

Hear Israel

More About Life and Death.

Beit Emet Congregation ~ Vancouver, WA

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Text: Tazria/Metzora; Torah: VaYikra 12:1-15:33; Haftarah: Malakhi 3: 1-20; T'hillim 139:12- 16; B'rit Chadashah: Romans 8:23; Corinthians Alef 6:19; Thessalonians Alef 5:23

Theme: We are to affirm life as our Abba YHVH does.

I. Introduction.

Tazria-Metzora, this combined Torah parashot deals exclusively with regulations relating to the condition of **purity, tahor (ritually pure or clean)** and **impurity, tamei (ritually impure, unclean, or common)**. In addition, R. Milgrom suggests that the loss of **blood** and of **seed** meant death, and above all the Elohim of Yisra'el desires **life**. Blood is the symbol of **life (VaYikra 17:10, 14)**, and the

seed is the source of **life**. In these instances, then, **impurity** is associated with death.

Tazria means ("**be delivered**") while **Metzora** means ("**the leper**").

Metzora has not always been so-called. Earlier Rabbis, like Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon, Rashi and Rambam, called it by the preceding words of the verse, **Zot Tihyeh** ("**This shall be**". . ." **the law of the leper**").

These thoughts are triggered by this week's double parasha, which deals with the subject of illness. The Torah considers the status of new mothers, persons afflicted with a disease of the skin, and persons experiencing certain normal or abnormal bodily discharges. All three are deemed to be conditions of less than a perfect **life** warranting some degree of separation. For the Torah, which is wholly committed to affirming **life**, death becomes the ultimate source of **impurity**. And conditions regarded as life-threatening or a lessening of **life** likewise contaminates this concept.

R. Gillman writes: We are tempted to dismiss these chapters of **VaYikra** as irrelevant to us today. However, we may want to look at them again and understand them as statements with profound symbolic weight that help to define some of the most basic commitments of Scriptural **emunah (faith)** in antiquity and today as well.

Each morning many observant Jews begin their prayers with a noteworthy expression of gratitude. In this refined translation of part of the extended **Sim Shalom**, it reads as follows: **Praised are You, YHVH our Elohim, King of the Universe Who with wisdom fashioned the human body, creating openings, arteries, glands and organs, marvellous in structure, intricate in design. Should but one of them, by being blocked or opened, fail to function, it would be impossible to exist. Praised are You, YHVH, Healer of all flesh Who sustains our bodies in wondrous ways.**

R. Schorsch writes: “I love the unvarnished particularity of these words that celebrate the reality of our bodies. Having just awakened, we are stirred by the discovery that our body continues to function smoothly without pain or disorder, and we pause in thankfulness, mindful of how delicate is our endowment. We praise Elohim for one more day of well-being.”

While I do agree with his thoughts and am grateful for my **life**, Am I the only one here that awakens with aches and pains? Oy! Vey! It could be worse.

As I have mentioned, part of the extended **Sim Shalom** prayer celebrates the excellence of the human body. In Hebraic understanding, it is no less the mirror of YHVH’s grandness than the **nefesh (soul)**. Scriptural emunah does not separate human nature into body and nefesh, polar opposites locked in never-ending

conflict. The body is not haSatan's domain or the seat of our passions, to be conquered by the **ruach (spirit)** for:

T'hillim 139:12- 16 Even darkness is not dark for You, But night shines as the day – As is darkness, so is light. For You, You possessed my kidneys; You have covered me in my mother's womb. I give thanks to You, for I am awesomely and wondrously made! Wondrous are Your Works, and my being knows it well. My bones were not concealed from You, when I was shaped in a hidden place, knit together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body. And in Your Sefer (Book) all of them were written, the days they were formed, While none was among them.

Any form of dualism is abhorrent to the Natzeri Believer's monotheism. Body and nefesh enjoy the same divine creative Father and, therefore, at the end of time individual resurrection will not be restricted to the ruach. The emphasis on the body in this concept is a healthy appreciation of the set-apartness of the whole person. We can understand our emunah not just as a claim about what will happen in a time beyond our knowledge, but also as a view on how we ought to conduct our **lives** here and now.

Rav Sha'ul shares these insights when speaking of our set-apart bodies and not the sins of the flesh which many Christian Scriptural scholars, with Greek thinking and not Hebraic thinking, confuse with our set-apart bodies.

