

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Metzora:*** **Leviticus 14:1- 57**
 Haftarah: **II Kings 7:3-20**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Romans 6:19-23**

For him who is to be cleansed

[Leviticus 14:4]

Today's Meditation is Job 3:1-13;

The Amidah prayer Focus for This Week is Petition No. 1, *Da'at* [Knowledge/Understanding]

Vayadaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor – And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying ... ***Zot tihyeh torat ha-Metzora*** - This is the torah² concerning the person with tzara'at ... ***b'yom t'horato v'huva el ha-kohen*** - in the day he is made tahor, and he goes before the kohen. **Leviticus 14:1-2.**

Welcome to the 28th parsha of Torah - *Metzora*. In this parsha the Holy One will introduce the next phase of His Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover Protocols - the phase in which we will learn to deal with the deleterious effects that prolonged exposure to *tumah* (KJV 'uncleanness') has on our health, our relationships, and our mission calling. Whenever *tumah/uncleanness* is welcomed into our lives, indulged, celebrated, and given unlimited license, it wreaks untold havoc. Left unchecked, *tumah* reproduces like rabbits and quickly spreads into every part of our lives it touches. Left unchecked, it ultimately causes us to develop a dangerous spiritually based but physically- and socially- toxic condition that the Holy One labels *tzara'at*. That is why the Holy One has gone to such length to teach us what *tumah* is, how to recognize and manage opportunities for contact with it, and how to cleanse ourselves from it when contact is unavoidable. *Tzara'at* is what happens when we give place to the flesh, ignore the Holy One's instructions, and let our hearts, our minds, our ultimately mouths become hotbeds of toxic *tumah*. Yeshua described what this looks like, saying: ***Those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things that defile a man.*** **Matthew 15:18-20a.** If you

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² Verse 2 in our English versions refers to a "law" – the "law of the leper". In Hebrew the word translated "law" is *torah, tav, vav, resh, hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #8451, pronounced *to-law'*. As you probably know by now if you have been participating in this study, the word *torah*, understood Hebraically, does not mean "law" in the sense Westerners understand "law". It is not a dictate issued by a powerful governor enforceable by criminal penalties or civil liability. Instead, it is a *loving instruction*, or *teaching*, or *revealed wisdom*, as a father would give/impart to a son, or a master would give/impart to a beloved apprentice. It is a way of life, health, and peace.

want to know if you have allowed *tumah* to fester to a level that, if the Holy One were to shine the high-beam level of the Light of His Countenance on you, would constitute *tzara'at*, just ask yourselves these ten questions:

1. Am I dissatisfied with my lot in life? Unhappy? Discouraged? Depressed?
2. Am I worried? Anxious? Afraid? Obsessed with evil and/or evildoers?
3. Am I jealous? Envious? Obsessed with 'equality', 'fairness', and/or 'justice'?
4. Am I angry? Irritable? Frustrated? Outraged?
5. Am I easily offended? Quick to judge others? Unforgiving?
6. Do I indulge lustful thoughts? Am I sensual? Sentimental? Fleshly-appetite motivated and driven?
7. Am I prone to involve myself in interpersonal, political, ideological, or theological drama?
8. Am I resentful? Vengeful? Obsessed with seeing others 'get what's coming to them' and/or 'deserve'?
9. Do I feel like a victim? Am I constantly thinking and/or talking about the hurts, wrongs, injustices and/or insults that I feel I, my family, or my ethnicity/culture has endured in the past?
10. When I communicate with others, how much of what I say or write consists of complaint? Accusation? Manipulation? Self-Promotion? Bragging? Exaggeration? Gossip? Insult? Derogative labeling/name-calling? Character-assassination? Sarcasm? Profanity? Lewd talk?

With the Psalmist may we all cry:

Examine me, O Holy One, and prove me; try my mind and my heart.

[Psalm 26:2]

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties.
And see if there is any wicked way in me – then lead me in the way everlasting.*

[Psalm 139:23-24]

May all our interactions and conversations with our fellow man come under His intense but loving gaze! May all the *garments we each choose to use like Adam and Chava's fig leaves, to hide our nakedness from the world*, come under His diagnostic microscope! May every piece of the *material 'stuff' we touch and use in the course of ordinary life* be carefully examined for their Kingdom usefulness! May even *the foundation and walls of the houses we inhabit* be inspected for signs of acute, infectious toxicity!

The Torah Concerning the Person ...

Torah is the Creator's protocol for transforming ordinary human beings like us from a motley crew of self-centered slaves and shrews to a fitting helpmeet for Himself – a Bride without spot, wrinkle, or blemish. **Psalm 119:9, 11, 97-105**. We can – and should - therefore embrace the Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover protocols of *Sefer Vayikra*, as we do all the *mitzvot* of Torah, with complete confidence that they are intended for, and will invariably result in, our and the world's good. With that as a background, let's begin to examine that plan in the context of the *tumah-to-the-limit* disaster-zone the Torah calls *ha-metzora*. Through the empowerment of Torah the Holy One invites all human beings to become *people of ever-increasing beauty and purity*; all of them – yes, even the lowly *metzora*.

With the Light of the Holy One's Presence shining on Moshe's countenance, and with the Holy Words of the Creator of the Universe bathing us in Pure Heavenly Light, we suddenly started seeing 'spots' and 'blemishes' in ourselves where before we had seen nothing amiss. What Torah speaks about being in the *basar* is not just the skin. What happens in the skin is merely evidence of what is going on deeper, in the animalistic and pseudo-intelligent part of us that operates contrary to the Spirit of the Holy One. This includes the 'flesh' man's will, mindsets, attitudes, priority matrix, set of values, emotions, defense mechanisms, coping mechanisms, thought patterns, speech patterns, habits, cultural assumptions, and reaction patterns. The 'flesh' is basically everything that connects us to the animal nature in us rather than the neshama the Holy One breathed into us.

What are all these *spots, sores, lesions, and blemishes* that are suddenly showing up in our flesh? They represent the cumulative effect on us of every insult of *tumah* we have ever received and left un-*tahored*. This includes every ingested but never expelled morsel from the *tamei* realm – whether received through the digestive system or any other of the flesh man's 'gate' organs (eyes, ears, nose, taste buds, and nerve endings) – we have received. It thus includes the dark energy impact of every negative word we have either spoken or heard, and every painful, traumatic, unjust, or perverse event we have ever either participated in or witnessed. It covers every incident of murmuring, complaining, accusing, blaming, and judging –dished out or received. It includes every incident of ridicule, rejection, humiliation, or verbal, physical, or sexual assault or abuse – whether we suffered it or committed it. It involves every time we succumbed to, or put anyone else into, a position of worry, fear, anger and/or rage. It includes every experience of life where we have felt, or made someone else feel, manipulated, controlled, abandoned, unappreciated, and/or unloved; or helpless, hopeless, and/or impotent; or inferior, unloveable, and/or useless. It includes every event of abuse of or dependence upon

alcohol, drugs, ‘comfort food’, or sexual admixture to ‘help us make it through the night’. It includes every rant, every argument, and every physical fight. It includes every incident of betrayal, bereavement, or broken heartedness.

Wounds of the flesh such as these often turn into wounds of the soul. Though deeply embedded in our past, they can be triggered by any other *tumah* insult we experience in the present. Their operation drains us of energy and passion. They ultimately have an adverse effect on all our interactions and relationships with others, especially those closest to us – not to mention our own health, productivity, mood, confidence, inner peace/turmoil index, joy/depression index, thanksgiving/complaint index, and contentment/dissatisfaction index.

So – how can our *tumah*-associated ‘wounds of the soul’ be healed? They must be exposed to Divine Light. That is what is happening at Sinai. That is why we have suddenly begun seeing our spots, sores, lesions, and blemishes. But seeing them is only the first step. Such wounds can only be healed when we acknowledge their existence, take ownership of and responsibility for their continued effect on us, stop blaming others for them and the problems they are causing, and seek out and submit to a true *kohen* [in our case, that ultimately means Messiah Yeshua; for others, it may mean us!] who we can trust not to overreact, be disgusted or repulsed, judge, look around for someone to blame, or either preach at or pontificate to us, but who will instead both create a safe place for us to heal up and lead us along a pathway that will lead to our healing and restoration. If that does not happen – if we *refuse to cooperate* with the healing protocols just described - well, that is how *tumah* gets completely out of control, and a person who could have – indeed should have – been healed and restored to wholeness and functionality, instead becomes, for a time at least, an unholy, unwholesome, toxic *metzora mess*. Ah, but Torah has good news. Being a toxic *metzora mess* is most definitely not how a person’s story has to end! With the Holy One, and the Torah, there is always hope – and indeed a confident, expectation of redemption and restoration – even for the worst *metzora mess* in the world!

