

# Larchmont Temple—CHEVRAH TORAH, 5781/2020-21

## DISCOVERING OURSELVES...UNDERSTANDING THE OTHER

Through the human exchange, difference becomes a blessing...We must learn the art of conversation, from which truth emerges not, as in Socratic dialogues, by the refutation of falsehood, but from the process of letting our world be enlarged by the presence of others who interpret reality in ways radically different from our own...We will make peace only when we learn that God loves difference and so, at last, must we. [\[The Dignity of Difference, Rabbi J. Sacks, pgs. 22-23\]](#)

## TAZRIA/METSORA—Leviticus 13:1-8; 14:1-12

### KEY KOSHI:

*WHAT does the kohen's response to the metsora teach us about our being there for the sick, bringing comfort, healing, & hope? How does the metsora model the community we share/can create?*

### P'SHAT...

13:1] The Eternal One spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2] When a person has on the skin of the body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of the body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests. 3] The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of the body: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of the body, it is a leprous affection; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce the person impure. 4] But if it is a white discoloration on the skin of the body which does not appear to be deeper than the skin and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall isolate the affected person for seven days. 5] On the seventh day the priest shall conduct an examination, and if the affection has remained unchanged in color and the disease has not spread on the skin, the priest shall isolate that person for another seven days. 6] On the seventh day the priest shall again conduct an examination: if the affection has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce the person pure. It is a rash; after washing those clothes, that person shall be pure. 7] But if the rash should spread on the skin after the person has been seen by the priest and pronounced pure, that person shall again report to the priest. 8] And if the priest sees that the rash has spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce that person impure; it is leprosy.

<sup>1</sup> וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן  
לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup> אִדָּם כִּי־יִהְיֶה בְעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ שְׂאֵת  
אוֹסֶפֶת אוֹ בְהֶרֶת אוֹ בְּהִיָּה בְעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ  
לִנְגַע צָרְעַת וְהוֹבֵא אֶל־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ  
אֶל־אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים: <sup>3</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן  
אֶת־הַנִּגַּע בְּעוֹר־הַבָּשָׂר וְשַׁעַר בִּנְגַע הַפֶּדָּה  
לְבָן וּמִרְאָה הַנִּגַּע עֲמֹק מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ נִגַּע  
צָרְעַת הוּא וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְטִמָּא אֹתוֹ:  
<sup>4</sup> וְאִם־בְּהֶרֶת לְבָנָה הוּא בְעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ  
וְעֲמֹק אִיר־מִרְאָה מִן־הָעוֹר וְשַׁעֲרָה לֹא־  
הָפְדָה לְבָן וְהִסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנִּגַּע שִׁבְעַת  
יָמִים: <sup>5</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי  
וְהִנֵּה הַנִּגַּע עֲמֵד בְּעֵינָיו לֹא־פָשָׂה הַנִּגַּע  
בְּעוֹר וְהִסְגִּירוֹ הַכֹּהֵן שִׁבְעַת יָמִים שְׁנִית:  
[שְׁנִי] <sup>6</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֹתוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי  
שְׁנִית וְהִנֵּה כָּהָה הַנִּגַּע וְלֹא־פָשָׂה הַנִּגַּע  
בְּעוֹר וְטָהָר הַכֹּהֵן מִסְּפַחַת הוּא וְכִבֵּס  
בְּגָדָיו וְטָהָר: <sup>7</sup> וְאִם־פָּשָׂה תִפְשָׂה  
הַמִּסְּפַחַת בְּעוֹר אַחֲרֵי הִרְאָתוֹ אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן  
לְטָהָרָתוֹ וְנִרְאָה שְׁנִית אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>8</sup> וְרָאָה  
הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה פָּשְׂתָה הַמִּסְּפַחַת בְּעוֹר  
וְטִמָּאוֹ הַכֹּהֵן צָרְעַת הוּא:

[פרשת מצורע] <sup>1</sup> וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה  
לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup> זֹאת תִּהְיֶה תוֹרַת הַמְצָרַע בַּיּוֹם  
טָהָרָתוֹ וְהוֹבֵא אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>3</sup> וְיָצָא הַכֹּהֵן

14:1] The Eternal One spoke to Moses, saying:  
2] This shall be the ritual for a leper at the time of being purified.

