

### Parashat Tazria



#### Spiritual Cooties

ספר ויקרא פרק יג  
וְאִם-פָּרוּחַ תִּפְרַח הַצָּרַעַת בְּעוֹר וְכִסְתָּהּ הַצָּרַעַת אֶת  
כָּל-עוֹר הַנִּגָּע מֵרֹאשׁוֹ וְעַד-רַגְלָיו...כָּלֹּ הַפֶּה לְבָן טְהוֹר  
הוּא:

“If the leprosy will erupt on the skin, and the leprosy will cover the entire skin of the affliction from his head to his feet...having turned completely white, it is ritually fit.” Leviticus 13:12,13

When we approach a study of the Bible, we correctly expect to find a practical application, an encouragement here or there, or an answer to life's tough questions. As you can see from the passage above, this will prove challenging in our portion for the week. However, with an extra measure of dedication and with the help of God, we will be rewarded.

To reap any fruit from this week's portion, we need to clarify two key terms: *tzara'at* translated as “leprosy,” and *tahor* which Daniel Lancaster from [First Fruits of Zion](#) renders as “ritually fit.” Biblical leprosy is not the same disease as modern day leprosy. In fact, rabbinic opinion regards biblical leprosy as a supernatural event that God sent to punish man for certain deeds; especially *lashon hara* (evil speech). We find that both Yeshua (Jesus) and Paul ratify this understanding throughout the Apostolic Writings (New Testament). The second term, *tahor*, or “ritually fit” describes a person who is in a physical state that is fit to enter the Tabernacle/Temple and participate in its services and eat the sacrifices performed on the altar. Our Torah portion this week informs us that someone who was diagnosed with *tzara'at* by a priest was not *tahor*, i.e. a leper could not participate in the services of the Tabernacle/Temple and he had to be isolated outside the camp (Lev. 13:46). If others approached him he had to warn them by shouting, “Unclean! Unclean!”

The verses above, however, present us with a puzzling paradox. If a patch of leprosy which has already been seen by the priest grows slightly larger, the person is still ritually unfit and is again sent out of the camp or city. On the other hand, if the patch grows so much that it covers the leper's body completely, he is declared *tahor*, ritually fit and is no longer banned from the Tabernacle/Temple or other people! What is the Torah trying to teach us here?

Remember that biblical leprosy was sent to a person to make him aware that his behavior was unacceptable. Before the leprosy came, he may have considered his failings to not be very severe. The first appearance of the leprosy (the small patch), informs him that he quickly needs

to change his thinking and repent of his sinful actions. So he is sent to the priest who will guide him through this repentance. If the leprosy spreads after this process has taken place, it is a sign that the leper's efforts to change were not sufficient. He is sent out again to continue working on himself until he is healed.

These laws are designed to encourage repentance. However, should a person's leprosy erupt to cover his body from “his head to his feet,” and he is declared ritually unfit, there is a risk that he will perceive himself as permanently damaged, beyond repair, and without hope. He might give up completely and stop trying to improve his thoughts and actions which would defeat the very purpose of leprosy. To prevent this, our verse tells us he is instead declared “ritually fit.”

It is important to note that this merciful exception to the law of *tzara'at* is only true if the leper had already approached the priest regarding the small patch of leprosy on his skin. If he had not approached the priest at the onset, even if the leprosy spread to cover him from head to toe, when he is finally examined by the priest he is declared ritually unfit. This comes to teach us that only one who has put some effort into improving himself spiritually, demonstrated by approaching the priest when the problem was small, merits the declaration, “Fit!” should the disease spread to his whole body. Yet, the one who has not shown any interest in improving himself, and does not go to the priest at the first appearance of leprosy, he is declared ritually unfit when the leprosy spreads to his whole body. This is to teach him that he is at fault for not being concerned about the root cause of his initial leprosy.

At a deeper level, this law of leprosy is teaching us about submission to God. Submission is one of the primary ingredients to repentance. When a person is afflicted with a patch of leprosy, he may not feel he needs to repent. He may convince himself that the patch is merely a coincidence rather than a sign of his perverse behavior. The Torah therefore requires him to be sent out of the city in order for him to contemplate the meaning of the partial patch of leprosy on his body. Think of it as a grown-up “time out” from God to bring the man around to full repentance. By contrast, the person afflicted with leprosy from head to toe does not need to go through the entire process of exclusion in order to reach

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repentance. Why? Because he sees with clarity that his affliction is from God, and that he *must* have done something to come to such a wretched state. For this one, submission to God comes easily and quickly because his own body is a testimony against him.

The Bible is full of stories of men and women who come to the realization that submission to God is the only way to postpone or even annul Divine decrees of punishment (The story of Ahab, king of Israel, in 1 Kings Chapter 21 is a great example). Perhaps the greatest illustration is how Messiah Yeshua dealt with the lepers He encountered in His ministry. Leprosy symbolizes the sinful condition of every person. We are all afflicted with spiritual leprosy. Because of sin, everyone must be sent out of the camp, destined for death and decay.

But our leprosy is still of the patchy type. While we walk in this world, it is not too late to come to the priest and say to Him, "Yeshua! Master, have mercy on us all!" (Luke 17:13). Yeshua is the cure for our disease. He is the perfect, eternal priest who, at the final judgment, will scrutinize each person looking for evidence of spiritual leprosy. He will look to see if you have waited to come to Him, postponed seeking Him because of fear or arrogance, and now stand before Him fully covered from head to toe with the disease that will cause you to be banned from eternal life. The world to come is no place for lepers. Revelation 21:27 tells us that "nothing ritually unfit...shall ever come into the New Jerusalem." But you are not yet damned. There is still time to present our symptoms to the Master before our day of examination. It is possible even now that "the life of Yeshua also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." (2 Corinthians 4:11).

May you cast yourself before Him for the healing of your heart and the cleansing of your soul, Amen.