Romans 8:23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Ruach, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Corinthians Alef 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Ruach HaKadosh Who is in you, Whom you have from Elohim, and that you are not your own?

Thessalonians Alef 5:23 Now may the Elohim of Shalom Himself set-apart you entirely; and may your ruach and nefesh and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Adonai Yahshua HaMashiach.

In order to begin to appreciate some of the **emetim (truths)** in this double portion, we need to review the meanings of the words **tahor (ritually pure or clean)** and **tamei (ritually impure, unclean or common)**. There are various conditions that render a person into a **tamei** state. One mentioned is when a woman has a baby. The woman who has just given birth certainly did not sin. Nor is the birthing of a child sinful. Why then, is the new mother rendered **tamei**? Simply because she has come into contact with the realm of sin and death; in this case, at childbirth, she bled. The Torah declares that the **life** of the nefesh is in the **blood**. **Blood** was meant to carry the **life** throughout the body; it is the nutrient and oxygen supplier to the various parts of the body. So, every loss of **blood** was death occurring. Thus, even in the process of producing a new **life**, what was meant for

life was drained out of the body, the **blood**. YHVH is interested in teaching us through every situation in **life**, and it is important to Him that any contact with the area or realm of sin and death is emphasized. The main point that **the Kadosh (Set-apart)** One is stressing, is that in reality there are only two spiritual kingdoms: the **Kingdom of YHVH**, in which there is **Light, Life and Tzadakhah (Righteousness)**, and the kingdom of haSatan, in which there is sin and death. The shedding of **life-giving blood** at childbirth is an illustration of the difference between the two kingdoms. **Nu (so)**, a new mother is declared **tamei** when she gives birth.

II. The Weird Skin Afflictions.

After teaching about the steps a new mother must take after giving birth, the parasha instructs Yisra'elim on the steps to take should various skin afflictions or ailments occur. R. Berkowitz writes: "Although the text mentions several different types of afflictions, unfortunately the Hebrew words describing them are almost impossible to translate into English. However, there are two particular classifications of afflictions that are extremely important. They are called **tazria** and **metzora**, the titles for our parashot. These names are used to describe the particular afflictions that render a person **tahor** or **tamei**. Interestingly, these names are also used to describe the same afflictions when they appear on inanimate objects such as clothes or houses."

Most **VaYikra** translators have erroneously translated the word **tazria** as leprosy. Leprosy, as we know it today, is really called Hanson's Disease, and is probably the "least contagious of diseases and 90% of all people are immune." This is not the description of the affliction found in our Torah portion. It could well be that these afflictions are solely supernatural afflictions sent from YHVH for basically two reasons:

First, people contracted a **tazria** or **metzora** condition as a result of personal contact with the realm of sin or death and not utilizing the proper channels of cleansing prescribed in the Torah. A **second** possible reason was unconfessed sin. Nu, these could have served as a disciplinary measure, designed to work **t'shuvah (repentance with turning toward YHVH)** in a Yisra'eli's **life**.

1. The First Stage

To arrive at an inward understanding of the question of t'shuvah, using Hebraic thinking, we must consider what Rashi says of the verse, **VaYikra 13: 46** "**He is unclean – all the days he has the infection he is unclean. He is unclean, and he dwells alone, his dwelling place is outside the camp. "**

Rashi comments, "(Even) people who are **unclean** (for reasons other than leprosy) shall not abide with him ... because he, by slanderous statements, parted man and wife, or a man from his friend, (therefore) he must be parted (from everyone)."

We can say, then, that he is excluded from the camps because of his association with strife and dissension. His slander causes men to be distant from one another, whereas the idea of **kadoshim (set-apartness)** is unity. He has no place, therefore, in the **Kadosh (Set-apart)** Congregation. But what is more, he is to be separated even from the other categories of unclean people, as Rambam says, his slander is progressive.

At first it is turned against ordinary people, then against the **tzadek (righteous)**, then against the **navi'im (prophets)**, and finally against YHVH Himself, and he ends by denying the fundamentals of emunah. This is worse even than idolatry, for the idolater does not always deny YHVH, he denies His uniqueness. And might I add His Torah. Could this be the case of many of our Efrayim brothers and sisters?

R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson shares a point of **halakhic (oral)** law as well as an inward Chassidic belief, "It is certain (that every Jew) will in the end return in repentance." Could this also mean Efrayim ?