Every Metzora Can Easily Be Tahor-ed and Restored!

Metzora is a Hebrew noun that is found multiple times in the original Hebrew text of the 28th parsha. The first instance in this parsha is found in Leviticus 14:2. In the Authorized King James translation this Hebrew noun was rendered as “*leper*”. This made sense to Englishmen in the early 17th Century – for a disease by that name had been a regular feature of life there since medieval times. Known today as Hansen's disease, the condition with which every English person alive in that day was familiar was a slow incubating disease caused by a bacteria. That disease often resulted in loss of fingers and toes, gangrene, blindness, collapse of the nose,

ulcerations, lesions and weakening of the skeletal frame. By calling a *metzora* a 'leper', the translators were seeking to cause the reader to shudder in revulsion – if not fear. But is an English 'leper' – at least in the context with which 17th century Englishmen knew it – really the same thing as a *metzora* as described by the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov thousands of years previously, in the Hebrew language, to Hebrew people? To really understand what a *metzora* was – not from a 17th Century English cultural worldview, but from the Holy One's perspective, one must look at the concept through Hebraic lenses – and with Sinaitic bifocals.

Hebraically, in the context of what the Holy One was releasing on Mount Sinai, the descriptive noun *metzora* is simply the way the Holy One chose to refer to a human being who has obsessed over and immersed himself in *tumah* and *has therefore begun to ooze a toxic form of tumah called tzara'at into the environment*. As we have learned previously, *tumah* is not 'uncleanness' in the personal hygiene sense, and *tzara'at* is nowhere close to the contagious viral disease we Westerners identify with leprosy. *Tumah* is merely the negative effect that *tamei* things, people, thoughts, speech, and behaviors bring about in a person or creature's life. And *tzara'at* is simply a form of *discipline lovingly visited by the Holy One* on persons in and associated with His redeemed community who accumulate insults of *tumah* to the point that they wind up engaging more or less continuously in *lashon ha ra* [negative, judgmental speech about others].

The sages have long taught that *tzara'at* is the natural by-product of such things as *manipulation [especially lying, exaggerating, misrepresenting for selfish ends], selfish misuse of one's capacity for sexuality, pride, and slander*. The Chasan Sofer ties each of the different types of *tzara'at* mentioned in Torah to different forms of *lashon hara*:

- 1) *Se'it* (i.e. a rising): A person speaks negatively about others in an attempt to improve his own stature;
- 2) *Sapachat* (i.e. a spreading scab): A person might join a group, organization, institution, or a philosophical, political, sociological, or ideological movement of people who speak against others, and start to speak *lashon hara* because those he or she associates with do;
- 3) *Baheret* (i.e. an indentation, or sinking spot): A person might have committed a trespass or made a false accusation against someone else, and in an attempt to exonerate himself, he rationalizes and deflects the attention away from his behavior or speech by projecting what he has done or said onto, and shifting the blame to, the other person.

Yeshua confirmed that there is a connection between one's spiritual experiences

and condition and the higher levels of *tumah*, saying to scribes and Pharisees: *it is what comes out of the mouth – this is what defiles a man*, then explaining to His talmidim: *... those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies*. Matthew 15:11, 18-19.

The presence of active *tzara'at* in a person means that person is acutely spewing *tumah* out of his or her flesh like a volcano. From indulging a persistently bad attitude, to habitually releasing critical, sarcastic, demeaning speech, to engaging in a long-standing pattern of self-obsessed, shrew-like behavior, the *metzora* is a person who *has deliberately and persistently wandered so far off of the Holy One's assigned pathway of life*, and is therefore so *absorbed with death and things associated with death* [i.e. the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] that he or she is simply too toxic for association.

A *metzora* is not someone who is 'ill' – at least in the sense of needing medical attention or drugs. Neither surgery, nor prescription drugs, nor herbal remedies, nor intravenous fluids will cure a *metzora*. A *metzora* is *someone who has refused to humble himself or herself and become a source of blessing to the world, and is therefore temporarily under the Holy One's tempered Hand of discipline*³. In order to help the person understand toxicity and negativity he has been dishing out, the Holy One allows him to experience that toxicity and negativity as operates in his flesh. He is one who is receiving, measure for measure, what he 'dished out'.

But ... *it is only words*, some say. No, dear ones. Words can encourage – or they can condemn. Words can inspire – or they can arouse doubt, fear and despair. Words can motivate – or they can paralyze. Words can edify – or they can destroy. Words can guide one to safety – or they can push one off a cliff. Words can heal - or they can pierce the heart like a javelin. Look at the Holy One – He used words to create the Universe. But look at the Serpent – he used words to corrupt the heart of man and bring death to the world. So, never underestimate the power of your words – for the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven, or for the expansion of the domain of darkness.

³ Parsha *Tazria* began with the Holy One's instructions concerning a woman giving birth to a son. Some Jewish sources see this as an allusion to the coming of the future Redemption, which is often described using the metaphor of birth. The birth of a son, they opine, can be interpreted as a reference to the strength and permanence that will characterize the ultimate Redemption, because this Redemption will not be followed by an exile. Under this interpretation, the woman called a *tazria* in Leviticus 12 alludes to the Jewish people, who will ultimately bear fruit in the advent of the Era of Redemption, when Messiah is manifest in the world.

What is Tumah?

*Tumah*⁴ is a Hebrew word the Holy One uses multiple times in the *Kedusha Discourse*. Our English Bibles generally translate this Hebrew noun into English as ‘uncleanness’, ‘pollution’, or ‘ritual impurity’. But *tumah* is one of the many Hebrew words employed by the Holy One that has no suitable English equivalent. The adjective corresponding to *tumah* is *tamei*, which we have in these studies come to recognize as the polar opposite of *tahor*. We have encountered the adjective *tamei* in regard to certain animals which we are not to either eat or touch, women in their time of menstruation or when they have unnatural discharges or issues of blood, and persons and garments manifesting inward toxicity through the appearance in their flesh of various kinds of spots and wrinkles. *Tumah* and *tamei* are both derived from the verb root *tama* [*tet, mem, alef*]. This verb describes the process that derails or distracts a human being from his appointed journey toward *wholeness, shalom, and fulfillment of purpose and destiny*.

Everything that distracts or diverts or hinders a son or daughter of the Covenant from pursuing his or her Divinely ordained path of life, or which tends to delay him or her in doing so, is *tamei*. All creatures, all things – as well as all people, thoughts, speech, and behaviors - that draw the attention, affection, passion, energy or loyalty of a son or daughter of the Covenant away from the Holy One’s calling upon his or her life are likewise *tamei*. Meanwhile, the cumulative negative effect that all *tamei* things, people, thoughts, speech, and behaviors have brought about is what is described in Torah as *tumah*.

An Analogy – Tumah is like Malware

It may help the modern reader to think of *tumah* as essentially like a computer virus. It is a particularly nasty form of malware that gets into your hard drive and begins to take up more and more space, slow down your operating system, and proceed without your knowledge to corrupt and delete important files. The sooner you catch and deal with the malware, the less damage it will inflict upon you and your sphere of influence – and the quicker you can get on with becoming who you are created to be and doing what you have been called, empowered, and commissioned to do. But if you do not detect and deal with the malware, it can absolutely wreak havoc on your operating system - and severely limit, at least temporarily, your potential to be light to the world and salt to the earth.

The first area of the soul that is usually affected by the malware of *tumah* is *shalom*. Is your *shalom* compromised? Look for a source of *tumah*. The second area of the human soul that is generally compromised by *tumah* is *joy*. Are you

⁴ *Tumah* is spelled *tet, mem, alef, hey*.

struggling to maintain – or have you lost – the *joy of your salvation*? The culprit is almost certainly an open wound of active *tumah*. Also placed at risk by *tumah* are critical attributes of the Redeemed like *fear of Adonai*, *love of Adonai*, *love of fellow man*, *patience*, *forgiveness*, *gentleness*, *kindness*, and *self-control*. The diminution of any of those things constitutes a telltale sign that the malware of *tumah* is present, is active, and is doing damage. Where does it always manifest? It always manifests in *the flesh*.

Have You Had Any Flesh Eruptions Lately?

Before we get too deep our readings this week we would all be well served to do a quick 'check' of our flesh. Is there something toxic and self-destructive going on inside us – arising out of persistently bad attitudes, negative talk, and destructive behavior patterns - that needs to be addressed? If we are going to successfully approach the Holy One, much less commune meaningfully with and receive downloads of revelation from Him at His Appointed Times, all the *tumah* insults that attach themselves to our lives needs to be dealt with and surrendered according to our Creator's wise protocols. Let's face it - none of us want to be stuck outside the Camp, covering the bottom part of our face and shouting '*Unclean! Unclean!*' at the top of our lungs, as happy pilgrims dance past us on their way up to Jerusalem to meet with the Holy One. We all want to join in the great celebration of our progress to date on the glorious journey to freedom. Nobody wants to be *the odd metzora out*.

