unless you're a roofer. Otherwise, it's not the place to be.

There was once a great man – I can't tell you his name now because of consideration for who he was – and he was walking on the roof, and he fell into a trouble that plagued him for the rest of his life. Throughout all history, it's a reproach to us. This great man made a very big mistake because he was walking on the roof. Because from a roof you can see things that you're not supposed to see.

If you came here tonight just to hear that one thing, it was worth it. Don't look into windows. If you ever happen to be on a roof, look at the clouds. Look at the niflaos Hashem. הַמְכֶסֶה שָׁמַיִם בְּעָבִים – He Who covers the skies with clouds, and think, הַמְכִין לְאָרֶץ מָטָר – "He's preparing rain for the world" (Tehillim 147:8). See these clouds? Clouds are full of good things. When a cloud is floating over your head, it looks a plain gray but it's full of red strawberries, and red cherries, and red apples, and pink peaches. Oh, that cloud is full of good things!

So, when Hashem covers the skies with clouds, you should think, **הַמִּכִּין לָאָרֶץ מָטָר** – He is preparing water for this earth. **הַמַּצְמִיחַ הָרִים חֲצִיר** – He'll make vegetation grow. Otherwise, stay off roofs. Don't look around.

Sightseeing in Shul

Not only outside; even in the shul, people have to be trained. I learned this from my *rebbe*, *zichrono livracha*, that when you are *davening*, just look in your *daled amos*. Don't look around making investigations; who walked in, who's sitting where. Not only Shemoneh Esrei; Baruch She'omar, anything, don't look around. No pictures except the words in the *siddur*.

Avraham trained himself not to see what wasn't worthwhile seeing. We know about *devarim beteilim*, speaking words in vain, but there's such a thing as *re'iyah beteilah*, looking in vain. Not everything in this world is worth seeing. That's a lesson! Of course, it takes training, but if we'll imitate him even a little bit, it's already a big success.

Part II. Impressionable Looking

The Spiritual Eye

Now, you have to understand that Avraham Avinu trained himself like this not only so that he shouldn't look into a stranger's window and get into trouble. He had a bigger motive; he was especially careful because a person's eyes are the window to his soul. What you see is what you become.

I'll explain that. We imagine that seeing is a biological function, that it's the cornea, the iris, the retina, the optic nerve. But actually it's much more than that. When you see, you're not seeing only with your flesh-and-blood eyes and flesh-and-blood brain; your *neshamah* is seeing. Whatever you see, you're impressing a picture onto your soul.

Forever Film

And it remains there. Don't think that you saw it and that's it; you turned away and it's gone. No.

Even though you don't see it anymore, you created a picture and the film is deposited in your mind. You'll forget about it maybe, but it sinks to the subconscious, into the recesses of your *neshamah*, and it's there.

That's why even sixty years later it might surface inadvertently. You're walking along the street and something triggers a flashback to some picture that you saw as a child. Because it was recorded. Every picture that you see is recorded forever! The Kuzari says that (3:5). He writes that whatever once went into your mind, even the foolishness that you saw in your youth, you'll never get rid of it all the days of your life.

And my *rebbe* added something. He said that you take it with you into the Next World, too. Don't think you'll be able to leave it in your grave; it goes with you because the eyes are the window to the soul and the soul is forever. And therefore, whatever you see, for good or *chas v'shalom* the opposite, creates an impression on the soul that stays with you forever.

Avraham's Ambition

Now, Avraham understood that he was in the world for his one chance at creating a *neshamah* that he would be proud of forever, and therefore he made up his mind to prevent unnecessary pictures from cluttering up his mind.

It's like taking photographs. Would a photographer just walk carelessly around the street and snap every few minutes? No. He doesn't waste film. And the film recorded on the brain is more important because that film never goes lost!

