

"Send out men for you that they may scout out the land of Canaan." (13:2)

Rashi cites the *Midrash* which questions the juxtaposition of the chapter discussing the spies upon the chapter dealing with Miriam's speaking *lashon hora* against Moshe. It states that the *Torah* sought to emphasize the spies' iniquity. They saw the punishment meted out to Miriam for slandering Moshe, and they, nonetheless, spoke *lashon hora* against *Eretz Yisrael*. They should have heeded the lesson inherent in Miriam's punishment.

Horav Chaim Shmulevitz, z.l., derives from this *Chazal* that Hashem's punishment is presented as a corrective measure, rather than punitive. It is Hashem's way of communicating displeasure with an individual's deeds and a warning to the recipient to mend his ways. Thus, the spies were held accountable for having witnessed Miriam's punishment for a deed similar to theirs, yet not taking the lesson to heart. He states this is the reason that punishment is meted out "*middah k'neged middah*," measure for measure. Its purpose is to avail one the opportunity to become cognizant of his sin and to improve himself in the relevant areas.

The purpose of punishment is not to afflict the recipient, but rather to demonstrate to the sinner the area in which he is remiss. Regrettably, man sees that which he desires to see. It is a human tendency to rationalize and justify even the greatest miscreancy. Indeed, even after punishment, the sinner will attribute his punishment to another "mistake" he has committed.

Horav Shmulevitz, z.l., tells the following story in conjunction with his thesis. The wife of a famous *Torah* personality of the previous generation happened to differ with her husband regarding suitability of a prospective son-in-law for their daughter. Although this prospective groom was a great *Torah* scholar, he limped. The physical impediment was a point of consternation for this woman. One morning while she was bringing a glass of warm milk to her husband before *shacharis*, she slipped and broke her leg. She felt this was Hashem's punishment to her for serving her husband a drink before his prayers. She could not bring herself to admit the real reason for her punishment. Rather, she substituted an honorable deed.

From the chapter of the spies and the condemnation against them for failing to take personal note of Miriam's punishment, we derive that one must learn a lesson even from another's punishment. Miriam's illness should have served as an object lesson for the spies. Indeed, it is easier to accept a personal lesson by viewing it through the perspective of another's affliction, since one's own personal vested interests can veil the truth. May we merit to be among those who reflect upon the focus of rebuke and accept its intended lesson.