

"LOOKING AT THE WORLD WITH NEW EYES"

At the beginning of his immortal Guide for the Perplexed (Part I, Chapter 2), Maimonides records a question that was posed to him concerning the story of Adam and Eve which we read this morning. These first two humans were given a single commandment by God: not to eat of the fruit of a certain tree. They violated that commandment. One might imagine that as a consequence they would suffer some severe punishment. Yet the major result of their transgression is va-tipakahna einei shneihem, that the eyes of the both of them were opened. Is not this an amazing story, an astounding turn of events? Does this mean that sin is to be rewarded with knowledge? Does crime pay?

The answer that Maimonides gives is a profound one, and crucial to his whole philosophy. It is not an easy one to understand; the commentators on the Guide are not of one mind concerning its precise meaning. This morning, however, I wish to propose to you another answer, one suggested by a legendary and intriguing personality in the history of Hasidism, R. Yitzhak Isaac of Komarno. It is an important explanation, and one to which I think Maimonides would have given his consent.

The Rabbi of Komarno tells us that man was initially endowed with two sets of eyes, i.e. two ways of viewing life, two kinds of vision. He was given the einei basar, eyes of flesh, and einei ruah, eyes of the spirit. The einei basar represent man's physical and material outlook. They offer a direct channel to the senses. They are mere sight. The einei ruah are the eyes of the soul, a man's spiritual vision; they represent insight rather than just sight. They are what Yehudah Halevi in his Kuzari has called ha-ayin ha-niseret[†], the hidden eye, man's deeper, inner vision.

Before they committed their sin, Adam and Eve looked at the world and at each other only with einei ruah, with their spiritual eyes. They did not measure everything in terms of their own wants and needs and desires. They saw the best

in others. They perceived nothing untoward, unseemly, un-Godly. After their transgression, the einei ruah were blinded -- that was their main punishment -- and, instead, va-tipakahna einai shneihem, their physical eyes, their einei basar were opened. They exchanged their higher vision for a base and lowly view of the universe. Henceforth they were sensitive to all that is ugly and degrading. What they now saw, which previously had no effect upon them, led them to thoughts of passion and temptation and uncontrollable appetites. For instance, before the sin, they beheld the human body as something noble and decent, as natural and therefore worthy, as a yetzir kapav shel ha-Kadosh barukh Hu, the creation of God's hands. Such is the view with einei ruah. Afterwards, however, when their einei basar were opened, the nakedness they beheld became for them a frightening phenomenon, something repulsive precisely because it was so immorally attractive, something dangerous and fraught with baseness, and hence va-yitboshashu, something to be ashamed of.

Interestingly, our Haftorah seems to support this interpretation of the two sets of eyes. The selection from Isaiah contains no less than eight references to eyes, blindness, and seeing again!

And what a difference between these two ways of looking at the world! Where you behold a man with einei basar, you see not a man but a mere animal who just happens to be a step or two ahead in the evolutionary scale. And if man is but an animal, then he can be used, manipulated, exploited; for then he is an object, a "thing," an "it." But if you regard him with your einei ruah, then man is, as King David put it, "but little lower than the angels." Then he is a person, endowed with his own unimpeachable value. Then he is, as Kant taught, an end in himself.

Look at the world with einei basar, and a home appears but as a house populated by related individuals. Look at it with einei ruah, and even a mere table becomes a mizbeiah, an altar!

There is an important philosophic difference between these two types of "eyes." The einei basar see in the world only diversity, differentness, atomization, and fragmentization. They behold powerful forces pitted against each other in relentless struggle and ceaseless strife, a society caught up in calamitous conflict, where ultimately only the Law of the Jungle prevails. It is man eat man, and every man for himself. Whereas with einei ruah one has a completely different weltanschauung, an utterly different view. One sees the world's rich diversity kept together by an underlying unity -- the oneness of its creator; a world where cooperation and symbiosis accomplish more than collision and war; where peace makes sense; where man can unite about the oneness of God. The view of einei basar is that of disintegration, and is characteristic of idolatry, both ancient and contemporary. That of einei ruah is the vision of integration, and is of the essence of Judaism which aspires to the time that ve'hayah ha-Shem le'melekh al koh ha-aretz, ba-yom hahu yihyeh ha-Shem ehad u-shemo ehad, that God will be King over all the earth and He and His Name will be One.

If one's einei ruah are blinded and he uses only einei basar then he will build his city in a way that is haphazard and neglectful and harsh -- just like ours! Then, any building that does not prove itself completely functional and practical and efficient and thoroughly economical must be torn down mercilessly and replaced by those cavernous, impersonal, aluminum-and-steel monsters that swallow their armies of willing victims who troop in every day exactly at 9:00 AM, and disgorge them again precisely at 5:00 P.M. Such a limited, foolish view has no use for elegance or beauty or esthetics or sentiment or tradition or the past or graciousness or memory. A city built -- or, better, unbuilt -- in this manner is impersonal and cold and gray; it lacks charm and intimacy. It is not a place to live in. To live, one needs at least a little of the einei ruah!

Or take a synagogue. The practical man who possesses only einei basar looks at ~~the~~ ^{your} synagogue and his questions reveal the sad restrictions of his view: how big

is it? What is the size and wealth of its membership? What about the budget and the deficit and the dues? Approach it, however, with the vision of einei ruah, and you ask: how many of its members truly "daven" in it? What is the level of their observance? Do they study Torah and attend the adult education facilities made available for them? How warm and authentic is their prayer? Such is the difference between the two sets of eyes!

