

Parshat Tazria

The Responsibility of the Metzora

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Most of Parshat Tazria deals with the **metzora**, one inflicted with a certain skin disease similar to leprosy. Chazal (Arachin 15b) tell us that one of the many reasons *nega'im* come is because of *lashon hara*. They derive this from the pasuk: "He who slanders his neighbor in secret, him I will cut down (*atzmit*)."
(Tehillim 101:5) The word '*atzmit*' is a form of '*tzemitut*,' which Onkelos translates as '*chalutin*.' This refers to a '*metzora muchlat*,' one whom the kohen has decided is inflicted with definitive *tzara'at*.

The Gemara goes on to describe all the terrible things that happen when one slanders, and the grave nature of what a person who speaks *lashon hara* can be compared to. *Tzara'at* may single one out as a slanderer, but more importantly, it requires him to be completely isolated from his people. Why is this so? What connection is there between slander and separation? To answer this one must first understand the importance of the people from whom he is being separated.

Many view *achdut*, or unity, as a warm fuzzy feeling of "togetherness." However, reality is that being unified creates a tremendous and everlasting **responsibility** to everyone else. A similar term for this is *arvut* (mutual responsibility). The Gemara (Sanhedrin 43b) quotes the pasuk: "The hidden [sins] are for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed ones are for us and our children forever." (Devarim 29:28) Chazal learn from the dots on top of some of the words this idea of, "All Jews are mutually responsible one for another." After crossing over the Jordan River all Jews were thereafter punished for everyone else's sins. From here we can see that one who slanders is speaking against those that he is responsible for, and negating his responsibility!

Rav Hirsch comments that according to Chazal *tzara'at* is not just a bodily disease, but also a spiritual disease. When a person slanders another he is punished with separation because his sin was an act directed against unity. His words caused disruption in the unity of Klal Yisrael. Therefore, he must take a "time out" in complete isolation to fully comprehend that his words, in essence, have isolated others.

However, because of the responsibility factor, the isolation works both ways. Not only the *metzora* feels that isolation; the rest of the people also sense the isolation from him. With everyone in some form of separation, hopefully they will all be able to see and understand the cause of the split, and recognize the importance and meaning of their unity.