

The Metzora – Giving Space or Reaching Further In

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A. Leviticus 13:45 teaches us that a Metzora [a leper] must inform passersby that he or she is infected by shouting out, "Unclean, unclean." The sources below explore opposing meanings that can be derived from the practical and symbolic actions of the Metzora's act of social-distancing.

1. Does one inform others that he/she is impure in order to keep them away or in order to arouse their sympathy and care (see debate in source #2)?

2. Does an infected person cover his moustache in order to prevent the spread of his infection or as a sign of mourning, meaning, as an act that would give expression to his internal state and would also arouse sympathy in others (see sources #3 & #4)?

3. Is the social isolation of the Metzora a punishment for the distance he created between spouses (and or others) through his/her gossip or is his/her isolation a gift to deepen his/her sense of self, his/her level of confidence, self-reliance and independence (see sources #5, #6 & #7)?

<p>1. Leviticus 13:45-46</p> <p>45 And the person with <i>tzara'ath</i> [leprosy], in whom there is the lesion, his garments shall be torn, his head shall be unshorn, he shall cover himself down to his mustache and call out, "Unclean! Unclean!"</p> <p>46 All the days the lesion is upon him, he shall remain unclean. He is unclean; he shall dwell isolated; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.</p>	<p>1. ויקרא פרשת תזריע פרק יג</p> <p>מה והצרוע אשר בו הנגע בגדיו יהיו פרמיו וראשו יהיה פרוע ועל שפם יעטה וטמא טמא יקרא: מו כל ימי אשר הנגע בו וטמא טמא הוא כדד יושב מחוץ למחנה מושבו:</p>
<p>Leviticus 13:45 teaches us that a Metzora [a leper] must inform passersby's that he is infected by shouting out, "Unclean, unclean." The source below, and the ones that follow, explore opposing meanings that can be derived from the practical and symbolic actions of the Metzora's act of social-distancing.</p>	
<p>2. BT Moed Katan 5a</p> <p>R. Abahu said: The allusion is from here: and he (a <i>metzora</i>) shall call out, "<i>Tamei, tamei.</i>" We see here that <i>tumah</i> calls out to [the passerby] and says to him: "Keep away?" And so said R. Uziel the grandson of R. Uziel the Great in expounding this verse: <i>Tumah</i> calls out to [the passerby] and says to him: "Keep away!" But does this verse come to teach this rule? Why, this verse is needed for another rule, as was taught in the following Baraisa: This teaches that [the metzora] must inform the public of his misfortune, so that the public will beg on his behalf for mercy. Thus, the cry of "<i>Tamei, tamei</i>" is not intended to alert passersby to the existence of <i>tumah</i>, but to arouse their sympathy for the afflicted person.</p>	<p>2. תלמוד בבלי מסכת מועד קטן דף ה עמוד א</p> <p>רבי אבהו אמר מהכא: דוטמא טמא יקרא - טומאה קוראה לו, ואומרת לו: פרוש. וכן אמר רבי עוזיאל בר בריה דרבי עוזיאל רבה: טומאה קוראה לו ואומרת לו: פרוש. והאי להכי הוא דאתא? ההוא מיבעי ליה לכדתניא: וטמא טמא יקרא - צריך להודיע צערו לרבים, ורבים מבקשין עליו רחמים! - אם כן ליכתוב וטמא יקרא מאי וטמא טמא - שמעת מינה תרתי.</p>
<p>3. Ibn Ezra, Leviticus 13:45</p>	<p>3. אבן עזרא ויקרא פרשת תזריע פרק יג</p>

<p>“His mustache...He shall cover it with his clothes” ...so that it [tzara’at] does not spread through his breath.</p>	<p>ועל שפם...יעטה בבגדיו...והטעם, שלא יזיק ברוח פיו.</p>
<p>4. Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1</p> <p>R. Chalbo taught in the name of R. Huna: ...[this is] like a mourner who covers his mustache [with his clothes] and cries as it says in Leviticus 13:45, “he shall cover himself down to his mustache.”</p>	<p>4. שיר השירים רבה (וילנא) פרשה א</p> <p>רבי חלבו בשם רבי הונא אמר... כאבל הזה שהוא עוטה על שפמו ובוכה המד"א (ויקרא יג) ועל שפם יעטה</p>
<p>5. Rashi, Leviticus 13:46</p> <p>He shall dwell isolated: ...Our Sages said: “Why is he different from other unclean people, that he must remain isolated? Since, with his slander, he caused a separation [i.e., a rift] between man and wife or between man and his fellow, he too, shall be separated [from society].”- [Arachin 16b]</p>	<p>5. רש"י, ויקרא פרשת תזריע פרק יג</p> <p>בדד ישב :...ואמרו רבותינו מה נשתנה משאר טמאים לישב בדד, הואיל והוא הבדיל בלשון הרע בין איש לאשתו ובין איש לרעהו, אף הוא יבדל:</p>
<p>6. Deuteronomy 33:28-29</p> <p>28 And Israel dwelled safely and alone as Jacob [blessed them], in a land of grain and wine; also, their heavens will drip dew. 29 Fortunate are you, O Israel! Who is like you, O people whose salvation is through the Lord, the Shield Who helps you, your majestic Sword! Your enemies will lie to you, but you will tread upon their heights."</p>	<p>6. דברים פרשת וזאת הברכה פרק לג</p> <p>ח) וַיִּשְׁכֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטוֹב כְּדָד עֵין יַעֲקֹב אֶל-אֶרֶץ דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ אֶף-נְשָׁמיו יַעֲרֹפוּ טֹל: כט) אֲנִשְׁרִיךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל מִי כְמוֹךָ עִם נוֹשֵׁעַ בִּיקוֹק מִגֹּן עֲזָרָךְ וְאֲשֶׁר-חָרַב גְּאֻתְךָ וַיִּכְחָשוּ אֵיבֶיךָ לָךְ וְאֶתְהָ עַל-כְּמוֹתֵימוֹ תִדְרֹךְ: ס</p>
<p>7. Rashi, Deuteronomy 33:28</p> <p>Safely and alone: Every single individual [will dwell safely]-each man under his own vine and his own fig tree. [And their security will be so sound, that] they will have no need to live together in one group, because of the enemy.</p>	<p>7. רש"י דברים פרק לג</p> <p>בטח בדד: כל יחיד ויחיד איש תחת גפנו ותחת תאנתו מפוזרין ואין צריכים להתאסף ולישב יחד מפני האויב:</p>

B. As we experience the social-distancing and isolation wrought by Covid19, the various interpretations of our Torah portion raise important questions:

1. Are we using the experience to grow distant from others or to draw closer to one another?
2. Do measures such as standing 6 feet apart or wearing maska cultivate fear or sympathy in our midst?
3. Is our sense of isolation a heavy burden or a unique gift?