

# THE BEST MEDICINE

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

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

Our sages tell us that Tzaraas was really a physical manifestation of a spiritually rooted malady. The main cause is assumed to be Loshon Hora, namely gossip. It is no wonder that the one diagnosed with a full blown case of Tzaraas was sent out of the camp to be alone since he abused his gift of speech and caused people through his negligent talk to become separate from each other.

It's a strong medicine. Why is the Metzora cast away into temporary isolation for having prattled with his lips a bit much? Which one of the Mitzvos in specific had the Metzora violated? The Chofetz Chaim counts not less than 31 potential violations, 17 "don't do's" and 14 "to do's" associated with Loshon Hora. Why are there so many laws governing talk? From the sheer preponderance of commandments we can infer how vital this discipline really is.

The more powerful a thing is and the more it is capable of making accomplishments so too it is equally able to afflict great harm. Therefore a toddler needs only a few rules to drive his tricycle. He's not going so far and so fast in that thing. Once the child starts to ride a two-wheeler though then he needs to wear a helmet and learn to signal. A driver of a car has to take a written and a driving test to affirm that he has the requisite skills and knowledge, since the size and speed are so much more. In order to drive a bus one needs a bigger upgrade of licensing because now he carries dozens of lives with him on the road. To be worthy to fly a plane requires thousands of training hours. The margins of error are much smaller when cruising 600 miles an hour at altitudes in the 30,000 feet range with hundreds of individual lives across broad oceans. In proportion to the magnitude of the potential productivity so is the concern for the dread of destructiveness and hence the need for more and even stronger regulations.

Why then is there so many laws surround the mouth and with regard to Loshon Hora? It just dawned on me "big time" recently in a brief exchange I had with someone after Davening just this Yom Tov. This fellow was calling me softly, "Label!-Label!" I looked to the heavens before turning around as if pretending a voice was being uttered from on high. I told him in a kidding fashion, "I thought I was being called from up there." He answered with appropriate seriousness and said, "That is a voice

from on high." HASHEM gifted us with the unique ability to express ideas with words. That breath of life that made man into a "living being" was installed from within "The One Above". Targum explains that at that moment "man" became a "speaking spirit". It hit me that every human voice is a thin slice of the Divine. I began to listen to myself and others differently for a very short while afterwards.

The British poet Rudyard Kipling rightly said that "Words are the most intoxicating drug in the universe!" So Shlomo HaMelech stated, "Life and death are in the hands of the tongue!" So-much rides on the successful delivery of a word like the landing of a plane filled with passengers.

A colleague and friend of mine told me he waited in line for a day to see the Steipler Gaon tzl. in hope of receiving a blessing to be spared the legal fallout of a traffic violation. When it was his turn, the holy Rabbi asked him, "Did you do it?" He told him the truth of course, "Yes!" The Steipler berated him, "They should take away your license! You're driving a death machine! Do you know how serious it is!? You could have killed someone!" It was an alarming and potent dose of the absolute truth, which is **the best medicine**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](http://Torah.org).