

The Hidden meaning of Leprosy

In weeks reading from [Parshiot Tazria and Metzora](#) (*Vayikra / Leviticus 12:1-15:33*), there are a number of instructions on the ritual service related to woman giving birth and what they are to do following having a baby. For a baby boy, she will be unclean for seven days (*12:1-2*) and on the eighth day the child is to be circumcised (*12:4*). Following this, the woman is to remain thirty days without being intimate with her husband and she is considered unclean, not allowed to touch any consecrated thing. Giving birth to a baby girl, the time doubles, two weeks and two months. Having completed the time period, the woman is to bring a young lamb as an Olah Korban (whole burnt offering) and a dove as a Khatat Korban (sin offering). A poor person may bring two turtle doves or two pigeons for a sin offering (*12:5-8*).

The Torah portion continues to describe the disease of Tzaraat (Leprosy). Studying the Scriptures this week, there is an interesting comparison that may be made regarding tzaraat.

ספר ויקרא פרק יב *Vayikra / Leviticus 13:1-3*

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן
לֵאמֹר: ב אָדָם כִּי-יְהִי בְעוֹר-בְּשָׂרֹו
רו שְׂאֵת או-סִפְחַת או בַּהֲרַת וְהָיָה
בְּעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֹגַע צָרְעַת וְהוּבֵא
אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן או אֶל-אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו
הַכֹּהֲנִים: ג וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַנֹּגַע
בְּעוֹר-הַבָּשָׂר וְשַׁעַר בְּנֹגַע הַפֶּה | לָבֵן
וּמְרֹאֵה הַנֹּגַע עֲמֹק מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ נֹגַע
צָרְעַת הוּא וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמְא אֹתוֹ:
ד וְאִם-בַּהֲרַת לְבָנָהּ הוּא בְּעוֹר
בְּשָׂרוֹ וְעֲמֹק אִיו-מִרְאֵהּ מִן-הָעוֹר
וְשַׁעֲרָהּ לֹא-הָפֵךְ לָבֵן וְהִסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן
אֶת-הַנֹּגַע שְׂבַעַת יָמִים:

13:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 13:2 'When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. 13:3 'The priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean. (NASB)

In *Vayikra / Leviticus 13*, the opening verses begin with the Lord God

telling Moshe how to instruct Aaron regarding tzaraat. The MT describes the problem in this way:

ב אָדָם כִּי-יְהִיָּה בְעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ שְׂאֵת אוּ-סִפְחָת אוּ בְהֶרֶת וְהָיָה בְעוֹר-
בְּשָׂרוֹ לְגִגַּע צָרְעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוּ אֶל-אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים:

13:2 'When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. (NASB)

In *Vayikra / Leviticus 13:2*, reader would see the words *בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ* “*in the skin of his body*,” whereas, a listener might hear the words *בְּאוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ* meaning “*in the light of his body*.” The way these two Hebrew words which sound the same but having two different meanings causes us to see the sin of tzaraat in a very different way. If the Apostle John would have been teaching in the Synagogue, and said in *1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 1:7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (NASB)*, would the listeners have been reminded of Parashat Tazria and this play on the words with the description of Tzaraat? Note the parallels here to Parshiot Tazria and Metzora, a person who has tzaraat would not have fellowship with God and the people because he was put out of the community due to his skin disease. Note that fellowship with the Lord is connected to the Temple service and God’s people (community). Would a working knowledge of the rabbinic understanding on tzaraat have played a significant part in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians regarding one being formerly darkness (*living in the flesh*, or *בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ* *in the skin of his body*) verses now being in the light (*בְּאוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ*), as a result of being in the Messiah, and hiding God’s word in one’s heart, one is completely transformed from the inside out, shining forth God’s love and righteousness by the way he serves the Lord and others. Could this have been what John was trying to say regarding walking in darkness as opposed to walking in the light, in God’s truth? Could this have been what the Apostle Paul was thinking when he wrote to the Ephe-

sians in *Ephesians 5:8*?

