

PARASHAH: M'tzora (Person afflicted with tzara'at)
ADDRESS: Vayikra (Leviticus) 14:1-15:33
READING DATE: Shabbat
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

This is **Parashat M'tzora**. This portion functions as a continuation of the previous passages dealing with the deadly disease of tzara'at, commonly called leprosy. During regular years, the two short portions are read together; in leap years they are read separately.

The important lesson that must be appropriated from both **Parashat Tazria** and from **Parashat M'tzora** is that the disease of tzara'at could only be diagnosed and treated if it proved to be transitory. The job of the functioning cohen (priest) was to examine the patient, make notes on the condition, wait, reexamine the patient, make more notes, and finally pronounce the findings of his diagnosis. If you were fortunate his verdict was “tahor” (cleansed). For those unfortunate few who ended up with the chronic form of this skin malady their fate was sad indeed: banishment from the community of ritually clean people. The Torah prescribes no cure for chronic tzara'at.

“No Hope?”

Ismar Schorsch is Chancellor of the prestigious Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan, New York. His mother, a survivor of the Shoah (the Holocaust), has had chronic psoriasis for as long as he can remember. He makes an interesting comparison between this disease tzara'at and his mother's psoriasis, finally coming to this grim conclusion:

"I am struck rather by the fate of the person who came down with psoriasis. What would have happened to my mother in the Israelite camp in the wilderness? Our material, which is entirely of priestly origin, focuses exclusively on diagnosis. The function of the priest is to distinguish between the chronic and temporary state of a skin ailment. That may require a period of quarantine, one or two weeks (everything in multiples of seven), after which a final determination is made. Should the person be lucky enough to be declared clean, he or she would be subject to no more than a rite of purification, which would eliminate all traces of impurity.

Our *parasha*, however, offers no hope for the person afflicted with something more grave than a passing skin eruption...

In short, my mother would have been banished from the camp permanently. Without benefit of a prophet's prayer, she would have been regarded as a source of constant danger to the purity of the Tabernacle and the safety of the community. The Torah leaves no doubt about her fate. It bluntly describes what was to be done to the victim of an incurable disease. "As for the person with a leprous affection, his clothes shall be rent, his head shall be left bare, and he shall cover over his upper lip; and he shall call out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall be unclean as long as the disease is on him. Being unclean, he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp (Leviticus 13:45-46)." With its overriding concern for the purity of the Tabernacle, Leviticus made no provision for those thrown into an irredeemable state of impurity. It extended neither sympathy nor support to those most in need of both. Clearly the public good took precedence over the well-being of the individual."¹

This comment of his hits home when we realize that such individuals' lives were forever altered by the decision made by the priest. Such individuals might possibly fall into a state of bitterness and resentment against both the priest and against God for seemingly "cursing" them with this skin condition.

But HaShem is not without compassion. His Love is demonstrated in every generation, but has been demonstrated most completely and effectively in the generation that Yeshua lived in. Why? Because only Yeshua has been documented with curing an Isra'elite from the chronic form of tzara'at!

Again, quoting from my previous commentary:

The proof that the coming messiah was a genuine and not a phony was demonstrated not only in that he would heal the afflicted individual, but that he himself would not become defiled! In Yeshua's example given in Mattityahu 8:1-4, our LORD instructed the former leper to go to the priest

¹ <http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/parashah/5755/metzora.shtml>

as a “testimony unto them” (KJV). This was done for at least two reasons: (1) in obedience to the very mitzvah found in [Parashat Tazria], vindicating Yeshua’s adherence to the Torah of Moshe, and (2) to authenticate the miracle—thus proving his claims to messiahship! In every single instance where he healed the inflicted, or raised the dead, his holiness did not decrease! His state of clean never diminished! On the contrary—disease and death always fled from his presence (...)! Surely he was The Messiah for those days! Surely he is The Messiah for us today!²

As I stated at the close of the previous commentary, **“When our uncleanness encounters the holiness of the Prophet from Natzeret—our disease must flee! We have no need to go about crying, “Tamei! Tamei!” (Unclean! Unclean!) Rather, we have the freedom to proclaim, “Tahor! Tahor! (Cleansed! Cleansed!)”**³ This wonderful truth is a result of our placing our trusting faithfulness in the hands of the Healer of healers! Just like the leprous individuals in our two portions, we need to come before the Priest, for only his office was given the authority to make the pronouncement, “Tamei!” upon the inflicted individual (from **Parashat Tazria**, read Vayikra 13:6, 13, 17, 23, 28, 34, 37, 38, 41, 58, and 59; and from **Parashat M’tzora**, read Vayikra 14:8, 9, 18-20, and 29-32). How is this solution made available for us today, seeing that the earthly priesthood has been dissolved by Yeshua’s own heavenly priesthood?

