



Parasha M'tzora: Person Afflicted With Tzara'at

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**Text: Torah: VaYikra 14:1- 32; Haftarah: M'lakhim Bet 7:3-10;
B'rit Chadashah: Ya'akov 3: 2-10.**

Theme: To be clean is to be free of enmity towards others.

I. Introduction.

This Parasha deals with the **m'tzora (leper)**. There is a misconception about the condition termed in the Torah, **tzara'at**, usually translated as leprosy, but the Torah's description of it sees it not as strictly a medical condition. The various symptoms described do not correspond to the symptoms of leprosy or Hansen's Disease, as we know it, or perhaps to any other condition known to modern medicine.

R. Silberling states: As Yahshua and his talmidim went forth to cure the sick; they encountered **m'tzorot (lepers)** who were excommunicated and isolated. **Tzara'at (leprosy)** put the individual into a state of **tamei (ritual impurity)** that excluded him from virtually all Community activity, and made it impossible for him to participate in any religious events. His life was lived outside the physical and spiritual life of the Community.

The above presents a very real application for us today. Sin and impurity also separate us from our Community of Faith and our center of worship. Corporate worship is the last place many want to be when we are filled with shame and guilt. However, two of the sacrificial offerings that are brought to the Kohanim are a **ckatat (sin)** offering and an **asham (guilt)** offering. Nu, it is as we come before our great Kohan HaGadol, Mashiach Yahshua. He is the place for healing.

Uncleanness, it invades our bodies; it invades our minds; it invades our **ruach (spirit)**. Because **tzara'at (leprosy)** is apparently not a simple medical issue, the sages saw it as a spiritual condition, a punishment for sin, the visible outworking of an inner disorder. Ramban summarizes this perspective in his commentary on **VaYikra 13**, noting that the **tzara'at (leprosy)** described in Torah "is not in the natural order of things, nor does it ever happen in the olam outside Yisra'el."

But when Yisra'el is wholly devoted to YHVH, then His **Ruach (Spirit)** is always upon us, to maintain our bodies, clothes, and houses in a tov appearance.

II. The Sickness of Slander.

R. Resnik states: The sages of the Talmud went further. They not only claimed that **tzara'at (leprosy)** is the result of sin, but specified the variety of sin that leads to it. Leper in Hebrew is **m'tzora**, which can be read as a contraction of **motzi ra, one who brings forth or spreads evil (speech), a slanderer** (Arachin 15).

The sages have said, 'Why is the **m'tzora (leper)** different from others who are impure, so that he must stay in isolation? Since he caused separation through malicious talk, between a man and his wife and between a man and his friend, he too shall be put apart' (Arachin 16).

Tzara'at (leprosy), then, could be the result of **lashon hara (evil speech)**, which includes gossip, slander, and divisive talk. This understanding of **tzara'at (leprosy)** may stem from an incident recorded in the **Sefer of B'midbar**. Aharon and Miryam challenge the leadership of Moshe, saying, **B'midbar 12:2 And they said, "Has YHVH spoken only through Moshe? Has He not also spoken through us?" And YHVH heard it.** YHVH rises to Moshe's defense, describing his unique spiritual status and concluding; **B'midbar 12: 5-10 And YHVH came down in the Column of Cloud and stood in the door of the Tent, and called Aharon and Miryam. And they both went forward. And He said, "Hear now My Words: If your Navi (Prophet) is of YHVH, I make Myself known to him in a vision, and I speak to him in a dream. "Not so with My servant Moshe, he is trustworthy in all My House. "I speak with him mouth to mouth, and plainly, and not in riddles. And he sees the form of YHVH. So why were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moshe?" And the displeasure of YHVH burned against them, and He left. And the Cloud turned away from above the Tent, and look: Miryam was leprous, as white as snow! And Aharon turned toward Miryam, and look: a m'tzora (leper)!** Immediately Miryam is stricken with **tzara'at (leprosy)**, because she was the one who had instigated the complaints against Moshe. She must be put apart as the passage above describes, because she has caused separation between Aharon and herself on one hand and Moshe on the other. Even after YHVH responds to Moshe's prayer for her healing, she must remain outside the Camp seven days.

