

San Francisco Jewish Women's Fund  
Dvar Torah for Parsha Tazriah  
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So, at this point I considered hitting the reverse button and returning to last week's Torah portion, but how cowardly would that be? As I am only two weeks away from the 47<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my own Bat Mitzvah, I should be up for the challenge.

OK, so here goes – my attempt at interpreting the “grossest portion of our Torah.”

Tazriah means “she conceives.” So it all begins with childbirth – or, put another way, it all begins with creation.

G-d is instructing Moses about purification rituals for a mother following childbirth. It seems she needs to separate herself from her community for a period of time that ranges from 7 days for a male child to 2 weeks for a female – let's not go there. After that period, she is able to return to her community and become one of them once again.

The Torah portion then goes on to describe a wide range of gross skin afflictions that sound like leprosy, acne, impetigo, or all of the above, which also require a period of isolation – when people are removed from their community and forced to acknowledge their impurity prior to returning at some time when they are considered to be “cured” of their affliction.

In the case of childbirth, it would appear that the affliction has less to do with spiritual impurity and more to do with physical impurity, while in the case of the skin outbreaks, there was supposedly an underlying issue of an individual's behavior that led them to this physical manifestation of impurity and required a period of isolation prior to tshuvah, or return.

So how hopeless is my task of tying this Parsha to our session on grantmaking?

Not hopeless at all...

Here's the deal: There are many times in our lives when, either through our own fault or through no fault of our own, we are exiled and/or isolated in some way from the community to which we feel we rightfully belong.

Sometimes it's a sudden circumstance that can send an individual into an isolated existence – loss of a job or means to earn income, loss of mobility, loss of a spouse, diagnosis of disease, coming out as LGBT or Q.

Sometimes it's years of isolation based on ongoing low socioeconomic status, or simply living long enough to lose most of those who have been our friends and community.

I'd just like to point out that, almost without exception, every single one of the grant applications we are currently looking at somehow speaks to the need to reconnect people to their communities. And, the one grant that does just the opposite is trying to prepare people for the time at which they will become permanently isolated from the entire community which they have inhabited on this earth, as they prepare for the permanent and, as far as we know, complete isolation of death.

So, with one exception, these grants are each proposing ways for individuals to be connected or reconnected and reintegrated. Whether it's attending a Shabbat lunch, or being driven out of the facility to go shopping and site seeing, or learning new skills that can return one to productivity, we are being asked to look at opportunities to help move individuals from isolation to connection. We are being asked to dismantle the metaphorical yet real leper colonies that exist in our society and culture.

We have all experienced periods of isolation. Thankfully, most of us have had the good fortune of a return. Now we have the opportunity to help others experience some aspect of reconnecting, reintegrating, returning.

Which brings us back to the very beginning of the Parsha – Tazriah – she conceives.

By helping to end isolation and by creating engagement and connection, the women in this room have come together in order to help create new life.

Tazriah.

We conceive.