



A Foundational Article on the Labyrinth of Life, that we merited to hear from The Spinka Rebbe Shlita.

1. The Course of Bilam HaRasha

Have you ever asked yourselves in what course people are taught to become envious?

Probably not. **Because as unpleasant as it is to hear – we don't need to be taught bad middos. Everything is alive and vibrant within us – without us even wanting it...**

Ayin Ra'a (Evil eye) It's not a profession that requires studies.

Also, Ta'ava (Lust) - is something that comes automatically.

And **Ga'ava (Pride)**? It also doesn't require professional training. You don't need to go to a teacher to learn to be haughty. All these come to us naturally...

And here we come to the famous Mishnah in Pirkei Avos, which describes the difference between the talmidim of Avraham Avinu and the talmidim of Bil'am HaRasha:

The talmidim of Avraham Avinu – they possess an ayin tovah, a Nefesh sh'felah, and a ruach nemuchah.

The talmidim of Bil'am HaRasha, on the other hand, acquired from their master the ayin ra'ah, the Nefesh rechavah u'mis'aveh, and the ruach gevohah.

Why does one need to be Bil'am's talmid to acquire this list of negative traits? It makes sense that an ayin tovah, and a ruach nemuchah, which are good middos – these are all things contrary to human nature, and one must struggle and work with the Nefesh to acquire them. For this, one indeed needs to be a talmid of a positive figure.

But an ayin ra'ah?! Are we lacking role models? Do we even need role models?!

And in general: from where do we know that Bil'am had an ayin ra'ah? On the contrary, if we observe the Pesukim that describe his actions – we discover a figure standing on the mountaintop, gazing at the nation dwelling at its foot – and expressing his admiration with voice and blessing!

Are such warm and moving brachos to be called 'ayin ra'ah'?!

2. Man Seeks Stability

Life, as is known, is not black or white.

We all have many moments of white, moments when we are carried on waves of success, whether in ruchnius (spirituality) or in material achievements, times when we feel the action bubbling in our very bones, we are full of encouragement, of giving, of an ayin tovah, **days when every tefillah is a true tefillah, the daily schedule is packed exactly as we expect from ourselves – and we go to sleep at the end of them with a wonderful feeling.**

But let's not evade, let's admit that we all also have upside down times – literally.

Times when we have no strength for anything, everything is stuck, we feel unmotivated to act and invest, times when we are not encouraging, we are busy with small matters, annoyed by everything, unfocused, feeling emptiness, **days when nothing manages to fulfill our expectations – and we go to sleep at the end of them with a terrible feeling.**

Think about what our Nefesh goes through in this turbulent journey of life:

A Nefesh that yearns for a feeling of self-worth, a Nefesh that seeks its identity, its meaning, a Nefesh that constantly asks itself – who am I really?

How can it receive an answer – when the data changes every moment? **How will this Nefesh find rest – when the internal contradiction between black and white is so blatant and glaring?**

A person cannot contain these opposites, he doesn't know how to live with this contradiction, and therefore he will always prefer to be focused on the current feeling:

If we are in moments of happiness – suddenly all the dark moments dissipate. **Don't talk to us in those moments about difficulties, about what we went through just yesterday, about fears and anxieties, don't bring us back to the days we spent in darkness. Shhh... everything is good, don't disturb!**

In those wonderful moments, our Nefesh identifies itself as wonderful and special human beings, full of worth, full of inspiration, full of action, successful and good-hearted, and why ruin the celebration with memories of negative moments? Why return to our existential contradiction?!

But then the opposite moments arrive...

Suddenly everything gets stuck, suddenly the good intentions and aspirations we wrote down in our ambitious goal plan – everything dissipates in favor of lack of will, lack of satisfaction, and middos ra'os that suddenly flood us...

And the Nefesh, anxiously following the events – feels lost in the face of losing its former identity!

And therefore, all at once man decides: **apparently, I really am worth nothing, apparently, I truly have no chance, apparently this is who I am – and I have no reason to invest in trying to change, because it won't work anyway...**

We know these feelings as 'despair', and the behavior that follows – as 'recklessness'...

