

"And the person with tzaraas... his garments shall be torn, the hair of his head shall be unshorn ... he is to call out 'contaminated, contaminated'... He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp." (13:45,46)

We must endeavor to understand the rationale behind the *metzora's* unusual punishment. Why is the *Torah* so demanding in its insistence that he be excommunicated from the community--punished in a harsher manner than any other individual who has become *tameh*, spiritually unclean ? Indeed, he may not be in the presence of any other person who is also *tameh*. The requirement to wear torn clothes and cry out *tameh, tameh*, also seems to be out of character with other *tema'im*.

The *Baalei Mussar* explain this issue with a study in human behavior. The *metzora* is a "*motzi ra*," he seeks to ferret out and divulge every human failing he can find in people. If a person is comprised of ninety-nine percent virtue and one percent which is less than virtuous, the *metzora* will find that deficiency and publicly "expound" upon it. Conversely, if the slanderer himself possesses one iota of decency, he will exploit that simple virtue to no end. This reflects basic human nature. We tend to have one set of rules when the "honoree" is ourselves and a completely different one when the subject is someone else.

Chazal teach us that man's focus in life should be the converse: Seek out the good in others while simultaneously demand high standards of oneself. This is the essence of a *ben Torah*. *ufz ;fk ostv kf ,t is huv*, "Judge every man favorably," a dictum championed by *Chazal* is more than good advice; it is a requisite for Jewish behavior. It is not considered an extreme, but is the required Jewish norm to find the inherent good in everyone. One who doesn't follow this orientation not only is unable to get along with other people, but will consequently alienate himself from the *derech Hashem*.

Thus, it is apparent that one who finds fault and slanders others will gain nothing from a punishment which permits him to be associated with others. He must be secluded from society, made to wear torn clothes and publicize his unclean state. In his state of forced seclusion, the only person who he is now able to disgrace is himself. This extreme condition might invoke within him feelings of regret and inspire him to see the good in others, while simultaneously scrutinizing his own behavior.