



Parshiyot Tazria / Metzora – April 16, 2021 – 4 Iyyar, 5781

Dear TBE Family and Friends,

The annual cycle of Torah readings, conceived some two millennia ago, has an uncanny ability to deliver to us messages that precisely address the issues of our own day. In this instance, as our community, our country and, indeed, the world at large grapple with the complex question of emerging from the near-complete “lockdown” that we have experienced as a result of the COVID pandemic, our Torah reading, too, addresses the issue of how we re-engage with those from whom we have separated ourselves out of fear for our physical security.

The twin *parshiyot* (portions) Tazria and Metzora that are read together this week deal with laws concerning impurity, but they are particularly concerned with the issue of the leper (the literal translation of “*metzora*”). Their initial concern is, of course, on the diagnosis of the disease: How do we know that a person (or, in the Torah, an object, too) has been afflicted by leprosy (rather than a less fearsome disease)? Then, once we have ascertained that this is the case, how do we achieve a sufficient distancing of the diseased from the vulnerable to ensure that contagion does not occur?

It is a set of questions that have become far-too-familiar to us over the past thirteen months. We have grown accustomed to assessing every aspect of our lives and habits, trying to ensure that we maintain behaviors that keep us and those who rely upon us safe.

The Toraitic discussion of this matter does not end at this point, however. Instead, an even more lengthy portion of the text is concerned with the process of eventual re-engagement with those who have been kept apart. How do we know when it is safe to again come together? How do we prepare for and effect the rapprochement in a manner that ensures both the physical and spiritual well-being of all concerned? Who should be the individuals who oversee this process and assess the risks it inevitably entails?



These questions are as knotty in our own day as they were for our ancestors in the days of yore. The Torah's acknowledges that there are no clear and certain answers to this question, as there is no existence free from doubt or peril. The text also acknowledges that the process and timing of this re-engagement may, of necessity, look different for different individuals, depending on their circumstances. However, the author of our sacred text is equally unambiguous in declaring it an imperative – despite our fears and doubts – that we work consistently and committedly toward bringing together parties who have been separated thereby risk becoming estranged. The society's unity, and the mental and spiritual welfare of its diverse members are, the Torah tells us, not incidental concerns.

We will not find in the pages (columns) of our holy scriptures a blueprint for moving out of the extreme isolation of COVID, even as we cannot look to this text to provide a scientific explanation of Creation or a diagnostic standard for mental or physical illness. But we can look to our texts to help us frame the questions we ask as we navigate these waters and can draw assurance from the reminder that prior generations have steered through a similarly disorienting course, successfully.

Before signing off, let me extend a special invitation to everyone to join us for our Shabbat morning service this week, which will be led by members of our Midrashah Aleph service. The service can be accessed using this [link](#).

Shabbat shalom,

-- Rabbi Rachel Safman