

You shall not take a bribe, for the bribe will blind those who can see and will make righteous words crooked. (23:8)

Rashi teaches that even a Torah scholar who takes a bribe will ultimately become confused, his learning forgotten, and his vision dimmed. This is a very frightening punishment. A person can spend his entire life developing his erudition to the point that he achieves the appellation of *chacham*, Torah scholar. Yet, if he takes a bribe, it will be the catalyst for his downfall. Veritably, we are all judges in one way or another. We judge people and situations. Imagine if we are bribed because someone comes across as the underdog; we perceive him to be the one who is being persecuted, and, as a result of our myopia, we pass judgment on another person, holding him/her guilty in our eyes. Is this not reason for Heavenly repercussion? What if the form of bribe is eminence, power, glory – not money – but just as dangerous? Is this any less of a bribe? Can we really assert that we are bribe-free, or do we tend to bend the law, because, in our mind, we can relate better to one of the litigants? The do-gooders who seek a wrong to be righted – an opportunity to achieve glory at the expense of someone for whom they do not care for anyway – are as equally guilty of taking a bribe as the one who accepts cash.

Having said this, we can move on to the punishment. It is guaranteed. The Torah warns us about the consequences of accepting a bribe. It affects one's mind, destroys his learning, and takes a physical toll on his vision. If the Torah, as per *Rashi's* explanation, informs us that this is the punishment for one who accepts a bribe – then it is a verity. It will happen. The judge whose decision is biased as a result of taking a bribe – regardless of the size or nature of the bribe – will lose his vision, in more ways than one. *Horav Shlomo Amar, Shlita*, states this emphatically, deriving from the text of *Targum Yonasan* that a judge who accepts a bribe will lose his physical ability to see. The *Chida* relates the reality of this punishment based upon an incident that took place in the Jewish community of Egypt.

Horav Chaim Kapusi, zl, was a *Rav* in Egypt. When he reached an advanced age, his vision became impaired. It came to his attention that his detractors, individuals who did not agree with the elderly *Rav's* rendering of the law – especially if it found them guilty – were spreading vicious rumors about him. They contended that the reason his eyesight had failed was that he was taking bribes when he *halachically* adjudicated the law. *Rav* Chaim was a saintly scholar who was greatly troubled by these reprehensible rumors. He decided that the only way to put the rumors to sleep was to take immediate and emphatic action.

That *Shabbos*, as the *Sefer Torah* was resting on the lectern, in front of the entire congregation assembled in *shul*, the *Rav* ascended to the podium: "I have heard reports of troubling rumors being spread concerning my veracity in adjudicating *halachah*. I have been slandered as one who accepts bribes. They support their villainous lies with the fact that I have lost my sight. Therefore, I decree, in front of the Torah and in front of the entire congregation, that if I accepted a bribe of any sort that I should continue to be vision-impaired. If, however, I am innocent of these iniquitous

allegations, my sight should return!"

The next morning, the *Rav* arose and his sight had returned! The *Chida* adds that he saw the *Rav's* handwriting prior to his loss of sight, after he lost his sight, and again, once it had returned. There was no doubt that the *Rav* was the beneficiary of a Heavenly miracle sent to clear his impeccable reputation.