Ephesians 5:8

5:8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light (NASB)

ἵητε γάρ ποτε σκότος, νῦν δὲ φῶς ἐν κυρίῳ: ὡς τέκνα φωτὸς περιπατεῖτε

I have heard it said by some Christians, that God’s righteousness just emanates from the children of God. The idea is that somehow everyone will see the righteousness of Christ in our lives without works. This concept poses a serious problem. The problem with this interpretation of God’s righteousness emanating from us may be illustrated in the following scenario. Suppose there are two men, one who is a believer in Yeshua, and the other who is an Atheist. Both men are dressed alike, standing side by side, there are no revealing markings on their bodies, both men remain silent and expressionless. By simply observing what they look like from the outside without observing their deeds, it would be impossible to know which one has faith in God. God’s righteousness does not “emanate” in the sense that one just needs to sit back and do nothing. The righteousness of God, the light of His truth, is coupled to the way that we walk (*1 John 1:7*), a life that is actively serving God in righteous deeds especially for the one who believes in Yeshua the Messiah. God’s righteousness is seen in the one who lives by His commandments, and this is what both Yeshua and the Apostles taught.

In the Torah portion, the Lord continues saying clothing is also capable of contracting Tzaraat (*13:47*). The linen garment is to be quarantined for seven days and reexamined. If the garment is found to contain Tzaraat it is to be burned with fire (*13:51-52*), totally destroyed. When the Cohen looks and the Tzaraat in the garment and it has not spread, the garment is washed and if the spot remains, the garment is to be declared unclean and it is to be burned with fire (*13:55*). If the mark is faded after washing, the mark is to be torn out of the garment, washed a second time, and inspected to be certain the Tzaraat has not reappeared in the garment (*13:56-59*). A similar inspection takes place for mold in a home. Mold is also considered tzaraat. A diseased house goes through the inspection, quarantining,

and re-inspection phases, and if the mold is a spreading mold, the entire section of wall or house is torn down and the stones cast outside of the community. If tzaraat is to be compared to sin, then sin must be removed from our lives, just as John said, *1 John 1:6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (NASB)*

Now based upon this play on the words in the commands on tzaraat, where the reader would see the words בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ “*in the skin of his body,*” and the listener would hear the words בְּאוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ “*in the light of his body,*” the rabbis interpret the disease of tzaraat coming as a result of personal sin. Taking these things into consideration, all of these things paint for us a very important picture. The healing of tzaraat was known as something only God could do, the Lord forgives, heals, and cleanses the person stricken with tzaraat.

In *Tehillim / Psalms 51*, David is applying the concept of cleansing to the internal cleansing from sin in the phrase תַּחֲטָאֵנִי בְּאַזּוֹב וְאֶטְהַר “*my sins in hyssop and I will be clean.*” The way this Psalm is worded, he is definitely thinking of Parashat Tazria. In *Tehillim / Psalms 51*, David uses different words to describe the different aspects of sin in his life. He is asking the Lord to cleans him both inwardly and outwardly. David desires not only that his sins be forgiven him but that his heart would be made pure in *Tehillim / Psalms 51:12-13*, יְבִי לִבִּי טְהוֹר בְּרָא-לִי אֱלֹהִים וְרוּחַ “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.*” (NASB) (English bible 51:10-11). David asks the Lord to create (בְּרָא) in him a “*lev tahor*” (לֵב טְהוֹר), “*a ritually clean/pure heart,*” and to restore to him the joy of God’s salvation and to sustain a willing spirit within (הַשִּׁיבָה לִּי שְׁשׂוֹן יִשְׁעֶךָ וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה תִּסְמְכֵנִי). David says literally, “*return to me*” (הַשִּׁיבָה לִּי), this word shows us his repentant attitude, the turning from sin, and returning to the Way of the Lord. The way David is repenting and asking for forgiveness, all of these requests suggest that the Lord is the one who is doing these things on David’s behalf, even helping him to have a sustained spirit within (וְרוּחַ נְדִיבָה תִּסְמְכֵנִי), to “*uphold*” his spirit within which may indicate the Lord’s role in keeping David’s spirit willing to be obedient and not sin. This should be our prayer today that

the Lord would help us to live obedient lives.

