

Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHA

ISSUE 28

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TAZRIA/ METSORA

6th Iyar 5775

Kohen - First Aliya:

Chapter 12, verse 1 - Chapter 13, verse 23

- ✚ Bnai Yisrael are instructed regarding the ritual impurity contracted by a woman who gives birth. The timeframe of this impurity differs depending whether the child is a boy or girl.
- ✚ Once this period of impurity has passed, the woman must immerse herself in the Mikvah and is required to bring a korban orla (burnt offering) and a korban Hatat (Sin offering)
- ✚ The Torah then begins discussing the laws of Tzara'at, a skin discoloration which renders a person ritually impure. Anyone showing signs of these symptoms must go to a Kohen for confirmation.

Levi - Second Aliya:

Chapter 13, verses 24 – 39

- ✚ We learn the laws of Tzara'at which appears following a burn to the skin. This form of Tzara'at is different to the standard Tzara'at discussed in the previous Aliyah.
- ✚ This Aliya concludes with how a person should be treated if they have been afflicted with a multiple of dull white patches which have appeared on their skin.

Sh'lishi - Third Aliya:

Chapter 13, verses 40 - 54

- ✚ The procedure followed by anyone who has been inflicted and diagnosed as having Tzara'at is mentioned here.
- ✚ The person must tear their clothes, not cut their hair and wear a mask over their mouth. They must then stay outside of their city's perimeter until their condition has cleared up and been declared pure by the Kohen.
- ✚ Clothing can also be infected with Tzara'at. If a Kohen acknowledges the garments have been infected, then he keeps it in quarantine for up to two weeks.

R'VI' - Fourth Aliya:

Chapter 13, verse 55 - Chapter 14, verse 20

- ✚ At the conclusion of the quarantine period, depending on the circumstances the garment is either declared pure, or completely burnt.
- ✚ The purification procedure for a person who have contracted Tzara'at is as follows. Once the Kohen determines that the Tzara'at has been healed, the initial stage of the purification commences with a ceremony which involves two birds, scarlet yarn, a plank and water taken from a flowing stream.
- ✚ The person also shaves their entire body and offers up three animals and an oil offering to the Mishkan.
- ✚ The Kohen processes the korbans in the manner prescribed, completing the purification process.

Chamishi - Fifth Aliya:

Chapter 14, verses 21 – 32

- ✚ Two birds are allowed to be substituted for two animals if the individual could not afford to purchase the above Korban.
- ✚ The purification process reserved for this impoverished person which is slightly different to the norm is discussed here.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya:

Chapter 14, verse 33 - Chapter 15, verse 15

- ✚ People's homes can also be contracted with Tzara'at. In this case, the Kohen quarantine's the house for three weeks. If the Tzara'at has spread the house has to be knocked down and rebuilt.
- ✚ Other forms of ritual impurities and the method of attaining purity once more are discussed here.

Sh'vi'i - Seventh Aliya:

Chapter 15, verses 16 – 33

- ✚ A Niddah (a woman in her menstrual cycle) is deemed impure for seven days. Anyone who touches her during this time would also be classed as impure until the evening.
- ✚ If she has sexual relations during this period, the partner becomes impure for seven days also.
- ✚ Finally the laws relating to a Zavah (a woman who menstruates longer than normal or at a different time to her cycle) are mentioned here.

Haftorah – MELAHIM II (2ND BOOK OF KINGS) Chapter 7 verses 3 to 20

OVERVIEW:

- ✚ A catastrophic famine was raging in the northern territories of Israel. King Jehoram of Israel was contemplating having Elisha the Navi killed because he believed that had Elisha daverned (prayed) on his peoples behalf, the entire tragedy could have been prevented.
- ✚ Elisha reassured the king that the famine would come to an end the very next day and food will be plentiful once more.
- ✚ The King's officer disbelieved him and scoffed at the prophecy made. Elisha responded, "You will see with your own eyes what I say is true, but you shall not reap any benefit or eat from any of the produce."
- ✚ Four men suffering from Tzara'at who were dwelling in quarantine were so hungry, that in desperation decided to approach their enemy's camp, to beg for food, but upon arrival they found the place deserted.
- ✚ The men reported their findings to King Jehoram. Even though the king originally thought the enemy were playing a trick on him and were preparing a surprise attack against his kingdom, he sent messengers to confirm the four Tzara'at statement. The people, realizing a miracle had taken place, swarmed out of the city and looted the enemy camp, thus breaking the famine and fulfilling Elisha's prophecy.
- ✚ The officer who mocked Elisha was trampled to death by the rampaging crowds fulfilling the Navi's words.

LINK TO SEDRA READING:

- ✚ The Haftorah relates the story of four men stricken by Tzara'at, a skin ailment caused by sins, which was one of the main topics of this week's Torah reading.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

The majority of this week's double sedra deals with a peculiar condition called Tzara'at. This condition has long been erroneously translated into English as leprosy, which clearly it is not. For starters, unlike leprosy, people were not afraid of "catching" Tzara'at.

Tzara'at is not contagious in the way leprosy is. If it was, then the rules associated with Tzara'at would not make sense. For example, a person who is entirely covered with the disorder is not necessarily considered tamei (ritually unclean), though one who is only partially covered would be classed as tamei and would have to be quarantined. . Also if the walls of a house shows signs of Tzara'at then the house is sealed off and deemed uninhabitable but all of the contents of the home are removed and left outside. Surely this is not the way to halt the spread of a contagious illness.

So! What kind of affliction was Tzara'at and why did it occupy such an important role in the spiritual / ritual life of our ancestors? More importantly, what meaning or relevance does a study of Tzara'at hold for us today?

The cause of Tzara'at is implied by its very name. A person who has Tzara'at is called a Metzora. According to rabbinic tradition this word loosely means "one who spreads slander". (Loshen Hora) Hence Tzara'at was a form of punishment for committing such an act.

This week's Haftorah explains the reason why someone who is infected with the disease is placed in quarantine, isolated away from his community. It was because that person had acted in a selfish manner and needed to be taught a lesson. In the Haftorah, four men afflicted with Tzara'at are contemplating their future. Inferring that they have nothing to lose they decide to desert to the enemy army of Aram. As they approach the Aramean camp they observed that it was completely abandoned. Their first reaction was to steal all of the silver, gold and other items of value left behind. Until one of the four men spoke up and pointed out, "The reason why we have Tzara'at in the first place was because we all spoke Loshen Hora. We have a chance today to rectify our misdemeanors by reporting back our good news to the king, that our enemies have fled.

Tradition suggests that this is a parable about selfishness versus selflessness. The four men are afflicted with Tzara'at because of the sins of some unstated previous acts of selfishness. The punishment is that they are then isolated from the rest of the community. The "treatment" that brings about a change within the four men is the very same thing as their punishment, namely, isolation from the community.

The experience of being removed and separated from the community motivated the men to cease from acting selfishly and begin to put the needs of the community ahead of their own. As a result of their "rehabilitation" the four men are redeemed, the enemy is scattered and the city of Samaria was saved from attack.

The Haftorah helps us to better understand that the main subject of this week's two very difficult sedra's. Tzara'at, is not literally about skin afflictions but rather it is about social and spiritual conditions that threaten the wholeness or integrity of the community. The lesson of this Haftorah is just as true today: selfishness leads to isolation, while acts of sharing and generosity cultivate a sense of belonging and inclusion.

