

RISE UP & POSSESS

Look! What Do You See?

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"Look! HaShem your G-d has given you the land. Rise up, possess! Even as HaShem G-d of your fathers has spoken. Do not fear and do not be small." (Dev. 1:21)

"Look" (Re'eh) and "listen" (Shema), these two words are repeatedly used by Moses throughout the final of the five books of the Torah, Deuteronomy. This last book of the Torah record the final instructions that Moses laid down before the nation of Israel before his death. Over and over again, he admonishes the nation to "look" and to "listen." In ancient times, "looking" and "hearing" had very precise and very different meanings. These distinctions are unfortunately not readily understood by modern minds. Without such insights, we miss the point of what Moses was so emphatically trying to teach us. Over the centuries our Sages have recorded these insights and have passed them down to us.

In the Talmud, when a topic of pshat (simple level learning of Torah) is discussed, the text traditionally introduces the material with the words, "Ta Shema" (Come, Listen). In the Zohar, when a topic of sod (the deeper, Kabbalistic level of Torah) is discussed, the text usually introduces the material with the words, "Ta Hazei" (Come, Look). Rabbi Yosef Hayim, the Ben Ish Hai of Baghdad (B.I.H. Drashot, Lekh L'kha) explains that these two words, "look" and "hear," describe to us two different modalities as to how the world is perceived. This unique difference in terminology used to introduce topics of rational and mystical studies is by no means a coincidence. The difference in language is to subtly suggest to us that a shift in thinking modalities is called for.

Listening and seeing are the two physical senses that are the most common forms for us to receive information from our outside world. Yet, there is a vast difference between them. When we hear something, such as words, we must first come to understand and master the skills of language, otherwise, words are just a garbled bunch of meaningless sounds. Even once the language is mastered, many times we have to think about and deeply contemplate what we hear. In other words, learning by sound is not automatic. It takes time and effort. Anyone who has ever attended school and has had to listen to a teacher knows exactly what I mean.

This is why the Talmud traditionally begins its discussions of legal topics with the words Ta Shema (Come, Listen), because the text is calling you to put on your 'thinking caps' and to pay attention. Torah laws dealing with how we human beings are to interact with one another are designed for typical, normal human beings living in this typical, physical world. Such laws therefore are meant to be rational and logical. Yet, sometimes, without serious intellectual effort, Talmudic logic is not understood correctly. Therefore, correct action is incumbent upon intellectual refinement. If one does not "hear" what is being taught, one cannot do what one has been instructed. Thus "hearing" modality of learning is crucial for any kind of intellectual understanding. Hearing corresponds to the rational and logical processes of thinking.

The sense of “sight” on the other hand operates in a very different manner. When we see a thing, we automatically absorb a tremendously larger amount of information than from simply hearing mere words. What is seen with the eyes makes a deeper, indelible impression than that which is merely heard with the ears. The old saying demonstrates this, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” What we see transcends words and can be felt deep within us. The vision resonates meaning that arises out of the very depths of the unconscious, from the seat and source of the soul itself.

For this reason, with regards to the commandment of the Tzitzit, we are instructed to “look” upon them so that “you will remember all the commandments of HaShem.” (Num. 15:39). Here we see that the act of viewing the Tzitzit is not performed to teach us anything new, no intellectual exercise is here required. Rather, the act of viewing is to serve us as a reminder. The act of viewing does not bring to us any new information from outside of ourselves, which needs to be thought over and integrated. Rather, the act of viewing brings up into our consciousness previously stored and understood information; an intuitive awareness which might not be in the forefront of our minds, but lies deeply buried, lurking around somewhere in the unconscious.

Therefore, the modality of sight can remind us of previously stored knowledge, information that can have its source from domains beyond the intellect and which can transcend time, space and the limits of the consciousness itself. This is why Kabbalistic topics are introduced by the words, “Ta Hazei” (Come, See) because mystical knowledge is said to have its source in the Neshama soul, which is the source of our individual and collective unconscious. Study of real Kabbalah, and not the philosophical academic forms popular today are not designed to teach us anything really new. Rather the meditative practices are designed to enable us to acquire inner vision and to “see within,” to remember that which we have always known, but may have forgotten due to the overwhelming disturbance and blockage caused by the rationalizing and dismissive conscious mind.

