

**And the person with tzaraas in whom there is the affliction... he is to call out: “Contaminated, contaminated...” “He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (13:45,46)**

*Horav Yehoshua Shklar, Shlita*, writes that he heard from one of the contemporary *Mashgichim* an explanation why *lashon hora* is different than all other sins. When a person sins, it affects a certain part of his body. When a person slanders his fellowman, regardless of the nature of the slander, it affects the entire human being. The entire subject of the *lashon hora* has been transformed, diminished by the slander. For instance, if one were to allege that an individual was guilty of a sin – ie, theft, moral turpitude, ethical impairment – it is not just one specific point about this person which is affected. The entire individual has been transformed. He is a thief! A liar! A scoundrel! He is no longer the same person.

Thus, one who speaks *lashon hora* is punished in an external manner. He is isolated from everyone – even other sinners. Since, with his words, he has transformed a person, he, too, must be transformed through isolation which leads to introspection, the catalyst for *teshuvah*, repentance.

Perhaps we must take this idea a step further. A skin disease begins with a slight spot, a discoloration, a mole. For all intents and purposes, to the spectator it is nothing more than an isolated external disfigurement. Sadly, we know that this is not always true. The mole may be an external indication of a serious disease. It appears to be an isolated mole, but it is the first sign of what could be a disease, that, if left unchecked, can prove fatal. *Tzaraas* begins with a skin discoloration which bespeaks a dramatic change in a previously healthy person. He is now a (spiritual) leper. That little spot declares that the person you knew is no longer the same person. He is gravely ill. All because of one spot. Just like *lashon hora*; one word destroys an entire person. The slanderer asks: “What did I do?” We reply: “You destroyed a person.” One little mole indicates a sudden and extreme transformation.

This might be the reason the slanderer is punished with *tzaraas*. It teaches him that one little external disfigurement can be devastating – just as one harmful slander can destroy an individual. There is nothing small or innocuous about slander, as there is nothing insignificant about a skin discoloration. It could be deadly.