

Introduction to Parsha #28: Metzora¹

READINGS: *Torah Metzora:* Leviticus 14:1 – 15:33
 Haftarah: II Kings 7:3-20; Malachi 4:1-6
 B'rit Chadasha: Romans 6:19-23



The kohen will make kafer for him – and ... tahor!
[Leviticus 14:20b]

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 3, *S'lach* [the Petition for Forgiveness]

Vayedaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor – And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying ... **Zot tihyeh torat ha-metzora b'yom tahorato** – these are the protocols for the day the metzora becomes tahor Leviticus 14:1-2a.

Have you ever met a real-life *metzora*, Beloved? Have you ever heard his/her tale of woe? Have you ever walked even a step – much less a mile - in his/her shoes? Do you know what being a *metzora* looks like? Can you imagine what he/she feels like? Do you know, from either personal experience or observation, the many ways in which the Biblical *tzara'at* a *metzora* carries in his/her flesh affects his/her life, his/her self-image, his/her family, his/her personal, business, and communal relationships? Do you know how having a *metzora* – or a group of *metzorim* - living in your area impacts the environment? In the natural, at the surface level of objective 'reality', the answer to each of those questions has to be 'no'. There is simply no such thing as Biblical *tzara'at* or a Biblical *metzora* in any era in which there is no standing Tabernacle or Temple with a functioning Aharonic priesthood. A kohen's pronouncement is necessary to make one a *metzora*; and the signs that make it possible for a *kohen* to pronounce someone a *metzora* are not visible except in the presence of a member of Aharon's bloodline.

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All that being the case, how are we to take – and what exactly are we supposed to *do with* – the detailed discussions of *tzara'at* as a condition and *metzorim* as afflicted people with which the Holy One bombards us in parshot *Tazria* and *Metzora* – at the very heart of the Torah?

***What is a Metzora? And Why On Earth Do Metzora-Protocols
Take Up So Much 'Scroll Space' in Sefer Vayikra?***

The current era of *Imanu-El* – *i.e.* God with us, dwelling in our midst, in the *Mish'kan* – is wonderful. Finally we are beginning to understand what He meant when He said that He would be *our God* - and we would be *His People*. We play host to His Majesty and Royal Retinue every day. Everything we think, say, or do is elevated. The Spiritual Searchlight/Spotlight that accompanies His Abiding Presence is intense and a little daunting – but most of us are growing to love it. Now that we have experienced this level of intimate communion with the Creator of the Universe, we wouldn't have it any other way. We like never being out of either His sight or His earshot. We are acclimating to this new experience of us going nowhere without consulting Him and Him doing nothing in the world without involving us. Most of the time we are thrilled about it. But then ... well, there are moments when – let's just say - it is a bit more than our flesh can bear. Sometimes our flesh erupts, and we want to cop an attitude, indulge a mood, or throw a hissy fit. Sometimes our pseudo-intellect tells us we should be offended, outraged, and/or incensed, and get all up into self-promotion, vigilante vengeance, and self-righteous arrogance. Sometimes our tongues and vocal chords forget in Whom we live and move and have our being and revert to old habits we picked up in Egyptian bondage. That is when our lips start uttering words of complaint, murmurings, accusation, comparison, criticism, judgment, insult, profanity, vulgarity, lewdness, delicious nuggets of gossip, and dissension – not to mention releasing torrents of mindless, self-absorbed, drivel. Sometimes we use our tongues as weapons against our fellow man. Sometimes we get on a *nasty-disposition roll*, justify our toxic negativity, take delight, even *pride*, in such things as sarcasm, cynicism, and character assassination - and we virtually *dare anyone to make us stop*. When that happens in a Spiritually supercharged atmosphere like that of the era of *Imanu-El* – well, let's just say that *tzara'at* is never far behind. If we do not realize the error of our way and clean up our act, the Holy One is not afraid to *take our dare*. He disciplines those He loves. So, before we destroy everyone around us, and drive too many people away from not only us but from Him, He intervenes. He makes dramatic examples of us – to stop us from poisoning our environment with *lashon hara*. The main tool He uses to stem the toxic outflow is *tzara'at*. If we thumb our nose at Him and His ways of emunah, of shalom, of joy, of patience, and of hope, He pulls back His Hand and lets us experience a taste of our own medicine. It is the epitome of grace, really. He

doesn't give us what we deserve – just the minimum that He knows it will take to get our attention, and incentivize us to shut down the negativity flow and get back where we belong - to the humble pathway of gratitude for life, hope for humanity and Creation, and servanthood to those most in need of love and mercy.

