

# Weekly Teaching

April 5, 2019

This Shabbat, we will read from the Book of Leviticus, specifically on the skin afflictions of leprosy.

The Torah records that when an Israelite was afflicted with the strange malady of *tza'arat* (leprosy), he or she became an outcast, as they were forbidden to remain within the Camp of the Israelites.

The “leper” became a seemingly “untouchable” who was forced to live on the far edge of society—returning only after elaborate purification rites were publicly performed.

One can easily imagine how even the “healed” leper was stigmatized.

There is a common rabbinic tradition to try and explain the affliction as a punishment for the sins of evil speech, such as slander and gossip.

While we can understand the theological desire to note how evil speech can stain our soul, it is a terrible theology to assert that someone afflicted with a disease is receiving a divine punishment for some behavior that they have done wrong.

When reading of the “leper”, it is our opportunity to understand that we are seeing an outcast, both physically and spiritually.

While the Bible describes a person that no one wants—a person who is shunned, lost, forgotten and unloved—this is not just a description of ancient society, but modern times as well.

Today we still too easily allow for outcasts who live at the far edge of society; psychological wildernesses, where we can pretend that they don't even exist.

We place our blinders on and teach ourselves to not touch the unwanted physically or spiritually.

The Bible comes to warn us about allowing for human untouchables, and this is why we must read the commanding voice of God within our sacred text.

In the Bible, God orders that the *Cohen* (the priest), the highest ranking person in Israelite society, be the one to go outside the camp and treat the leper.

And the job of the *Cohen* was to not just go out and physically treat the afflicted, but to figure out how to best reintegrate them and re-absorb them back into society.

We're supposed to read the Bible and realize the following: if the individual held in highest esteem by society has been ordered by God to reach out to the outcast with compassion and understanding, then every citizen of the human family must do the same.

We read Leviticus and are supposed to ask ourselves:

- Who are our modern-day untouchables?
- Who is starving for love?
- Who is lonely for fellowship?

It is our reminder that, like the *Cohen*, we need to seek out and welcome everyone in need of our love instead of taking the easy road and turning our backs.

Let us find the strength to reintegrate into our community all those in need of inclusion, and to do so without any type of stigma.

We are all created equally in the image of God; it's time for us to put into better actions the meaning of our religious beliefs.

Shabbat Shalom,

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