And so Avraham trained himself. When he had an opportunity to put his eyes on something, he decided to look only for pictures that he wanted to impress on his *neshamah* – pictures that would shape his mind the way he wanted. Avraham Avinu understood that the most important pictures are the ones that remind you about Hakadosh Baruch Hu! And that's a lot!

The Best Pictures

It includes all the natural objects in the world. Every natural object was created for the purpose of awareness of Hashem. But not merely to gain our consent, that we should say, “Yes, we admit — Hashem made the world.” That, you knew already from when you were a little child. *Bereishis bara Elokim!* You accepted that at the age of five. Only that since then, you never thought about that subject and you think you’re finished! But that’s a great pity because *Bereishis bara Elokim* is a subject you have to be studying all your life.

When you take the time to look at Hashem’s creations in the world, little by little you gain an awareness of Hashem. It’s very good if you have that little five-year-old boy’s *emunah peshutah* but it’s not good enough because now you’re a big boy of fifty years. And so we say to this big boy, this big *frum* Jew, “You’d better go out into the world with open eyes and get a little more *emunah* than *peshutah*.”

A World of Pictures

And the Chovos Halevavos teaches us in Shaar Habechinah that the best way to do this is by studying Creation. Once you learn the art of looking you’ll see that the sights are crowding in on us. They are so numerous that there is no empty space in the world. **מָה רַבּוֹ מַעֲשֵׂי הָשֵׁם** – *How many are Your works, Hashem* (Tehillim 104:24).

There’s no need to go to Niagara Falls. Did you ever try putting an apple on the table and looking at it for fifteen minutes? Not once in your life? You don’t know what you’re missing. Try it once when nobody is home. Your wife is shopping on the avenue and the children are in the *cheder*, so take a nice red apple, put it on the table and look at it.

Look at the redness, the beauty of it, the shape of it. It’s gorgeous. If you look more closely you’ll see little dots all over the red apple that remind you of water falling down, a waterfall. Did you ever see a waterfall? There are dots in the water, air dots. That’s what an apple looks like. A red waterfall

falling down on all sides. It looks like the water is coming out of the depression where the stem is and pours out on all sides. It’s a waterfall of color. A beautiful sight.

Look more and you’ll see that it’s wrapped in a wax wrapper, a hermetically sealed waterproof case. If you take the peel off the apple, how long will it take for the apple to begin to decay? Immediately it begins turning brown. But this apple was lying on your table perhaps for weeks and it didn’t turn brown. That means this gorgeous peel you’re looking at is doing a perfect job keeping the apple fresh for you. Do this for fifteen minutes and you’ll be a different person forever.

The Important Ignored Subject

And so the world is full of pictures. On all sides, we have living pictures and each one is powerful enough to make a lasting impression on us, to make new people out of us.

Now, I know that this is a subject that’s unfortunately ignored almost entirely by the *frum* world. You’ll go back to the yeshiva and they’ll say, “*Shemiras einayim*, very good! To keep my eyes on the sidewalk, excellent! But to look around and see? To see Hashem’s creations and gain more *emunah*?”

And the answer is that this is really the purpose of *shemiras einayim*. The eyes are intended for *avodas Hashem*, for seeing Hashem in creation. Suppose someone brought you into an art gallery — I’m not recommending any art galleries, especially nowadays — but suppose someone brought you into a kosher art gallery. But you took a handkerchief out of your pocket and blindfolded yourself. And now you’re walking down the corridors and on both sides are beautiful paintings, but you see nothing.

So it’s nobody’s fault but your own. Hashem is showing us pictures and He wants us to use our eyes to bring those pictures into our souls. “Pull off the blindfold and you’ll see,” Hakadosh Baruch Hu says. “Pick up your eyes and see what I created.”

Avraham's Dandelion

Avraham did that and that's how he became so great. Avraham Avinu walked outside and he saw a dandelion. Nobody else saw that because they had trained themselves to see what's unimportant and injurious. But dandelions? Who needs it? Avraham, however, trained himself to see what's necessary, and so when a bright yellow dandelion stuck its head out of the earth, Avraham stopped to look. A dandelion! From such a sight you can come to all the *emunah* in the world. And so Avraham said, "I'm going to focus my camera and take a picture of that."

