

[Tell a story](#)
Parshah and Haftara Metzora
by Julie Zhuk on 2023-04-22

[Comments](#)

Parshah Metzora

Last week's parsha and this week's parsha are linked together. This week's parsha is a continuation from last week. The focus is more of how one's actual home becomes impure. When this happens, everything must be taken out.

The parsha states the main reason why someone's house became impure was because of the negative way people in that house spoke. There's a story about a family not wanting to share any of their tools the neighbors constantly asked to borrow. It turned out that the house became impure and everything was taken out. The family was embarrassed for everyone to see they had everything and just didn't want to share.

The Torah warns that if a Jew views their possessions as something exclusively their own this trait isn't as bad as speaking negatively about others. It is still considered not good because the person is undermining their relationship with the people of Israel. By doing this, they are compromising their relationship with their home in the land of Israel. By not sharing the tools within their home with others around them, they were susceptible to caring only about their own home and not being apathetic to what was going on in the rest of the land.

The Torah teaches it's important to do more than not harm one another. Every Jew must see their possessions as a means to live a life of meaning. This includes transcending themselves and sharing with others. A lot of this week parsha has to do with the power of speech. It's important for us to be friendly and help anyone in need.

Maimonides says it's good for Jews to rejoice, it's considered a mitzva. If a Jew isn't including their neighbors or others around them. They are considered rejoicing of their gut. When there is a holiday to be celebrated, it is important for Jews feed people who are converts, widows, orphans, and anyone who is poor and destitute. The joy that Jewish people strive for comes from using our homes to transcend ourselves.

Haftara Metzora

There are four lepers that discover the camp of Aram. It is deserted and they report this sensational find to the king, who verifies it. The famine comes to an end and the king's officer does not benefit thereof, as Elisha had prophesied. This week's haftara starts with, there are four people who are considered to be lepers. They are standing at the entrance gate and those words are strongly reminiscent of the central topic of the weekly parsha, tzara'as. The parsha instructs us concerning the laws of the purification of the leper whom the kohen declared to be

pure. While the four lepers in this haftara were tragically afflicted with chronic and incurable tzara'as.

We know that sometimes a house is stricken with tzara'as spots because its owner selfishly refuses to share home and hearth with those that are less fortunate than himself. The outbreak of the house: he himself will eventually be stricken unless he mends his ways. The four lepers in this haftara were characterized by self-ishness. Despite their suffering, they obstinately refused to mend their ways. A background to the haftara has to do with Gaichazi. He was Elisha's servant. The events described here are a sequel to last week's haftara.

After Elisha had healed Na'aman, the general of Aram, of his tzara'as, the prophet swore, "will not accept any gift from you!" Na'aman and his servants took leave of Elisha and departed to Aram. Elisha's servant, Gaichazi, overheard his master's words, and disagreed. "My master was wrong in declining Na'aman's gift," he said to himself. "I think it would have actually been a mitzva for him to accept it, for do not our Sages teach, 'One may not heal a non-Jew without payment'?"
I will quickly try to catch up with Na'aman and accept payment from him."

Gaichazi, of course, was deceiving himself into thinking that he was performing a mitzva. In reality, Elisha had a precise calculation for refusing payment. It was because he wished to perform a kiddush Hashem by demonstrating clearly that Na'aman's cure came from a Divine miracle rather than by the prophet's healing powers. Gaichazi caught up with Na'aman as he (Na'aman) had not yet gone far from Shomron.

When the general realized he was being followed by Elisha's servant, he dismounted from his horse. He asked, "Is all okay? My master has sent me after you. Two students suddenly arrived from Mount Efrayim, and are in urgent need of money and clothing. My master requests that you kindly give them a kikar of silver and two changes of clothing." Recalling Elisha's earlier adamant refusal to accept anything, which the prophet had endorsed with an oath, this quote struck Na'aman as suspicious. Na'aman had doubts were more or less dispelled by Gaichazi's statement: "I swear that I am telling the truth." "Well, then please take two kikar of silver, instead of one," he urged Gaichazi. After an initial show of reluctance, Gaichazi graciously accepted the offer when Na'aman persisted. Despite the oath, Na'aman was not fully convinced of the validity of the story. He therefore dispatched two of his servants along with Gaichazi, ostensibly to carry the treasure for him. In reality, their mission was to observe whether or not Gaichazi would actually hand over the money to Elisha. However, Gaichazi circumvented detection by dismissing the two servants as soon as the group arrived in the vicinity of the city. He managed to conceal the treasure as well as the clothing.

