

Metzora **Infected One Staying Clean and Dealing with infections**
Torah: Leviticus 14:1-15:33
Haftarah: 2 Kings 7:3-20
Brit Chadashah: Matthew 23:16-24:2, 30, 31

This is the last Shabbat before our annual celebration of Pesach. Metzora is another very technical portion which deals with both hygiene and quarantine. Chapter 14 deals with the rituals of cleansing when someone recovers from skin conditions which the Torah calls leprosy. It also discusses the sacrifices which were offered to celebrate this happy event.

The infected person would have been living outside the camp, so the priest leaves the camp to make his inspections. If he certifies that the infected person is now recovered there is a ritual of shaving and bathing, followed by a special double anointing of blood and oil which is then also followed by a sacrifice of two, one year old lambs.

The first part of the bathing and shaving ritual occurred outside the camp. The person being purified would procure two kosher birds along with cedar wood, crimson and hyssop. One of the birds was killed and the other was dipped in the blood of the first bird, along with the cedar wood, the crimson and the hyssop. The person being cleansed was anointed seven times with the blood soaked bird and was declared pure. The other bird was released into the fields.

In order to re-enter the camp, the one newly declared pure, would shave all their body hair, and wash both their clothes and themselves. The water used for bathing could not be stagnant and this freshly drawn water is called living water in the Bible. Once inside the camp, the newly purified person had to remain outside their tent for seven days. After this seven day period, they would again shave all their body hair, including their beard and their eyebrows and wash their clothes again and bathe a second time in water.

Next, the cleansed one procured two, one year old lambs and a sheep, along with flour kneaded with oil and a hin of oil, which is equivalent to 5.7 litres or one and a half gallons. All of this was presented to YHVH at the entrance to the tent of meeting. All of this was waved before YHVH and one of the lambs was slaughtered as a guilt offering. The priest then took its blood and put it on the person's right ear lobe, on their right thumb and also on the right big toe.

The priest then put oil in the palm of his left hand and anointed the person's right ear lobe, their right thumb and their right big toe. This was done on top of the blood and is very similar to the anointing ritual for the priests. What was left of the oil in the palm of the priest, was poured over the head of the one being purified. The second lamb was then offered as an atonement offering and the sheep was offered as a burnt offering. This was all done after the seven days he spent outside his tent and on the completion of these rituals, the person was declared to be clean.

If the person was poor, a single lamb was used for both the guilt offering and the atonement offering. Two pigeons were given as offerings and smaller amount of kneaded flour was used, along with a log of oil, which is just about half a litre. There is no mention of cedar wood, crimson or hyssop in this reduced ritual.

The two rituals were almost alike, except that in the second one, no bird was set free. The one being purified did receive an anointing of blood and oil. One bird was offered as an atonement

offering and the other as a burnt offering. At the conclusion of this lesser ritual, the person was declared clean. Being poor never prevented a person from being cleansed before YHVH.

When it came to mould in a house, first all its contents were removed to prevent them from becoming infected. The house would then be inspected by a priest and if the mould was deep, the house was left empty for seven days. If the mould had spread during this time, the infected stones and all the mortar were removed and dumped in an unclean place. If the mould returned after this process, the whole house was demolished and dumped in an unclean place. If the mould did not return, a cleansing ritual similar to the one performed for the person recovering from a skin condition was undertaken and once it was complete, the house was declared pure. All of these rituals were performed to teach the people the difference between that which was pure and that which was unclean.

When it came to wounds that leaked blood or puss, an elaborate discussion deals with everything around the person which could be made impure. These items were just impure until the evening. It even says that if an infected person spits on a clean person, they are unclean until the evening and if a clean person is touched by an infected person without washing their hands, they would also be unclean until the evening.

There was also a seven day cleansing period, after which sacrifices were offered as they went through a modified cleansing ritual. The Torah takes uncleanness very seriously and the passage goes on to deal with other situations where body fluids could make a person unclean. If a woman was bleeding outside of her monthly cycle, anything she touched and any person she touched, was considered unclean and had to wash themselves. If a man had sexual relations with the woman and they developed a bleeding wound, they had to go through a seven day quarantine, followed by a cleansing ritual. If the man just had an emission of sperm, they had to wash themselves and were unclean until the evening.

