

Shavua Tov

Weekly  Parsha

A Rood Awakening! Torah Commentary
By Glenn McWilliams

Torah Portion: *Metzora*

מצרע

“Leper”

**This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing:
He shall be brought unto the priest.**

Zot tihyeh torat ha **metzora beyom taharato vehova el hacoheh.**

Scripture for study:

Vayikra (Leviticus) 14:1 - 15:33

Over the last few weeks we have been affirming two very powerful revelations contained in the Torah. The first revelation is that YHWH ELOHIM is an Elohim of distinctions. From the very beginning of creation we witness the Holy One making distinctions.

“And Elohim said, Let there be light: and there was light. And Elohim saw the light, that it was good: and Elohim divided the light from the darkness. And Elohim called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.” (Genesis 1:3-5)

“And Elohim said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.” (Genesis 1:6)

“And Elohim made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also. And Elohim set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness.” (Genesis 1:16-18)

“And on the seventh day Elohim ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And Elohim blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.” (Genesis 2:2-3)

“And YHWH ELOHIM commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it.” (Genesis 2:16-17)

“Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, These are the beasts which ye shall eat among all the beasts that are on the earth. Whatsoever parteth the hoof, and is clovenfooted, and cheweth the cud, among the beasts, that shall ye eat.” (Leviticus 11:2-3)

“These shall ye eat of all that are in the waters: whatsoever hath fins and scales in the waters, in the seas, and in the rivers, them shall ye eat.” (Leviticus 11:9)

Over and over again throughout the Scriptures we witness YHWH making distinctions in all aspects of life and creation. This brings us to the second very significant revelation. If we are to be the image of YHWH in the world,¹ then we need to become people of distinctions. Two of the most important distinctions that we need to understand are between the two realms or states of *tahor* and *tamei*.

Usually translated as “clean” and “unclean,” these two distinctions often set the boundaries to the image of Elohim that we are to embody in the world. By better understanding these two concepts we are better able to fulfill our calling as a priestly people.² *Tahor*, which is most often translated as “clean,” refers to those things that are helpful and useful in being the image of Elohim. Things that belong to the realm of *tahor* are generally those things that are holy, pure, good, and have to do with life. Things that belong to the realm of *tamei* are those things that are not useful or acceptable as a part of the image of Elohim. Things that belong to the realm of *tamei* are usually about death, defilement, mixture and sin.

In last week’s Torah teaching we discussed how various natural bodily functions can move a believer from the realm of *tahor* into the realm of *tamei*. When seed leaves a man’s body or ovum leaves a woman’s body during her menstrual cycle, both the man and the woman become *tamei*.³ This, as we discussed in last week’s lesson, is because the egg and the seed represent potential life lost. Death is not consistent with being the image of the living Elohim, therefore it renders us *tamei*. We also learned last week that childbirth, again a very natural process, causes a woman to move from the realm of *tahor* to the realm or state of *tamei*.⁴ While childbirth clearly is an act of life, we must realize that from the time of the fall in the Garden of Eden man is no longer born in the image of Elohim, but in the image of fallen Adam.⁵ Thus the mother is rendered *tamei* by childbirth for bringing a mixed seed (nature) into the world. So we learned last week that even our natural bodily functions can in fact move us from one realm to another.

This week we will be looking at a supernatural source of becoming *tamei*. I want to be very clear from the start of this teaching that the affliction of *tsara’at* is not leprosy. Leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease, is a bacterial infection caused by mycobacterium leprae⁶ which infects skin tissue, subsequent nerve endings, and mucous membranes. While leprosy is a chronic, infectious disease well-known and documented in the Middle-East, this is NOT what our Torah teaching is about. *Tsara’at* is a divine affliction, as we shall clearly see. *Tsara’at* may best be described as the physical symptom of a deeper spiritual condition. Evidence of this is testified to in the fact that it is the priest that makes the diagnosis and not a physician. The reality that we are dealing with a spiritual rather than physical condition is hinted at in the text itself:

“And the priest shall look on the plague in the skin of the flesh: and when the hair in the plague is turned white, and the plague in sight be deeper than the skin of his flesh it is a plague of tsara’at: and the priest shall look on him, and pronounce him tamei.” (Leviticus 13:3)

Clearly *tsara’at* is not a matter of the skin but of the heart. We should remember that plagues were often a sign of YHWH’s warning of judgment upon sinful behavior. It was a plague upon the house of Pharaoh that warned the ruler of the sinfulness of his behavior in taking Abram’s wife Sarai.