What is Tzara'at – And What is a Metzora?

The most intense level of *tumah* a person can experience in this life is what is found at work in anything our Bridegroom-King calls an *abomination*. This is when the malware virus of *tumah* has basically turned your soul into a chaotic, destructive, weapon of darkness instead of a healing tower of light. Abomination status is very, very serious. It is like having *terminal cancer* of the soul. It does not end well. Let's pay attention to the warning signs along the way - and *not go there*, okay?

One step back from abomination in the *tumah malware infection* continuum is a state the Holy One calls '*tzara'at*'. *Tzara'at* involves an oozing, active, toxic discharge of *tumah*. Heaven forbid - is that a description of what your life - or the life of anyone you know - has been like lately? The presence of *tzara'at* in a person means he or she is so badly infected with the *tumah* malware virus that uncleanness is spewing out of his or her flesh like a volcano. The usual signs are [1] a *persistently bad attitude*, [2] *outbursts of negative emotions* - things like anger, outrage, jealousy, fear, worry, and depression, [3] *speech that is habitually*

critical, accusatory, sarcastic, and/or demeaning, and [4] self-obsessed, shrew-like reaction and behavior patterns.

To have *tzara'at* is to get as far away from the holiness to which we are being called as a human being can get – and still be able to come back. A person with such a condition is known as a *metzora*. To become a *metzora* the person had to have ignored a spate of warning signs the Holy One gave regarding how to stop the encroachment of *tumah* on the soul. To become a *metzora* the person had to have wandered so far off of the Holy One's assigned pathway of life, and gotten so heavily dosed in the *tumah* of this world, that he or she is – temporarily at least - simply became too toxic for human association.

Fortunately *tzara'at* - unlike the advanced and almost always fatal condition the Holy One calls 'abomination' - is completely reversible. All one has to do to be purged of *tzara'at*, and restored to a state of Bridal purity and Kingdom productivity, is to start to pay attention to one's flesh eruptions, self-diagnose – and then follow the simple cleansing protocols that our Bridegroom-King has graciously laid out for us. All one has to do is start making 'bride's choices', instead of continuing down the pathway of 'shrew's choices'.

It is Time to Make a Bride's Choice: For the Sake of the Bridegroom-King and the Kingdom of Heaven, Will You Reject All Things Tamei?

If the Bridegroom-King says 'Don't' do something – will you do it anyway? If the Bridegroom-King says 'Separate yourself' – will you just keep wallowing in that from which He called you out? If the Bridegroom-King says 'Never' – will you think to yourself 'Sometimes, when I feel like it? Ah, dear reader, a Covenant is about walking together - and how can two walk together unless they be in agreement? **Amos 3:3.**

The focus of this week's installment of the Kedusha Discourse will be upon THE PROTOCOLS BY WHICH ALL THOSE WITH TUMAH – INCLUDING THE METZORA – CAN MADE WHOLE. Are you up for it? Do you want to be whole? Do you want to represent the Holy One accurately and respectfully to the world? Do you want to get your life back on the pathway the Holy One has prescribed for life, health and peace – for you and those you love? If so, in order to double check yourself for any sign of lingering *tumah* or oozing *tzara'at* before the Divine Appointment of Passover and our celebration of freedom arrives, here are some questions you may want to ask yourself:

1. Are you currently nursing any oozing sores of anger, offense or unforgiveness - toward another human being, an ethnic group or gender, a leader of either government or religion, the Holy One, or yourself?

2. Have you been expending time, energy and passion practicing outward forms of religious activity in order to cover up scaly areas of covetousness, materialism, and/or overindulgence of the flesh's appetites, drives and urges?

3. Have you been releasing any toxic discharges – in attitude, in mood, in emotion, in opinion, in body language, in speech, or in behavior?

4. Are you walking around in rags covered with either the filth of human flesh or human blood? Or are you wearing fine linen garments, clean and white?

5. Is being around you pleasant, inspiring, and beneficial – or unpleasant and dangerous - for other human beings?

6. Is your home a sweet haven of Heavenly *shalom* - or a budding Sodom and Gomorrah full of worldly indulgences, fierce territoriality, profane thought and speech, self-obsession and contention?

What You Sow, That Shall You Reap

The Holy One is good, and He is kind. His primary attributes, as He Himself described them, are *mercy, graciousness, longsuffering, abounding in goodness and truth, and forgiving of iniquity, transgression, and sin*. **Genesis 34:6-7**. His Thoughts and His Words are always consistent with these attributes. He is always looking for and calling forth with Empowering Words the essential good He has created – and ever sees - in everything [See **Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31**]. While He understands evil, He has neither fear of it nor repulsion against it - for He knows that evil of every kind, in every dimension and degree can always be overcome with good. He knows beyond a shadow of a doubt that He can work all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His Purpose [i.e. the purpose of redemption].

All the Holy One's thoughts - and hence all His Words - are therefore redemptive in nature. Even when He must, for the sake of love, use His Words for discipline or chastisement He always does so as a precursor to even greater levels of blessing. From whence, then, come negative words? Negative words come from *unenlightened, un-surrendered minds*. Negative words come from hearts that have refused to receive and be changed by the Holy One's mercy, His graciousness, His longsuffering, His goodness, His truth, and His forgiveness of sin, iniquity and rebellion. Negative words thus testify that their speaker has rejected the Holy One's thoughts and ways and chosen instead the way of the serpent – the way of cynicism, disputation, accusation, criticism and self-righteous judgment. Negative thoughts and words testify that someone has been keeping company with the ultimate *tamei* creature – the serpent – and has embraced his *tumah*.

Unfortunately, whenever a person starts down this path, if they do not heed the

Holy One's gentle admonishment that '*sin lies at your door, and its desire is for you, but you can rule over it!*' [Genesis 4:7], negative thoughts and attitudes entrench themselves in his soul. A destructive process is activated. Like weeds in a garden, any negative thoughts and attitudes one does not reject begin to reproduce. They sprout, take root and start to take over. In short order the infestation manifests in negative speech. Then come the cynical rolling of the eyes, the impatient chuckle of derision, and the disapproving frown that accompanies and reinforces negative speech. In this manner, men and women who are called to be a light to the world, a blessing to all families of the earth, and ambassadors of the Most Merciful, Gracious, Longsuffering, Kind, and Forgiving King in the Universe become ... well, they become *something else* – something malignant – something *ugly* and *destructive* and *sickening*.

Oh Beloved – every time we allow that to happen we thereby dishonor not only our neighbor [which is murder], and ourselves [which is false witness]; we also dishonor the Holy One [which is blasphemy]. When we speak or express attitudes non-verbally in a manner which is negative concerning a fellow human being, we take the road of the Serpent. What we are really spewing is the putrid flesh of the fruit with which that *tamei* creature and his minions are obsessed – *i.e.* the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the Garden of Eden, as you will recall, the Serpent spoke evil of the Holy One – impugning His motives in telling Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The poison seed the serpent spouted was received by Chava, and she made her mind a womb where that poison seed could grow and receive sustenance, and from which it could bring forth its evil fruit. The words – and negative vibrations – festered in Chava's mind, driving a wedge of separation between herself and the Holy One, first of all, and, eventually, between herself and Adam⁵.

So it always is with negative speech. What do you think happens when you make critical comments toward another human being? What happens is that you drive a wedge – a wedge:

- [1] between *yourself and the Holy One*,
- [2] between *yourself and the person you criticize*, and
- [3] between *the person you criticize and whoever may listen to your criticism*.

Lashon ha ra is anti-social, divisive behavior in its most primal form. It isolates people from the Benevolent Creator, from their destiny, and from each other. And

⁵ Before this incident, Adam said of Chava "... *she is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh*". Genesis 2:23. Afterwards he said: "... *the woman you put here with me, she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.*" Note the difference in perspective. Consider what 'grace' Chava forfeited by receiving and heeding the Serpent's *lashon ha ra*.

it also *isolates* the speaker - and everyone who embraces his or her negative words - from the person they were created to be. Negative speech is Serpent venom – nothing more, nothing less. But do not worry – the Holy One has an anti-venom.

