**Metzora Shabbos Hagadol 5776: What Do You Think?**

By Rabbi Joshua (thoughtfully known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

Tzora'as, whose laws are dealt with in Parshas Metzora, is a skin disease that generates a high degree of impurity, and necessitates the person afflicted with it staying outside of the camp, and bringing certain sacrifices after the affliction clears. The Talmud lists a number of sins for which this affliction is given as a punishment, but the most prominent among them is the sin of lashon hora, or evil speech. The word metzora - often (but incorrectly - editor) rendered as a leper - is taken by the rabbis to hint to this, being read as motzi ra, or giving out evil. As Rabbi Menachem Leibtag points out, however, it is interesting that in the book of Vayikra, there is, beyond this one hint, no explanation given for the affliction of tzora'as. We do find, in Parshas Shemos, that Moshe's hand became leprous when he disparaged the Jewish people when talking to God, and in Parshas Ki Seitzei, Miriam is punished with tzora'as for speaking critically of Moshe. But in the parshiyos in Vayikra that discuss these laws, nothing is said about the reason for it being brought upon him. Why is this so?

Rabbi Leibtag suggests that that the Torah wishes to leave it up to the afflicted person himself to go through a period of self-introspection, and figure out for himself why he had been distanced from the community. This introspection will hopefully lead him to a realization that his divisive form of speech is what caused his present condition, suffering with a condition that separates him from the community. The process of purification provides him with a means to ease himself back into the community, participating in it in the future in a more positive way.

I would add to Rabbi Leibtag's explanation that the reason for the Torah leaving it up to the metzora to figure out for himself what he did wrong is that lashon hora is usually spoken precisely because the person did not think before he spoke. We often find ourselves saying things on impulse that we later regret. If we would think for a moment before speaking, and consider who we are speaking to, and what the consequences of we are about to say might be, we would be more circumspect in what we actually say. We have mentioned in the past that Rav Pam, zt"l, did not like people to use the expression 'whatchamacallit,' because it indicated that the person using it was speaking without thinking. The metzora, through his self-introspection, must come to the realization that he had not, in the past, taken this precaution, and in order to rejoin the community in an effective way, he must, in the future, think before he speaks.