

guidance, vision and illumination – which are all functions of one’s eyes. As the final arbiters of Jewish law, they infuse our nation with the clarity that comes with Torah erudition and the wisdom, the result of their *daas Torah*, wisdom honed and inspired by the Torah. In his *hesped*, eulogy, for the *Maharam Shick*, *Horav Nota Wolf*, *Rav* of Pressburg, Hungary, and the leading elder of the Torah community, offered the following parable, which gives us a powerful insight into the meaning of *einei ha’eidah*.

A king became ill, the sickness affecting his vision. In no time, he lost sight in both of his eyes. The preeminent eye specialists from all over his land were immediately summoned to his bedside. After a meticulous examination which left no avenue of treatment ignored, they ultimately arrived at a consensus of opinion: the king required an eye transplant. If they could provide him with a healthy set of eyes, they could remove his useless ones, and the king’s vision would return. There was one problem: no one was willing to donate his eyes to the king.

Money was no issue. The king would pay almost anything for his vision to return. The king’s servants searched every nook and cranny of his land, to no avail. No one was willing to part with his eyes. As a last option, the king’s servants when to the jail which was home to some very nasty people, many of whom had little or nothing to look forward to. One prisoner was serving a life sentence with no hope for parole. They made him an offer that was truly incredible: “If you contribute your eyes to the king, he will commute your sentence and allow you to go free!” They were offering this man the most elusive gift that he could ever dream of receiving.

“What benefit do I derive from the freedom which you grant me, if I will be blind? What do I gain from leaving prison if I will, for the rest of my life, live in darkness?” he asked.

The prisoner understood the reality of life and how a life of darkness is not much of a life.

“Our sages teach us,” *Rav* Wolf declared, “*misas tzaddikim*, the death of the righteous, atones for the generation.’ The passing of a *tzaddik* leaves a tremendous void. The pain felt by the congregation of Jews when a Torah giant passes is an atonement for them. With the passing of the *Maharam Shick*, we merited a huge atonement for our generation, but he was the *einei ha’eidah*, our eyes, our vision, our hope and inspiration. True, we have been forgiven, but how can we continue on without vision, amidst the darkness which suffuses us all?”

A powerful statement which we often forget to

take to heart. Without our leadership, we are like blind men groping in the dark. Trading our “eyes” for atonement is not a very reasonable trade.

Va’ani Tefillah

ראה בעיני – Re’eh b’anyeinu. Behold our affliction.

Anyeinu – our affliction – has a double meaning. An afflicted person is impeded by the distress which causes him pain and suffering. An *ani* is a poor man, which (in some way) is also a form of affliction. One is impeded from doing what he desires due to his lack of funds. The *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, describe the *ani b’ruach*, one who is spiritually afflicted, who has paucity of the spirit, a weakness of character and emotional inadequacy which stunt his spiritual achievement. *Anyeinu* – our affliction – our poverty – regardless of the definition (affliction – poverty of the spirit) is ours. This means that we understand and concede that we are the cause of our own troubles. Yes, we acknowledge the role that we play in our afflictions. We are our own greatest enemy. When we recite this blessing, we should pause for a moment and reflect: True, we have *tzaros*, troubles, but are we prepared to accept our personal contribution towards these afflictions? We ask Hashem to look at our affliction. We are ready to accept responsibility for our actions. Now, please help us!

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Parashas Shelach

תשע"ז

פרשת שלח

שליח לך אנשים ויהרו את ארץ כנען

Send forth for yourself men, and let them spy out the Land of Canaan. (13:2)

Rashi comments concerning the juxtaposition of the sin of the *meraglim*, spies, upon the sin of Miriam, which concluded the previous *parsha*. The *meraglim* should have derived a lesson from Miriam’s punishment for speaking about her brother, Moshe *Rabbeinu*. If the *tzadokes*, righteous woman, Miriam, was punished for simply talking about Moshe in a manner that might have a negative connotation, how much more so should they have been mindful of her punishment and not spoken negatively? The question concerning *Rashi’s* comparison (*Miriam’s lashon hora* to that spoken by the *meraglim*) begs elucidation. *Lashon hora* is evil under any circumstance. When one speaks against a Torah personality, it becomes exponentially worse. When it is the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, *Rabban shel kol Yisrael*, it goes off the charts! How could this be compared to the *meraglim* speaking negatively of the Holy Land, sticks and stones – not people of such exemplary caliber?

