

Rashi quotes the Midrash that the story of the spies is juxtaposed to the story of Miriam's leprosy to teach us that the spies should have learned a lesson regarding the hazards of slander from Miriam. Torah tells us to remember, not to forget, what happened to Miriam on our journey from Egypt. This is one of the 6 זכירות that we recite daily. According to Rashi, the underlying reason of this command is to remember the Miriam episode so you will not engage in slander as Miriam did against Moses. Why did the Torah single out slander in this way? How does it differ from other interpersonal obligations, מצוות בין אדם לחברו? Why did the Torah deem it necessary to include the Miriam incident among the greatest incidents of Jewish History that we are obligated to always remember? Prima facie it was an insignificant episode, not comparable with the events at Sinai or the Exodus itself or the creation of the world and the Sabbath. We must examine what Miriam and Aaron did.

[Usually we have great latitude in interpreting the Torah. However we don't enjoy that freedom with certain Parshios. For example, an eye for an eye according to Chazal refers to monetary compensation. I have no right to interpret it literally, in a way that differs from the קבלה. Similarly, if someone would interpret פרי עץ הדור as any beautiful fruit other than an Esrog, according to Rambam he would commit heresy. וקצותה את כפה does not mean we cut off her hand; rather it refers to monetary compensation for shaming the protagonist. Rambam in his introduction to סדר זרעים has a section entitled interpretations of Torah transmitted by Moses. He says that we must interpret the text in the way the קבלה tells us. The Rav said he heard from his father in the name of his grandfather Rav Chaim Brisker that the Parsha of Miriam should be included in this group that may only be interpreted according to the קבלה. We must interpret carefully the entire story of how Aaron and Miriam spoke about the אשה כושית that Moses married.]

The word כושית refers to Tzipora's uniqueness, her singular beauty and character. While כושית can mean black, it is also used by the prophet who refers to the Jewish People as הלא כבני כושיים אתם לי, you are a unique, singular people unto Me. Our Rabbis say that Moses divorced his wife after receiving the עשרת הדברות at Sinai, when he was commanded to send the people back to their tents. Gd commanded Moses to remain with Him. Moses, could not return to his regular life, which included his marriage.

Aaron and Miriam thought Moses should have continued the marriage, that the separation from Tzipora was unfair and uncalled for. They questioned the possibility that Gd ordered Moses to separate from his wife, saying they were

prophets as well, that Gd spoke with them too, and they were not commanded to separate from their respective spouses. Why should Moses be different?

Gd confronted Aaron and Moses telling them He speaks to Moses face to face and that he is His trusted servant. How did this answer their question? They failed to recognize that besides his unique saintliness and kindness, Moses was completely different. They argued that Gd spoke to them as well. Based on their own experience, they thought Gd does not approve of a life of abstinence and separation. In failing to recognize Moses' personal uniqueness, they were unaware of the associated uniqueness of Moses' prophecy relative to all other prophets, including themselves.

They were told not to compare themselves to Moses. What is applicable to Miriam and Aaron is incongruous in relation to Moses. Rambam says that Moses' prophecy was unique from all other prophets in several ways. Moses received his prophecy while fully awake. Other prophets experienced prophecy in a dream-like state. Moses received prophecy face to face. Other prophets received their vision through an angel, parable or allegory. Moses was full of vigor after receiving a prophecy. Other prophets became weak after their prophetic encounter. Moses attained prophecy whenever he wanted. Other prophets had to prepare themselves prior to their prophetic encounter.

Moses' uniqueness as a prophet and as a human being was expressed in the words *לֹא כֵן עַבְדִּי מֹשֶׁה*. Gd told Aaron and Miriam you cannot compare yourselves or your revelation to Moses. Their sin was overlooking or ignoring the uniqueness of Moses the person and the uniqueness of his prophecy. Maimonides codified this uniqueness in his 13 fundamental principles of faith, that we believe Moses' prophecy is true and that he was the greatest of prophets that came before or after him. We remember Miriam's sin because her slander negated Moses' uniqueness.

Moses was the greatest yet loneliest person. He had no peer that he could communicate with or confide in. This selection and loneliness expresses the concept of *בְּחִירָה*, selection. It applies to the Jewish People as well; we are the chosen people. We are alone, without a peer in a world that cannot and will not understand us. Denying *בְּחִירָה* is tantamount to denying Judaism. Jacob loved all his children; however his love for Joseph and subsequently Benjamin precipitated metaphysical or ontological oneness. Jacob united with them in a single state, an I-awareness that included these 2 sons while excluding the rest. The rest of the brothers recognized this unique bond between Jacob and the children of Rachel. Judah proclaims that Jacob's life force is bound up with that of Joseph and

Benjamin, not with the any of the other brothers. The same uniqueness applied to Moses. Miriam and Aaron overlooked it. That is why the Torah warns us not to compare Moses with other prophets.