R. Schneerson further shares: This explains the verses in **VaYikra 14: 1-4:**
And YHVH spoke to Moshe, saying, "This shall be the Torah of the 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 leprosy is healed in the leper,"

The form of the verb carries with it an assurance for the future that even he who stands outside the three camps, who is isolated by his sin, will in the end turn to the kohan in t'shuvah. And this was the man whose very nature was to resist this return to oppose **kadoshim (set-apartness)**, and join forces with the heathen **olam (world)** outside the camp. This is why he "**shall be brought**" - in the passive - for his return is contrary to his will. Interesting eh, does this describe Efrayim in the Christian olam bound by traditions and **lawlessness (not keeping Torah)** as well as secular Y'hudim and religious Y'hudim bound by rabbinic tradition and hostility toward Adon Yahshua YHVH as the Mashiach ?

2. The Second Stage

The initiating cause in the awakening of the desire to return is not to be found in the man himself, but in the promise of YHVH that even if it requires: **Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 20: 33 "As I live," declares the Master YHVH, "do not I, with a mighty Hand, with an outstretched Arm, and with wrath poured out, reign over you?**

R. Sacks shares: But if at first the impetus to return breaks in on him from the outside, it is the divine will that ultimately it should become part of his deepest nature. Nu, there is the further assurance that not only will he **do t'shuvah (repent with turning toward YHVH)**, but he will experience t'shuvah as the truest expression of his own personality in all its facets: Will, intellect and feeling. In the

light of this we can see why, after the Torah stated that the leper "**shall be brought to the kohan,**" it continues, "**and the kohan shall go out of the camp.**"

In this stage of t'shuvah, of "**cleansing,**" is the sudden revelation of YHVH coming in, as it were, from the outside. Because it has not yet become part of his own personality, this revelation is unrelated to the personal situation of the man. He is "**brought**" out of himself and his environment. But afterwards the kohan comes to him: That is, his situation becomes important again, as he strives to translate his revelation into a cleansing of the whole circumstances of his **life**. And since the "**cleansing**" extends even to his environment, he achieves something that even the perfectly tzadek could not: He **sanctifies (set-aparts)** what lies outside the camp, where the tzadek man has never been.

Nu, we say that t'shuvah done from great love turns even wilful sins into merits, it sets-apart even what did lie outside the Will of YHVH and is now cleansed.

Sometimes, depending on the specific situation of the person involved, isolation from the Community was necessary. Once the cause of the affliction ceased, the Yisra'eli was instructed to go through a certain procedure of cleansing which involved close inspection by a kohan, an **immersion or mikvah**, and the offering of a **korban (sacrifice)**.

Similarly, the abhorrence of death prompted the Torah to forbid **kohanim**

(priests) to come near the corpse of a Yisra'eli, except for their immediate relatives. And the **Kohan HaGadol (High Kohan)** was denied even that privilege. The Torah chose decisively for embracing the gift of **life**: **D'varim 30:19** **“I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse,” “Choose Life”** declares Moshe to Yisra'el just before his death. Nor do we have any idea where Moshe is buried. His grave was not to become a shrine. Neither death nor the dead were to dominate our **lives**.

Remember this picture: David and his men are on the run from Sha'ul's wrath and about to attack a wealthy scoundrel named Naval. His wife Avigail, both strikingly beautiful and intelligent, intercedes to stay David's hand from murder. She presents David with a generous gift of her own and acknowledges the **tzadakhah (righteousness)** of his cause, which must not be tarnished by innocent **blood**. She assures David of YHVH's protection in battles to come. **Sh'mu'el Alef 25:29** **“And if anyone sets out to pursue you and seek your life, the Life of my Elohim will be bound up in the bundle of life in the care of YHVH; but He will fling away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling.”**

The Scriptural use of the words **bi-zror ha-hayyim (the bundle or bond of life)** refer elegantly to YHVH. Because of its opposition to death, it triumphed over death by affirming **life**.

