

## The Month of Tamuz:

# Do you want to be a student of Avraham Avinu or a student of Bilam the wicked?

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### Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin Mourns with all of Israel for our Boys

#### Introduction

Tamuz is a challenging month of being tested. Ya'acov and Esav divided the year between them. In the end Ya'acov was able to recover most of the months of the year, yet Tamuz and Av remained under the domain of Esav.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, we must work hard to overcome the many challenges of this month, and reach deeply into our hidden resources to stay focused and connected. Here in Israel, we could really feel the shift as soon as the month of Tamuz kicked in.

Already on Rosh Chodesh, the unbearable heavy heat of the burning summer marked the onset of the month. Now, our people are in tears, after 18 days of praying, taking on extra mitzvot and guarding our tongue. On the third of Tamuz, the Lubavitch Rebbe's 20th *Yahrtzeit* (anniversary of passing) the bodies of these three pure and holy Yeshiva students were found.

I cry with their mothers, as I try to hold on to my own Yeshivah student son, age 17. I can look forward hugging him tight when he comes home next time for Shabbat, but the mothers of the three will never ever hug their sons again! How can we bear all this pain. We prayed so hard, "Bring our boys home!" Hashem brought them home – home to Himself in the world of truth. He calls home the holiest, the purest, like the yeshiva students from Mercaz Ha'Rav several years ago.

There is a dispute in the Talmud whether Israel will be worthy of redemption even if we don't do *teshuvah* (repent). Rav said, all the ends will be completed, this thing is only dependent on *teshuvah* and good deeds, but Shemuel said it is enough to the mourner that he shall stand in his mourning...<sup>2</sup> Rashi explains that the pain of exile is enough for Israel to merit redemption even without *teshuvah*. So when Hashem calls home the holy and pure, within our tears is the comfort that through this suffering and mourning, the final Redemption is near. Even as the going gets rough we need to keep going – keep coming to Israel without fear and trust that there are still blessings to glean even in the month of Tamuz.

<sup>1</sup> Zohar, part 2, page 78b.

<sup>2</sup> Babylonian, Talmud, Sanhedrin 97b.



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The great effort which we must employ to bring down blessings at this time takes place through our eyes. “He who has a good eye will be blessed for he gave from his bread to the poor.<sup>3</sup> A good eye – the eye of mercy and generosity towards others has the ability to draw down blessings. For with a good eye we connect with Hashem’s attributes. Conversely, an evil eye minimizes his influence from Above.<sup>4</sup>

This connects us to the parasha of the week, *Parashat Balak*, which describes how the wicked Bilam attempted to curse the Jewish people through his eyes. It is interesting to notice that the word עַיִן/*ayin* – ‘eye’ is mentioned 13 times in our parasha<sup>5</sup> corresponding to the 13 attributes of mercy. Moreover, the *gematria* (numerical value) of the Hebrew word for עַיִן/*ayin* – ‘eye’ is 130, its small *gematria* being 13. Thirteen is a very interesting number; it bonds multiplicity into oneness. This is why both the Hebrew word אַהֲבָה/*ahava* – love and אֶחָד/*echad* – one, share the numerical value of thirteen. When we unite in love, the multiplicity of our individualities merges to become one. This concept of the unity and oneness of Hashem is hard for the other nations to grasp this is why for them the number 13 is an unlucky number. In Judaism it’s the opposite. We have 13 tribes (including Efrayim and Menashe) and attributes of mercy. Therefore, Avraham our father who is known for his love and kindness towards humanity, discovered the oneness of Hashem. Whoever possesses the following three traits is of the disciples of our father Avraham; and whoever possesses the opposite three traits is of the disciples of the wicked Bilam. The students of our father Avraham have a good eye, a meek spirit and a humble soul. The students of the wicked Bilam have an evil eye, a haughty spirit and a gross soul.<sup>6</sup>

When we cultivate “a good eye” we develop the character-trait of רַחֲמִים/*rachamim* – mercy, to really care about others with our full heart like Avraham did. In contrast becoming a student of Bilam by looking at others with an evil eye entails succumbing to the character-trait of כַּעַס/*ka’as* – anger.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the connection between giving out an evil eye and anger is that anger is an extraneous negative spirit which can enter a person when involved in impurity. It is not really part of the person, therefore one who gets angry upon returning to oneself usually regrets whatever he or she said and did during the anger burst. Likewise, giving an evil eye to others is giving an extraneous spirit entry way through the eyes. Focusing on our personal blessings and working on feeling good about ourselves is the best shield against the entry of any kind of negative spirit.

### Looking for the Good Points

It is Hashem’s way to look at the good that we do even if some of our actions are not good. We learn this from the Torah verse of this week’s *parasha*, “He has not seen iniquity in Ya’acov.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, we need to give the benefit of the doubt even to a complete wicked person, because it is impossible that no good point can be found in him. We also need to find good points in ourselves.

<sup>3</sup> *Mishlei* 22:9.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Nadborna, *Hanhagot Tzaddikim*, Good behaviors.

<sup>5</sup> *Bamidbar* 22:5, 22:11, 22:31, 22:34, 23:27, 24:1, 24:2, 24:3, 24:4, 24:15, 24:16, 25:6 (twice).

