

THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION, METZORAH, DEALS WITH LEPROSY AND THE RITES THAT ONE MUST PASS THROUGH TO TRAVERSE FROM BEING TAMEI (IMPURE) TO TAHOR (PURE). GOD OUTLINED WHAT PROCESS WOULD HAVE TO BE UNDERTAKEN FOR AN AFFLICTED PERSON TO ONCE AGAIN BE ABLE TO ENTER THE TEMPLE AND EVEN ONE'S HOME. ALL THIS WAS IN PREPARATION FOR ENTERING CANAAN AND THE HOLY LIFE THAT WAS TO BE ESTABLISHED THERE.

FIRST OF ALL, FOR CLARIFICATION, THE SKIN DISEASE OUTLINED IN THE TORAH IS NOT THE LEPROSY WE HAVE TODAY. IT'S MERELY A TRANSLATION. WE KNOW THIS BECAUSE OF THE CERTAIN AND QUICK RECOVERY OF THE AFFLICTED.

TO BECOME PURE ONCE AGAIN, THE PRIEST OR KOHEN DIAGNOSED A PERSON AS A METZORAH (A PERSON WITH TZARAAT, THAT IS, A SKIN AFFLICTION). A METZORAH COULD NOT ENTER THE TEMPLE. HE OR SHE HAD TO LIVE OUTSIDE OF THE CAMP FOR A WEEK, THEN OUTSIDE OF HIS/HER TENT FOR A WEEK. ONLY AFTER THE KOHEN PROCLAIMED THIS PERSON ONCE AGAIN PURE, DID HE OFFER A SACRIFICE AND ALLOW THE FORMER METZORAH TO ENTER THE TEMPLE.

THE PORTION, METZORAH, GOES ON TO DESCRIBE SEVERAL REASONS WHY SOMEONE MIGHT BE TZARAAT RANGING FROM EXCEMA TO MENSTRUATION TO OTHER BODILY DISCHARGES. AND WHILE EVEN AT FACE VALUE, THE PROCESS OF DIAGNOSING AND PURIFYING THE AFFLICTED IS INTERESTING, AT FACE VALUE IT DOESN'T RELATE MUCH TO OUR POST-TEMPLE, PROGRESSIVE MINDS.

AH, BUT WE ALL KNOW HOW JEWS (FROM THE SAGES TO OUR CONTEMPORARIES) LOVE TO EXPOUND ON THE TORAH'S TEACHINGS.

SO WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO US TODAY?

MIDRASHIC LITERATURE TEACHES THAT THERE'S AN ETYMOLOGICAL PLAY ON THE WORD METZORAH, THAT IS

MOTZI SHEM RA – ONE WHO SPEAKS EVIL...A SLANDERER.
AND, IN FACT, IN THE TORAH, MOSES' SISTER, MIRIAM, BROKE
OUT WITH SCALES ON HER SKIN AS A CONSEQUENCE OF
SLANDERING MOSES BEHIND HIS BACK.

AND WHILE THE DISEASE'S MANIFEST MAY BE PHYSICAL, THE
ROOT CAUSE OF THE AFFLICTION IS ONE OF CHARACTER
WHICH IS WHY THE KOHEN, AND NOT THE MEDICAL DOCTORS,
WERE NEEDED FOR RESTORATION WHICH MEANT NOT ONLY A
DISAPPEARANCE OF THE LEPROSY, BUT THE PERMISSION FOR
THE NOW PURE TO CO-MINGLE WITH GOD.

SO WE SEE HERE THAT SINFUL ACTS ARE REVERSIBLE AND
DIRE FATE IS AVERTED. SOUND FAMILIAR? THIS IS REALLY A
PRIVATE YOM KIPPUR.

IN THE TALMUD IT SAYS “THE SLANDERER IS AS IF HE DENIED
GOD. IT IS A SIN SO GREAT THAT IT EXTENDS EVEN UNTO
HEAVEN. HE AND I CANNOT LIVE TOGETHER IN HE WORLD.”

WE ARE ACCUSTOMED TO THINK OF GOSSIP OR SLANDER AS
WORDS THAT WILL BE QUICKLY FORGOTTEN. BUT THE WORD
IS A DEED. IT IS AN ACTION FOR WHICH WE ARE HELD
RESPONSIBLE.

FURTHERMORE, THE SLANDERER HURTS THREE PEOPLE:
HIMSELF, THE ONE WHO HEARS THE SLANDER AND THE
PERSON WHO IS SPOKEN OF.

THE RECITATION OF THE PRAYER: “O GOD, GUARD MY TONGUE
FROM EVIL AND MY LIPS FROM SPEAKING FALSEHOOD” IS NOT
AN IDLE PRAYER. IT CANNOT BE SAID MECHANICALLY.

IT IS THE RECOGNITION THAT SLANDER (IN WORDS OR TONE)
CAN DESTROY RELATIONSHIPS AND EVEN SOCIETIES.
UNDERSTOOD IN THIS LIGHT THE ENTIRE TORAH PORTION IS A
RUNNING COMMENTARY, IN SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE, ON THE
SCOURGE OF SPEAKING EVIL. A SEEMINGLY OUTDATED
SECTION OF THE TORAH COMES ALIVE AS A CURE FOR AN EVER
RECURRING MALADY.

THE ABSENCE OF A SACRIFICE TO EFFECT A CURE IS BUT ANOTHER LESSON TO HUMANITY OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN CURING THE ILLS OF THE WORLD. FIRST COMES HUMAN INVOLVEMENT LEADING TO THE CURE, AND ONLY WHEN THE CURE HAS BEEN AFFECTED IS THERE A SACRIFICE...WHICH WE MAY THEN INTERPRET AS A FORM OF THANKSGIVING. MAY THAT DAY COME SPEEDILY AND IN OUR TIME.