



Parashat Tazria-Metzora
II Kings 7:3-20
April 25, 2015 / 6 Iyyar 5775

The Haftarah for this coming Shabbat in the Diaspora is the Haftarah for the combined portions of Tazria-Metzorah. The Torah portion of Metzorah tells the details of how one deals with the spiritual disease of tzara'at. While many refer to the disease of tzara'at as leprosy, it is not a disease for which you go to the doctor. Rather it is the Kohane, a priest, who performs a ritual to rid the individual, his home and possessions of the disease. Thus, it is generally understood that this disease is a physical manifestation of a spiritual illness. The person afflicted with tzara'at was required to be outside the camp of the Israelites in the wilderness or later outside the community. Miriam, Moses' sister is famously afflicted with this disease until Moses prays for her healing.

The Haftarah opens with four men afflicted with the disease gathered outside the gates of an Israelite city. The city has big problems in that it is under siege from the Arameans. The siege has caused famine and awful consequences for the residents of the city. One of the most striking images regarding the severity of the siege is mothers cannibalizing their own children to survive. Things are not going so well for the four men outside the city, either. They are starving. If they cannot find a solution to their hunger, they will die of starvation.

Unable to enter the city, they realize that they have only one choice, and that is to go to the encampment of the Arameans, the same people who have besieged the city. The four men head to the Aramean camp thinking that they have nothing to lose. At least at the Aramean camp, there is a chance they will find enough food to survive. If the Arameans kill them, they were going to die of starvation anyway. However, when they get to the camp, they are shocked to find that the camp has been totally abandoned. A miracle of God has caused the Arameans to flee in fear from an imagined attack. The Arameans heard the sounds of chariots and cavalry which they believed were Hittites and Egyptians hired by the Israelites to kill them.

The hungry men take advantage of the abandoned food and valuable possessions. After enjoying the fruits of their adventure, the men realize that they need to go back to the city and inform the residents of the Aramean retreat. They realize that even though they had been barred from the city because of their affliction, it was their duty to save the city with the news of the Aramean retreat. They could not stay and gorge themselves while others starved. It is ironic that those who are despised, powerless and unwanted are the key to the saving of the besieged city. When the diseased men return to the city, they inform the gatekeepers of their good news. The gatekeepers relay the message to the king, who is skeptical of the message. The king is

concerned that there might be a trap. One of the king's men convinces him to do some reconnaissance to find if the Arameans have set up an ambush.

The Israelites soon learn that there is no trap, but the retreat of the Arameans is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Elisha. The king's aide, who does not believe the prophecy, is informed by Elisha that while he may witness the miracle, he will not "eat of it". When the Israelites get to the camp, this same aide is appointed to be a guard at the camp but in the haste of the Israelites to reach the camp and eat the food, the aide is trampled to death, fulfilling Elisha's word.

When God chooses to use the four diseased men as his messengers, we see once again that it is not always the strongest, wisest or richest among us that serve as the implements of God. The gifts of life come from a variety of sources, but we need to be skilled and open enough to recognize them when they arrive. And of course, when they arrive from whatever source they may appear to come, we must remember to thank God, the ultimate source of all that is good.

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one originally written for the Unraveller for April 27, 2012 by Rabbi Yaier Lehrer, spiritual leader of Adat Shalom Congregation in the Pittsburgh area.