It must be individually internalized by each and every one of us that:

“In our Messiah Yeshua, the Torah calls all genuine believers a “Kingdom of Cohanim (priests)”, a title previously exclusively reserved for ‘Am Yisra’el (Sh’mot 19:6) but now extended unto the entire Body of our LORD.” (Revelation 1:6)

As priests we have the awesome responsibility of showcasing the Glory of HaShem to the surrounding nations, as well as ministering to one another in the Body. This means, that the healing of the person afflicted with tzara’at among us takes place when the genuine flow of mercy and grace from the Healer flows through us! Yes, today Yeshua still seeks to touch those lepers among us, yet his hands and feet are actuated within our hands and feet! We have become his extension of mercy and healing among the inflicted!

Spotting the “Phonies”

This also means that a heavy price will be paid by those charlatans who claim to have a healing touch from God, but whose very lives testify otherwise. While it needs to be realized that not every “show-and-tell” healer is a phony,

² Ariel ben-Lyman HaNaviy, *Parashat Tazria* (HaNaviy Internet Ministries [HIM], 2005, p. 5.

³ Ibid, p. 6.

unfortunately many unsuspecting sheep are rapidly being caught up in the sweeping wave of “sensationalism”, without having any real depth of understanding of the grander purposes of our Almighty Father. As such, many unsuspecting believers are sometimes duped into giving up all that they own to follow these individuals from city to city as a sort of “disciple”, only to discover in the end that they have been following a cult of some sort. In its extreme case, it can lead to corporate suicides and the like (recall Jim Jones and Guyana, or more recently David Koresh and the Branch-Davidians). On a level closer to our own neighborhood, it can assume the guise of the popular faith healer on our own Christian television broadcasts! We simple cannot and must not be caught up in sensationalism!

But don't misunderstand what I am teaching here. We are about to experience a genuine flowing of the *charismata* (the supernatural sign gifts)! Before our LORD returns to take his bride unto himself, I believe that the Ruach HaKodesh will again be poured out in abundance among his faithful followers (reference Joel 2:28-32). The great and terrible Day of the LORD is fast approaching, and his genuine talmidim (disciples) will again witness in power and in Truth to prepare the earth for his coming. Surely this will involve a resurgence of supernatural miracles—to include healings. Yet, the B'rit Chadashah also makes it frighteningly clear that the counterfeit signs will also abound (read 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12)! We need, therefore, to learn in this day and age how to spot the genuine and how to avoid the counterfeit.

And how shall we accomplish this?

Getting “Under the Skin”

Allow me to make a midrash on the current parashah. When a person afflicted with tzara'at was recognized as such, he was banished to a place “outside of the camp” (see Vayikra 13:45; 14:3) until he could be examined by the cohen and thus receive the announcement of “tahor”. Today, we don't really encounter too many within our midst of believers (remember, the unclean individual came from among their own!) with the deadly disease of leprosy.... Or do we?

The rabbis taught that leprosy was actually an outward manifestation of a greater personal and inward spiritual disease! In particular, they believed that tzara'at was brought on by slander, gossip, and a haughty (proud) spirit. How did they arrive at this postulation? The methods of cleansing mentioned in our current portion included various plants and tree wood, to include the noble cedars (usually from Lebanon; read 14:4 and 6). The **Talmud** states in **Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7**, “...**this is what Solomon said, ‘Why are the most majestic and most humble of plants, cedar wood and hyssop, combined in these rites of purification? Because man is stricken with leprosy as a punishment for being haughty and arrogant as a cedar, and when he humbles himself like the lowly hyssop he will ultimately be cured’.**”

The genuine healing brings with it a healing of the mind and spirit as well as the body! If the person remains outside of the camp (of genuine believers), then his healing was probably a show, and in the end it won't be just his body that perishes...

