



HAFTARAT PARSHAT TAZRIA-METZORA Lessons for the Modern State of Israel

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It is inconceivable and absurd that God should bring on redemption by means of those who deny and hate Him. Hence, Zionists and the State of Israel are in effect obstacles to the true redemption. This view, formulated by Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum in his magnum opus, *Vayoe! Moshe*, is a fundamental tenet of the worldview of the Neturei Karta. Rabbi Teitelbaum's rejection of the possibility of non-religious actors playing a role in redemption stands in direct contradiction with this week's Haftarah.

Fittingly, with Shabbat marking the 5th of Iyyar, the official date of Yom Haatzmaut, this week's Haftarah offers a response to R. Teitelbaum, suggesting that anyone can be the agent of divine providence. After reading in the Torah about the rules governing *tzara'at*, we recount the story of four lepers who were exiled from the community after Gehazi, assistant to the prophet Elisha, abused his relationship with him.

When Elisha declined payment for healing Na'aman, the Aramean general, with leprosy, Gehazi pursued him, deceitfully requesting funds in Elisha's name. Due to his family's greed and having embarrassed the prophet, Gehazi's family was banished from the community of Israel. Gehazi, who betrays the prophet for greed, is punished with the same ailment that Na'aman was cured from: leprosy for himself and his three sons.

At the time, the Aramean army had laid siege to the cities of Israel, causing great famine amongst the people. With Gehazi and his family living outside the protective walls of the city and certain death looming, they decided to venture down to the encampment of the Aramean army, hoping to surrender and find something to eat.

To their surprise, the camp had been abandoned. Instead of simply taking food and their fill of gold, they decided to inform the Israelite king, Yehoram. Despite fearing that it might be a trap, Yehoram proceeded to the Aramean encampment and – thanks to this act, the Jews of Samaria were saved.

From the Torah's narrative, emphasized by the Talmud (Sotah 47a), Gehazi and his family are both physical and spiritual lepers. They have perpetrated the great sin of publicly disgracing God and His prophet.



And yet, it is these very lepers who inform the king, thereby facilitating the salvation of the Jewish people. This shows that God does not wait for the most worthy candidates, but instead, even someone as deeply flawed as Gehazi –one of the few figures in Tanach denied a portion in the world to come for his misdeeds (Mishna Sanhedrin 10:2) – can be chosen to be the agent of redemption.

Gehazi and his leprous sons are not meant to be equated with the early secular Zionists, whose fundamental aim was to ensure the safety of the Jewish people. Yet the story highlights the theological position articulated by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and Rabbi Norman Lamm: that God is not limited in who He uses to bring about redemption.

Rav Kook wrote at great length of the role God assigned to the secular Zionists in the redemption process of the Jewish people. People of all backgrounds and levels of religious observance played a role in the birth of the State of Israel – and continue to do so today, contributing to the country's defense, growth and success.

That God chose primarily non-religious Jews to establish the state may strike us as puzzling, but it should not lead us to doubt the blessing that Israel represents. In fact, in the eighteenth century, Rav Chaim ben Attar commented that righteousness is not a prerequisite for the Jewish people's redemption. Thank God we have never reached the point that we were bereft of righteous people – and indeed, the State of Israel is the greatest supporter of Torah study in the world.

Since October 7th, we have witnessed an outpouring of heroism from soldiers, civilians and volunteers of all stripes – many of whom may not define themselves as religious – but whose actions have unmistakably advanced the cause of Jewish sanctity and survival.

These include our reservists and their families, medical professionals healing wounds of both body and soul, and the thousands of volunteers still supporting the war effort, even after months of exhaustion and grief. Their level of formal religious observance – or if they are even Jewish – does not define their capacity to redeem or protect the Jewish people or to serve as agents of God.

As we stand between Yom Hazikaron and Yom Haatzmaut, we are reminded that redemption is forged not only in the *batei midrash*, but also in the trenches of war, in hospitals and in homes. Every act of courage, every life sacrificed in service, sanctifies God's name and brings us closer to the fulfillment of God's promise.