In this way the entire matter would not come to Elisha's attention. When Gaichazi returned to the prophet, Elisha right away asked him, "Where have you been?" Gaichazi replied in an evasive tone. Elisha had ruach hakodesh and was well aware of all that had happened. He thundered at Gaichazi, "Even though I was (physically) here in Shomron, I know all about your misdeed. You have defrauded Na'aman of money with which you intend to get garments, olive groves, vineyards, sheep, cattle, and maidservants. You disregarded my oath not to accept anything from Na'aman. You have also coveted his belongings. Well, you shall have them, and

not just the money! Take his tzara'as! Let it cling to you and your sons as long as you live!" The Midrash asks why did his sons deserve this kind of punishment? It was because they knew of their father's crime, but didn't say anything. They kept quiet and that is why they are considered to be accomplices. When Gaichazi left Elisha, his body was covered with the white spots of the dreaded tzara'as. The Midrash asks what exactly was Gaichazi's offense that deserved such harsh punishment? He had committed several of the sins that called for the tzara's punishment. The first was a disgrace to G-d, he had desecrated G-d's honor.

Elisha had sworn in G-d's Name that he would not accept money. Here Gaichazi had disregarded that oath. The second reason was, for taking a false oath is when Gaichazi swore falsely to Na'aman that Elisha had sent him. The third reason was speaking poorly, on a previous occasion Elisha had sent Gaichazi to revive the child of a woman from Shunam with the aid of his staff. On the way, he mocked his master by expressing skepticism regarding the promised miracle. Even though Gaichazi's punishment was fully deserved, our Sages indicate that Elisha had been overly harsh. He "pushed Gaichazi away with both hands" by sentencing him to lifelong isolation. What he should have done is leave the door open for him to do teshuva. There was a famine in Shomron. There was no rain that fell in Israel. It was due to the sins of the Jewish people. Produce was scarce back then and the famine had set in. In addition, a new calamity befell the Jews. The king of Aram (Syria) was Hadad. He had raided Israel occasionally, now brought his entire army to besiege Shomron, the capital of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes.

Since the city was completely surrounded by the enemy, the residents were not able to leave in order to get food. Supplies in the city dwindled steadily until they were totally exhausted. The famine was unbearable. All kosher animals had already been consumed. As a last resort, the Jews slaughtered horses and other non-kosher animals, for they were desperate to relieve their hunger pains. The Torah only allows this in life-or-death situations. Even reptiles and crawling animals were killed and devoured. Soon edibles were scarce and a donkey's head which contained very little meat could be obtained only for the exorbitant sum of eighty silver pieces. There was also a measure of pigeons' dung that was valued at five silver pieces. It is not clear what the Jews used the dung for. According to some commentators, edible kernels could be found in it. There were others who maintain that it was used for fuel, since all their wood had been used up. One day, as King Yehoram was strolling along the city wall of Shomron, a woman appeared before him. She screamed, "Help, my master, the king!"

The king assumed that she was desperate for food. He replied in a bitter tone that if G-d does not help you, how can I? Do I have something to give you from the threshing floor or the wine press?" The woman indicated that this had not been her intention; she wished the king to administer justice. He told her to state her case. She said she was having a problem with her friend and she wanted to ask the judge about her case. The women were extremely hungry and wanted to eat their sons. Her friend suggested, 'Let us both eat your son today and tomorrow we will eat mine.' So we slaughtered my son and cooked his flesh and ate it. The following day we slaughtered her son and cooked his flesh. This woman deceived me! She hid her son's flesh so that she would be able to eat it all herself, instead of sharing it with me! I demand justice for that! King Yehoram was shocked. He tore his garments in grief. It became apparent that the king was doing teshuva, because he was wearing a sackcloth under his royal robes. Yehoram's teshuva, though, was not real. It was superficial, it was a result of the pressure from the famine.

