

Stigma  
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Luke 8:43-48 KJV

43 And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, 44 Came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanch'd. 45 And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? 46 And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. 47 And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. 48 And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.

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We continue our journey through time and space with our spring study and preaching series, Trekking through the Bible. Today, our inspiration comes from Star Trek: Enterprise, a spin-off series that ran from 2001-2005. This series is a prequel to the original series, set in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century, approximately 100 years before Captain Kirk and Dr. Spock. It follows the adventures of the **FIRST** Starship, Enterprise NX-01, led by Captain Jonathan Archer. This episode has two storylines, A and B. So, without further ado...

#### Captain's Starlog, Supplemental

On board the Enterprise, Chief Medical Officer Phlox (a Denobulan) confirms with sub-commander T'Pol, (a Vulcan), that her symptoms are worsening, and he fears that left untreated, could lead to death. T'Pol has Pa'Nar Syndrome, a non-contagious, stigmatized, disease contracted by Vulcans.

The Enterprise is at a planet named Dekendi III, where an Interspecies Medical Exchange conference is happening. Phlox will be attending this conference, along with several prominent Vulcan doctors. He wants to speak with the Vulcans to learn all he can about Pa'Nar Syndrome, but T'Pol is strongly against it, fearing they'll learn of her condition, and she'll lose her job. Phlox attends the conference and tries to get information about the disease from the Vulcans claiming it is research for a fellow Denobulan.

As expected, the Vulcans learn that Phlox' intentions were less than accurate and that T'Pol is infected with Pa'Nar Syndrome. We then learn that Pa'Nar Syndrome is a neural disease that degrades a Vulcan's synaptic pathways, their endocrine system and immune system. Pa'Nar Syndrome can only be transmitted through improper "mind-melding"

In the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century (pre-Spock) melding was considered an "unnatural practice." Those who engaged in it often chose to hide it from others because "melders" were ostracized by Vulcan society. Should someone contract Pa'Nar Syndrome they were shunned, marginalized and potentially worse. As such, research into curing Pa'Nar Syndrome was not a priority. Those suffering from the disease received little to no sympathy because the prevailing attitude was that "they got what they deserved for engaging in such an unnatural practice to begin with."

What we also learn is that T'Pol did not willingly engage in the mind-meld in which she contracted the disease.

Phlox and Captain Archer implore T'Pol to tell the Vulcan medics how she contracted Pa'Nar; "They will understand that it's not your fault, that you were violated." T'Pol refuses to expand upon the circumstances of her mind meld. She believes that if she tries to "excuse" her disease by revealing it's the result of a Mind Rape, she'd be voicing tacit approval of the discrimination against consensual mind-melders; "They don't care how I contracted Pa'Nar, just that I have it." The senior Vulcan medic initiates procedures to recall T'Pol and have her returned to Vulcan to face consequences. Captain Archer demands a immediate hearing and it is granted. At the hearing, one of the medics reveals that he is a melder, virtually ending his career, but he also reveals his knowledge of how T'Pol contracted Pa'Nar. In the end, T'Pol's career is saved, Phlox receives new information about Pa'Nar that can help T'Pol, and T'Pol commits to fighting for sufferers of Pa'Nar and against the discrimination of melder.

THEN there's the B-Plot.

It involves Dr. Phlox, his wife Feezal and Commander Trip Tucker. The first thing you should know about Denobulans is that polyamorous relationships are normal. Dr. Phlox and his wife Feezal talk with each other about their other spouses – it's typical for Denobulans to have three spouses. The other bit of backstory is about Commander Tucker – he's known for being a stereotypical "ladies' man" – happily single and ready at all times to fawn over women with the hopes of "enjoying their company."

Feezal lives on Dekendi III and when the Enterprise arrives for the medical conference Feezal comes on board to help set up a sophisticated medical microscope with Trip. When Feezal meets Trip, it's evident that she is very attracted to him. It's not only evident, but blatant. Feezal makes repeated overt sexual advances toward Trip. He tells her he is uncomfortable with it since she's a married woman, but she doesn't seem to be bothered at all.

