

# A note from Rabbi Seth

April 24, 2020

Dear ones-

Before sharing some words of Torah, two quick announcements!

1) Friday night services start shortly, **this afternoon at 5pm EDT** at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8321750148?pwd=eUVKRFRwNHhBdm1hR1FISnhEaTd6dz09>, run by WCJA's **\*new-(ish)\*** religious directors, Mackenzie Grace and Noah Jacobson. If you have Shabbat candles at home, please have them on hand!

2) If you have lost a loved one (family member, friend, mentor, teacher, etc.) to Covid-19 and are seeking support and community, you are warmly invited to join a weekly grief support group on Wednesdays at 7pm EDT (and 6pm CDT, 5pm MDT, and 4pm PDT). This group is open only to current Williams students. For more information and the login info, please email me.

And now, a brief Torah thought:

This week's Torah reading, [Tazria-Metzora](#), is probably one of the hardest passages to relate to our lives. That's because the parsha deals mostly with surface afflictions that would appear on a human body or on physical property called *tzara'at*, and most of the time, it's pretty difficult to say something relevant about it in a Dvar Torah. Because, honestly, what can we say about an obscure skin condition that relates to our lives?

The Torah does not give any explanation as to why a person or a physical object would contract *tzara'at*, and most of the text in the Torah deals with the treatment of the condition. That process would entail a period of quarantine, examination by a priest (the kohein), and a ritual to reintegrate the person with *tzara'at* back into the community.

At a time when so many of us are in our homes, and those exposed to or suspected of having covid-19 are in quarantine, it's not hard to draw parallels between those afflicted by *tzara'at* and our current scenario. But what I am struck by is how the Torah text spends a lot of time describing the ritual of reintegration. Which is to say, more important than discussing the affliction, the thing that the text cares about is the process of healing, both personal and social.

I recently learned a powerful teaching about healing from one of the chaplains at Albany Medical Center, who recently facilitated a program through the Chaplains' Office. At one point in her career, this hospital chaplain served on a burn unit. She shared that one of the things she learned about burns is that they get worse before they get better. And more than that, that the process of healing is not linear. One part of the wound might heal within a few weeks, while another part would take months.

The same applies to our own grief and healing. For each of us, there might be days when we actually feel great or that parts of our experience that are going well. And other days, we feel anxiety, dread, and fear. And some days, we may feel both, and so much else in between. That speaks to our experience of grief and healing: some parts of ourselves have already healed from this crisis, while others will take much more time to process. We are currently in the midst of a great wound, and we can't will it to heal. We also cannot say how exactly it will heal. As we care for ourselves and the people we care for, we just need to keep showing up, again and again, with as much of an open heart as we can muster.

That is, I think, one of the messages of this week's Torah reading. That as much as we might focus on our hope of when things might return to normal, when we can go back to campus, or for our seniors, our plans for post-graduation, the current calls for us to tend to our grief and our healing. To bring care to our tender places, and to focus on what we might need to heal.

Wishing you and your families a Shabbat of rest and peace,  
Rabbi Seth