

“He must dwell in solitude, his dwelling shall be outside of the camp.” (13:46)

One would think that enough has been said and written about lashon hara, slanderous speech. Everyone knows what it is, the seriousness of this sin and the tragic effect it has on those involved. Yet, this does not seem to prevent the baal lashon hara, slanderer, from plying his trade. Is there anything left to be said that might have an effect on the baal lashon hara? There might be.

As punishment for the baal lashon hara's evil words, he is sent away from the community to live in solitude until that day that his tzaraas, spiritually inflicted leprosy, is gone. He may now prepare for re-entry. What does living alone do for the metzora and how does it change his outlook on slanderous speech?

When we ponder the mindset of one who speaks lashon hara, we discover a characteristic of his personality that for some is probably the primary factor that motivates them to disparage others. They think they endear themselves to people when they are the primary source of information. They feel that people will want to engage them in conversation because they will provide them with something interesting to talk about. Who is not curious to hear juicy gossip about others? He wants to be the medium for disseminating this information, thereby providing for himself a constant following of “friends.”

To a certain extent and for a short term, he is probably correct. People enjoy, and some even thrive on gossip about others. Does a relationship, however, based upon smut, gossip and disparaging others really endure? Does anybody with a drop of intelligence in his head want such a person for a friend? True, we might choose to listen because that is a human shortcoming; but who really wants to call such a person a friend? He is dangerous. He is destructive. He is sick. He may be the delight of the evening, but he is never someone we choose to invite to our home or with whom we associate on a regular basis.

People with a modicum of refinement would do well to distance themselves from the slanderer. Indeed, anyone who keeps company with a baal lashon hara is probably as degenerate as he. In the end, the slanderer will be left alone, without friends. No one wants to be a friend with someone who will stab him in the back the next day. The metzora's excommunication from the community is an appropriate and fitting punishment. Maybe, by being alone, he will come to realize the true effect of his evil tongue.