Trip decides to talk with Phlox. He tells him about his wife's advances and to his surprise, Phlox seems glad, Phlox even tries to encourage it. Trip, however, isn't willing to fool around with another man's wife. At the end of the episode, Phlox, Feezal and Trip are discussing the microscope as Feezal is preparing to depart back to Dekendi III.

Phlox: "It's a shame that the two of you didn't get to know one another better."

Trip: (continually embarrassed) "I'd better get back to my warp engine, the plasma is running a little hot."

Feezal: "I know how it feels," clearly continuing her flirting, this time in front of her husband.

Trip: It was a pleasure meeting you. (he then excuses himself)

Phlox: Humans.

Feezal and Phlox look at each other and laugh.

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Stigma – a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person. Shame, disgrace, dishonor.

For T'Pol – the stigma is, Pa'Nar Syndrome. A disease contract during an intimate act that is unnatural, not normal and associated with shame and disgrace. It's something that affects her life in many ways and causes others to look at her and treat her differently.

For Phlox & Feezal – the stigma is their polyamorous marriage. A lifestyle choice that some see as unnatural, not normal, disgraceful and disrespectful. It affects their lives and like Pa’Nar Syndrome, causes others to look at them and treat them differently.

And let’s not forget our scripture reading from today; the hemorrhaging woman. There is much speculation as to what exactly her condition was. Many scholars settle on it being an uncontrollable and unending menstrual bleed that continued for twelve years.

From Leviticus and other Biblical texts, we know that there were many laws and customs related to impurity and uncleanness. Many verses speak to the “uncleanness and impurity of a woman in regard to her menstrual discharge.” Society was accustomed to the normal routine of daily life surrounding a woman’s menstrual time, but this unnamed woman in Luke – her condition wasn’t normal. Natural, normal women did not experience this kind of situation. According to Jewish tradition, this woman was untouchable and profane for all of that time – complete cut off from society, shunned and avoided by everyone.

She has visited many doctors and healers, and none of them has been able to heal her. It seems frenetic and like she is acting out in a last-ditch effort when she seeks out just a touch of Jesus’ cloak. Her very presence in a large crowd would be frowned upon in this society because of her uncleanness. Her normal, daily existence would often have been spent watching people skirt around her to avoid the possibility of contact. No brushing or touching or sharing friendly gestures on the path. No welcoming, inclusion or even politeness. She lived in isolation and would have been known for her uncleanness. She’s “that” woman, stay away from her.

For the hemorrhaging woman – the stigma is her uncleanness. A physical condition that is deemed as unnatural, unclean and unholy – religiously shameful. It affected her life and caused others to look at her and treat her differently.

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On Monday night, when we began to discuss the episode and consider biblical and social narratives, the conversation immediately turned to the AIDS pandemic. Many reflected on their memories of when AIDS first emerged in the early 1980’s – it was, “the Gay Cancer” or “the Gay Plague.” How were gay men treated? Much like T’Pol and “melders.” It was a disease that affected an undesirable minority of the community – gay men. The disease was killing “those people” – good, it’s what they deserve. The efforts to learn, discover, address and cure HIV/AIDS took a low priority – lock them away, avoid touching them or being near them. If it was learned that someone had contracted HIV/AIDS, they were automatically assumed to be gay, whether they were or not – like T’Pol, the details of “how” one contracted the disease didn’t matter.

In the episode, T’Pol tries to hide her status as Pa’Nar positive because she feared being outed as a “melder,” though she wasn’t one. She feared the ostracizing and isolation associated with having the disease and being a melder. When Captain Archer begs her to tell them how you got the disease she says, “it’s not about the disease.”

She’s right. Whether it’s Pa’Nar Syndrome, HIV/AIDS, or hemorrhaging – it’s not about the disease. Regarding polyamory, it’s not about intimate relationships with more than one person. So, what is it about?

It’s about what we value.

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We value power. We value control. We want to create power dynamics, so we deem these people acceptable and those unacceptable. We do it often and repeatedly --- and in regard to anything and everything.

