



## How Does the Plague of Locusts Heal Our Spiritual Vision?

### The Blessing of Vision

Although, I've been slightly vision impaired since early childhood, I thank Hashem for the ability to see. Despite all the darkness, the world hosts so many magnificent, colorful creatures, butterflies and flowers. I understand why a blind person is one of the four considered dead (*BT, Avoda Zara 5a-b*), as it states, "He has made me dwell in darkness like those who are forever dead" (*Eichah 3:6*). I recall my paternal grandfather in his old age, nearly blind, sitting, and sometimes nodding off, on an armchair in his own corner, very cut off from everyone around him. How sad to be unable to see the light of dawn or marvel at a sunset. How wonderful to be able to enjoy the beauty of art and revel in reading regular books! As a young bookworm, it was noticeable that I always held the book close to my face and thereby often hunched my shoulders. My parents took me to the eye doctor, who diagnosed me with nearsightedness (myopia) and astigmatism. I would always sit in the front row of the classroom to be able to read the blackboard, but now, my conscientious parents also ensured that I wore glasses. Yet, from the time I turned a teenager, I shed 'the ugly glasses.' They were uncomfortable on the bridge of my nose, and vapor would also condensate on the inside. Besides I naturally looked much better without them. So, I happily freed myself of the constraint of the old glasses, accepting a bit of blurry vision, as a small price to pay. Until this day, I hardly ever wear glasses, since I don't do much driving or watch performances. Interestingly, I've noticed that often people who wear glasses on a daily basis need to get stronger and stronger eyeglasses, whereas I – *bli ayin hara* – have kept more or less the same prescription over the years. There are also other benefits to not wearing glasses, such as not being bothered by all the particles of dirt on my floors and the wrinkles that face me in the mirror. I kind of like my blurred world. So, if you wave to me from afar and I don't recognize you, don't take offence. It is nothing personal. I will make sure to get close enough, to find out who you are! Yet, besides physical vision, spiritual vision is no less important. The Plague of Locusts in *Parashat Bo* alludes to the rectification of spiritual vision.

### Chava's Transgression Through the Sense of Sight

According to Eliezer ben David, author of *Out of the Iron Furnace*, the purpose of the Ten Plagues was not only to punish the cruel Egyptians, but also to repair the various wrongdoings of each generation, including the generation of The Flood and of the Tower of Babylon. This culminates in rectifying the fall of Adam and Chava in the Garden of Eden. He writes that the plague of hail atoned for Adam's sin of not listening to Hashem, while instead, he heeded the enticement of his wife. The plague of locusts atoned for Chava's part in the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Her transgression began with eyeing the forbidden fruit, as it states: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes... so she took of its fruit, and she ate..." (*Bereishit 3:6*). Whereas, Adam's sin consisting in listening, Chava's misdeed was through seeing. This is because the sense of hearing is intrinsically linked to understanding and to the intellect, whereas the sense of seeing relates to our heart and emotions as it states: "...and you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you are going astray" (*Bamidbar 15:39*). Women are capable of great intellectual achievements, as we learn from Bruriah and many other holy women. Men may rise to great height of emotions, like King David, whose book of *Tehillim* expresses the entire range of emotions, from deep pain to the greatest

exhilaration. Nevertheless, the realm of emotion is primarily in the feminine sphere, whereas the realm of intellect is primarily in the masculine sphere. There is an allusion to this principle in the Talmudic names of the sun and the moon. When you look closely at these words, you notice that the Talmudic name for sun: חַמָּה/*chama* includes within it the letters of מוֹחַ/*moach* – brain, while לְבָנָה/*levanah* – ‘moon’ includes the letters לֵב/*lev* – heart. Every culture, religion and spiritual path recognizes that the moon is intrinsically linked to the feminine, whereas, the sun relates to the masculine. Thus, generally speaking, the heart is the major driving force of women, whereas men are mainly motivated by their brain. That, of course, does not mean that men don’t have hearts and women lack brains.

