

PROTECTING THE EYES

114

לימוד הדבר תורה לזכות ר' שלום מרדכי הלוי שני בן רבקה לגאולה קרובה מן המיצר אל המרחב

STANDING GUARD

The Torah commands us, "*v'lo sosuru acharei levavchem v'acharei eineichem*", we should not follow our heart and eyes, for the eye sees, the heart desires and the body then commits wrongdoings.

(שלה טו, לט, רש"י שם)

The Navi Yeshaya praises one "who closes his eyes from seeing bad" and promises that he will be protected, lack no sustenance, his children will develop properly and he will merit to see the glory of the King.

Chazal give an example of one who does not gaze at the women laundering clothes by the river or similar. When there is an alternate route, one is obligated to take it and earns no special praise for doing so (for otherwise he is a *rasha*.) The Navi Yeshaya is speaking of one who must take this route, yet forces himself, with great difficulty, to turn his eyes away.

(ישעיהו לג, טו-יז, בבא בתרא ג"ז ע"ב, שו"ע אהע"ז סי' כ"א ס"א)

The Medrash says that whoever restrains himself in the area of *tznius* is called *kadosh*. The Navi Elisha is described by the woman of Shuneim as "*kadosh*", for throughout the time he was there, he never looked at her.

(ויקרא רבה כ"ד ו)

The Medrash tells of the great *kedusha* of Yosef Hatzaddik who controlled his eyesight and guarded it. Potiphar's wife tried to entice him to look at her, even putting an iron rod under his neck, but despite all she did, he did not look. Later when Yosef, newly chosen as second to the king, was led throughout Mitzrayim, the princesses endeavored to look at his face, yet he did not glance at any of them. Yosef therefore merited success in *Olam Hazeh* and *Olam Haboh*.

(בראשית רבה פ"ז י"א, ילקוט שמעוני ויחי רמז קס"א)

On ben Peles's wife was determined to prevent her husband from joining Korach's campaign against Moshe Rabbeinu. She positioned herself at the entrance of her tent and uncovered her hair, saying to herself, "Now I know they will not approach the tent, for even these *resha'im* are careful to guard their eyes."

(סנהדרין ק"ט סע"ב)

SAFEGUARDING ONESELF

A *talmid* of the Baal Shem Tov once requested his Rebbe's advice on how to guard his eyes from seeing bad. The Baal Shem Tov advised him to travel to a particular city and stay at a certain individual's home where he will learn the proper conduct. Arriving at his destination, the *talmid* was very surprised to find that his host was a simpleton who worked most of the day at the port.

Some days later, alone in his host's home, he noticed a window high up near the ceiling. Being very curious, he placed one table atop another, piled a third above those two, and climbed up. Moving aside the curtain to look out, he was shocked and disgusted to see some neighbors behaving inappropriately. When his host returned, the *talmid* asked him, "I'm surprised at you! How can you live near such bad neighbors?!" and related what he had seen through the window. The host replied, "The question is on your behavior! I have been living here for twenty years and have never considered checking to see what my neighbors are doing, and you're here for only a couple of days, yet you could not restrain yourself from climbing up to look..."

(רשימות דברים ה"א ע' ד)

During the time that the Rebbe resided in Paris, he was very careful to protect the *kedusha* of his eyes, and left a strong impression on the chassidim there.

The chossid Rabbi Sosonkin related: "Once walking down the street in Paris, I passed the Rebbe who was holding a fully opened newspaper in front of him. When the Rebbe noticed me, he commented, 'Nu, it is impossible to walk in the streets of Paris with open eyes...' Chassidim once peeked into the newspaper and noticed that it was years old."

(ימי מלך ה"א ע' 465, ח"ג ע' 21)

The chossid Reb Mendel Futerfass was very careful not to gaze at women, even in his old age. Once some mothers of students in Beis Rivka of Kfar Chabad asked to meet with him to ask their questions, and Reb Mendel declined, for on principle, he did not meet with women. On another occasion, a gathering was held in Kfar Chabad for a mixed

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group of soldiers, and Reb Mendel sat at the head table, unobtrusively looking down the entire time.

(מפי הרד"מ שי' דרוקמן)

Someone once asked the Rebbe what to do when doing *mitvzoim* in such places which require caution of what can be looked at there. The Rebbe replied, "When one thinks words of Torah while going on *mitvzoim*, the Rebbe goes along and protects him from all negative influences."

