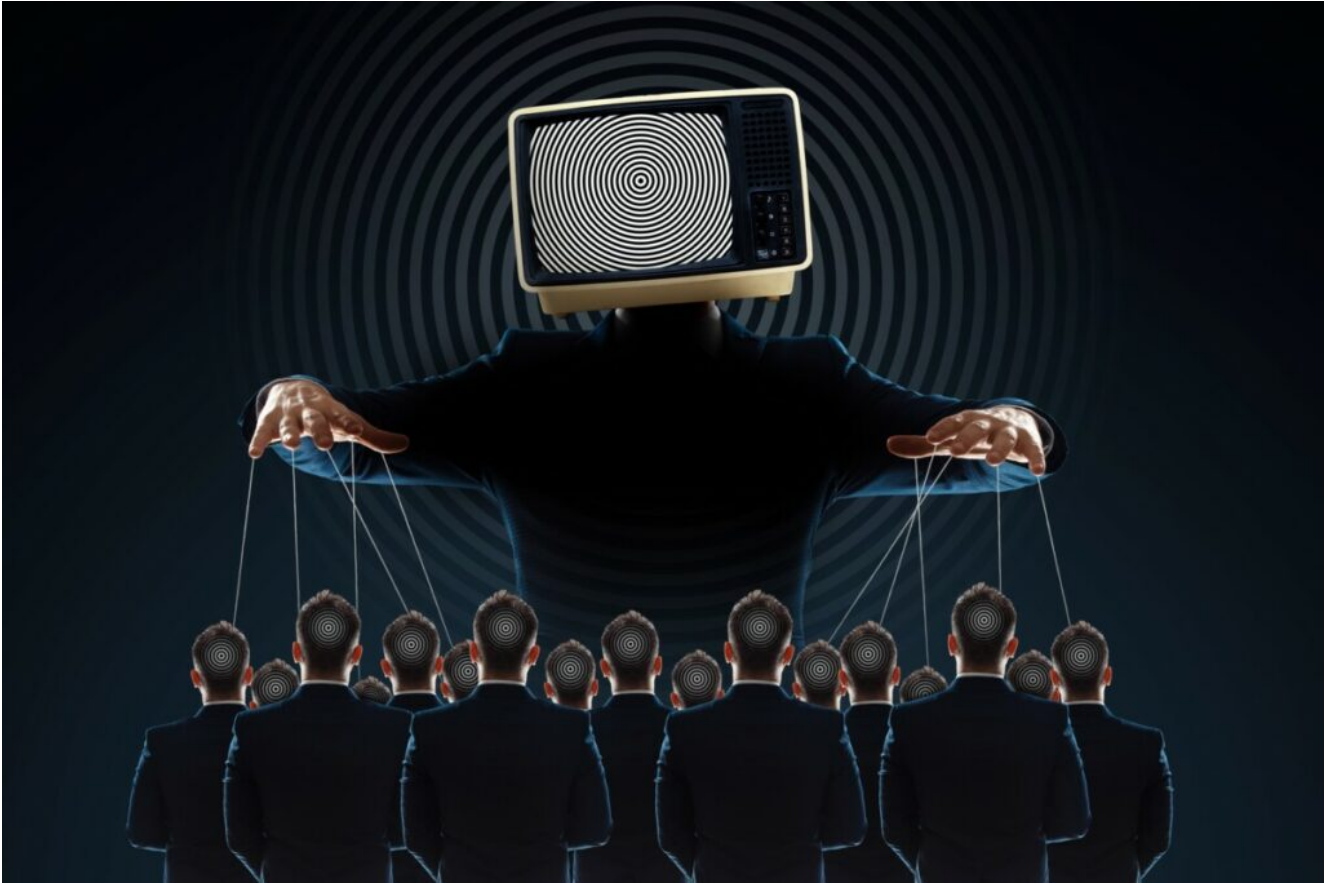


# The Scourge of Slander

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This week's parsha is Tazria and it contains two major themes.

The first (short) part contains the laws of a woman who gives birth and also speaks about the mitzvah of circumcision. The second part contains the laws of one who is afflicted with leprosy; may HaShem spare us. Let us focus on the ideas of leprosy.

The Talmud teaches (Erakhin 15b) that the affliction of leprosy is a result of slander. When one slanders another, he causes a separation between people. Therefore, as a leper, he must remove himself from people and spend his days separated from his family, neighbors, and indeed, his whole community.

The Talmud then elaborates on why slander is so evil. HaShem created the tongue to be horizontal in the body, while the body's parts are basically vertical. Also, all limbs are

exposed, but the tongue is internal! Additionally, HaShem created the tongue to be inside "two walls," i.e., the teeth and the lips, providing it with guardians to hold it back from speaking about others. Yet, the slanderer finds a way to destroy others' lives. For one can speak slander in one place and, by casting aspersions upon others, literally destroy a person's life who lives maybe thousands of miles distant! May HaShem spare us. So bad is slander that the Talmud compares that speaker to an atheist! And it teaches that with slander one commits the worst of crimes: even worse than idolatry, adultery, and murder!

The destruction brought about by slander can be readily seen in the media. For example, once reporters get a feeling that fits their mindset – whether true or not, it does not matter – they publicize that 'fact'. When it develops that they are wrong, an apology will appear hidden somewhere in the later pages. An example is the Hamas claim that Israel bombed a hospital and 500 people were killed. Later on, it was found out an Arab missile bombed the hospital, and some 50 people were hurt or killed. But the media slandered Israel without retractions for several days and, months later, some still make that claim.

It does not matter what the truth is; only the bottom line matters and the sensation they cause. Atheists, idolators, murderers with the tongue. But it can be any one of us who succumbs to slandering others. This is why the tongue has guardians to restrain it from falsehood and destroying lives.

Thus, leprosy. An affliction that causes unwarranted division and separates people. The parsha teaches us to guard our tongues and strive for unity. For unity, when all are one, there is no basis for separations and division.

Shabbat Shalom!