



To be “Out of the Camp”
Torah Reflections on Parashat Naso
Numbers 4:21 – 7:89
2 Sivan 5774 May 31, 2014

To be “out of the camp” brings up feelings of abandonment, alienation, and isolation. In the Torah portion *Naso*, God instructs Moses to remove from the camp anyone with skin eruptions or discharge--that is, those who are not ritually pure (Numbers 5:1-2). Isn't that how we feel when faced with a severe illness of self or loved one? Doesn't it feel as though the world goes on without us? That things may appear to be normal, business continues, activities take place, but somehow we are no longer part of that world? We are no longer in that camp.

A neighbor of mine, Mr. Joseph, spoke of his experience of having a daughter diagnosed with Tay Sachs disease. Before the birth of that child, his parenting world consisted of parent-teacher conferences, report cards, Little League games, and birthday parties. When Sarah was diagnosed, his fathering role took him to Children's Hospital where he spent months in doctor-parent conferences, with lab results, treatments, and waiting room time with parents of other terminally ill children. He described his experience as “other worldly”. He said, “Until you are the parent of a sick child, you are unaware of the existence of that other reality. There is an alternate universe that those in the healthy world never even see.”

Zari, a young woman diagnosed with AIDS, expressed similar feelings. She said that when she was diagnosed, suddenly she saw everything from a different perspective. The healthy seemed to be traveling on a different plane—a sheltered one. She felt her reality was raw, closer to the source, more vivid, actually more aware. Being “out of the camp” made her more appreciative, more awake, and indeed, more alive.

To be out of the camp can seem a punishment, or an opportunity for spiritual growth. The experience of being out of the camp, out of our previous daily existence, can force us to find our own reserve and help us to re-examine our beliefs about ourselves and God. While their diagnosis is nothing they would have chosen, many people who have struggled with illness describe unexpected, positive effects from their confinement and travail. For some it may actually be feeling closer to God; for others, a sense of accomplishment in finding their own strength. Rhonda, a woman with fibromyalgia, said, “I often thought of myself as a fragile flower. Now I know just how strong a woman I really am!” Like a crucible, the illness applies stress and pressure, but one may emerge stronger and more sure.

Later in this same *parasha*, God further instructs Moses to bless the people of Israel. All of us are eligible for this blessing, those in and out of the camp. To all the children of Israel,

May God bless you and protect you.

May God let the light of God's presence shine on you and be gracious to you.

May God look kindly upon you and grant you peace!

Thus they shall set My name upon the children of Israel and I will bless them.

(Numbers 6:24-27)

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This Torah Reflection was written by Karen Kosarin Frank, RN, Director Project SHIN, Metrowest Jewish Health and Healing Center, West Orange, NJ. The Torah Reflections series is published by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties. More information and healing-oriented resources can be found at www.JewishHealingCenter.org.



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