

Send forth men, if you please, and let them spy out the Land of Canaan. (13:2)

This *parsha* follows immediately after the incident in the previous *parsha*, in which Miriam's criticism of Moshe *Rabbeinu* led to her punishment. *Rashi* explains that the *meraglim* should have learned the effects of malicious gossip from Miriam. Regrettably, they did not, and they returned to Moshe with vicious slander of *Eretz Yisrael*. It would seem from *Rashi's* explanation that the primary fault of the spies was that they neglected to take heed of what had happened to Miriam. Their error was not their disregard of the general laws of *lashon hora*, slanderous speech, but rather that they did not derive a new lesson from Miriam's incident. What novel *halachah* could they have learned from Miriam's episode?

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that *lashon hora* is one of those *mitzvos* that addresses the relationships between man and his fellow man. Simply put, disparaging words hurt. They damage reputations, break homes, disturb harmony among people and destroy lives. It would, therefore, follow that one who speaks *lashon hora* against earth and stones, which have no emotion and whose "feelings" will not be hurt, would not be held in contempt. The *meraglim* justified their slanderous comments regarding *Eretz Yisrael* because it only consists of earth and stones. They were not causing emotional damage, because the land had no feelings.

Chazal respond that they should have learned a lesson from the incident of Miriam's comments against her brother. *Chazal* view Moshe *Rabbeinu* as the individual who achieved the standard of humility. He thought nothing of himself. He was emotionless regarding his self-image. Therefore, perhaps speaking *lashon hora* about Moshe would not be considered contemptible. He is like a stone - inanimate regarding himself. The *ma'ase*, incident, of Miriam teaches us otherwise. Moshe is a *cheftza d'kedushah*, object of holiness. His entire essence is so suffused with sanctity that to impugn his dignity is to impugn Hashem *Yisborach*. To speak against "*avdi Moshe*," My servant Moshe, the one who was the quintessential servant of Hashem, is to speak against the Almighty!

Eretz Yisrael is also a *cheftza d'kedushah*. It is "G-d's country." While all other lands are included in the concept of "*v'haaretz nosan livnei adam*," "*the land He gave to mankind*," *Eretz Yisrael* goes under the purview of "*v'haShomayim Shomayim l'Hashem*," "*the Heavens belong to Hashem*." Thus, it was Miriam's incident and subsequent punishment that served as an indictment against the *meraglim*. We may add that this idea extends to all those who devote their lives to *Torah* study and dissemination. They give of themselves, so their relationship with *kedushah*, holiness, is much more defined. Therefore, to disparage them is to impugn Hashem. A *talmid chacham*, *Torah* scholar, is the embodiment of *Torah*. To denigrate him is to malign the *Torah*, which is an integral part of his life.

Regarding the *metzora*, one who is afflicted with *tzaraas*, a spiritually induced form of leprosy (for want of a better term), we find that he must be brought, "*v'huva el haKohen*" (*Vayikra 13:2*). Why

does the *Torah* simply not say, "and he will go," (on his own volition) to the *Kohen*? The *Chasidische seforim* explain that, regrettably, people direct much of their *lashon hora* against their spiritual leadership, the individuals who devote their lives to *Torah* and *Klal Yisrael*. By its very nature, the leadership is in the forefront of the battle to maintain the spiritual integrity of our People, on the "cutting edge" of everything that affects the community. Thus, it is conceivable that there will be malcontents who have a problem with authority or find it difficult to accept a leader's rendering of the law. This will lead to *lashon hora* directed at the leader, his organization or institution, and, ultimately, against everything for which he stands. Thus, we understand why the *metzora* will not go on his own to the *Kohen*.