The Septuagint translation of *Tehillim / Psalms 51* says the following:

Septuagint

Psalmoi / Psalms 51

51:7 Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be purified: thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow. 51:8 Thou shalt cause me to hear gladness and joy: the afflicted bones shall rejoice. 51:9 Turn away thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit in my inward parts. 51:11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and remove not thy holy Spirit from me. 51:12 Restore to me the joy of thy salvation: establish me with thy directing Spirit. (LXX)

The rabbis translate David's words into Greek to say that he is requesting the Lord to establish him with God's directing Spirit. What we are being shown here is how the Lord is involved in the cleansing, guiding, sustaining, and saving process. In addition to this, in the ritual of the sprinkling of the waters of purification we find a direct connection to the cleansing of the leper according to *Vayikra / Leviticus 14*. The act of Yeshua in healing the lepers in *Matthew 8:2-3, Mark 1:40-42, and Luke 17:11-19*. In *Luke 17:11-19*, coupled with the text that we are looking at on the transformation of the body shining forth the light (truth) of God, the rabbinic understanding on sin and tzaraat, and Yeshua's instruction to go and show yourself to the priests, reveals to us that there was forgiveness, healing, and transformation that took place in the lives of these lepers. The Lord God has done something great here now let's try to figure out what happened with an investigation. (Note we are not told this happened in the NT.) In addition, when the lepers left Yeshua, as they walked to show themselves to the priests, they were healed. They repented, walked in a different way, obeyed Yeshua, all of these things are consistent with the way in which we should live our lives, as John said in *1 John 1*, we are to walk in the truth and light of God and His word. *Luke 17* translates literally to say, "*Continuing on the journey, to show themselves to a Cohen (ἱερεῖον) it*

came into existence (ἐγένετο) their cleansing.” (Πορευθέντες ἐπιδείξατε ἑαυτοὺς τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν. καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ ὑπάγειν αὐτοὺς ἑκαθαρίσθησαν.) The Greek stem καθαρίζω (katharizo) for the word ἑκαθαρίσθησαν (ekatharisthesan) is a verb meaning “*to make clean, cleanse, to cleanse a leper by curing, to free from defilement of sin and from faults, to purify from wickedness, to free from the guilt of sin, to consecrate or pronounce clean in a Levitical sense.*” As these 10 Lepers acted upon their faith, the Lord God healed them of their disease of tzaraat. Based upon the text it appears the men (i) believed Yeshua was able to heal them and (ii) they needed to act upon their faith even though the tzaraat remained in their bodies physically. The work of believing and then physically doing what the Lord instructs us to do are connected. In other words, we are shown how important it is to step out in faith, first trusting in the Lord, and then ordering our steps based upon the faith that we have. By performing the act of going to the Cohen to show their bodies they were healed. Did their healing come by their own hands or by their works, or by the power of God? They walked by faith to show their bodies to the priests and offer the sacrifices required according to the Torah command. By their faith they glorified the name of the Lord and were obedient to His word and God healed them. Studying the Apostolic Writings, note that healing was always done to glorify the Lord God Almighty.

In addition, the idea of our words bringing our body under guilt (Lashon Hara) is drawn out from the story of Miriam and Moshe. Remember Yeshua’s words in *Matthew 12:36* when he said that every idle word that men speak, they will give account of in the day of the Lord. This is very similar to what is written in the *Mishnah Pirkei Avot 3:1*.

Mishnah Pirkei Avot 3:1

Akavia ben Mahalalel said: Keep in mind three things, And you will not come into the hands of sin: Know: From where you came, And to where you are going, And before Whom you will have to give an account and a reckoning. From where did you come? From a putrid drop. And to where are you going? To a place of dust, worms, and maggots. And before Whom will you have to give an account and a reckoning? Before the King of kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He. (עקביא בן מהללאל אומר, הסתכל בשלשה דברים ואין אתה)

בא לידי עברה. דע מאין באת, ולאן אתה הולך, ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון. מאין באת, מטפה סרוחה, ולאן אתה הולך, למקום עפר רמה ותולעה. ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון, לפני מלך (מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא.)

When Yeshua says we will give an account for every idle word *“Will believers, also have to give an account for every word they have said?”* If we consider the comparison of tzaraat to sin, have you thought about the future moment when you will stand before your High Priest (Yeshua) for inspection? This should cause us to carefully consider our lives and our walk before the Lord? Based upon the Scriptures, everyone will give an account for the words they have said, and the life they have lived.