Transgression against YHVH and His Commandments will take us out of the path of blessing and into the way of death. When the moral life is sick, it is just a matter of time until the physical life is destroyed. Rav Sha'ul tells us in **Romans 6:23** that, **The wages of sin are death, but the free gift of YHVH is eternal life in Mashiach Yahshua."**

Nu, **tzara'at (leprosy)** in the Torah could be no ordinary disease, but be the visible punishment for a spiritual sickness.

Again, R. Resnik states: It is said that gossip has three victims: the one being gossiped about, the one who gossips, and the one who listens. Gossip, then, is a sin of omission as well as a sin of commission. The one who listens to gossip sins by not speaking out against it. In our practical experience we find it easier to refrain from gossip than to speak up and take a stand against gossip when we hear it. We may not say anything ourselves, but until we speak out against **lashon hara (evil speech)**, we are accessories to it.

III. Restoration Begins Outside the Camp.

VaYikra 14:1-18 And YHVH spoke to Moshe, saying, "This shall be the Torah of the m'tzora (leper) for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the Kohan, and the Kohan shall go out of the camp, and the Kohan shall look and see, if the tzara'at (leprosy) is healed in the m'tzora (leper), then the Kohan shall command, and he shall take for him who is to be cleansed two live and clean birds, and cedar wood, and scarlet, and hyssop. "And the Kohan shall command, and he shall kill one of the birds in an earthen vessel over

running water. "Let him take the live bird and the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the live bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water. "And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird loose in the open field. "And he who is to be cleansed shall wash his garments, and shall shave off all his hair and wash himself in water, and shall be clean. Then after that he comes into the camp, but shall stay outside his tent seven days. "And on the seventh day it shall be that he shaves all the hair off his head and his beard and his eyebrows, even all his hair he shaves off. And he shall wash his garments and wash his body in water, and shall be clean. "And on the eighth day he takes two male lambs, perfect ones, and one ewe lamb a year old, a perfect one, and three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil. "And the Kohan who is cleansing shall present the man who is to be cleansed, with these offerings, before YHVH, at the door of the Tent of Meeting. "And the Kohan shall take one male lamb and bring it as a **asham (guilt) offering**, and the log of oil, and wave them as a wave offering before YHVH. "And he shall slaughter the lamb in the place where he slaughters the **ckatat (sin) offering** and the burnt offering, in a **Kadosh (Set-apart) place**. For the **asham (guilt) offering**, like the sin offering, belongs to the Kohan. It is most **Kadosh (Set-apart)**. "And the Kohan shall take some of the blood of the **asham (guilt) offering**, and the Kohan shall put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. "And the Kohan shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. "And the Kohan shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before YHVH. "And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the Kohan puts some on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, on the blood of the **asham (guilt) offering**. "And the rest of the oil that is in the Kohan's hand he puts on the head of him who is to be cleansed. And the Kohan shall make **kapparah (atonement)** for him before YHVH.

The first thing we note is that the Kohan had to go outside the camp to perform this rite. The **m'tzora (leper)** was not allowed inside the camp until declared clean. It is significant that Yahshua also made a **Kapparah (Atonement)** ritual "**outside the camp.**"

The ritual for the **m'tzora (leper)** required two birds. The first was slaughtered over an earthen vessel of running, living water. The blood of this bird was then sprinkled over the **m'tzora (leper)**. The second bird was dipped into the blood and water mixture in the vessel the blood of the vessel. **Ivrim (Hebrews) 9:20 states, "All things are purged by blood."**

The second bird is then set free. It is ironic that the second bird is set free only when the first bird completes the cleansing ritual through its own death. As the blood splatters from the freed bird, the **m'tzora (leper)** knows that cleansing has been obtained before YHVH and the Community, he is no longer a social outcast, but one who has received the grace of YHVH. **Yochanan Alef 1:17 states, "If we walk in the light as He is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of Yahshua His Son cleanses us from sin."**

Nu, when the **m'tzora (leper)** is healed, he must follow a complex ritual supervised by the Kohan before he can be declared clean and restored to his people. The first element of the ritual involved "**two live, clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop.**" The methods of cleansing included various plants and tree wood, to include the noble cedars (usually from Lebanon). The Talmud states in Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7, "...this is what Shlomo said, 'Why are the most majestic and most humble of plants, cedar wood and hyssop, combined in these rites of purification? Because man is stricken with **tzara'at (leprosy)** as a punishment for being haughty and arrogant as a cedar, and when he humbles himself like the lowly hyssop he will ultimately be cured'."