However, to another who told the Rebbe that he feels that doing *mitvzoim* in such places is causing him damage *b'ruchnius*, the Rebbe responded, "If you feel you cannot go there, then do not go there!"

(סיפורים חסידיים ח"א ע' 164)

At a *farbrengen* in Riga, the Friediker Rebbe said: "There are times when one should not go out in the streets. If one must go out, he has got to set hours when he will not go, and take the least populated roads when he does."

(סה"ש תרפ"ט ע' 60)

When Shaul Hamelech asked some girls for directions, while searching for his donkeys, they gave a lengthy response. Chazal say that they did not do so because they wanted to gaze upon his good looks, "For just as it is forbidden for a man to gaze upon a woman, it is forbidden for a woman to gaze upon a man."

The Mittlerer Rebbe writes that when a woman does gaze, this can cause her children to be born with a certain sickness.

(ילקוט שמואל א' פ"ט, פוקח עורים)

KEDUSHA OF THE EYES

The Rebbe Rashab writes: Those who care for their *neschama* and want to prevent it from becoming impure, should limit their vision and not to look at everything around them, especially forbidden sights. Even if this is difficult, one should strengthen himself like a lion and know that it is vital for his *neschama*, without which all his *avodah* is like nothing and will have no effect. For one's physical health, nothing is overlooked; how much more so should this be regarding the life of the *neschama*.

The Rebbe adds that the mere sight of something negative, even without thought, has a negative effect on the onlooker.

(קונטרס העבודה פ"ב, אג"ק ח"כ ע' פב)

The Rebbe writes in a letter: One who looks where he should not is misusing his eyes. He is considered blind for the moment, and a blind person is considered to be lacking in life.

A German Yid once traveled to the *tzaddik* Reb Pinchas of Koritz to request a *bracha* for his daughter who had suddenly become blind. "The reason," said Reb Pinchas, "is that her father is also blind and this is a hereditary disease." The Yid protested, "But my eyes are perfectly healthy, and I don't even wear glasses!"

The *tzaddik* explained that a sinner is the one who is truly blind. He warned the Yid that his entire family was in danger of losing their vision, for "One who gazes upon the face of a *rasha*,

his eyes grow dim." Hearing this, the Yid wept and resolved to begin conducting his life according to Torah, and upon his return to Germany, he made his home *kosher* in all respects. When the daughter was cured, she traveled to Koritz to see the *tzaddik* and donated money for the writing of two *Sifrei Torah*.

(אג"ק ח"ט ע' שד"מ, ספורי חסידים זוין תורה, ע' 97)

Once when Rashi left the Beis Medrash, he saw a minister's wife riding towards him and was greatly disturbed that his holy eyes had to witness such a scene. Later on, when he wrote his *peirush* on the Torah, and tried to describe the *eifod* of the *Kohen Gadol*, he understood that this was why he had seen that woman.

(לקו"ש חכ"ו ע' 198)

The chossid Reb Yitzchok from Yanovitch would do business with a German Yid who would deliberately ask him many questions of *k'fira* (heresy) to challenge his *emunah*, but Reb Yitzchok was able to answer them all.

Seeing his lack of success in angering Reb Yitzchok with his questions, he decided to make him stumble with lusts. "We've been doing business together for a number of years," he told Reb Yitzchok, "so why don't you come over to my home for a friendly visit, at least to drink a cup of tea." Reb Yitzchok agreed, and when he arrived and sat down by the table, the businessman had his daughter, dressed in an insolent *untzniusdik* manner, serve refreshments. Immediately, upon seeing her, Reb Yitzchok vomited, being unable to handle the insolent immodesty.

(רשימות דברים ח"א ע' רל"ז)

The Rebbe Maharash suffered from various ailments and would therefore travel occasionally to medical health resorts. On one such trip, he met one of the *g'dolei ha'mussar*, who also required this visit for his health. One of the procedures was to wash oneself in the remedial springs of water. Two lines of chairs, one for men and the other for women, were set up opposite each other for people to sit and wait their turn.

Sitting on line, the Rov was greatly disturbed that he was facing immodestly dressed women, and wondered how the Rebbe Maharash was able to sit, wearing his glasses, yet undisturbed by this. Exiting the fountain area, the Rebbe showed the Rov how he had come with glasses made from opaque material, and so he was spared from looking at any immodesty.

(רשימות דברים ח"ג ע' קמ"ו, וראה כע"ז בלקו"ס ע' קג ולשמע אוזן ע' 76)

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