

## Table Talk: Tazria-Metzora

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Gossip has never been more pervasive or more corrosive than it is today, and here's a secret: It's all Perez Hilton's fault.

OK, it's not really his fault. In truth, it's ours.

With a few words and a click of a button, each of us has the power to destroy—to destroy reputations, careers, marriages, and even to destroy our beliefs in truth.

There are all sorts of religious and social strictures against gossip, but they haven't stopped its spread. Every form of technology that speeds communication, from radio to the Internet, has helped spread gossip's influence. It's the sin that keeps giving.

In the double *parashat* Tazria-Metzora we hear about a highly contagious skin disease called Tzaaras, which was similar to leprosy. The Torah says the disease affected the walls of a person's home. Obviously, this was no ordinary illness. Moreover, Tzaaras was the only disease that God afflicted on people as punishment—and specifically as punishment for the misuse of words. The Torah makes it clear that gossip is no trivial thing. If you cause strife in the community by speaking ill of another person, you become an outcast from the community so that you can't infect anyone else.

If gossip is so vicious and such a serious offense, why does it feel so good? Why does it sell so many magazines? And, if the threat of skin disease didn't wipe out gossip, what are we supposed to do about it now?

At the Shabbat table tonight, see if you can have a conversation without using names or referring to people at all. Talk about movies, books, events, ideas...but no names. Here are some questions to help:

- 1) What's the most harmful or embarrassing thing someone ever said about you, and how did it feel? (Don't mention the name of the person who said it)
- 2) Can you think of a time when you resisted the temptation to gossip? What helped you resist?
- 3) If gossip is true, does that make it OK?



**Table Talk**

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