



Parshat Tazria: Narrow Vision

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Midrash in Vayikra Rabbah teaches that one of the ten reasons *tzaarat* (leprosy) came on a person was because of *ayin ra* (a negative eye). The letters of the word *tzaarat* can be transposed to read *tzarat ayin*, narrow vision. When the Torah discusses the *negaim* (different types of blemishes) it says, "The one to whom the house belongs will come to the *kohen*." The Gemara explains that *tzaarat* came upon a person who intended to have his home all to himself. The foundation of the world is *chesed*. Hashem created man so that he would give. If he is egotistical and thinks only of himself, he corrupts his soul.

When a person would find a *nega*, he had to empty his entire house before the *kohen* came. Everyone would see what he had and they would know that he had lied and been stingy with his possessions. This taught the sinner a fitting lesson. We are meant to share what we have with others.

The essence of *ayin tova* (a good eye) is an orientation of doing *chesed*. A person should look for opportunities to give to others. This is

emulating Hashem. The Siftei Chaim notes that the root of *tzarat ayin* is one's ego, the I, which is the source of all negative *middot*. Thinking of others, giving a sincere compliment, and making people feel special, involves shrinking your I and stepping out of your me. When you smile to someone, you give a part of yourself to the person. This is what Hashem desires. The Gemara says the walls of a person's home will testify before him. When we fill our homes with acts of loving kindness, we create an abode where Hashem's presence can rest.

The Rambam says *ayin tova* means being content with what one has. A good eye denotes a wholesome acceptance of yourself and your lot in life. A person with an evil eye will always be jealous and dissatisfied. He lacks *emunah* and *anavah* (humility). If you have *emunah* you will believe that whatever a person has is meant for him. Being jealous means that you doubt Hashem's ability to decide what is best for the person. A humble person will say, "I don't deserve anything." Everything Hashem does is *chesed*. Instead of

feeling dissatisfied and wanting more, a humble person will thank Hashem and use what he has been given to elevate Hashem's name. The Leket V'halibuv notes that if you move the letter *ayin* to the beginning of the word *nega*, you get the word *oneg* (pleasure). If a person looks at everything in a negative way, he will have *negaim*. In contrast, if he works on attaining an *ayin tova*, life will be pleasurable and joyous.

Rashi explains that *ayin tova* is about honoring others. The Alei Shur writes that this begins with honoring oneself. Recognizing that there is a spark of divinity within each of us, leads a person to respect others too. When the students of Rabbi Akiva didn't treat each other with *kavod*, it was symptomatic that on their level they lacked the ability to recognize the greatness within themselves.

May we merit to seize every opportunity to give, may we discern the goodness and blessing in our lives, and may all our interaction with ourselves and others be honorable.

Derech Hashem: Hashem As The Ultimate Perfection #1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Derech Hashem, by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, is a remarkable book that defines how to progress towards knowledge of Hashem. It begins by discussing how every Jew must believe in and know Hashem. Belief is recognizing that everything comes from the Creator and it is all good. If it does not feel good, it's meant for *tikun*. Knowledge is being able to accurately describe Hashem's presence in the world. The way to come to real *emunah* is through *emet*.

Any description of Hashem inherently limits Him. We use words because we don't have any other means to describe Him, but they are not accurate presentations. One of the illusions we have is that Hashem is somehow held down to nature. However, natural law really has no essential being. Hashem is completely whole and needs nothing. When you see things in the world that seem to show imperfection such as terrible natural disasters, realize these are not glitches. This is exactly how things were meant to be.

Studying the chain of tradition and the intricacy of nature brings a person to *emunah*. No other group of people ever claimed to have had a collective prophetic experience, except the Jews. You can't have millions of people being told they experienced something without having someone say, "I never saw or heard anything." This collective experience is the basis of our *emunah*.

Studying the intricacy and precision of nature gives us some sense of the perfection of its Author. Observing the wonders of creation compels one to admit there is a Creator.

Most of the material world we experience is composed of many different components designed to work together. In contrast, Hashem is simple. He is what He is. His essence is one and everything is contained within Him. Although you could use different words to describe Hashem, all of it has one core. It's like a ball radiating different colors. Knowing Hashem's *achdut* (unity) makes you

recognize that His energy can be found in any situation and within any person because everything is bound to Him. Although Hashem is perfect in many different ways, these ways don't limit his perfection. They are all a part of his mystic wholeness.

