Parshas Nitzavim 5772 בס"ד

*וַתִּרְאוּ אֶת שִׁקּוּצֵיהֶם וְאֵת גִּלֻּלֵיהֶם עֵץ וָאֶבֶן כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב אֲשֶׁר עִמָּהֶם*

*“And you saw their abominations and their detestable idols, of wood and stone, of silver and gold that were with them.”*

In his very last day in the physical world Moshe Rabbeinu used the opportunity to reiterate the dangers of becoming enamored by idolatry and by idolatrous concepts. Moshe describes these idols as despicable and loathsome. Rashi says that Moshe Rabbeinu used these strong terminologies to describe these gods because they were indeed despicable. Rashi says: “These idols were called שקוציהם/shekutzeihem because they are disgusting like revolting creatures. They are also called geluleihem/גלליהם detestable because they stink and are disgusting like excrement.” The late Rav Yitzchak Zeev Soloveitchik ז"ל asked a remarkable question, if these idols are indeed so despicable, as described by Moshe Rabbeinu and Rashi, why was there a need to warn Klal Israel to stay away from them? Why would Moshe think that Klal Israel would become charmed by them to such an extent that they would forgo our holy Torah and tradition? Why would anyone desire to be around such idols let alone worship them?

The reason according to Rav Soloveitchik is that the eye and the power of vision are so powerful that it will make an everlasting impact on a person. The Torah is teaching us that they will see them and subsequently be impacted by them. Regardless if those things that they see are despicable; it will most likely impact them in some way or other. During the Communist regime there were many Jews who thought that they too were immune to communist ideology and who ended up being swept up by these very same ideas that they despised. Communism was and still is a form of idolatry. The great Magid story teller, Rav Sholom Schwadron said that he was taught an important lesson from his mentors regarding the power of idolatry. A person first will see the Avoda Zarah and will considerer it כשיקוץ/k’shikutz, something despicable. However the next time he will see it he will make light of it and say that it is just “"עץ ואבן/ “Eitz v’even,” wood and stone, it is not so bad after all, maybe an art craft. The next time he sees it, it will have become something important and valuable"כסף וזהב" /”kesef v’zahav, gold and silver.

The Talmud says תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא דף קז עמוד ב))a frightening statement: והסיר ה' ממך כל חלי, אמר רב: זו עין. רב לטעמיה, דרב סליק לבי קברי, עבד מאי דעבד. אמר: תשעין ותשעה בעין רעה, ואחד בדרך ארץ “Hashem will remove from you all the sickness that were found in ancient Egypt. The Torah has a healing power over us. The famous sage Rav went to visit the cemetery and was able to see who died as a result and cause of the evil eye. He said that 99% of those buried in the cemetery died because of the evil eye. 1% only died because of natural causes. How did Rav know this? There is a disagreement between the Rishonim, the early commentators. Some say that he knew this through Lachash, mystic powers, which he possessed. Others say that Rav used to plant a tree on the burial site and those trees which did not take root and sprout flowers was a sign that those buried underneath died from natural causes. Regardless of how Rav knew this information, it is clear to us that those people died because of the misuse of the power of the eye. The Torah warns us not to go after our eyes. The eye sees, the heart desires and the hand carry forth the act. A Torah Jew is expected to control all his limbs and to guide them to the service of the creator. When describing the greatness of Avraham Avinu, Rav Avigdor Miller said that Avraham was in total control of his eyes and he only saw what he chose to see. A verse tells us about Avraham Avinu: He lifted his eyes and behold he saw three men were approaching. What is the need to say that Avraham lifted his eyes and saw isn’t it natural that if one lifts his eyes he automatically sees that what he is gazing at? Rav Miller says that this verse proves Avraham’s ability of total self-control over his eyes so much so that he only saw what he chose to see. Avraham understood that a Jew can be impacted by what and how he sees and perceives things. Avraham realized that a good eye is blessed. Someone could have been standing right in front of Avraham but if he chose not to see then he did not see. Avraham was the master of the good eye. Avraham viewed everything through the lenses of the Torah. He saw the positive in everything. Those who have a good eye are considered by the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos as the Talmidim and disciples of Avraham Avinu.

Of all the central messages that Moshe Rabbeinu chose to hand over to Klal Israel prior to his departure from this world, he chose to hand over this message in the very last day in this world. Moshe realized that we are affected by those things we see. Moshe wanted to make sure that we would be prepared to face these obstacles and not be swept away by things that may look tempting but yet are destructive to the Neshoma of a Jew. As we approach the Yom Hadin the Day of Judgment of Rosh Hashanah may we develop a good eye to see only things that are healthy to our Neshomas. May we not be counted amongst those who according to the holy sage Rav died as a result of the misuse of the eye. May we be blessed always with a good eye and see everything through the clear lenses of the Torah.

Wishing you all a wonderful Shabbos! שבת שלום