

PARASHAT METZORA- 2014, 5774
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In parashat Ki Teitzei (Devarim 24:8) the Torah writes “*Hishameir Lecha*” *guard yourself against the plague of Tzara’at....*” and immediately in the next pasuk the Torah commands (24:9) “*Zachor-remember that which HaShem did to Miriam on the road at the time you went out of Mitzrayim*”. The juxtaposition of the two verses leads our Chazal to conclude (Gemara Arachin 15b) that the plague of Tzara’at comes as a punishment for Lashon Hara. Miriam spoke “Lashon HaRa” about her brother Moshe and she was stricken with Tzara’at for seven days.

The Torah further tells us that as a result, Miriam was sent outside the camp for the duration of her “tzara’at. Because of this the entire camp waited for her recovery and did not travel for the next seven days. No one moved forward, everyone waited for Miriam, (Bamidbar 12:1-16). Why did they wait for her? Why couldn’t they have moved on and force her to catch up with them at a later date? The entire Jewish nation waited for Miriam as a “reward” for her having waited for her brother Moshe, when his basket was placed in the Nile River (Shemot 2:4). So now, the Jewish people waited for her (Rashi) .

I truly wonder how happy Miriam was with this “reward”. Perhaps if she had the option she may have preferred that the Jewish people continue traveling without her, with the intent on catching up with them later. For by waiting for her most likely people would be asking one another, “Why aren’t we moving?” The answer would be “It’s all Miriam’s fault, because she spoke Lashon Hara about her brother”. What kind of “reward” is this for her?

Rambam, in Hilchot Tumat Tzara’at 16:10 addresses this question, and claims that we have to go a step further. After the people realize that the standstill was due to Miriam’s talking about her brother they will then come to the conclusion- “if that is the punishment for Miriam, who loved her brother dearly, and who risked her life to save him from the Nile, how much more severe will our punishment be if we speak real Lashon Hara? For she didn’t really speak Lashon HaRa about Moshe, all she said was “why did you have to separate from your wife where as we, who are also Nevi’im (Prophets) did not do so?”

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Her question to Moshe was a “mistake”, she didn’t realize that Moshe was not just another Navi, he was singularly the greatest Navi, and none could compare to him. That was her mistake- but it wasn’t Lashon Hara, nevertheless-she was punished. So now people began to tremble and fear how severe this sin could be, and perhaps refrain from Lashon Hara. So Miriam’s seven day seclusion may have been a deterrent for Lashon HaRa among the masses. That was her “reward”!

We can’t control others from speaking Lashon Hara- but we COULD deter them by simply refusing to listen to them! That is our message and our goal