

“AND MIRIAM SPOKE ABOUT MOSHE” (BAMIDBAR 12:1)

They revealed the information to Shaul

THE NAVI (SHMUEL I, CHAP. 23) DESCRIBES King Shaul's pursuit of Dovid in the mistaken belief that Dovid was a threat to his throne. Members of B'nei Yisrael revealed Dovid's hiding place to Shaul. Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva 3:200) explains that this *lashon hara* did not benefit the informers in any material way. Rather, they revealed the information to Shaul in the hopes that Shaul would bless them.

Rabbeinu Yonah, while discussing this incident, quotes a Gemara (Eruchin 15b) that makes an astounding statement regarding *lashon hara*: One who speaks *lashon hara* is considered as if he denied the existence of Hashem, because he causes great harm to his friend and does not even derive any substantive benefit from his tale-bearing. This type of malicious action – to cause destruction to others without any gain of money or physical pleasure, could only come from one who has thrown off the yoke of Heaven. Rabbeinu Yonah uses the example of the informers to Shaul as an illustration of this behavior.

Can a desire for a blessing bring a person to trample on Torah values?

It is easy to understand a person who sins due to a momentary blindness caused by his physical desires. The passion for physical pleasure is a powerful, emotional drive that temporarily overcomes one's intellectual standards of right and wrong. But how can we comprehend a sin that is fueled not by pleasures of the flesh, but by spiritual wants? Can a desire for a blessing bring a person to trample on Torah values? Especially in light of the great harm – both physically and spiritually – that their *lashon hara* caused, why would members of B'nei Yisrael perform such a heinous sin in order to receive a *bracha* from Shaul? Didn't they understand that a *bracha* would be of little benefit to them if they were committing a sin on par with denying Hashem?

This incident gives us an insight into a basic human frailty – the tendency to act inconsistently. What they did was not uncommon. Human beings can – and often do – tolerate extreme inconsistencies in their actions. We can put great effort into reaching a goal; yet act in a way that negates that goal without even realizing it. Parents can spend large amounts of their hard earned income to educate their children to the beauty of the Torah; yet they can sometimes set an example that flies in the face of what their children learn in yeshiva. Well-meaning Jews can invest time and money into performing *mitzvos*, even those *m'd'rabanan* - of Rabbinic origin – with all kinds of stringencies, and at the same time treat others in a way that violates basic commandments of interpersonal behavior, which are *d'Oraisa* – Torah ordained *mitzvos*.

First one must establish what is true good and true evil

The only way to avoid such inconsistencies is to be constantly aware of our actions, always evaluating them against the absolute, unchanging standards of the Torah. The *middah* of *zehirus* – watchfulness – is explained by the Mesilas Yesharim as having two steps: First one must establish what is true good and true evil. Once we have clarified our yardstick of right and wrong, we can then apply it to measure our actions, and hold them up to the light to see where we are veering off the path to our goal in life. This technique has to be repeated often, in order to reassess our position and correct it if necessary. If we practice this simple process, we will find it relatively easy to avoid the pitfalls of inconsistency and stay on course in our life's journey towards the goal of perfection.