

Parshat Tzaria-Metzorah: Leprosy and Lashon Hara – April 13, 2013

The two Parashot we are reading this week, Tazria and Metzora, deal with the laws regarding biblical leprosy. Our Sages understood leprosy as a physical manifestation of a spiritual disease, identifying the word "Metzora" (leprosy) to "Motzi Ra", a person who speaks evil of other people.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (Germany - 19th century) comments on a particular saying on the Talmud which says that a one-day old child can be afflicted with biblical leprosy. The obvious question here is: If our Sages say that the biblical leprosy is a punishment for a sin, why should a baby who has not sinned be punished?

Rabbi Hirsch answers with the following explanation: In the case of the children, leprosy is not related with his/her sins but with the sins of her/his parents. Just as a form of leprosy can invade clothes or even a house as a warning to its owner for her/his sins, so too leprosy on an innocent child could be the consequence of the his/her parent's actions.

The Torah would be saying to the parents: Think twice before doing or speaking, because everything that you do or say will have consequences on you and on the people around you. The Torah is stating that every parent is accountable for the imperfections that will transmit to her/his children. The Talmud, therefore, would be reminding us about our responsibility in the upbringing of our children. After all, what will happen with our children in the future will be related to the way we raise them.

Shabbat Shalom!