And as he looked, he saw a remarkable thing. Right next to the yellow dandelion stood a gray ghost — the seed ball of another dandelion. And the seed ball was taller than the flower next to it.

Avraham was thinking, "Why is it that the seed ball is always taller than the dandelion?" Click. He took a picture.

The Launchpad

The answer you see immediately. Pluck the seed ball and give a little puff and the air is filled with a squadron of little parachutes carrying seeds. The seeds are spread by means of the Mashiv Haruach, but had the wind blown on the seed ball while it was still low in the grass, the parachutes wouldn't have a free field to take off. And therefore after the yellow flower turns into a seed ball, it shoots up higher, making a launching deck for its squadron of airplanes.

And now Avraham studied the parachute itself. Almost a hundred beautiful little hairs, arranged so that they float in the wind in perfect balance. Even the rain won't ruin them. And hanging underneath is the passenger, the seed, jacketed in a secure little container. It's so strong that even if it falls into the brine of the ocean it's not spoiled. Eventually it lands in a little crevice and accomplishes its purpose.

And Avraham understood that there was another purpose too, a much bigger purpose: that

he should see it! That he should take a picture with his eyes and see that there is a Borei. And he develops the film and now it's hanging on the walls of his soul forever.

Imitating Avraham

Anyone can do that. A person can become inspired by seeing the handiwork of Hashem and become great, even almost up to *ruach hakodesh*. You know, as a young man, I was a *baal mussar*. I came to Slabodka, and they didn't know me there. I was an American boy who came on my own. One day, I went outside of the town all by myself and lay down in the meadow. I'm sure they were spying on me, "What's this *Amerikahner* doing out there by himself?"

I was lying there for an hour and a half looking at a daisy. I want to tell you, it was the greatest experience of my life. I was practicing *bechinah* according to the Chovos Halevavos. I can't forget that day. I was there for an hour and a half thinking about the *niflaos haBorei* that were all around me in nature. Now, I had studied these things before, but this was different; when I got up and walked home, I was walking on clouds. I never had in my whole life such an experience!

Now, I did it only one time so I don't have much to show for it except that I can tell you the story and show off. But the Medrash says that Avraham lived that way. And he became greater and greater until he actually felt that he was almost seeing Hashem. That's what it means *הִצִּיץ עָלָיו בְּעַל הַבֵּיָרָה*, that the Master of the great palace, the world, looked through the window and He said, "Avraham! You guessed it! *הִבְיָרָה בְּעַל הַבֵּיָרָה* – I'm the Creator" (Bereishis Rabbah 39:1).

It means Avraham became great from a dandelion. But not only a dandelion. He didn't give up. He grabbed onto this program of seeing with a ferocity and he did it again and again until he became a Navi, until he became Avraham Avinu.

Uncluttered Heads

Now, such a thing you can't accomplish if you're looking everywhere and cluttering up your mind with unnecessary pictures. It's like some people, they go out and buy whatever they see and come home with all kinds of gewgaws, all kinds of unnecessary bric-a-brac and unimportant little things. And so a lot of space is taken up that could be utilized for better purposes.

The mind, after all, is the most expensive apartment that you can find and every inch is valuable. It's like a place that you rent for ten thousand dollars a week. It's too expensive to bring in useless things. Even your shoes you leave in the hall because you cannot take up an inch of that valuable space. Our minds must be uncluttered. They must be free of any kind of superfluous furniture in order to put in the necessary things.

And because Avraham wanted an uncluttered mind so that he could fill it with better things, therefore he trained himself, וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת עֵינָיו – first he made a decision and raised up his eyes, וַיִּרָא – and then a second decision; click, he decided to take the picture. And that's how he utilized his eyes to create a great *neshamah*.

