

THE EAR THAT HEARS

by Rabbi Label Lam

Miriam and Aaron spoke about Moshe regarding the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. They said, "Was it only with Moshe that HASHEM spoke? Did He not speak with us, as well? And HASHEM heard...Miriam was afflicted with Tzaraas like snow! (Bamidbar 12:1-10)

And HASHEM heard: This teaches that there was no one there to carry the conversation further, but rather they spoke privately between themselves. (Sifri)

Why does the verse tell us that "HASHEM heard"? Does HASHEM not hear everything? King David wrote in Tehillim, "He Who implants the ear can He not hear? He Who formed the eye does He not see?" The Mishne in Pirke Avos states, "Know what is above from you. An eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all of your deeds are recorded in a book! (Avos 2:1) The Prophet Amos (4:13) writes, "...And it's told to a man his conversation!" The Talmud states about the verse, "Even a light conversation between a man and his wife!" Rashi comments on the spot, "All the deeds of a person are detailed before him at the time of his death." The question stands. Why does the verse state that "HASHEM heard"? Isn't obvious that everything is heard by HASHEM?

The Chofetz Chaim who made it his life's mission to arrest the deadly scourge of evil speech- gossip, wondered why the telephone had been invented in the 20th century. He posited that it was meant to offer a clear demonstration that what one person says in privacy here in an apparent "cone of silence" can be heard in another place. Now telephones and cell phones are so ubiquitous as well as tape recorders to remind us how far a word might travel.

I can still recall with horror the day the phone call came. It was Elul, the month leading up to and immediately preceding Rosh HaShana, the day of judgment. A neighbor from the street behind our own sheepishly informed my wife that she had been using a baby monitor and for some time and now since we had started using a cordless phone she could hear all of our telephone conversations. We were mortified. What had she heard? Which conversations? It was extremely difficult to pass this person in the street and feel completely at ease.

On the positive side, etched in my memory, is a brief encounter a friend of mine and I had with a great individual in Jerusalem. We were having a casual conversation, elbows resting on opposite railings on the walkway steps outside on the Ohr Somayach Campus. Rabbi Namchman Bullman ztl. was passing by. He paused and put his hand on the shoulder of each of us and showered us with

dramatic praise, "I like the way you're talking. It's open. There are no secrets here. You're not whispering about forbidden things." Then, he just continued on his way.

Perhaps there's no bigger secret in the verse, "HASHEM heard" other than the frightening news, HASHEM is listening. If we would be cognizant that the microphone is open and what we were about to say would be spread across the globe we would all probably speak with greater caution. We have here "good news" and "bad news". Just incase you thought that nobody had taken note of your true wit and wisdom, don't worry. The good news is that everything you say is forever. The bad news though is that everything you say is forever.

When recalling what happened to Miriam, we should remember well to feel the fear of the ear that hears. Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.