The Anti-Venom

If negative speech is serpent venom, *tzara'at* is the Holy One's chosen form of anti-venom. *Shaul* of Tarsus [i.e. the 'apostle Paul'] wrote to the embattled community at Corinth: "*Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap*". Here is how that works in the realm of negative speech. He/she who brings about isolation through negative speech will himself/herself be isolated. Instead of testifying negatively about others he will have to testify negatively about himself - first through the nonverbal language of running *tzara'at* sores, then by living outside the camp, unkempt, and uncovered, proclaiming '*Tamei! Tamei!*', every time he/she sees someone approaching. Is this the wrath of a vengeful God? Or is it the discipline of a loving Father, and the anti-venom of the Great Physician? In parsha *Metzora* we will begin to clearly see that it is the latter, not the former.

The Scalpel of the Great Physician Stands At the Ready

The Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover is about to enter its most dramatic phase. None of our number is exempt from its beautifying effects – not even the one modern English readers have come to call 'the leper'. In the Hebrew text, this one is called *ha-metzora* – i.e. the spewing human fountain of *tzara'at*. Parsha *Metzora* therefore begins with the Holy One's instructions as to how a *metzora* – i.e. one with the most severe degree of *tumah* that is reversible – can be cleansed. The Torah contemplates, you see, that every *metzora* can and will be made whole. The Holy One wants us to *envision a glorious healing*, not *fixate on a horrible disease*. Torah's instructions regarding the *metzora* are therefore not about *accusation* or *condemnation* – they are about *restoration*. In this parsha the Holy One lays out in advance all the details by which a *metzora* who has returned to a state of wholeness can re-enter the pathway to life, health, and peace and rejoin the rest of the Redeemed Community in the Great Mission of Redemption.

Before the parsha is over the Holy One will also discuss the symptoms and laws of "house *tzara'at*", the presence in our homes of which is indicated by the appearance of discolorations in the stones of the homes of people who refuse the Holy One's invitation to deal with the *tumah* in their lives. Our Bridegroom-King will then conclude the parsha with a series of warnings about various circumstances and conditions that can infect us with *tumah* and send us down a very dark road. This part of the Divine Discourse will get really, really personal, as the Holy One's instructions touch on intimate and highly personal activities. Topics covered will include natural bodily processes associated with menstruation, procreative activity, as well as various abnormal bodily emissions and discharges.

In each case the procedure for returning to a *tahor* state is laid out by our Divine Bridegroom in detail in order that there can be no question but that His goal in bringing every situation to the fore is redemptive, not punitive. The Holy One is wise, kind, faithful, and good. He always has a recovery strategy in mind, and is constantly at work leading us to and through its steps. He always has a course correction mapped out to offset every course deviation we can dream up. He always has a plan of healing that will cause every seemingly impossible situation we can create to culminate in joyful celebration. Blessed be His Glorious Name!

Starting the Patient on the Pathway To Restoration

The Holy One does not intend for the *tzara'at* He brings to the surface as anti-venom to be a permanent condition. *Tzara'at* is intended as a cure -- not as a disease. The Holy One's purpose is merely to spur the one afflicted -- in Hebrew, the *metzora* - to repentance, to *t'shuvah*, and to restoration. Hence parsha *Metzora* begins with the occurrence of a wonderful thing - a person with *tzara'at* is supernaturally *healed*. The Holy One wants us to know how to help the former *metzora* make the transition back to the Covenantal lifestyle. He therefore provides a detail-rich 'how to' manual to guide us -- and of course the former *metzora* - through the whole joyful process. The process begins with *a meeting, outside the camp, between what have now become old and dear friends*. But how does this meeting occur? The *metzora* cannot come to the *Mish'kan* and present himself/herself to the *kohen* there; it is clear that until the process is much farther along, the *metzora* must remain outside the camp at all times -- and either wait for the *kohen* to come out and see him according to the seven-day cycles established by Torah, or he/she must rely upon some benevolent passerby to agree to go to the *Mish'kan* and ask the *kohen* to make the journey out to the *metzora's* isolated abode. Whichever way it occurs, some unselfish person from the community must act as an intermediary for the *metzora* -- if necessary becoming *tamei* himself/herself for the *metzora's* sake.

Note that this protocol assures that the *metzora* - he/she who consistently and repeatedly spoke evil of a fellow human being - now finds himself/herself totally dependent upon the goodness, graciousness, and unselfishness of another human being. He who himself/herself brought about division among the Holy One's people must now depend upon the willingness of another human to sacrifice on his/her behalf in order to bring about reconciliation. A necessary first step in the process of healing and restoration is thus *to give the metzora a renewed appreciation for his fellow human being which was obviously lacking previously*.

Getting word to the *kohen*, however, is just the beginning. The *kohen* who has been working with the affected person all along, and knows all about his/her *lashon ha ra* and the issues underlying it, then must agree to leave the holy environs of the

Mish'kan and head out into the desert – and the realm where the chol and tamei proliferate - alone. This is a beautiful illustration of a person denying oneself in the course of serving others, and of going the extra mile, and carrying the extra burden, for someone who clearly does not deserve it. What a testimony of the Holy One's love!

V'yatza ha-kohen el-michutz l'machaneh

The priest is to go outside the camp,

V'ra'ah ha-kohen v'hineh nir'pa nega ha-tzara'at min ha-tzarua

And he is to examine the metzora to confirm that the plague of tzara'at is healing.

When the *kohen* reaches the remote area where the afflicted stays, meditates and recuperates, he greets his old friend with a smile. This is no ivory tower. This is no well-kept study hall or house of worship. This is the abode of uncleanness. This is the house of bondage and shame – the ‘hell hole’ as it were. After engaging the *metzora* in conversation, without a trace of condescension, contempt, or condemnation, the *kohen* will carefully unwrap the *metzora*'s bandages and inspect all areas of the person's body spots, sores, scales, lesions, boils, blemishes were the last time these two spoke. If after a thorough and intimate inspection of each spot, sore, scale, lesion, boil, and blemish, the *kohen* is satisfied that there is now in none of those places any *raw, irritated flesh, any expansion of scale, any abnormal growth of discolored hair*, or any other sign of acute and active *tzara'at*, imagine his broad smile! Imagine the joy with which he reports his findings to the *metzora*. Imagine the *metzora*'s great relief!

It is now time for the implementation of the Holy One's protocols for the former *metzora* to transition from his/her ‘ultra- *tamei*’ status as a *metzora* back to *tahor* status, and a return to “normal” life and relations. After the two share the ‘good news’, therefore, the *kohen* and the *metzora* become partners in the next phase of the protocol.

Setting the Stage for the Great Cathartic Play: The Process of Selection, Collection, and Preparation of the Elements

Between them they must collect all the following Divinely prescribed elements for use in the powerfully moving, three-part purification celebration ceremony called for by Torah:

1. Two *tzipporim chayot tahorot* – i.e. living birds of a *tahor* species – must be caught or purchased;
2. a branch of *etz erez* – i.e. cedar wood must be cut;
3. *shani tola'at* – either a vial of scarlet dye, or a linen thread dyed scarlet - must be extracted or acquired; and
4. an *ezob* – or twig of hyssop - must be cut; and

5. *k'li cheres* – i.e. a clay pot must be obtained;
6. *mayim chayim* – i.e. living water must be found, drawn, and vesseled;
7. *clean/new clothes for the former metzora to put on must be procured*;
8. *the best two male lambs⁶ from the metzora's family's flock must be set apart as korbanot kadosh l'Adonai*;
9. *one female lamb from the metzora's family's flock must be set apart as a korban kadosh l'Adonai*.
10. *six quarts of choice flour from the metzora's family bins must be set apart and dedicated*; and
11. *a cup or vial of the metzora's family's purest olive oil must be set apart and dedicated as well*.

Of course, since the *metzora* is still in isolation, much of this work must be done for him by the kohen, working closely with members of the *metzora's* family. The kohen must examine each element, find it acceptable or explain why it is not, and authorize or reject it. This takes time and patience, not to mention investment of significant resources. The *kohen* sacrifices his time and effort; the family sacrifices its time, effort, and assets; and it is all for one who once slandered others – most likely including the very people who are now sacrificing for him/her - with every breath.

Here is love, vast as the ocean; lovingkindness as the flood.

Grace and love, like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above.

And Heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.

[*Here is Love Vast as the Ocean*, an early 19th Century hymn by William Rees]

Act I of the Joyful Purification Ceremony – the First Day Protocols

Once the elements are collected and set apart, a great three-act play begins. It all starts in the *metzora's* humble and isolated dwelling, with the *killing of one of the two birds*.

V'tzivah ha-kohen v'shachat et ha-tzipor ha-echat

The priest is to direct that one bird be slaughtered

el-kli-cheres al-mayim chayim

over living water in a clay bowl.