Horav Yerachmiel Chasid, Shlita, explains that the *issur*, prohibition, against speaking *lashon hora*, has nothing to do with the hurt one causes the subject of his slander; rather, it is about the *middos ra’os*, negative character traits, which catalyze the slanderer’s descent to such a low spiritual plateau. He writes that he heard this principle from *Horav Chaim Shmuelovitz, zl*, who supported it with the following proof. *Klal Yisrael* was punished with *yom l’shanah*, one year of wandering in the Wilderness, for every day that the *meraglim* spent reconnoitering *Eretz Yisrael*. Why is this? Their slander of *Eretz Yisrael* occurred on the day that they returned; why should they be punished for forty days if the sin lasted (at the most) part of one day? This indicates that, for forty days, their deficient character traits festered within them, their psyches became poised toward slander as soon as they arrived. Those forty days set the tone for the *lashon hora* they spoke upon returning home. *Klal Yisrael* listened and accepted the *lashon hora* that was forty days in the making.

It is for this reason that *Horav Hillel Zaks, Shlita*, posits that *lashon hora* spoken for a positive purpose is

permissible. (Of course the meaning of “positive” is not arbitrary. It must be verifiable and without question.) This is unlike any other *aveirah*, sin, found in the Torah, in which the end does not justify the means. We do not find a dispensation for *chillul Shabbos*, desecrating *Shabbos*, if it is for a positive purpose. According to the above idea, *lashon hora* for a purpose is not *lashon hora*. The definition of *lashon hora* is slanderous speech which emanates from a person’s mouth – speech that is founded and rooted in the speaker’s negative character traits. One who speaks for a positive purpose has no character traits which generate his *lashon hora*; rather, the words that exit his mouth are the products of a positive attitude and an exemplary character who seeks only to help, to save, to do something positive for the person against whom he is speaking. There is no envy, no hatred – only love and care. This is not the *lashon hora* that is rooted in evil, but help in the guise of *lashon hora*. Some medicines happen to be bitter, but they work!

יעלו בנגב ויבוא עד חברון

They ascended in the south and he arrived at Chevron.

(13:22)

From the Torah’s use of the singular *va’yavo*, and he came, *Chazal* (*Sotah* 34b) derive that Calev alone left the group, so that he could visit the graves of the Patriarchs to pray that they intercede on his behalf. So great was the ability of the *meraglim* to influence that Calev feared being influenced by them. Yehoshua had no reason to leave, since Moshe *Rabbeinu* had already prayed for him before they had all left the camp. In his *Iyun Yaakov* commentary to the *Talmud*, *Horav Yaakov Reisher, zl*, asks why Calev prayed at the graves of the Patriarchs. *Chazal* teach that everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, which is in the domain of man. It is up to each and every one of us to endeavor to overcome the harsh influence of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. We cannot just pray that he exert no hold over us. We must do our part. A person may petition Heaven for assistance, knowing that he is ill equipped to go it alone. Nonetheless, he must do his own *hishtadlus*, endeavoring, and not rely solely on Heaven.

Horav Yosef Chaim, zl, m’Bagdad, addresses the same question. In his *Ben Yehoyada* commentary, he adds

that this question applies equally to Moshe's prayer on behalf of Yehoshua. In other words, how does prayer for Divine assistance in combating the *yetzer hora* achieve efficacy when this battle must be fought and won by the human being without the help of Heavenly intervention? Furthermore, he asks, what is meant by the statement that Calev prayed for Hashem to save him from the *atzas*, counsel, of the *meraglim*. This suggests that Calev was aware of their nefarious intentions to slander the Land and mislead the nation into believing that continuing on to *Eretz Yisrael* was foolhardy. The text does not imply any sin on their part until they returned. If they had already planned their mutiny, then this was not the counsel of the *meraglim*, but rather, the sin of the *meraglim*.

Rav Yosef Chaim explains that, when Chazal posit that Hashem does not assist a person in his battle with the *yetzer hora*, it means in situations in which the *yetzer hora* attempts to convince a person to commit a clearly-defined major sin. In such a case, the person is acutely aware that he is up against a sin of major proportion. He should neither continue along this path, nor should he circumvent the issue, so that he does not confront the *yetzer hora* in a head-on battle, a fight which he will probably end up losing. Heaven removes itself from the fray in order to enable the person to earn his just reward. He sees the sin; he knows what he must do. If he acts appropriately, his actions will warrant Heavenly reward.