If he had done some serious soul-searching, he would have understood that he must destroy the two calves that were officially worshiped in his kingdom as well as the other images found in the land. Instead of admitting that the tragic situation was due to the nation's collective sins, this wicked king blamed it on G-d's prophet. He said Elisha had the power to abolish the famine, he could beg G-d for mercy, but he refrained from doing so. Yehoram said that he swore Elisha's head would no longer be attached to his shoulders by the end of the day! King Yehoram promptly dispatched a henchman to Elisha's home, with orders to execute him. The prophet knew about it because of his ruach hakodesh. At the time the communal elders were deeply involved in a discussion of Torah matters. Elisha addressed the elders asking, do you see what I see? Know that Yehoram, son of the murderer-king, Achav who killed Navos, is sending someone here to behead me! Please cooperate with me and detain the messenger when he arrives at the door.

When the king, who is following, comes, I will talk to the king. King Yehoram's messenger came while Elisha was still speaking. The elders kept him outside, and indeed, the king arrived soon after. The elders then opened the door in his honor. The messenger was not interested in carrying out his bloody mission. He said to the king, "G-d has sent this famine to punish us for our sins. How can we even think of begging Him for relief? If I now stretch forth my hand in murder against His prophet?! The Almighty will certainly not have mercy on us after that!" In a remorseful way the king said, "You are right, my command was uttered out of sheer grief and despair. The prophet is not guilty at all. We must do teshuva. The famine is, but the fulfillment of the Torah curse.

This is in Devarim 28:13: 'You shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and daughters which G-d has given you, in the siege and the oppression which the enemy will oppress you.' These words coming from G-d are meant to let the Jews know He immediately had mercy upon them. He informed Elisha prophetically that the famine was going to end. Elisha told the Jewish people: "Listen to the word of G-d, tomorrow at this time, about 13 pounds of fine flour will be sold at the cheap price of a shekel in the gate of Shomron. Barley will be sold for an even cheaper price, two pounds for one shekel. Elisha had predicted that this would come to pass "tomorrow, at this time." Prophets usually give an exact time for the fulfillment of their words so that when the event comes to pass, it is clear to all that it was brought about by G-d.

It seems that the king would have believed Elisha's words, but the officer who always came with him, skeptically mocked the prediction. He called out that this generation is as sinful as that of the Flood. The flood generation gets a nickname from the Midrash called Mabul. The officer said, its members certainly don't deserve a miracle! Do you think G-d will actually cause food to rain down from heaven for these people?!" Elisha's response to this was that the officer would see it with his own eyes, but the officer would not eat from it! The officer was punished measure for measure for disbelieving that he would not merit to personally enjoy the fulfillment of the prophecy which he questioned.

Anyone who scoffed in Egypt, who didn't believe that Moses had been sent to redeem them, died during the Plague of Darkness and were not privileged to experience the redemption. At the same time, those who deny the revival of the dead, would not merit to arise as promised.

The events that we have related thus far, precede those of the haftara that starts at this point. Back to the part of the story where Gaichazi and his sons are in the camp of Aram. As mentioned in this haftara before, there were four men that were struck with tzara'as, a kind of leprosy. They were staying outside of the gate of Shomron and they had been expelled from this walled city in accordance with Torah law. The lepers were not identified by name, maybe because - we will soon see - they performed a meritorious deed which G-d did not want to be attributed openly to the evil people.

There is also the reason that it would be a disgrace to G-d if it had ensued from publicizing the fact that Elisha's servant Gaichazi and his sons were lifelong lepers - for that is who the lepers were, according to the Gemara. Gaichazi's sons said to each other, "Why should we just sit here and wait until we die of hunger?!"

Even if we were to enter the city, which is permitted in a life-and-death situation, we would perish from lack of food. If we stay here, we are certain to die. There was an alternative to this, they could enter the camp of Aram, the besiegers of their city. If the Aramite soldiers would grant them some food, they would survive; and if they would kill them, they would not have lost anything, for here the sons of Gaichazi would perish from hunger either way. Accordingly, the four men waited for the arrival of dusk, when it would be easier to travel undetected. Then they walked to the outskirts of the camp of Aram.

They were surprised to note that it was totally unguarded; not a single sentry was posted around the entire camp. The Midrash asks us readers how could this be explained? It was actually part of G-d's plan. He had performed a miracle: He had caused the Aramite soldiers to hear the clanging and roaring of numerous chariots and horses - a din so tremendous that it stimulated the approach of a vast army.

