



Parashiot Tazria/Metzora

April 17, 2021

Torah: Leviticus 12:1-15:33

Haftarah: 2Kings 7:3-20

Ketuwim Sh'lichim: Matthew 8:1-4

We have a dual *parasha* today, *Tazria* and *Metzora*, which respectively mean: “she conceives” and “a person afflicted with *tza'arat*.” In common years, years like this year, 5781, these two are read together. In leap years, they are read separately. In *Parasha Tazria*, Israel is instructed about the purification rituals for mothers following childbirth as well as the procedures for identifying and treating those who were infected with *tza'arat* which is translated as leprosy. In *Parasha Metzora*, the purification ritual is described for people and homes afflicted with *tza'arat* and also instructions regarding the emission of bodily fluids. Today without a Temple, none of this is possible, but the underlying spiritual principles are still relevant for us. There are many types and shadows pictured in the physical Tabernacle that are present in our time without a Tabernacle, but in a spiritual context. All of the laws of *Tazria* and *Metzora* are inactive today, but the underlying spiritual principles are still very much active and we can not only learn from them but also apply them in our lives.

Yeshua encountered several different lepers. Our *Shlichim* reading in the *Torah* service today was about the one described in Matthew 8: *1 When He came down from the mountain, large crowds followed Him. 2 And a man with tza'arat came to Him and bowed down before Him, saying, “Master, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” 3 Yeshua stretched out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing. Be cleansed.” Immediately his tza'arat was cleansed. 4 And Yeshua said to him, “See that you tell no one; but go show yourself to the kohen and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them”* (Matthew 8:1-4 TLV). Yeshua’s instructions to the man were to follow *Torah*. He said, “show yourself to the *kohen*.” Leviticus 14 tells us that the *kohen*, the officiating priest, would have to come to him outside of the camp. This man could not even go into Jerusalem, the camp of that day, but had to ask someone to go into Jerusalem and tell a *kohen* that he was outside the camp waiting to be examined. But, after the *kohen* came out and examined him and he was found to be clean, he still could not enter Jerusalem and the Temple until he was cleansed. The cleansing would also take place outside the camp. According to Leviticus 14, the ceremony utilized two clean living birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop which also had to be brought out for him. Following the ritual described using these items, the man would have been pronounced clean.

It was not easy to be part of Israel in Tabernacle and Temple times. Today, as followers of Yeshua, after sincere repentance and a request for forgiveness, we are forgiven. But, not so back then. This man with *tza'arat* had not been accused of a particular sin, yet in that day this condition was seen as a judgment for sin. If this condition was for sin, whatever it was, consider what this leper had to do to become clean, or as we would say today, forgiven. He had to go to a spot outside of Jerusalem and then find someone to take a message to the Temple and then wait there until a priest came out to examine him. Once the priest examined him and found him clean, the leper had to send someone back to the Temple for two birds,

cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop. And, he had to pay for these items. But, even after following the directions with these items in the cleansing ceremony, it was not over. He then had to wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe himself in water before he would have been declared clean. Only then could he go inside the camp, Jerusalem, but once there had to live outside of his house for seven days. At the end of the seventh day he had to again shave his hair from his head, beard and eyebrows, wash his clothes, and bathe his body. Only then and finally, would he be clean. But, it was only at this point, some eight to ten days later, that he could follow Yeshua's second instruction; "offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them." Then, on the eighth day after his ceremony began, he could take two male lambs, a one year old female lamb, fine flour and oil to the Temple and have the *kohen* offer them. If he was poor, there were lesser sacrifices which he could offer. It was quite a ritual, but that is what Yeshua commanded him to do. Everything in Yeshua's actions toward this man show that He fully supported *Torah*. Do we living today really appreciate the fact that ADONAI and Yeshua have made it so easy for us. We don't have to go through everything which the Israelites worshipping under the Levitical priesthood did. We can repent in just a few seconds and be forgiven for any sin. Any sin, if we sincerely repent.

Let's look a little deeper. Did this man with *tza'arat* really sin? Was his physical condition because of something that he did that brought leprosy on him? In John 9 we read about a man blind from birth. Yeshua told his disciples that his blindness was not due to sin by either the man or his parents, but that "the works of G-d might be brought to light in him." But in most cases, *tza'arat* was not something that a person was born with. It usually happened later in life unless you were unfortunate enough to be the descendant cursed along with the parent. Why did anyone have *tza'arat* in those days of the Tabernacle and Temple? Was it a result of sin?

What was this physical condition? We know today that *tza'arat*, translated from the Greek as leprosy, was not Hansen's disease, the leprosy of today. The *Septuagint*, the Greek language translation of the *Tanakh* from about 200 years before Yeshua's time, uses the word *lepra* to translate the Hebrew word *tza'arat*. *Lepra* comes from the Greek word *lepros* meaning, "rough or scaly." As best we know, it was some kind of non-life threatening skin disease made up of scaly and ugly looking skin patches which could be located on any part of the body.