Being in covenant with the Creator of the Universe is a great privilege – one that should never be taken lightly. The Holy One is eminently brilliant, exquisitely skillful, incomparably wise, and unflinchingly good. He does all things well. His Presence is intoxicating. His Majesty is breathtaking. His Touch is transforming. His Words are empowering. His Spirit is invigorating. His Ways are inspiring. His Patient, Gentle, Ever-faithful Lovingkindness is humbling. His *shalom* is calming, refreshing, and healing. Who in his or her right mind would not want to know Him, delight in Him, walk with Him, talk with Him, and learn from Him how to love the world's most unlovable people, places, and seasons the way He does? Who would not want to stand in awe of Him? Who would not willingly bow the knee to Him? Who would not joyfully cast all one's earthly or Heavenly crowns before Him, gladly lay down one's life to serve Him, enthusiastically worship Him, and – if and to the extent He allows it – humbly co-regent with Him?

The Holy One is, in fact, so good, so kind, and so gracious it makes us giddy. We do not serve Him grudgingly, out of fear of reprisal; Heaven forbid. To the contrary, we serve Him with exceeding joy, motivated by intense love. He is the farthest thing from a cruel taskmaster anyone will ever see. To those who know Him, His Torah is therefore not a burdensome system of laws. It is instead wonderful. The loving instructions for life it contains are a delight – indeed a treasure – to us. No one in their right mind would seek to avoid or escape – much less complain about or resist – any of them. After all, the Holy One knows where to put – and what to do with – everything He has made. He knows what will benefit – even nurture - Creation ... and what will throw it out of sync - or off trajectory - and thereby bring harm to it. He knows how to establish and maintain a delicate balance between *darkness and light*, between *chaos and order*, between *what is seen and what is unseen*, between *what is becoming whole and what is fragmenting*, and between *what He can let go on in the foreground and what He is bringing to pass in the background*. He knows what facilitates - and what interrupts - the balance of Creation. He knows what is *healthy* - and what is *toxic* - for mankind. His Torah, therefore, is both wise and gentle. It is every bit as full of mercy and grace as it is full of Fatherly advice and counsel. Every syllable of each story in Torah, as well as every single Hebrew letter of every single Divine Pronouncement thereof, bespeaks a *precious, precious gift* that the Holy One has bestowed upon Creation. Each one emanates from the twin fountains of His Great Wisdom and His Great Love. See **Psalm 19:7-11**. The loving instructions for life His

Torah contains open up to us a beautiful Divinely illuminated pathway of life, hope, health, and peace. No one in their right mind would seek to avoid or escape them. The wise man runs to embrace them, crying out with the Psalmist:

*Open my eyes, O Holy One –
that I may see wondrous things in your Torah.
I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your Mitzvot from me!
My soul breaks with longing for Your Mishpatim at all times!*
[Psalm 119: 18 – 20]

Pure Light – and sheer delight – *that* is His Torah. Each parsha opens to us a door that leads to understanding and embracing our purpose, our destiny and the true freedom of sons and daughters of the Holy One. It contains no curse whatever for him or her who will but *sh'ma, sh'mar* and *asah*; it instead catches such a person up in an ocean of blessings. Every syllable – indeed every single Hebrew letter – of Torah unwraps a *precious gift* that the Holy One has in mind for mankind. Every word unleashes wave after wave of Divine Energy into our souls. Every narrative connects us, and our children, and our children's children, to our true identity and reason for being alive. Every aliyah unveils a secret strategy of *tikkun olam*. Every *mitzvah* provides a salve for the healing of some aspect of Creation. See **Psalm 19:7-11**.

