

Today's Torah portion is a double portion:**Tazria/Metzora** (She Bears Seed/Infected One). It deals with two key strategies when you have to deal with illness: hygiene and quarantine. The prophetic portion is 2 Kings 4:42-5:19 and 7:3-20. The New Testament portion is Luke 7:18-35 and Matthew 23:16-24:2 and vs. 30, 31. I will leave these two portions to your personal study and will concentrate on the Torah portion.

The double portion deals with infections and wounds and with conditions which involve issues of blood or weeping wounds. When a person became ill, they were both inspected by a priest and were quarantined for the duration of the infection.

The first blood condition which is discussed is pregnancy and child birth. As with her menstrual cycle, the mother of a male child was considered impure for seven days. The male child was circumcised on the eighth day and it took another 33 days for the mother to be purified. She was not kept in total isolation, but could not touch holy things or go into the sanctuary.

The purification for a female child was an initial two week period of impurity, followed by an additional 66 days for the purification. This doubling of the time for a girl does not mean that girls are twice as impure as boys. Her mother is actually giving her daughter an advanced purification for her first menstruation. The girl was doubly purified from her future blood impurity, when her future menstrual kicked in.

Once the purification through quarantine was completed, there was an additional atonement ritual where the cleansed person was fully reintegrated back into the community. There were various levels of offerings for atonement, depending on the person's financial resources. Centuries later, when Messiah's Mother Mary offered an atonement offering after her purification, she and her husband gave two turtle doves, which was the poor person's atonement offering. They were not rich.

Chapter 13 deals with leprous conditions where growths or sores appeared on the skin. The priests would examine the infected area to determine both the depth and the extent of the problem. If this involved an issue of blood or a weeping boil, the sufferer was quarantined for seven days.

If the condition had not worsened during the first seven days a subsequent seven day isolation was required. Then if the condition did not spread, the person was declared pure and washed their clothes. If the infection spread, the person was declared impure and the infected one had to live in permanent seclusion until a visible improvement occurred.

Several kinds of infection are mentioned and when the infected person was declared pure, as mentioned before, they would have to go through an atonement ceremony in order to be fully integrated back into the community.

Each time an infection developed or when there was a change in an existing infection, a priest would examine the wound and in each new case, it would require a seven day isolation, to see if the problem was improving or worsening.

If an improvement was noticed, a second isolation might be required. However in some cases

only one seven day isolation was sufficient and the recovered person was declared pure and performed a thanksgiving atonement offering. The same kind of seven day isolation was used when moldy growths appeared on an article of clothing.

In the case of the purification of a person, alongside the atonement offering, a guilt offering was offered as part of the reintegration rituals. The blood from the sacrificial animal was put on the person's right ear lobe, their right thumb and their right big toe. This was similar to the consecration ritual which the priests went through and was a sign that the newly re-integrated person was also re-consecrated to the L-RD. And just like the priests, they were also anointed with oil as a sign of joy that they were no longer sick.

The size of the guilt offering was determined by the person's financial resources, but the details of the ritual did not vary with the smaller sacrifice. The same level of re-integration was achieved in every case.

If a house became infected with mold, the infected stones were removed and replaced and the house was closed for a seven day quarantine. The house was fully cleansed before the isolation occurred. If the plague of mold returned, the house was demolished and the infected stones were disposed of. The one disposing of the stones was put in isolation until sunset, along with anyone sleeping or eating in the house and everyone concerned washed their clothes. No one was allowed to be a carrier of any residual infection.

If the house was declared pure, there was an additional seven day isolation, before the house was declared finally clean. The people had to be sure, with no possibility of doubt.

The portions end with a discussion of people experiencing a weeping discharge of blood or puss. When this occurred, the infected person was declared impure, along with any bed or chair they sat on. Any saddle they had used was also declared impure. Any person coming into contact with either the infected person or any place they might have sat down, would wash their clothes and be considered impure until the evening.