### The Fall of Spiritual Vision

The serpent, which was cunning, was aware of women’s emotional vulnerability associated with sight. Therefore, it first tempted her to use her power of sight to look at the Tree and become seduced by its beauty. Chava’s fatal look at the forbidden fruit caused a spiritual fall in the sense of sight of all humanity. Adam and Eve could no longer fathom the divine through their sense of sight. They could now only “hear the sound of Hashem walking around in the garden” (*Bereishit* 3:8). Whereas, the human eye has a great power to affect love and healing, after the sin, it also became capable of causing harm, both to the ‘seer’ and to the ‘seen.’ When a person looks at others with jealous eyes, it can cause both physical and spiritual damage. For example, the Torah describes how Bilam attempted to curse the Jewish people through his eyes, as it states: “Bil’am lifted up his eyes, and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes” (*Bamidbar* 24:2). He tried to impose upon them the evil eye” (Rashi). Healing spiritual vision not only includes rectifying the evil eye, but also to strengthening our eyes against temptation and opening them to spiritual vision. Since Chava looked at the Tree, our eyes can easily lead us astray. This is documented by the power of colorful billboards and attractive advertisements. Moreover, we often walk around with blinders. Although, blinders are supposed to reduce visual distractions from a horse, when misused by people, it may work the other way around, in a spiritual sense. People may be distracted by the many attractive pleasures of the world, so that, they become blinded to the true goal of serving Hashem.

### Rectifying the Sense of Sight Leads to Conscious, Holy Eating

The inner purpose of the Plague of Locusts was to rectify the sense of sight, which, when properly used, can bring humanity to great heights and holy perceptions. Unfortunately, just as in Egypt, the sense of sight is still often misused causing much damage. Due to the relationship between the Plague of Locusts and the sense of sight, the locust is described as covering the ‘eye’ of the land, and darkening the land:

**ספר שמות פרק י' פסוק יד ויעל הארבה על כל ארץ מצרים וינח בכל גבול מצרים כבד מאד לפניו לא היה כן ארבה כמהו ואחריו לא יהיה כן: (טו) ויכס את עין כל הארץ ותחשך הארץ ויאכל את כל עשב הארץ ואת כל פרי העץ אשר הותיר הברד ולא נותר כל ירק בעץ ובעשב השדה בכל ארץ מצרים:**

“The locusts ascended over the entire land of Egypt, and they alighted within all the border[s] of Egypt, very severe; before them, there was never such a locust [plague], and after it, there will never be one like it. They obscured the view of all the earth, and the earth became darkened, and they ate all the vegetation of the earth and all the fruits of the trees, which the hail had left over, and no greenery was left in the trees or in the vegetation of the field[s] throughout the entire land of Egypt (*Shemot* 10:14-15).

The locusts could not see the land because of their own multitude. Just as the blind eat ravenously and are not easily satisfied, because sight is a prominent factor in satisfaction, so too, the locusts ate without pause or satiation, because they could not see how much they were devouring” (Kli

Yakar, *Shemot* 10:5). In contrast, we, who can see, must learn to elevate our sense of sight. Let us make our meals a feast for the eyes and take the time to enjoy the colors and textures of the food, before digging into it. Thus, rectifying our sense of sight – in the month of Tevet – can bring us to the rectification of the sense of eating – the sense of this month of Shevat. The way of beautifying food, and consciously looking at it, for the sake of mindful eating, is a vital repair of Chava, whose eating from the forbidden fruit was preceded by her misused sense of seeing.

### The Centrality of the Sense of Sight

Due to the centrality of the sense of sight, the *parasha* starts with the plague of locusts, to begin this new stage of redemption. In fact, all three plagues mentioned in *Parashat Bo*, relate to the darkening of sight: “The locusts, darkened the face of the earth” (*Shemot* 10:15); by the plague of darkness, it states, “There was darkness over all the land of Egypt” (*Shemot* 10:22); whereas the plague of the first-born “was in the middle of the night” (*Shemot* 11:40). These last three plagues clarified once and for all the darkness and death of the Egyptian outlook – “He placed them in darkness, like the eternally dead” (*Eichah* 3:6), and paved the way for discovering the light of Hashem. Our eyes can lead us astray or elevate us. Just as the plague of locusts repaired the sense of sight in the redemption from the Egyptian exile, so can we bring about redemption today, by repairing our sense of sight, and steering clear of all the enticing distractions. “As in the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders” (*Michah* 7:15). May Hashem grant us heightened vision, and may we merit to see revealed miracles in our days!