The woman who was bleeding outside her menstrual cycle could not begin the cleansing ritual until the bleeding stopped. She was not required to live outside the camp, but limited her contact with clean people. Once the bleeding stopped the cleansing rituals and sacrifices proceeded and after they were completed, she was declared pure.

These rituals involved first inspection, then quarantine. At the end of the quarantine, another inspection followed and in order for the person to be declared clean, an elaborate set of rituals and sacrifices was performed. If the problem did not go away, only then was the infected person required to live outside of the camp. Various kinds of infectious diseases have affected mankind over the years. Quarantine and hygiene were radical innovations which the Torah introduced. When we get sick, we have to take precautions not to infect others.

Modern medicine has only recently discovered the benefits of hygiene and quarantine and while the exact causes of the sicknesses being dealt with are not given, the Bible deals with sickness as a physical problem which was not usually caused by evil spirits. Your problems will only go away when you deal with them and the Bible teaches many ways to deal with both physical and spiritual problems. Your physical and your spiritual health are both important to YHVH. We need to live cleansed lives.

Sermon: Passover is Coming: Shabbat HaGadol (the Great Sabbath)

While Yom Kippur is called the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Sabbath before Passover is called the Great Sabbath (Shabbat HaGadol). It is the last of six special Sabbaths in the lead up to

Passover, and here they are: (1) Shabbat Shireh – the Sabbath of the song which the people sang once they were safely across the Sea of Reeds and witnessed the drowning of Pharaoh's mighty army. (2) Shabbat Shekalim, when every male Jew paid 1/2 of a biblical shekel for the upkeep of the tabernacle and later the temple. In our generation, orthodox Jews are collecting golden shekels for the building of the third temple. This money is kept in the synagogue of the chief Ashkenazi rabbi. For us, Paul said that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, so there is no need for a third temple to be built.

(3) Shabbat Zachor (Sabbath of Remembering). We are to remember that we are engaged in a generational conflict with the enemy that will continue until the Messiah returns. (4) Shabbat Parah (the Sabbath of the Red Heifer) – every year a flawless red heifer was sacrificed and its ashes were collected and mixed with water to purify (anoint) people who were recovering from any defilement. Red Heifer in Hebrew is Paran Adama or Adam's cow. For us, we celebrate the fact that Messiah took on Adam's sinful nature, without sinning and took this victory to the cross.

(5) Shabbat HaChodesh (Sabbath of the month). The first of Nissan is the new year for the Lord and announces the beginning of a new festival cycle. (6) Shabbat HaGadol is the Sabbath just before Passover and is celebrated in anticipation of our deliverance from Egyptian slavery. We must not forget that Passover is a big deal for at least two reasons. First it is a yearly commemoration of our deliverance from Egypt and it is also where the ritual of the Lord's Table comes from and we celebrate our deliverance from the Egypt of this world.

Next Friday will be the 27th time I have celebrated Passover as a Messianic Jew, but I have never gotten tired of the Seder. Rabbinic Jews celebrate two Seders, where the second one replaces the Festival of First Fruits and the beginning of our annual countdown to Shavuot (Pentecost). We need to develop our own ceremony to celebrate First Fruits.

When I first took the shul, I was not happy with the Messianic Seder we were using. It was more like a summary overview that left out some major features of the Seder Meal. So I began to read and research any number of Haggadahs (Seder ritual guides) and designed one for us that goes through the entire Seder ritual from a Messianic perspective. I have not made any changes to it for at least ten years and I am getting very familiar with its contents.

You see, over the years, people have come to shul because, for most Gentile believers, we are very exotic and quite different. However, when the newness wears off, too many quit attending and go looking for another exciting new spiritual experience. For many of these spiritual gypsies, this becomes a life habit and they never settle down to grow roots and become spiritually mature. Visitors are always welcome in shul, but once the newness wears off, we get to see what they are really made of. One friend attended our shul for some five or six years and admitted that this was the longest she had ever stayed in any congregation.

It is true that we are called to be wanderers and pilgrims, travelling through this world on our way to our father's Home in Glory, but we are not called to change congregations after the newness wears off or when spiritual issues come up that we are not willing to solve.