Look at the State of Israel only with einei basar and you see nothing essentially different from any other small, struggling Middle East state. Torah has no special place in it. But view it with einei ruah and you have not ^{only} the State of Israel, the modern version of Palestine, but also the Holy Land, the land of prophecy, concerning which we so fervently pray ve-tehezenah eineinu be'shuvkha le'Tziyon be'rahmam, may our eyes -- our inner, spiritual eyes as well as our physical eyes -- behold the return of the Shechinah to Zion!

Of course, a modern state must be highly concerned over such questions as technology and economy and security, as must a modern man be involved in business and making a living. I do not mean to suggest that we can or should completely close our einei basar. Once those "eyes" have been opened, they can no longer be closed. We can not expect to return to the Paradise from which Adam and Eve were exiled. But at least we can attempt to recapture some of the vision and the wider horizons of what the Torah tells us of primitive man. At least we can try to open those eyes which are usually shut tight. At the very minimum, we must add the einei ruah to the einei basar; or, if you will, we must learn to look at life with bi-focals, through a double set of spectacles of both self-interest and higher and deeper spiritual insight.

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I ~~admit~~ that this matter of general outlook, of regarding the world with new eyes, those of einei ruah, is crucial to being a religious Jew. To return to Torah requires more than accepting a number of new observances heretofore neglected.

These observances or mitzvot must necessarily initiate an inner transformation, so that one gains a new hashkafah, a new outlook. If we become more observant but continue to see the worst in people, read the same innaneⁿ literature, watch the same insipid and vulgar entertainment, approach our fellow-men with suspicion and contempt and vindictiveness, imagine that the world of the spirit is a convenient fiction -- we are not yet really religious Jews. We must still experience ve-yitboshahsu, shame, for the spiritual blindness that afflicts us.

A highly relevant and charming (though perhaps trivial in its immediate implications) example of the opening of the einei ruah as part of becoming a religious, Orthodox Jew, is found in a modern teshuvah or responsum. You know that the Responsa Literature, that of she'elot u-teshuvot, the legal answers written by great Rabbis to those who sent them questions in Halakhah, has long been considered an excellent source of the inner history of our people. That holds true for our modern times as well. I would like to commend to your attention, therefore, a contemporary responsum which sheds light on the return to Judaism in our days, if not quantitatively then at least in quality. The teshuvah appears in the most recent volume of responsa, Iggerot Mosheh, by an outstanding rabbinic scholar, Rabbi Mosheh Feinstein. A teen-ager who evidently came from a non-observant home, and who had but recently become a ben Torah and student in a yeshivah, addressed an intriguing question to the Rabbi. He harbored guilt feelings over his lack of observance prior to his accepting the life of Torah, and wanted to know how to repent, how to do teshuvah. What was it that so disturbed him? ^{What} ~~was~~ ~~it that so disturbed him?~~ Was it his neglect of kashrut or Shabbat? No, it was not; there was nothing that could be done about that retroactively. But this young man, having become a true and authentic Torah Jew, had gotten himself a new set of eyes, einei ruah. His new approach, his new attitude, his new vision included the principle of Torah that din perutah ke'din meiah, that injuring a fellow-man to the extent of one penny was as bad as that of a hundred dollars. He felt contrite over the childish pranks of his youth: for taking money his parents had given him for food and misappropriating it for entertainment;

for ducking under the turnstile when entering the subway; for pocketing money from the telephone coin-box which did not belong to him. As a ben Torah he has acquired a new vision, a new outlook, and this bothered him. Therefore he writes the question, and receives a serious and solemn answer from his Rosh Yeshivah! Only a small indictment of the difference made by opening the right eyes!

When our first ancestors sinned, they lost their spiritual vision and instead were confined to their material views. If we are to live lives that are decent and blameless and genuinely Jewish, then we must reverse the process. The Rabbis of the Mishnah had some excellent advice on how to do that. They taught us, in Pirkei Avot: histakel bi'sheloshah devarim ve'i ata ba li'dei averah, consider three things and you will avoid sin. One of those three things is: da mah le'maalalah mimkha, ayin ro'ah-- know what is above you; ~~an~~ a seeing eye. Perhaps what they referred to is not, as is the usual interpretation, a heavenly, angelic or divine eye, but -- a higher human eye! They perhaps meant to tell us that there is something le'maalalah, something higher and loftier and nobler mimkha, which issue from the deepest recesses of our selfhood, and that is: an ayin ro'ah, a seeing eye, a spiritual vision, a new way of looking at the world! Every man and woman has such an eye or set of eyes, but they too often remain closed all through life. If you are to avoid a life of sin and moral blemish, however, open them up, reassert them, develop a new perception, a new vision.

As we begin a new cycle of Torah reading this Sabbath, the answer given by the Rabbi of Komarno to the question recorded by Maimonides is of utmost relevance to all of us. Let us get ourselves a healthier, broader, more sublime outlook, one filled with true Torah insights, and we shall then discover that our lives can indeed be transformed. We will experience da mah le'maalalah mimkha, that we can find within our own selves new resources for self-transcendence and moral growth and spiritual greatness.

V'eineinu tirenah malkhutekha, "May our eyes behold Thy kingdom." If we make

use of our einei ruah, then the Almighty will grant that even our einei basar
will have the privilege of beholding the Kingdom of God; a world of peace
and plenty, of joy and serenity, of splendor -- and spirit.