Part III. Looking for Greatness

A Used Camera

Now, all this seems quite a feat. It's not easy to live with such self-control, to be a master over your eyes. And so we have to speak a little bit about how we can accomplish that.

First of all, nobody should get dejected because of what was up till now. Here's a seventy-year-old man and he never heard this before; could be he's a *baal teshuvah*, and for the first twenty years of his life he went to the movies and all types of wicked pictures are on his *neshamah* – pictures that can't be erased.

So a note of consolation: Imagine you were given a beautiful mahogany table but you didn't

realize how delicate it is and you were careless and allowed it to be scratched. Now, a deep scratch in mahogany you cannot undo. Even if a master furniture craftsman varnishes it and it'll glisten more than before, there'll always be a depression in the wood.

What can you do? So if you're really interested in making it a perfect table, you can buy an expensive gold plate that'll cover the entire table; it becomes a more beautiful object than before and the scratch nobody will notice.

Seeing Tzaddikim

It means you start taking better pictures with your eyes; keep covering the old photos with new ones. Get busy looking at the clouds and the dandelions and the leaves. Even to look at *tzaddikim* is very good; the *chassidim* used to travel to look at the face of a *tzaddik*.

Ooh, that's an excellent picture! Rabi Yehuda Hanasi once said, "You know why I'm sharper than my colleagues? Because I saw Rabbi Meir from behind. I wasn't fortunate enough to see his face, but I saw the back of his head and that's why I'm superior. And had I seen his face, ooh, what would have been with me!" (Eiruvim 13b).

Overlaying with Perfection

So all types of good pictures you can take. *Tzaddikim* and apples and clouds. And you overlay the scratch with gold. Of course, it would have been better if he had never damaged the surface. But if you'll overlay it with gold, it becomes very holy. It's like the *shulchan*. The *shulchan* was made of expensive wood, but on top was a covering of gold. And even if the wood had a scratch, the pure gold covered it.

So that's what an old man who never heard this before can become. He covers his scratched mahogany with gold and he is better than he was before. Very many times he's better than an ordinary mahogany man. A mahogany Jew, an ordinary *frum* Jew who never did any big sins,

might not have many nicks or scratches — but he didn't overlay it with gold. A *baal teshuvah* overlays it with gold and he becomes more precious. He can even be carried into the Beis Hamikdash.

Great Ambitions

And so whoever you are, whatever you've done in your past, you have to start out now from the vantage point of being ambitious. Say, "I am ambitious. I, Chaim ben Dovid or Dovid ben Chaim, want, *b'ezras Hashem*, to overlay my *neshamah* with golden pictures as much as I can while I'm still alive. My eyes are a window from the outside world into my mind and I'm going to make sure that only the right things enter those windows."

So he feels ambitious now. He has aspirations to make of himself the best that he can. And therefore, he gets into the habit of thinking, "When I look in that direction, will that help me in my ambition or is it a waste?" And on that basis he makes the decision. He's walking in the footsteps of his first father.

Stroll Safely

Now, that's possible to achieve but it needs a great deal of training. Imagine you're walking in the street. First of all, you're studying the sidewalk. No superfluous pictures. Of course, when you cross the street, don't guard your eyes; guard yourself. First look left and then look right. Then again, look left and look right. Twice.

Especially today when cars are turning on two wheels because the licenses are given to young fellows. So you have to look where you're crossing the street. So *וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו*; you decide I'm going to pick up my eyes. But what do you want to see? Just cars and traffic lights. You're not interested in anything else. At first you don't succeed but after a while you learn to screen out the unimportant things and see only the essentials.

After you've crossed the street, however, your next job is to study the sidewalk again. The cement is kosher to look at. If you want to raise your eyes

and study a tree and remark on the wonders of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, that's all right too.

Seeing People

Of course, it doesn't mean you ignore people. Certainly you have to look at your fellow Jew and greet them. It's a trick you have to practice. You're not looking around at everything; you're thinking your own thoughts about Hakadosh Baruch Hu, but now you notice a neighbor coming by so you have to raise your eyes and discharge your responsibilities.

