

## Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam on the way, when you were leaving Egypt. (24:9)

*Rashi* comments: Remember what was done to Miriam who spoke against her brother, Moshe (*Rabbeinu*) and (as a result) was stricken with *tzaraas* (spiritual leprosy). *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* comments: Take care not to be suspicious of your friend (not to suspect him of wrongdoing). Remember what Hashem, your G-d, did to Miriam because she suspected Moshe of something which was unfounded: she was stricken with *tzaraas*. *Rashi* attributes Miriam *HaNeviyah's* illness/punishment to speaking ill of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. *Targum Yonasan* seems to feel that her shortcoming was in incorrectly suspecting Moshe of a wrongdoing. **Horav Kalmen Pinsky, zl**, observes (from the commentary of *Targum Yonasan*) that the primary sin of (speaking) *lashon hora*, slanderous speech, lies not in the speaking, but rather, in the negative outlook that the speaker has, which serves as the precursor of his slanderous comments.

Negative outlook, a jaundiced view of others, catalyzes negative speech. When one views the actions (or inactions) of his fellow through the tainted perspective of a malignant viewpoint, he will inevitably see evil, which will ultimately lead him to speaking evil. The *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, (*Shaar HaTenuvah*) writes: "One should accustom himself not to speak about people regardless of the nature of his comments – whether they be negative or even positive. *Horav Rephael Hamburg, zl*, relinquished his position as *Rav* four years prior to his passing in order not to be compelled to speak with – or about – people. He asked anyone who visited not to speak about another person. He feared that one thing would lead to another. He very much feared the "another," which meant (inadvertently) speaking *lashon hora*.

A distinguished member of the Yerushalayim community; an individual who zealously upheld the Torah and *mitzvos* – and made a "point" to see to it that others did so also – once came to **Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl**, with a complaint concerning two *yeshivah* students. Apparently, this man's apartment was opposite *Yeshivas Mir*, allowing him to have an unobstructed view of what was going on in the area. He claimed that he saw two students perusing a secular newspaper in a store that was in the proximity of the *yeshivah*. He felt that a *yeshivah bachur* had no business reading such a paper, and one who did should be excoriated. "How," he declared, "could someone commit such a dastardly act within the immediate locality of the *yeshivah*? The holy *yeshivah* is a place of refuge for elevating one's *yiraas Shomayim*, Fear of Heaven. How can such *bachurim* be accepted in the *yeshivah*? What are they being taught here?"

The man continued ranting and raving as if these two boys had committed the most reprehensible act of moral turpitude (truthfully, to some, reading a secular newspaper is a moral failing).

The *Rosh Yeshivah* replied, "You are definitely correct. We must address the situation and see to it that it does not occur again. However, let me ask you a question. You have been living in this area for quite some time. Have you ever taken the time to issue a compliment concerning the

extraordinary *hasmadah*, diligence, of our students, who can be found learning until very late at night? Do you ever laud the study of *mussar*, ethical character refinement, that exemplifies our *yeshivah*? What about the dignity and *yiraas Shomayim* displayed by our students? Are you quick to recognize that? No! It is only when you something negative that you come running, quick to condemn and assail. Perhaps, if you will accustom yourself to seeing the good and positive and accentuating it – your criticism will be viewed as constructive – not disparaging.”