The Aramite soldiers exclaimed to each other, "The king of Israel must have hired troops from the kings of Chitim and Egypt to attack us!" The soldiers were stricken with panic and were obsessed with only one thought - escaping alive. Abandoning their horses, donkeys and all of their possessions, they scurried as fast as they could in the opposite direction to that from which the noise had come from. It is nevertheless surprising that they did not mount their horses for faster escape. Maybe they were hoping to discourage enemy pursuit by diverting their attention to the animals and the spoils. Gaichazi and his sons were cautious as they entered the camp.

It struck them as strange that they didn't encounter a single person. They approached the first tent, straining their ears for a voice inside. Not a sound was heard, and so they stealthily entered. The tent was unoccupied but it was well stocked with food, gold, silver, and clothing. The famished men threw themselves at the food and feasted to their hearts' content. When their bellies were full, they didn't stop to consider the desperate plight of their brothers back in Shomron who were still dying from lack of food. It didn't occur to them to inform the Jews that

there was food in the camp of Aram, even though every moment's delay was fatal. Jews were steadily perishing from hunger. No, Gaichazi, and his sons had no such thoughts. Notoriously greedy, they were jubilant upon discovering the treasure left behind in the tent.

They grabbed as many valuables as they could. Since they didn't even trust each other, each one sought a hiding spot for his booty. Even after having raided the tent, they were oblivious to the emergency situation in Shomron. All they thought about was how to take possession of even more spoils. They entered the next tent, and rejoiced when they discovered that it too was filled with valuables. This time Gaichazi and his sons didn't bother with the clothing; they were only concentrating on hiding the gold and the silver. Finally, after raiding the second tent, they remembered that they were obligated to inform their fellow Jews of the wondrous happenings in the camp of Aram.

They said to each other how they were not acting properly. They decided it would be best to share this good news with their brothers who were back in Shomron. Still, these men here had a lust for money and would have prevailed if not for their fear of punishment. They thought to wait until the morning then the king would be furious with them and bring them to a trial.

They decided to let him know and they believed it was clear a miracle had happened here. They thought the miracle was for the sake of the Jewish people. The Midrash tells us that Gaichazi and his sons were evil and had already wasted precious time. Now, luckily, the fear of being punished made them stop plundering and induced them to walk back to the gate of Shomron. They told the main gatekeeper, "We have just come from the camp of Aram. There is not a soul there! The enemy soldiers left their horses and donkeys tied to their tents. All of their belongings are unguarded here inside!

The main gatekeeper relayed the message to the royal palace guards, who passed the message onto the king. King Yehoram verifies the report of Gaichazi and his sons. The report reached the king in the middle of the night. It left King Yehoram feeling confused and he was doubtful. He thought for sure this was a trick of the Aramim. He said this to his ministers. King Yehoram believed that it was a trick, because the Aramim people knew how desperate the Jews were.

The Aramim knew that the Jews were driven by hunger. King Yehoram believed that the Aramim people were hiding in the fields, planning to seize the Jews alive if they were to come into the camp of Aram. It may surprise us that King Yehoram, who knew of Elisha's prophecy the day before, didn't consider the possibility that this was its fulfillment. Maybe the reason for this was simply that the king was roused from his deep sleep. He did not have a fully clear mind. Moreover, Elisha had prophesied, "Tomorrow, at this time... and it was still in the middle of the night. It is more likely, being as evil as he was, Yehoram did not have faith in the prophet's words.

Yehoram's ministers debated with each other how to act. Finally, one of them suggested taking five of their surviving horses and sending them with riders to the camp of Aram. Even if this scene was staged as a ploy by their enemy. Even if they would kill their riders and horses, the

ministers would still be none the worse. Because from their perspective, they would perish from hunger in the city without having a way of getting food. King Yehoram decided to compromise by risking only two riders and horses to investigate this matter.

When the two riders reached the Jordan River, they were met by an incredible sight: strewn all over the wayside were garments and paraphernalia, discarded by the Aramite soldiers in their haste to flee unencumbered. The king's messengers returned, and the good news spread like wildfire. The famished populace didn't wait for royal permission anymore. It surged en masse to the camp of Aram to satisfy its hunger. Afterwards, the people plundered the booty. We have reached the part in the haftara of the fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy. The price of food fell fast. Precisely as Elisha had predicted, a se'a of wheat as well as two sa'a of barley were sold for a shekel in the gate of Shomron.

Supervision was required in the market place to ensure that purchases were paid for and that valuables were brought to the king's treasury and not looted. King Yehoram appointed the officer who usually accompanied him to be in charge of the sales. The gate of Shomron was overcrowded. There were throngs of Jews eagerly pushing forward to buy wheat and other staples after all the years of deprivation.