III. Again, the Two Kingdoms.

Again, we will visit the two kingdoms. In **Romans 5: 12-21**, we find a remarkable contrast between two realms of spiritual existence, the kingdom of sin and death, and the **Kingdom of Light, Life and Tzadakhah**. The first hint, in the **Sefer of Romans**, that these realms of spiritual existence are, in reality, two separate kingdoms is in **verse 14** which describes death as “**reigning**” from Adam. Where something reigns, there is a kingdom. We call this particular kingdom, the kingdom of sin and death, because **verse 14** says that “**death**” reigned, and sin causes death. There is a spiritual progression in this kingdom which follows a path somewhat along these lines: Adam sinned, sin spread to all through Adam, condemnation was upon all through Adam, ending with death to all through Adam. It is evident from this sequence that for men Adam committed the first sin. This cancer or disease of sin became part of his spiritual DNA, so to speak, and was subsequently passed on through all of his descendants. All, therefore, became sinners. This sin, the result of a basic deep-seated rebellion against YHVH and His Torah, brought condemnation (**verse 18**) to all who sinned. The sinners were condemned by the **Tzadek (Righteous) Judge** of all mankind to die, both spiritually and physically. So, the kingdom of sin and death is characterized by the three parts in the sequence described above: sin, condemnation, and death.

IV. Mashiach and the the Kingdom of Light, Life and Tzadakhah.

Fortunately, **Romans 5:12-21** describes another Kingdom. Whereas Adam was the first leader in the kingdom of sin and death, **Mashiach (Messiah)** Yahshua, according to **Romans 5**, is the great leader of the second Kingdom. In fact, Yahshua is called in **Corinthians Alef 15:45** the last Adam. Here, in **Romans 5**, Rav Sha'ul declares that the first Adam was a type of Mashiach. Thus, Yahshua and Adam were meant to be compared with each other. Just as Adam was the key person who brought in the kingdom of sin and death to earth, so the last Adam, Mashiach Yahshua, would bring in the **Kingdom of Light, Life and Tzadakhah** to all who would be in Him. This second Kingdom also has an important and particular sequence of characteristics: Mashiach's **Rachamim (Grace)** and **Tzadik Sadek** ("Righteous Justification - to do justice, vindicate, acquit, prove right – all in a righteous way").

V. Haftarah: Malakhi 3: 1-20.

This Haftarah I'm using this week is from **Malakhi Chapter 3**. Malakhi the **Navi (Prophet)** explains that the **olam hazeh (this world)** is the manifestation of YHVH's presence and **Kavod (Esteem)**. Yet, many are incapable or unwilling to properly recognize YHVH's manifest presence. Even when the **B'eit Ha Mishkan (Tabernacle)** and **B'eit Ha Mikdash (Temple)** stood, and especially when Mashiach Yahshua came, most of B'nai Yisra'el did not appreciate their opportunity to draw near to YHVH and serve Him. Malakhi forewarns that

insincere expressions of devotion are equivalent to offering blemished **korbanot (sacrifices)** and YHVH will punish those who lack sincerity and devotion.

To reenter R. Siegel's observations we see that this week's haftarah depicts the Yisra'eli scene moments before the advent of Mashiach. Malakhi, the last navi before Y'hudah's first exile, shares with us the prevalent conversations during the final moments of our final exile. The masses of our people will reflect upon the generation's unprecedented affluence and conclude that Torah observance is a wasted exercise. Their argument will be, "What material gain has ever come from observing His Commandments or walking the downtrodden path for His sake? They constantly praise the agnostics and the wicked that met much success and yet, escaped the wrath of Above."

Malakhi 3:14, 15: 14 "You have said, 'It is worthless to serve Elohim. And what did we gain when we guarded His Charge, and when we walked as mourners before YHVH Tzva'ot (of Hosts)? 'And now we are calling the proud blessed – not only are the doers of wrongness built up, but they also try Elohim and escape.' "

The impressive financial success of so many unaffiliated people will suggest an indifference on the side of YHVH, almost to the extent of condoning their inexcusable behaviour, or so it would appear.

What will be the response of the tzadek? The Navi continues, **Malakhi 3:16**

"Then the Elohim fearing people will speak amongst themselves and YHVH will hearken, listen and preserve the comments of those who revere Him and respect His Name." Paraphrasing R. Siegel, he, continues even further: During those dark moments Elohim fearing people will be scarce. However, those who will endure and persevere, despite the fierce influences of exile, will remain steadfast in their **emunah (faith, trust)**. They will gather and strengthen one another sharing their true perspectives on **life**. They do not seek tangible benefits from **life** and certainly do not expect a reward in this finite world (Malbim 3:16). Their service is based on reverence and respect rather than reward or material gain. To them, the absence of fame or financial success will not present serious challenge to their commitment. Instead, they will patiently await the era of redemption wherein the **Kavod (Esteem)** of YHVH will become revealed to all.