In His precious Torah the Holy One empowers all persons who enter Covenant with Him to become *people of ever-increasing beauty and purity*. Torah is His protocol for the Ultimate Divine Bridal Make-Over through which He intends to transform 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, blemish, or any such thing. **Psalm 119:9, 11, 97-105**. We can – and should - therefore embrace the Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover protocols of *Sefer Vayikra* with complete confidence that they are intended for, and will invariably result in, our good.

***Leaving the Elementary, Introductory Things,
And Moving On Into the Deeper Levels
of the Holy One's Glorious Bride-People Make-Over Protocol***

We have finally come to understand, embrace, and follow the Creator's instructions as to what He designed as food for us and what He has deemed *un-food*. That is excellent! But that is just the '*tip of the iceberg*'. There is much, much more to the 'clean/unclean' and 'holy/profane' distinctions than mere issues of what is to be eaten. For example: do you know - and are you observing - the distinction between 'clean' and 'unclean' thoughts, attitudes, and emotions? Do you recognize, and maintain the distinction, between 'clean vs. unclean' sources of information, 'news', and education, and between 'holy' and 'profane' approaches to

leisure, 'pleasure', and entertainment? Can you immediately recognize and navigate successfully through the maze of 'holy' and 'profane' motivations, modes of communication, types of interactions, and levels of relationship?

Welcome to the 28th week of the annual Torah cycle - the week of parsha *Metzora*. I have some questions for you as we enter into the revelation stream week. These questions do not pertain to people outside the Covenant. They pertain to like you and me, who bear the mark of Heaven's King. Here are the questions:

1. What do you think happens to our souls, and to the environment of our various assigned spheres of influence, when we consistently and willfully ignore the wise instructions the Holy One has given us in Torah about navigation through interactions with the *tamei* realm – or when we implement them half-heartedly and/or halfway?
2. What do you think happens to our souls, and to the environment of our various assigned spheres of influence, when, instead of being recognized as toxic, and kept at a safe distance, *tumah*-producing creatures, thoughts, attitudes, mindsets, opinions, worldviews, philosophies, ideologies, political platforms, and priority-systems are accepted, embraced, revered, and partnered with?
3. What do you think happens to our souls, and to the environment of our various assigned spheres of influence, when we give ear to, lend credence to, and actually engage in *tumah*-promoting kinds of 'dark energy' speech – things like murmuring, complaining, blaming, judging, accusing, slandering, libeling, belittling, and bullying – not to mention profanity, hate-mongering, fear-mongering, sarcasm, cynicism, and divisive and/or inciteful rhetoric?
4. What do you think happens to our souls, and to the environment of our various assigned spheres of influence, when, though it is totally inconsistent with our calling, we choose to pursue sources of pleasure, curiosity-satisfying, entertainment, education, information, and pseudo-truth that are founded in and spew fountains of *tumah*?
5. What do you think happens to our souls, and to the environment of our various assigned spheres of influence, if we actually invite *tumah* into the fabric of our lives – and allow it to incite the animalistic lusts of our flesh to follow their agenda instead of the Holy One's?
6. What do you think happens to our souls, and to the environment of our various assigned spheres of influence, if we yield our pleasure and pain receptors to *tumah*, and let its corrupting influence darken

our thoughts, meditations, moods, attitudes, emotions, contaminate our homes, and start to defile everyone and everything around us?

7. What do you think happens to our souls, and to the environment of our various assigned spheres of influence, when despite the selfless efforts, blessings, and patient ministry of whatever *kohen* we consult, we choose to keep on indulging dark and unclean thoughts, speaking dark and unclean sayings, and interacting with others in toxically narcissistic, anti-Torah ways?

These seven questions – and the situations they present in hypothetical form - are what parsha Metzora is about. The *Metzora* protocols are the Holy One's patient, gentle, loving, redemptive response to these five situations.