The death of the first bird, who gives his life that his fellow living creature might be spared, represents the termination of the *metzora's* former, diseased state. As this first bird's life is ebbing away, the kohen gets his hands and garments dirty again. He must *collect the fresh, red blood of this bird in the clay pot of living water* that has been set aside for this purpose. Into that mixture of blood and water

⁶ In case of poverty, one male lamb and two turtledoves or pigeons may be substituted for the two male and one female lambs, but two quarts of fine flour, plus the vial or cup of olive oil, are to be provided.

the *kohen* then immerses *the cedar wood, the scarlet dye - or a thread dyed with it, the sprig of hyssop*, and then *the second bird*, representing the former metzora's new, healed and restored identity.

Et ha-tzipor ha-chayah yikach otah v'et-etz ha-erez

And the live bird he is to take, together with the piece of cedar,

v'et-shni ha-tola'at v'et ha-ezov

the crimson, and the hyssop,

v'taval otam v'et ha-tzipor ha-chayah

And he is to dip [each of the elements] along with the live bird

b'dam ha- tzipor ha-sh'chutah al ha-mayim ha-chayim

into living water mingled with the blood of the slaughtered bird.

Four times the *kohen* plunges his hands into the water and the blood; four times his hands emerge. Out of death emerges new life. Out of the water and the blood emerges a new creation, foursquare. *Selah!*

The Sprinkling of the Blood

The first act in the great play is just beginning, Scene two of this Act involves the *kohen* approaching the former metzora for a *dramatic sprinkling ceremony*. The *kohen* must dip his hands into the blood seven times. Each time he must sprinkle/shake it from his hands onto the body of the person who once slandered everyone he or she did not like – to provide that person a blood covering like that of the four elements the *kohen* dipped in the blood/water mixture in the first scene.

V'tiharo v'shilach

and the person will become tahor

Free-Bird Flying – Free at Last! Free Indeed!

The next part of the protocol is *the great release ceremony*. The *kohen* takes the remaining, living bird, still dripping with its cohort's blood, out to a field. Holding it with both hands, he lifts it high into the air ... and sets it free. Off it goes, into the skies - to fly majestically, to rejoin its family, to live, and to thrive as its Creator intended.

et ha-tzipor ha-chayah al p'nei ha-sadeh

He is then to send the living bird away toward the fields.

One bird dies; one bird gets covered with the other's blood - then gets set gloriously free. It is hard not to notice the parallel between the two birds of the *metzora-tahoring* protocol – one of which dies, and the other of which goes free, with many of Torah's pictures of people and things which came in 'twos'. Think of Kayin and Hevel. Think of Avraham's two sons, Yishma'el and Yitzchak. Think of Yitzchak's two sons, Ya'akov and Esav. Think of the two images of Messiah in

Hebrew tradition – Messiah ben Yosef and Messiah ben David. Think of the two goats of *Yom Kippur* [the Day of Atonement]. In each case one either dies [or is cut off from his father and considered as dead], and the other one goes free and walks in the special blessing of the Holy One. There is something significant just below the surface [or perhaps hovering somewhere above it] of all these situations.

Starting Over – With All Things New!

After the freed bird flies away, another series of symbolic ‘new man arising’ ceremonies are to be carried out by the person who has been healed under the *kohen*’s supervision. First the person who has been healed shaves cuts off all the hair from his or her head, closely shaving every bit of hair from his or her scalp, cheeks, throat, neck, and eyebrow areas. After all the hair of the person’s head and neck area is completely gone, making his or her scalp and skin is as smooth as those of one newborn, it is time for him or her to completely self-immersed in a living water *mikveh*. When the person arises from the *mikveh*, he or she puts on the clean clothes selected for the occasion.

Clothed, and In His - or Her - Right Mind

Act I of the restoration ceremony thus ends with the person ‘clothed’ in pure, pristine, white linen garments, but finally ‘in his – or her - ‘right mind’. Wow! It has been a long, long road. At long last, the former *metzora* can re-enter the camp as any other redeemed soul. He/she need never again shrink back from human contact in shame, much less cover his or her lip and cry out ‘*TAMEI! TAMEI!*’ at everyone he/she meets. But he/she is only part way ‘home’; and must stay alone for six full days in what we might call a temporary ‘half-way house’ tent.

V’chibes ha mitaher et-begadav

The person undergoing purification is then to immerse his clothing,

V’gilach et-kol-se'aro

And he is to shave off all his hair.

V’rachatz b’mayim v’taher

He is then to immerse in a mikvah and thus complete stage one of purification.

v'achar yavo el ha-machaneh

He may then return to the camp,

v’yashav michutz l’aholo shiv’at yamim

but he must remain outside his tent for seven days.

[Leviticus 14:8]

Part II of the Purification Ceremony – the Seventh Day Protocols

There is now a ‘lull’ or intermission of sorts in the great play. Six days of *re-entry*, *re-acclimation*, *teshuvah*, and testimony take place. On the seventh day, the second phase of the *tahor-ing* ceremony will commence. Everyone the person once

mocked, slandered, bullied, ranted at, lusted over, judged unkindly, gossiped about, etc. is to be seen, humbly approached, and asked for forgiveness. At the conclusion of this process, the former *metzora* will again shave off all hair – the ‘six days growth’ - from his/her scalp, cheeks, throat, neck, and eyebrow areas. When this is done, the person will once again completely immerse himself/herself in a living water *mikveh*. The first time he/she did this it was very private, outside the camp, with just the *kohen* assigned to his restoration knowing what was going on. This time the process is repeated inside the camp, and using the same water source the other people in the camp – including those the former *metzora* once mocked, slandered, gossiped about etc. – go to immerse themselves before entering the Courts of the *Mish'kan*.

Part III of the Purification Ceremony – the Eighth Day Protocols

Then on the eighth day, the last great day of the *tahor*-ing celebration ceremony, everyone in the community is called to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The now *tahor* former *metzora* is escorted to the brazen altar by his now intimate friend, the *kohen*. The former *metzora* brings with him/her the two male and one female lambs - or, in cases of poverty, one male lamb and two turtledoves or pigeons – and the prescribed quantities of both his finest wheat flour and his purest olive oil.

The Making of Korban Asham

One of the male lambs is then presented as a *korban asham* – to symbolize the removal of all guilt, shame, regret, angst, emotional trauma, and stigma associated with having had *tzara'at*.

The Public, and Very Hands-On Anointing of the Formerly ‘Untouchable’ Person With Oil

To testify of the completeness of the stigma removal, the *kohen* will take apply some of the blood of this male lamb to the former *metzora*’s right ear lobe, the thumb of his or her right hand, and the big toe of his or her right foot.

Next, the *kohen* pours a liberal quantity of pure olive oil from the cup or vial into the palm of his left hand. He will then dip his right index finger into the pool of oil in his palm, and ‘sprinkle’ the oil on his finger in the direction of the inner sanctum, representing the Holy One Himself. The *kohen* will repeat this process until he has sprinkled oil toward the Holy Place seven times in all. Then, from the leftovers of the oil in his left palm, the *kohen* will sprinkle the same parts of the former *metzora*’s body to which he previously applied the blood of the male lamb that served as his or her *asham*. The *kohen* will then smear the remainder of the oil in his left hand on the person’s recently shaved head.

The Making of Korban Chata'at, Korban Olah and Korban Minchah

The final crescendo of the *tahor-ing* ceremony is then provided through the presentation of the second male lamb [or a turtledove/pigeon] as a *chata't* – *i.e.* an acknowledgment of and request for atonement for violations of the Torah; followed by presentation of the female lamb as an *olah* – *i.e.* as a testimony of the subordination of the former *metzora's will* – *regarding the past, present, and future* - to the Holy One's will; and the presentation of a cup of precious flour, on which has been drizzled the purest, most valuable, olive oil from the *metzora's* family's treasury – *i.e.* a commitment of all material things in or that will come into the possession of the former *metzora* to the Plan, purposes, and service of the Holy One for it.

Then ... well, then *newness of life* happens. Then newness of life must be walked out, day after day, situation after situation, interaction after interaction. Temptations to resort to old ways, and engage in *lashon hara*, indulge lust, greed, manipulation, anger, paranoia, and other forms of narcissism must be faced and overcome. Tumah must be recognized for the identity-stealing, mission-sabotaging and destiny-destroying threat that it is – not just to the person who just came out of its prison, but also for every human being alive.

Free Bird Flying

The most fascinating part of today's aliyah – and of the whole process of redemption from *tzara'at* – involves the Holy One's instructions concerning what is to be done with the two birds. One bird dies; one bird gets covered with the other's blood - then gets set free. It is hard not to notice the parallel between the two birds of the *metzora* – one of which dies, and the other of which goes free, with many of Torah's pictures of people and things which came in 'twos'. Think of Kayin and Hevel. Think of Avraham's two sons, Yishma'el and Yitzchak. Think of Yitzchak's two sons, Ya'akov and Esav. Think of the two images of Messiah in Hebrew tradition – Messiah ben Yosef and Messiah ben David. Think of the two goats of *Yom Kippur* [the Day of Atonement]. In each case one either dies [or is cut off from his father and considered as dead], and the other one goes free and walks in the special blessing of the Holy One. There is something significant just below the surface [or perhaps hovering somewhere above it] of all these situations.

