



Continuous Caution

Among the numerous topics and halachot in our *parashah* we find the injunction to recall what was done to Miriam while journeying in the desert. (*Devarim* 24:9) Miriam spoke against her brother Moshe and was stricken with *tzara'at* (*Bamidbar* 12:1-16) Thus, the Torah underscores the need to constantly remember the consequences of speaking *loshon hara*.

Rav Broide *zt"l* in *Sam Derech* quotes three different approaches to our verse. Rashi and the Rambam understand this as advice; take a lesson from what happened to Miriam and be careful not to speak negatively of others. The Ramban, however, counts this in the tally of mitzvot; it is a *mitzvat aseh* to recall what Miriam did and how she was punished. We find a third view in *Targum Yonatan*—this is a warning not to suspect people, as we see what happened to Miriam when she suspected her brother of wrongdoing.

The Saba of Slabodka *zt"l* shares a powerful insight following the opinion that this verse indeed conveys a mitzvah. There are six such events that we are enjoined to remember: the Exodus from Egypt, the Sinai experience, Amalek, the Golden Calf, Miriam and Shabbat. How, he asks, can we compare remembering what Miriam did to remembering what Amalek did to the Jewish people! Miriam was a

righteous woman whose sin was barely perceptible and was judged for speaking inappropriately about Moshe Rabbeinu. Amalek was our chief enemy and acted with unbridled cruelty to *Am Yisrael*! Yet, by juxtaposing the two events, the Saba explains, we see how careful we must be in the arena of speech. Each person is created in Hashem's image, and that demands from us extraordinary care when we speak of another. The Torah demonstrates here how careful we must be to honor and preserve the dignity of every person.

Following the approach of *Targum Yonatan*, Rav Kalman Pinsky *zt"l* sees how one can avoid speaking negatively of others. We must first habituate ourselves to view others in a positive light. When we have a “good eye” and we seek to give others the benefit of the doubt, we are less likely to find something negative in someone else. Rav Tzvi Meir Zilverberg *shlit"l* teaches that this is the intention in the verse, “*Mi ha'ish hachafetz chaim ohev yamim ler'ot tov, netzor leshoncha mei'ra u'sefatecha mi'daber mirmah* — Who is the man who desires life, who loves days to see goodness? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceitfully.” (*Tehillim* 34:13-14) If you desire and love life you will develop yourself to see the good in others. Naturally, you will then avoid negative, disparaging or antagonistic speech about others.

Remembering Miriam is a call to remember the sanctity of the human being. It also reminds us to see goodness in others and highlight their positive qualities and features. ■