

3 Adar, 5777 (29/4/17) **New Series: Learning to Do It His Way** J. M. Terrett

## Where Do You Get Your Exercise From?

**Tazria (She Bears Seed)/Metzora (Infected One)**

**Taking the Time to Heal**

**Torah:** Lev. 12:1-13:59; Lev. 14:1-15:33;

**Haftarah:** 2 Kings 7:3-20

**Brit Chadashah:** Luke 7:18-35 Matt. 23:16-24:2, 30-31

Reading: Donna pp. 33, 35 and Ps. 106, 120. Jewish Hero: Cup Bearer; Torah carrier: Teresa

### **L-rd's Table**

This week's Torah Portion is one of the times when the portions are doubled to allow for the special holy readings during the Festival Cycle, when the regular Sabbath readings are suspended. This week is also a double portion where the first portion is very technical (TT) and the second portion is technical (T), so we have our work cut out for us to adequately cover the material.

It deals first with a woman giving birth and the procedures she had to go through for her purification. It then deals with some one who contracts a leprous skin condition. It also deals with how to treat an article of clothing which may contain an infection and the next portion extends the discussion to how to treat a house which may also contain an infection. The next section goes on to deal with conditions which involve a discharge of blood and what needs to be done for the infected people to be purified from their condition.

a woman's menstrual cycle is dealt with, along with the case where the issue of blood continues longer than her usual cycle. Rather than be troubled by the fact that a very normal part of life is being dealt with along with infectious conditions which also involve a discharge of blood, several considerations need to be dealt with.

First, none of these conditions are described as either proceeding from a demonic source, or from a punishment which was caused by disobedience or because a crime was committed. These people are not being smitten with a plague because they have somehow displeased the L-rd. This is one of the earliest discussions of disease as the result of exposure to an infection and offers two very wise solutions to dealing with sickness: quarantine and hygiene.

It is understood that any discharge of blood is potentially hazardous for health and that skin condition could be infectious and persons afflicted with either category of illness need to be quarantined until they make a full recovery. Said another way, whenever the immune system is unable to prevent a discharge of blood or the appearance of a potentially infectious skin condition, the person or persons involved are put into quarantine for their safety and for that of the community.

It is also interesting to note that even various articles of clothing and household objects, including the house itself, are recognized as potential sources of infection.

They are also subjected to both quarantine and hygiene in order to cleanse them and to prevent them from passing on their contagious infections to the community.

The accounts are both detailed in how to deal with skin conditions and issues of blood and also

very general, looking at similar symptoms and not specific diseases or infectious conditions. The two passages recognize that disease can spread by physical contact with an infected person or an infected object or place and is not primarily the result of divine punishment or demonic influence.

The two portions not only give rules for quarantine, but also procedures to recognize and celebrate healing and recovery so that the overall health of the entire community is protected.

The mention of both child birth and a lady's menstrual cycle is not saying that either event is somehow related to disease or any other infectious condition. It is a recognition that whenever blood is involved, the affected person or persons needs to both benefit from quarantine and hygiene until there is no more bleeding and a full recovery is made.

A woman was quarantined during her monthly cycle and was given a week to fully recover, not because she was considered in any way contagious or suffering from some kind of disease. Anytime there is blood involved, there is the potential for an infectious condition to be acquired during her weakened condition and she was given time in quarantine to rest and fully recover.

The same occurred after she gave birth. In some cultures, a woman was expected to return to her regular work routine immediately after giving birth and this along with the lack of the most basic rules of hygiene, meant that childbirth is still considered the most potentially dangerous event a woman could experience in her life. In this passage, she is given a full week to recover and an examination is made to ensure that she is not bleeding after her menstrual cycle is completed. She is not being considered an unclean person, she is being treated with consideration so that her health is not compromised whenever she suffers from an issue of blood.

One final consideration and it concerns the rules around childbirth. For a son, she is given a week to recover and then a circumcision is performed and she is given time to care for the baby for another 33 days before she is declared fully recovered – before her purification is declared and she gives a double offering (a lamb for the burnt offering and a dove for the sin offering).