Why did the Torah add **בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם** to the command to remember the Miriam incident? After all, we knew where this happened. Had Moses not been unique among men, the Exodus would not have taken place. No other prophet could bring about those miracles. Moses alone had the aspect of **סְגוּלָה**, not Aaron or Miriam. The Jews were taken out of Egypt because they also had a uniqueness, a **סְגוּלָה** element. The **סְגוּלָה** element in Moses facilitated representing Gd as His messenger, to redeem the people. They were **בְּדֶרֶךְ**, on their departure from Egypt. Miriam failed to recognize that the reason they were on that very journey at all, and not still mired in slavery in Egypt, was Moses's uniqueness. That is why there is a separate article of faith regarding Moses' prophecy.

The uniqueness of Moses can be seen when it comes to Jewish Law. No other prophet can introduce new laws after Moses. No other prophet, in the role of a prophet, can interpret the Torah. Regular people can interpret, But a prophet cannot claim that he has been told by Gd to interpret the law. Only Moses could interpret and introduce laws on behalf of Gd. Zecharia records that people in the diaspora sent a letter inquiring from the Priests as to how should they observe the fast days after the construction of the second Temple? Should they continue the observance or not? This inquiry was addressed by the Prophet to Gd. Gd answered that these fast days will eventually be **לִשְׁשׁוֹן וְלִשְׁמֹחָה**. Gd gave instructions to Zecharia concerning a Rabbinic obligation. Gd told the Prophet how they should observe this Mitzvah. Why should that not raise the Mitzvah of these fast days to the Biblical level, **דְּאוּרֵייתָא**? The answer is that since it did not come from Moses it remains Rabbinic. This demonstrates Moses' uniqueness.

We now understand the juxtaposition to the story of the spies and the slander they spoke against the land of Israel. Slandering anything considered by Gd a **סְגוּלָה**, be it an individual, people or object, is a terrible sin. Like Moses and the Jewish People, the land of Israel has the characteristic of **סְגוּלָה**, it was selected by Gd above all others. The spies failed to grasp the uniqueness of the land. Just as with the Miriam's sin, anytime a **סְגוּלָה** is ignored or denigrated, its uniqueness is called into question, and the resulting loss of prestige can be catastrophic. Miriam's slander against Moses set the stage for others to challenge him as well, like the spies and Korach. The chain of events set into motion by Miriam's slander led to the people spending 38 years in the desert and Moses denied entry to the Promised Land, resulting in the exile we find ourselves in to this very day. The juxtaposition

of the stories is warranted because the spies neglected to learn the lesson that slandering something Gd considers a **סגולה** can have terrible negative repercussions.

The episode of the spies is very puzzling. Why was it necessary to send them in the first place? Prior to their leaving, Moses gave them a set of questions they were supposed to report back on. The report they brought back did not answer the questions Moses put to them. Why were they punished so severely for their seemingly enigmatic sin?

The Torah does not refer to the group as **מרגלים**. The Torah tells us their mission was **לתור**. The difference between **רגול** and **תור** is **רגול** means to seek out the weak spots of a potential enemy. The spy must collect strategic military information. The Torah describes the job of a spy in **פרשת מקץ**. Joseph accused his brothers of being spies who came to scout out the weaknesses in the Egypt defense to facilitate an invasion.

Our Rabbis tell us a man may not betroth a woman until he sees her, no matter how highly recommended she comes. This is based on the story of Eliezer and Rebecca. Even though Eliezer told Isaac what transpired on his trip to Charan and even though Eliezer was his father's trusted servant, Isaac did not take her for a wife immediately. He did not betroth Rebecca based on Eliezer's report until he was convinced that she was worthy of replacing Sarah. He brought her into the tent of Sarah prior to the marriage. He needed to know if she was a worthy successor to his mother. Will she be able to restore her glory? Would Rebecca return the blessings that were present in his mother's tent? Rashi says that all these things indeed returned. Only then was he convinced and he married her.

