

“And how is the land – is it fertile or is it lean? Are there trees in it or not?” (13:20)

Rashi comments that Moshe's reference to a tree is an allusion to a *tzaddik*, righteous person. He was teaching the *meraglim*, spies, that if a righteous person was living in the land, he would protect its inhabitants from attack through his merit. In his *Sefer Simchas HaTorah*, *Horav Simcha HaKohen Sheps, z.l.*, supplements *Rashi* with another reason for comparing an *adam kasher* to a tree. In addition to the shade which a tree provides and the fruit which it produces, a tree has a cleansing effect on the ecology. A tree purifies the air by its very existence. It balances the oxygen level in the air. Likewise, besides a *tzaddik's* righteous endeavors, his very being in a community has an expiating effect on the surroundings. Hashem sends a special *shefa*, spiritual abundance, to an area that is home to the righteous.

The following narrative, cited by *Rabbi Paysach Krohn*, demonstrates how far this effect reaches. When *Horav Yisrael Salanter, z.l.*, the father of the *Mussar* Movement, ethical behavior, passed away, he was basically penniless. His surviving descendants inherited limited material possessions from his “estate.” One man in *Rav Yisrael's* neighborhood had the good fortune to gain possession of *Rav Yisrael's* hat. This hat was not the kind that is worn today. It was old, creased and dilapidated from years of wear. Yet, this man treasured the hat as if it was worth a king's ransom. Every Shabbos, without fail, he wore the hat. At first, the people paid no attention to the hat, but after awhile people took note of how strange he looked wearing this dilapidated hat. As frequently happens, people felt the need to ridicule him.

“How can you wear that thing on your head?” they asked disdainfully. “It is so dirty and tattered. You are *mevazeh*, humiliating, the Shabbos and yourself by wearing that hat.”

At first, the man ignored the derisive remarks. One day he finally responded, “Would you agree that there is a certain *hiddur*, extra beautification/refinement, in not speaking *lashon hara*, evil speech, on *Shabbos kodesh*?” “Yes,” they agreed, “not speaking *lashon hara* on Shabbos certainly adds to the degree of reverence for the holy day.”

“Then I must tell you, that when I wear *Rav Yisrael's* hat on Shabbos, I simply find it impossible to utter any form of forbidden speech. So great is the influence of his hat!”

If this was the effect of *Rav Yisrael's* hat, can we even begin to perceive the influence *Rav Yisrael* himself had on people?