For a baby girl, she is given 14 days to recover from the birth and spends an additional 66 days before she is declared fully recovered when her purification is completed. The same two offerings are made, a burnt offering and a sin (expiation) offering, and then she could return to full participation as a part of the community, as long as no subsequent issues of blood occurred.

At the end of the purification period, the celebration ritual became associated with presenting the child, boy or girl, to the L-rd, so that they could also be fully accepted as new members of the community. But why the extra time for a baby girl? Are little girls more subject to uncleanness and infection than little boys? The best explanation I have so far encountered, comes from the Talmud. Because little girl will one day begin her own menstrual cycle, the mother is purifying her by proxy, with the second seven days and is giving her a double full recovery period in recognition of the special, important future role she shall one day play in the generational life of the community.

What can we learn from this passage? First disease is primarily an infection and is not some kind of punishment for spiritual or moral misconduct. Second, infected people need to experience both quarantine and hygiene, so that they can recover and not infect the general

community. Lastly, any issue of blood needs to be dealt with so that the persons affected by this condition are given time to heal, whether it is part of a woman's normal monthly cycle, a response to a birth, or involves an infection which needs time to heal. Healing as a return to wholeness remains the sole objective of both portions.

Sermon: **Learning to Do it His Way: Where do You Get Your Exercise From?**

Passage: ***Blessed is the man who does not walk according to the counsel of the wicked nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the company of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the L-rd and on His law, he meditates day and night! He is like a tree that is planted beside the streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaves do not wither – and he finds success in all that he does*** (Psalm 1:1-3)

In my next series I want to examine several passages which talk about our need, as believers, to adopt biblical strategies as the primary, singular way we relate to all and any happenstances that we encounter during our pilgrimage through this life. I use the terms primary and singular because, while we receive spiritual life when we come to the L-rd and accept him into our hearts and lives, spiritual health only comes as we learn to adopt biblical strategies as both the best and the only way to live in the L-rd.

Far too many believers never grow up or mature spiritually and they remain carnal babies, causing perpetual spiritual and personal havoc for themselves and for any community that they wander through. They feel hard done by and do not understand that they have to move beyond just regularly repenting for their foolishness and acquire the spiritual and emotional stability which can only come from obedience to the stipulations of His Word.

James puts this dilemma in an interesting light when he asks his readers to show him their faith without works, while he shows his by his works. He goes on to say that faith without works is dead, just like a body without breath has no life (James 2:14-26). Paul says that carnality – responding from the flesh – is a childish stage we need to grow out of and put away from us ( I Cor. 13:11).

Too many believers never grow up and they live dry, withered and unfruitful lives in the L-rd. They are embroiled with and choked by the works of the flesh and have no room to grow in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:17-24) and they spend their lives stumbling around in spiritual darkness, like so many clumsy bulls in so many unfortunate tea shops. They forget that salvation is not only about a redeemed soul, but it is also about a changed life. We cannot escape from the reality that whatever we sow, we shall reap and realizing we are withered and choked and need to start over again is not how the L-rd wants us to spend our lives as we wander through this life towards our final Home in Glory.

I said it last week, I want to repeat it today – the biggest barrier to the Gospel is not the ravages of evolutionary nonsense, nor the rise of global immorality and it is not even the rising tide of spiritual apostasy by those believers who are abandoning their faith in the Bible. The biggest barrier to the Gospel is the garrulous crowd of misbehaving believers who are giving us such a bad name in the eyes of the society which is horrified and turned off by their constant and disreputable hijinks, supposedly in the name of the L-rd.

Without abundant light and salt, believers have lost their credibility and have nothing to say to

the world. I once had a student who claimed to be a Christian but who was foul mouthed, running with the heavy drinkers and engaging in illicit sexual activities. I expressed my shock and disbelief and asked him to do the L-rd a favour and not to tell anybody he was a believer. I hope that none of us finds ourselves in a similar situation where our silence would be doing the L-rd a favour.