Abraham testified to the trustworthiness of Eliezer. Eliezer told Isaac about her piety and kindness and commitment. Why did he not trust his opinion? Because marriage is not just an ordinary transaction or a civil commitment or mundane partnership. It is an existential commitment, a personalistic covenant of 2 lonely people that unite and forge a common destiny, to travel the same road together. In order to make such an all-encompassing commitment one cannot trust anyone else's opinion. Man must know the woman well enough, and vice-versa, the woman must know the man. Had marriage been just a civil institution and not an existential, covenantal union, then firsthand personal knowledge would not have been necessary. Marriage is more than a conventional, practical solution. It is a metaphysical merger of destinies. It is the unification of two souls. Therefore Eliezer could not be relied upon, no matter how loyal he was, only Issac could.

We read in Bhaloscha that the Jews, with Moses in the lead, were ready to march into Eretz Yisrael. Moses invited Yisro to join them. The entry to Eretz Yisrael was not simply the act of crossing the Jordan River or climbing its surrounding hills. To Moses, it was the marriage of people and land. It was the union of the rocky hills and sandy trails with the people that returned after several centuries. Upon entry to Eretz Yisrael, land and people were to be fused into a single existence with a common destiny. Land and people were to forever share victory and defeat, honor and shame. **קדשה לשעתה וקדשה לעתיד לבא**, He sanctified the land at that time and for the future. The marriage was to last forever. The groom could not enter the land without getting to know the bride, the land, intimately. They were told it was a land of milk and honey but they had to experience it. That's why Moses sent explorers to simply study the land prior to their entry. There was no reason to gather intelligence. Gd would take care of that. He sent them as the prospective groom to meet the would-be bride. He sent them to see the land, **מה** **היא**, to get acquainted because we are going to unite destinies forever.

Why was it necessary for Moses to instruct the spies how to enter the land and the route they should take? They would have found the path on their own. Moses revealed to the explorers why he sent them and what the essence of their mission was. He said that they should go up through the Negev and up the mountain. We have to go back to Vayeshev to understand the significance of this.

Torah says Jacob sent Joseph to inquire as to the welfare of his brothers from the valley, the depression, the depths of Chevron and he came to Shchem. Rashi asks the obvious question: Hebron is not in a valley, it is on a plateau on a mountain. Why does the Torah refer to it as the valley of Hebron?

Apparently, valley here refers to the **ברית בין הבתרים** and Abraham. Rashi saw great symbolism in the word **עמק**. In a valley, one finds himself surrounded by tall mountains, with restricted light and a restricted field of vision. On the other hand, a person standing on top of a mountain has an extended field of vision that allows him to see things he never could from a valley. Rashi tells us that **עמק חברון**, the depression of Chevron, means Jacob accompanied Joseph down the hill and into the depression. He didn't just send Joseph, he accompanied him along the way. When he came to the valley, Jacob bade Joseph farewell and sent him to his brothers in Shchem.

Why did Jacob accompany Joseph, after all it was quite a distance from where they lived in the hills down to the valley. He did this because the Divine Providence, the

השגחה, wanted him to. There was great symbolism in Jacob accompanying him down the hill into the valley. Jacob was completely unaware of the consequences that this mission would have. He descended from the mountain where he normally enjoyed clear vision, רוח הקודש, to the valley where his vision became clouded, obscured.

Had Jacob had his decisive intuition that day, רוח הקודש, he never would have sent Joseph to his brothers to inquire as to their welfare. He knew the brothers hated Joseph. Jacob did not know he would not see Joseph for another 22 years. The exile began the moment he kissed Joseph good bye and sent him to Shchem. Joseph was not being sent to Shchem but to Egypt. That day Jacob descended with Joseph into the valley and his vision became obscured. Joseph was the first exile to leave Eretz Yisrael for Egypt. Jacob was the next. Jacob lost his vision that day and acted in ignorance of the eventual results of this errand.

Now, Moses said, what Jacob started will be consummated. He told the 12 explorers to go up from the south, to climb the same mountain and go to the same place where the covenant that united people and land was struck so many years before. Climb the same mountain Jacob descended to initiate their long exile by separating clan and land, when he sent Joseph on that fateful mission to Shchem to seek his brothers.

Moses told the group of spies they were elected to carry out a much more pleasant assignment. They are to climb to the peak of the mountain and cast a searching glance across the land. We no longer belong to the generations that waited and looked forward to the return of the people to the land. We are the generation that will fulfill the promise. With a single gaze, you will embrace the entire grandeur of the land and landscape. You will immediately understand our relationship to the land. We are not looking for a land in a material sense. We are being wedded to the land with a merged destiny. We will feel the suffering of the land when occupied by strangers. The land will share in our plight when we suffer in exile.