When it has been reported to the priest,  
3] the priest shall go outside the camp. If the priest sees that the leper has been healed of the scaly affection, 4] the priest shall order two live pure birds, cedar wood, crimson stuff, and hyssop to be brought for the one to be purified. 5] The priest shall order one of the birds slaughtered over fresh water in an earthen vessel; 6] and he shall take the live bird, along with the cedar wood, the crimson stuff, and the hyssop, and dip them together with the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the fresh water. 7] He shall then sprinkle it seven times on the one to be purified of the eruption and effect the purification; and he shall set the live bird free in the open country. 8] The one to be purified shall wash those clothes, shave off all hair, and bathe in water—and then shall be pure. After that, the camp may be entered but one must remain outside one's tent seven days. 9] On the seventh day all hair shall be shaved off—of head, beard [if any], and eyebrows. Having shaved off all hair, the person shall wash those clothes and bathe the body in water—and then shall be pure. 10] On the eighth day that person shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish, three-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in for a meal offering, and one log of oil. 11] These shall be presented before the Eternal, with the person to be purified, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, by the priest who performs the purification. 12] The priest shall take one of the male lambs and offer it with the log of oil as a reparation offering, and he shall elevate them as an elevation offering before the Eternal.

אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה  
נִרְפָּא נִגְעֵ־הַצֹּרֶעַת מִן־הַצְּרוּעַ : 4 וְצִוְּהָ  
הַכֹּהֵן וְלָקַח לַמִּטְהָר שְׁתֵּי־צִפְרִים חַיִּים  
טְהוֹרוֹת וְעֵץ אֶרֶז וְשִׁנֵּי תוֹלַעַת וְאַזְבִּיב :  
5 וְצִוְּהָ הַכֹּהֵן וְשַׁחֵט אֶת־הַצֹּפֹר הָאֶחָד  
אֶל־כְּלֵי־חַרֶשׁ עַל־מִים חַיִּים : 6 אֶת־הַצֹּפֹר  
הַחַיִּה יִקַּח אֹתָהּ וְאֶת־עֵץ הָאֶרֶז וְאֶת־שִׁנֵּי  
הַתוֹלַעַת וְאֶת־הָאַזְבִּיב וְטָבַל אוֹתָם וְאֶת  
הַצֹּפֹר הַחַיִּה בְּדַם הַצֹּפֹר הַשְּׁחֻטָּה עַל  
הַמַּיִם הַחַיִּים : 7 וְהִזָּה עַל הַמִּטְהָר מִן־  
הַצֹּרֶעַת שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים וְטָהָרוּ וְשַׁלַּח אֶת־  
הַצֹּפֹר הַחַיִּה עַל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה : 8 וְכַבֵּס  
הַמִּטְהָר אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְגָלַח אֶת־כָּל־שַׁעְרוֹ  
וְרַחַץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָהָר וְאַחֵר יָבֹא אֶל־  
הַמִּחְנֶה וְיֹשֵׁב מִחוּץ לָאֹהֶל שִׁבְעַת יָמִים :  
9 וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִגָּלַח אֶת־כָּל־שַׁעְרוֹ  
אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ וְאֶת־זָקְנוֹ וְאֶת גְּבִת עֵינָיו וְאֶת־  
כָּל־שַׁעְרוֹ יִגָּלַח וְכַבֵּס אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְרַחַץ אֶת־  
בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְטָהָר : 10 וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי  
יִקַּח שְׁנֵי־כִבְשִׁים תְּמִימִים וְכִבְשָׂה אֶחָד  
בֵּת־שָׁנָתָה תְּמִימָה וְשִׁלְשָׁה עֶשְׂרִינִים סֹלֶת  
מִנְחָה בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן וְלֹג אֶחָד שֶׁמֶן :  
11 וְהֶעֱמִיד הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּטְהָר אֶת הָאִישׁ  
הַמִּטְהָר וְאֹתָם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה פֶּתַח אֹהֶל  
מוֹעֵד : 12 וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַכֶּבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד  
וְהִקְרִיב אֹתוֹ לְאַשֶׁם וְאֶת־לֶגֶם הַשֶּׁמֶן וְהִגִּיף  
אֹתָם תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה :

