

Rambam (12th century, Egypt) - Laws of Tum'at Tzara'at,
16:10:

"Tzara'at is a general term that includes many distinct conditions that differ one from the other. A whitening of human skin is called 'tzara'at,' a loss of some scalp or beard hair may be 'tzara'at,' and a discoloration of garments or the house is 'tzara'at.' This condition that afflicts garments or houses to which the Torah refers by this term is not a natural occurrence but rather a miraculous sign that would transpire in ancient Israel in order **TO DISSUADE THEM FROM ENGAGING IN EVIL TALK (*lashon hara*)**. Thus, if one engaged in disparaging speech, then the walls of his house would become discolored. If he repented, then the walls would recover, but if he persisted, then...the garments upon him would be afflicted... if he persisted, then his very skin would be stricken and he would be publicly SEPARATED AND ISOLATED so that he would be unable to engage in the chatter of the wicked, namely foolish words and evil speech. Concerning this very thing, the Torah warned when it said: 'Observe diligently the laws of tzara'at...remember what God your Lord did to Miriam on the way as you left the land of Egypt...' (Bemidbar 24:8-9).

