When you look at a photograph, you are looking at unvarnished reality. Or are you?

It’s a common misconception that ‘the camera never lies,’ that it always replicates reality with total fidelity. The camera can be made to ‘tell lies’ — digital technology now allows the manipulation of a photograph so that virtually anything is possible.

Long before today’s technology, however, artists took up the camera as a tool of expression, knowing that it can be made to comment on reality as well as reproduce it.

The same is true of the human eye. “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” runs the famous adage. Man has the ability to recognize reality — but he can also create his own reality. Creating one’s own reality is called fantasy.
THE CREATIVE EYE

When the Jewish People were poised to enter the Land of Israel, Moshe sent out spies to investigate the land. These spies returned with a negative report. They slandered the Land of Israel and said that G-d could not bequeath the Land to the Jewish People because its inhabitants were too strong.

That night the Jews cried.

The Midrash tells us that G-d said, “You cried for nothing. I will establish for you a crying for generations.” That night was the night of the 9th of Av, the date of disaster in the Jewish calendar (See this month’s sign).

SPYING IS BELIEVING

What was the mistake of the spies?
Hashem gives endurance to things by ‘seeing’ them: “And G-d saw the light that it was good.” Man is created “in the image of G-d.” Thus our eyes are ‘like’ G-d’s: We too can give enduring substance to that which we see. We can lift up our eyes and recognize Who it is that creates Reality. We can see Reality as it is — or we can invent ‘reality’: We can ‘film our own script,’ using our eyes as a camera to create our own fantasy world.

This is what the spies did. They projected their own fantasy world onto reality, and made that fantasy into ‘reality.’ They wrote their own script in which G-d was unable to bequeath the Land to the Jewish People, and then they used their eyes to ‘film’ their fantasy and make it into ‘reality.’

PUTTING THE MOUTH BEFORE THE EYE

On the ninth of Av, we read the Book of Eicha (Lamentations) in the Synagogue. Each verse in each chapter in Eicha is alphabetical. The first verse of each chapter begins with aleph, the second with beis, etc.

However, towards the end of the fourth chapter, there is a strange reversal of the alphabetical order. Instead of the letter ayin preceding the letter peh, the order is reversed. The peh precedes the ayin. Why?

Peh is a Hebrew letter — but it is also a word. Peh means ‘mouth.’ Similarly the letter ayin is not only a letter, it is a word also. Ayin means ‘eye.’

In other words, the very structure of the Book of Eicha hints to the seminal error of the spies — they put their mouths before their eyes!

The spies reversed the alphabet of Reality. They put the peh — the mouth — before the ayin — the eye. They wrote their own false film script and then they saw what they had said.

When we cry on Tisha B’Av we are reversing the process that was the root of the evil of the spies: Tears wash the eye clean, purifying the perception of the world.

Just as tears purify the physical eye, expelling dust and foreign bodies, so tears expel the detritus of false perception.

In a flood of tears, we release our constrained emotions, and in the clear calm after the storm, we can see reality.

Cry Me A River

Who can cry anymore? On the ninth of Av we are supposed to cry over the destruction of the two Holy Temples and all the other tragedies that have befallen our people. But who can cry anymore? Our senses have become so dulled, our perceptions so blunted that we have no way to even begin to understand the loss of our Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple). If the world only knew what it has lost by destroying the House of G-d.

We cannot cry anymore, but maybe we can cry because we cannot cry.

Sources: Talmud Sanhedrin 104a; Talmud Succah 55b; Ramban on Bereishis 1:4; Ramban on Bamidbar 13:28; Rabbi Moshe Shapir o; Rabbi Nachman Bulman; Rabbi Yosef Brown; Rabbi Matzuyahu Glazerson; Rabbi Moshe Zauderer; http://www.vsb.cz/pub/texts/Online-Book-Initiative/Holocaust/treblinka.new

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