

(You might want to consider that this was not written in our consumer society.)

5) After a person who had *Tzara'at* has been declared to be free of it (by the Kohen) he goes through 2 ceremonies as part of the purification (14:4-20). Where does each one take place? What do you think that these locations symbolize? How long does the process take? Where is the Metzora (=person who has/had *Tzara'at*) during this period? Why?

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The weekly Haftarah Commentary
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TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Tazria & Metsora

April 28-29, 2017 – 3 Iyyar 5777

Annual (Leviticus 12:1-15:33): Etz Hayim p. 649-670; Hertz p. 460-477

Triennial (Leviticus 12:1-13:39): Etz Hayim p. 649-657; Hertz p. 460-464

Haftarah (2 Kings 7:3-20): Etz Hayim p. 675-678; Hertz p. 477-479

Tazri'a-Metsora: A Story of Awareness and Healing

Yardén Raber, Conservative Yeshiva Talmud Faculty

The book of Leviticus (*Sefer Vayikra*) entails many difficulties for the modern reader. First, it can easily be conceived as a cluster of ritual laws that have little to do with our modern Jewish experience. Second, the priestly image of the world depicted in it seems quite detached from our world outlook; for example, the forces of purity and impurity that play such a fundamental role in the metaphysics of Leviticus. Though they can still be relevant in some areas of our lives, their influence has diminished significantly over the centuries, for many reasons.

One reading *Tazri'a-Metsora* immediately realizes the difficulties that Leviticus poses. The *parashah* deals with impurities of *physical* origin, such as those caused by *tzara'at* (scale disease) and bodily secretions. The idea that a phenomenon of natural and physiological origins, such as a disease or a secretion, might be considered a source of *ritual* impurity raises a severe theological problem. How is it possible to conceive a physical dysfunction, over which one has no control, as the cause of grave impurity? Adding serious impurity to the disease itself seems arbitrary punishment for the person who contracted the latter.

Apparently the Sages also were troubled by this idea. In the Talmud (*Arachin* 16a) Rabbi Yohanan suggests that the infections caused by a scale disease (*neg'a'im*) should be conceived as the result not of a *physical* dysfunction but rather of a *moral* one. He lists seven immoral acts as possible causes, among them *lashon ha-r'a*, slander or evil gossip. A parallel explanation is found in a story in *Leviticus Rabbah* (*Metsora* 16). There Rabbi Yanai suggests that the word *metsora* is a contraction of the phrase **motzi shem r'a**, i.e., one who defames or denigrates others. These two Palestinian sages offer similar responses - despite manifesting itself through physical signs, *tzara'at* is not a physiological disease but rather a sign of *moral* ill health. Therefore, people *do* have control over it; one can prevent this disease by refraining from defamatory conduct and communications.

The *S'fat Emet* (Rabbi Yehudah Arie'el Alter, Poland, 19th-20th Cent.) elaborates on this idea. Drawing on the *K'li Yakar* (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz, Poland, 16th-17th Cent.), he suggests an alternative etymology for the word *metsora*. According to his view, this term is not a contraction of the phrase *hamotzi shem r'a* – as suggested by Rabbi Yanai — but rather a part of this phrase: **motsi ra'**, i.e., he who *takes out the evil*. As he often does, the *S'fat Emet* succeeds in bringing up a very profound psychological reading of the text. The infection (*neg'a*), the wound caused by the disease, indicates that a person afflicted is actually taking out, or digging up, the hatred that resides in his heart. Conceived this way, the infection is not only a sign of the disease, but also a means of its healing. Only by removing the evil from one's heart can a person truly be cleansed of it. According to this interpretation, instead of avoiding the disease, sometimes we have to immerse ourselves in it; we have to willingly defile ourselves by coming in contact with all that is harmful in order to achieve a true and total purification. The awareness of our own wounds is often the beginning of our healing journey.

A Vort for Parashat Tazria & Metsora

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, CY Faculty

On the words “wherever the priest can see” in Lev 13:12, the Mishna (*Negayim* 2:2-3) says the priest does not examine for leprosy “on a cloudy day” or if he, the priest, has poor vision or is blind in one eye. The *Glilei Zahav* (R' David Moshkovits, Romania, early 20th C) says that one should not look for *nega'im*, blemishes, in the Jewish people, or in a fellow Jew, on a “cloudy” day, when things are bad or there are pressures and troubles affecting us, jointly or individually. One who looks with impaired or limited vision sees only the blemishes, not the troubles (*tsarot*) which are weighing upon us, and therefore is not qualified to judge what blemish is pure or impure.

Table Talk

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

Following the painful event of the death of 2 of Aaron's sons during the celebrations for inaugurating the Priesthood, we are taking a double-Parasha (1 week) break from Kohanim in the Tabernacle and learning a bit about purity. Purity is a state that can change, it has nothing to do with hygiene.

- 1) A woman who gives birth becomes impure (12:1-5). Interestingly, the period of her impurity does not seem to be contingent on her physical condition but rather on a certain amount of time passing after the birth. Why do you think this is so?
- 2) Starting in chapter 13 we learn about *Tzara'at* (usually translated as leprosy). Who/what can be afflicted by *Tzara'at* in this section? What organ of the body is affected the signs of *Tzara'at*? (13:1-2)
- 3) Who is qualified to determine that the problem is indeed *Tzara'at* (13:2-8)? Note the terminology used to describe the status of the person. What does that tell you about *Tzara'at*?
- 4) It turns out that not only people can be affected by *Tzara'at*. What else might be affected (13:47-59)? Why do you think that great trouble is taken to isolate the potential *Tzara'at* and not destroy the entire garment?