“And YHWH plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai Abram’s wife.” (Genesis 12:17)

We should notice that in the book of Exodus there is a peculiar pattern to the plagues that YHWH sends upon Egypt.

- A warning by water followed by a plague (Exodus 7:15-25)
- A warning in the palace followed by a plague (Exodus 8:1-15)
- No warning; just the plague (Exodus 8:16-19)
- A warning by water followed by a plague (Exodus 8:20-32)
- A warning in the palace followed by a plague (Exodus 9:1-7)
- No warning; just the plague (Exodus 9:8-12)
- A warning by water followed by a plague (Exodus 9:13-35)
- A warning in the palace followed by a plague (Exodus 10:1-20)
- No warning; just the plague (Exodus 10:21-23)
- Judgment upon Egypt’s firstborn (Exodus 11:1ff)

In this pattern we witness the great patience, mercy, and justice of YHWH. Pharaoh was given six warnings and nine plagues prior to sentence being passed against him. Repeatedly YHWH warns the children of Israel of the consequences that will befall them if they break the covenant.

“And if ye walk contrary unto Me, and will not hearken unto Me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins.” (Leviticus 26:21)

“If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, YHWH your Elohim, then YHWH will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuances.” (Deuteronomy 28:58-59)

We witness this promise in action throughout the wilderness journey. Miriam is afflicted with *tsara’at* for questioning Moses and speaking derogatorily about him.⁷ The spies who returned from the land and gave a negative report were afflicted with a plague.⁸ The children of Israel’s lust for meat and derogatory speech about manna was likewise met with a plague.⁹ Yet another plague fell upon the children of Israel for their immoral behavior with the

Midianite women.¹⁰ What we should realize in all of these plagues, including *tsara'at*, is that YHWH is not trying to destroy the wicked but to lead them to repentance. Again, let us remember that this is all about the self-revelation of YHWH. What does YHWH reveal about Himself in all of these warnings and plagues?

"Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith YHWH ELOHIM: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?" (Ezekiel 18:23)

"As I live, saith YHWH ELOHIM, I have not pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Clearly YHWH is an Elohim of life. To this end YHWH ELOHIM will chastise the wicked in hopes of leading them to choose life. The will of Elohim toward the children of Israel is made very clear in the blessings and curses put before them prior to their entering into the promised land. YHWH declares,

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: that thou mayest love YHWH thy Elohim, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him: for He is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which YHWH sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

We should realize then that the intention of YHWH is not merely to punish and put away, but to chastise the fallen one that he may repent and be restored.

"Thou shalt consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so YHWH thy Elohim chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of YHWH thy Elohim, to walk in His ways, and to fear Him." (Deuteronomy 8:5-6).

"My son, despise not the chastening of YHWH; neither be weary of His correction: for whom YHWH loveth He correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." (Proverbs 3:11-12)

"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes." (Proverbs 13:24)

"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." (Hebrews 12:6)

"For as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." (Revelation 3:19)

While *tsara'at* is a divine affliction, we need to be clear that it is not for the mere punishment of sin but to serve as the chastisement of a loving Father administered in the hopes of leading the

errant one to repentance, restoration, and above all, life. With this understood, it should not surprise us to see a somewhat progressive nature to this affliction. The *tsara'at* begins with a small bean-size bump on the skin,¹¹ but may also afflict the beard and hair,¹² garments,¹³ and ultimately one's house.¹⁴ We may see this as an intensifying of the plague on those who stubbornly refuse to repent. The plague may begin as a small bump on the skin easily hidden from sight by one's beard or hair. So YHWH afflicts the hair. One may then cover up the affliction and baldness by a veil or garment. So YHWH afflicts the garment. One may then sequester themselves in their home to hide the presence of the affliction. But YHWH afflicts the house, causing everything to be brought out of the home and into plain sight. Rabbi Hirsch writes,

"If we consider the nega'im¹⁵ laws in their totality, we will see them as a most splendid institution of the most divine providence that watches over and educates each and every individual. We see how in the Jewish state, based upon the law of Elohim, social sins, misdemeanors, are brought out into the open to be punished and corrected. Under the system such sins as arrogance, falsehood, avarice, and slander escape the authority of human tribunals, but in the Jewish state governed by Elohim's law, Elohim Himself appears as the accuser and as the witness."¹⁶

Since YHWH can see what man cannot, *tsara'at* becomes the means by which YHWH exposes even the darkest secrets of a man's heart and soul. As we have said from the start, *tsara'at* is a physical symptom of an inward spiritual condition. Only YHWH can discern a man's heart,¹⁷ but once discovered, YHWH begins the process of exposing the hidden sins to the light of day that they may be repented of.

