

## **He shall dwell in isolation; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (13:46)**

The *metzora* receives retribution commensurate with his nefarious deeds. He has spread rumors, slandered people, broken up friendships, and caused the destruction of families. It is, therefore, appropriate that he have the "opportunity" to feel some of the pain of solitude himself. Let him see how it feels to be alone, away from friends and family, a pariah whose seclusion is self-inflicted. He is being compensated for what he has done to others. Sometimes it is necessary for an individual to experience the hurt that he has caused others before he is motivated to expiate his sin.

We can infer another message from the *metzora*'s imposed seclusion. One who speaks *lashon hora* foolishly thinks that he endears himself to others. After all, every time he is able to come up with a choice piece of gossip, he attracts a crowd of avid listeners. What he does not realize is that after all has been said and done, no one really wants the slanderer as a friend. Can he be trusted? No! He lives for attention, regardless of the expense to others. Who knows when they will be on his list? The slanderer does not really have friends; on the contrary, he has followers who listen to his "*shmutz*." Indeed, the *metzora*'s friends are as simple-minded as he. When the *metzora* is sent into seclusion, he has the opportunity to think. We hope that the stark realization of isolation will awaken him to the fact that his slanderous tongue has actually caused his seclusion from society.

The *Yalkut Shimoni* cites a dispute between Rabbi Yochanan and Resh Lakish concerning the distance one must maintain from the *metzora*. Rabbi Yochanan says that four *amos*, cubits, on the eastern side is sufficient, while Resh Lakish contends that one must stay away up to one hundred *amos*. *Chazal* explain that in truth they are not disagreeing. The difference lies in whether or not the wind is blowing. If there is no wind, then four *amos* is sufficient. If there is a wind, one hundred *amos* is required. *Chazal* add that Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi would not even enter the street on which the *metzoraim* lived. At first we may conclude that *Chazal* were concerned with the contagious nature of this disease. If so, what is the meaning of distancing oneself from the *mizrach*, eastern side, of the *metzora*? Does one side have a greater proclivity for spreading the disease than the other? Also, why were Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi wary of entering the street on which the *metzoraim* lived? Were they more concerned than their *rebbeim*, who only distanced themselves a few *amos*?

**Horav A. Y. Kilav, Shlita**, remarks that the dispute between the *Tannaim* is not simply in reference to geographical distance. A relationship with a *metzora* can have an adverse spiritual effect upon a person. Certainly the *metzora* is bitter and full of criticism against the Al-mighty. If he had accepted his punishment and repented, his disease would have disappeared. One should stay away from a person whose sin has so permeated his character that it is reflected in leprous lesions throughout his body. He espouses venom and slander, spewing hatred and contention wherever he goes. We must distance ourselves from his *mizrach*, eastern side. This is a metaphor for the essential source of sin--the mouth and the mind.

The blowing wind is an analogy for the *metzora's* mouth. If he is finally still, if he has "shut-down" the destructive force that issues forth *lashon hora*--his mouth, if the wind is not blowing, then one must only distance himself four *amos*. If the *metzora* has, regrettably, not learned his lesson, if he continues to disparage others, spreading his criticism and complaints, then one must distance himself up to one hundred *amos*. Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi represented the next generation. They did not have the self-confidence to withstand the harmful influence of the slanderers. Consequently, they prohibited entering the neighborhood in which the *metzoraim* lived. Indeed, who can assess the pernicious influence of *lashon hora* better than its victim?