

Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe regarding the Cushite woman which he took. (12:1)

Rashi quotes *Midrash Tanchuma (Parashas Tzav 13)* which asks, “From where did Miriam know that Moshe *Rabbeinu* had separated from Tziporah?” (Miriam complained about Moshe moving out of his family tent. The reason given was that he never knew when Hashem would speak with him. Thus, he had to maintain his purity at all times. Miriam rendered, “Was Moshe the only one who spoke with Hashem? They, too, received His word – yet, they did not separate from their spouses.”) The *Midrash* says that Miriam heard Tziporah say, “Woe is to those who are called to prophecy, just like my husband separated from me.” Understandably, Tziporah was having difficulty with being left alone. Is this sufficient reason for Miriam and Aharon to “rebuke” Moshe? He was the *Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael*. One does not just talk about the leader of the Jewish People in such an unkindly manner.

Horav Elyah Svei, zl, cites *Chazal (Shabbos 87a)*, who teach that Moshe *Rabbeinu's* separation from Tziporah was one of the three things that he did on his own, without Hashem commanding him to do so. The Almighty agreed with Moshe's decision. Certainly, Aharon and Miriam recognized that Moshe was no ordinary *Navi*, Prophet. His “relationship” with Hashem was totally dissimilar to that of any other *Navi*. Thus, if Moshe made a decision, they had good reason to respect it, especially since Hashem agreed with Moshe. Yet, his revered siblings took issue with his decision. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the provocation which catalyzed their displeasure and ensuing rebuke was the pain which Tziporah experienced when Miriam heard her lament the conditions in which a *Navi's* wife must live. She sensed Tziporah's pain, her loneliness, her yearning. She perceived the pain of a woman who just wanted her husband. Moshe did what he had to do. Yet, Miriam felt that he should have considered Tziporah's distress.

Hashem responded to Miriam and Aharon's concern, *Madua lo yereisem l'dabeir b'Avdi b'Moshe*, “Wherefore then were you not afraid to speak about My servant, Moshe?” (Ibid. 12:8). *Sforno* explains Hashem's counter response to the allegations implied by Aharon and Miriam, “It is, therefore, inescapable that this can only be attributed to evil of the heart, for if I truly understood that I am cognizant of his deeds, then you must have thought that I was in error in choosing him to be the nation's leader. You should have recognized that I would not have granted Moshe this exalted position had he not been worthy.” Hashem was strongly intimating that they were questioning His Omniscience. If he was aware of Moshe's shortcomings, how could He have appointed him to be leader? If they were implying that He was unaware, that would be a far more egregious accusation on their part.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* underscores the depth of Hashem's rebuke. Insinuated by Hashem's statement (as explained by *Sforno* and alluded to by *Rashi*), Aharon and Miriam were guilty of *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, questioning Hashem. The very idea that two such Torah giants, founding pillars of the Jewish nation following the Egyptian exodus, could err so egregiously is absolutely

mind-boggling.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that this idea is the underlying deficiency which sets the tone for all sin. People think that Hashem does not know, because if a person were to believe in his heart that Hashem is all-knowing and all-seeing, he would never dare to sin. This is much like the individual who is careful not to sin publicly because people will see. He sins in private because he will not get caught. But what about Hashem? He sees. This is what *Chazal* mean (*Sotah* 3a) when they teach, "One does not sin unless a spirit of foolishness enters within him/his heart/mind." This was Hashem's accusation to Aharon and Miriam. They should have made a simple calculation: If Moshe is leader, then obviously this is Hashem's desire. He does not make mistakes. To impugn His decision is to question His ability, His awareness of everything that takes place. Hashem also intimated to them that, if Moshe was insensitive to his wife's pain, if that was the type of person he was – Hashem would not have chosen him to be the nation's leader. Empathy with all Jews, of all backgrounds and social strata, is a pre-requisite for leadership. Apparently, when a *ruach shtus*, spirit of foolishness, reigns, anything is possible.

When we mention Torah leaders who empathized with all Jews – not only their *chassidim* or *talmidim* – the *Pnei Menachem*, *Gerrer Rebbe*, *zl*, comes to mind. His heart flowed with love for every Jew. He felt their pain and empathized with their travail. Furthermore, he understood what they were experiencing, often better than they did themselves. In a letter to a *chassid*, he writes, "I received your letter and, between the lines, I detected many unshed tears in your heart that weigh you down." He would recognize the pent-up emotions swelling within a petitioner, and he would help him to express himself. He understood that, if someone was coming to him, he had already experienced much pain.

Sometimes, grief is buried within our emotions, as a result of our subconscious efforts to suppress them until we are prepared to come face-to-face with the reality of our loss. The wife of a *chassid* had been diagnosed with a terminal illness, and she had undergone difficult and debilitating treatments. Sadly, the efforts did not produce a lasting cure and she passed away leaving him with a large family, many of whom were young children. On the day of his wife's *shloshim*, thirtieth day of mourning, the father and his orphaned children came to the *Pnei Menachem* to petition his blessing and *nechamah*, consolation. Throughout their conversation, the *Rebbe's* voice was choked with tears. He was personally feeling their anguish; their tragedy was his tragedy. He spoke to the young orphans and encouraged them, infusing them with hope for a better tomorrow. "You will one day establish wonderful Jewish homes, and you will be blessed with longevity and fruitful lives... You will undoubtedly receive preferential treatment from the *Avi yesomim*, Father of orphans. If you act appropriately, it will be a tremendous source of *nachas* for your mother's *neshamah*. Your father will be happy; Hashem will be happy; and you will be happy."

He then addressed the father, "Be strong, strengthen yourself. We are unaware of Hashem's *cheshbonos*, calculations/reasons, but you should be hopeful that good days will come. Indeed, you will be blessed with good days in the future."

The *Rebbe's* words expressed deep feelings and emotions, manifesting empathy that heartened the father. They emboldened him and left him feeling that a large weight had been removed from his heart. That night during *Maariv*, the father moved to a corner of the *shul* and broke down in bitter weeping. The wellspring of tears that he had repressed suddenly burst forth, this being the first time since his wife had become ill that he had openly expressed his emotions. During the entire ordeal, he had kept up appearances, squelching what was eating away at him. The *Rebbe's* soothing words, spoken with such feeling and love, pierced the façade behind which he was hiding, allowing his pent-up pain and anguish to be released. Words spoken from the heart enter the heart.