

So they said to one another, “Let us appoint a leader, and let us return to Egypt.” (14:4)

The *chet meraglim*, sin of the spies, was the transgression that put an end to the possibility that the Jews of that generation would settle in *Eretz Yisrael*. This was a generation that had survived the Egyptian bondage, were privy to the miracles of the Ten Plagues, were liberated from Egypt and experienced the Splitting of the Red Sea; later, they stood at *Har Sinai* and witnessed the greatest Revelation in history, as they received the Torah. Yet, this generation was barred from entering *Eretz Yisrael*. It would be their children, instead, who would enter and settle in the land. While we have no question that their sin was iniquitous, did it warrant such terminal punishment? With no intention to minimize the sin of *lashon hora*, slanderous speech, it seems that their punishment is not consistent with their sin. Indeed, the worshippers of the Golden Calf had transgressed the boundary of *avodah zarah*, idol-worship; yet, they were not banned from *Eretz Yisrael*.

Horav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, zl, explains that we are being taught an important lesson with regard to the far-reaching impact of a sin. Even if a sin is in and of itself not that egregious, but its antecedent consequences are, then the sin (and its coinciding punishment) is measured in accordance with its ramifications. The *meraglim* set the tone for the Jewish People to lose their faith in *Eretz Yisrael*. It was not so much the lies in their own right that comprised the sin; it was the feeling and attitude that the lies spurred. They created a movement in opposition to settling the land and a rejection of Hashem as having the ability to conquer the land. The actual sin (slander) pales in comparison with its repercussions. Hashem measures and determines punishment synchronic with the entire sin – the actual deed and its aftermath.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* advises us to be *misbonein*, thoroughly reflect over and over on every action, every deed, to be certain that it is pure, not only concerning its present negative impact. We should also consider the deleterious effect (it might have) some time later, down the road. Reflection prior to action ensures that what one is about to do has been well thought out and issues which might arise which would negatively impact the results are addressed – or the project is shelved. The reflection can be not only concerning the upcoming activity, but also reflecting upon oneself – one’s motivation: Is it pure, or might there be a taint of contaminant that will ultimately disfigure the end result of his actions?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* relates that a *meshulach*, fundraiser, visited Volozhin to raise money for a charity. The man’s external demeanor and the way he dressed and carried himself lent the impression that he was a distinguished person – and, by extension, the organization that he represented was worthy of consideration. He did quite well in his efforts to raise money. When he reached the home of the *Rav* – *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, the *Rav* decided not to give him a contribution. After a while, it was discovered that this man was, in fact, a fundraiser for missionaries, whose sole purpose was to subvert Judaism and pollute Jewish minds with their apostasy. These were enemies of the worst kind, who sought to destroy us spiritually and alienate

us from Hashem. How did *Rav Chaim* know? He explained that when the *meshulach* visited his home, he felt an overarching desire to reach out and help him. At that point, *Rav Chaim* knew that something was wrong. The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, attempts to make us slothful with regard to *mitzvah* observance, to conjure up all kinds of excuses either not to give *tzedakah*, or to give to an inappropriate cause. When one has an overpowering desire to give – it means the *yetzer hora* is behind his impulse; the *yetzer hora* wants him to give money. We cannot have a good reason for a charity to be supported by the *yetzer hora*. *Rav Chaim* knew himself well, and he reflected thoroughly on his every action. This is the meaning of *hisbonenus*.