



THE EYES HAVE IT

Harav Y. Reuven Rubin Shlita

It starts with stealth, like so much in our lives, things often change in small increments, with nary a wrinkle in the fabric of our everyday. For me it was a surprising remark from my trusted optician at a regular exam some years ago. "You know Rabbi, you have the beginnings of cataracts in your eyes, they aren't troublesome yet but may be in the future." Well like to most people, trouble in the future just means somewhere down the distant road, and it won't be anything drastic, anyway, will it? The good doctor was reassuring, 'nah, we can do things for cataracts today,' and as I said, it seemed a long way in the future.

Well like so much more in life, that long off future arrived, and I type these words under a bit of duress, but with great thanks to the Eibishter. The road to this juncture took its time, but as I was ambling along life's pathway, things were ever so slowly getting cloudier. The lights seemed to become more dimmed and faces from afar were becoming decidedly blurry. My yearly checkup got more taken up by the subject of cataracts until I could not remain in denial any longer, the time had arrived and the inevitable had to be faced.

I admit I was taken to this point kicking and dragging my heels and I accept that cataracts are part and parcel of the gift of growing older. In truth, many a friend my age has had to face the same moment of decision. They all seemed to recover quickly and extolled the virtues of the procedure. Problem was that I have a personal phobia about people fiddling with my eyes, it's so bothersome that even the thought of putting in eye drops causes a wave of defensive blinking on my part. I guess you could call me a world class coward when it comes to anything affecting my eyes, but it is what it is. I'm sure I am not alone in this fear, I can sense a good number of you squirming at just the thought of some tall shadowy figure hovering over your face, scalpel in hand, whispering kind words of "stay still now". Be this all as it may, the inevitable day of my first procedure arrived and yours truly went forth with trepidation comforted with brochos from a number of Tzadikim. Speaking about my own personal experience, I found the actual procedure calm and painless. The medical attendants were friendly and reassuring, and the surgeon spoke to me and explained what was about to transpire with a measure of understanding that made me more confident.

בס"ד



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לזכר ולעילוי נשמת
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I share all this to get us to the point of post procedure. Cataracts are usually a two-pronged operation, one eye is done and then after a week or so, the other. I sit here in that intervening week, the eye which was operated on now gazes out on a world of clarity I never remember having. Yes, it is awash with drops every few hours, and true my old glasses are close to useless because they cause blurriness in my newly clarified eye, but all these points will soon become just momentary blips as the healing takes place and my other eye joins the ranks of the newly cleared. I accept that at this moment you must be thinking, "Oy vey! Rubin is sounding like some alta kvetch that loves boring everyone with all his medical escapades." That is not the purpose of this screed, the reason I wax lyrical about my new found vision is that it awakens another clarity that calls to all of us at this time of year.

Hashem affords us windows of opportunity where we can regroup our spiritual hopes and refocus on what is real. The period when we read the beginning portions of the book of Shmos is just such a time; called Shovovim, it refers to the first initials of the weekly readings from Shmos through Mishpatim. These days are meant to inspire us in becoming more in sync with the holiness and spirituality of a Torah lifestyle. In these special days our efforts towards creating holiness within ourselves is given special help from on high, and "Guta Yiden" have always spoken of such matters during this period.

We face enormous challenges and it is no easy task to navigate the turbulent waters that we find ourselves in. We glimpse that which previous generations never were challenged with. Screens beckon at every step, visions unsightly are thrown in the path of our holy children to a degree we old-timers can't fathom. The whole fabric of kedushah is creased by the coarseness of our surroundings. I have shared that the Eibishter has cleared away my eyes and left me with a new clarity I never could have hoped for. Obviously, I am speaking metaphorically but the calendar tells me its an apt moment to awaken ourselves towards the greater need for spiritual clarity. Our generation suffers from a chronic problem of moral coldness. In our times where so much Torah is taught and our ranks swell daily there is a certain tendency to become calcified in our observance, not really challenging ourselves towards growth. Kain Ayin Horah there are tens of thousands where once there was but a mere handful, yet the fire seems to get dampened at times and we are all aware of our losses. This dullness of spiritual clarity comes from the golus we find ourselves in, and no surgeon can clear this up. It is up to each individual to tend to the spiritual health of their unique neshomah.

In Parsha Vaeira we read "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." The Gerrer Rebbe Ztl points out that the Hebrew word "sivlos" means not only "burden" but also "tolerance". Therefore, the passage can be read as "I will deliver you from being tolerant of Egypt." We can all learn from this nuance in the words. It is very easy to become tolerant of a bad situation, and this is no small form of slavery. We stumble through life tolerating the coldness in our hearts, not being able to stir ourselves from our slumber. The dust of golus shrouds our vision and we become desensitised to what our true vision should be. These auspicious days are calling us to wake up and rekindle our souls so we can feel and see our Torah in everything we do.

I thank the Eibishter for my new physical clarity of vision and daven that these new eyes remain clear and spiritually pristine. Let us all grasp onto this season's Ais Rotzon, and clear our neshomalach with Torah clarity of kedushah.

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