



Who heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds
Parshas Shlach

Feivel Epteiker stood in the doorway, his eyes shining. From the moment he first heard the Karliner Rebbe was coming for a visit in Israel he has been waiting with great anticipation, hoping to receive a blessing from the Rebbe. Feivel, a medic, had seen the Rebbe during his previous visits, but now desired to meet him in person. The line to meet the Rebbe was long and slow moving.

Finally his turn had arrived, the Rebbe smiled at him, Feivel stood there embarrassed. "I feel a special affinity towards you; please tell me what you do for a living." Feivel did not understand. "I am only a simple person", he responded. The Rebbe asked again. "I am medic; I treat the residents of Jerusalem, doing my best to heal their ailments and wounds."

"Perhaps you've done a good deed?" the Rebbe continued to inquire. After coaxing on the Rebbe's part, Feivel told of situations that arise occasionally when he treats women. On one hand he must treat them, for saving lives precedes all. On the other hand he wished to maintain a purity of mind. He developed a special pair of spectacles which keep him focused solely on the area he is treating. The Rebbe said: "Now I understand my affinity towards you. What inspired you to behave in this manner?" Feivel replied: "From the Talmudic figure Abba Umna, Abba the bloodletter"¹.

When my father would tell us this story he would explain the background. Abaye, the Talmudic scholar, would receive a special revelation every Shabbat eve. Rabba would receive a special revelation once every year, on Yom Kippur eve. Abba Umna would receive a special revelation one once a day. The Talmud tells us of this incident: "Abba was a bloodletter, and would receive greetings from the Heavens daily. Abaye received greetings on every Sabbath eve, Raba on the eve of every Day of Atonement. Abaye felt dejected because of the special honor shown to Abba the bloodletter. People said to him: This distinction is made because you cannot do what Abba does. What was the special merit of Abba the bloodletter? When he performed his procedure he would separate men from women, and in addition he had a cloak which held a cup for receiving the blood and which was slit at the shoulder, and whenever a woman patient came to him he would put the garment on her shoulder in order not to see her exposed body."² In merit of this he received special greetings from "the Heavenly Academy".

In our weekly Parsha, a verse relating to the commandment of Tzizit³, which we recite twice a day during the prayers, states: "And you shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes after

which you are going astray."⁴ Rashi explains: "the word "wander" denotes to the wandering of the spies⁵ in the beginning of the Parsha.

The heart and eyes are the spies for the body. They are its agents for sinning: the eye sees, the heart covets and the body commits the transgression". Rashi makes a wonderful connection between the sin of the spies in the beginning of the Parsha.⁶ There is a direct connection between the spies' sin and the Tzizit. What is the connection? There appears to be a contradiction. On one hand, the eye sees, and then the heart covets – the eyes are the leader. On the other hand – "You shall not wander after your hearts and after your eyes" – the heart is the instigator?

When we take a close look at the spies' incident we learn the proper order of things. The eyes do see, but are guided by the heart's inclinations. If the heart wants to see the good, the eyes will look upon things positively. If the heart is drawn to negativity, the eyes will follow suit.

We learn this from the spies. The spies came with a negative attitude when they came to spy upon the land of Israel, and that is what they found. G-d worked many wonders during their trip, but they chose to perceive these wonders as oddities. For instance; G-d planned the death of a Canaanite nobleman to coincide with the spies' visit, in order to busy the locals with funeral arrangements and mourning – as a way to divert their attention from the reconnaissance mission. They used this as evidence of a negative trait of the land and reported: "We can't succeed because the land devours its inhabitants!" – a reference to the funeral. Yehoshua and Calev, came with pure hearts, and were the only two spies who spoke positively of the land.

Rashi teaches us that the eye leads the heart, but the heart guides the eye as well. Therefore the Torah states: "After your hearts and after your eyes".

Feivel stood in the middle of the room. The Rebbe took Feivel's hand in his own hands and said: "Anyone who overcomes his inclinations and maintains a purity of mind will be granted all he wishes for the heavens."

The Rebbe returned to Europe, and subsequently perished in the Holocaust. Those who heard of Feivel's special meeting with the Rebbe, now came to him for a blessing, – for the Rebbe said that all Feivel wishes for will be granted.

⁴ Bamidbar 15, 39.

⁵ A word with the same root *tur* is in both sections.

⁶ The Torah (Bamidbar, 13-14) describes the famous story of the 12 spies – one from each tribe – who are sent into Israel to explore the land. Their mission seems rather innocuous at first: Determine how to battle the Canaanites and then settle 3 million men, women and children in the new land. The spies are sent (ostensibly) to survey practical matters like fortification of the cities, geography of the land, opportunities for farming and commerce, the best access routes, etc. In Israel, G-d shows them encouraging signs that the land is indeed plentiful and rich. Things go wrong. After 40 days, the spies come back and 10 of them recommend against entering the land. They report: "We can't succeed because everything is huge!" "We can't succeed because the land devours its inhabitants!", "And we can't succeed because it's too strong!". The Israelite community accepts the report, and gives up their dream of going into Israel. The consequence? If you don't want to enter the land, says G-d, then you won't enter the land. All Israelites will die out over the next 40 years in the desert, and only their children will enter the land.

¹ Bloodletting (or blood-letting) is the withdrawal of often little quantities of **blood** from a patient to cure or prevent illness and **disease**. Bloodletting was based on an ancient system of medicine in which blood and other bodily fluid were considered to be "humors" the proper balance of which maintained health. It was the most common **medical** practice performed by doctors from antiquity up to the late 19th century, a time span of almost 2,000 years.

² Tractate Taanit, 21b.

³ The name for specially knotted ritual fringes worn by **Jews**. Tzitzit are attached to the four corners of the prayer shawl.