In a very real sense, as believers, we possess both the seeds of our own destruction and the seeds of our own spiritual fulfilment and we have to decide what kind of impact we are willing to have on the progress of the will of G-d in our lives and in the life of our generation. I recently posted on Facebook that nothing we do as believers can slowdown or get in the way of the will of G-d being accomplished. We have to decide whether it will be fulfilled through us or inspire of us. If we are unwilling to be His servants, He will do what He has done in the past – He will move on to find those in the highways and byways and hedgerows who will respond to His invitation and adopt a banquet friendly lifestyle.

In our community, as we prepare to celebrate the giving of both the Law and the Spirit, we want to reinforce our understanding of our need to learn to do things His way, so that we are not passed over as His purposes are accomplished in the world around us. We want to be authentically Sabbath powered and Festival driven as we allow His word to be the place where we are planted and from which we draw our strength.

I selected a passage from the book of Psalms to begin this series because these songs and ballads were written by people who wanted to respond to every situation in their lives, so that their lives reflected both their faith in G-d and their confidence in His provision. It is really a collection which is divided into five separate books and was compiled over the centuries, from the time of Moses until our people came home from the Babylonian captivity. Because it is principally a collection of songs, while the five books of the Torah are called the Torah for the head, this collection of songs and ballads has been called the Torah for the heart.

Each of the five books of Psalms, begins with an introductory Psalm and ends with a concluding Psalm, but the first two Psalms in Book One, are considered to be the general introduction to the entire collection. We are not told who the author of this Psalm is, but his message is clear and begins with a blessing on those who will avoid engaging in negative spiritual exercise when it comes to deciding how to live.

Three forms of exercise are listed in the first verse: walking, standing and sitting and they involve voluntary actions which are decisions based on personal choice and not on circumstances. We do not lose our free will when we come to faith, we just need to learn to exercise it differently, because our lives should be walking in a new and different direction.

The first action involves walking according to the counsel of the wicked, who the Bible describes as people who have decided to do whatever they feel like doing, instead of choosing to do what they know is right. Our feelings and our drives tell us what condition we are in and describe our desire for sensual fulfilment and physical gratification. They are neither right, nor wrong, anymore than a match or knife or a vehicle are. It is how we decide to relate to them which determines right and wrong. A wicked person allows these feelings and drives to determine how they respond to what comes their way and considers physical satisfaction as the highest and most noble goal of life.

The Bible says that just as hell and destruction are never full, so the eyes of man are never satisfied and our flesh will either be the race horse we have trained and which we ride to our Father's Home in Glory, or the wild donkey which overpowers us and drags us in the other direction, towards our ultimate spiritual destruction.

It is a choice we need to make and deciding to walk according to the counsel of the wicked will lead us into the negative spiritual exercise which will strengthen our flesh and weaken our spirit. If we allow the Lord teach us how to tame our flesh, including our unruly tongue, then we can seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and not live as enemies of God and His Word. In a very real sense, you win or lose, depending on how you choose.

The older you get and the more experiences you have, the less impact the issues of your family of origin have, because making righteous choices will lift you out of the mud and lead you into the salty light and away from the destructive counsel which increasing numbers of wicked people are accepting in our world today. There are people in our world today, who consciously decide to do what they know is wrong and will lie and cheat and manipulate, in order to get their own way. Wicked people become enemies of God and His Word by choice no matter whether they are living through good times or are having to plod through trouble and deep valleys.

How are you walking and whose counsel are you following? Are you allowing yourself to be shaped by the good decisions you are making or are you letting your drives and desires determine what kind of life you live?

Related to walking according to the counsel of the wicked is standing in the way of sinners, instead of making a stand for the Lord according to His Word. What do you stand for? Have you moved away from the values and beliefs of the world or have you become a spiritual chameleon, who lives one way in shul and another in the world for the rest of the week?

Lying and stealing and gossiping are activities we should not stand for in our lives and we should not stand with people who engage in this kind of negative exercise. We need to be a part of the flock of our Good Shepherd and not stand with the carnal gangs who are trying to win control of the neighbourhoods of our world.

Standing is important because people see what kind of people we are when we defend positions which the Bible teaches and stand against those which the Bible does not support. One negative way of handling disagreement and which is another form of negative spiritual exercise, relates to sitting in the company of mockers.