Everything stems from the desperate internal search for self-definition: **either we are good and special and wonderful – or we are hopeless rags**, and if so – let's at least go with our middos and desires, why fight them in vain...

3. Be Concealed, Be Hidden

Why does our Nefesh so desperately need this stability? Why is it so difficult for it to contain the conflicts and contradictions between strong moments and moments of helplessness?

Here comes an amazing revelation that Reb Asher illuminated: Human ga'avah is what pushes man to achieve an **all this stems from one word – ga'avah.**

The human ga'avah is what pushes a person to reach an independent definition, to become something that has an existence in itself, that has a definition, that has an identity.

Of course, we would all prefer a positive definition and identity, but when there is no choice – even an identity of misery, even a self-definition full of despair – is good for us.

But how would Reb Asher say it? Man must strive to resemble his Creator: just as HaKadosh Boruch Hu is 'tamir v'ne'elam' (hidden and concealed) – beyond all identity and definition, **so too man must become 'tamir v'ne'elam'**, to stop striving for an absolute self-definition, to stop labeling himself, to stop attributing every success or failure to himself in an attempt to understand through them 'who am I actually', **to know that ultimately 'ein od milvado', and that all reality in this world is merely an illusion...**

4. A Journey Between Extremes

HaKadosh Boruch Hu is the One who leads man through this turbulent journey of life, between successes and failures, between good middos and moral corruption, between pleasant days and days of darkness.

All this is actually a journey of connection back to Him, blessed be He!

The internal contradictions indeed take from us the stable ground – but this is precisely why it is done: to make us stop clinging to one absolute definition, to stop deciding that we are good and that's it – or bad and that's it, **but rather to observe and understand: we, by ourselves, are prone to falling – and here is proof, that so many times we have failed, but HaKadosh Boruch Hu watches over us and gives us a chance – for behold, so many times we have succeeded!**

Do not become addicted to success – and also not to failure!

To constantly live both extremes – and from them to come to the understanding that we are dependent on the Creator!

5. Ten Personalities in One Man

This also has a clear effect on mental health:

Think of people (almost all of us are like this), who go through ten types of moods every day, between wonderful feelings – and depressing moments...

If a person completely clings to the current feeling, if a person defines himself absolutely according to what he feels now – he is actually changing his identity ten times in one day!

What a mental upheaval it is, to change ten identities in one day!

Do we still have questions as to why he feels completely devoid of identity and self-worth at the end of the day? We are surprised why he falls so quickly into anger and desires? He is unstable! He has no place in any identity – for more than half an hour!

But if a person surrenders to the reality to which HaShem has led him, and he understands that his life is complex, that he is neither good nor bad – but created, and he is merely undergoing a journey between successes and failures to prove to him that he needs the Creator...

Such a person – does not sit in a slingshot! He is constantly connected to himself; he does not change his identity – not even once! He is calm, he is himself, he contains his complexities!

6. Everything Depends on the Roots

Reb Asher says: The world is full of wonderful and flourishing trees – from which one wind is enough to uproot their life force.

Why? Because their external appearance is indeed impressive, but their roots are few and weak! They are not connected to their source of vitality!

The correct investment, therefore, is precisely in the deep places, in the roots. The more roots one has – the greater his chances of life.

Man, he is indeed an 'eitz hasadeh' tree of the field. When he invests in the external layer, in self-definition, in identity, in attracting admiring glances from the surroundings, in looking good – he will usually prefer to ignore the deep roots.

Because a person's roots, says Reb Asher, these are – his middos ra'os!

For precisely from there, precisely by contemplating them, not trying to deny them, but rather acknowledging and living with them – he understands how much he needs the source of life!

The more roots he identifies – the more connected he is, and his chances of life increase!

