



Shabbat Shalom

Mezora

Leviticus 14:1 – 15:33

As men and women created in God's image, we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves and to treat everyone with respect.

This shall be the law of the leprous person for the day of his cleansing. He shall be brought to the priest. (Leviticus 14:2)

So begins a detailed description of the rituals involved with purifying someone who has been afflicted with Biblical Leprosy.

The original Hebrew word used in the Bible for this leprosy is “Zaraat,” which is commonly translated as leprosy. As all modern individuals are aware, however, leprosy is a medical affliction which, since the invention of antibiotics, is fully treatable medically. In referring to “Zaraat”, the Bible discusses a purely spiritual cleansing, performed by the priest. It is clear, therefore, that the word leprosy is actually a mistranslation of the word “Zaraat” and that the disease referred to in the Bible, although similar in its physical manifestations to leprosy or some other skin disease, is actually a spiritual ailment requiring a purely spiritual cure.

Although the Bible does not mention in these chapters in Leviticus what the cause of such an affliction would be, we do have a hint of the cause in a later chapter. “*Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite he had married... And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them... behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow*” (Numbers 12:1-10). Miriam was stricken by God with this same skin disease, clearly as a punishment for having spoken ill of her brother Moses.

God does not treat gossip lightly. As men and women created in His image, we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves and to treat everyone with respect. This includes not maligning them, even in a light, gossipy way. Our sages have said that if one shames another person in public it as if he has murdered him. The import of this statement is that a person's honor, reputation and dignity are often as important to him as his physical life. When you damage a person's reputation, you are destroying an important part of his humanity. Similarly, when we gossip about people, we tarnish their reputation and cast a shadow upon their motivations or actions. When Miriam criticized Moses' relationship with his wife, she did just that and she was severely punished.