"But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against YHWH: and be sure your sin will find you out." (Numbers 32:23)

"The secret things belong unto YHWH our Elohim: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." (Deuteronomy 29:29)

Our Rabbi Yahshua also taught,

"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known." (Luke 12:2)

Once the spiritual condition has been revealed and the afflicted person has been declared unclean, he is separated from the community.¹⁸ There are several reasons for this. First let us be clear on this matter that the symptoms of *tsara'at* are NOT contagious. Rabbi Hirsch goes into great detail on this matter in his commentary on the Torah.

"No part of Elohim's Law has had to serve so prominently to explode the illusion about the 'sanitary purposes of Mosaic Legislation' as has this chapter, which deals with nega'im (leprous 'marks' or 'afflictions'). On the face it, there are facts stated in this chapter that would seem to foster such an illusion. After all, it

obviously deals with diseases, more specifically with a disease that appears to be contagious. Those affected must be quarantined. Why should that be done if not in order to prevent contagion? All this was sufficient to label these laws as 'sanitary regulations,' and the priests who administered them as medicine men or physicians. And if, out of the whole register of human diseases, only this one disease, 'leprosy,' was singled out for police regulations, then, it is claimed, the reason obviously is that this was the one horrible disease from which the Jews suffered most of all, and then there must be some foundation to Tacitus' fairy tale that the Jews were expelled from Egypt because they were carriers of leprosy." ¹⁹

Rabbi Hirsch gives a great number of reasons in his commentary as to why this law of *tsara'at* is not about sanitation or hygiene. If this is true, then we might ask why it is necessary to separate the afflicted one. A number of answers may be given to this inquiry. First we should remember that this whole teaching is about the self-revelation of YHWH. By the receiving of the Torah the children of Israel have agreed to live by the self-revelation of YHWH. As such, the children of Israel become the restored image of YHWH in the world. Thus it is of vital importance that we understand the distinction between *tahor* and *tamei*. Those who have been afflicted with *tsara'at* are declared *tamei*; that is, unfit or unacceptable as a member of the embodiment of YHWH. Because of their unfavorable spiritual condition, they are then removed from the body of believers. By removing the offending member YHWH protects His image from corruption. By the removal of the offending party YHWH makes clear the distinction between what is *tahor*, acceptable as His image, and what is *tamei*, not acceptable as His image.

A second reason that the offending member is removed from the body of believers is to protect the body of believers. While the physical symptoms of *tsara'at* are not contagious, the spiritual condition may be. We have seen numerous times how sin spreads throughout the body of the children of Israel. In the wilderness it was the contagious grumbling of the mixed multitude that evoked a plague.

"And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat." (Numbers 11:4)

Likewise Miriam and Aaron, grumbling against Moses' leadership, may have provoked the children of Israel to rise up and challenge Moses' and Aaron's leadership.

"And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married." (Numbers 12:1)

"Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: and they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron." (Numbers 16:1-3)

While physical contagion is not involved, certainly the sin itself seems to spread with disastrous results. By separating the offender from the community YHWH keeps the effects of the contagion of sin from spreading.

Finally, by separating the offender from the community YHWH creates the atmosphere for repentance. Let us not lose sight of the fact that YHWH's purpose is always towards the restoration of all things. By separating the offending person, YHWH creates in them a hunger for restoration and a love for the body of believers. This becomes very clear when we understand the process of restoration, especially in the symbolism of the elements involved in the cleansing. Let us turn our attention now to this wonderful process of restoration.

After the afflicted one has repented and YHWH has lifted the plague, the priest examines him and the process of restoration begins. There is a three-part ritual that is followed for a person afflicted with *tsara'at*: the bird ritual, the shaving of the body, and the offering of the sacrifices. Once all of this is complete, the penitent may return to his place in the community of believers and the body of YHWH.