His soul will also perish.

A genuine and complete healing of body by the genuine Healer of hearers should be followed by a genuine healing of the spirit. The healings described in our parashah allowed the individual to come back into the community—and this was mainly on the physical level. An individual who surrenders to the Master Physician, and becomes supernaturally cured of his physical and spiritual tzara'at likewise becomes a member of the community of called-out ones. Let's do our part in helping these precious new members feel welcomed.

A Personal Lesson

I want to build on the rabbi's interpretation and further suggest that the tzara'at infecting many believers today is indeed a spiritual sickness. We belong to the community. Yet, when we (knowingly or unknowingly) allow our various members to be used as instruments of unrighteousness, we open the door to spiritual defilement. The sages mentioned pride and arrogance in our above example, but allow me to share a personal example that just may hit close to home, especially with you male readers. The following incidents are true and happened to the author, therefore, the names have NOT been changed.

Just before I began to prepare this commentary, I decided to do some research using an Internet search engine. These computer-assisted researches use key words to collaborate a wealth of information and then display the various resources for you to browse through. The word I was using for my search engine had to do with psychological disorders, as my midrash is purporting that the serious illness of physical tzara'at can be compared to a sort of spiritual sickness of sorts. My query yielded a host of various web sites where psychology was mentioned. I clicked on one of those sites, and to my surprise a mural of half-naked men and women invaded my computer screen! The link was mistakenly cross-referenced to a web site dealing with "psycho-sexual disorders" and the topic of "sexual bondage" was the opening image. Needless to say, I assessed the mistake and quickly began to "browse back" so that I did not lose my initial query, wanting to get rid of the current web site graphically displayed across my screen.... But was I quick enough? Apparently not.

The image of males and females doing things that our God did not create them to do—especially with partners who were obviously not their own, superimposed itself onto my mind in a matter of seconds! I felt violated. Why would Yeshua allow this mistake to make its way to Ariel's computer? —a computer dedicated

to spreading the Good News of the Messiah's atoning death, burial, and resurrected life! Well, I decided to forget about it and go on to type this very commentary that I am sharing with you today, but the image wouldn't let me focus on the Torah. My mind had contracted a small form of tzara'at, and it was beginning to make my whole body feel infectious! I needed a cohen (priest) fast!

Thanks be unto our God, I no longer have the mind of my former self! I no longer need to allow my members to behave in the manner of an unredeemed man of this world's corrupt system. Because of who I am in Messiah, I have the mind of Messiah! Romans 12:1, 2 informs me that I have been transformed by the renewing of my mind! My Cohen HaGadol is the Only, Unique Son of the Father himself! I put down my keyboard, and picked up my Sword—my Torah! I thumbed through the current parashah looking for that blessed phrase...

“...thus the cohen will make atonement for him; and he will be clean.” (14:20b)

Those comforting words exploded upon the soul that was tainted with this world's leprosy. I humbly accepted my High Priest's cleansing pronouncement, “Tahor!”, basking for a moment in the light of this glorious Truth. But HaShem wasn't finished cleansing me just yet. I felt as if he were saying that my body itself needed to be immersed in this cleansing power....

I took a shower.

It is amazing what the physical manifestation of a spiritual truth can do for the soul! I felt “re-charged” and freshly prepared to write this commentary! The Holy One, Blessed be He, turned an otherwise trivial incident into something for me to personally be thankful for.

Conclusions

The following incident may not ever happen to you. It may have already happened to you. You may believe that a leprous condition has infected your spirit and soul, until you feel violated and dirty. It may be the leprosy of greed, or lust, or anger, or jealousy, or unforgiveness; you may be infected with the leprosy of pride, or ill intent towards your neighbors, friends or family, or you may just feel like you need a renewed and refreshing touch from the Healer of healers!

Go see the Priest.

His name is Yeshua.

His Words are Spirit....

And his Words are Life!

The closing blessing is as follows:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher natan lanu Torah-emet,
v’chay-yeh o’lam nata-b’tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you O’ LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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