In the midrash on the Psalms, the rabbis interpret slander (Lashon Hara) as a parallel to Leprosy. From a Torah perspective, the one who is a leper is to be brought to the priest for inspection, and similarly, the one who slanders is also to be brought to the priest for inspection (note the child who slanders his mom and dad, or one being brought before the judge in the Torah). For the one who is a leper, if the priest finds the person to be with leprosy, he is put out of the city. Similarly, for the slanderer upon inspected if he is found to be a slanderer, he is put out of the city. Does this sound a lot like what we read in the book of Revelation, which says, *22:15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (NASB) and 22:15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (NIV)* Note the people who love and practice lying are the one's who practice falsehood, they are the slanderers. This appears to follow very closely to the person who pretends to take a vow, or pretends to give charity, or to be learned or wise. The one who pretends is one who practices falsehood. The man who lives his life as a slanderer, he will be brought to our high priest Yeshua, and if found guilty, will be cast outside to be numbered with sorcerers, idolaters, immoral and murderers. Should this not make us take a couple steps back and examine our lives? When you stand before the Lord, will he say depart from me you *“worker of lawlessness?”*

In the Aramaic Targum on *Tehillim / Psalms 51*, the rabbis have David

asking the Lord to return His Torah to him for the purpose of exulting in His redemption and that the spirit of prophecy would sustain him. The idea behind this request is by being taught the way of God a sinner will be converted. (אֶלְמֶדָה פִּשְׁעִים דָּרְכֵיהּ וְחַטָּאִים אֵלֶיהּ יָשׁוּבוּ: טו 51:13 *Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You. NASB*) Note that conversion is the English rendition of the word “*Yashuvu*” (יָשׁוּבוּ) meaning to return to the Lord. This is David’s way of saying one returns to God’s His ways, to the ways of the Torah, which are rooted in love, grace, mercy, justice, and righteousness that we have towards one another. David is speaking of ordering one’s life according to the Torah. Have you ever ordered your life according to the Torah? Do you have a standard for living before God? David asks the Lord to open his lips so that he can declare his praises (51:15). This is important because it illustrates that the Lord is involved in placing in our hearts a reason to praise His name. The Aramaic Targum has David asking the Lord to open his lips with the Torah so that His mouth can give Him praise. The reason being, contained within the Torah is the expectation of what the Lord is going to do in our lives because of what He has done in the past. This means that Scripture gives us reason to believe and reason to praise God’s name even before He has done anything on our behalf.

In the case of tzaraat, and the Torah portion for this week, our Drash on these Scriptures direct us to presuppose that in the synagogue service, the reader would see the words בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ “*in the skin of his body*,” whereas, a listener might hear the words בְּאוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ meaning “*in the light of his body*” coupled with the rabbinic illustrations and comparisons between light and darkness, truth and lies, righteousness and unrighteousness, etc. These two Hebrew words which sound the same but have different meanings cause us to consider our lives and the words of the Apostolic Writings in a way that it is only when we sincerely return to the Lord and act upon our faith that the Lord will work in our lives to take care of impurity, uncleanness, and sin. According to the Torah, only the Cohen could diagnose tzaraat. The reason being, tzaraat was both a physical and a spiritual malady that requires spiritual discernment to both diagnose and treat. When someone was found to have tzaraat, they were forced to leave society and undergo a period of mourning and Teshuvah (repentance). Before the leper is reintegrated into the community of believers,

he must undergo inspection. Today, do we live our lives with the idea that in Christ we will not be inspected? How much responsibility do we have on our part to strive for righteousness, to walk in God's ways, and to seek the Lord for help with everything? How much of an impact will this have on the day we stand before the Lord for inspection? (*Matthew 7*) What I am proposing is that our attitude is as important an aspect of our salvation as is our faith in Yeshua because both are intimately connected. We are to live by our faith. Granted, we all make mistakes, we all fail, and we all sin. But the general attitude today is that one does not need to be grieved over one's sins because we have Yeshua. The point is, though we sin, we are striving to turn from our sins, and to walk in the light as John wrote in *1 John 1*. I believe these things need to be discussed and talked about. When it comes to discipleship, we should discuss with one another our issues and difficulties, what works, what doesn't work, how do you turn from sin in your life and be successful at it? Without the Lord, it is impossible, but even with the Lord, a life of righteousness is difficult. It is also a joy to walk in His ways and to abide in the Messiah Yeshua by faith in the One who sent Him! Praise the Lord!