The bird ritual is filled with symbolic significance. These symbols in part are to help instruct the penitent so that he may understand clearly how to avoid a recurrence of this affliction. Let us look briefly at how the sages explain the symbols.

The two birds represent the two natures, the *yetzer hatov* and the *yetzer hara*.²⁰ To be restored we must control our *yetzer hara* and let our *yetzer hatov* live victoriously over this evil propensity. The clay pot represents our physical beings. We are made from the clay of the earth. This vessel which is man must be filled with living water,²¹ which is the Torah. The cedar wood represents our haughtiness, while the hyssop represents humility. The scarlet is from a worm, and represents the lowliness of sinful man.²² Only when the proud cedar becomes like humble hyssop are we declared *tahor*.²³ All of these symbols are likewise shadow pictures of the Messiah who is the ultimate restorer. The dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit resting upon Yahshua.²⁴ The wood is a symbol of the cross.²⁵ The earthen vessel is a symbol of Yahshua coming in the flesh.²⁶ The living water is a symbol of the Torah poured forth from Messiah to bring life to all who would receive it.²⁷ The scarlet is a symbol again of Yahshua's lowliness and the blood he shed to restore us. Thus in this peculiar ritual we witness the shadow picture pointing us to the true offering and means of restoration from our sins and separation from YHWH.

We should also recognize that the rest of the ritual of restoration and cleansing is very similar to that of the consecration of the *cohanim*.²⁸ This similarity is not by accident. As we have already mentioned above, the children of Israel have been called to be YHWH's priestly people.²⁹ By becoming *tamei* they have robbed YHWH of their priestly service. Now they must be reconsecrated to the priesthood of all believers. As we learned from last week's portion, the blood is not the means of contamination, but of purification.³⁰ By applying the blood to the ear, the thumb, and the foot the afflicted is cleansing his thoughts, his deeds, and his walk. By applying the oil the penitent is consecrating his thoughts, deeds, and walk. The oil here represents the Holy Spirit. This part of the ritual teaches us that we are cleansed by the blood, but must live by the Spirit. Without the Spirit the process of purification and restoration is

incomplete. Thus we learn that simply removing sin does not make us fit to be the image of YHWH in the world. We must have the Spirit of YHWH within us. It is not the lack of sin in our lives that sanctifies us, but the presence of the living Elohim.

By learning to make godly distinctions in our lives, especially between *tahor* and *tamei*, we shall find ourselves becoming a fit habitation for the Spirit of the Holy One to dwell in, with, and among us. It is by the presence of His Spirit that the image of YHWH is restored and we are restored to our place as the crown of His creation.

SHAVUA TOV!

¹ Genesis 1:26-27

² Exodus 19:5-6

³ Leviticus 14:16-19

⁴ Leviticus 12:1-8

⁵ Genesis 5:3

⁶ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov, Hansen's Disease.

⁷ Numbers 12:1-10

⁸ Numbers 14:37

⁹ Numbers 21:5-9

¹⁰ Numbers 31:16

¹¹ Leviticus 13:1ff

¹² Leviticus 13:10ff

¹³ Leviticus 13:47ff

¹⁴ Leviticus 14:34ff

¹⁵ Hebrew for plague

¹⁶ The Pentateuch, Samson Raphael Hirsch, The Judaica Press, Inc. Pp. 418-419

¹⁷ 1 Samuel 16:7; Deuteronomy 8:2

¹⁸ Leviticus 13:4-6

¹⁹ The Pentateuch, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Judaica Press Inc. Pg. 417

²⁰ *Yetzer hatov* is our inclination to do good; *Yetzer hara* our inclination toward evil doings.

²¹ Jeremiah 2:13, 17:13; Zechariah 13:1, 14:8; Isaiah 12:3; John 4:10-11, 7:38

²² Psalm 22:6

²³ The Schottenstein Tikkun, Mesorah Publication, Pg. 259

²⁴ Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32

²⁵ Matthew 10:38; Mark 15:32; John 19:17,19

²⁶ John 1:14; Philippians 2:5f; Colossians 3:9-10

²⁷ John 4:10-11, 7:38, 19:34

²⁸ Exodus 29:30ff; Leviticus 8:23ff

²⁹ Exodus 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9-10

³⁰ Leviticus 12:4-5