That's what Avraham Avinu did. When he had to look someplace, he discussed with himself, "Does it pay to lift up the eyes?" And when he came to the decision, yes, so *וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו*, he lifted up his eyes. He saw somebody out of the corner of his eye or he heard them, so he said, "Ah! Somebody's coming. An opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of greeting someone *b'seiver panim yafos*." So he lifted up his eyes.

Seeing Leaves

Otherwise, you're not interested. You're looking only for Hashem. So if you're taking an autumn morning walk and you see the leaves changing colors, you decide, "This is important for me because I learned in Chovos Halevavos in Shaar Habechinah that we can learn from the creation of Hashem about His great wisdom and kindness. So now I'm going to focus my camera and take a picture of these leaves."

Why are they changing colors? Beautiful flaming flags of red and gold! So he's thinking how Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge of nature, and everything is working according to a Master Plan. He makes the trees change colors as a signal to the birds. You can be sure that Avraham looked up and saw the wild geese maneuvering in the skies, wheeling and practicing, getting ready to migrate.

Seeing Birds

You didn't see that all summer. And now, if you live in the north, you see the birds getting together

in flocks and they're making a drill. They're practicing flying back and forth, pivoting and turning. Then they take off and go down south to the warmer climates. How did they know it's time? If they'll wait till it's too cold and they'll freeze to death — it'll be too late.

The answer is there was a certain reflex caused by the colors of the autumn foliage; it pressed a button in the instincts of these birds and gave them the signal to prepare for migration: When the trees are changing colors, it means: "Birds! Get ready! You have your marching orders now!"

And for us, too, when the trees empty out. The leaves gave us shade in the summer, but for winter we want more sunlight, so the heavy foliage disappears and the warm sunlight is now more accessible to us.

And that's how Avraham walked through the world. He looked where he was supposed to look and he thought and he became great.

A Waste of Eyes

But suppose you're an empty-headed fellow; you're not interested in this Torah system. So as you're walking down the street, your mouth is agape and your eyes are photographing without end. You're wasting the film on anything. You'll take in a hippy, a foolish bum, a silly woman, silly pictures on the billboards, and all these things will clutter up your mind with the garbage of the world. You'll see some inane fellow holding a cigarette; he says, "I smoke Winston." And you'll get the great wisdom from that billboard in your head and this picture will forever be in your mind. You know the great importance of smoking Winston.

Even when the leaves already fell off the trees and you're wading through them, you're wasting the opportunity. Up to now you had to crane your neck to see the leaves and you neglected them; now they all fall down and before our eyes, with their bright colors, they pile up. A wonderful sight! But you're like a dumbbell so it's nothing to you.

But the ambitious man and the ambitious woman — nothing doing. He knows what the eyes are for. He's passing a store that sells paperbacks displayed in the window, so he knows he has to close his camera. But when he passes a pile of leaves or a garden with a rosebush he knows he has to focus. In a garden, it pays to take pictures.

Breiteh Pleitzes

Now, everything we're saying here means that there's a big responsibility that falls on our shoulders. Don't we know that many people are using their eyes to see all the wrong things? They see sad things, wickedness, *reshaim*; things that make stains on their souls that will last forever. People whose eyes wander are lazy and careless; sometimes they even look into the windows of houses as they pass by. When people are looking for things to see, Hakadosh Baruch Hu punishes them and causes them to see certain things that ordinarily they wouldn't have seen. It's an *onesh*. **הָבֵא לְטִמָּא פּוֹתְחִין לוֹ** – *If you're coming to defile your neshamah, then Hashem opens up doors for you* (Yoma 38b).

