



# Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

IN THE HEART OF THE OLD CITY OF JERUSALEM

## **Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner on...**

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18 Kislev 5769

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### Emergency Treatment

[Be-Ahavah U-B-Emunah – Parashat Vayishlach 5769 – Translated by Rafael Blumberg]

Many Jews have the daily custom of reciting six specific verses after morning services (Sefer Charedim, Chapter 4). One of them is, “Remember what Hashem your G-d did to Miriam” (Deuteronomy 24:9). This refers to when Miriam was punished for speaking negatively to Aharon about Moshe’s separation from his wife (Rashi).

Question #1: Surely Miriam was speaking the truth! Didn’t Moshe in fact separate from his wife?

Answer: That approach is a mistake. Lashon Hara, negative speech, even if true, is forbidden. If it is false, it is called “Motzi Shem Ra”, libel, which is even more severe.

Question #2: And how about the fact that Miriam didn’t speak publicly, but only told one person?

Answer: That involves a second fallacy. Even to tell just one person is forbidden. If one tells a lot of people, the sin is multiplied in accordance with the number of listeners.

Question #3: And what about the fact that she was talking to Aharon, a holy man who knew how to guard his tongue?

Answer: That involves a third mistake. One is forbidden to tell even a righteous man, let alone a sinner who will spread the gossip.

Question #4: And how about Aharon’s being part of the family?

Answer: There's a fourth fallacy. One cannot even tell family, let alone hanging out the dirty laundry.

Question #5: But didn't Miriam love Moshe like her own self? Wasn't his very birth due to her having convinced her parents to remarry, and didn't he remain alive because she saved him in the river?

Answer: That's a fifth mistake. Even if someone owes you a lot, that gives you no right to speak evil of him.

Question #6: But how could Miriam know that G-d had commanded Moshe not to return to his wife? After all, both Miriam and Aharon were prophets and after the Revelation, G-d commanded all of Israel and them themselves, "Return to your tents" (Devarim 5:26). How could Miriam know that by contrast, G-d had commanded Moshe, "You stay here with Me" (verse 27)?

Answer: A sixth mistake. When one doesn't know something, he shouldn't talk as though he does know. Rather, first he should investigate and ask questions. Indeed, Moshe was not like all the other prophets. In Bemidbar 12:6-7, G-d explains how all the other prophets operated, and then He concludes, "My servant Moshe is not that way." The Rambam (Guide to the Perplexed, 2:35) explains that Moshe was not actually a prophet but much loftier. Yet we lack the words in human language to describe what he was, we therefore also refer to him as a prophet. Miriam and Aharon viewed Moshe from an exalted vantage point, not the vantage point of regular people but from that of prophets, and this led to Lashon Hara.

Question #7: Miriam was a holy, meritorious woman. Why was she punished for a small sin?

Answer: This involves a seventh mistake. Even a holy person is forbidden to speak Lashon Hara. It also involves another mistake: Lashon Hara is not a small sin.

Question #8: But Moshe was very humble and he didn't take it to heart, as it says, "Moshe, however, was very humble, more so than any man on the face of the earth" (Bemidbar 12:3).

Answer: Here is the eighth mistake. One is even forbidden to speak Lashon Hara against a humble person who forgives you. It is true that Moshe forgave, but G-d did not. (see Rambam, Hilchot Tum'at Tzora'at 16:10; Ramban on Bemidbar 12:3, and Ramban in Sefer HaMitzvot 7).

If so, then a question still remains: How can we solve the problem? Should we remain silent when we see things that seem to us improper?

The answer is: Certainly not. Yet one should speak to the person himself. One should not speak about him, but to him. Had Miriam asked Moshe directly, he would have immediately explained matters to her and the episode would never have been revealed. There are obviously some people to whom it is impossible to talk, and there are others who do not listen. But Moshe was not that way. He was humble. He was not protected by servants and secretaries. Rather, anyone could approach him, let alone his sister.

Dear reader, if you don't know everything written above, then you have a serious problem, and you require emergency treatment. You should immediately start studying the works "Chafetz Chaim" and "Shemirat HaLashon". The first one will teach you the laws, and the second one will build up your personality making you incapable of speaking Lashon Hara. You will naturally be disgusted and averse to speaking it. One should not just learn these works, but one should review them many times. In the meantime, jump into the fast lane, by following the Talmudic rule: "What is hateful to you, do not do to others." And just as you do not like it when others speak about you, do not speak about others either. While this does not solve all the problems, it does solve many of them. We will then be the living fulfillment of, "Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking falsehood. Shun evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it" (Tehillim 34:14-15).