



Seeing G-d with Both Eyes

When Professor Alexenberg moved to Yerucham, he never imagined that events would turn out as they did.

Open A College Town

Good Shabbos!

In 1977, a Jew named Mel Alexenberg, who lived in Teaneck, New Jersey and served as a Columbia University professor, decided to make Aliyah and go live in Yerucham, Israel. Professor Alexenberg is an internationally known artist and authority on the intersection of art and technology. He currently lives in Raanana, Israel.

At the time, however, Yerucham was a little village in the Negev. It had been established in the early 1950s as a transit camp for new immigrants from Romania, Morocco, Iran and India. In the 1960s it was converted into a permanent town—but its difficult economic situation drove its youth away, particularly in the 1970s. Professor Alexenberg decided to move specifically to this village and help develop it.

Before he moved to Israel, he came in for a yechidus, a private audience with the Rebbe. He told the Rebbe his plans. The Rebbe blessed him and advised him to start a local college. The Rebbe told him that in the United States, you've got plenty of small towns that are entirely built around and dependent on the college or university they have—the school creates jobs for local residents and generally makes the town a good place to live. And so, the Rebbe advised, Professor Alexenberg should set up a college in Yerucham and thus

stop the negative migration out of the town.

So Professor Alexenberg sold his Teaneck house, left his teaching job and made Aliyah to Israel. He and his wife arrived in Yerucham on a Thursday.

On their first Shabbos in Yerucham, they went out for a stroll about town, during which they discovered a building that appeared nearly complete but also completely empty. It looked like a school. He asked some locals what it was, but no one knew what to tell him.

On Sunday morning, Professor Alexenberg went to visit the head of the city council. He told him that he was a new arrival from America, and he asked him what was going on with the building. The council head slapped his hand to his forehead and said, "Oy, that building?!"

The Building

The council head told Professor Alexenberg that two years ago, he had gotten a call from the government's Ministry of Education, which had decided to permit a plan for a school for exceptional students in Yerucham.

The council head claimed that they had only had five such students in town, but the Ministry of Education official did not want to listen. He said, "Look, the Ministry has made a decision. The money has already been assigned to this project. Plans for the building are under way, and you have to build it."

Close to the end of construction, it turned out that the Ministry of Education official had turned out to be the bumbling bureaucrat that he seemed to be: He had mistaken the town of Yerucham for the town of Netivot. The Ministry had actually wanted to build a school for students with special needs in Netivot, not Yerucham.

The end result was that the Yerucham City Council was "stuck" with a

big new building—and nothing to do with it!

Well, Professor Alexenberg told him: “Listen—the Lubavitcher Rebbe advised me to start a university in Yerucham, and this building is perfect for that!”

Well, it wasn’t much longer before the city council head contacted the village engineer and happily told him to come down with the keys to the building, because “we now have a Jew who wants to do something with it.”

The Budget

In those days, Israel was embarking on sister city projects between Jewish communities throughout the world and cities in Israel. And so the city of Yerucham had ended up with Montreal, Canada as its “twin sister.”

The city council head told Professor Alexenberg that in another two days, a contingent from Montreal was coming for its first-ever visit to Yerucham—and since he didn’t speak English, he now asked Professor Alexenberg to serve as the council head’s interpreter. Professor Alexenberg gladly agreed.

So the contingent arrived and Mel, who had only arrived five day prior, served as their guide. They asked him what was planned for Yerucham and he told them, the Lubavitcher Rebbe had advised him to build a university in town. They were very excited and said, “We want to help – tell us what you need and you got it!”

So here, Professor Alexenberg was only in Israel for five days—and already had a building and financial backers. He only now needed to actually start his university.

The University

So Professor Alexenberg went to Bar-Ilan University, where he met

with Rabbi Toby (Tuvia) Bar-Ilan, for whose illustrious father the university had been named. He told him that the Rebbe had advised him to set up a university in Yerucham and that he now had the building and had the money—but he just needed guidance and help on how to actually start a university.

Rabbi Bar-Ilan said, “Listen, it’s an excellent idea! Bar-Ilan has university chapters in the north, the east and the west. We’re now looking to set up a chapter in the south.”