Rashi quotes that when Gd appeared to the patriarchs as קל שד-י, He used a name that means He promised but did not yet fulfill. The patriarchal generations lived with superhuman faith in Gd and His promises. Moses's generation was one of fulfillment characterized by the ineffable name of Gd and the return of the people to the land.

Moses charged them with וראיתם את הארץ מה היא. What was their mission and what were they to report back? He told them to go up through the Negev, South. The

Negev is the cradle of Jewish History. It was the area that pulled Abraham and where the ברית בין הבתרים, covenant between Gd, Abraham and land was consummated. Now Moses said we will reverse Jacob's movements. Jacob went from the peaks of the mountain to the depths of depression and exile. We will rise up from exile to return to the land and unite our destinies. You will see that the land is worthy of our sacrifices and our longing for her. It behooves us to unite destinies with the land. The most outstanding quality of the land according to Chazal is that the divine countenance, שכינה, is to be found there. Only in Eretz Yisrael can everyone be inspired. There is no prophecy in חוץ לארץ. The task of the Jewish People is to be a nation of prophets. This can only happen in Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, Jonah recognized this and attempted to avoid his prophecy by escaping the land rather than traveling to Ninveh and deliver Gd's message.

Moses told the explorers to seek the element of Segula in Eretz Yisrael. Somehow that uniqueness will be united with the uniqueness of the people. Unfortunately, the majority of the spies did not even show enough interest to enter Hebron. They certainly did not climb the mountain Jacob descended. They explored it piecemeal instead of taking in all its grandeur from the top of the mountain. To them this was just another nondescript land, dispensable, and if so, then so are the people. They never reported back with an answer to Moses's charge of וראיתם את הארץ מה היא: is it worthy of an eternal union with the people or not? Only Joshua and Caleb said that the land is טובה מאד מאד, it is worthy for us to join in an insoluble union. We have no other land, our destinies are linked up. That's why Tanchuma said that the spies should have taken a lesson from Miriam. Just like she overlooked the Segula element of Moses, they ignored the Segula element of the land. That's why they were both severely punished. She ignored his uniqueness even though she knew that there were differences between her, Aaron and Moses. Both stories showed a lack of appreciation of Segula. One who does not believe in Segula, is incapable of waiting for the redemption.

The element of Segula applies in Judaism to many situations. We have a hierarchy of values where we must make choices. For example Shabbos is considered the choicest of days, חמדת הימים. It is unique, singular, a Segula. Yom Tov is not Segula as there is a common קדושה, sanctity, that applies to all Yomim Tovim. Torah, Moses, Moshiach, Am Yisrael, Shabbos, the Davidic Monarchy all have the element of Segula. The definition of Segula is to be found in the Almighty. Maimonides repeats many times that Gd is not only One, but He is **the only One**. He is singular. This is the great mystery of faith, the mystery of אהי-ה אשר אהי-ה. On the one hand Gd is the origin of everything. If there is existence, Gd is present. To exist means to be in the heart of eternity. Whoever is embraced by Gd exists.

There is unity between creation and creator. On the other hand, Gd is alone, different in the ultimate sense of the word, from the world. Gd not only created and sustains the world, He also negates the world. He is exclusive, a Yachid. If there is being, it is only the true being of the Almighty. No one can imitate Gd or say that he shares in divinity. Divinity is exclusive. Consequently our existence is a dream, an illusion, as the Piyut on Yom Kippur says, כחלום יעוף.

In one sense, Gd supports the world and is close to the world. All we have to do is look at Gd to see how to live, והלכת בדרכיו. On the other hand Gd is יחיד, only He exists. When the insignificant being comes close to Gd, he ceases to exist, as when finitude is added to infinity, you still have infinity. Gd is אחד and infinite simultaneously. The paradox is that while Gd communicates with man in this world, yet Gd is still יחיד בעולמו, which implies the absence of that very communication because there is no world that exists outside of Gd. As Zohar says דמי כולא כמאן דליתא דמי, from the standpoint of Gd, the world is as if it never existed.

Since man is created in the image of Gd, he has a dialectic existence. He is part of the universal order as well as a single Segula individual. Man may be compared with other creatures, with the brute in the field and the tree in the forest, yet man remains an outsider with nothing in common with nature. At times he participates in the universal order and other times he confronts it. This dialectic is extant within society and the relation between man and man. On the one hand he is told to practice חסד, kindness, to tear down the barriers surrounding egocentric individuals and share everything with others. On the other hand, man is also urged to guard his uniqueness.

