

1<sup>st</sup> of Iyar, 2023

Over the next year, members of our Ahavath Chesed community will be volunteering Divrei Torah, words of Torah, on the weekly Parashat. These will be published on our website and in the HaKol, the monthly newsletter, to be a source of inspiration for us all. I am starting out the series with a Dvar on the parashat dreaded by all Bnei mitzvot, Tazria/M'tsora, with many ideas based on a weekly torah study group with Rabbi Victor Reinstein, but I will add a little of my own ideas.

Rabbi Isaiah ben Abraham HaLevi Horowitz (The Shlah) said that the whole book of Leviticus is a book of Tikkun—that seems unlikely, but in this Parasha of Tazria-Metsora, filled with blood and oozing and leprosy and skin plagues, we find some surprising teachers that teach of healing.

As Rabbi Sternberg has said, the “Nega” (plague) on someone’s skin is not a medical situation. Instead, it is connected to Lashon Hara—speaking badly. The word for “Leper”-- M'tsora-- tells us this: Motzi rah (bringing forth bad). The parasha begins with Adam (Leviticus 13:2), “When a person (adam) has on skin of the body a swelling or...” Adam already tells us that this is not a medical situation. Adam is the highest name for a person. Adam was made b'Tzelem Elokim—in the image of G-d. But Adam is the leper. Therefore, this person, who might be shunned due to their disease, is actually someone in whom we see the divine presence. In Leviticus 13:3 (“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's even clearer—it uses the work “Amok” to talk about a plague which is “deeper than the skin”—the message is so clear, not to see things “skin deep” but look below the surface.

Again in Lev. 13.2, the torah teaches us that the leader, Aaron, the Cohen must see the person with a Nega (nun-gimel-ayin). This reminded me of when a citizen is in distress, and the president of the United States calls them on the phone and tells them that they are with them. This person—the exemplar of a shunned person—with leprosy—must go straight to the top, and get help from Aharon himself. This is amazing! The Slonimer Rebbe comments on this section, that this is not a physical sickness and the holy torah is eternal. This is not about ritual impurity only, since that does not apply today, but about seeking healing—advice and remedy—from the holiest person) when it's needed.

The Sfas Emes asks “what is the Torah of the M'tsora?” --the teaching of the leper. Our parasha actually uses those words (Leviticus 14:2). He answers that they need to give their Divrei Torah as part of the healing. In Leviticus 13:45, a very famous and disturbing scene is painted. “ As for the person with a leprous affection: the clothes shall be rent, the head shall be left bare, and the upper lip shall be covered over; and that person shall call out, “Impure! Impure!” “

This reminds of masks and social distancing and the plagues we have experienced. What is the purpose? Rashi, ordinarily amazing, is unhelpful in suggesting that it is only to prevent others from becoming impure by contact. Truly, as many point out, the translation is wrong, since the trope marks indicate a stop that occurs as “Tamei | Tamei he will cry.” Thus the leper doesn't cry out “impure” ... the impure leper just simply cries out. He was made in the image of G-d, he needs the help of the high Priest, he is crying out to us, his tzaarat is a tsoros, (his leprosy is like a sorrow). They say that who cries out at night, their voice will be heard, the stars and the constellations will cry with them. Shabbat shalom, Dana Manley