

# THE POWER OF SPEECH

## Background

The spies came back from their tour of the land and reported that, “It is a place of giants living in fortified cities... It is a land that eats its inhabitants... Any attempt to conquer the land of Canaan will fail...” This led to the Jewish people accepting their word, not trusting in HASHEM, and ultimately, it caused the death of that entire generation in the desert.

The Medrash is teaching us that had these spies acted appropriately, they would have seen what happened to Miriam, learned a lesson from her, and not spoken their disparaging report about the land of Israel.

## Questions

There is no concept of *lashon hara* about land. By definition, *lashon hara* means not speaking words that damage a person's name, property, or feelings. But land is an inanimate object.

Even if there was a concept of *lashon hara* about land, we know that one is allowed to speak *lashon hara* for a good purpose. According to what the spies were thinking, this was for a good cause: to save the Jewish people from imminent destruction. If anything, their sin was a lack of faith in HASHEM. So how could paying more careful attention to the punishment for *lashon hara* stop them, when according to the laws governing *lashon hara*, they would be allowed to say what they did in their report?

### ספר במדבר פרק יג

(ב) שְׁלַח לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיְתְּרוּ  
אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי  
נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ אֶחָד  
אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִטָּה אֲבֹתָיו  
תִּשְׁלַחוּ כָּל נָשִׂיא בְהֵם:

*Send for you men and let them spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Jewish People. One man for each tribe of his father's you should send, each one a prince amongst them.*

### רש"י על במדבר פרק יג פסוק ב

(ב) שְׁלַח לְךָ אַנְשִׁים -  
(במדבר רבה) למה  
נסמכה פרשת מרגלים  
לפ' מרים לפי שלקתה  
על עסקי דבה שדברה  
באחיה ורשעים הללו ראו  
ולא לקחו מוסר

*Send for you - Why was the episode of the spies put close to the incident of Miriam? Because she was punished for the derogatory speech she said about her brother, and these wicked people saw but didn't learn from it.*