

THE POWER TO REPAIR

by Rabbi Label Lam

And the person with the "tzaraas" in whom there is the affliction - his garments shall be torn, the hair of his head shall be shaved, and he should cover himself up to his lips; He is to call out, "Contaminated-Contaminated!" All the days the affliction is upon him shall he remain contaminated; he is contaminated. He shall dwell in isolation. His dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Vayikra 13:45-46)

He is to call out, "Contaminated-Contaminated!"... 'Why should he call out? He needs to make his suffering known so the multitudes will beseech mercy for him!' (Midrash HaGadol)

How does the afflicted one's sitting alone and announcing his polluted state inspire people to pray for his mercy? I think there's a process at play here we can all easily appreciate. It well known that the affliction of "tzaraas" is a response to the crime of loshon hora-speaking negatively about others and sowing seeds of hatred between people. He is no innocent victim in this play. No! The one who now sits alone has negatively impacted the neighborhood with his loose lips and has separated friends. Therefore he is now made to sit apart. How does he ever get out of the dark soup he is in and undo the damage he has already done?

Now King Solomon (reputed to be the wisest man who ever lived) formulates the following: *"He who covers his willful transgressions will not succeed, but one who admits and abandons them shall gain mercy."* (Mishle' 28:14) Is it magical or mystical? How does it work? How does one find mercy? The Malbim comments on the verse, "A person who invests all his energy in concealing and disguising his wrongs and faults will ultimately be exposed and shamed for his incorrigible hypocrisy. A man who confesses his sins openly, on the other hand, shows his sincere contrition and will easily find forgiveness and compassion."

I think we have all experienced this on some level with others. Someone has offended us and we harbor deep feelings of resentment for years. As long as the hurt goes unacknowledged so the embers of enmity continue to glow. Then one day the person offers a sincere apology. The response is immediate and equally earnest, "What offense?!" It's like it never happened. In one instant- erased! What just happened?

As long as a one denies and obfuscates a given wrong be it heavenward or to man, that person is as if pursued by a train he is trying to escape by foot. He is a fugitive from truth. The world wishes to shake him to his core. Then he turns to the on-coming train and admits responsibility. Suddenly the train becomes a sweet tabby cat that curls around his feet. He is instantly flooded with

compassionate wishes.

So too the chronic gossip is made to camp outside of society. He has effectively abandoned his ways and then he is made to humiliate himself by pronouncing his contaminated state to anyone who would wander too close. He admits and abandons or abandons and admits and the result is that the perception of him is altered. Instead of being hated and despised, he is looked upon as one who requires pity and mercy. His own acknowledgment has changed him and how he is beheld both in the eyes of G-d and man. He creates meaning from suffering and demonstrates hope.

Rebbe Nachman said, "If you believe you have the ability to destroy something then you must also believe that you have the capacity to correct it." With the mouth that the afflicted one had done so much damage in the world, has he been granted by the power to repair. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.