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RABBI WEIN'S WEEKLY BLOG



Metzora

The Torah reading of this week deals with the mysterious spiritual disease that caused physical manifestations on the skin of a human being, on the stones of a house or on the fabric of textiles. The rabbis connected the onset of this disease to words of hate and slander. Later generations incorrectly described this disease as being leprosy, but we are now aware that this is not an accurate definition or description of the syndrome that the Torah describes.

What is clear is that the spiritual state of the person, just as the emotional and mental condition of human being, has physical manifestations and greatly influences behavior, appearance and general outlook. The Torah prescribes a process of purification and healing that will allow the victim of this disease to become healthy again and to return to normal society in a rehabilitative fashion.

The Torah emphasizes to us the importance of being part of society and not to remain as an individual isolated from all others and self

absorbed in one's own problems and disappointments. This is a very important lesson about life. It is especially important in a society such as ours that has, to a great extent, turned inward and encourages people to think only about themselves and their personal welfare and desires.

In Judaism, being outside of the camp is not seen as a matter of pride or accomplishment. Rather, it is seen only as a temporary expedient in order to help purify one's own spirit and body so that one can return to being part of the general society and to contribute to the welfare of that society.

We have numerous references in the Talmud and in Jewish tradition as to the importance of being connected to society. The rabbis in Avot cautioned us not to separate ourselves from the community. The great holy man Choni HaMa'agol appeals to Heaven to either grant him societal interaction or to allow him to pass on from this world. Naturally, the type of society that the rabbis were talking about is one that strives for justice and morality and retains within it the core of Jewish and Torah values.

A society that is immoral and without a moral compass, a society that flaunts aberrant behavior and justifies even infanticide is not one that we should wish to be attached



to or be part of. Such a society must be opposed and if opposition to it is stifled, as unfortunately it is in our time, then separation and isolation from that society is not only justified but necessary.

That is what Maimonides meant when he said that one should go out into the desert and live alone rather than succumb to the values and behavior of an evil society. The dermatological disease described in the Torah may no longer be with us, however the causes for and the effect that it has on society generally, certainly are present in our time. We have to engage in acts of self-purification, and, if necessary, isolation in order to rehabilitate ourselves and society generally. 🕯️