Our *haftarah* reading today from 2Kings 7 is about four men with *tza'arat* outside the city gate of Samaria. All we know about them is that they had it. We don't know why. An alternate *haftarah* reading for today is in 2Kings 5 about *Na'aman*, the commander of the army of the King of Aram, who also had *tza'arat*. Scripture says that he was highly esteemed in the king's eyes and even though he was a mighty man of valor, he had *tza'arat*. Was there something else in his life that might have caused it? We don't know any other details about him, but in this same story there is someone else who gets *tza'arat*. It was Gehazi, *Elisha's* servant. While *Elisha* had refused any payment for *Na'aman* being healed, his servant sneakily ran after him and lied saying that his master had sent him to request silver and clothing for two young sons of the prophets. *Elisha* had a vision of this and when he confronted Gehazi about it, he said: 27 "Therefore, the *tza'arat* of *Na'aman* will cling to you and to your offspring forever." Then he went out from his presence with *tza'arat* as white as snow (2Kings 7:27 TLV). We do know what caused it for Gehazi. It was greed and lying. And, it also caused his descendants to have *tza'arat*.

There are others in Scripture who were known to have *tza'arat*. In 2Chronicles 26, we read about Uzziah, king of Judah. He initially did what was right in ADONAI's sight and did many good things through the years. After he became famous, Scripture says this: *16 But when he became strong, his heart grew so haughty that he acted corruptly. For he trespassed against Adonai his God by entering into the Temple of Adonai to burn incense upon the altar of incense* (2Chronicles 26:16 TLV). When he was confronted in the Holy Place by the *kohenim*, he raged against them and *tza'arat* broke on his forehead. And, he was a leper for the rest of his life. We have a pretty good idea of what caused Uzziah's leprosy. It was a heart condition, a condition called pride! He felt that he had become so great that he could do anything he wanted, even if it was a duty which ADONAI had given to others. Uzziah was one who had a haughty heart and he acted arrogantly superior. One who acts in this way also shows contempt and lack of respect to others.

In 2Samuel 3, we read about Joab, a nephew of King David and a commander in his army. Joab murdered Abner who had been the commander of King Saul's army for revenge because Abner had killed his brother Asahel in battle. Pretending to want to talk to Abner, Joab came close to him and stabbed him in the groin. When David learned of Abner's murder, he said: *28, "I and my kingdom are innocent before Adonai forever from the blood of Abner son of Ner. 29 May it whirl on Joab's head and on all his father's house. May the house of Joab never be without someone with discharge or tza'arat, lame or one fallen by the sword or one who lacks food"* (2Samuel 3:28b-29 TLV). We don't have any Scriptural evidence that Joab ever got *tza'arat*. But, David's words to him were essentially a curse that also extended to his family predicting that he and his family would suffer because of his crime of murder.

Moses' sister *Miryam* also had *tza'arat*, a punishment she received from ADONAI. She and Aaron both complained against Moses, criticizing him for having married a woman from Cush, an Ethiopian woman. But, that wasn't their only sin. Numbers chapter 2 says this: *2 They asked, "Has Adonai spoken only through Moses? Hasn't He also spoken through us?" Adonai heard it* (Numbers 12: 2 TLV). They were questioning the authority of one who had been anointed by ADONAI, Moses a very humble man, who did not glory in his position. But, *Miryam* and Aaron wanted to be equal in authority to their younger brother and this made ADONAI angry. As a result, He came down in a column of cloud to confront them: *10 When the cloud lifted up from above the Tent, behold, Miriam had tza'arat, like snow! As Aaron turned toward her, behold, she had tza'arat* (Numbers 12:10 TLV)! For reasons unknown to us, Aaron who was equally guilty, was not afflicted. Fortunately for *Miryam*, her leprosy was not a lifetime sentence. ADONAI had mercy and at the end of seven days she was healed and brought back into the camp. What was her sin? It seems very likely that it was also a sin of pride, although not to the extreme that it was with Uzziah.

In Luke 17 Yeshua healed ten lepers, who in the context of the Scripture were Samaritans, foreigners according to Yeshua. Although they were not Jews, Yeshua commanded them to go and show themselves to the *kohenim*. We are not whether they did this or not because they were healed on the way as they left Yeshua. If they had obeyed Him, they would have had to go through the same procedure that the leper in Matthew 8 did, be declared clean by the *kohen*, go through the cleansing ceremony and finally, offer sacrifices. We don't know why these ten had *tza'arat*, but with most of the others, it seems to have been caused by matters of the heart, something sinful in the heart. Jeremiah declared this truth: *9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and incurable—who can know it"* (Jeremiah 17:9 TLV)? He was speaking of an unregenerate heart, a sinful heart. That kind of heart is the cause of most of the problems of the world. There is anger hate and murder in the hearts of

many in our nation. The shooter who killed eight and then himself in Indianapolis night before last most certainly had a very serious heart problem which led him to murder. We can almost say with certainty that those who do not know Yeshua have sinful hearts and their actions grow out of what they hold in their heart.