## REMEZ...

- 13:2 *When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash or a discoloration...*  
IBN EZRA...As in "Adam, ki yakriv korban" [Lev 1:2] The text does not say "any Israelite," rather the stranger is included in these verses...For "there shall be one law for the citizen and the stranger." [Ex 12:49]
- 13:3 *The priest shall look at the affection on the skin of his body. If...the priest sees it and pronounces him: Unclean.*  
TALMUD...If the kohen "looks" shall he not "see?" This is to teach us that in examining, his eyes must be open, looking upon the affection as he sees the one who comes. [Sanhedrin 34b]
- 13:4 *But if it is a white discoloration on the skin...the priest shall isolate the affected person for seven days.*  
B.LEVINE... "v'Hisgir haKohen et haNega"...ONKELOS translates "Tzara-at" with the Aramaic word "Segiru," which means not only to confine but also to close off...RASHI notes that a special house was used for such purposes. The incident of Miriam's affliction with tzara-at informs us that the place was "outside the camp."... The text literally states that the "disease" was quarantined, meaning, of course, the diseased individual.  
IBN EZRA...Literally, the priest shall isolate "the affection." Of course, in practical terms, it is the person who must be isolated.  
S'FORNO...Since these affections of the skin are sent as punishment, the seven days are meant to rouse him to repent.
- 13:8 *And if the priest sees that the rash has spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him: Unclean. It is leprosy.*  
RASHBAM...It is definitely leprosy, and he must now "dwell apart" [v.46] until the time he is cured and can bring the sacrifice of the two birds enabling his return.
- 14:2-3 *This shall be the ritual for the metsora at the time he is to be cleansed. He shall be brought to the priest. The priest shall go forth outside the camp, and the priest shall see. And if the metsora is healed of his affection...*  
MUNK... "And the priest shall see..." Torah is not giving us health measures because the issue is morality. It is up to the kohen, the sacred teacher of the people, to guide the affected person back to the community, from his isolation to human connection, by "seeing him."  
S'FORNO... "He shall be brought—The Kohen shall go..." This cannot mean the metsora is brought into the camp, for he is still forbidden to enter. We understand, then, that he is brought to a place nearby, just outside the camp, and the kohen meets him there, so he can be examined in a dignified manner.  
M.M. SCHNEERSON... There is an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the metsora is brought, but on the other hand, the kohen must go out...We sense the struggle the impetus to return breaks in from outside, so he must be brought, even if he cannot make it on his own.  
SIFTEI KOHEN... Whoever sees the holy kohen go to the trouble of leaving the Israelite camp will rise... Younger kohanim will go along to escort him to see how he sees—how the affliction should be regarded. The result is that, in his going out to aid in healing, a multitude of others will be drawn into the healing process, all because of one person who is sick and in need.
- 14:4 *And if the metsora is healed of his affection, the priest shall order two live birds brought for him who is to be cleansed...*  
SIFRA... "v'HEENEI NIRPAH—And behold he is healed..." It is not necessary for the affliction to disappear. If symptoms of contamination are gone...the metsora becomes eligible to begin the ritual of purification.  
DEBORAH NIEDERMAN...When the kohen is called to examine someone with a skin affection, it is the duty of the kohen to pronounce him "clean or unclean." If "unclean," he shall dwell apart, outside the camp." Why? It is assumed that a problem with any one individual can affect the entire community. When we send someone "outside the camp, we must be doing it to protect the good of the community...And, if sent outside, we have a responsibility to help the one suffering to find comfort in her distress...and so, too, discover a way back in.

## DRASH...

Prof ARNIE EISEN...

[Chancellor, JTS]

The Ba-al Shem Tov, seeking the sort of symbolic meaning in this week's section of Leviticus that we too search out, found the laws of scaling and scalding, bodily discharge, and fungus... suggestive of the need for repentance and humility. Focus on the body, its pains and its sores, its frequent need for healing and repair, all of which point towards mortality, bring thoughts like the Ba-al Shem's to mind....

Pretense does not hold up well in the face of unbearable itching, oozing or boils. When the skin that usually marks the boundary between each of us and the rest of creation breaks down, the rest of the self may break down with it. Ridges and crevices that appear in the surfaces of flesh that are normally smooth may disrupt our sense of at-homeness in the world. We fear that discoloration on the outside will signal to everyone that something inside us is not right. We are discomfited, uneasy in that skin.

The priest's relentless quest to impose order—directed in this particular case at the outbreak of lesions and sores—cries out with pathos of its own limitations. What can the holy man do in the face of a contagious skin disease that he can describe in precise detail but cannot, for all his ritual knowledge, cure? Not much, we learn. The priest performs no magic whatsoever. He waves no incense at the affliction, recites no incantations over it. He cannot make the bad stuff go away. Medicine is not the art he practices.

Five acts and only those five are ascribed to the priest in chapters 13 & 14...1. He listens carefully to the victim's report and decides if further action is required. 2. He sees, examines or investigates, judging by the signs whether the infection has run its course. 3. He pronounces the afflicted pure or impure, and by saying words makes them so. 4. He imposes or lifts quarantine, depending upon the apparent need. 5. He offers sacrifice, framing ritual for the re-entry to make a place for the afflicted to come back home.