Man exists in 2 spheres. If man lives only in his personal sphere, his רשות היחיד, he becomes an egotist. If he lives only in the public sphere, רשות הרבים, he loses his originality and inspiration, his Segula element, and becomes an imitator.

Moses was the great leader who on the one hand was one of the crowd. In Judaism, leadership is measured by the leader's ability to suffer for the crowd. The leader assumes the accumulated suffering of the individuals in the crowd. The first prerequisite of the Jewish leader is to have the capacity to suffer for and with the people he leads, not to be glorified by them. That is the approach of the pagan hero. Moses suffered with them at the Golden Calf episode when he said to Gd, מחני נא, erase me from Your book if You will not forgive this people. Time and again, he sacrificed his life for the people. His life was open to all. He did not display his Segula when he dealt with simple people and their needs. He could never be left alone. He sat and judged the people from morning till night,

surrounded by the tumultuous crowd. He personified their hopes and dreams. He suffered and rejoiced with them.

However there was a Segula element in Moses. He was lonely. This Segula, a singular existence that no one else could understand, share or appreciate, could not be communicated to the people. How could he communicate with the people if there was no one else like him who could appreciate and understand what he was going through? He was the loneliest person on the earth who would pitch the אהל מועד outside the camp, away from everyone else. Moses was two different people in the public and private domains. In the רשות הרבים he merged with the people. In רשות היחיד, he could communicate only with Gd. This mode of existence which is rooted in the idea of והלכת בדרכיו finds its complete harmony in Gd. But in the final analysis, that is what we all are: human, dialectic beings with 2 personae and approaches to the world around us.

Rationalization disappears when we introduce the Segula element. For example, our faithfulness and attachment to Eretz Yisrael is logically incomprehensible. The closeness of people to land is amazing. American Jews are usually very pragmatic. But they are ready to attack anyone, even the president, if he says something with even a whiff of anti-Zionism. We must ask where is their logos, their rational thought process? They will risk everything, even their status and standing as citizens of this country when it comes to Eretz Yisrael. [Note: this lecture was given in 1975, a time of crisis for Israel in the UN and within the American Government. Unfortunately some of this dedication appears to have disappeared in some segments of the Jewish community over the last several years.]. The normally clear minded Jew becomes cloudy regarding Eretz Yisrael because of our Segula relationship with Eretz Yisrael.

We cannot rationalize events that revolve around Segula. There is an element of the frighteningly strange, of the hidden and ineffable in the Segula charisma. There are many associated enigmas. Why were we selected as עם סגולה? Why was Eretz Yisrael selected as the land of the עם סגולה and endowed with Segutla? Why should the עם סגולה live in exile for thousands of years? We cannot comprehend logically these questions. When values are comparable and common themes unite them, the mind rationalizes. However, Segula is above and beyond the capacity of the logos to understand. When we add Segula to the background, history is easier to understand. Still at other times, when Segula is revealed, Am Segula, Eretz Segula, Moses Segula, everything becomes mysterious. The Segula element can only be lived and accepted as an act of faith.

A fringe of blue, תכלת, is included in the fringes, ציצית, which are otherwise לבן, white. White and sky-blue symbolize 2 ideas in Hebrew semantics. White symbolizes that which is clear and readily grasped. It is symbolic of human understanding. Clear and distinct, white and obvious, are the criteria of truth. As we say in Hebrew, הדבר מהווה, white represents that which I understand clearly.

Blue according to Chazal, suggests the mysterious, boundless distance. Chazal said תכלת is likened to the sea and the sea is likened to the heavens which are likened to the Heavenly Throne of Gd, כסא הכבוד. It represents what is remote from our reach, the Segula quality. The paradoxical unfolding of our destiny is symbolized by תכלת.

Apparently, the Jew is expected to focus on the white. The Torah encouraged man to explore the phenomena of nature and use his mind, to be scientifically oriented and technologically minded when he explores the world, represented by the white strands. 7 (or 6) threads of ציצית are white (Machlokes Rambam and Raavad). There is one thread that is blue in the ציצית. It represents the things that go beyond the rational, the mysterious and awesome where we unexpectedly encounter the Segula quality. At that time, everything becomes distant and strange, remote as the sky and distant from our mind. However, we have been trained to embrace לבן and תכלת. If the experience is understandable, our intellect interprets it accordingly through לבן, the logos. Otherwise we interpret it through תכלת, through an act of faith and appreciation of Segula: 'וראיתם אותו וזכרתם את כל מצוות ה'.

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