<sup>6</sup> *Pirkei Avot* 5:11.

<sup>7</sup> Kedushat Halevi, *Mesechet Avot* 5:11.

<sup>8</sup> *Bamidbar* 23:21.

Even when we feel really badly about ourselves, we need to look at ourselves in a different light and search from within the negative some good points in order to revive ourselves.<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Eliezer holds that the best trait for a person to acquire is a good eye.<sup>10</sup> This is because the first טוב/ *tov* – good mentioned in the Torah is connected with seeing the light. וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב. – “And G-d saw the light that it was good.”<sup>11</sup> This is also the first time seeing is mentioned in the Torah. From here we learn that the purpose of our sense of vision is to see the good – to see the light within all reality. So next time when you notice something ugly or someone behaving in a bad way, see if you can go deeper beyond the surface to find something beautiful within the ugly, and a good point within the negative behavior. Try to implement this exercise at least throughout the month of Tamuz.

### ***Emunah* in Hashem and being Happy with our Portion**

Being עין צר/*tzar ayin* – stingy emanates from the aspect of כפירה/*kefira* – denial of Hashem.<sup>12</sup> This is because stinginess often comes from fear that there won't be enough left for ourselves if we share freely. The more *emunah* we cultivate, the more generous we can become, as we learn that the more we give, the more Hashem replenishes us, and takes care of all our needs. The same way, the more a baby suckle, the more milk is created in the breasts of her mother. It states עֲשֵׂר תְּעַשֵּׂר/*aser ta'aser* – “You shall truly tithe...”<sup>13</sup> The double Hebrew language can be understood as a pun. The word *ta'aser* (tithe) is similar to *tit'asher* (become rich). Therefore the midrash teaches us that the meaning of the verse is “you shall tithe in order to become rich.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, the more we develop a good eye to give generously, the more blessings of abundance we will receive. Although it is not allowed to test Hashem as it states, “Don't test Hashem...”<sup>15</sup> Here is an exception, as Rabbi Hoshiah said, it states, “Bring the whole tithe to my treasury so that there is food in my house. And please test me in this says the Hashem of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of Heaven and pour out a blessing on you until there is more than enough.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Two Eyes – Two Ways of Looking**

We are used to think that the first original sin was eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In reality, it was looking at the Tree of Knowledge actually preceded the eating and caused our exile from Eden. “The Woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was desirable for the eyes... Both of their eyes – were opened and they knew that they were naked...”<sup>17</sup> Hashem created everything with wisdom. Therefore, He created us with two eyes to allude to the fact that there are two kinds of seeing, to the right or the left – the world to come, or this world. Likewise, in the heart there are two chambers, “The heart of the wise to his right...”<sup>18</sup> The vision of the eye

<sup>9</sup> *Likutei Halachot, Hilchot Techumin v'Aruei Techumin* 6:11.

<sup>10</sup> *Pirkei Avot* 2:10.

<sup>11</sup> *Bereishit* 1:4.

<sup>12</sup> *Avodat Yisrael, Pirkei Avot* 2:10.

<sup>13</sup> *Devarim* 14:22.

<sup>14</sup> *Midrash Tanchuma Re'eh* 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Devarim* 6:16.

<sup>16</sup> *Malachi* 3:10, *Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit* 9a.

<sup>17</sup> *Bereishit* 3:6-7.

<sup>18</sup> *Kohelet* 10:2.

depends on the heart, it is all one matter. The Zohar explains that we cover the eyes of the dead, because at the time of his death he sees the face of the *Shechina*, therefore he should no longer see in this world. Moshe Rabbeinu saw with clear vision even in this world. He never saw anything distorted, therefore his eye did not dim. “Moshe was 120 years old when he died, his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated.”<sup>19</sup> It is written “his eye” in singular language, for it refers to his right eye with which he had a special vision beyond this world of judgment. In contrast, about Bilam it is written *שָׁתָם הָעֵינַי*/*sh'tum ha'ayin* – a blind eye,<sup>20</sup> referring to him being blind in his right eye. He could only see through his left eye, the eye of judgment and negativity. Average people look with both of our eyes... But both of Moshe Rabbeinu’s eyes were like his right eye which was good, as it states about him “She saw him that he was good.”<sup>21</sup> This is the opposite of what happened when Adam and Chava’s two eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. Through eating from the Tree of Knowledge two kinds of looking were created.<sup>22</sup> This brought about the exile from Paradise, the prototype of all exiles. Just as we were expelled from Eden through misuse of eyesight, likewise the ultimate redemption will take place through rectified vision. Let us start now working on our sense of vision, avoiding looking at the neighbor’s greener grass, rather seeing the good in our own portion, finding good points even when we are disappointed with ourselves, and developing an *ayin tovah*, sending out light and blessing to everyone around us!

<sup>19</sup> Devarim 34:7.

<sup>20</sup> Bamidbar 24:3, 24:15.

<sup>21</sup> Shemot 2:2.

<sup>22</sup> Sefat Emet, Parashat v'zot Ha'Beracha.