There is, however, another *yetzer hora* which is difficult to battle and emerge triumphant. This is the *yetzer hora* that presents a sin as a *mitzvah*. Under such circumstances, one may turn to Hashem and petition His Divine assistance. We need Divine guidance to deal with the *yetzer hora*, when: a person is unaware that a given endeavor is wrong; when supporting a certain person runs counter to Torah dictate; when an organization that presents itself as holy and Torah-oriented is neither.

When the *meraglim* commenced their mission, they were still considered pious, upright individuals, highly respected leaders of their respective communities. What happened? How did they suddenly fall from such a high perch, *igra rama*, height of spirituality, to *bira amikta*, nadir of depravity? The wily *yetzer hora* convinced them that, if the Jews believed *Eretz Yisrael* to be a good and welcoming land, it would diminish their reward. What is so special about going to a land that has everything? Now, if the land would be miserable, a land that devours its inhabitants – and they are still determined to go – that would present an incredible opportunity for reward. The *yetzer hora* manipulated them, but *Klal Yisrael* was not strong enough to undertake going to a land that would present extreme difficulty for them. Thus, they wept and wept, and they mutinied against Hashem.

Calev understood that their intentions were the

work of the *yetzer hora*. It was a strong and convincing *yetzer hora*. Nothing is as difficult to contend with as the *yetzer hora* of *frumkeit*, observance. It presents itself as the *mitzvah* which will save those who support it, when, in reality, it is a destructive sin. Calev left to pray, because he knew quite well that – without Hashem's support – he would have great difficulty overcoming the challenge presented by the other *meraglim*. He dealt with the *atzas*, counsel, of the *meraglim*. They had not sinned – yet, but they had already fallen under the ruse of the holy counsel to save the Jewish People. He prayed and was saved. They did not, and, as a result, we have *Tishah B'Av*, our national day of mourning.

וַתֵּשָׂא כָל הָעֵדָה וַיִּתְנוּ אֶת קוֹלָם וַיִּבְכּוּ בַלַּיְלָה הַהוּא

The entire assembly raised up and issued its voice; the people wept that night. (14:1)

The *Talmud Sanhedrin* 104b states that the fateful night on which the *meraglim*, spies, shared their slanderous report of *Eretz Yisrael* with the nation was the Ninth of Av. The people reacted with unwarranted, incessant weeping, which consumed the entire nation. The weeping was a reaction to a report that was foundless. Furthermore, they had been guided by Hashem in the wilderness under the protective shield of the Clouds of Glory. For them to cry without reason was ludicrous. Hashem said, "You cried a *bchiyah shel chinam*, unwarranted weeping. I will establish for you a *b'chiyah l'doros*, weeping for generations." This refers to our national day of mourning – *Tishah B'Av*, when we mourn the destruction of our *Batei Mikdash* and the ensuing exiles which resulted from their loss. In other words, the sin of the *meraglim* catalyzed the destruction of our *Batei Mikdash*.

Megillas Eichah laments the *churban*, destruction of Yerushalayim, and the loss of the *Batei Mikdash*. The *Talmud* (mentioned earlier) intimates the catalyst which led to the *churban*: "They jeered at you" (*Eichah* 2:16). *Rava* says in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "Why did Yirmiyah (author of *Megillas Eichah*) place the *pay* before the *ayin*? (This refers to the fact that the *pasuk*, *patzu alecha pihem*, which begins with a *pay* is written prior to the *pasuk* which begins with an *ayin*. Since *ayin* precedes *pay* in the *Aleph-Bais* sequence, it raises concern, obviously implying a key to understanding the sin of the *meraglim*.) It was because of the spies who spoke with their mouths (*pihem*) (*pay*) what they had not seen with their eyes (*eineihem*) (*ayin*)." This is the meaning of the *pay* preceding the *ayin*. Simply, Chazal are teaching us that the *meraglim* spoke before they saw. Since they did not see, they should have refrained from speaking. This is questionable, since everything that came from their mouths was actually true. The land was unique; the people were giants; the fruits were exceptionally large; people were dying everywhere. The nation that inhabited Canaan was very strong and

prepared. To overwhelm them would take a miracle. Their problem was not what they said, but rather, how they presented their story. It came across as being negative, suggesting that the Jews had no chance whatsoever of successfully conquering *Eretz Yisrael*. Why did the *pay* precede the *ayin*?

