

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Metzora
April 16, 2016

פרשת מצורע
ח' בניסן תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Vayikra* (Leviticus) 14:1-15:33

In this *parasha*, God describes the purification ritual for people and homes afflicted with *tzara'at* (leprosy); God also instructs Moshe and Aharon regarding laws related to the emission of bodily fluids.

Chapter 14, verse 11 tells us: **וְהַעֲמִיד הַכֹּהֵן הַמְטַהֵר, אֶת הָאִישׁ הַמְטַהֵר וְאֶתֶם לְפָנַי**, – The *cohen* that cleanses him shall set the man that is to be cleansed and those things before Hashem at the door of the tent of meeting.”

The phrase “at the door of the tent of meeting” is striking. Why at the door specifically? One way to find an answer to such a question involves looking at other examples in the Torah of where **פֶּתַח** – *petach*, “door” or “opening” – is used. This traditional method of biblical exegesis, known as *gezairah shavah* – an “equivalent linguistic construct” – involves elaborating on the meaning of a word or a phrase by taking note of how it gets used elsewhere.

Two of the most famous uses of this word **פֶּתַח**, *petach*, occur in *Parashat Vayera*. Avraham welcomes his guests, men he does not recognize, **וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח-הָאֵהָל**, – as he was sitting at the door of his tent.” (*Bereshit* 18:1). Later in the *parasha*, (19:6), Lot confronts the Sodomites who would like to attack the visitors whom he has taken into his house **הַפֶּתַח** – *hapetcha*, “in the doorway.”

What could these incidents have in common? A possible answer lies in the physical use of doors. A door differentiates between what is inside and what is outside; it creates a clear border between domains. Doors could do the same thing spiritually and may serve as a literary tool in the Torah to represent the borders of spiritual domains.

In the case of Avraham, he did not know who these visitors might be, whether they believed in one God, or whether they were pagan idol worshippers. Although he was famous for welcoming guests, he did create a boundary between those who believed in God who became members of his household, and those who did not, whom he needed to keep at “arm’s length” while still welcoming them as guests.

The differentiation is even clearer in the case of Lot. The “good guys” were inside his house, and the “bad guys” were outside his house, with only the door serving as a protective division between them. He succeeded in keeping the visitors safe and repelling the attacks of the Sodomites.

What light could these instances shed on why the Torah stipulates that a person in the process of being cleansed of a spiritual issue should be brought only to the door of the tent of meeting, that is, the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle)? The *Mishkan* was the ultimate separate domain. On one side was the hubbub of daily life; on the other side was Divine worship. On one side was death and impurity; on the other side was life and purity. Bringing people only to the door while they were undergoing cleansing indicated that they were making their way back into the community of Divine worship.

Perhaps this is one reason why a *mezuzah* hangs on a doorpost. As we enter and exit from one physical and spiritual domain to another, we stop for a moment to remind ourselves that God oversees all of these domains and shelters us no matter where we are physically or spiritually.

Shabbat shalom.

For discussion:

- Think of as many different kinds of doors as you can. How do they separate between and protect what is on the inside and what is on the outside?

- Count the number of doors in the room you are sitting in. Include all kinds of doors: entryways, cabinets, etc. How many are there? Did you realize there were that many? Why do you think we take doors for granted and do not notice them?
- Look at *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 15:12-18. In keeping with what we have said about doors, why do you think this ceremony happens in the doorway?