The officer fell down in the jostling crowd; he was inadvertently trampled upon by the masses and he died. Each of Elisha's predictions had now been fulfilled exactly as he thought it would. The Midrash tells us that the officer deserved this tragic end for three reasons. One was on the simplest level, he was a Jew who did not believe in G-d. He denied the truth of Elisha's prophecy. Just as he "stepped on" meaning he despised G-d's word, so he was trampled on in public. This happened in front of the king and nobles, cutting into a conversation between the king and the prophet without having been consulted. In the same way, he was sentenced to an abrupt, sudden death.

The second reason was according to the explanation quoted in the Midrash, the officer once argued. He said, "This generation is as sinful as that of the Flood, and that is why he does not deserve a miracle." It was for this accusation of the Jewish people that he was punished. The prophet had responded back to him that he would not benefit from a miracle because he was not worthy of it. As opposed to the people, who would have merits and would experience a marvelous gift coming from G-d Himself.

The third reason for the officer being punished so harshly was, the king had originally intended to kill Elisha. Later he relented to do this and when the officer scoffed at Elisha's prediction, he-maybe purposely- rekindled the king's anger, and this was what jeopardized Elisha's life. For this alone, he deserved to die. The last three verses of the haftara repeat the officer's comment on Elisha's prophecy and his punishment. These three verses impress upon us the justice of G-d's ways, for, as we just explained, he certainly deserved to die. The haftara comes to a conclusion with the statement, "This happened to him."

This means the officer received the measure for measure punishment that he deserved. A haftara does not usually end with a negative or discouraging verse. This haftara concludes with

the officer's tragic death. It appears to violate this rule. The difficulty can be resolved by understanding that in reality, it was to his ultimate advantage. Meaning that it atoned for his sin in this world, and so it secured him a share in the world to come.

Before we are officially done with this haftara, there is a further listing of miracles that were performed by Elisha. It is a continuation from last week's haftara found in Tazria. The wonderful happenings related in the haftara of Metzora will help complete the list of Elisha's miracles, as follows. There was the tenth miracle, Na'aman's recovery from his tzara'as. That was in last week's haftara Tazria. The eleventh miracle was when Gaichazi and his sons became afflicted with Na'aman's tzara'as. This was what Elisha had decreed. The twelfth miracle was when Elisha's students went to the edge of the Jordan River and chopped wood for building a larger Bais Hamidrash.

One of the student's borrowed an ax-head that fell into the water. Elisha made the iron float up by casting a piece of wood into the river. This is found in the book of Kings in chapter 6. The thirteenth miracle was when the Jewish people were saved from the famine. This happened when the army of Aram ran away, this took place in the haftara of Metzora. The fourteenth miracle, the last miracle, was when Yehoram's officer died an unnatural death.

He died because he didn't believe in the prophecy that Elisha had. In reality, no prophet is a "miracle worker." G-d alone performs miracles, but He allows a tzaddik "to decree," and fulfills the command, provided he has reached a high level of holiness. Just like his master, Eliyahu, Elisha had achieved an exceptional degree of spiritual perfection. This was why he was chosen as the messenger to demonstrate G-d's greatness to the Jewish people of the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. It was in order to deter them from worshiping idols.

We find out in this haftara, why the good tidings were brought to the Jewish people by Gaichazi and his sons. There is a general rule, "Good news is conveyed by means of a meritorious messenger." Why, then, did G-d cause the happy event of the end of the famine to be brought about through Gaichazi and his sons? One explanation of this is that the lepers were chosen for this errand. It was an encouraging sign for the Jewish people in the future times. Meaning if the Jews were ever to despair of redemption, they should consider their generation totally unworthy.

They should also remember that G-d promised to send them Mashiach even if the generation is totally corrupt. At the same time, it was G-d who sent Moses to Egypt. He sent Moses there when the Jewish people had sunk to a very low level. King Yehoram's generation, too, was undeserving, but G-d saved it from the famine. Lepers were chosen to effect salvation, because they are governed by a law that symbolizes this concept. If a leper's entire body is stricken with tzara'as- which would indicate that he was as defiled as can be. Meaning he is declared pure. Similarly, if the Jewish people have sunk to their lowest level, G-d will nevertheless redeem it for the sake of His Great Name.