



Parashat Beha'alotcha

The end of Parashat Beha'alotcha deals with the Miriam's sin of lashon hara, of relating to Aharon, her brother, that which she had heard from Tziporah, Moshe's wife. Rashi explains that Miriam overheard Tziporah comment that Moshe had separated from her in order to be constantly prepared for nevuah. Miriam was punished for this in three ways: 1) with tzara'at; 2) the whole machaneh waited a week to travel until Miriam healed, during which time they most certainly spoke of her punishment; 3) for all generations, we must recall Miriam's sin every day as one of the six zechirot – along with remembering Amalek, yetziat Mitzrayim, Kabbalat haTorah, Shabbat, and the Cheit haEigel. Why was Miriam punished so harshly for speaking about Moshe, especially since, as Rashi explains, she did not intend it derogatorily?

At the beginning of the next parasha, parashat Shelach, the Torah deals with the sin of the meraglim. Rashi explains the reason for the juxtaposition of these two parshiot: Miriam was punished with tzara'at for speaking against Moshe, but these resha'im, the nesi'ei ha'eidah, witnessed the incident but didn't take mussar from it. This explanation is troublesome, for how can we even compare between the two incidents? The meraglim specifically intended to speak degradingly of Eretz Yisrael, whereas Miriam had absolutely no derogatory intent!

To answer these questions, we will explain as follows: Of the five basic senses – sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell – four are for the most part objective, in the sense that a person perceives the stimulus as it is. If a person smells a fragrance, he either smells it as pleasant or unpleasant, depending on whether it is in fact pleasant or unpleasant. The only sense that is subjective by nature is sight. A person sees things as he wishes to see them. One person sees a cup as half-full, while another sees it as half-empty. The subjective nature of vision allows for the concept of ayin tovah and ayin ra'ah. The tremendous strength of ayin ra'ah can be seen from the gemara which relates that Rebbi once pointed out to his talmidim as they passed a cemetery that 99% of the people buried there died before their destined time because of ayin ra'ah. We see that a person has tremendous ko'ach in his eyes, ko'ach which can be used either for good or, chas v'chalilah, for evil.

Not only do we have eyes, but even the land has eyes. Balak's messengers tell Bilam about us, Am Yisrael, saying, "Hinei am yatza miMitzrayim hinei chisah et ein ha'aretz, Behold, a nation has left Egypt; behold it has covered the eye of the land" (BaMidbar 22:5). In other words, even the land has the power of the ayin to influence a person's actions. Our job is not to be influenced by the ayin of the land, but rather to influence the land through our own ayin tovah. For this reason, there are many many examples in Chazal demonstrating the tremendous power of the eyes.

Miriam haNeviah is to a great extent the reason for Moshe's birth. As a young child, her father,

Amram, who was the gedol hador, separated from his wife, Yocheved, after Pharaoh decreed that all male children be cast into the Nile, and the entire generation followed suit. Miriam pointed out to her father that by separating from his wife he was essentially making a decree even worse than Pharaoh's – Pharaoh only decreed that the males be killed; Amram was essentially decreeing that no children, not even females, be brought to life. At this, Amram returned to his wife, and the entire generation again followed suit. That Miriam was able to see the greater picture is demonstrative of her ayin tovah. This positive attribute was granted to all of Am Yisrael at Har Sinai, as the Torah says, "V'chol ha'am ro'im et hakolot, And the entire nation saw the sounds" (Shemot 20:15). However, afterwards they all returned to normal, as the Torah says, "Lech emor lahem shuvu l'oholeichem, Go tell them, 'Return to your tents'" (Devarim 5:27). Only Moshe remained at the original level of Har Sinai, as the Torah continues, "V'atah poh amod imadi, And you, stand here with Me" (v. 28).

The Rambam explains that Moshe was the master of the nevi'im, different from all other nevi'im in four key ways, one of which was his ability to speak with Hashem whenever he wanted, constantly in Hashem's presence, like a malach Hashem. Miriam was unable to perceive this difference, and so when she heard from Tziporah that Moshe separated from her because of a tzivuy Hashem, she should have asked Moshe directly, rather than discussing it with Aharon. Her sin was in speaking to Aharon about Moshe. For this reason, the Torah stopped the whole machaneh and publicized her sin to such an extent, in order that we understand that improper sight leads to improper speech.

The same way that there exists ayin tovah and ayin ra'ah, there exists lashon tov and lashon hara. The Torah wanted to arouse within us a sensitivity to ayin tovah and lashon tov, because all of the major corruptions in the world began with improper sight. The sin of Adam haRishon began with, "Vateire ha'isha ki tov ha'eitz l'ma'achal, And the woman saw that the tree was good for eating" (Bereishit 3:6). Cheit haEigel began with, "Vayar ha'am ki boshesh Moshe laredet min hahar, And the nation saw that Moshe delayed from descending the mountain" (Shemot 32:1). HaKadosh Baruch Hu wanted us to understand that sight, proper or improper, is the key to success or failure.

This is the relationship between the sin of Miriam and that of the meraglim. In each case there was improper sight (despite the fact that Miriam was really looking out for Moshe, not looking to disparage him, as explained earlier). The nesi'ei ha'eidah saw Eretz Yisrael improperly, even though Moshe had explicitly warned them to look at the land properly, as it says, "Ur'item et ha'aretz, And you shall view the land" (BaMidbar 13:18). Their sin was that they preceded their mouths to their eyes, influencing their sight and biasing their judgment. This is one of the reasons that the hadassim are higher than the aravot in the arba'at haminim – the hadassim represent the eyes, while the aravot represent the lips. The eyes must be given more importance than the lips, because otherwise, if the lips are given precedence, there is no chance for ayin tovah. The number of hadassim in the bundle teaches a similar lesson. The lulav corresponds to the spine, and therefore there is one lulav in the bundle, just as we have only one spine. The etrog corresponds to the heart, and therefore there is only one etrog in the bundle. The aravot correspond to the lips, and therefore there are two of them – one for the upper lip and one for the lower lip. Accordingly, then, there should be only two hadassim in the bundle, since the hadassim correspond to the eyes. Yet the Torah commands us to take three hadassim in the bundle! The explanation is that not only must a person see with his two physical eyes, but he must also see with the eye of his mind, his seichel.

The ability to see with ayin tovah can be gained only through Torah. On this, the first Shabbat after

Kabbalat haTorah, we must take this message to heart, adopting the lesson of ayin tovah. To the extent we accomplish this, we will merit speedily to see the fulfillment of, "Ki ayin b'ayin yiru b'shuv Hashem tzion, For they shall see, eye to eye, Hashem returning to Zion" (Yeshayahu 52:8).

Shabbat Shalom!
Meir Goldwicht

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