If we look at nature and trace things back we will always come back to the first cause, which is Hashem. Everything else is the result. All of this seems deep and distant but we can bring it down to our reality every time we make a *bracha* (blessing). Thinking of the meaning of "*Baruch ata*" can change us.

Hashem will give people opportunities to experience their own goodness so that they can become like Him. If you would ask a person, "What would you feel if you'd get what you want most?" The person would probably answer, "I'd feel successful, connected, and whole." Hashem wants to give us those feelings, which are a dimension of what He is. All of the different things Hashem created in

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the world are there to make it possible to attain some measure of His goodness. The feeling can come to us through something else, but ultimately it's really Hashem we're searching for. Moving towards Hashem makes you a different person and that in turn expands your capacity to experience His wholeness. For a person to experience his

own goodness, he has to choose it. Inner change generates joy.

Although we have something reminiscent of Hashem within us, we must still face our flaws and failings. We have a choice. We can get depressed, or we can say, "This is where I'm supposed to be at the moment. I can make the

best of it and move further." Acknowledging our faults and saying, "I'll fly with it anyway," is following the path to the true joy Hashem meant for us.

Derech Eretz Kadma L'Torah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinish Ginsburg

We have an age-old custom to learn Pirkei Avot on Shabbat during the period of *sefirat haomer*. The standard reason given is "Derech erez kadma l'Torah." (Developing one's good attributes precedes the Torah.) What better way to prepare for *matan Torah* then to refine our *middot* through the teachings of our sages. In Shaarei Kedusha, Rav Chaim Vital asks why the Torah includes so few *mitzvot* that involve *middot* improvement. He explains that good *middot* must be there from the beginning. They are a prerequisite for absorbing and learning the Torah.

Rav Nebenzhal points out that we can find this concept in the *chumash* itself. The episodes preceding *matan torah* teach us important lessons of *derech erez*. When Amalek attacked the Jews, Moshe told Yehoshua to gather an army. "Choose men for us." Rashi notes that although Yehoshua was his student, Moshe equated him with himself. This was a tremendous lesson in honoring others.

During the battle with Amalek, as Moshe prayed, he became weary and sat down. Rashi points out that he didn't sit on a pillow

or cushion, but rather on a rock. He shared the pain of am Yisrael. In Parshat Yitro, the Torah notes that although Moshe was involved in teaching Klal Yisrael, when his non-Jewish father-in-law came, he stopped and went out to greet him. This showed incredible *derech erez* and *hakarat hatov* (gratitude). We also see Moshe's remarkable humility when he accepted Yitro's advice to set up a system of judges.

Rav Nebenzhal points out a Gemara which he thinks is the key to understanding the sin of the students of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Yehuda ben Nechemia once bested his Rebbe, Rabbi Tarfon. His face became radiant and he rejoiced for knowing something his teacher did not. The Gemara then says that Rabbi Yehuda died during the *sefirah* period. Rav Nebenzhal explains that this might have been the students' sin. We have to be happy with our own knowledge, and when others know too. The Siftei Chaim quotes a *midrash* in Bereishit Rabbah. Rabbi Akiva warned his five new students, "Do not have a stingy eye towards your friend." In a sense he adjured them not to commit the mistake of his previous students.

The Torah points out that before *matan Torah*, the Jewish people experienced a feeling of unity. Similarly, while every person in am Yisrael has their role, it's all of our Torah together. If we want our personal *kabalat haTorah* to be complete we should desire that every Jew know his Torah too. This was the mistake of the students and this is why they died before *kabalat haTorah*.

There's a custom to say the prayer of Rabbe Nechunia ben Hakana before beginning to learn. We ask, "May I not stumble in a matter of Jewish law and may my friends not rejoice in it. May my friends not stumble and may I not rejoice in it." Rabbe Nechunya ben Hakana lived a long life because he never derived honor from the shame of his fellow Jew. Rav Nebenzhal points out that the opposite is true too. Rabbe Akiva's students died young for this very sin.

We say in *shemonei esrei*, "V'ten chelkeinu b'toratecha." Our job is to focus on acquiring our own portion in Torah. At the same time, we must wish that our friend get his personal *chelek* too.