Catching Reflections of Messiah In it All

Some ancient sources consider parsha *Metzora* to allude to Messiah's appearance in the world. They quote an ancient midrash: "What is Messiah's name? The Leper of the School of Rabbi, as implied by the prophecy, "*He has borne our sicknesses and endured our afflictions.*" *Messiah will sit among the lepers and be a leper himself.* The sages reason that the *metzora* described in Leviticus 14 is the Messiah

as he exists while Israel is in *galut* [exile]. He is not a part of the community; he is unable to fellowship with, much less deliver and/or rule over his bothers. Unbeknownst to them, he is bearing their punishment and their sin on their behalf as the one bird bears the punishment and sin of and for the other. Similarly the sages say that the other term that recurs over and over in parsha *Metzora* - *tahor* - refers to Messiah *after he reveals himself and brings about the end of galut and the promised redemption*. The sages say therefore that Messiah is called a *metzora* (Sanhedren 98b) because his job is to purify all evil from the world and that can only be done if the evil first comes to the surface. They point out that *tzara'at* is a skin condition - consisting of impurity that has been brought to the surface. This brings up a conundrum of sorts for the sages. How could Messiah be a *metzora* and still be able to enter the camp and assume leadership? And yet they believe that is exactly what will happen. How can this be though? Consider the Torah's strange pronouncement that someone whose entire body was afflicted was, though afflicted with *tzara'at*, considered *tahor*. Wait a minute – when he has one or two spots or blemishes a man is a *metzora* – but when he is *completely covered with tzara'at* he is *tahor*. Does it make sense now? As soon as he takes all the evil world's sin and rebellion on him, and bears the evidence of it in all areas of his flesh, so that he is so horribly disfigured by the chastisement that he is unrecognizable, he becomes *tahor*. And so Messiah did – *all for you and for me!*

The sages see the *metzora* of Leviticus 14 as symbolic of the sons of Israel in exile. Israel, they reason, has, like the *metzora*, has been *sent outside the camp to live, until the time of cleansing comes*. They see the *kohen* [priest] referenced in Leviticus 14, who ultimately declares the *metzora tahor* again, as the Holy One Himself, Who will tell us when the time for *geulah* [redemption] has come. Some Messianic believers, however, might see the *kohen* in question as Yochanan the Immerser, a direct descendant of Aharon, who ministered in the spirit of Eliyahu, who declared Yeshua of Natzret to be *tahor*.

The sages see the two birds of the purification ceremony as two Messiahs - *Mashiach ben Yosef* and *Mashiach ben David* - and see the three species – *etz* [wood], *erev* [wool (of crimson)], and *ezov* [hyssop] – as representing the three patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, respectively. Followers of Messiah might however see in the two birds of Leviticus 14 the manifestation of the *Ruach* which rested upon Yeshua after His immersion by Yochanan in the Yarden, which would both die and live [through the Resurrection], and might see in the *etz* [wood] the substance of the Roman execution stake, in the *erev* (wool) the garment of Yeshua for which the Roman soldiers cast lots [**Matthew 27:35; Luke 23:34**], and in the *ezov* [hyssop] the substance used by the Romans to offer Yeshua vinegar water [**John 19:29**].

The sages and followers of Yeshua alike see the bird set free as representing the triumphant Mashiach ben David, who will fly all over the fields of earth [see **Leviticus 14:7**] in order to harvest the long-lost descendants of Avraham from where they have been dispersed throughout the entire world. The eventual return of the *metzora* to the camp is thus to be equated not only with the return of Yeshua but with the resultant redemption of Israel from exile, as spoken of by the prophets of the TaNaKh as well as by Shaul of Tarsus [See **Romans 11**].

While I do not dare presume to have the ‘final word’ on this, please give some consideration to the following. The Hebrew word *tzipor*, *tzade*, *peh*, *resh*, which our English Bibles translate as ‘bird’, has a numerical value [all Hebrew letters are also numbers] of 370. This is the same numerical value of the Hebrew phrase ‘*Zeh Mashiach*’ [this is Messiah].

The Redemptive Purpose of the Holy One

Whether the picture of the two advents of Messiah is visible to you in this passage or not, one thing should be clear: The Holy One desires for those stricken with *tzara’at* to be made *tahor*.⁷ The whole purpose of *nega tzara’at* [the plague of *tzara’at*] is redemptive, not punitive. To be made *tahor* however a *metzora* must realize why he/she has been stricken - i.e. what areas of *lashon ha ra*, or evil speech, he/she has consistently engaged in which are inconsistent with his Redeemed Nature - and *must begin to look upon his fellow human beings the way the Holy One sees them*, rather than critically and negatively. And of course he/she must make *t’shuvah*.

A Gateway to Wholeness Entered By Trusting and Following

You see, dear ones, the protocols the Holy One sets out in Torah for regaining what the Covenant recognizes a *tahor* state are a mere gateway of surrender to the greater process. Some might refer to them as just a ‘first step of faith’. The better word would be trust – and in particular the kind and level of trust that results in *sh’mā* responsiveness. It means trusting the Holy One enough to agree to do exactly what He says. The kind of faith/trust that doing what Torah says will restore you to a *tahor* status is not faith/trust in the protocol; it is faith/trust in the Author of the protocol. That is because the Holy One's protocols are not designed to have any efficacy in and of themselves. They are designed merely to set a *tamei* person who wishes to be *tahor* again on a journey to complete wholeness of body and integration of soul.

⁷ Please see Monday’s Study of parsha *Tazria* for a detailed discussion of the status of *tamei*, and how it differs from a status of *tahor*.

Once a person takes the first step on that journey, the Holy One agrees, as part of His Covenant, to look upon the person as if that person has already completed the journey. After all, he is both Eternal and Omniscient. He sees the end of a thing from the beginning. He merely declares what He sees – even though we who can only see through a glass darkly think we see something else. In other words, the protocols called for by Torah are merely the necessary first step of sweet surrender to a process of restoring wholeness that may take a lifetime. With the first step comes a commitment to follow through on all the others - and keep the heart and mind ever moving in that direction as the Shepherd leads.

Completing the protocols to be declared *tahor* is the gateway through which one re-enters the full spectrum of the Torah lifestyle. That, of course, means expending energy loving the Holy One with all heart, soul, and strength, meditating on and living out in real time His Words of Life instead of fixating on terrible things and terrible people. The Holy One will lead you faithfully through the process, dear ones – if you let Him.

Getting an Inspired Vision for the House and the Home

Do you have a vision for what kind of home the Holy One wants you to have? Do you have an understanding as to what kind of attitudes, speech, behaviors, and material things, if you allow them in your life, your home, and your family activities and relationships, will hinder if not derail the Holy One's vision and your dream? What kind of home environments do you think the Holy One envisions His Redeemed modeling to the world? What atmosphere should be present in them? What decorating motifs do you think fit in with the Bridegroom-King's Plan – and which do not? What should go on in the houses of the Redeemed? What kinds and qualities of conversations, activities, interactions, priorities and atmospheres should characterize those dwellings? On the other hand, what should the houses of the redeemed definitely NOT look like? What should definitely NOT go on in them? What kind of conversations, activities, interactions, priorities and atmospheres should most definitely NOT characterize them? It makes one think, doesn't it?

It is time to get serious about – and take responsibility for – what we bring into, and what we say and do in, our houses. We cannot and should not try to control what others who live there – especially adults - bring into the house, speak into the atmosphere there, or do there, of course. But we most definitely can – and should - take responsibility for every thought, word, and action emanating from within us. Our tents and tabernacles should inspire pagans to sigh 'how lovely' – even when they are made of wood and stone. And out of our homes should flow love, mercy, kindness and forgiveness, all mingled with the beautiful sound of the praises and

the wise counsel of our King.

Is There Shalom In Your Home?

Let us consider, for a few moments, the houses in which we live. We are a specially chosen people - a kingdom of priests and a Holy Nation unto Him. The places we eat, sleep, observe the Sabbath, take our wives, honor our parents, raise our families, and generally learn how to get along and work with each other and cultivate relationship with the Holy One should be little beachheads of Heaven on earth. So, I ask you - is there *shalom* in your home? Whatever your answer, have you considered why that might – or might not – be the case? Our houses are not just *places to toss our hat and 'let it all hang out'*. Neither are they to be *palaces to show off our wealth*, or *museums to show off our artistic flair*, or *moated castles that isolate and protect us from the world around us*. Our houses are spiritual habitations – places of *gladness, thanksgiving, prayer, bonding, blessing, worship, study and meditation*.