Instead of being fascinated by what is new, we need to be committed to seek regular renewal, as the garden of our heart and lives ceases to be choked with the works of the flesh and we begin to develop the wonderful fruit of the Spirit. There will always be new things coming into our lives and we will always need to make changes so that our spirituality remains fresh and

does not grow stale. Changing congregations always involves considerable upheaval and until we settle in, G-d cannot help us work through the issues He wants us to deal with. There is really nothing new under the sun, experiences are just recycled as we move in our journey from conception to the grave.

How well are you settling in our midst? Once we get to know people, we can begin to discern the issues they need help working through and we can benefit from their participation in our lives and in the life of the shul. We need to find an assistant technician for our live streaming. We need to find musicians for our worship team. We need more volunteers for our Shabbat school. And very soon we will need a youth group and a youth leader. It is only when the dust settles and the newness wears off, that we can get to work on the issues G-d wants us to work on. How well is your dust settling?

So, for me, there is going to be nothing new in the Seder I am leading for the 27th time, but I will be experiencing lots of kavanah (intention) where my heart's intention is once again stirred and I am able to dive into the meaning and significance of this amazing ritual meal. I do not grow tired of removing all the chametz (leavening) from my home and storing it in the garage in a plastic tub. If you are going to follow this practice, all products which contain leavening should be removed from your kitchen cupboard by next Thursday evening at the latest. We will be observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread from sundown on Friday, April 15th until sundown on Friday, April 22nd. We will observe Yizkor (memorial) during our service on Saturday, April 23rd. We will set up photographs on our memorial table and light candles as we honour our beloved departed. If you have any photographs you would like to display, please feel free to bring them.

The season of Passover, which is what the week of Unleavened Bread is called in modern Judaism, is a time for extended spiritual self reflection so that none of the leavening of sin is allowed to take root in our hearts and lives over the next year in the L-rd. We want to make spiritual realities more important to our lives than the fickle, changing circumstances which may wander through our lives.

As we explore the meaning of Shabbat HaGadol, I want to study a favourite Scripture passage that continues to impact my life, even though I have been studying it for 50 years.

Passage: "I exhort you therefore brethren by the compassions of G-d, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to G-d which is your reasonable, spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this present age, but be transformed by the renewal of your understanding so that you can discern what is the will of G-d, which is good, acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1, 2)

G-d wants us to have a deep, passionate response to all He has done for us. He did not hold back His beloved only Son and He does not want us to hold anything back from Him and the wonder of His Word. He not only grants us life everlasting when we come to faith, His promises also give us guidance, protection and provision, not so that our life will float to Heaven on a rose coloured cloud of ease, but so that it can shine brightly as we travel through our fast pace, darkening world. Nothing in our hearts and lives should be out of bounds to Him.

Under the sacrificial system, all the rituals and the various kinds of sacrifices, both symbolically represented the wonderful salvation which our Messiah brought to us and our need to be separate from the defilement of the world and be holy. What is symbolic is always superseded by that which is actual or real. The early Messianic community still participated in temple worship and while sacrifices for sin were fulfilled in the Messiah, the Festival cycle was not

abolished. Now, we remember the great salvation which our Messiah won for us and which our people waited so long for. On Rosh Hashannah, we celebrate His kingship and His lordship, as well as the coming Judgment of all the nations and generations of mankind.

By faith we have salvation and by prayer, repentance and obedience, we obtain atonement and are washed clean and restored to spiritual wholeness. Since the destruction of the second temple, it has not been possible to offer actual sacrifices of any kind. It may surprise you to know that at the beginning of traditional Jewish prayer books, one of the first prayers to be recited is: may these prayers and the recitation of these sacrifices count as if they were actually offered and may they be counted as acceptable in your eyes.

While they are still waiting for some version of the Messiah to appear, we are celebrating the Messiah who did appear and who accomplished salvation and atonement for us and we are now just waiting for His return to set up His everlasting kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. All we have to actually do is to have faith and learn obedience. All the symbols do is to remind us of what He did and what He will do when He returns.

On Yom Kippur we celebrate our salvation and atonement, as we draw near to the true High Priest who now dwells in the true, heavenly Holy of Holies. We can still fast as a means of crucifying our flesh and honouring His great sacrifice. At Sukkoth we celebrate that fact we are only dwelling in these temporary tents of flesh and remind ourselves that we are only strangers and pilgrims travelling through this dark, fading world.