A person's senses are capable of experiencing only what a person's personality allows. Thus, two people can look at the same object and see two different images. An individual who is profoundly spiritual sees the spiritual potential in a given object, while his counterpart looks at the very same edifice and sees nothing but stone, mortar and wood. A classic example is cited by *Horav Shimon Schwab*, *zl*, from the preparation for the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Binding of Yitzchak. As Avraham *Avinu* and Yitzchak (*Avinu*) neared the site, the Torah records their reaction. *Va'yaar es ha'makom meirachok*, "They saw the place from a distance" (*Bereishis* 24:4). The *Midrash* asks, "What did he see? He saw a cloud hovering over the mountain. Avraham commented, "It appears that this is the place where Hashem wants me to sacrifice my son." Avraham then asked Yitzchak, "My son, do you see what I see?" Yitzchak responded affirmatively. Avraham then turned to Eliezer and Yishmael who had accompanied him, and asked, "What do you see? Do you see what I see?" They responded that they saw nothing, to which Avraham remarked, "Since a donkey does not see and you do not see, you might as well remain here with the donkey." This indicates that the ability to perceive a spiritual image from a physical entity is determined by a person's spiritual persona and plateau. One who is not spiritually connected has limited vision.

This, explains *Rav Schwab*, was the sin of the spies. They looked at *Eretz Yisrael* through the lens of physicality. Had they applied their spiritual perspective, they would have perceived the *Shechinah* resting on *Har Ha'Moriah*, the place where the *Akeidah* took place. They would have perceived the unparalleled sanctity of Kiryas Arava, and, with every step on the soil of the Holy Land, they would have sensed the *kedushah*, holiness.

Why did they not perceive the *kedushah*? They left with malevolent intentions to slander the land; thus, whatever they saw was tainted by their preconceived notions. Their mouths reported what they saw with their physical eyes. They told the truth – from a physical sense. From a spiritual perspective – they lied. By placing their *pay*, mouth (for which they had prepared) before the *ayin*, eyes, of what they really saw, they were unable to render a positive report on *Eretz Yisrael*, because, after all was said and done, they saw no *kedushah*.

במדבר הזה יפלו פגזיכם

In this wilderness shall your carcasses drop. (14:29)

Ever since that first *Tishah B'Av*, when the *meraglim*, spies, returned with their slanderous report of *Eretz Yisrael*, *Tishah B'Av* became a sad, fateful night for

the male members of *Klal Yisrael*. The decree had been issued that they would not enter into the Promised Land. The wilderness would become their graveyard. Every *Tishah B'Av* every (eligible) Jew dug a grave for himself, lay down in it and prayed. Would he wake up in the morning, or would this be his last night on earth? Every year, fifteen thousand men did not wake up. Whoever did not arise in the morning, *yoshev b'seiser elyon* (the chapter recited at a funeral when the deceased is being taken on his final journey to his grave) was recited next to his grave and then he was covered. (I have always felt that a lesson may be derived from this sort of morbid self-burial. One who slanders – ultimately buries himself.)

This scenario continued on every *Tishah B'Av* until the final year, when the last group of fifteen thousand Jews laid themselves to rest. An astonishing thing took place on the next day: nothing happened. They were all alive! This must be some mistake, they thought. So, the next night, they repeated the procedure – and the next – and the next – until the fifteenth of Av, when they realized that Hashem must have rescinded the decree. Why? What was different during the last year that had allowed these Jews to live?

Horav Chaim Tzarkovsky (cited by *Horav Shlomo Levinstein*) explains that it was their *davening*, praying, that made the difference. It is not as if the previous groups did not pray to live. They certainly prayed, but theirs were not prayers that emanated from the deepest recesses of their hearts, because they all knew that their death was not a sure thing. Only fifteen thousand would die. Who said they were to be among the unlucky ones? When the last year arrived, the men knew this was it. There were no others. It was them – or nothing. Thus, their prayers were powerful. They knew that, unless Hashem listened to their prayers, they would die. The fear and trepidation that accompanied their prayers were unlike anything heretofore experienced by any members of the Jewish People. They all thought death was not inevitable. They had an option; they had hope. The last group had exhausted all options and all hope. Prayer was their only option.

Indeed, prayer is (always) our only option. If we would always *daven* the way we do when we are up against a wall with no options, our prayer would achieve greater efficacy. Anyone who has ever had his options taken away and is suddenly compelled to realize that there is only one way out – (and it is not pleasant) either gives up hope or, if he is a believer, prays like he has never prayed before. This is the definition of *avodas ha'tefillah*, praying as if no other options exist.

והיה אם מעיני העדה נעשתה לשגגה

And it will be, if from the eyes of the assembly it was done by error. (15:24)

Enei ha'eidah, eyes of the assembly, refer to the *Sanhedrin* who, as the leaders of the nation, provide