Arachin 16 reads: The disease of **tzara'at** is thought to have come about through malicious talk, which the sages compare to the mindless chattering of birds. Therefore, it would seem logical that the purification ritual from **tzara'at (leprosy)** requires birds to be effective.

But why is one bird killed and the other set free? The Sefat Emet offers a thoughtful insight in his commentary on this Parasha: The birds are there to atone for two sins. The one that is slaughtered is there so that one will cut himself off from idle chatter, and much more from evil talk itself. The bird that is set free is to prepare the mouth and tongue to speak Words of Torah.... This bird points to pure speech, which is the very essence of the human being. The verse in **B'reshet 2:7 And YHVH Elohim formed the man out of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils breath of life. And the man became a living being, or ... man became a living nefesh (soul)** is better translated: **... a speaking ruach (spirit)**.

Nu, this is a lesson of the live bird. It reminds us of our uniquely human ability to reflect divine **emet (truth)** through our words. We are not only to avoid speaking harmful words, but to bring purity into any conversation and thereby transform it. When we fail to do so, even if we have spoken no falsehood ourselves, we sin. The consequence of such sin is no longer visible among us as **tzara'at (leprosy)**, but the more subtle consequences, distrust, disrespect, alienation, fear, are evident all around us.

The live bird reminds us of the YHVH-given power of speech, and our obligation to use it well. As Shlomo wrote in **Mishlei 18:21, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit."**

VaYikra 14:7 "And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the live bird loose in the open field.

There were other serious problems inherent with the disease, drastic measures that were taken when someone was afflicted by certain serious infectious skin diseases. The victim had to become an outcast. The negative social and spiritual consequences must have been devastating. Having the disease was bad enough, but not to be able to be with the Community or engage in its religion would make the person feel quite worthless.

While it would have been wonderful to be cured of such diseases, it would have likely taken a great deal of additional time to once again be fully part of the Community. When people are afflicted it is common for others to continue to ostracize them, even after their health is restored. The effect of this ordeal would have likely caused the afflicted one to have a very negative view of oneself. To address this problem could be one of the reasons for the elaborate cleansing ceremony described in this week's Parasha. Over and over again the person would have heard, "You are **tahor (cleansed)**, you are **tahor (cleansed)**, you are **tahor (cleansed)**."

But not only was their healing proclaimed, they experienced complete restoration. Again, remember, that one aspect of the cleansing ceremony is that the blood from the **korban (sacrifice)** was to be placed on the cured person's right ear, thumb and big toe. The only other time this was done was when Kohanim were ordained. So instead of saying to the ex-sufferer, "You can come back now, but don't get too close," they were treated most special. After this ceremony everybody would know that they were truly healed, cleansed, restored, and accepted.

This vividly illustrates what it is like when YHVH restores us to Himself through Mashiach. Because of our sin, we don't have the kind of relationship with YHVH we were designed for. And because of this break in our most basic relationship, we are not in Community with others as we should be.

But when YHVH restores us, He wants us to know that we are fully accepted by Him. YHVH's forgiveness is thorough and complete. He no longer takes our past wrongs into account. They are forgotten for tov. We are accepted as His Children and He desires to use us in His Service.

Notice that restoration only truly occurs within the Community of YHVH's People. To experience His restoration, we need to acknowledge our sin, just like the diseased person needed to reveal his condition. Then we need to hear YHVH's Words of acceptance through others. When this occurs we can then function in this life as we were meant to, fully restored.

Again, the sages taught that **tzara'at (leprosy)** was actually an outward manifestation of a greater personal and inward spiritual disease! In particular, they taught that **tzara'at (leprosy)** was brought on by slander, gossip, and a **haughty (proud) ruach (spirit)**.

The genuine healing brings with it a healing of the mind and **ruach (spirit)** as well as the body! A genuine and complete healing of body should be followed by a genuine healing of the **ruach (spirit)**. The healings described in our Parasha allowed the individual to come back into the Community, and this was mainly on the physical level.

