

Get in their Heads: Understanding Others Rabbi Dovid Ostroff

Based on Sifsei Chaim "Middos", page 300

אמר להם (ריב"ז לתלמידיו) צאו וראו איזוהי דרך ישרה שידבק בה האדם, רבי אליעזר אומר עין טובה (אבות פ"ב, ט')

We are also familiar with the *Mishna* that says whoever has *עין טובה*, רוח נמוכה ונפש שפילה, is a *talmid* of Avraham Avinu. What is this *Ayin Tova*?

Rashi explains *ayin tova* to mean, one is not jealous of one's friend and *חביב עליו כבוד חברו*, ככבודו, your friend's respect and honor that he receives is as dear to you as when you receive it, or your friend's status is as important to you as yours is. Imagine this, you see your friend walking into a room full of people and she receives winks and smiles acknowledging the esteem she holds in their eyes. You don't always receive that respect and admiration or not that much, so what are your thoughts? Be honest – are you happy and proud of her or is there an aching twinge saying, why don't I get it like that?

Let's say you do feel genuinely happy in the above scene, but is it not a *middah* of *לב טוב*, feeling proud and happy for her, why does *Rashi* call it *עין טובה*?

Two people can read the same newspaper page and see different things, depending on their interests. A mother can hear her baby cry in her sleep and yet continue sleeping when a truck drives by, because her ear is tuned to her baby.

We too see what we WANT to see. If we want to see good in people we will see it and if we want to see evil, we will, it all depends on our intention. The *Ayin Tova* is really what we WANT to see, depending on our intentions and thoughts. After we've seen what we want to see, we can FEEL for the other with the *לב טוב*.

A person with *Ayin Tova* wants to see one's friend's needs and feelings and adopts them like his own, and then feels for him, with his *lev tov*, like he feels for himself. A person with an *עין רעה* wants to see another person's weaknesses and looks to find bad points, and will then feel jealousy and hatred towards the other person.

That's what *Rashi* means when he says one does not have *קנאה* towards one's friends, BECAUSE one's friend's honor and success are dear to him. When your friend has more than you, or is better, richer, smarter and everything else, not only don't you mind but you're happy for them because his success is dear to you like you would be for yourself.

Let us examine the *Ayin Tova* of Avraham Avinu.

Avraham Avinu prepared three tongues for three Arabs, all the while knowing that even three people cannot consume an entire tongue, so why slaughter three animals? Would it not have sufficed to give them cold water and ices? And why mustard, isn't that a bit overdoing it?

Imagine the following: a friend visits you on a hot summer's day and you have a bottle of chilled water and a bottle of chilled Coke in the fridge. You want to give her the water because the Coke is for you/your family/ when you're hot/ a bar mitzva – you name it, the excuse is there. You overcome yourself and you bring out the Coke, hoping she doesn't entirely consume it.

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Then imagine the following: three friends visit you and you graciously present them the chilled Coke, but you don't bring out three Coke bottles (בל תשחית?). Well why should you? Then why did Avraham Avinu? Because placing three bottles is the ultimate *Ayin Tova*, since each person will think they can drink as much as they want, whereas one bottle is divided and each person will hesitate before replenishing their glasses. Avraham wanted each person to feel like a lord and eat to his heart's content without any limits. Learning from Avraham Avinu and having that *Ayin Tova* makes you his *talmid*.

Where or from whom did Avraham Avinu learn this from? From *Hashem yisborach* who gives us in an unlimited fashion. We don't deserve anything and yet He outpours goodness endlessly. Avraham avinu saw how *Hashem* was עולם חסד יבנה and emulated *Hashem* to the highest degree.

When *Rabeinu Yonah* writes in *Sha'arei Teshuva* (3:13):

כי חייב אדם לטרוח בדרישת טוב לעמו ולשקוד בעמל נפשו על תקנת חברו אם דל ואם עשיר, וזאת מן החמורות ומן העקרים הנדרשים מן האדם, שנאמר (מיכה ו, ח): "הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד"

A person must constantly toil to better another person's life, because that is how one is to think about another person; and it is not a luxury, it is a *mitzvas Aseh*.

- Constantly be aware of whether things you do will cause others to have to clean up after you or make them feel awkward or uncomfortable.
- Look for simple things to help or assist.
- When in line at the store, never make someone feel that you're better or that you're right. Give in.
- When food served at the restaurant is not exactly as you ordered, before summoning the waiter, think whether you're going to upset someone and is it really worth it.
- When you see someone taking the last piece of juicy meat for supper, don't wish that she chokes on it, rather think how happy she must feel and you go make yourself a peanut butter sandwich. Let's face it, you'll feel satisfied with both in your stomach, and by being happy for the other person, you gained *shleimus hanfesh*, an *ayin tova* and a lasting satisfaction.
- Who's going to get the last piece of cake – make sure the person getting it feels that you WANT her to have it
- Help girl setting table or placing tablecloth
- Roommate sleeping – how would you feel if you were sleeping, how would you expect her to behave?
- Something falls, rush to pick it up
- Someone falls or something awkward happens – don't look
- Phone rings in class – don't look, what would YOU want
- Talking about someone else – would YOU want someone to talk about YOU
- Parking space – be happy for the person that got the parking space
- Roommate gets food parcel – are you happy and excited for her?

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