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Shlach

If only the spies had learned from Miriam, how speaking *losbon bara* is a bad thing. Perhaps they would have held their tongues and not spoken badly about *Eretz Yisroel*, and we wouldn't still be waiting for Moshiach to come. Such a simple thing, so much consequence.

Then again, why should they have learned *anything* from Miriam regarding speaking badly about *Eretz HaKodesh*? Miriam and Aharon spoke *losbon bara* about a fellow human, and not just any fellow human, but the great Moshe *Rabbeinu* and *Gadol HaDor*. That's serious, *very* serious. The spies spoke *losbon bara* about a land, so what comparison was there?

Instead, call them *kafui tovab*, deniers of good. God had blessed them with the gift of *Eretz Yisroel* and they were rejecting it. Being a *kafui tovab* was enough to get Adam *HaRisbon* ejected from Paradise, so it ranks as a very bad thing to do. So maybe the lesson to be learned from Miriam was not just the sin of *losbon bara* about another sin, but actually what leads to it.

Last week's *parsba* makes this point. Miriam's point was that she was also a prophet and yet she was still home for dinner on time each night. Aharon was a prophet too and still did not fall short on any family duties. Why then should Moshe, their brother and fellow prophet?

God's answer:

"Please listen to My words. If there be a prophet among you, I, God, will make Myself known to him in a vision; I will speak to him in a dream. This is not so with My servant Moshe; he is faithful throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth; unambiguously, without riddles, so he can behold the image of God. So why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moshe?" (Bamidbar 12:6-8)

In other words, God told them, “How can you compare yourselves to my great servant Moshe *Rabbeinu*? You spoke as if you are on par with him and you are so wrong. Had you considered his greatness versus your own, you would have never dared to speak out against your brother, even for a good reason!”

That is the root cause of *losbon bara*. It comes from a greater sense of ego than a person should have. That’s why the Torah pointed out in that Moshe was the humblest person in the world, even though it was not necessary to answer the question. Just explaining that Moshe was a higher level prophet than they were would have made the point. Mentioning his extreme humility was making a different point, that it was their lack of humility that prompted them to speak badly about the greatest prophet to have ever lived.

That’s what the spies should have learned from Miriam, how too big an ego and too great a sense of entitlement can distort your viewpoint and make you say things you really shouldn’t. It’s not that humble people don’t notice bad situations or the wrongdoings of others. But being humble and not considering themselves on par with the people they deem worthy of criticism, they approach it from a sense of right and wrong only.

Miriam used herself as the measuring stick to criticize her brother.

Moshe pointed out the flaws of others, but only on behalf of God and Torah.

In fact, had the spies not thought too highly of themselves and considered themselves entitled, they probably would have refused the mission just out of respect for God and Moshe *Rabbeinu*. And had the people not had their own sense of entitlement, they wouldn’t have asked to spy the land in the first place.

We’re not talking about giving up rights that the Torah gives you. We’re talking about the extra “rights” that you give yourself, that extra sense of importance you feel you have, whether you do or don’t. Greatness has a way of manifesting itself, without getting a boost from us. On the contrary, when we feel the need to let the world know how highly we think about ourselves, even subtly, it’s usually because we think we’re better than we are.

Ego and entitlement have plagued mankind from the beginning. It has bloated personalities that have led to incredible destruction. It distorts a person’s sense of truth and then the world’s. Today, it is probably the number one cause of most of what’s wrong with the world. So many causes are being fought for, not because they are based on objective truth, but based on personal truths built upon bloated egos and a false sense of entitlement.

The problem is, it is hard to show people who think like this that they think like this.

Usually, it takes the harsh reality of the consequences of their mistaken thinking to do that, as was the case of the spies. All of a sudden, once God stepped in and set things straight, they immediately changed tracks and tried to right their wrong. But, as is so often the case, it was too little, too late. And as the world seems to inch in a similar direction, you have to wonder if waking up is possible before reality does it for us.

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Good *Shabbos*,
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