Anyone who touched the impure person and did not wash their hands, had to wash their clothes and was considered impure until the evening. Hygiene and quarantine are necessary procedures in the recovery process, even for us in our current Covid 19 pandemic.

When a person was purified from their flux, they would count an additional seven days and wash themselves and their clothing with fresh water. They would then bring an offering of two turtle doves, one for the atonement offering and one for the burnt offering.

A person who experienced a defilement of any kind was required to wash both himself and his clothes and would be impure until the evening. Over and above the stipulations related to her menstrual cycle, a woman with a weeping discharge of blood or puss was also required to be isolated and once she recovered, she would follow the purification and atonement ceremonies. Anyone who slept with the infected man or woman had to wash themselves and their clothing and would be impure until the evening.

These detailed procedures involved both quarantine and hygiene. They also involved sacrifices to celebrate their recovery before the L-rd. Three things.

First a certain level of sickness will sometimes strike people for no apparent reason and should

not be considered as some kind of divine judgment due to sinfulness or disobedience. Next, sickness was always taken very seriously and was treated until the person was fully recovered. Full recovery was always the end game. Lastly, our G-d given, immune system often just requires quarantine and hygiene to deal with most infections and wounds. Once full healing occurred, sacrifices were made to the One whose help actually brought on the healing.

These passages are one of the earliest recorded medical procedures calling for quarantine and hygiene. During our current Corona crisis we also need to follow both good social distancing and quarantine, along with proper, regular hygiene. Once we are out of the woods, we can plan for a massive celebration as we offer our thanks to G-d for his deliverance. Blood both feeds the body and also removes toxins. Any blood related problems should be taken seriously. We also need to follow good spiritual hygiene and not allow ourselves or our lives to become infected with any of the filth of the world, which may be lurking in the shadows.

### **Sermon: Did You Know that Familiarity is Not Fellowship?**

Before I delve into my sermon, because today begins a new Hebrew month, I want to talk to about both the meaning and the procedures involved in celebrating the L-rd's Table. Let's start with the meaning.

During the last Supper, which was a Passover Seder meal, the L-rd took two symbols of the Passover meal and gave them added meaning. He was not canceling Passover, nor was He creating some kind of new magic ritual where the Communion elements took on special spiritual powers. He took a piece of Matza and called it a symbol of His body. He then took a cup and said that the wine was now also a symbol of His blood.

There are three understandings of what happens during the celebration of the L-rd's Table. Catholic and Orthodox Christians mistakenly believe that the bread and the wine magically become the physical body and blood of the Messiah. They believe they are repeating the sacrifice of Calvary every time they perform the ritual. It is a misunderstanding of John chapter six where the Messiah tells the lazy, hungry people whom He has refused to feed a second time, that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood, if they want to have eternal life.

When His apostles were asked if they were also offended, they said that Messiah alone had the words of everlasting life AND that the flesh profits nothing, it is the Spirit that gives life. He was telling off some people who just wanted another free lunch, not talking about a ceremony where the bread and wine actually became His flesh and blood. A symbol remains a symbol.

Most protestants believe in consubstantiation, which says that the Spirit of Messiah comes into the bread and the wine and that people are spiritually feasting on the Messiah and not eating His literal body and blood. Nice try, but no cigar. A symbol remains a symbol.

The Bible teaches that this is a symbolic ceremony of testimony and of forgiveness, where we renew the finished work of the cross into our hearts and lives. We remember, we also seek both repentance and forgiveness. Nothing more and certainly nothing less. Well, who may perform this ceremony and how is it to be done?

Any believer may perform the ritual of the L-rd's Table. It can be a simple, but profound ceremony, much like a personal mini day of atonement. After a prayer asking for the blessing

of the L-rd over the ceremony, a piece of unleavened bread is taken and the words of the Messiah are repeated (this bread is my body which was broken for you, do this in memory of me). It is part of a symbolic act and no actual changes to the bread or the wine occur.

