

A Taste of Your Own Medicine

Parashat Tazria – Rabbi Jay Weinstein

Our parasha deals with the intricate laws of tzara'at (loosely translated as leprosy). Although the Torah itself does not tell us the reason why one is punished with tzara'at, our Rabbis teach us that it is due to *lashon hara*, or speaking evil of someone. What is the connection between the two? Usually, we have a principal of "*midah k'neged midah*" that the punishment fits the crime. If so, we must find a connection between the sin or *lashon hara* and the punishment of one's body being stricken with boils.

To solve our problem, we have to investigate what the prohibition of *lashon hara* is all about. In order for speech to constitute *lashon hara* it must be true. In other words, if I say negative words about someone and it's not true than this is not *lashon hara* (please note, this is still forbidden under different prohibitions!!) So, if what I say about my friend is true, what's the problem?

It's not about the words but rather about the context. For example, if I see my friend speeding down the street and I say to my neighbor "so-and-so drives like a maniac," I'm telling only a fraction of the story. Does he always drive like that? How many accidents has he gotten into in his life? Instead of giving a full description of his driving habits, I take one detail that I saw and categorize him as a driving maniac! Although that detail is true, he did drive dangerously for 5 minutes, I negate to tell how he drives the other 99% of the time. *Lashon hara* is about focusing on one bad detail without putting it in its proper context and not recognizing the total picture of a person's life.

Unfortunately, when one has a physical disability, even if 99% of their body is working well, human nature is to focus on that one negative aspect. The person who has *tzara'at* now walks around with a boil on their body. Anyone who encounters this individual will automatically focus in on that faulty part. Even though the majority of the body looks and functions normally, human nature is to focus on the disability.

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Now, we can understand why someone who speaks *lashon hara* is stricken with *tzara'at*. The individual who decided to focus on a negative detail about his friend and speak *lashon hara* about him (even though it's true) is now put in a situation where people focus in on his negative quality, mainly the *tzara'at* on his body. What we should strive for is the exact opposite. The lesson of *tzara'at* is to focus on the positive qualities of every individual.

Shabbat Shalom!



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