Drasha/Sermon Parshas Vayigash "The Good Eye"

We’ve all heard the expression that “the eyes are the window to the soul.” In other words, most people agree that much information can be gleaned by simply looking into another’s eyes.

For example, psychopaths are often described as having “dead eyes.” And have you noticed when videos or photographs try to hide someone's identity, it is the eyes that are blurred out? There are many English idioms about eyes. Here are a few classic ones that cover a wide range of contexts and meanings:

A roving eye

A sight for sore eyes

An eye for an eye

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

Give the evil eye

More than meets the eye

Pull the wool over your eyes

The apple of my eye

Eyes tell us so much that some believe we can tell something about people by their eye color. While this might seem like a far-fetched idea, new research suggests there are many links found between personality traits and the color of a person’s eyes.

What are your perceptions about eye color? Let's take a look at personality traits associated with some of the more common eye colors.

Hazel Eyes: Determined, imaginative, loves adventure and trying new things, often has a boundless inner vitality. People with hazel eyes are often risk takers yet profound thinkers, courageous in face of adversity, aware of their own limitations, responsible, but often have a serious selfish streak.

Green Eyes: People with green eyes are often unpredictable. They are original, creative, highly intelligent, intellectual, and can easily employ serious concentration even in highly distracting environments. People with green eyes love freedom, are passionate, and perform well under great pressure. They tend to be the happiest of all the different eye colors.

Black Eyes: Those with black eyes have a dynamic character full of vitality. People with black eyes tend to be hot-tempered, impulsive and often seek dangerous adventures. They command respect, exhibit great dignity, but they are often pretentious, secretive and mysterious.

Blue Eyes: Our blue-eyed friends often have high intellect and demonstrate devotion to noble causes. They exude sincerity, self-sufficiency, and are sentimental. People with blue eyes get easily bogged down by routine, often hold grudges, and are moody, but have great stamina.

And perhaps best of all ....

Brown Eyes: Those with brown eyes are outgoing, vivacious, and affable. People with brown eyes have a strong sense of commitment. Often attractive and adorable, they enjoy making new friends. Kind, loyal, sociable and devoted to the special people in their lives, those with brown eyes like to cheer people up, and take seriously their personal relationships.

Do any of the descriptions above fit you, or most of the people you know? Regardless of eye-color, we can aspire to the worthy trait of our brown-eyed friends seen in this week's Torah portion: Love of harmony.

After Yosef revealed himself to his brothers, he sent wagons to Cana'an to bring his father and extended family to Egypt. The Torah enumerates all of Yaakov's descendants and ends with a tally of those mentioned: "All the person of Yaakov's household who came to Mitzrayim numbered seventy." (Genesis 46:26)

Why mention 'person' in singular?

The Torah doesn't mean to imply that Yosef and his brothers had the same world outlook. What do you call a large group of people who profess the exact same mindset in all areas of life? Zombies! Universal agreement in all areas is sometimes found among people devoid of spirituality. Those with a connection to spirituality will develop their individual talents and intellect into a unique approach to life which will determine the way they think and respond to any given situation.

Rather, the brother's quality of oneness was an expression of their living in harmony with one another (after making amends with Yosef). They loved each other and cared deeply about one another.

In music, harmony is the use of simultaneous pitches (tones, notes), or chords. In life, harmony is the use of the generous spirit of the ayin tova - the good eye. As it says in Ethics of the Fathers, The disciples of our father Abraham have a good eye (5:19). What marks a person as one who lives with a good eye? Let me share five identifying signs.

1. They're satisfied -- except for the amount they give away. Those with a generous spirit and good eye always want to give more. They want to be more generous with what they have. But they are not driven by the desire to acquire more possessions. They may have a nice house and they may have a nice car, but those things do not drive them. They would be just as content without them.

2. They say "yes" more than they say "no." Those with a good eye have the amazing ability to say “yes.” Do they have more money, time, or possessions than everyone else? Not necessarily. But they manage their money, time, and possessions in a way that allows them to say “yes” more often because they prioritize people over each of those areas.

3. They don't talk about "their" possessions. Because those with a true spirit of generosity don't see themselves as owners of those possessions. They know that any possession they hold belongs to Hashem, and it is their challenge to properly administer those possessions for G-d’s purposes. Those with a good eye understand that their blessings are just tools to be used for generosity. They truly believe that Hashem did not design us to be hoarders, but conduits through which His blessings flow.

4. There is a sense of levity about them. Their orientation toward giving and lack of attachment to possessions develops a spirit of lightheartedness in them. They are not burdened by the drive to get and keep more stuff. They are not concerned about keeping up with the Goldbergs, and they live life with the freedom of an open hand and a generous eye.

5. They focus on what they have in common with others. Distinctions such as wearing a velvet or knitted kippah -- or no kippah at all -- a white or blue shirt, a long or short jacket or a baseball cap or striemel, are not grounds for feelings of animosity. Their desire to serve Hashem - the single G-d - allows them to look at others with a benevolent eye. If differences found in others irk a person, he must check his GPS to determine what life goal he is pursuing. As Rav Meir Shapiro (the famed founder of Daf Yomi) put it, "Whether davening Nusach Ashkenaz, Sefard or Eidut HaMizrach, everyone joins together by Yehi chavod Hashem L'olam, because regardless of how one gets there the ultimate goal of every Jew is to bring glory to Hashem!"

Yosef and his brothers became 'one person' and reconciled to each other and lived in harmony when they were able to see beyond their differences. Let us learn from our brown-eyed friends and others who look at their fellow Jew and fellow man with a benevolent spirit, and a good eye.