



Parshat Tzaria-Metzora- April 25, 2020- 1 Iyyar 5780

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By agudasachim | April 23rd, 2020 | Rabbi's Parasha Message | Comments Off

Let's try a moment of Torah study this week. If you're lacking the texts in your home library, I recommend the Sefaria website (<https://www.sefaria.org/texts>). It includes the basics and is relatively easy to navigate.

The Torah portion this week is Tazria-Metzora. We'll be focused on Leviticus, chapter 13, verse 46. The context is about biblical skin ailments referred to in this passage as "nega," the word for "plague." This verse instructs us that the afflicted must isolate and "dwell alone," apart from the community ("outside the camp"). As is so often the case, the Torah seems aligned with current events.

It is often noted that the Torah seems to regard the plague as not merely a physical circumstance, but as a spiritual condition accompanied by physical manifestations. Other ailments do not require isolation, are not labeled ritually unfit, and are to be treated by a doctor. One afflicted by nega must be treated by a priest (kohane).

The Talmud regards nega as a punishment for antisocial behavior (Arachin 16a). Oddly, the Talmud also imagines our ultimate hero, the messiah, to be among the afflicted (Sanhedrin 98a-b). Indeed, the Haftarah (II Kings 7:3-20) depicts four individuals who, due to their symptoms, have been banished from the city of Shomron while it is under military siege. Desperate, they take a risk and end up courageously and generously saving their city from famine. What do we make of this ambiguity? Should the one obliged to "dwell apart" be considered a positive or negative figure?

A classic Hasidic work, *Tifereth Shlomo*, posits that only one who separates from the community is able to redeem the sparks of holiness which reside in the darkness of isolation. Just as the ritual of the Red Heifer (Numbers Chapter 19) must take place "outside the camp," one who seeks to redeem the impure must be willing to seek out the dark places. You don't clean up the mud without getting dirty hands. A more modern take might be that the perspective of the outsider has an advantage over that of the insider. One who desires to think outside the box must be prepared to leave the box (for more on the author of *Tifereth Shlomo*, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shlomo_Rabinowicz).

Please let us know if more weekly parsha study style messages would work for you. Stay safe.

B'Yedidut (w/friendship),

RML

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