IV. Decrees of protection.

The Yisra'elim of old understood the similarities between **tzara'at (leprosy)** and religious purity. Decrees were therefore established not only to protect people from defilement, but, more importantly, to make a path of life and restoration for the **m'tzora (leper)**, a way by which YHVH could extend His Arm of Redemption to heal and reconcile in His sovereign **rachamim (mercy)**.

The first nine verses of **VaYikra 14** recount the intricate purification ritual of the **m'tzora (leper)** healed by the **chesed (lovingkindness)** of YHVH. This is a unique purification rite, and remember that it is similar to that which is used to purify the Kohanim in **VaYikra 8:23**. This ritual does not heal the **m'tzora (leper)**, only YHVH does, but declares that the sufferer has been restored physically and needs ritual purification, which allows him re-entry and full acceptance in the Community of Yisra'el.

V. Tzara'at (Leprosy) and the Mashiach.

A final aspect goes beyond the application of **tzara'at (leprosy)** to sin: Yahshua was not afraid to approach and heal **m'tzorot (lepers)**. **Luke 5:12-15** tells of Yahshua touching and healing a **m'tzora (leper)**, and **Yochanan Mark 14:3** tells of one called Shim'on, who was a **m'tzora (leper)** until Yahshua healed him. In **Mattityahu 10:8**, Yahshua Commands his talmidim to also go out and heal **m'tzorot (lepers)**.

In **Mattityahu 11: 2-6**, the healing of **tzara'at (leprosy)** is given as one of the signs of the Messianic reign. **Mattityahu 11: 2-6** **And when Yochanan had heard in the prison of the Works of Mashiach, he sent two of his taught ones and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" And Yahshua answering, said to them, "Go, report to Yochanan what you hear and see: "Blind receive sight and lame walk, m'tzorot (lepers) are cleansed and deaf hear, dead are raised up and poor are brought the Tov News. "And blessed is he who does not stumble in Me."**

The Talmud in Sanhedrin 98b asks, "What is His (the Mashiach's) Name" One of the answers is, "His Name is 'the **m'tzora (leper)** scholar,' as it is written, 'Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did **kavod (esteem)** him a **m'tzora (leper)**, smitten of YHVH, and afflicted.'" In later Jewish thought, this thought of the **m'tzora (leper)** was applied to Mashiach in connection with the Suffering Servant of **Yesha'yahu 53**. Like the **m'tzora (leper)**, the Mashiach would be a pariah who did his work outside the camp. Like the cleansing purpose of the two birds, Yahshua, too, would die to make purification on behalf of others, only to rise, like the bird dipped in the mixed blood and water, to bring freedom to all who acknowledge their impure condition and their need for **Kapparah (Atonement)**. As the blood of

the resurrected bird is sprinkled on the **m'tzora (leper)**, we too, find that the Blood of Yahshua makes us pure again and restores us to corporate worship of the one true YHVH.

VI. Conclusion and Application.

Could it be that the **tzara'at (leprosy)** infecting many Believers today is indeed a spiritual sickness? We belong to the Community. Yet, when we (knowingly or unknowingly) allow our various members to be used as instruments of unrighteousness, we open the door to spiritual defilement. The sages mentioned pride and arrogance. The serious illness of physical **tzara'at (leprosy)** can be compared to a sort of spiritual sickness of sorts. **Lashon hara (evil speech)** cannot exist among us, cannot defile our Congregation, our Community, our lives.

We read in **Ya'akov 3: 2-10** **For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, an olam of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Elohim and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of Elohim. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.**

You may believe that a leprous condition has infected your **ruach (spirit)** and **nefesh (soul)**. It may be the **tzara'at (leprosy)** of greed, or lust, or anger, or jealousy, or unforgiveness; you may be infected with the leprosy of pride, or ill-intent towards your neighbors, friends or family, or you may just feel like you need a renewed and refreshing touch from the Healer of healers!

Do **t'shuvah (turning around in repentance)** and turn back to YHVH and you will be able to enter back in. Go see the Kohan HaGadol, His Name is Yahshua. His Words are **Ruach (Spirit)** and His Words are Life!

