

# SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



## Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 22

*Tazria, Sicha 2*

### Skin Deep:

Introducing the laws of tzaraas, the Torah says “when an adam/man has a lesion on the skin of his flesh...” (Vayikra 13:2) The noun adam refers to a human being who is refined and elevated. How does a person on this level become inflicted with tzaraas? The Alter Rebbe explains that the miraculous illness which appears on the skin calls attention to a subtle trace of negativity which remains in the outermost layers of the person’s soul. Only a person who has refined their inner negativity is struck with tzaraas as a Divine miracle illuminating for them the final frontier of their spiritual work.

### The Question:

The Sages teach that tzaraas is punishment for lashon hara, evil speech. Rambam writes that lashon hara is equivalent to the three cardinal sins, and a person who speaks is considered to have denied G-d’s existence. (Hilchos Deos 7:3) How does this fit with the Alter Rebbe’s depiction of a lofty person

who has refined all but the most external elements of his soul?

### The Explanation:

In the laws of tzaraas Rambam describes the sin of lashon hara differently. Instead of identifying it with heresy and murder, as he does in the laws of character (cited above), he places it in the general category of negative speech which can eventually lead to denying G-d. In a long passage, Rambam describes the slippery slope a person embarks on if they engage in foolish and idle talk, ending with heresy.

It follows that there are two categories of lashon hara:

1) the intentional act of negative speech. This is evidence of internal evil within the person, and it inflicts real harm on the subject of the speech. This is the type of negative speech discussed in the Laws of Character, which is described in the worst terms.

2) a conversation which unintentionally paints someone in a negative light, even if that was not the speaker’s intention. This is not evidence of some internal rot of the speaker, but it does show that their

garments of expression, their speech, is not sufficiently refined. This kind of careless speech can become dangerous if left unchecked. And this, the Rambam is saying, is the dimension of lashon hara which invites tzaraas.

Thus, the Rambam's description of negative speech in the context of tzaraas does concord with the Alter Rebbe's explanation — they both speak of someone whose garment of speech is tainted, but not someone who maliciously seeks to harm others with his words. This is why Rambam uses Miriam as an example of someone struck with tzaraas, because Miriam was a righteous woman who, in conversation, said something that could be interpreted

negatively, even though she did not intent it in that way, nor did Moshe, the subject, perceive it that way.

### **A Deeper Dimension:**

This explains why only a Kohen can purify a person struck with tzaraas. The final traces of negativity which is expressed in the external "skin" of a person stems from the deep recesses of the soul which most people don't have access to. The Kohen represents G-d's attribute of kindness which extends to the furthest depths of reality. But in order to actualize this kindness, the Kohen must speak the words "pure," bringing G-d's infinite kindness to purify even the hidden negativity of the person afflicted with tzaraas.

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