



Parashah 28: M' tzora

Leviticus 14:1 - 15:33
“One afflicted with *tzara'at*”

“You must keep the Israelites separate from the things that make them unclean.”
Leviticus 15:31

1. Cleansing from Infectious Skin Diseases - 14:1-32

- a) Describe the process that the priest followed to cleanse a person who has been cured of an infectious skin disease. Where did this process take place? Did this process cure the person of the disease? Do you see any symbolism in any of these actions?

The priest went to the person (outside the camp) and if he or she was determined to be healed, then the priest ordered 2 live clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet yarn & hyssop. One bird was killed over fresh water in a clay pot. The other bird, the wood, yarn, & hyssop were dipped in the blood (/water?) and sprinkled 7 times over the one cured. The live bird was then released. This process did nothing to cure the person, only to provide ceremonial cleansing. A possible symbolism is that one bird represented what might have happened to the person (death) and other represented the removal of the affliction.

- b) What responsibilities did the person being cured have in the cleansing process? How long did this process take? What did the person do after this period?

Once pronounced clean, the person washed his clothes, shaved his hair, and bathed. He was then allowed to return to the camp but he had to stay outside his tent for 7 days. On the 7th day, he again washed his clothes, shaved, & bathed. On the 8th day, he presented himself at the Tabernacle entrance with 2 male lambs, 1 ewe lamb, a grain offering, and a log (~2/3 pint) of oil.

- c) Describe the process that was to be followed when the person presented himself to the priest at the Tabernacle. What changes were allowed if the person was poor? Can you see any symbolism in this entire process? Why do you think God defined such a process for cleansing after an infectious skin disease?

One of the male lambs and the oil was offered as a guilt offering. Some of the blood of this offering was put on the right earlobe, right thumb, & right big toe of the one cleansed. A similar thing was done with some of the oil. (Some oil was also sprinkled on the altar and put on the head of the one cleansed.) The remaining 2 lambs were sacrificed, 1 as a sin offering & 1 as a burnt offering. If the one being cleansed was poor, he could substitute 2 doves or pigeons for the sin & burnt offering, but still had to provide the lamb as a guilt offering. The entire process seems rather mysterious. However, it was the process that God commanded for one to be declared clean after such a disease.

2. Cleansing from Mildew or Fungus - 14:33-57

- a) Where were the Israelites to look for mildew or fungus? Who was to decide if it was a spreading mildew? Describe the process that was followed.

The mildew or fungus was to be found in the houses in the land being given to them by God (Erez Israel). A priest was to examine it. All the items in the house were to be removed and the house shut up for 7 days. If after that time the mildew had spread, the priest declared the house contaminated.

- b) What was done to a house that had a mildew to keep it from spreading? What was done if this didn't work? What about the people who worked or lived in the house?

The contaminated stones were to be removed and the inside walls were to be scraped. New stones & plaster were to be installed. If the mildew reappeared, the priest examined the house and declared it unclean and it was torn down. People who went into the house were unclean until evening. People who slept or ate in the house had to also wash their clothes.

- c) Describe the process that the priest followed to purify a house cleansed of a spreading mildew. Is this process familiar? What symbolism do you see in this?

The process that was followed was the same as that for cleansing from an infectious skin disease: 2 clean birds, cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet yarn handled in the same way.

3. Discharges Causing Uncleaness - 15:1-33

- a) What do you think is meant by "bodily discharges" in this passage? What kinds of things could cause these?

Although usually taken to mean discharges from the sexual organs, it could also mean any discharge (runny nose, puss from a sore, etc.) Usually this is caused by an illness or infection.

- b) In what ways might a person with such a discharge bring about uncleaness? What does this suggest to you given your understanding of infectious diseases?

The bed, chairs, and clothes of such an infected person are unclean. Also if one touches such a person or comes in contact with their spit, they are unclean.

- c) Verses 19 - 30 are the "Laws of Niddah", the laws associated with women during their menstruation periods. What do you find interesting in these verses?

It is interesting that the woman is considered unclean for 7 days and if any one touches her, he is also unclean.

- d) Describe the process that one went through to be purified after the uncleaness caused from a bodily discharge. Is it the same for a man and a woman?

Two doves or pigeons are offered (burnt & sin) for either a man or woman.

- e) In verse 31, God states his purpose for these regulations. What do you think God is trying to teach us with these laws?

This verse captures God's intent with all of the regulations given in the previous 2 Torah portions: The Israelites must learn the difference between clean & unclean so that they won't inadvertently defile the tabernacle and thereby die. This may seem mysterious to us, but God has definite requirements for cleanliness in order to live among his people.

Digging deeper

1. Read the Haftarah for this week, 2 Kings 7:3-20. Does this story enhance your understanding of this week's Torah portion? What insights do you see?

The story of Elisha and the Aramean siege of Samaria. The obvious connection is the lepers at the city gate.

2. In Hebrew, the word for unclean is *tamei* and the word for clean is *tahor*. God wants us to know the difference between the clean and the unclean. What spiritual significance do you see in this? What do you think God is really trying to tell us with these laws?

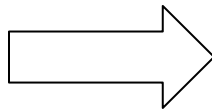
God is trying to get us to understand the wall that separates us from Him: uncleanness. While it may not be obvious to us, it is vitally important to our having fellowship with God. We must be "clean" to enjoy fellowship with God. He has graciously provided ways for us to be cleansed and to remain clean. If nothing else, we should learn how important ceremonial cleanness is to God.

Clean and Unclean

“They [the priests] are to teach my people the difference between the **holy** and the **common** and show them how to distinguish between the **unclean** and the **clean**.”

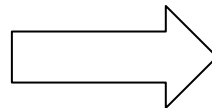
Ezekiel 44:23

Tahor



- to be bright, pure
- sound, clear
- unadulterated, uncontaminated
- innocent, holy
- to be clean

Tamei



- to be foul, especially in a ceremonial or moral sense
- contaminated
- defiled, polluted
- to be unclean