It has been said "When our uncleanness encounters the **Kadoshah (Set-apartness)** of the **Navi (Prophet)** from Natzeret, our disease must flee! We have no need to go about crying, "**Tamei! Tamei!**" (**Unclean! Unclean!**) Rather, we have the freedom to proclaim, "**Tahor! Tahor!**" (**Cleansed! Cleansed!**) This wonderful truth is a result of our placing our trusting faithfulness in the Hands of the Healer of Healers! Just like the leprous individuals we need to come before the Kohan, for only His office was given the authority to make the pronouncement, "**Tahor! (Cleansed!)**" upon the inflicted individual (**VaYikra 14:18-20, 29-31**).

VaYikra 14: 18-20 "The rest of the oil that is in the Kohan's hand he shall put on the head of him who is to be cleansed. So the Kohan shall make kapparah (atonement) for him before YHVH. "Then the Kohan shall offer the Sin Offering, and make kapparah (atonement) for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Afterward he shall kill the Burnt Offering. "And the Kohan shall offer the Burnt Offering and the Grain Offering on the altar. So the Kohan shall make kapparah (atonement) for him, and he shall be clean.

It must be individually internalized by each and every one of us that: In our Mashiach Yahshua, the Torah calls all genuine Believers a "**Kingdom of Kohanim**", a title also designated unto 'Am Yisra'el. **Sh'mot 19:6** 'And you shall be to Me a Kingdom of Kohanim and a Kadosh (Set-apart) Nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the Children of Yisra'el." but now extended unto the entire Body of our Mashiach.

And **Revelation 1:5, 6** reads “**and from Yahshua Mashiach, the trustworthy witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the sovereigns of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us m'lakhim and kohanim to His Elohim and Father, to Him be Kavod (Esteem) and rule forever and ever. Amein.**”

R. Ariel states: As Kohanim we have the awesome responsibility of showcasing the **Kavod (Esteem)** of YHVH to the surrounding nations, as well as ministering to one another in the Body. This means that the healing of the person afflicted with **tzara'at** among us takes place when the genuine flow of **rachamim (mercy)** and grace from the Healer flows through us! Yes, today Yahshua still seeks to touch those lepers among us, yet his hands and feet are actuated within our hands and feet! We have become his extension of **rachamim (mercy)** and healing among the inflicted!

Nu, let us build each other up and not gossip or slander, but bring healing and restoration. Let our Congregation relate to one another in love and in cleanliness.

We begin to understand the leprous sin within when we recognize our need for a cure that has no source but Mashiach Yahshua. In **Romans 7:24**, Rav Sha'ul cries out with all of us leprous ones, saying, "**Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?**"

When Yahshua cleansed the **m'tzorot (lepers)** of their afflictions, He did so spontaneously and miraculously. According to the Torah, for such a cleansing and restoration, there would have to be a **t'shuvah (turning around in repentance)**, resulting in forgiveness. Yahshua granted deliverance to these helpless ones of Yisra'el. In healing the men of their supernatural afflictions, Yahshua was making a clear statement that He had the power to forgive, cleanse, and restore those who are hopelessly and helplessly caught up in their sin. He was making a claim to be both the Mashiach, the **Kadosh (Set-apart)** One of Yisra'el, and the Son of YHVH. Our Kohan HaGadol is the Only, Unique Son of the Father himself! B'ruch YHVH, we no longer have the minds of our former selves! We no longer need to allow our members to behave in the manner of an unredeemed man of the **olam hazeh (this world's)** corrupt system. Because of who we are in Mashiach, we have the Mind of Mashiach! **Romans 12:1, 2** informs us that we have been transformed by the renewing of our minds! **Romans 12:1, 2 I beseech you therefore, Brethren, by the Rachamim (Mercies) of YHVH, that you present your bodies a living korban (sacrifice), kadosh (set-apart), acceptable to YHVH, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to olam hazeh (this world), but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that tov and acceptable and Perfect Will of YHVH.**

And so, we think of our Yahshua when we read **VaYikra 14:20** "**And the Kohan shall offer the Burnt Offering and the Grain Offering on the altar. So the Kohan shall make kapparah (atonement) for him, and he shall be clean.**