



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

The Missed Lesson from Miram

Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Shelach | Sichah 1

The Context:

Shelach tells the narrative of the errant spies. It continues chronologically from the end of last week's *parsha*, *Beha'alotcha*, which tells of Miriam speaking against Moshe, and her subsequent punishment.

The Rashi:

In his first comment on *Shelach* (*Bamidbar* 13:2), Rashi asks why these two stories are placed together:

Send for yourself men — Why is the section dealing with the spies juxtaposed with the section dealing with Miriam? Because she was punished over matters of slander, for speaking against her brother; these wicked people witnessed this, but did not learn their lesson. (*Midrash Tanchuma*, "*Shelach*," sec. 5)

The Question:

If the Torah presents these two events in chronological order, why is the placement of the narrative of the spies so difficult as to compel Rashi to offer an explanation?

The Explanation:

A reader might assume that the Torah placed the narrative of Miriam next to that of the spies in order to inform us that her sin was as grievous as that of the spies.

To forestall this misunderstanding, the Torah could have separated these stories from each other. Thus, Rashi asks why these stories are juxtaposed.

His explanation is that the Torah juxtaposes these narratives in order to amplify the sin of the spies: “They witnessed, but did not learn their lesson.”

Meaning, they should have perceived the negativity of Miriam's speech, but they did not, making their sin even graver. What was it that they saw but did not take to heart?

What Went Wrong?

In looking at Miriam's speech, it becomes clear that she did not say anything false or even derogatory about Moshe. In Rashi's words, “She was punished over matters (alternatively, the “preoccupation” or “business”) of slander.” It was her loquaciousness, the intensive “business” of gossip, that led her to judge Moshe unfairly.

Similarly, the spies did not tell lies about Eretz Yisrael. They spoke in detail, however, about its negative qualities. After seeing how Miriam's unrestrained speech led to sin, they should have been aware of the pitfalls of speaking without restraint.