In Matthew 15, Yeshua confronted some Pharisees regarding their misuse of *Torah*. They had accused His disciples of breaking the traditions of the elders by not “ritually” washing their hands before they ate. Yeshua’s response to them was that they had changed *Torah* into man-made rules and made the Word of G-d, the real truth, null and void. Then He said: 10, “Hear and understand. 11 *It’s not what goes into the mouth that makes the man unholy; but what comes out of the mouth, this makes the man unholy*” (Matthew 15:10b-11 TLV). Eating with unwashed hands doesn’t make a person unclean, but the words which come out of his mouth do. Unclean is what the leper had to cry out in order to keep other people away. He was physically unclean while Yeshua also spoke of spiritual uncleanness. *Torah* says: 45 “*The one with tza’arat who has the plague-mark shall wear torn clothes, the hair of his head is to hang loose, he is to cover his upper lip and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean’*” (Leviticus 13:45 TLV)! Yeshua continued, explaining to his disciples what He had said to the Pharisees. 19 “*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander. 20 These are the things that make the man unholy; but to eat with unwashed hands does not make the man unholy*” (Matthew 15:19-20 TLV). Eating without ritual handwashing, *netilat yadayim*, doesn’t make a person unholy, that is, separated from ADONAI, but the wicked thoughts and wicked actions coming out of a person’s heart do! Look again at Jeremiah 17: 9 “*The heart is deceitful above all things, and incurable—who can know it*” (Jeremiah 17:9 TLV)? Here is the next verse: 10 “*I Adonai search the heart, I try the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds*” (Jeremiah 17:10 TLV). ADONAI is saying to us that He gives to us according to our ways, that we reap what we sow. It might not be immediate, but it will happen. 7 “*Do not be deceived—God is not mocked. For whatever a man sows, that he also shall reap*” (Galatians 6:7 TLV).

Can Yeshua’s words in Matthew 15 also apply to those who have placed their trust in Him, those of us who have regenerated hearts? Can we have evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander in our hearts? I think that we all know that we can. Every one of these things can manifest in the heart of a believer. Probably every one of us has had at least one of these seven things or some form of it in our hearts as a follower of Yeshua. But, this is just thinking these things. Yes, these things do begin as thoughts in our hearts, our mind. But, in Matthew 5, speaking about adultery, Yeshua said: “just thinking about it is committing it in your heart.” And, the same thing applies to each of these other things, evil thoughts, murder, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander? Thinking them is equal to committing them and thought can grow to an actual commitment of them. It would be interesting to know how many of the people who commit murder in the United States each year has made a profession of faith. I would think that it would be a fair number. But, as we know, a profession of faith without a life of discipleship many times returns to the character of the life before the profession. If we as believers don’t nip these evil things in our hearts in the bud, they can continue and grow into full bloom. As Barney says: “Nip it! Nip it in the bud!”

The rabbis consider *tza’arat* to be punishment for *lashon hara*, gossip and slander. While we see in Scripture that *tza’arat* was punishment for this sin in some cases, in other cases it was a punishment for other sins such as pride, greed, and possibly even murder.

Because ADONAI gave these sins of the heart a physical manifestation on one's person, there was no way to hide that you had sinned. It is hard to deny that you have sinned when you get a supernatural skin condition from it. Solomon said: 23 *"Guard your heart diligently, for from it flow the springs of life"* (Proverbs 4:23 TLV). The "springs," the issues of life, develop from what we have in our hearts. If we do not guard our hearts, even after we have trusted Yeshua, these negative heart issues can flow forth into our lives. And, while ADONAI does not seem to be striking people with *tza'arat* today, we do reap what we sow. After *Sha'ul* told us that "we reap what we sow," he said: 8 *"For the one who sows in the flesh will reap corruption from the flesh. But the one who sows in the Ruach will reap from the Ruach eternal life. 9 So let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we don't give up"* (Galatians 6:8-9 TLV). The negative side of sowing in the flesh today is what we could call "spiritual *tza'arat*," the effect of the potential of our internal sins to grow into external sins. But, as followers of Yeshua who have circumcised hearts, we can also reap positive things but we must sow positive things in order to receive them. And we will, if we let the *Ruach Elohim* control our hearts and minds. *Sha'ul* also told us: 14 *"Now a natural man does not accept the things of the Ruach Elohim, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1Corinthians: 2:14 TLV). But regarding us, those of us in Yeshua, he said: 16 ... *"But we have the mind of Messiah"* (1Corinthians 2:16b TLV).

Guarding our hearts is something which we must do regularly. Check it to see if it's still circumcised. Even as believers, we can allow hurts and issues with others to allow our hearts to tend toward the negative side. You remember the old saying "XYZ!" Let's change it just a little bit: "XYH!" Examine your heart! Examine it regularly and consciously open it to the *Ruach*. If we regularly examine our hearts, we can trust that these words of *Sha'ul* to the Philippians are also words for us: 7 *"And the shalom of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua"* (Philippians 4:7 TLV). All of the issues of life flow from our hearts. The condition of our heart is very important. To have a heart faithful to our Messiah, a heart free from spiritual *tza'arat*, we must diligently guard it. *Shabbat shalom!*