

# שלה

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## THE MERAGLIM

והאנשים אשר עלו עמו אמרו לא נוכל לעלות אל העם כי-חזק הוא ממנו

But the men that went up with him said: “We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than us” (*Bamidbar* 13:31).

The *meraglim* sought to divert *Klal Yisrael*'s attention away from conquering *Eretz Canaan*, and so they spoke ill of the land and described how insurmountable a task conquering it would be. They were actually implying that even Hashem was incapable of successfully overcoming the inhabitants of the land. The defenders of Canaan were described as so powerful that even Hashem's miracles would be powerless against them (*Sotah* 35•). These *meraglim* witnessed the ten *makos* of Mitzraim, the splitting of the sea, the giving of the Torah at *Har Sinai*, the falling of the manna from heaven and many other miracles performed by Hashem. How could they rationally have thought that Hashem's miracles would prove inadequate? The fact that some individual members of *Klal Yisrael* rebelled against Hashem in this glorious period of time is difficult enough to understand, but to actually deny that Hashem possessed the power which these people themselves openly witnessed defies imagination. After all, the defenders of Canaan were merely creatures created by Hashem; how could the *meraglim* testify that created entities were more powerful than the Creator? They were intelligent, articulate men, the flower of *Klal Yisrael* (*Bamidbar* 13:3); certainly they could not in any fashion believe the statement they were making.

The only way to understand this is to return to fundamentals. *Rabbeinu Yonah*, in *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (217), explains the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* (14:9):

אולים יליץ אשם, ובין ישרים רצון

Fools interpret sins, but among the righteous is good will.

*Rabbeinu Yonah* explains that fools look to denigrate others by alluding to their own shortcomings. By pointing out others' faults, the fool seeks to elevate himself. In fact, he fails to recognize any accomplishment in others because he is too occupied with identifying their deficiencies. He resembles a maggot which is only attracted to rot, and his proboscis is only effective in detecting decay, for a fool is only interested in impropriety. In contrast, the way of the just is to overlook the inequities of others and to accentuate their merit. Our Sages declare:

כל הפוסל פסול ואינו מדבר בשבחה לעולם... במומו פוסל

He who declares [others] unfit is [himself] unfit, and never speaks good [of anyone]...with his own blemish he stigmatizes [others] as unfit (*Kidushin* 70:),

The root of the word “evil” (אול) — “fool” — is “al” (אל) — “not” or “nothing” — connotating that the *evil* is a nothing person, an empty person. The only way he can elevate himself is to pull others down. This is what the *Navi* had in mind in the statement:

As a wild ass's colt is a man created (*Iyov* 11:12).

For righteousness must be cultivated in a person. Righteousness does not just happen, it must be developed by training. As long as man does not receive proper instruction he is an “*al*”-person, a nothing person — an *evil*, a fool. Only upon receiving direction can the *evil* become a *yashar* — ”straight” or upright person. That is why Shlomo *Hamelech* decided to juxtapose the term “*evilim*” with “*yesharim*” (in the above quoted *pasuk*), two terms not generally thought of as antonyms. The transition between *evil* and *yashar* can only be effected by *sheivet musar* — the rod of instruction.

The *meraglim* suffered from the *evilim* syndrome because they lacked a measure of instruction. It is true that they were in fact very close to Hashem. The generation of the *midbar*, the one that was redeemed from Mitzraim and that accepted the Torah at Sinai, was the best that *Klal Yisrael* ever produced. There was never a generation as close to Hashem as they were (Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* 47). But it was their very closeness to Hashem that magnified their shortcoming in the *evilim* syndrome.

It is unfortunate that man's nature is to hurt those he loves most. The brunt of his shortcomings is borne by his immediate family, especially his spouse. He ascribes his own deficiencies to his wife. After all, the fool does not recognize his own faults — so he blames it on the person closest to him, his wife.

The relationship between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael* is:

כי בעליך עשיר

For your Maker is your husband (*Yeshayah* 54:5).

There is an intimacy between Hashem and *Klal Yisrael*, and no generation perceived it more than the generation of the *midbar*. They were the only generation to actually hear the voice of Hashem at Sinai, to actually see Hashem in various forms at *Kerias Yom Suf*, and they could almost touch the Presence of the *Shechinah* in the *Oheil Mo'eid*. Their closeness was their downfall.

הקדוש ברוך הוא מדקדק עם סביביו כחוט השערה

Hashem is as meticulous with those close to Him as the thickness of a hair (*Yevamos* 121:).