At Chanukah, we celebrate the fact that Messiah did come into the Temple during the Festival and did declare His Kingdom. We also celebrate the bravery of those who refused to assimilate into the Greek religion and who fought a long war to liberate the Holy Land. On Purim, we celebrate the great deliverance of our people from their enemies, the courage of Esther and Mordecai and the mass conversion of so many Gentiles into Judaism. Passover is a remembrance of our double deliverance – from Egypt and from the Egypt of this world.

During the week of Unleavened Bread we examine our hearts and lives to make sure that there is none of the leavening of sin lurking in any corner of our lives. First Fruits reminds us that the countdown to the Kingdom has begun and that the Word of our Messiah will be shared with each generation until the end comes. Believers in the days when our Messiah walked among us, were the First Fruit of the Gospel. We are the fruit of one generation and our children are the fruit of the coming generation.

At Shavuot, we remember the courage and wisdom of Ruth and celebrate our double whammy. First, we celebrate that the Ten Commandments was given at Sinai (which is in the Roman province of Arabia and not in Arabia itself). Secondly, we celebrate the giving of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It was also when Yeshua returned through the Spirit and took up residence in the hearts of the believers. The Festival Cycle and Passover are just as real and relevant for believers today, because of the spiritual principles they teach and they are a symbolic memorial of what Messiah actually accomplished for us in fact.

We need to become living sacrifices and instead of offering up animals on the altar, we need to offer our bodies to G-d and let Him take up residence in our hearts, as we wander through this world. This and this alone is our reasonable worship because of all He has done for us and because one day His Eternal Kingdom will burst forth over all the nations and generations of

mankind. Filling our hearts and lives with faith, repentance and obedience is what we are called to.

We must never become conformed to this sinful, secular world which is having less and less to do with spirituality and filling up with violence and the lies of false science. Do not be taken in by any version of Evolution. Do not be deceived into finding abortion for any reason to be an acceptable way to treat babies in their mothers' womb. Avoid any form of fornication (sexual immorality or sex outside of marriage) and the sexual brokenness of homosexuality. The Bible firmly teaches that heterosexual monogamy is the only acceptable form of sexuality.

Instead of being conformed to this dark age in any way, we need to be constantly transformed in our spirits and our minds so that we never lose our way spiritually in a world that is making less and less sense as our pockets fill up, our air and water gets polluted and as cruel and immoral wars are being waged across our world. Pray for the Ukraine, that the war and the slaughter of innocents would stop and that the country and its people can begin the long process of recovery. Give the Messiah control over your finances and pay a tithe of ten percent of your increase. In our increasingly materialistic world, it is one of the hardest spiritual lessons to learn and one of the most important.

There are spiritual realities and spiritual disciplines that I have been studying and practising for fifty years. Things in our lives never stand still and as we face new challenges, we have to take His unchanging Word and apply it again and again until our life returns to a place where His protection and provision will keep us steady through all and any storms of life.

You know, even though my heart rages at injustice, murder and the monstrous mistreatment and cheating that innocent people are subjected to, I do not lose hope. I still feel that it is our duty to stand up to bullies and not become intimidated by the vast immorality which is sweeping across the world once again. In Judaism, we call this responsibility: "Tikkun Olam", which is Hebrew for the healing of the world or the age. We always want to be part of the solution and never be part of the problem.

I am not a fan of air and water pollution and I think that deforestation is a crime, along with the destruction of vital natural animal habitats. I am glad that many once endangered species are beginning to make a come back, but it may surprise you that I am a big supporter of zoos, even for large animals. If the animals are given enough space and sufficient food and medical care, they can lie around all day like kings waiting to be fed. No other animals are trying to kill them and the usual ravages of old age do not significantly shorten their life span. Expanding zoo habitats is essential to the well being of the animals and keeping an animal in a zoo is not an act of cruelty. They are relaxed, content and enjoying life, instead of being sick and perpetually hungry in the wild. I believe that climate change is really a kind of millennial weather pattern where the earth goes through a natural phase of warming up.

So, instead of expressing my concerns by becoming a radical activist, I want to concentrate on the most important task of a believer's life – discerning the will of G-d in every part of my life and at every stage of my life. The L-rd has a specific agenda, do you share it?