An opportunity is given to silently confess sins and seek repentance and then the bread is eaten. The wine (or grape juice) is then taken and the words of the Messiah are repeated (this cup is the new covenant in my blood and every time you do this, you announce my death until I return). The cup is then drunk and a final prayer of thanksgiving and commitment is offered. The ceremony could take just a few minutes to perform and appropriate Scripture passages could also be read during the ceremony.

We do this once a month at the new moon, so that the coming month begins free of sin and full of our renewed commitment to the Messiah. We do not eat Him, we learn to walk with Him and learn not to let the leavening of sin re-infect our lives as we walk through this darkening world on our way to our Father's Home in glory.

Now to my message: **familiarity is not fellowship**. There is a proverb which says that familiarity breeds contempt. This is often taken to mean that once you are able to penetrate the facade and discover the person behind the mask, you lose respect for them. This is why many professionals maintain a certain distance between themselves and their clients and do not let them become part of their private, social lives. Who they really are remains hidden.

Now while I believe in maintaining healthy boundaries, no role, however exalted, should be allowed to become an act or a show which a person performs, without letting people see who they really are behind all the glamour. Disappointment often sets in when you discover that your leaders and other professionals are mere human beings, performing a special task for which they are both gifted and trained to perform. We want to believe that they are somehow super human and not mere mortals like the rest of us. They have to be flaw free to please us.

When we see a person adopting a professional role, if we do not realize that there is an ordinary human being behind their leadership function, we will always become disappointed when we discover the humanity behind the role. Clergy leaders fulfill a necessary role and perform complex functions, but these should not be performed as separate from their basic humanity. Once we discover each other's humanity and flaws, does this kind of disappointed familiarity breed contempt? Are we disappointed when reality replaces our dreams?

In the past, I have said that there are five stages people go through when they settle into a spiritual community and the same would apply to a new job, a new house or a new relationship. Stage one is, WOW, this is so fantastic and I am so lucky to have found this. The next is, OH OH, there is something not quite right about this. Then comes, NO WAY, this is totally ridiculous and I want nothing more to do with it. I want out of here right now.

Fortunately, there is also, MAYBE things aren't as bad as I thought they were and just took a little getting used to. Finally comes, OKAY I have found my place and I really feel I belong here because I know the people and the objectives of the group which I am joining. Sadly, too many believers only reach stage three and I call them the permanently NO WAY believers.

They have no ability to build longevity and always cut and run when they discover things aren't as perfect as they seemed. They came with unrealistic expectations and put the leadership

and the community on a pedestal where they are not allowed to possess any of the human frailty which all of us come equipped with. They want fantasy, not reality.

Paul was a gifted scholar and an amazing preacher, even if he had a speech impediment. But, boy did he have a temper and boy, could he hold a grudge. He even had a physical disability which reduced his ability to function in ministry – his eyes never fully recovered from his temporary blindness. But as he grew in the L-rd, he discovered that his weaknesses could become strengths, because they increased his dependence on G-d through His Word.

I am quite a charismatic leader, and a scholar, with lots of personality and a developed speaking ability. But I have no mechanical ability and dislike weird and false doctrine of any kind, be it ever so minor or ever so major. I also have a temper and an overly developed sense of humour and a memory which is not always reliable. Once people find out that I am not the totally amazing super spiritual giant they first encountered, then the familiarity which breeds contempt sets in, and I either have to get better at concealing my humanity or they wander off in search of a new Peter Pan and a better Never Never land. Good riddance.

Our human frailty needs to be seen as one of our strengths and not one of our weaknesses. We should not be wearing facades and I am scared of heights, so no pedestal for yours truly. Leadership is a position and not a possession and we all share in the ministry of this shul. Once the dust settles for newcomers and we learn their measure as they learn ours, then true fellowship kicks in and we get to work in deed and in truth and not just in word and in theory.

**Toxic fellowship** occurs either where people are playing hide and seek, trying to disguise their frailty or where carnal people have learned enough spiritual terminology to express their unresolved issues with spiritual sounding language. They are not seeking resolution, just carnal power where the works of the flesh become the place where they live, instead of the fruit of the Spirit, which is the only place we are called to dwell. Toxic fellowship is not welcome in our shul. We are neither playing mind games nor going on power trips. Time is too short for silliness of that kind. We take His Word seriously, how about you?