Even when your successes are great and everyone admires you – **don't forget to strengthen the roots, don't forget how much you need the Creator, don't forget the abundance of proofs you have, all the times you acted exactly opposite to logic, all the moments you failed and got angry and did not succeed – and then you will understand how much you must hold on to your source of life...**

7. Between Two Life Paths

The Ba'al Shem Tov HaKadosh reveals a wonderful secret regarding the Mishnah that describes the difference between the talmidim of Avraham Avinu and the talmidim of Bil'am:

Both – have everything!

We are talking about human beings like all of us, who look at their lives and don't understand what is happening to them. **How can it be that on the one hand they are so good and wonderful, so successful and active – but on the other hand they have so many weaknesses, so many dark places that they have no idea where they spring from.**

And these people, they seek spiritual guides to explain the conflict to them, to tell them how to contain this complexity.

There are those who choose to go to that one with the covered eye, to Bil'am HaRasha. They tell him about the complexity – and he mocks:

What's the connection? Why is it so complex? It's actually very simple: be – yourselves! Simply yourselves! Whatever arises in you at that moment – that's exactly who you are! Don't dwell on trifles, don't contemplate, don't contain complexities!

Are there moments when you feel like being wonderful, chanting poems about the wonderful nation, doing chessed, looking with an ayin tovah? Do it – with all your might!

Do you feel a desire to be nice people? Be 100% nice! Forget all the moments you got angry... **you are wonderful and special and nice – and that's it.**

Do you suddenly feel a strong need to be angry? Go with that feeling, that's who you are, you are angry – and you have no way to change it, and you are not supposed to try to change it... **Get annoyed, say everything that tickles your tongue!**

In the morning you can bless the Yidden – and in the evening offer the most wicked ideas to the enemies of Am Yisrael!

In the morning you can strive to die in kedusha and taharah – and in the evening fall into the most bizarre and animalistic desires!

And this does not contradict, because it is not connected! You are – whatever arises in you at that moment!

This is Bil'am's school of thought, this is his way of looking at life.

And the result of this? Complete detachment from the One who bestows successes, and a rapid deterioration into the human and natural realms, of ayin ra'ah, a Nefesh rechavah, and a ruach gevohah...

But there are people who choose to ask Avraham Avinu, they pour out their hearts and tell him about internal contradictions.

And Avraham, he also tells them about a burning palace, about an amazing mansion that there's no way it doesn't have a leader – versus a burning fire that seemingly proves there's no leader and no plan here.

He tells them about contradictions that pained him – and revealed his Creator to him, and he tells them: Your ayin ra'ah – is the way to reach an ayin tovah – because you connect to the One who can grant you the ayin tovah! The recognition of the desires and the Nefesh rechavah that trouble you – connects you to the One who can calm the yearnings for evil – and grant you yearnings for kedusha! Don't break from the ruach gevohah, use it to see how insignificant you are – and how much you need the Creator to grant you anavah (humility)...

8. Where Am I?

A small and young child went shopping with his mother in the big city – and suddenly found himself alone.

Alone, amidst a strange human mix, without his worried mother.

He searched with his eyes for the loving figure – and couldn't find.

"Mama!" he cried out in panic, and burst into tears, "Where are you?"

A compassionate passerby saw the crying child, and approached to offer help. She asked him to recall his mother's phone number, and he, with great difficulty, remembered.

Two rings – and the mother answers the call. She sounds worried – just like a mother searching for her beloved son. "Where are you, my little tzaddik?"

And the child, only increased his weeping:

"Believe me, Mama, I have no idea where I am – I only know that I am looking for you. Come and get me from here!"

There are people who seek to understand where they are, what their place is, they seek stability, they want to manage on their own.

But we, Ribbono Shel Olam, we don't know where we are, we have no idea, the upheavals we go through, this 'one moment in heaven, next moment in the dumps', brings us to the unknown.

Therefore, we have only one request of You: – טוב ומטיב 'Tov U'Meitiv – be sought by us!'

You, who know well where we are – You come and seek us, You come and clear a path for us back to Your home! שוב אלינו בהמון רחמים! Return to us with Your abundant mercies!

Gedanken from the Spinka Rebbe Shlita.

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