

## Are there trees in it or not? (13:20)

Was Moshe *Rabbeinu* interested in the land's vegetation? *Rashi* explains that Moshe's inquiry concerning a tree was an allusion to a *tzaddik*. He wanted the spies to discern whether a righteous man was in the Land, in whose merit its inhabitants would be spared. The righteous activities of *tzaddikim* are undisputed. If one were asked to paint a portrait of a *tzaddik*, he would probably depict a man with a saintly countenance, bent over a pile of *sefarim*, Torah volumes. Some *tzaddikim* are ordinary people, but have earned *tzaddik* status because they are *mezakei ha'rabim*, bring merit upon many people. Among them are individuals who have sacrificed their own perfection for the sake of perfecting others. Such a person has the added benefit of earning reward as a result of those whom he was instrumental in bringing to perfection.

*Chazal* teach that one who brings merit upon many people – *ein cheit ba al yado*, sin will not come through him. He will not be the cause of a sin for others – and certainly not himself. Many attempt to reach out to those in need of perfection, but, due to their own lack of perfection, they do so prematurely; and not only do these individuals not succeed in their mission, but they also hurt themselves in the process. *Horav Avigdor Miller, zl*, was wont to say that when young men who are yet unripe, not yet having themselves achieved the learning necessary to teach others, go out into the world and attempt to teach others, they may fail and, in the process, hurt themselves. They are like unripe fruit which can spoil easily. They must have a message to convey to the world, and a manner in which to communicate that message effectively. This process involves time and patience, as the would-be-mentor matures spiritually.

*Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl*, would relate the following story concerning the extraordinary impact of *zikui ha'rabim*. The story occurred during one of his trips to London during *Chanukah*. He visited a distinguished businessman, himself a Holocaust survivor, who manifested unusual respect and love for Torah scholars who disseminated Torah. Indeed, anyone who promoted Torah study and *mitzvah* observance was very special in his eyes. *Rav* Sholom wondered what in his life had catalyzed such refreshing admiration. The man noticed the look of incredulity on his face and said, “*Rebbe!* My attitude toward *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, is all because of my father.” A minute passed, and the man saw that *Rav* Sholom was expecting an explanation for the explanation. He said, “Let me share my story with the *Rebbe*.”

“In the city where we lived, there was a tailor who was aptly called Moshe the tailor (*der shneider*). Unfortunately, he was a *maskil*, member of the Enlightenment, a secular Jew who observed absolutely nothing. His father became ill and passed away. Moshe sat *shivah*, observed the seven-days of mourning. (Apparently, in Europe circa pre-World War II, this was one of the traditions to which *maskillim* still adhered.) Sadly, due to his alienation from Torah, the majority of the community (which was observant) did not make the effort to visit him during his period of mourning. My father's attitude was, ‘He is a Jew and, as such, he deserves to be visited.’ My father proceeded to go over to his house and spend time with him.

“When Moshe saw my father at his doorstep, he could not believe his eyes. My father broke the ice with warm comforting words. After a short conversation, my father said, ‘Moshe, you are obligated to provide your father’s soul with the ability to rest in peace. It would be appropriate for you to attend services in a *shul* where you could recite *Kaddish Yasom*, orphan’s *Kaddish*. This would be a tremendous *illui neshamah*, perpetuation of your father’s soul.’ Surprisingly, Moshe immediately agreed and followed through on his commitment. After services, he remained in *shul* to attend a *shiur*, Torah class, and, in due time, he became a fully-observant Jew who adhered to all *mitzvos*.

“When I was thirteen, the Nazis ravaged our city and murdered the entire community – my family and Moshe the tailor included. I was saved and sent to a concentration camp where I was interred for five years. I was befriended by a young man who was quite distant from the Torah way. He attempted to convince me that to turn my back on Torah, to assimilate and emulate the lifestyle he had chosen for himself. Unfortunately, he was able to sway and convince me to ‘alter’ my religious commitment. I drew the line, however, at *Shabbos*. I would not be *mechallel*, desecrate, *Shabbos*.

“With the advent of the American liberation, we were both sent to a Displaced Persons camp where we were slowly introduced to a normal way of life. It took some time before we were able to eat regularly. Our bodies were unable to digest real food and certainly could not handle regular sized meals. To consume too much too fast was to invite illness and even death. We were nursed back to normal eating habits.

“One *Shabbos*, following a hearty dinner, my friend pulled out a cigarette and said, ‘After eating such a filling meal, I must smoke a cigarette,’ which he promptly did right in front of my face. He offered one to me, and, knowing that I had never smoked on *Shabbos*, put it into my mouth. All this was despite his awareness that I drew the line at *Shabbos*. My *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, burned within me: What damage can one cigarette make? I thought to myself that after all I had undergone these last five years, I was entitled to one cigarette. The *yetzer hora* knew that once he gets you into the *techum ha’heter*, boundary of permissiveness, he has you. Now, once I smoked, the *yetzer hora* had little resistance in convincing me to take the train into town – which we did.

“The city was packed with people rushing all over, and whom do I meet? None other than Moshe the tailor. I could not believe my eyes. Moshe had died at the hands of the Nazis. What was he doing here? He was certainly some sort of apparition. But why? It had to be some sort of subconscious vision. Moshe was no longer alive. Nonetheless, I was too shaken up to continue with my friend. I returned to my room and began to cry incessantly. I had just desecrated *Shabbos*. What had gotten into me?

“I drifted off to sleep and began to dream. In my dream I saw Moshe laughing at me, ‘Your father was the reason I became observant. I could not “live” with the notion of you – his son – desecrating *Shabbos*. I asked permission to descend one time to save you from falling into the eternal abyss.’ That day forever changed my life. My father’s love of Torah caused him to reach out to an unaffiliated Jew. In turn, that Jew saved me. Those who devote themselves to *zikui*

*ha'rabim* are, therefore, my heroes.”