As you meditate on the beautiful, encouraging, life- and hope-filled words of this parsha, just keep the following in mind:

***Oh, if our skin, our faces, our hair follicles, our clothing,
and the places we frequent could talk ...
what a sordid tale they might tell!***

To the Holy One, you see, all those things DO talk – and the tales they tell would all too often make a sailor blush, shame a harlot, and make a swine herder hold his nose and turn his face in disgust!

The Danger of Taking Tumah To the Limit

The focus of our study this week is parsha *Metzora* – which is an integral part of the Holy One's Great '*Kedusha Discourse*'. The eighth of the great discourses of the Bridegroom-King at Mount Sinai, this stunning revelation download began at Leviticus 10:8 and will continue all the way through Leviticus 24:9. It thus constitutes the longest continuous Divine Discourse in the entire Torah. In this paradigm-shifting Discourse the Holy One gives substance to His call to all people he has redeemed to become *holy as He is holy* – i.e. ***kedoshim ki kadosh Ani***. See **Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; 20:26** Lest we have any doubt as to what that means, He uses the Kedusha Discourse to *clearly define each and every element of the beautiful form of holiness that He has ordained for us to [a] incorporate into our lives and [b] model to the world*. In the course of it all, He tells us plainly what will *foster and expedite* the development of holiness in us – and what will *hinder and/or delay* it.

The metzora protocols make up only a small portion of this Great Discourse. The emphasis of these protocols is on empowering us to recognize, isolate, and rid ourselves, as well as the houses in which we live, of tumah that has been allowed

to run amok in us, and morph into something our English Bibles call ‘leprosy’. This is what ‘*uncleanness*’ does to a person or environment when it is allowed free rein, team up with the urges, appetites, and attitudes of the flesh to create strongholds, invite in unclean spirits, and wreak destructive effects.

Of course, we have already discovered in these studies that what we know in modern English as ‘uncleanness’ is not at all what the Holy One refers to in the *Kedusha Discourse* of Torah as *tumah*. Nor, we now know, is what we think of when we hear the modern English as ‘leprosy’ anywhere close to what the Bridegroom-King is referring to in this Discourse when He speaks to us of a corrupted condition of the flesh [much more than just the skin] by the name of *tzara’at*. We will talk more about that later in this shiur – and throughout the week. In the meantime what we are becoming more and more sure of every day is that as we prepare our hearts and homes for the upcoming Divine Appointments of *Passover*, *Unleavened Bread*, *Firstfruits* and *Counting the Omer*, even before we start searching the house for leaven we would probably 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 sooner rather than later?

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*. So perhaps we need to come to a functional level of understanding concerning what a *metzora* – and for that matter a person carrying any level or *tumah* - *is* and *isn’t*.

What is Tumah – and What Kind and Level of Tumah Does it Take to Make a Person a Metzora?

*Tumah*² is a Hebrew noun that the Holy One employs multiple times, and in multiple contexts, 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 in Divine Speech 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

² *Tumah* is spelled *tet, mem, alef, hey*.

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 - which 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 which 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 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 the Holy One, the love of Holy One, the 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*.

***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?***

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 restored to a state of purity and 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'.

If the Bridegroom-King says '*Don't*' - 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.**

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.

Before we get too deep our readings this week, therefore, 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*. And so, with the Psalmist, we should 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 the Holy One’s 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! May even *the foundation and walls of the houses we inhabit* be inspected for signs of acute, mission-sabotaging, ecosystem-threatening toxicity!

And may we all have this assurance: *Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the ones He has sanctified according to the will of God.* **Romans 8:27.**

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 a few 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 full of worldly indulgences, fierce territoriality, profane thought and speech, self-obsession and contention?

Living in the Light of our King's Countenance

The Community of the Redeemed has recently experienced a bright new beginning. Something is vastly different about our environment – and us – since the Holy One forgave us one-by-one for the part each of us played in the sin of the golden calf. Everywhere around us Creation is testifying that this is a season of new life, fresh growth, and great potential. A clean slate of possibility has been laid out before us. Life is suddenly a palette, and we have been given a beautiful vision to paint. and is learning to embrace.