Some people who come to faith in the L-rd, seem to be always going from one crisis to another because they suffer from **carnal instability** and keep repeating negative behaviour patterns. They do not know where they are headed, but go as fast as they can to get there quicker and they think if they keep repeating strategies that do not work, that eventually they will work. They blame people and life experiences for their perpetual failure and feel if they can just get a break, things will work out without making the life changes which the Gospel of the Torah requires from sincere, successful disciples. How are these changes doing with you?

Unless you agree that they are just in the middle of a bunch of bad luck, you are cut off because you become their enemy by telling them the truth. We each possess two levels of being: our basic temperament and our acquired personality. We cannot change the way G-d wires us, but we can change the way we handle the wires. Some people have personalities which are out of sync with their temperaments and are either people pleasers or are perpetually angry and depressed because nobody seems to get who they are pretending to be. By temperament, I am a recluse, by training I am an extrovert. Patti is the opposite, so we make a good team. She needs people constantly, I constantly need lots of time to recharge. Do you really know who you are or does carnal instability continue to ravage your life?

I know too many believers who have become so fed up with other believers and the carnal games which some communities constantly play, that they have ceased to attend anywhere.

They have become **spiritual vagrants** who have never persevered beyond familiarity to discover true fellowship. Our shul does not claim to be perfect, we just claim to be serious in our desire to live lives of faithful obedience, through the whatevers which life throws our way.

We have high standards of reconciliation, which too many who have come through our fellowship, refused to uphold. But just because somebody bugs you by the way they talk or how they live, does not mean they have to change to please you. You may need just to grow a little mature ability to accept, acceptable differences in our midst. How about you?

Sometimes spiritual vagrants pick up their toys and wander over the horizon because we did not learn to play by their rules. They go from being spiritually vagrant to living a life of **rootless rambling**, randomly picking up their doctrine from strange sources with little or no biblical credibility. And they begin to live by a moral code which has little or nothing to do with the values of Scripture because they have never found a place where they can fit in.

Some of them may have mental health diagnoses, but if they are willing, these are treatable. Others may be trauma survivors, bouncing from one bad relationship to another, or one unsuitable job to another. Some fall for quack cures and even become long distance groupies to toxic and negative “ministries”, because no local situation is ever ideal enough for them.

North America is home to millions of believers from any number of doctrinal persuasions, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Some groups are theological cults whose faith is not firmly based on the scriptures. Others are mind bending cults who crush and break people's spirits and Scientology is one of the worst of these. It is like there are any number of wolves running among the sheep and creating any number of casualties and unless we find a safe haven, we could find ourselves targeted for destruction. Where is your safe place?

There is also a growing crowd of evolutionary materialists whose doubt and whose strange pseudo scientific mythology can be quite contagious to unconnected, isolated believers. We have to learn to do our time and become connected with our local, imperfect community. We need to grow past carnal familiarity and accept one another in our Beloved Messiah and form a redemptive team, a biblical flock that looks out for each other and holds us all accountable, both doctrinally and spiritually. Do you know who has got your back?

This means having what we believe and how we live, examined, not so that all differences disappear and we become a community of clones, but that we learn the difference between acceptable differences and those which will either destroy us or damage us and those around us. The current Covid crisis is giving us more time to think than we may like, but if we can dispose of some of the useless spiritual baggage we have been meaning to deal with, then it will be time well spend. How well are you spending your time.

May you have fellowship, rather than familiarity. May your isolation and hygiene protect you and all of us from infection. May your celebration of the L-rd's Table bring abundant forgiveness and powerful repentance into your life. May you learn to be a team player among like minded disciples of the King – never toxic, never unstable, never vagrant and never rootless or rambling. Life is too short to waste on carnal rabbit trails when the L-rd's straight and narrow beckons. Shabbat Shalom and shavua Tov. Be blessed and strong!