Their deficiencies, in their own minds, became Hashem's “deficiencies.”

כל עניני העולם...נסיונות לאדם

Every situation in this world is a test for man (*Mesilas Yesharim* 1).

Every breath man takes is a test; man is constantly being tested and graded by Hashem. The extent to which man passes these tests determines his ultimate eternal reward. Hence, it is important to note that most men spend the majority of their lives married. Men and women do not get married just to establish a family — it is a convention that was designed by Hashem, with cunning, plan, and purpose, to test man. It is a most difficult test indeed. Two independent people need to merge their selfish interests in a common cause. The confined relationship of marriage is fraught with difficulty and danger. It is this very test, designed by Hashem, that measures a man's worthiness, and to a great extent determines his *Olam Haba*.

The *Gemara* (*Kesubos* 62:) tells of a disciple, Rav Rechumi, whose arrangement with his wife was that he study Torah in the Academy all year, and he would return home only for *Yom Kippur*. One *Erev Yom Kippur* he became engrossed in a Torah topic and delayed his arrival home. His wife, fearing that her husband abandoned her, cried a tear. As punishment for distressing his wife, albeit for extenuating circumstances, Rav Rechumi lost his life. How careful one must be in dealing with one's spouse — imagine the severe punishment resulting from actual maltreatment of a wife. The majority of man's life is spent in marriage; the extent to which he passes this test determines to a large degree his ultimate reward.

If this idea is carried one step further, the relationship between man and wife is ultimately a preparation for the relationship between man and Hashem. In marriage, man is being trained to subordinate his selfish needs for a higher cause. If man successfully negotiates a career in marriage, he is prepared for a relationship with Hashem.

כי בעליך עשיר

For your Maker is your husband (*Yeshayah* 54:5).

Man must be trained to overcome his shortcomings and to enter into an intimate relationship with Hashem. Unfortunately, some men abuse their wives. The *evilim* only see faults in others; they are blind to their own inequities. In order to elevate themselves, since on their own they are merely “nothing” people, they must denigrate those who are closest to them. The *meraglim* were extremely close to Hashem, but they lacked the requisite training to remove the *evilim* stigma from the “*ayir pereh*” — “wild colt” — state in which they were created, so that they vented their frustration onto the one closest to them, Hashem.

It is true that these *meraglim* witnessed firsthand the great miracles of Hashem and that they represented the intelligentsia of that generation. But, in an absolute sense, they were still at the “*ayir pereh*” level. The jump from lowly slave to leadership role in a free *Klal Yisrael* was too sudden and did not allow for intensive personal development. The education the *meraglim* received from their involvement with Hashem's miracles did indeed affect them, but sufficient time had not elapsed for them to integrate what they had witnessed into perfection of character. In a time of intense stress, their latent shortcomings surfaced. Had they undergone more rigorous training over a longer period of time, perhaps they could have overcome their inherent personality flaws.

The numerous miracles performed by Hashem in behalf of *Klal Yisrael* were for one purpose only: to impress *Klal Yisrael*. Miracles are educational tools, shortcuts taken in order to teach *Klal Yisrael emunah*. All the *makos* of Mitzraim, *Kerias Yam Suf*, *Kabalas Hatorah*, the manna, Miriam's Well, *Milchemes Amaleik*, etc., were all designed to impress upon *Klal Yisrael* the omnipotence of Hashem, so that they would come to have great *emunah* in Him. Hashem wanted *Klal Yisrael* to shed its cynicism (which is a character flaw) and to become elevated to a level of *emunah* in Him. The curriculum of study (the miracles) were insufficient to accomplish this task. *Klal Yisrael*, and especially the *meraglim*, required much more intensive study, a much broader curriculum, and more time, to successfully accomplish this necessary character development. Although they were privy to great miracles, this was not adequate in overcoming their personality flaws (*Kli Yakar, Devarim* 1:37).

Just as man is expected to actually acquire *mitzvos*, and to avoid sin, so man is expected to develop good character traits (Rambam, *Hilchos Dei'os* 1:6). Man is mandated to elevate his personality from an “*ayir pereh*” state to a perfection of character. If one fails to accomplish this, he is called a sinner. The *meraglim* were sinners because they did not put in the requisite effort and energy into assimilating their education. They beheld the greatest miracles ever witnessed by man, before or since. And with all that, their mission resulted in tragic failure, to the extent that they proclaimed that Hashem was incapable of defeating the inhabitants of the land.

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