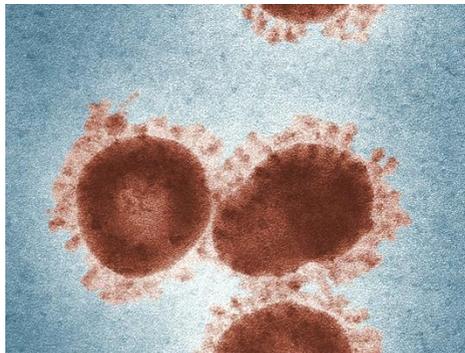

*Ancient vs
Modern
Medicine...*

Rabbi Alon Meltzer

A New Page of Talmud

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Tazria 5782



When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests. (3) The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of his body... (5) On the seventh day the priest shall examine him, and if the affection has remained unchanged in color and the disease has not spread on the skin, the priest shall isolate him for another seven days. (6) On the seventh day the priest shall examine him again: if the affection has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean. It is a rash; he shall wash his clothes, and he shall be clean. - **Vayikra 13:2-6** These are the names of leprous plagues — A RISING, A SCAB etc., — and they are the one whiter than the other. It is an enactment of Scripture that the uncleanness and purification of leprous plagues are pronounced only by the mouth of a priest - **Rashi**

When a person has on the skin of his body...
**אדם קִי־יָהִיָה בְעוֹרֵי בָשָׂרוֹ...
 Vayikra 13:2**

disease known to modern medicine has been made.— **Robert Alter on Vayikra 3:2³** AND WHEN THE PLAGUE OF LEPROSY IS IN A GARMENT. This is not in the natural order of things, nor does it ever happen in the world [outside Israel], and similarly leprosy of houses¹⁴⁰ But when Israel is wholly devoted to G-d, then His spirit is upon them always, to maintain their bodies, clothes and houses in a good appearance. Thus as soon as one of them commits a sin or transgression, a deformity appears in his flesh, or on his garment, or in his house, revealing that G-d has turned aside from him. It is for this reason that Scripture states, *And I shall put the plague of leprosy in a house of the Land of your possession*,^{141(14:34)}, meaning that it is G-d's punishment upon that house. Thus [the law of leprosy of houses] applies only in the Land of Israel. — **Ramban on Vayikra 13:47** ⁴ The directives are so particular, they're so specific,

on Vayikra 13:2² Throughout this long section on dermatological disorders, the precise identification of disease and even symptoms remains uncertain, and the approximations afforded by translation are chiefly guided by etymology. The fact of the matter is that the ancients perceived and described diseases and their symptoms differently than does modern Western medicine, and some conditions that they understood to be a single malady may actually have been a variety of diseases, not all of them intrinsically related. Scholarly attempts to equate the various conditions reported here with specific dermatological disorders have had only limited success... Although older English translations represent the Hebrew *tsara'at* as "leprosy," modern scholars are virtually unanimous in rejecting this identification. The symptoms do not correspond, and there is scant evidence that leprosy was present in the Near East before the Hellenistic period. No positive identification with a

and that's what we're experiencing right now every day. "This is how to wash your hands thoroughly. This is how to separate and sterilize your groceries. This is how long the virus lives on a box or on cardboard." And also this is a reminder, whether or not our ancestors knew what was coming, that in a certain way, it never dies: the idea of plagues, of pandemics, of infection, of someone being a leper or diseased. It's the minutiae of the sterilization: "In order to come back, here are the things you need to do."- **⁵ Abigail Pogrebin on the podcast Parsha in Progress, episode 41**

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