

## If a tzaraas affliction will be in a person, he shall be brought to the Kohen. (13:9)

The *Talmud Bava Metzia* (59a) relates that David *Hamelech* bemoaned to Hashem that, following the incident with Bas Sheva, certain men were humiliating him. He added, “Even when they are engaged in (studying) *Negaim* (*Mishnayos* discussing various plagues) and *Ohalos* (*Mishnayos* dealing with *tumah*, ritual contamination, in a closed area such as a tent), they come to me and ask, ‘David, what form of execution does *bais din* give to one who has an immoral liaison with a married woman?’” They were alluding to David’s relationship with Bas Sheva which was legally permissible, but this did not prevent their tongues from wagging.

This outrage took place during David’s *shiur*, *halachic* lecture. One person (probably egged on by others) had the temerity to ask a question which was obviously an allusion to David *Hamelech*. The king did not flinch. He responded, “The punishment for one who cohabits with a married woman is *chenek*, death by choking. However, the punishment for one who embarrasses another Jew in public is losing his portion in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come.” The implication was clear: “You might think that I acted inappropriately. Even if it were true – which it was not – your sin of humiliating me in public carries a much greater punishment.”

The question that requires elucidation is why David chose *Negaim* and *Ohalos* over any other difficult (requiring serious concentration) *sugya*, topic, in the *Talmud*, to emphasize how such men can interrupt what seems to be serious learning to humiliate him.

*Likutei Shoshanim* (cited by *Peninei Kedem*) explains that *negaim*, various plagues, are Heaven sent to punish one who speaks *lashon hora*, slander. Thus, David intimated, “Even when they are engaged in *Negaim* – they know that *lashon hora* catalyzes *negaim*. This still did not prevent them from slandering me publicly. Furthermore, although they are studying the laws of *ohalos*, a tent which is a canopy over a dead body, thus bringing to mind the *yom ha’missah*, day of death (when we will all have to give a reckoning), these wicked men had no problem slandering me.”

We wonder what provoked such scholars to act so despicably, to insult in the lowest manner, the *Melech Yisrael* – whom Hashem had chosen to be His anointed one. Was it jealousy – or righteous indignation? Was it *frumkeit* – or fragile egos? Perhaps they heard members of their congregations murmuring, and, in order to satisfy the people, they were willing to transgress and spill blood. I ask this because the problem has not disappeared. We still have weak, spineless leadership holding positions of power, who, when their *baalei batim* say “Jump,” ask, “How high?” All this is carried out at the expense of others and their families. If David *Hamelech* complained about this outrageous behavior, what should we say?