Real Kabbalah, real Torah and real religion therefore reach out and touch the Living Presence of G-d Active and Alive in everything around us. As such, this Living Torah does not teach us anything new, but rather, reminds us of spiritual knowledge that our Neshama already knows. Thus, real, experiential Kabbalistic knowledge, unlike surface level Talmudic information is not acquired through hard and laborious intellectual pursuits. Real Kabbalah enters into one through the what we call the heart, which is actually the unconscious mind, and never through the head symbolic of the rational intellect.

Let the philosophers argue and debate this all they wish. Talk is cheap and action always speaks louder than words. One’s actions externally are supposed to be the expression of one’s inner vision seen within. This is the secret of the words sung in the Shabat song “L’kha Dodi,” Sof Ma’aseh B’Mahshava Tehilah (last in action, first in thought). There is an intense connection between the two unaffected by intellectual or emotional considerations. Like Pinhas, when he acted against Zimri, to appease Heaven and end the plague spreading death in the Israelite camp, he acted in accordance to his inner vision and did not pause to rationalize, think about or try to understand why he was compelled to act as he did. He just did it! Like Pirkei Avot states, “it is not the study that is essential, but the action that counts.”

Gazing upon the “thread of blue” in the Tzitzit can put one into a meditative trace enabling one to experience this inner vision. Of course, those today who refuse to embrace the rediscovered Tekhelet can never experience this in any way. Their intellectual stubbornness has blinded their eyes from seeing an essential ingredient in the process of redemption. In my audio lessons on the first chapter of the Sefer Yetzirah I cover the details of this meditative practice for those who may be interested in following it.

Vision invokes inner memory, unfettered by the limits of the rational intellectual mind. The reason is that the sight modality contains an element that sound learning does not. When we sit to learn a text, the words are often boring. These do not often stimulate us. We have to often arouse ourselves to learn. Whereas with visual learning, pictures and imagery move us emotionally. Visual imagery stirs up our hearts and motivates us to action. The imagery itself arouses us, without any effort on our parts. This is a known psychological fact.

Thus we see learning by sight and sound are both crucial elements in human educational development. Learning by sound (Ta Shema) brings new information into us from the outside. We thus learn what to do, how to walk the proper path, how to live by the Halakha. Learning by sight (Ta Hazei) raises up within us already acquired knowledge that is now emotionally charged and motivates us to act. We follow the Halakha not just because we believe in it, but rather because we know it, we recognize it and experience within it the Higher Reality. Those so enlightened need no motivation to observe Torah because life itself is their inspiration and everything in life reflects to them Torah, the natural Way of Heaven, the true Halakha. With sight and sound learning modalities operating in harmony, we are naturally motivated to act and we know the right things to do!

In this section of Torah, Moses encourages the Israelite people to “rise up and possess” the land of Israel. He does not call upon the people to HEAR his words, he tells them to LOOK! With regards to doctrines and Halakha Moses indeed tells the people to listen and to understand, as it says, “Shema Yisrael (Listen, Israel) HaShem is our G-d, HaShem is One.” (Dev. 6:4). The unity of G-d must be understood intellectually and taught to others, even as the continuing verses in the Shema teach. The intellectual acknowledgment is then reinforced and perceived within, once one “places these words upon one’s heart” (Dev. 6:5).

Yet, here, with regards to the Land, mere hearing is not enough. It is not enough to intellectually convince the people that going to Eretz Yisrael is a right and good thing. The people must be motivated to rise up. They must know from within the depths of their souls that Eretz Yisrael belongs to them, not because of any intellectual argument, but rather because that’s the way it is, period!

Eretz Yisrael for Am Yisrael, this is not an intellectual concept; it is an emotional/spiritual reality. The Land is the People and the People are the Land. Only when together the Land with the People do both merit the title Israel. This truth is engraved upon the collective Israelite Neshama soul. Rather than teach this anew to the people, Moses is telling the people to experience it from deep within their souls.

Eretz Yisrael is yours, Moses says! It has always been yours! The Land is the people, the people are the Land. See this! Know this! Do not just think about, see it! Manifest it! For this Divinely instilled picture is in your hearts and your souls. Allow now the fire in your hearts to burn away all imposing forces that prevent manifest reality from expressing itself. Moses knew well that the type of motivation necessary to inspire the people required vision. This is why we speak and say that when a person has an idea of a greater destiny, he has a vision of it, not merely a thought or concept about it.

The language of vision and its communication is also the modality of spiritual learning. Prophets had visions. A Seer is called so because he is one who sees. Moses was calling the people to activate their spiritual sense of being the children of prophets, to activate their inner knowledge and to enable them to reveal their manifest destiny.

