

COMMENTARIES OF THE DUBNO MAGGID

PARASHAS SHEMOS

In Hashem's first meeting with Moshe at the burning bush, He tells him (Shemos 3:7): "I have indeed seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their screams on account of their taskmasters, for I have known of their sufferings." We have previously presented several of the Maggid's interpretations of this statement. We now present another.

One striking feature of the above statement is that it seems repetitive. The Maggid compares the statement to a passage in Tehillim that also exhibits a form of repetition (Tehillim 45:11): "Listen, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear – and forget your people and your father's house." We can ask: Why does the psalmist exhort the daughter both to listen and to see?

The Maggid addresses this question by elaborating on the senses of sight and hearing. At a basic level, the sense of sight enables a person to examine things that are close to him, while the sense of hearing enables a person to gain information about things that are too far away for him to see. For instance, through a series of vocal messages from one person to another, a person can obtain a report about some object or event from someone who saw it. Now, we might think that in regard to something that a person himself can see, there is no need for him to use the sense of hearing. But in fact there are situations where a person needs to use both senses together. Specifically, some things appear good but carry a hidden hazard, while others appear bad but carry a hidden benefit. In this case, just looking at the thing in question is not enough to get a true grasp of its nature; one must listen to information about it from people who are familiar with all its features. In this vein, Shlomo HaMelech teaches (Mishlei 20:12): "The ear that hears, and the eye that sees – and Hashem has also made both of them." That is, Hashem made the eye and the ear so that a person can also use both of them together when necessary.

The main area where a person needs to use both the ear and the eye is where he has to decide on a course of conduct. Often an action appears appropriate but leads to a bad outcome. Thus Shlomo teaches elsewhere (ibid. 14:12): "There is a route that seems right to a man, but at its end are the paths of death." When a person chooses a route solely on the basis of what seems right to him, he can easily fail to think properly about what he is doing, for he will naturally tend to put firm faith in his initial perception. Accordingly, the psalmist exhorts: "Listen, O daughter, and see!" Listening comes first, and then seeing. One must first listen to guidance from the leaders, and only then apply his own power of sight. After a person has heard proper guidance from appropriate authorities, he is able to see and perceive accurately whatever he encounters, and will not lead himself astray. Perhaps Shlomo also meant to indicate that hearing comes before seeing when he spoke of the ear that hears and the eye that sees, mentioning the ear before the eye.

We can link the above idea to a Midrash concerning sight. The Midrash says (*Esther Rabbah* 7:9):

"And Haman saw that Mordechai did not bow down and prostrate himself before him" (Esther 3:5). Said R. Eivo: "Regarding the wicked, it is written (Tehillim 69:24, homiletically): 'Their eyes are darkened from seeing' [i.e., what they have looked at has caused them harm]. For the sights that a wicked person's eyes see carry him down to *Gehinnom*. [The Midrash brings several proof-texts, the last of which is the above verse about Haman.] But the sights that a righteous person's eyes see brings him light, for what his eyes see elevates him to a lofty level. Thus it is written (Bereishis 18:2): 'And he lifted up his eyes, and he saw – and behold – three men were standing before him.' [The Midrash brings further proof-texts.]"

The wicked man follows the sights of his eyes and the inclinations of his heart. He therefore sees things incorrectly. But the righteous man lifts up his eyes to contemplate the consequences of every action from beginning to end, and he therefore does not falter.

Let us now turn our attention to Hashem's statement to Moshe. We bring out the meaning of the statement through an analogy. If we see a person hit someone with force, we can readily recognize from what we saw the pain that the victim suffered. But if we see a person give someone just a light slap, the pain inflicted is not immediately obvious. The victim may be an eminent person and the assaulter a lowly person, in which case, the victim will be deeply hurt: As the Mishnah says (*Bava Kamma* 8:1), the damages for embarrassment caused by an assault vary according to the stature of the assaulter and the victim. But if we did not know the people involved, we would not know of the victim's pain simply by seeing the scene. We would recognize the victim's pain only by hearing his cry of indignation: "Oy! That I should be slapped by such a scoundrel!" The ear gathers additional information not gathered by the eye.

Furthermore, in some cases even the victim himself does not recognize the full gravity of the offense committed against him – others, who are more aware of the stature of the victim's family, may well recognize it better. Thus, an assault potentially involves three levels of damage: the physical pain, the embarrassment that the victim himself feels, and the affront to the victim's honor that others recognize.

Hashem's statement to Moshe encompasses all three of these levels. *I have indeed seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt* – this refers to the physical pain that the Jews suffered from the crushing burden of labor they bore and the beatings inflicted on them. *And I have heard their screams on account of their taskmasters* – this refers to the humiliation the Jews felt over being oppressed by people as lowly as the Egyptians. *For I have known of their sufferings* – this refers to the degree of affront to the Jews that Hashem alone recognized, beyond the humiliation that they themselves felt.