

And I will place a tzaraas affliction upon the house in the land of your possession. (14:34)

Parashas Tazria/Metzora describe the laws of *tzaraas*, a form of spiritual leprosy, that struck a person as a result of deficient, slanderous, maligning speech. Obviously, deficient speech is rooted in a deficient character. *Chazal* teach that prior to *tzaraas* being afflicted on one's body, Hashem conveys subtle messages, such as plagues appearing on his clothing or on the walls of his home. It is only after the slanderer has chosen to ignore His messages that the plagues appear on his body. It would, thus, make sense that the Torah would teach the laws of *tzaraas* affecting all three locations in one *parsha*, followed by the laws of purification and cure from *tzaraas* in the next. Surprisingly, the laws of *tzaraas* on clothing and the body are in one *parsha*, followed by the details of the purification service in the next *parsha*, with the anomaly being that *tzaraas* of the walls of the home are in the conclusion after the preceding laws of purification. In other words, the laws concerning *tzaraas* of the home stand alone in a separate category, isolated from the other two. What is different about this form of spiritual leprosy? Furthermore, the *halachah* states that the laws of *tzaraas* of the house apply only in *Eretz Yisrael* – not in the diaspora. If the plague of spiritual leprosy is to serve as a deterrent from speaking *lashon hora*, it should be in effect in the diaspora as well. How are we to reconcile this?

In "Forever His Students" by Rabbi Baruch Leff, a collection of Torah thoughts and commentary by *Horav Yaakov Weinberg, zl*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that one question actually answers the other. Leprosy must appear on the individual or on something which belongs to him. A Jew has no real home outside of *Eretz Yisrael*. Our clothes belong to us, as do our bodies (sort of), but we do not truly possess our homes outside of the Holy Land. We live in exile on a temporary basis, hoping for the clarion call that will herald the advent of *Moshiach*. Only that which is truly ours can be afflicted with *tzaraas*. Therefore, the laws of *tzaraas* of the house are distinct, isolated from the rest. Likewise, they are only valid in *Eretz Yisrael*, because that is our true home.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* adds that Hashem's designation of one's body, clothing and home as the venue in which the *tzaraas* affliction would appear, was far from arbitrary. The disease could easily have affected our kitchen utensils, dishes, cars, animals, etc. Apparently, a significant relationship exists between slander/gossip/evil speech and leprosy/plagues in general, and the body, the home, the clothing, in particular. As in all punishments, it is *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure.

Tzaraas on the body invades one's privacy and compels him to become humiliated in public – an appropriate punishment for one who has invaded his fellow's private life and has washed his dirty linen in public. What the sinner's gossip wrought on the life of his victim, he receives in payback. Likewise, clothing grants a person a semblance of dignity and privacy (of course, this is true only if he/she dresses appropriately as befitting a dignified, modest person, not one who declares his/her lack of self-esteem for the world to see). This dignity was violated by the slanderer when he spoke

lashon hora about his victim. Last, we are plagued on the walls of our home as punishment for our slander, which stripped our victim of the privacy and comfort of his home. In some instances, the victim has been so deeply humiliated that he feels compelled to relocate. Certainly, he no longer feels as safe and relaxed in his home as he once did before. The paranoia that envelops him and follows him wherever he goes does not diminish even in what used to be the safety of his home.

As a result, the slanderer has stripped the dignity and privacy from the true possessions of the victim: his body, his clothing – but not his home in the diaspora, because it is not his true possession. Under such circumstances the consequence, i.e. leprosy, does not fit the sin. This man's home is not "his" home. Thus, *middah k'neged middah* does not apply. He will, nonetheless, receive his due punishment, but it will not be visible on his home's walls.