What Does the Torah Say About the Houses of the Redeemed?

Torah tells us several things about our houses. It started at the first ***Pesach***, where the Holy One told us that **the blood of the Pesach Lamb was to be a sign for us on the houses in which we lived**. As part of our commemoration of *Pesach* He told us that we are, as the full moon approaches in the first month of the Biblical year, to remove all *se'or* [leaven] and ***chametz*** [leavened products] from our houses. We are then to meticulously keep them free of *se'or* and ***chametz*** for seven full days. **Exodus 12:13, 15, 19**. The calling of the Holy One upon our home-life then expanded greatly in Deuteronomy 6:7. There Moshe told us that the primary thing we are supposed to do in our homes is speak about the mitzvot of the Holy One's Torah when we sit there. See also **Deuteronomy 11:20**. Then in Deuteronomy 6:9 Moshe instructed us to inscribe the mitzvot of the Holy One's Torah on the doorposts of our houses – and on our gates as well. In Deuteronomy 7 we were instructed that *we are not to bring any detestable thing into our house*. If we bring a detestable thing – anything the Holy One calls an abomination – into our houses we are assured that we will, like the detestable thing we brought in, thereby set ourselves and our households apart from the Holy One , and bring about our home's destruction. **Deuteronomy 7:26**.

The Psalmist picked up on these Torah truths and put them in language we could understand and put into practice. taught us that we are to *walk in our houses with blameless hearts, that while there we are to set no vile thing before our eyes*. He also taught us that we are to let no one dwell in our houses who practices deceit. **Psalm 101:2,3,7**. Indeed, the houses in which the people of the Holy One dwell are to be very, very *special places*. They are to be safe places. They are to be welcoming places. They are to be joyful places. They are to be exciting places. They are to be

places of *celebration*, of *Torah teaching*, of *purity*, of *prayer*, and of *Messianic fervor*. So ... is *your house* that kind of place, Beloved? If not, why not?

Are You Ready for a ‘Home Study’?

In some jurisdictions no child custody decision is made until a licensed professional counselor performs and reports to the court the results of what is called a ‘home study’. This occurs when an appointed counselor visits the homes of the parents or potential custodians of children to evaluate how good or how toxic the environment is for the welfare and development of the children. So ... if the Holy One were to order a ‘home study’ of *your residence*, what would He find? How much shalom is there? How much joy? How much practical evidence of love? How much Messianic fervor? What does Sabbath look like there? What do the six ‘workdays’ look like? How much Torah discussion – and practice – goes on in your house in an ordinary day? A week? A month? A year? How much prayer, praise and worship go on there on a week-by-week basis? Do you walk with a ‘*blameless heart*’ in your house? Are there any ‘*detestable things*’ allowed there? Go room by room. How about the entryway – what is there, and what message does it send? What is in the living room? The kitchen? The Den? The Bedroom? The Bathroom? The Closet? The Garage? The music room? The library? The computer room?

What kind of entertainment fills the airwaves? What *celebrations* take place in your house? Is the atmosphere in the home alive with affirmation and encouragement - or is it rife with complaint, criticism, judgmentalism and sarcasm? Are Kingdom-quality love, joy, and hope modeled there? How about Kingdom-quality kindness, longsuffering, meekness, goodness, and self-control? What values are inscribed on the doorposts and the gates of the house in which you live? What is the focus of the conversations that echo through your house on a day-to-day basis? Is *truthfulness* –or *deceitfulness* – more prevalent?

Those are tough questions I know, dear ones. But they need to be asked - and re-asked, and asked again. Part of our purpose and destiny, you see, involves making our residences into houses of *shalom* – living, breathing Torah lifestyle centers. Unfortunately, sometimes our houses reflect anything but the kind of peace, joy, and focus that people in intimate relationship with, and in the process of becoming like, the Holy One should reflect. Sometimes, alas, our houses wind up having *spots* and *blemishes* – just like us. Hmmm - I wonder if there is a connection.

Houses With Spots and Blemishes

Eretz Yisrael - the wonderful bridal chamber the Divine Bridegroom has prepared from before the foundation of the world for His Betrothed Bride - is a marvelous place. Even there, however, the *houses will not always be perfect*. In fact, the Holy

One makes it crystal clear to us long before we leave Sinai that even in the land of Promise the Holy One *is going to have to strike some of our houses with tzara'at*. For in His own Voice He tells us:

Ki tavo'u el-eretz Kena'an

When you come to the land of Canaan,

asher ani noten lachem l'achuzah

which I am giving to you as an inheritance,

v'natati nega tzara'at b'veyt eretz achuzatchem

and I place the mark of tzara'at in a house in the land you inherit ...

[Leviticus 14:33-34]

When we get to the land of promise, take possession of it, and build houses to dwell in, the Holy One warns us that He is actually going to give some of those houses *nega* [i.e. the mark] of *tzara'at*. *What meaneth this?* The verb the Holy One uses to describe the impartation of the *nega* of *tzara'at* is *natati* [or *I will give*]. *Natati* is a form of the same verb the Holy One uses to describe His *giving* of the land of Kena'an as an inheritance. The Hebrew thus makes it clear – selected houses in the Holy Land won't just be '*infected*' with *mildew* because of excessive moisture - as houses sometimes are elsewhere in the world. Selected houses in the Holy Land will be purposely given *nega tzara'at* by the Holy One. What is even more amazing, it appears that the Holy One actually intends the Divine gift of *nega tzara'at* to selected houses in Eretz Yisrael to be *a part of His covenant blessing upon His people*. Why? How can *nega tzara'at* be either a gift or a blessing?

Let the Rocks Cry Out!

The Holy One instructs us what is to happen when He gives a house in the Holy Land the mark of *nega tzara'at*. Keep in mind that the Torah is, as will be clear in a few verses, speaking of houses the walls of which are made of stone. The *nega tzara'at* always involves the stones that make up the house. When *nega tzara'at* is present therefore, it is *the rocks that cry out*. When this happens, Torah tells us:

Uva asher-lo ha-bayit v'higid l'kohen l'emor

The owner of the house is to come and tell the priest,

kenega nir'ah li b'bayit

'Something like a mark appeared to me in the house.'

[Leviticus 14:35]

The first thing that is to happen when the rocks of a house cry out is that a *kohen* is to be sought out and called to make an inspection. Penetrating streaks of *bright green* or *bright red* in the stone walls of a house mean something is badly wrong with the atmosphere in that home – and that something drastic needs to be done.

The House-Redeeming Process

If upon his inspection the kohen determines that the questionable blemish on the house consists of *streaks of bright green or bright red* and extend deeper than the surface of the wall, the kohen is to board up the house and it is to remain vacant for seven days. After the seven days have elapsed, the kohen is to return to the house and conduct another examination, to determine if the spot or blemish has grown. If upon his second inspection the *kohen* determines the spot or blemish has grown during the 7-day quarantine period, the kohen is to order removal of all the stones upon which the green or red mark of *tzara'at* is visible. These stones are to be disposed of outside the city, in a place reserved for *tamei* things.

After all stones that the *kohen* deems to contain *nega tzara'at* are removed, the *kohen* is to cause the walls on the inside of the house to be scraped and scrubbed. All the dust and residue scraped from the house is to be collected and taken to a place outside the community and disposed of in a *tamei* place.

After the house is cleansed of that which polluted the atmosphere and called the stones to cry out, the stones that have been removed are to be replaced with new stones, and mortared and plastered in place. From this point, the ultimate fate of a house that has borne the mark of *nega tzara'at* in its stones hangs in the balance. There will, you see, be a THIRD INSPECTION.

If after the affected stones are replaced signs of *nega tzara'at* do not re-appear in the house, the *kohen* will pronounce the house *tahor*. He will then conduct on the site of the house a ceremony much like the one performed when a *metzora* is healed. Again, two live birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop will be utilized. The *kohen* is to *kill* one of the birds over an earthen vessel. He is then to take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the scarlet, and the living bird, dip them in the blood of the slain bird and in the running water, and sprinkle the house seven times. Then he is to let the living bird loose outside the city in an open field, and the house, will be considered *t'hor* from thence forward.

But if after the stones affected by *nega tzara'at* are replaced, signs of *nega tzara'at* break out again, that house must be torn down - stones, timbers, and plaster, and all - and the debris must be carried outside the city and disposed of. Great will be the fall of that house. But if that be the case, that is the result of choices made by man. If that be the case, men refused the precious gift of *bayit shalom* [peace and wholeness of the home] which is freely offered by the Holy One to all.