Contemporary readers of Leviticus have more advanced science at our disposal. That science, contrary to the Torah's, has no room in it for divine intervention in the natural order of sickness and health, though many of us still petition God for healing...Modern skin diseases therefore run their course without recourse to the clergy. We consult dermatologists instead, and benefit from antibiotic salves; our doctors often know how to alleviate the pain and suffering that Leviticus takes for granted but never explicitly mentions, perhaps because there is not a lot its priests can do about them.

And yet we too cannot heal every malady that we understand, and we continue to understand far less than we would like. The text, for its part, though it knows no cure for the ailment it describes, does offer a remedy of sorts, made all the more valuable because medical treatment

is lacking. The priest places the suffering in an order of meaning and community. Once we realize that the priest is not there to play doctor, or even public health official, the link between priestly makers of meaning and us becomes clear and compelling.

...Milgrom, puzzling through what and how the code of skin diseases means, finds a "major clue provided by the text" in the fact that "the scale-diseased person must bring a *chattat* offering, implying that he has polluted the sanctuary. Thus, in this case, as in all cases of ritual impurity, we are confronted with the binary opposition between holiness and impurity, which...symbolizes the forces of life and death. The entire purification process is nothing but a ritual marking the transition from death back to life."

The Torah presumably knew of many other illnesses that beset ancient Israelites. None are given the priestly attention lavished on this one. God presumably could have awarded Aaron or Moses the gift of miraculous cure to this disease, but does not....The text makes no linkage between human suffering and moral wrongdoing. Torah seems to suggest, clearing space for the commentaries, that there is meaning to be found in diseases of the skin and wants us to seek it out for ourselves.

If we follow the Torah's lead, part of that meaning will reside in the strengthening of communal ties. Milgrom highlights this feature: "as the celebrant moves from the realm of impurity outside the camp, restored first to the community, then to his home, and finally to the sanctuary, he has passed from impurity to holiness, from death to life, reinstated with his family and reconciled with his God." Community is assisted mightily by the reminder that neither those who suffer nor those who are spared suffering [for the moment] are closer to God. Sickness, like Tza-ra-at, imposes isolation; deliberate effort is required to relieve that isolation—effort which in turn makes for deeper connection among the human beings involved in it. Affliction may also promote reflection on the true worth of things...This, in turn, may lead to greater attachment to others who take the question of meaning seriously...

None of this can happen if we stand dumb in the face of inexplicable suffering rather than use affliction as an occasion to seek out meaning and community. The Torah is far wiser than to ignore the healing power of language and accompany ritual; it is wise enough, too, to know that not only physicians are needed for healing. One hopes that we are wise enough to know this as well.

## SOD...

### DALAI LAMA....

[Time Magazine, 4.14.20]

Sometimes friends mask me to help with some problem in the world, using some “magical powers.” I always tell them that the Dalai Lama has no magical powers. If I did, I would not feel the pain in my legs or a sore throat. We are all the same as human beings. We experience the same fears, the same hopes, the same questions, the same uncertainties.

From the Buddhist perspective, every sentient being is acquainted with suffering and the truths of sickness, old age and death. But As human beings, we have the capacity to use our minds to conquer anger and panic and greed. In recent years I have been...trying to see things more mindfully and clearly, without the confusion of fear or rage. If a problem has a solution, we must work to find it; if it does not, we need not waste time thinking about it.

We believe that the entire world is interdependent. That is why I often speak about universal responsibility. The outbreak of this terrible coronavirus has shown that what happens to one person can soon affect every other being. But it also reminds us that a compassionate or constructive act—whether working in hospitals or just observing social distancing—has the potential to help many.

Ever since news emerged about the coronavirus in Wuhan, I have been praying for my brothers and sisters in China and everywhere else. Now we can see that nobody is immune to the virus. We are all worried about loved ones and the future, of both the global economy and our own individual homes. But prayer is not enough.

This crisis shows that we must all take responsibility where we can. We must combine the courage doctors and nurses are showing with empirical science to begin to turn this situation around and protect our future from more such threats.

In this time of great fear, it is important that we think of the long-term challenges—and possibilities—of the entire globe. Photographs of our world from space clearly show that there are no real boundaries of our planet. Therefore, all of us must take care of it and work to preserve our planet. This coronavirus was a warning that only by coming together with a coordinated, global response will we meet the unprecedented magnitude of the challenges we face.

We must also remember that nobody is free of suffering, and extend our hands to others... This crisis shows us that we are not separate from one another—even when we are living apart. Therefore, we all have a responsibility to exercise compassion and help...At this time of uncertainty, it is important that we do not lose hope...