

This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing. (14:2)

The phenomenon of the *negaim*, plagues, is a clear example of the cause and effect relationship between sin and punishment. Good deeds effect reward, and evil deeds bring retribution. Indeed, Chazal emphatically state that *lashon hora*, slanderous speech, directly causes *tzaraas*, leprosy. The *metzora* is relegated to living alone, away from people, as penance for his sins. He caused contention and rifts between people; therefore, he is separated from the community. Let him experience for himself the effect of his disparaging words. Let him see the hurt he has caused, the divisiveness and strife that his words have brought upon others.

The *Torah* implores us to "*remember what Hashem did to Miriam on the way from Egypt.*" This is not simply good advice. According to the *Ramban*, in performing this *mitzvah* one recalls more than a unique historical experience. This commandment is an admonishment to acknowledge orally and to contemplate the tragic effect of *lashon hora*.

In the *Talmud Arachin 15b*, Chazal compare the sin of *lashon hora* to the three cardinal sins: murder, adultery and idol worship. They encourage us to give up our lives rather than transgress these sins. This represents but a shadow of the travesty of *lashon hora*.

Yirmiyahu *ha'navi* says: (9:7) "*Their tongue is a deadly arrow, it speaks deceit.*" Chazal infer from the *navi's* words that the tongue's effect is like that of an arrow. **Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita**, explains the analogy in the following manner: First, an arrow can cause damage even from a distance. Similarly, the effect of *lashon hora* is far-reaching and long-lasting. It can hurt from even farther and the effects can last even longer than that of an arrow. Second, because the arrow is shot from afar, the hunter and his hapless victim never come face to face. The sting of *lashon hora* disparages without even permitting the victim the opportunity to respond to the allegations leveled against him. At least in the case of arrows, one can shoot back! Third, and probably the most compelling, just as one loses control over the arrow the instant he releases the bow, so does one lose control over the words he utters once they leave his mouth. One cannot "retract" his slander; the damage is immediate and uncontrollable. People do not seem to forget *lashon hora*. Slander has the uncanny ability to germinate and grow. Indeed, with time, people tend to be creative in interpreting the slander. Is it any wonder that Hashem says regarding the *baal lashon hora*, "I and he cannot live together in the world."