

He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (13:46)

Someone comes over and says, “Have you heard the latest about Moshe?” (Fictitious name) The perfect response, as noted by the *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, is: “Let me ask you a simple question. Did you make it your business to run the information (concerning Moshe) through your three sieves?” “What three sieves?” you ask. “Well, the first sieve is the one of *emes*, truth. Are you absolutely certain that what you are about to say is true?” At this point, the individual who was about to share a nice bit of information hesitates and says, “I heard it from someone whom I know is ‘probably’ reliable.”

“Fine; now let us focus on the second level. Is it *chiyuv*, positive? If you are about to share with me something positive concerning Moshe, then, by all means, share! Of course, I want to hear positive takes about Moshe. Now, let me tell you what the third sieve is: importance/significance. Is it vital that you relate to me something concerning Moshe, something which you are not certain passes the veracity test? Now, you agree that what you are about to tell me might not be true, is probably not positive, and is not that crucial. Why would you say it? And why would I want to listen? Perhaps the best thing to do is forget about it and do not speak.”

The commentators observe that the *metzora* is the only individual who is declared *tamei*, ritually contaminated, who is sent out of all three *machanos*, camps: first *Machane Shechinah*, holy camp; *Machane Leviah*, where the *Leviim* lived; and, last, *Machane Yisrael*, where the rest of the Jewish community made their home. *Badad yeisheiv*, alone he must live. No friends, no family, alone, until he personally feels the loneliness that he brought upon others.

There are three levels of *tumah*: *tumas meis*, defilement contracted by contact with a corpse; *tumas zav*, defilement as the result of bodily emission; and last, *tumas metzora*. The defilement of one who comes in contact with a corpse is *halachically* the most stringent, since it defiles others who come in contact with the one who is *tamei*. Because it is even more stringent than *tumas zav*, he is distanced from *machne Leviah*. On the other hand, the *metzora*, whose defilement is on the lowest level of the three, is removed from the entire community – all three camps!

The *metzora* has hope, if he remains silent. *Netzor leshoncha mei'ra*; “Guard your tongue from evil” (*Tehillim* 34:13). The *baal lashon hora* has hope. When he realizes and acknowledges the pain that he has caused, the destruction that he has wrought, when he feels the anxiety that he has caused others to feel in the pit of his stomach, he learns to correct the bad words with good words. We all thrive on praise and compliments. Sadly, some leaders find it very difficult to pay a compliment. It is almost as if, by offering praise, they feel that they are giving away a part of themselves. Recognizing the positive efforts of those around us (employees, friends, spouses, family) increases the self-esteem of the individuals whom we are praising and engenders greater productivity. It is a short-term need, which should be satisfied on an ongoing basis. Paying a

compliment is transformative; it costs nothing (unless the benefactor has serious personal esteem issues) and is extremely effective and rewarding.

How does one compliment, offer praise, if he has not perceived anything to compliment? If a person is not doing his job well, should he be complimented? Should one prevaricate specifically to make someone feel positive about himself? *Hevei dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus*, "Judge every man favorably" (*Pirkei Avos*). This does not mean that we should gloss over negativity and bad behavior. It means that we should look for the positive – remaining cognizant of the negative. If we search and look at the positive, the negative will either not matter or will matter less. Indeed, the positive compliment that we offer might so transform the individual that he will not exhibit his negative side. Everyone has a positive side; some of us simply refuse to look for it or to take into consideration that one might have a reason for his negative side. It all depends on how we look at someone and the image of him we choose to paint. The following story is illuminating.

A benevolent king was loved and admired by his constituents. This was despite the king's grotesque physical appearance. He was plagued with three prominent physical impediments, which made him self-conscious. First and foremost, he was missing his left leg. He had been born without one leg and, throughout his life, he was handicapped. Second, his right shoulder and back were hunched. This was a deformity that not only troubled him emotionally, but it also caused him severe physical pain at times. Last, the king's right eye was closed. Due to some form of palsy, the muscle in the lid of his right eye could not open and shut. Thus, if one were to see the king, these three deformities would be prominent.

The king decided that, like other monarchs, he wanted to have a large painting of himself hanging in the entrance foyer of his palace, so that his visitors would have an impressive image of their king to view with admiration and respect. Obviously, the artist who undertook this job would have to be very creative in order to gloss over the monarch's deformities. The ministers searched for the most talented artist in the land who was willing to undertake this project (not that he would have much of a choice). The artist came, made some notes and proceeded to paint his rendition of the king. A month later, the artist was ready to show his skill in capturing the king's image. He pulled off the cloth draping the painting, and there, for all to see, was a spitting image of the king – grotesque as ever. When the king saw the image of himself, he became furious. "How dare you paint such an ugly image of me?" the king roared. "But that is how his majesty looks. What did I do wrong?" the (foolish) artist replied. He was immediately sent to take up quarters in the king's dungeon. "Perhaps after some time in the dungeon, you will realize the pain that you caused me," the king railed.

The king still did not have a painting of himself. A second artist was commissioned. This one had already learned of the fate which his predecessor had suffered. He would not be so foolish. He presented the king with an image of himself that was absolutely stunning. It was also an outright lie. The king was presented as tall, erect, handsome, with a smile on his face, as both eyes stared out prominently. The king appeared to be a perfect specimen of humanity. The artist was proud of

himself, until the king saw the image and screamed, "You are making fun of me! You know that I do not look like that! I will allow you to spend time in the dungeon mulling over your egregious audacity. I may not look as bad as the previous artist depicted me, but I certainly do not look like this. I am no fool!"

The king then instructed his ministers to find an artist who would do the job – right, or else, he, too, would be participating in an extended visit in the dungeon. They searched the kingdom for an artist, but not just any artist. They needed the services of an artist who was as astute as he was skilled. He had to devise a way to avoid the king's abnormal appearance, while preserving his true mien. They found an artist who was known to be clever, having navigated a number of previous presentations employing skill, guile and creativity in thorny situations. The artist met the king, saw the previous images that had been made of him, and realized that he had before him a formidable challenge -- until he thought of a brilliant idea. He spent a few weeks painting the image he felt would receive the king's approval. At last, the day arrived. The king, surrounded by all of his ministers, waited in the large hall of the palace to see what this artist had produced. The easel with the painting was covered with a large cloth, which was removed at the artist's command. When they saw the painting, everyone stood dumbfounded. It was beautiful, and brilliant. The artist captured everything positive about the king, yet did not call attention to any of his abnormalities. The image showed the king riding on a white steed, while pulling back on a bow and arrow. It was the right side of the king, thus alleviating the need to show that his left leg was missing. His right eye was closed, because he was aiming at the target, and his shoulder was hunched because he was pulling back on the bow! Needless to say, the king was satisfied beyond belief.

The lesson for us is simple. We all have failings. We can either focus on these failings or present them in a positive context and background. When one looks for the positive, he will find it. One who sees only the negative has a jaundiced perspective which distorts anything that presents itself in his line of vision.