

## “How can I carry by myself your contentiousness, your burdens and your quarrels?” (1:12)

The nation of Moshe *Rabbeinu* was not an easy people to lead. Apparently, they needed to be trained in the ways and means of peoplehood – with the first requisite lesson being respect for leadership. *Rashi* identifies Moshe’s three complaints. The first was *contentiousness*. The people were difficult to deal with, especially during litigation. If a litigant saw his rival prevailing, he insisted on a trial delay, with the claim that he has other witnesses to testify in his behalf, or additional proof to support his position. Alternatively, he might have demanded his right to call for more judges on the court. Second, *your burdens*: the people were skeptical and suspicious of their leadership. Additionally, they always questioned Moshe’s motives, attributing a negative twist to everything that he did. Third, *quarrels*: the people were constantly arguing with one another.

The *Midrash* at the beginning of *Sefer Eichah* observes that three individuals prophesized with the word *Eichah*, how: Moshe, Yeshayah, Yirmiyah: Yeshayah said, *Eichah ha’seyah l’zonah*, “How did she become a harlot?” Yirmiyah lamented, *Eichah yashvah badad*, “How does she sit alone?” Moshe said, *Eichah esa levadi*, “How can I carry by myself?” Rabbi Levi says, “This is compared to a matron who had three servants. One saw her when she was relaxed and at peace. The other saw her during her period of tension and controversy, when she was defiant towards authority. The last saw her during her moment of degradation when she was deposed and humiliated. Moshe saw *Klal Yisrael* when the nation was at its high point, when it was honorable and held in esteem by surrounding nations. Yeshayah saw the nation during a period of tension when the nation was like a harlot at everyone’s beck and call. Last, was Yirmiyah who saw the nation during a time of destruction, alone and devastated.

In his *Daas Sofer*, the *Pressburger Rav*, **Horav Akiva Sofer, zl**, posits that the last two *Eichahs* – that of the *Neviim*, Yeshayah and Yirmiyah, were actually the result of Moshe’s lament/*Eichah*. He quotes the *Talmud Shabbos* 119, in which *Chazal* state, “Yerushalayim was not destroyed [for any other reason other than] because the people humiliated *talmidei chachamim*. Their lack of respect for the rabbinic leadership of the Holy City led to their destruction. *Chazal* go on to say that one who is *mevazeh*, denigrates, a Torah scholar, *ein lo refuah*, “he will not be healed.” In other words, he will succumb to a Heavenly dispatched illness. The sin of disrespecting a scholar weighs heavily over the head of the perpetrator to the point that it will outweigh his other merits (author’s suggestion).

This is what *Chazal* mean by including Moshe’s *Eichah* together with the laments of the *Neviim*. After all, they do not appear to be in the same category. Moshe complains about respect, while the *Neviim* lament the varied levels of destruction. It was the prevailing attitude in Moshe’s time that led to Yerushalayim’s physical devastation. When people lose or have no respect for their leadership, it indicates a deficiency in the spiritual and moral compass of a community. This, together with the social discord that prevailed in the holy city – the controversy among its citizens

and the unwarranted enmity among brothers – led to the destruction of the Second Temple, whose replacement has yet to occur.

Why is disgracing a *talmid chacham* such an egregious sin? The *Mishnas Yosef* quotes the *Nesivos Olam, Nesiv HaTorah* II, in which the *Maharal* explains that a *talmid chacham* is much more than an erudite individual who knows the Torah. One who studies Torah properly – with diligence, toil and love – becomes himself a substance of Torah. He becomes one with the Torah. This is consistent with *Chazal* who decry the fact that people arise for a *Sefer Torah*, but neglect to do so for a scholar, who is the embodiment of Torah. This is why *Chazal* are stringent in the punishment of one who does not properly eulogize a *talmid chacham*. One who denigrates a *talmid chacham* denigrates the Torah, which is the *dvar Hashem*, every word as if it has been uttered by Hashem, Himself.

A frightening story is related concerning an indirect insult to a holy *talmid chacham*. Indeed, the individuals involved had noble intentions, but they lacked aforethought. Had they considered carefully what they were about to do, they would have realized that they had gone too far.

*Horav Yehudah Assad, zl*, author of *Yehudah Yaaleh*, was a distinguished European *Rav*. His passing left a void in the hierarchy of the elite European rabbinate. It also orphaned his children, among them a number of daughters, some of whom had reached marriageable age and did not have great hope of finding a proper match without a dowry. The *Rav* was a holy person whose encyclopedic knowledge of Torah knew no peer, but this did not put bread onto the table. He left behind no worldly possessions, and departed this world a destitute person.

A group of close followers who were concerned about the plight of his daughters conceived a plan for raising the badly needed funds to arrange for the daughters' marriages. Their idea, although bizarre, succeeded in raising the necessary funds. The *Rav* had a distinguished and handsome countenance, but he had refused to have his picture taken. This was consistent with the ruling of other *rabbanim*, as well. Consequently, we do not have their pictures available for posterity. The followers dressed the body of the deceased in his rabbinic garb and sat him up in his chair – then they took a picture of him. No one knew the truth, and the money raised by this ruse served as a dowry for his orphaned daughters.

Obviously, these well-meaning individuals were guilty of *bizayon talmid chacham*, degrading a Torah scholar. Their intentions were noble; their actions, however, were reprehensible. All five perpetrators of this travesty died that year. One who shames a Torah scholar, regardless of his self-justification, will be punished.

**Horav Yitzchak Abulafia, zl**, was once gravely ill. He was paralyzed – unable to move or speak. The doctors had already despaired for his life. It was only a matter of time. *Horav* Alefanderi came to visit him and said, “*Chacham* Yitzchak, I promise you that you will arise from this illness. You must have faith in my word.” *Rav* Yitzchak moved his lips slightly to respond *amen*.

A number of days passed, and *Chacham* Yitzchak was cured. He soon arose from his sickbed and began to walk within a relatively short time later. The entire city hummed over the miracle. Then tragedy struck. One of *Rav* Yitzchak's close relatives suddenly became ill, and, a few days later, his soul went to its eternal rest. The entire town participated in his funeral. Among the mourners were *Rav* Yitzchak Abulafia and *Rav* Alefanderi. *Rav* Yitzchak turned to the holy sage and said, "His honor should know that when he left my house (after blessing me) the deceased, who was also there, began to chuckle, saying, "How could anyone regain his health from such an illness?" Now that I am cured, he became ill and died. *Rav* Yitzchak was alluding to the self-generated curse the deceased inadvertently placed upon himself by questioning the saintly *Rav* Alefanderi.