Over a thousand years later, the great Sage Hillel said it best, "if Israel are not prophets, they are the children of the prophets." (Pes. 66A). Although the layman is not trained in Kedusha (holiness) to reach the highest levels of prophetic bonding with Heaven, nonetheless, a communion of a lower level always exists. All children of G-d are connected to Heaven at the source of the Neshama soul. This connection cannot be severed!

Thus, whenever an individual wishes to, he/she can connect with the living spirit of G-d burning in their hearts. All one must do is to turn within oneself for a moment of silent contemplation (gazing upon one's Tzitzit or by inwardly gazing upon the holy Name Y-H-V-H assists in this endeavor). Then from deep within the recesses of one's unconscious mind will arise a passion and a memory of what it is to be a servant of Heaven. This emotional inspiration guides one beyond what intellectual thought can provide and the person so motivated becomes a hero and is ready and able to do great things.

These great things can be in any domain related to one's observance of religion or one's relationship with people and the world around him. This motivation inspired our Sages to write down their holy works. A spark of this same spirit was felt or somehow inwardly seen in the depths of the souls of those Zionist soldiers when they conquered the land of Israel, reestablishing a Jewish State after an almost 1900 year exile. It is the loss of this same spirit that today is the greatest threat to the continued survival of the modern State of Israel.

It is the mystical element of inner inspiration that drives one forward. Indeed, our holy Sages have taught in the Zohar numerous times that in merit of the study of Kabbalah will Israel be redeemed. The reason for this is now evident. Non-academically based, experiential mystical studies require of one to delve deep into one's heart and Neshama to find the answers one seeks. Once one is in touch with one's heart, the unleashed psychological potential is unstoppable! Once the inner power of the collective Jewish psyche is unleashed, the entire world can be changed. Mashiah can come as a result.

There is only one danger that the one with vision must be aware of. He must not become afraid or doubt what he sees in his inner vision. All too often, when we see the greater picture of destiny our rational mind steps in to convince us that such grandiosity is irrational and thus impossible. Other voices rise up from within us and from without to tell us to "LISTEN" to reason. This belittling of destiny is a poison to the soul. Doubt forever keeps us in exile. Indeed the Hebrew word for doubt, Safek, is numerically equal to Amalek, the archetypal enemy of G-d and Israel. (Safek - Samekh, 60 + Pey, 80 + Kof, 100 = 240; Amalek; Ayin, 70 + Mem, 40 + Lamed, 30 + Kof, 100 = 240). This was the voice heard by the children of Israel when they listened to the fear of the spies (recorded in Numbers). As a result of their doubts, they allowed themselves to be defeated by a spiritual/psychological Amalek. As such, an entire generation was condemned to die in the wilderness over a period of 40 years.

Communion with one's Neshama soul, one's spirit is through one's heart. In this case, one's heart is actually above one's head. The heart is actually the domain of what we call the spiritual. Spirit is a realm above intellect and this order must be respected in order for an individual to preserve psychological health and stability.

One of the fathers of psychology, Carl Jung (CW 13, 7) said it best, "*The intellect does indeed do harm to the soul, when it dares to possess itself of the heritage of the spirit. It is in no way fitted to do this, for spirit is something higher than intellect, since it embraces the latter, and includes feelings, as well. It is a guiding principle of life that strives towards super-human shining heights.*"

I quote here psychological sources to prove the point that what is discussed here is no mere religious philosophy, it is a necessary psychological truth!

"It is, unfortunately, only too clear that if the individual is not truly regenerated in spirit, society cannot be either, for society is the sum total of individuals in need of redemption",

Carl Jung, The Undiscovered Self, pg. 63

הרב אריאל ב"ר צדוק, ראש הישיבה
We must pay attention to this! Jewish survival depends on this! We must rise up and not be afraid or belittle ourselves with doubts!
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"Direction in life is not a simple straight line, fate confronts us like an intricate labyrinth, all too rich in possibilities and yet of these possibilities only one is the right way". Carl Jung, CW 7-72

We know the one, right way, it is the way of our holy Torah. Moses, upon him be peace commanded us to rise up and possess what is rightfully ours. It does not matter what other people have to say or what they might think. Cowards always seek to rationalize. Heroes always act with wisdom, superior intellect and conviction.

We must believe it in our hearts, we must know it in our minds, and we must see it with our eyes. Only when we have the inner vision, will we manifest the outer reality. This is G-d's promise to us. This lesson is applicable to all our daily individual struggles. Let us learn it well. Let us see the BIG PICTURE of Torah and mitzvot and make it so!
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