

Send forth for yourself men, and let them spy out the Land of Canaan. (13:2)

Rashi comments concerning the juxtaposition of the sin of the *meraglim*, spies, upon the sin of Miriam, which concluded the previous *parsha*. The *meraglim* should have derived a lesson from Miriam's punishment for speaking about her brother, Moshe *Rabbeinu*. If the *tzadekes*, righteous woman, Miriam, was punished for simply talking about Moshe in a manner that might have a negative connotation, how much more so should they have been mindful of her punishment and not spoken negatively? The question concerning *Rashi's* comparison (Miriam's *lashon hora* to that spoken by the *meraglim*) begs elucidation. *Lashon hora* is evil under any circumstance. When one speaks against a Torah personality, it becomes exponentially worse. When it is the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, *Rabban shel kol Yisrael*, it goes off the charts! How could this be compared to the *meraglim* speaking negatively of the Holy Land, sticks and stones – not people of such exemplary caliber?

Horav Yerachmiel Chasid, Shlita, explains that the *issur*, prohibition, against speaking *lashon hora*, has nothing to do with the hurt one causes the subject of his slander; rather, it is about the *middos ra'os*, negative character traits, which catalyze the slanderer's descent to such a low spiritual plateau. He writes that he heard this principle from *Horav Chaim Shmuelewitz, zl*, who supported it with the following proof. *Klal Yisrael* was punished with *yom l'shanah*, one year of wandering in the Wilderness, for every day that the *meraglim* spent reconnoitering *Eretz Yisrael*. Why is this? Their slander of *Eretz Yisrael* occurred on the day that they returned; why should they be punished for forty days if the sin lasted (at the most) part of one day? This indicates that, for forty days, their deficient character traits festered within them, their psyches became poised toward slander as soon as they arrived. Those forty days set the tone for the *lashon hora* they spoke upon returning home. *Klal Yisrael* listened and accepted the *lashon hora* that was forty days in the making.

It is for this reason that *Horav Hillel Zaks, Shlita*, posits that *lashon hora* spoken for a positive purpose is permissible. (Of course the meaning of "positive" is not arbitrary. It must be verifiable and without question.) This is unlike any other *aveirah*, sin, found in the Torah, in which the end does not justify the means. We do not find a dispensation for *chillul Shabbos*, desecrating *Shabbos*, if it is for a positive purpose. According to the above idea, *lashon hora* for a purpose is not *lashon hora*. The definition of *lashon hora* is slanderous speech which emanates from a person's mouth – speech that is founded and rooted in the speaker's negative character traits. One who speaks for a positive purpose has no character traits which generate his *lashon hora*; rather, the words that exit his mouth are the products of a positive attitude and an exemplary character who seeks only to help, to save, to do something positive for the person against whom he is speaking. There is no envy, no hatred – only love and care. This is not the *lashon hora* that is rooted in evil, but help in the guise of *lashon hora*. Some medicines happen to be bitter, but they work!