

## Opening One's Eyes

In this week's *Torah* portion *Sh'lach*, we encounter the episode of the spies, 12 leaders of our people who were sent on a mission to explore and examine the land of Israel. Ten of the 12 spies returned with a negative report. These spies rallied the people to accept their report, and, consequently, the Jewish people were punished and could not enter the land of Israel for 40 years.

Last week's *Torah* portion concludes with the story of Miriam speaking disparagingly about her brother *Moshe*, and as a result of her uncomplimentary words, was stricken with *tzoraas* (a skin ailment). She had to be quarantined for seven days creating a delay in the Jewish people's traveling schedule.

*Rashi* comments that these two episodes appear in this order for a reason. He states that our 12 leaders should have learned from Miriam's experience. However, a natural question arises with this statement. How are these episodes alike since Miriam spoke about a person while the spies spoke about the land. At first glance, one could say that these two situations are different, but upon further investigation one can see a common thread. Both parties' descriptions were negative.

From these two incidents, the *Torah* teaches us a lifelong lesson. Negative speech is unacceptable. It does not make a difference who or what the recipient is. If you are speaking harmfully about someone or something that is *loshon hora* (evil speech). Our character needs to be more principled. *Loshon hora* is not only about how it affects the person who is being spoken about but more so on how it affects the speaker. We need to always have a positive outlook on everything in life. Speaking positively in all situations about people, places and things is an important goal to achieve.