

# PARSHAS TAZRIA - METZORAH

*by Rabbi Dovid Siegel*

## *M'lochim II 7:3*

This week's haftorah tells us of the miraculous defeat of the camp of Aram. In the merit of King Yehoram's retraction from assassinating the Prophet Elisha, a prediction was made for an indescribable surplus of food during a most severe famine. Although the camp of Aram had laid a heavy siege against Israel, Hashem came to their rescue and produced deafening sounds which overtook the entire camp of Aram. Aram interpreted these sounds as coming from powerful armies who had come to the assistance of the Jewish people in their siege. Aram was so overtaken by this fear that they immediately abandoned their tents and fled for their lives, leaving behind all their provisions and possessions.

During this very same night four lepers decided to surrender to Aram in desperate hope of sparing their own lives. They were pleasantly surprised when they discovered a completely deserted camp, replete with all the needs for the famine-stricken Jewish nation. The lepers initially hoarded some of the loot but after brief consideration rushed over to the Jewish camp and informed them of their discovery. After a brief investigation of the authenticity of the story, the Jews ran to the scene and returned with an enormous surplus of food.

It is interesting to note that the heroes of this incident were lepers. The haftorah begins with, "And four men were lepers at the entrance of the city's gate." They were situated outside of the city's wall in fulfillment of the Torah's obligation of ostracizing lepers from their entire community. More interesting is our realization that this imposition became quite advantageous to them., Because they were outside of the city they had free access to the camp of Aram. This led to their attempted surrender which yielded their unbelievable findings. All of this ultimately brought the greatest benefits to the Jewish people. This chain of events seems to suggest that the punishment of leprosy can at times be a blessing. If one properly learns his lesson, his painful experience of leprosy can prove to be a real favor from Hashem, a blessing in disguise.

Our Chazal teach us that Hashem sends leprosy to one who is stingy with his possessions and greedy for money. The four lepers in our Haftorah had a previous record of seeking and obtaining possessions in most inappropriate ways. Rashi points out that they were the family of Gechazi who had previously misrepresented the prophet Elisha in pursuit of a handsome reward. When the prophet discovered this atrocity he severely admonished his servant with strong words of rejection. After this family had been ostracized for some time they began realizing their fault and were open to

rectifying it. Through Hashem's response in their darkest moment of despair they began appreciating kindness and the virtue of sharing. Their willingness to reconsider their ways resulted in a most unique opportunity to rescue the entire Jewish nation from starvation and death. They put their newly learned virtue to work and shared with everyone their unbelievable treasure. Yes, punishment is sent to us for the good and if we respond properly it can yield indescribable favor from Hashem.

This very same thought is found in today's Parsha regarding the appearance of a leprous spot on the wall of a home. The Torah says, "And I will give you a leprous spot in the house of your inherited land." (Vayikra 14:34) Our Chazal draw focus to the peculiar word, "give" rather than "send" which suggests that leprosy is some form of gift. They explain that in fact this leprous spot was a hidden blessing. Over the past forty years the Emorites buried treasures inside the walls of their homes. Knowing that the Jewish people were soon to occupy the land they permanently concealed their wealth to insure that the Jews never benefit from it. Chazal continue that Hashem sent this "gift" of leprosy to appear on the walls of these homes. During one of the purification stages the homes were torn down and a hidden treasures discovered.

This bizarre experience taught the leper a most meaningful lesson. As mentioned earlier one of the main causes of leprosy is stinginess. During the painful demolition of his contaminated home the leper began to realize and understand the extent of his inappropriate behavior. And in the midst of contemplating and reconsidering his wrong doings a treasure suddenly appeared. Hashem reminded the leper that wealth truly comes from above and inspired him to graciously share this gift with everyone in need. Although initially the leprosy was punishment for his stingy and greedy behavior it actually became a blessing in disguise. Once the leper learned to appreciate and share Hashem's wealth with others, his punishment was transformed into a heaven-sent present. Through his leper spot, untold treasures were discovered and after properly learning his lesson the leper was eager to share his wealth with everyone he knew.