

Parasha Metzora (Infected One)
April 16, 2005/7 Nisan 5765

Torah: Lev. 14:1-15:33

Haftarah: 2 Ki. 7:3-20

Brit Chadashah: Mt. 23:16-24:2, 30,31 (F&L)

This week's Torah portion deals with the ritual cleansing of impurity caused by a skin condition known in Biblical times as t'souris, which has been interpreted in modern times as leprosy, although there is some debate as to whether or not it actually was leprosy. Whatever it was, it was nasty, and caused oozing sores. The portion also described the purification process in other situations, such as cleaning up a dwelling infested with mildew and dealing with bodily fluids: for a man, a seminal emission, or a woman, her menstrual flow. Physical impurity, in Biblical Israelite terms, caused someone to be set apart from the rest of the camp and to go through a purification process, after which one could rejoin the rest of the group. Variations of these processes are still carried on by the very Orthodox who have rabbinic rules concerning proper relations between men and women during certain times of the month.

Leviticus 14: 54 These are the regulations for any infectious skin disease, for an itch, 55 for mildew in clothing or in a house, 56 and for a swelling, a rash or a bright spot, 57 to determine when something is clean or unclean. These are the regulations for infectious skin diseases and mildew.

Leviticus 15:31 " 'You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them.' (NIV)

The prophetic portion also speaks about people who are suffering from t'zarot, specifically a few who were acting selfishly but then who realized what they were doing was wrong and turned from their ways:

2 Kings 7:8 The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered one of the tents. They ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also.

9 Then they said to each other, "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace."

As followers of G-d and His Word, we strive for holiness. In Hebrew, the word we use for 'holy' is 'kadosh,' which literally means 'set apart.' We have chosen to

be set apart in our lives from the rest of the world. But what exactly is that supposed to look like in practical terms?

Well, obviously we no longer move ourselves to an outside location when we suffer from a bleeding sore or when we women have our periods. But there are things we do to set ourselves apart from the world at times, out of holiness. For one, being here on Saturday mornings. For another, avoiding certain kinds of food – it is amazing how these things that seem so small can impact one's life. What we eat literally affects places we can go and people we can stay with. \The important thing is to make sure we are keeping these commandments out of a desire to be holy, not to show off our presumed religious superiority to others. The principle is not to prove our spirituality to others through our physical diet, but to remember through keeping kosher that our bodies are the temple of G-d, and therefore He cares what we eat, how we eat, and why eat. All of the laws of the Torah were given so that we could learn that spirituality affects every area of our life without exception, and that every area of our lives need to be holy and dedicated to G-d.

Which brings us to the New Covenant. In the words of Yeshua:

Matthew 23:27“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to faith are Believers who are outwardly religious, but their hearts are not in it. Sooner or later this self-righteous veneer will wear off, and the true nature of their characters come through. Perhaps they are those who put on an act that everything in their lives are perfect, when they are really hiding personal turmoil. Perhaps they speak one thing with their mouths, and do another with their actions. Whether Believers or not, we're always going to be human, and our lives are not going to be perfect. External appearances ultimately mean nothing. Have a heart that is right with G-d, is what counts. Our lifelong goal needs to be holiness, in every aspect of our lives.