

The people took to seeking complaints; it was evil in the ears of Hashem. (11:1)

Complaining can reflect much more than simple negativity. It all depends against whom and about what one complains. A chronic complainer will invariably not be selective about what or whom he finds fault. It begins with mild grumbling about nothing of major concern, then graduates to harping about everything, anything and everyone. It, however, does not stop there. One who becomes used to denouncing everything will ultimately protest the way Hashem directs the general world, and especially this individual's own little world.

Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita, once commented to a close student, "You should know, one who looks askance on *hanhagas* Hashem, the manner in which Hashem acts, his attitude is one of the primary catalysts for his own prayers not to be accepted." To put this in simple, laymen terms: If one complains about Hashem – his prayers will invariably have great difficulty achieving efficacy. The reason for this is elementary. The essence of prayer is *hisbatlus* and *hachnaah*, self-abnegation, denouncing one's ego, before Hashem. Veritably, everyone should negate himself and his desires before Hashem. The problem is that when one is overwhelmed with *tzaros*, troubles, the first thing he asks is: "What does Hashem want from me now? Why is He picking on me? I don't deserve such a headache – especially now – after all I have gone through."

Now, if this person, with his baggage of *tzaros*, complaints, comes before Hashem in prayer – not only is he not filled with humility – he comes *ungezetzet* – morose, and filled with deprecation. His prayer will be anything but helpful. Indeed, his prayer, quite simply, might work in his disfavor! He is not beseeching Hashem – he is, *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, remonstrating against Him.

The *Rosh Hayeshivah* applied this rationale to explain a difficult concept presented in the *Talmud Rosh Hashanah* 18a. *Chazal* distinguish between two individuals upon whom was issued a similar Heavenly decree: they were both sentenced to be executed, or they were both to become gravely ill. Both men prayed; one was answered positively while the other, sadly, was executed or succumbed to the illness. *Chazal* posit that the one who was spared had prayed a *tefillah sheleimah*, perfect, complete prayer. The other one, whose prayer was seemingly rejected, had not prayed a *tefillah sheleimah*.

Both men equally perceived their upcoming mortality. They both knew that they were supposed to die. One accepted Hashem's decree and prepared himself for his impending death. He believed in Hashem's judgment and acquiesced to whatever Heaven was demanding of him. Thus, his prayer was heartfelt, without protest, no grumbling, just a simple entreaty asking that, despite his unworthiness, "Please Hashem, spare me! Let me live for my wife, my children, for myself. Give me a chance to do more for Your glory. Allow me to sanctify Your holy Name."

The other fellow had *taanos*. He was not prepared to accept the Heavenly decree. After all, he was

a good person. He studied Torah, performed *mitzvos*, gave *tzedakah*, charity. Why should he die prematurely? It just was not fair. It was not right. Since *tefillah* is comprised of *hisbatlus*, his prayer was missing the primary ingredient which would render it perfect and successful. Thus, he died. It is all in the presentation – and the presentation depends upon one's attitude.