Rabbi Bar-Ilan said that they wanted to follow the famous verse of the Torah known as “Ufaratzta”: “you shall burst forth west, east, north and south.” Bar -Ilan still lacked the “south”—a place in the Negev. We’ll set up your university in Yerucham as our chapter, he said. You just organize the place, get the students, and we’ll send you professors from the central campus.

So now, Professor Alexenberg is only in Israel ten days, and he already has a building, a budget, and a ready-to-go university with all the licenses and lecturers. He arrives in Israel in September— and after the Tishrei holidays, just about one month later, he opened a college with 400 students!

One Eye or Two

In the Shabbos Shacharis services, while the synagogue is still empty and only a few people have dragged themselves out to come early, anyone paying attention will notice that there’s a contradiction between two chapters of Tehilim that are recited at the beginning of the prayers.

In Chapter 32 of Tehillim, King David says, “Behold, G-d’s *Eye* is to those who fear Him.” In the following chapter, though, King David says, “G-d’s *Eyes* are to the righteous.”

If you noticed, there is an interesting difference in the verses.

Apparently, G-d watches the righteous with *both* eyes, while He watches ‘those who fear Him’ with only one eye. Obviously, the term ‘G-d’s Eye’ is a metaphor, so what exactly does it signify?

The Midrash writes (from Shir Hashirim Rabbah 8) is that when we do G-d’s will, He looks at us with both eyes, but when we do not, one eye is shut. But this interpretation doesn’t fit with the literal reading of our verse, which states quite emphatically that G-d looks at those who fear Him with *one* eye.

Two Forms of Recognition

The Rebbe explains in a Sichra (Shabbos Bereishis 5718) that there are several forms of Divine Providence, akin to the difference between watching something with one eye and watching something with two.

Some people don’t feel G-d’s presence in their lives. They think they’re handling everything well on their own. They are completely disconnected from their spiritual side—they don’t feel G-d’s Hand in their day-to-day lives.

But there are people who do indeed sense G-d’s presence in their personal lives. They take note of Divine Providence. When unexpected things happen to them, they see that there’s someone above them orchestrating the events. Sometimes, strange things happen to them, and they sense a message from above, but they don’t understand its meaning.

For such people, G-d’s supervision is “with one Eye”—they sense it, and they even take heart that there’s a message, but they don’t always know what message G-d is trying to give them.

Now, above them you have tzadikim. These are people who have the recognition and feeling that G-d directs their ways, and in every occurrence in life they know what message G-d wants to give them. These are the people who feel that G-d is supervising them “with both

Eyes.”

Yosef's Recognition

When we read this Portion of the Week, which deals with the story of Yosef and his brothers, we see something very interesting. Throughout the entire saga, Yosef is always mentioning G-d— even Potiphar the Egyptian, who worshiped idols, saw “that G-d was with him and that everything he did, G-d made succeed in his hand” (Bereishis 39:3).

When Yosef was thrown into the dungeon, even there, the prison warden handed him responsibilities, “because G-d was with him, and that which he did, G-d made succeed” (Bereishis 39:23).

Even the Pharaoh, who considered himself a god, declared, “Is a man with the spirit of G-d within him like this to be found?” after meeting Yosef (Bereishis 41:38). And Yosef himself definitely felt that G-d was supervising him with every step and tread. Yosef “HaTzadik” (“the Righteous”) merited G-d’s supervision “with both eyes.”

And so in this week’s Parshah, when Yosef finally reveals himself to his brothers, he tells them not to feel bad that they had sold him into slavery. It was all G-d’s hand, he told them, to be able to bring sustenance to them, their families, and to the entire world. He repeated this message three separate times, to hammer the message home. That is clearly a person who lives with acknowledgment that G-d is supervising him with both eyes.

Open Both Eyes

Each one of us experiences moments in our lives where we do not feel G-d’s supervision at all. In such moments, a person can completely forget that there’s Someone above directing everything, and he or she can get worried or angry that things are not going exactly as he or she had planned.

Then there are moments that we feel that there is Someone above

who is—but we still think that we've got control of the situation. That's "supervision with one eye."

And then there are events in life like the story in Yerucham. As Professor Mel Alexenberg himself agreed, it should have taken ten years to set up a university like that, but here it took ten days! In such situations, we all see the Divine Providence with both eyes.

My friends, this also depends on us. When we open both our eyes and look for G-d in our daily lives, we will then discover that G-d is watching over us with both His eyes, too.

Good Shabbos!