What has made the vast difference in our environment? It is the fact that now in the midst of our camp – inhabiting the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle] – the Creator of the Universe dwells right alongside us. We are *hosting Royalty*. The Manifest Presence of the King of the Universe is with us – and it has altered the spiritual climate dramatically.

Before this season the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya'akov was mostly a vague concept about which we indulged romantic notions and engaged in

theological arguments. Now suddenly He is a *very real and fascinating Persona with Whom it is our privilege to interact daily*. Before this season dawned the idea that we were Betrothed in Covenant to the Creator of the Universe was nice and neat and theoretical. Now suddenly passion to know His Heart, His Thoughts, and His Ways, and the joy of learning to actually co-labor with Him in His ongoing Kingdom work, are burning in us. Now we are running to Him, gladly submitting to His plan to make us over into His image. Now we are joyfully trusting in Him to cut away our excess flesh, reshape our wills, renew our minds, and circumcise our hearts.

No longer is He merely ‘the God Who speaks to Moshe’, or ‘the God Who delivered us from Egypt with a mighty Hand and an outstretched Arm’. Now He is our Faithful King, our Trusted Shepherd, and our Beloved Bridegroom. No longer is His existence a theological premise to debate; now His Presence is more real than the heat of the Sinai desert. No longer is His Goodness open for fruit-of-the-tree-of-the-knowledge-of-good-and-evil inspired argument; now it is the most obvious, incontrovertible fact in the Universe. The Physical Manifestation of the Glory of the Creator and King of the Universe is now constantly within our field of sight. We are constantly aglow with the Light of His Countenance. He is constantly energizing us. Seeing Him high and lifted up, with the Train of His Robe filling the Tabernacle, however, has made us realize to our horror that we are *men of unclean lips, dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips*. Nothing is hidden from His Sight.

In His Light we see Light. And in the brightness of that Light we also can suddenly see all our spots and wrinkles, all our blemishes, and every form and level of uncleanness from *tumah* to *tzara’at* – even to the dreaded level of no return – i.e. *abomination*.

Our Bridegroom-King has invited us to ‘*be holy as He is holy*’, you see. And we are beginning to realize that we want to do that – but that we are completely incapable of doing so – or even making a good beginning on that journey - in our own strength. We do not have either the technology or the capacity. Since we lack these things, we must ... *die to ourselves*. We must *deny gratification to the pseudo-intellectual curiosity of our minds, the narcissistic promptings our animal nature, and all the other the urges, appetites, lusts, and desires of our flesh*. We must be consumed in the Fire on our King’s Heavenly altar – even as we approach its earthly counterpart. We must yield our minds, hearts, and bodies to our Glorious Covenant Partner’s Will.

That, fortunately enough, is where the *Kedusha Discourse* comes in. The Words our Bridegroom-King has been speaking over us in this Discourse³ have been as coals from His Altar. These words are powerful, high-tech *tumah*-seeking missiles, launched by the Warrior King of Heaven on the ultimate seek-and-destroy, then *reform-rebuild-and-gloriously-restore, mission*. Even as these words have been prophetically calling forth holiness from the *neshama* that is now alive within us, they have, like live coals from His altar, gone forth to touch and remove the uncleanness from our *lips*, our *hearts*, our *minds*, our *wills*, our conversations, and from *every fold and wrinkle, spot and blemish, of our flesh*.

***The Scalpel of the Great Physician Stands At the Ready,
Poised to Cut Away All the Spots and Blemishes in Our Flesh
And Restore Us to a State of Wholeness in Time for Passover***

The Ultimate Extreme Bridal Makeover the Holy One has designed for all who would serve as Ambassadors of His Kingdom to the peoples of the earth 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*. *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* 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.

When our studies in *Metzora* are over we should find ourselves totally in awe of the Holy One’s kindness and goodness – for this parsha reveals as much as any in Torah how He always has in mind, and is constantly at work leading us to and through a recovery strategy. 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!