But the opposite is also true. **הָבֵא לְטָהָר מְסִיעִין אוֹתוֹ** – *When a person comes to purify himself, if he means business, he'll be helped.* **לֹא יִמְנַע טוֹב לְהִלָּכִים בְּתַמִּים** – *Hakadosh Baruch Hu won't withhold good from those who go in the ways of decency* (Tehillim 84:12). After a while, he'll see only the beautiful trees, the beautiful carpet of green grass, the beautiful sky, the colorful fruit in the fruit stand. Life will be a place where he'll see only things that will help him succeed in his career. And you'll see so much that there won't be any room anymore for anything else!

A Career of Looking

And that's why once you get started, you've embarked on a tremendous career for life. The career of not seeing what you shouldn't and seeing what you should is a ladder to greatness and so don't tire of it. When you practice these two attitudes of using your eyes — the *sur mei'ra* and

the *asei tov* — you transform your *neshamah*. Not only are you guarding yourself from seeing things that ruin the *neshamah*, but you're using your eyes for the purpose they were given to you — for seeing the things in this world that make your *neshamah* great.

And you should keep on looking for the next fifty years. Yes, fifty years looking at apples. Not only apples. Peaches too. And oranges! And trees and leaves. It's a career. Trust me, it pays to consider such a career because if that's how you photograph things in your lifetime, then you're going to have a beautiful album in your mind. And it's the most important one because that's the photo album of perfection that you'll take along with you into the Next World.

Have a Wonderful Shabbos

Let's Get Practical

Say Choose!

Avraham Avinu teaches us that *shemiras einayim* means much more than simply guarding our eyes from inappropriate sights. It is a program for life through which we consciously choose when to use those two built-in cameras, carefully recording for eternity only the right images — those that remind us of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

This week, *bli neder*, at least once a day while safely walking down the street, I will aim my lenses at one of the countless wonders of nature and contemplate how it demonstrates Hashem's kindness with His world.

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

120 – Guideline to the Torah | **267** – Shemone Esrei | **315** – The Mind is in Control | **410** – Hagar the Egyptian | **906** – Cultivating the Garden of the Mind | **E-228** – The Eyes: The Windows of the Soul

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Q&A

WITH
RAV AVIGDOR
MILLER ZT"L

שאלות ותשובות
עם ראב"ד אביגדור מילר זצ"ל



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QUESTION

How can we become masters of our thoughts?

ANSWER

It's not enough to say I don't want to think foolish thoughts. You must have some to take their place. You can't have a vacuum in your mind. If you're not thinking *divrei Torah*, the Rambam says, so *divrei shtus* will automatically come into your mind (Hilchos Issurei Biah 22:21).

So take some idea of Torah and keep it there as much as possible. Play with it always, remind yourself of it. For instance, you want to think of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. If there's nothing in your mind, think about the ten *makkos*. Now don't think it's a silly idea. Think of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* as frequently as possible. **לִמְעַן תִּזְכֹּר אֶת יוֹם צֵאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם כֹּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ**. Think of *dam*, that *makkah* that caused all of *Mitzrayim* to fall into confusion. *Tzfardeya*, *kinim*. Take time and think about all the *makkos*.

You think it's something that's not a real solid Torah thought? Absolutely it is. That's what Hashem wants. **לִמְעַן שְׂתִי אֶתְנִי אֵלֶיךָ בְּקִרְבִּי, וְלִמְעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנִי בְּנֵךְ** – You should relate it; you should talk about it always (Shemos 10:1-2).

Then, when your mind is full of the ten *makkos*, add some more thoughts. Think about the *mann*. For forty years, food fell from the sky. Imagine an entire nation of millions being fed in such a spectacular manner. Think about that generation, how they saw every morning that white substance waiting for them.

That's just two examples of thousands. There is no end to Torah thoughts. And therefore, little by little, your mind becomes full of Torah thoughts. And then, when your mind is full of Torah thoughts, it's much easier to exclude all the silly and false ideas, the fads that happen to be the trends of the time. You'll exclude them from your mind and you can keep your mind pure for the service of Hashem.

June 1990