

Finding a new path – Parshat Tazria Metzora

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Even when you seem to have reached your destination, there are always new goals on the horizon. And the opposite is also true: even when we fall and it seems like we have reached the bottom of the pit and it looks like there is no turning back, there are always new possibilities and opportunities. So instead of announcing that we have reached our destination, we should search for a path to begin anew.

This week we read the Torah portions *Tazria* and *Metzora*, even though they are two completely separate portions. During a year in which there is only one month of Adar, these portions are usually read together, allowing us to complete the entire Torah by the holiday of Simchat Torah.

Parshat Tazria deals with a woman who has given birth to either a boy or a girl and also with signs of leprosy which can appear on the human body. *Parshat Metzora* deals with the purification of a person who has been stricken with leprosy and the laws of *tumah* (ritual impurity), including discharges in both men and women.

We will focus on something wondrous found in the *parsha*: if a person develops a leprous lesion even if it is the size of a wheat kernel, it is unclean, and yet the Torah teaches: "And if the leprosy will erupt on the skin and the leprosy will cover all the skin of the affliction from his head to his feet...he shall declare the affliction to be pure" (Leviticus 13:12-13). That is, there is a situation in which the person has an impurity which is tiny, and the kohen will declare that the person is ritually impure. (This recalls our being in isolation due to the Coronavirus). And alternatively, sometimes the leprosy can spread all over a person's entire body and he will be considered ritually pure. This is something which is beyond explanation, for if a tiny spot of leprosy will make the person ritually impure, then being fully covered with leprosy should theoretically only increase the person's level of impurity. Why does the Torah consider such a person to be pure?

We will jump ahead a few Torah portions to an event that took place in the book of Numbers:

Korach was tremendously knowledgeable, unbelievably wealthy, and the head of the tribe of Levy. The most important person in the Tribe of Levi decides to conduct a divisive campaign against Moses and Aaron. He split the nation with a heated controversy while mocking and denigrating all that is holy and precious. Backed by judges and heads of the Sanhedrin, he unabashedly presented his arguments and tried to prove that (according to his own understanding) that the commandments did not make logical sense. He did this in order to "prove" that Moses and Aharon had made up (G-d forbid) the laws of the

Torah on their own.

In retrospect, everyone finds it easy to recognize that in fact his whole campaign stemmed from his jealousy of Elitzafan being chosen to be a *Nasi* (Prince—a role as a leader, as is described in *parshat Korach*), which signifies that this was all a completely personal issue. But outwardly, Korach concealed his malicious intentions and posed as one who was searching for and demanding the truth.

We will quote two examples which Korach brought in his struggle which are related to our *parsha*:

He took the *mitzvah* of a *tzitzit*, for example, and defiantly exclaimed: “A *tallit* with one thread of blue (*tachelet*) exempts the entire garment. How is it possible, then, that a *tallit* which is completely blue (*tachelet*) does not absolve itself but still requires the thread of *techelet* in the *tzitzit*?”

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The second question he presented was: “How is it possible that a leprous lesion the size of a grain of wheat will make someone ritually impure, but if it has spread all over his entire body he is considered pure?!”

Rabbi Natan explains what was behind Korach's malicious claims and where he erred.

Korach argued against Moses: “The entire assembly, all of them, are holy and G-d is among them. Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of G-d?” (Numbers 16:3). Korach believed that there are spiritual achievements that when a person reached them, there was no higher place to

strive for. Therefore, there was no longer any place for differences in class. Thus, he refused to recognize the exalted status of Moses and Aaron at face value. Accordingly, he wanted that he, too, would have a permanent rotation for the Priestly service.

Therefore, Korach came forth with his claim: if a tallit can become exempt from a blue thread (*techelet*), then when the entire tallit is blue (*techelet*)—and along the same lines, Korach himself, when a person comes to perfection, he has already arrived at the ultimate goal which the fulfillment of the *mitzvot* is supposed to bring him. According to this foolish claim, everything was intended only to bring a person to come close to and attain this goal. But when a person reached this level, what was the need to keep “simple” *mitzvot*? In this way, Korach sinned against the Truth and distorted the function and value of the *mitzvot*.

We can understand Korach’s remarks and mistakes according to that which is written in the Tikkunei Zohar. “Tzitzit and tefillin are a complete tikkun (rectification) for *Tzaddikim* (the righteous) and they merge the seven *Sefirot* (Divine Emanations) with the *Sefirah* of *Malchut* (Kingship). For average people, even though they put on tefillin in the same way that the learned people do, even so, this only helps as regards subduing their evil inclination. Concerning evildoers, it protects them against their accusers. In other words, the *mitzvot* are intended specifically for each person, small and the great. So, we see that for the wicked, the tefillin serve no more than a barrier against their accusers, were as for the *tzaddikim* they are a complete rectification which is on another spiritual level altogether. And so too is this true for every *mitzvah*.

God forbid that we should say that there such a thing as righteous man who had reached a level where he no longer needed to observe the *mitzvot*. While he does not need the *mitzvah* to connect him to the Creator the same way that an

evildoer does, that it should protect him from the forces of evil, especially after his death. Certainly, there are intentions and a need for even the most righteous to fulfill the mitzvot, level after level until infinity. And this is because he has an infinite number of spiritual levels still to achieve.

Thus, even if one thread of *techelet* exempts the entire tallit, it does not mean that a tallit which is entirely *techelet*, despite its importance, will exempt the tallit from the requirement to have the knots of the tzitzit strings, because after all, one always is required to fulfill the commandments on the simple (literal) level: to tie the tzitzit strings to each article of clothing. And it doesn't matter how important the fabric of the garment is (whether it is made of *techelet*), no matter who wears it. This was one of Korach's mistakes.

Korach was also wrong when he argued from the opposite direction:

He asked about that which was discussed in our *parsha*: how was it possible that a lesion the size of a grain of wheat would make a person ritually impure, whereas if it had spread over his entire body, he is deemed pure?! In his opinion, when a person had reached the lowest level, there is no longer any restraint and there is no more hope for him. This is his final level and there is no way to return.

He was wrong again!



It was specifically in these places that they found G-d...

The Creator teaches us in several places in the Torah: "When he sees that enemy power progresses and none is saved or assisted"... "See now that I, I am He." (Deuteronomy 32:36, 39). Similarly, we find in the verse: "I looked and there was no helper; I was astounded that there was no supporter, so My arm wrought salvation for Me" (Isaiah 63:5). Sometimes it is precisely in a completely hopeless situation where we feel we have lost everything, that the Creator wants to save us. There are plenty of stories about people who have fallen into the lowest places, and even into places where they thought they would never find the Creator, and it was specifically in these places that they found Him. G-d enlightened them with new insights and awakened in them a pure spirit. And they went out of the depths of evil and filth—even in our own generation!

Yes! A lesion the size of a grain of wheat warns man to do everything to purify himself, but even if G-d forbid the impurity spreads and wants to swallow the whole person, he should not despair! Therefore, when impurity envelops the entire body, the person remains pure! This teaches us that precisely then, G-d, may He be blessed, has mercy on us and

sends us help from on High to revive us so that we will return to Him, so that at the very least that we will not be completely lost G-d forbid. "Because G-d did not say to wipe out the name of Israel (Rashi, Proverbs 17:26).

So, we can learn from the *parsha* that it is always possible to come close to the Creator and that we should never despair. And on the other hand, we have learned that spiritually there is no such concept of reaching the final destination. There are always new goals we have to strive to reach for.

So, let's look for a new path! We should hope and believe that we can be renewed!

(Based on *Likutei Halachot, Shiluach HaKen* 4)