The Holy One's will is always to redeem. Hence He delights to end His discussion of the atmosphere and testimony of our houses with these encouraging words: ***v'chiper al-ha-bayit v'taher*** - he will ***make atonement*** for the house, and it will be ***tahor*** – i.e. *clean, whole, pure, worthy*. **Leviticus 14:53(b)**.

What do you think the Holy One is calling you do, dear ones – or quit doing – in order to make your house a ‘house of the holy’ – *i.e.* a place of shalom, and a refuge for the broken and hurting?

Questions For Today's Study

1. The process by which the Holy One instructs that a *Metzora* be restored to fellowship with the community after healing is specifically stated. The clear implication is that the Holy One expects those He disciplines with *tzara'at* to make *t'shuvah*, heed the discipline, and rejoin the community.

[A] List the elements/materials used by the *kohen* [priest] in the ceremony by which a person who has had *tzara'at* was restored to a *tahor* status.

[B] Where is the priest's cleansing ceremony to be performed?

[C] List, in the order they are found in Torah, the actions the priest is to perform in connection with the cleansing ceremony.

[D] Imagine you were a *Metzora* who had just completed this ceremony. Write a letter to an imaginary friend [who you had not seen for several days because you were in the isolation of the *tamei* on “high spiritual alert”] describing what you have been through, and what it meant to you to hear the *kohen* say “*Atah tahor*” [You are *tahor*!] Describe also what you will do next [Leviticus 14:8-14] before you will be able to see your friend again.

2. After the *kohen* [priest] concludes his ceremony for the *metzora*, the Holy One assigned the *metzora* certain responsibilities. If and when the *Metzora* demonstrated his submission to the Holy One by performing these *mitzvot*, the *kohen* was to complete the process.

[A] List each of the former *metzora*'s responsibilities in order.

[B] What *korbanot* are to be presented by the *metzora*?

[C] What special things does the priest do with the *korban asham*⁸ [translated as “guilt offering”, literally meaning “approach to the Holy One to have guilt removed”]? With the offering of oil?

[D] Now reread Matthew 8:4 and you will understand what Yeshua was telling “His” healed *metzora* to do. What does this tell you about Yeshua's attitude toward the Torah?

3. In another part of today's rather lengthy aliyah we see that our Covenant Partner in Heaven has made special provisions for persons who are poor, so that the poor as well as the well off may experience the joy of being declared *tahor* from *tza'arat*.

[A] How did the Holy One make it “easier” on the poor to enjoy this

⁸ See Friday's shiur of parsha *Vayikra* for a detailed discussion of the *korban asham*.

blessing?

[B] What “members” or parts of the *metzora*’s body receive a touch of the blood of one of the lambs?

[C] As which kind of korban is the lamb used?

[D] After applying the blood of the lamb to the *metzora*’s body, what does the priest next apply to the *metzora*’s body?

[E] As what kind of korbanot are the birds used?

[F] How does verse 31 describe the effect of this procedure on the *metzora*?

[G] In Strong’s look up the word translated as “atonement” in verses 29 and 31. Write the Hebrew word and its definitions.

4. Turning to the Haftarah reading for today, we find four *metzorim* living ‘outside the camp’ in the area of Jerusalem. The timing of this event is a siege of Jerusalem by the Arameans [Syrians]. The *metzorim* see their city [which they cannot enter because they are *tamei*] besieged and consumed by famine, and feel they have nothing to lose by going over to the enemy. But the Holy One has a wonderful surprise in store for them – and for the besieged citizens of His holy city! Read II Kings 6:24--7:2 to get the background for today’s Haftarah aliyah.

[A] In II Kings 7, what miracle had the Holy One performed with none of His people knowing about it?

[B] What does this tell you about the level of relationship of the Holy One’s people with the Holy One at that time?

[C] To which of His people did the Holy One choose to reveal this miracle?

5. Also in today’s haftarah the four *metzorim* about which we are reading make their approach to the camp of the Aramean [Syrian] forces besieging Samaria (the capital of the Northern Kingdom).

[A] What was the first thing the four *metzorim* did upon entering the first tent in the enemy camp?

[B] What three things did they carry off from this first tent and hide?

[C] Why did these *metzorim* hide things?

[D] From whom were they hiding them?

[E] What do you think stopped them in their tracks and caused them to stop hiding things?

[F] Of what “sin” were these men convicted?

[G] Whose judgment did these men fear?

[H] What did these men hope to accomplish by reporting what they had found to the royal palace?

6. In today’s reading from the B’rit Chadasha Shaul is speaking to the people at Rome he hopes to visit, concerning the process by which followers of Yeshua

become *k'dosh'im* [holy ones, saints]. Shaul, a Hebrew of Hebrews, likened the process of sanctification for followers of Messiah to 'the torah of the *metzora*' we read about in today's Torah aliyah. Every body part of the *metzora* affected by *tzara'at* had to be voluntarily submitted to the priest for inspection and "cleansing" to be made *tahor*. Shaul indicated that, in the same manner, every part of our body which we have used for [a] things that the Holy One has declared to be *tamei*, and [b] "wickedness", is to be voluntarily submitted to the Holy One, and surrendered to Him to use in redemptive acts [*mitzvot*] that will make us *tahor*. Remember, every time you see the word "uncleanness" in your English translations, your Hebraic mindset should kick in – and you should think "*tamei* according to the Torah".

[A] What "parts of your body" is Shaul of Tarsus saying were "*used in slavery to impurity* [i.e. things *tamei* according to the Torah] *and to ever-increasing wickedness*"?

[B] Look up the word translated "wickedness" in the NIV. [Hint: in the KJV the word is translated "*iniquity*"] Write the Greek word and its definition.

[C] On a separate piece of paper [which you will not show anyone] list each part of your body you have used in either a *tamei* or a "wicked" manner, and describe what impure or "wicked" thing(s) you have done with that part of your body. Then pray a prayer of repentance over what you wrote on the paper, receive the Holy One's forgiveness, and destroy the paper.

[D] What is Shaul saying we are to do with those same parts of our bodies from now on?

[E] On the sheet you are using for today's Torah assignment, list ways each such body part can be used for the purposes and in the manner Shaul directs.

8. Also in today's B'rit Chadasha verses Shaul continues taking the former pagans of Rome who have now met Messiah on a trip down "memory lane" to the days when their lives were focused on the things their society in Rome was focused on - self-indulgence, the pursuit of physical pleasure, entertainment, athletic accomplishment, body-beautification, personal power and popularity, and the accumulation of personal wealth.

[A] What does Shaul say these Romans were "slaves" of?

[B] In Strong's, look up the word translated as "sin". Write the Greek word and its meanings.

[C] What were these Romans "free" of before they met Messiah?

[D] In Strong's look up the words translated as "control" and "righteousness". Write the Greek words and their meanings.

[E] How does this verse fit in with Messiah Yeshua's teaching in Luke 16:13?

[F] What do you think it would mean to "despise" money, in the context

Yeshua was speaking?

[G] Do you see any relationship between what Shaul and Yeshua are saying and what the four *Metzorim* did in today's haftarah? Explain.

9. In Romans 6:22-23 Shaul talks of those who have become voluntary "slaves"/bondservants to the Holy One.

[A] Look at Malachi 3:18. How will these bondservants of the Holy One be identified as different from other people?

[B] What will surrendering to become a "slave/bondservant/husbandman/worshipper of the Holy One bring about?

[C] What will holiness [set-apartedness to the Holy One] bring about?

[D] What is the Biblical definition of the answer you just gave? [Hint: look at John 17:3!]

[E] Is this earned or does it come in some other way? If some other way, how?

[F] In Strong's, look up the words translated "wages", "sin", "death", "gift", and "eternal", and "life", as used in Romans 6:23. Write the Greek words and their definitions. Then write a brief essay on what you think Romans 6:19-23 means.

*May you be made tahor from every spot and wrinkle, and may you experience, and never forget,
The joy of a metzora who has been pronounced 'tahor'.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Job 2:1-6

*Again it happened on the day when the sons of God came
to present themselves before the Holy One that Hasatan came also among them
to present himself before the Holy One. The Holy One said to Hasatan,*

*"Where have you come from?" Hasatan answered the Holy One, and said,
"From going back and forth in the eretz, and from walking up and down in it."*

*The Holy One said to Hasatan, "Have you considered my servant Iyov?
For there is none like him in the eretz, a blameless and an upright man,
one who fears God and turns away from evil.*

*He still maintains his integrity, although you incited me against him,
to ruin him without cause." Hasatan answered the Holy One, and said,*

"Skin for skin. Yes, all that a man has will he give for his life.

*But put forth your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce you
to your face." The Holy One said to Hasatan, "Behold, he is in your hand. Only spare his life."*