The **Chazal (Sages)** in Yalkut Shimoni (591) explain this unwavering emunah with the following parable. The queen was once confronted by a maidservant in the midst of a dark night. The latter argued that she was more attractive than the queen herself! The queen responded calmly, "Say all you wish now because tomorrow in the **light** of day the **emet (truth)** will be revealed." In the same vein tzadek people, during our dark exile, find themselves at a serious disadvantage. In the absence of YHVH's clear revelations anything can be presented and said. Allusions can easily be misconstrued that promise eternal bliss for those who walk the unethical and

immoral path. It requires people of great character and commitment, to YHVH and His Torah, to rise above public opinion and speak the emet. Our response to this senseless talk should be. "Truth is in the Torah;" "Truth is around the corner;" "Soon Mashiach will arrive and the clear revelations of YHVH will tell the real story." Regarding those dedicated, Malakhi says, **Malakhi 3:20 "And for you who fear YHVH a gracious and healing sun will shine upon you."** Those who firmly awaited the **light** of redemption will merit its **light**, the brilliant radiance of YHVH. The **light** of day will finally arrive and those clear perspectives of the tzadek will become self evident **emetim (truths)**.

May we merit to experience this **light** speedily in our days.

VI. Revelation of Light and Life: The Order of Learning the Torah.

The usual order to take in learning Torah is to progress from the simple to the complex, from the light to the heavy.

PaRDeS – the four levels of understanding Scripture - from the most basic to the deepest: **Pashat (simple), Remez (hints or allusions), Drash (parables, riddles and allegories), and Sod (esoteric, mysterious)**. Differing levels may apply to what, at the time, is being learned:

We begin with the basic words of the Torah, move to the next level (if needed) and so on. It applies also to the depth of learning:

First comes acquaintance with the text and only afterwards come the

questions, analytics, and in-depth study. And it applies to the manner of learning.

R. Simlai shares: We do not reach at once the highest level of Torah study for its own sake, instead, when a learner studies, in the first place he does so with himself in mind. Then, we elevate the Source of the Torah on High, and unite it with the Essence of YHVH. We reach for drawing near to YHVH.

On the other hand, when the Torah was given, the order was reversed. Its devolution from the spirituality of YHVH to the physical situation of man was, as it were, a descent from higher to lower.

The Torah reached down from the heights of YHVH to become the possession of man. And we in our learning retrace its path, ascending from our physical situation to spiritual closeness with YHVH. To draw near to YHVH. This order of learning is mirrored in the structure of the Torah itself.

This is why the decrees concerning animals are placed first. To set-apart the animal world, by distinguishing the **impure** from the **pure**, is relatively simple. The problem of sin does not arise in their case. But for man to set-apart himself, given his capacity for wrongdoing, is far harder. Nu, the decrees of human conduct come last. Not because of man's innate superiority to the animals, but because of his deficiencies.

This, too, is R. Simlai's opinion as to why man was created last: "So that if he

becomes too proud, he may be reminded that the gnats preceded him in the order of creation."

VII. Conclusion and Application:

There is no no-man's land; a person is either in one kingdom or the other. He either has **life** or does not have **life**. A person is born into the first kingdom and can be reborn again into the Mashiach's Kingdom. Upon entering it, he is constituted a completely new and different person from the inside out! He is now the personal property of the **M'lakh of m'lakhim (King of kings)**, who has chosen him to be a part of His Kingdom ever since before the creation of the **olam (world)** (**Ephesians 1:3-4**). There are only two ways in the spiritual realm: the way of the **olam hazeh (this world)** of death and YHVH's way or **life**. Given the critical importance of making a distinction between the two kingdoms, and that there are only two kingdoms, we can see why YHVH placed vital teaching tools in the Torah to prepare His people for, and give them understanding of, the nature of the two kingdoms. This then, is the primary reason for the **tahor** and **tamei** distinctions.

When Yahshua cleansed the 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 from their sin towards YHVH)**, resulting in forgiveness. Yahshua granted deliverance to these helpless

ones of Yisra'el. Some watching, probably, would have gasped saying, "Who is He to forgive such people and cleanse their afflictions? He did what only our Elohim can do!" And so He did because that is Who He is! 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 in their sin. He was making a claim to be both the Mashiach, the **Kadosh (Set-apart)** One, blessed be He, of Yisra'el, and the Son of Elohim. Nu, let it be as it was ordained. Come, Adon Yahshua HaMashiach.