

Parshas Behaalosecha – Eliezer Stahl (*reprinted*)

יט סיון תשע"ט – 22nd June 2019 – שבת פ' בהעלותך

At the end of the פרשה we are told of how משה spoke לשון הרע about אהרן. She told אהרן that משה had separated from his wife צפורה in order to remain in a permanent state of purity so that he would be in a constant state of readiness to receive אהרן. אהרן and נביאים were also נביאים yet they did not do so. ה' appeared to them in a pillar of cloud and reproached them explaining that משה's level of prophecy was on a much higher level than theirs.

מרים was punished with צרעת and as a result had to sit outside the camp for seven days. The people out of respect for the great Tzadokes (explains the אור החיים) did not travel until she returned to the camp.

In זכור את אשר עשה ה' אלקיך למרים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים (כד:ט), פרשת כי תצא (כד:ט) – "remember what ה' your G-d, did to מרים on the way when you were leaving Egypt." רש"י explains that the purpose of remembering this event is so that we learn from it not to talk לשון הרע and the consequences if one does. The זכירת מעשה מרים (remembering what happened to מרים) as one of the מצוות רמב"ם includes מרים despite it being left out of the ספר המצוות רמב"ם's ספר. His source being the halachic מדרש (ספרי) that this פסוק is a positive commandment telling us that we must mention verbally what מרים did and take to heart the message not to speak badly of people. The (שמירת הלשון) שער התבונה פרק י"ב (in a note to חפץ חיים) expresses astonishment that there is no prevalent custom to perform this מצוה of verbalising מרים's deed.

Why was מרים's deed picked as the example to be repeated over and over as the tool to prevent the speaking of לשון הרע?

The רמב"ם (סוף הלכות טומאת צרעת) says that the תורה wants us to see that even what מרים said is considered לשון הרע despite the fact that she didn't say anything negative about משה, her mistake was just in equating him to other נביאים. The רמב"ם adds that she clearly had no bad intentions as she was speaking about her younger brother, whom she helped bring up, and whom she risked her life to save when he was placed in the Nile during פרעה's evil decree. In addition to this, she spoke only to אהרן, not before משה himself nor did she embarrass him in public and even if משה would have heard what she said, he would surely not have been in any way upset as the תורה testifies that he was the humblest of all men. Despite all of this it was still considered לשון הרע. We see from here how careful we must be with what we say about others so that we do not fall into the trap of speaking לשון הרע.

The חפץ חיים adds that we must also contemplate, the severity of the punishment of speaking לשון הרע; צרעת has no natural cure, and the מצורע is forced to live away from his family and friends outside the camp. We also see that this terrible punishment is given to anyone who speaks לשון הרע, even מרים the Tzadokes who was one of the seven prophetesses and in whose merit בני"י had water for 40 years in the מדבר (באר של מרים) (through the מדבר).

For these reasons the תורה made it obligatory to mention and contemplate מרים's deed to act as a reminder not to speak לשון הרע. The חפץ חיים in his introduction to his ספר on the laws of לשון הרע brings sources that say that the destruction of the ביהמ"ק was due to the sin of לשון הרע. He therefore reasons that it must be one of the main sins which is lengthening the current גלות. By being careful what we say about others, we can hasten the coming of משיח and the rebuilding of בית המקדש.