This argumentative group of people mock and make fun of things they do not understand or do not agree with and assassinate the characters of people they disagree with, without dealing with any of the issues involved in the disagreement. They belittle and accuse and sow dissension and doubt so that which is good and right and proper appears in a bad light because they want to call darkness, light and that which is sour, sweet – and that which is disgusting, totally acceptable.

It is a kind of group mentality which uses mockery and invalid criticism in order to avoid dealing with issues that challenge the ground they are seated on and the bad company which they are keeping.

We have dealt with three negative forms of spiritual exercise which will move us away from the Word and from walking in the salty light and the Psalm begins to offer a double solution which will undo all the damage we have suffered and return us to the spiritual heath which is our primary calling. Taking delight in the Law of the L-rd refers to the entire Scriptures and makes them our priory source of nourishment and gives us too busy to walk, or stand, or sit where we have no business of being.

How much delight do you take in His Word? When we are engaging in negative spiritual exercise, we find ways of avoiding His Word and we do not let it be the centre around which our lives revolve – it is degraded into the activity we avoid engaging in so that we do not see the error of our ways or our need to be held accountable for the choices we make.

What are you meditating on day and night? I find that even when I am watching TV or listening to the radio or when I go on line, the voice of His Word is still echoing through my mind. We are not called to be fascinated by the world or staring at it as if we felt like we were missing out on something we would rather be doing. There is no real or lasting satisfaction walking with the wicked, or standing with sinners – and being seated in the company of mockers fills our lives with so much darkness that there is no room for us to meditate on His Word or to take pleasure in the things of His Kingdom.

We are called to be feeding ourselves on His Word and to be walking and standing and sitting in its salty light, so that our positive spiritual exercise brings us spiritual maturity and abundance. as we walk with Him, we become like the tree planted by the waters of His Word and we give our fruit in our season and our foliage does not wither. Also whatever we undertake in Him according to His Word succeeds, as we overcome darkness and are not overcome by it.

We will still encounter difficulties which will try to wither us or uproot us far from the living waters of His Word, but His seasons will lift us out of whatever doldrums or drouths we may encounter. This is why we follow our weekly Torah reading cycle and engage in worship on Shabbat and participate in our communities observance of the Festival cycle. What is going on in our inside becomes more important than the trials we are walking through and even the baggage we came to faith with diminishes as the way we walk leads us through green pastures and beside still waters until we are healed, healthy and happy.

Withering foliage means that a tree is in distress and its life giving sap often retreats into its roots and hides until it gets the nutrients and the moisture it needs to be healthy and growing. Is your life flourishing or is your spiritual vitality withering because of the lack of the moisture and the nutrients which only His Word can provide? Is your life a series of spiritual successes where you have seen Him do wonders, despite all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune which life continues to throw at you?

Is your spirituality barely hanging on because you are engaging in negative spiritual exercise? Where are you walking? Where are you standing? Who are you sitting with? What kind of spiritual vitality do you have in your life? Are you flourishing or withering? Are you producing spiritual fruit in the seasons of the L-rd or have the unfruitful, negative spiritual exercises crowded spiritual health and vitality out of your life?

In this series, we will examine our need to do things His way, no matter where we are or what

is going on in our lives. We are on a journey through this life towards our Father's Home in Glory, and we must not get lost along the way or become distracted or choked by the unfruitful darkness and carnal foolishness of the world we are only walking through.

Living according to His Word will make us part of the solution as we become vehicles through which His purposes can be accomplished and not obstacles which His purposes have to work around. It is not a matter of where we live or what stage of life we are at and it is certainly not a matter of what we are going through in our lives. In times of great trial or in times of great peace, it is what is happening on the inside and which direction we are walking in, that will determine our spiritual health and fruitfulness in the Lord – and our usefulness as vessels through which His purposes can be fulfilled.

As we come to the Lord's Table today, let us decide to walk and to stand and to sit by the streams of living water which proceed out of His Word. And let us surrender any darkness, any damage and any distress which are keeping us from disengaging in negative spiritual exercise and returning to the pace we should be at in His Word.