



Shabbat Parashat Metzora
Haftarah II Kings, 7:3-20
April 4 2014 / 5 Nissan 5774

The Torah portion this week is Metzora and it speaks at great length about how to deal with leprosy—a terrible skin disease. The ancient rabbis give great meaning to this sidrah by making a play on words between Metzora (leprosy) and “Motzi Shem Ra” (one who gossips). They teach us to not only be concerned about physical leprosy, but even more with spiritual leprosy – with gossip and slander—and the commentaries are filled with descriptions of the damage that “lashon hara”—malicious gossip and slander—can cause.

The haftarah is from the book of II Kings, chapter 7:3-20 and was chosen because of this very topic of leprosy: the haftarah tells the story of four lepers who were sitting outside the gate to the city (as lepers were quarantined in order to prevent the disease from spreading). Their plight was particularly dire as they lived in a time of war. And while they were hungry, so to were the inhabitants within the city walls, who were being devastated by starvation.

In this terrible situation, the four lepers had to decide what to do –whether to take action or not. The text reads, “They said to one another: Why should we sit here until we die? If we decide to go into the city, we will die of the famine; and if we remain here, we will die as well; better to desert to the Aramaean camp: if they let us live, we will live; if they put us to death, we will be dead.”

The dilemma of the four lepers is a dilemma that all of us at times face during our lives: If I find myself in a bad place in my life, do I have the strength and courage to make a change? Can I seek a new job? A new home? A new group of friends? The question is not whether I should take a foolish risk, but rather if my present situation is untenable, do I have the courage to take even a small necessary risk for a better future?

The story of the four lepers continues in a remarkable—even miraculous way. The Aramaeans hear such a loud noise that they believe strong armies are moving against them and they flee from their camp. The lepers arrive at the deserted camp and they take an abundance of food and drink for themselves as well as gold, silver, and clothing. By going out of their own dwellings, they are rewarded for their courage and their fearlessness by finding everything the needed and even much more.

But the dramatic story of four lepers being saved because they took action and did not remain passive in the face of serious troubles does not end there. The lepers, isolated from their

people, demonstrate that they not only are brave, but also kind. As they are enjoying their great bounty, they immediately decide to inform the gatekeepers of the city of their good fortune. Thus the four sickly lepers saved the king and all the people from starvation and they demonstrated to all of us that a good heart can trump a bad condition in any time and in any place.

This haftarah truly enables all of us to recognize how much we need to be both courageous and compassionate---not matter what is our lot in life.

- When I am in a difficult spot, do I become passive and resign myself to my predicament or do I try to take action to create a better reality?
- In ancient times and in modern times, we easily quarantine those with physical ailments (think of the AIDs epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s). But what about those who are morally repugnant—do we accept them or isolate them?
- With all that we know about life, why do we still often base our assessment of people on affluence, fame, and good looks rather than on a good and compassionate heart?

This week's haftarah commentary was written by Rabbi Richard Spiegel of the Temple Etz Chaim in Thousand Oaks, CA. Rabbi Spiegel was born in Washington, D.C. and raised in Baltimore, Maryland and came to Temple Etz Chaim in June 2000. Rabbi Spiegel has been an active participant and leader in the Rabbinical Assembly, the international body of conservative Rabbis, throughout his career. Most recently, he served as President of the Pacific Southwest Region of the Rabbinical Assembly and is a member of the Board of Jewish World Watch.