Who is in power? Who has power? We value having power, control and the ability to dictate. Who gets to determine and define “a stigma?”

Stigmas –

marks of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person. Shame, disgrace, dishonor based on one powerful person or group’s thoughts, feelings and ideas. It boils down to discrimination and prejudice in many respects. One powerful person or group discriminating against another solely based on human-based prejudices, abilities, and power.

The majority of Vulcans **decided** that all forms of mind-melding were wrong, so, being in the position of power, they shamed the act and marginalized those who practiced it. Pa’Nar Syndrome – that “melder’s disease.”

Denobulans practice polyamory. Puritanical humans, assuming a position of power and superiority, **deemed** any form of love other than monogamy as wrong and therefore, treat it as shameful and ostracize or look down upon those who practice it.

Heterosexuals, in the majority, **declared** homosexuality as wrong and unnatural. Being in the position of power, they shamed and outlawed all aspects, forms and demonstrations of non-heterosexuality.

Men, having power and control, have negatively **denigrated** and stigmatized women’s bodies. For far too long, the blood that is shed by women routinely for the sake of giving life was shamed throughout history, while the blood shed by men in battle – in the act of taking life, was honored.<sup>1</sup>

When COVID-19 first came to light, the Chinese and Asian-looking were stigmatized. There were countless reports of Asian people in the United States and elsewhere being treated differently, being shunned, ostracized and even attacked because voices that had power were loud and deemed all Asians as the root of COVID-19.

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As Christians, we look to Jesus to guide our lives and how we live. Jesus’ is supposed to be our teacher and our example of what is important and what we value. How did Jesus handle stigmatization? He wasn’t having it.

Jesus fought against anything and everything that was discriminatory, ostracizing, marginalizing and stigmatizing. One of the continual lessons Jesus’ teaches in all he says and does, is about values. We see what and who Jesus values. Did Jesus value power? Did he prioritize, teach and value that we must strive to attain power and then wield it as “WE” see fit? Did he value the powerful? No. He exemplifies THE WAY. The Way in which we are to live our lives, including who and what we value, is about compassion, love, mercy, forgiveness, peace and relinquishing power in a selfless act for others. We value, support and love the orphans, the widows, the homeless, the prostitutes and the sinners.

Stigmatization occurs in the world because of what and who humanity **chooses** to value.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.faithward.org/the-woman-who-bled-for-12-years/>

*Humans* say, “we don’t care about those individuals” or “we don’t care about those details.” We only care about the social rules that we have created and placed upon *everyone*. It doesn’t matter if “THEY” have agreed to these social concepts or not. We are in power. We have deemed these social rules as the right rules and the only rules. Abide by them or suffer the consequences. Jesus and his teachings are quickly forgotten.

What did Jesus know about the hemorrhaging woman?

- \* Who she was?
- \* WHY she had touched him? (of all the people that were touching him)
- \* The condition from which she suffered?
- \* Whether she was a good or bad person?

From the text, we know that Jesus **FELT** power (or virtue) leave him and that it was because of a specific human touch. It was only after the unknown woman stepped forward, told her story and admitted that she touched him, did Jesus have all the facts.

Then what did Jesus do?

Jesus’ power = is to love, bless and heal.

I see how you’ve been relegated to a position of societal weakness and pain.

I recognize your faith in love and powers greater than this world.

Leave your isolation and return to community.

Your pain – emotional and physical - is gone.

You are blessed and healed because of your choices.

Go in peace.

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Because of the value that humans, cultures and society places on power over peace and authority over mercy we have created, allowed and perpetuated far too many stigmas in our world....

The stigma of

- \* Mental illness
- \* Incarceration
- \* Class
- \* Poverty
- \* Divorce
- \* Polyamory
- \* \_\_\_\_\_

What will we value? How shall we choose to respond?

Oh, to be like Jesus. Feeling the energy of another and CHOOSING to respond with intimacy, acceptance and loving touch. A faith that makes us whole and gives us peace.

May we live long and prosper. AMEN.