



AVRAHAM

Eyes to See

Rabbi Judah Mischel

Eyes are the windows to the soul. “G-d appeared to Avraham Avinu... he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing beside him, and he saw and he ran toward them... he prostrated himself to the ground and said: ‘Adonai, My masters, if only I have found favor in your eyes, please do not pass on from beside your servant’” (Bereishit 18:1-3).

After having circumcised himself as a man of 100 years old, on the third and most painful day post-op, Avraham Avinu had every reason to be resting and recuperating. Yet in his yearning for the opportunity to serve others, he waited outside his tent at the crossroads scanning the horizon for potential guests to whom he could offer respite, food and drink.

Avraham calls the travelers by an honorific, “Adonai.” Rashi, at first, gives us the simple interpretation: Avraham was showing the travelers deep respect. However, Rashi’s second interpretation is that the appellation is the Holy Name of Hashem! In the midst of prayer, deep in *d’veykut*, Avraham did not interrupt his davening. Noticing and calling out to the needy travelers was a natural expression of his connectedness to Hashem – and he called G-d’s name through them.

When Avraham “lifted his eyes” and noticed them approaching, he saw beyond their exterior, beneath the dust of the road and that of their idolatrous ways and recognized the Divine image within his guests. Avraham was not interrupting his *Avodat Hashem* in running to serve them – he was continuing it and expanding it. Directing his efforts and attention to the needs

of others in such a moment, Avraham Avinu proved he was ready to transmit the values of *chesed* and generosity to his descendants.

Orphaned from his parents as a young child, the Baal Shem Tov was drawn to the outdoors, where alone with Hashem, he found comfort and peace in the forest.

Once, little Yisrael ran away to the woods because he could not bear the *cheder* anymore. The dingy hovel was filthy, and the moody *melamed* was always screaming. The children were always fighting. His father, Rebbe Eliezer’s parting words to “love every Jew with all your heart and soul, no matter who he is,” rang in his ears. He desperately wanted to love everyone but was struggling. When he came to the forest, Yisrael davened and cried for salvation. A little boy, alone in the world...

An elderly man suddenly appeared and called the child by name. “Yisrael,” he said, “I have come to give you a blessing.” “What do you mean?” asked the startled Yisrael, “Who are you?” The old man only said, “May you have *einayim lirot*, eyes to see.” Yisrael wanted to find out who he was and what he meant, but the elderly *Yid* had disappeared.

Later that day, Yisrael made his way back to *cheder*. He was greeted by his teacher’s shouts, livid that Yisrael had cut school. Now, however, things looked different: The teacher was still screaming, but Yisrael looked at him with *rachmanut* – mercy – seeing an older man with unfulfilled dreams, suffering from poverty. He saw a *Yid* who had good intentions and wanted

to teach Torah – but had difficulty controlling his temper. Looking around the decrepit *cheder*, he appreciated the sacrifice being made for Torah study. When the children fought, he saw their passion and energy, and he focused on their potential.

The tradition passed on among the Baal Shem Tov’s students is that Reb Yisrael’s mysterious encounter in the forest that day was with Avraham Avinu. From then on, he had *einayim lirot*, “eyes to see,” and that transformative experience led him to embark on his life’s mission to restore dignity, honor and self-respect to a forlorn nation.

One need not stand outside a tent awaiting passers-by or experience a mystical revelation to attain “eyes to see.” When we look to the essence of another, sweep off the layer of dust and look past the outer facade to reveal beauty and G-dliness in every person we meet – we are seeing with soulful eyes and living the path of Avraham Avinu.

● Adapted from Rabbi Mischel’s new book, ‘Baderech: Along the Path of Teshuvah’ (Mosaica Press, 2021).

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