³ The first seven major Sinaitic Discourses in order of their presentation are: 1. the *Betrothal Discourse* [Exodus 20]; 2. the *Mishpatim Discourse* [Exodus 22-23]; 3. the *Mish’kan Discourse* [Exodus 25-31]; 4. the *Midot Discourse* [Exodus 34]; 5. the *Korbanot Discourse* [Leviticus 1-7]; and 6. the *Yom Ha-Sh’mini Discourse* [Leviticus 8].

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A Metzora Travelogue

Our parsha will start with a burst of excitement – a *metzora* has been healed, made hole, re-attained *tahorah*, and is ready to be restored to full participation in the activities of the Community and the Mish'kan. 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*. The *kohen* who has been working with the affected person all along, since the first evidence of *tumah* appeared, leaves the holy environs of the *Mish'kan* and heads out into the desert alone. When he reaches the remote area where the afflicted stay to meditate and recuperate, he greets his old friend and carefully inspects the locations on the person's body where he previously saw spots, sores, scales, lesions, boils, blemishes, etc. After a thorough and intimate inspection, if the *kohen* is satisfied that there is *no raw, irritated flesh, no expansion of the scale, no abnormal growth of discolored hair*, and no other sign of acute and active *tzara'at*, he will collect the following Divinely prescribed elements for use in a three-part purification celebration ceremony. The elements that must be collected and prepared include:

1. Two *tzipporim chayot tahorot* – i.e. living birds of a *tahor* species – one of which, will die; and the other of which will be bathed in water and its cohort's blood, then released to fly free, and live;
2. a branch of *etz erez* – i.e. cedar wood;
3. *shani tola'at* – either a vial of scarlet dye, or a linen thread dyed scarlet; and
4. an *ezob* – or twig of hyssop; and
5. *k'li cheres* – i.e. a clay pot;
6. *mayim chayim* – i.e. living water;
7. *clean/new clothes for the former metzora to put on;*

8. *two male lambs*⁴;
9. *one female lamb*;
10. *six quarts of choice flour*, moistened with olive oil; and
11. *a cup or vial of pure olive oil*.

Part I of the Purification Ceremony – the First Day Protocols

The ceremony will begin with the kohen *killing the first bird*, representing the *metzora*'s former, diseased state. As this first bird is life is ebbing away, the kohen will *collect its fresh, red blood in the clay pot of living water*. Into that mixture of blood and water the *kohen* will immerse *all the other elements*, one by one, the second bird, representing the former *metzora*'s new, healed and restored identity, being saved for last.

Then comes *the dramatic sprinkling ceremony*. The kohen takes some of the blood from the bird he has killed and sprinkles/shakes it seven times on the body of the person who has been healed.

Next comes *the great release ceremony*, as the *kohen* takes the remaining, living bird, dipped in its cohort's blood, out to a field and sets it free to fly, live, and thrive. After the freed bird flies away, a series of symbolic 'new man arising' ceremonies are 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, and closely shaves 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 newly born, he or she completely self-immerses a living water *mikveh*. When he/she arises from the *mikveh*, and puts on clean clothes, this concludes the first phase of the *tahar*-ing ceremony. The former *metzora* can now re-enter the camp, and need not declare 'unclean, unclean'. But he is only part way 'home'; and must stay alone for six full days in what we might call a temporary 'half-way house' tent.

Part II of the Purification Ceremony – the Seventh Day Protocols

On the seventh day, the second phase of the *tahar*-ing ceremony takes place. Again, the former *metzora* shaves off all the hair from his scalp, cheeks, throat, neck, and eyebrow areas. When this is done, the person being healed again completely immerses himself/herself in a living water *mikveh*.

Part III of the Purification Ceremony – the Eighth Day Protocols

⁴ 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.

Then on the eighth day, the last great day of the *tahor*-ing celebration ceremony, everyone gathers at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The now *tahor* former *metzora* brings forward to his now intimate friend the *kohen* the two male and one female lambs - or, in cases of poverty, one male lamb and two turtledoves or pigeons - along with quantities of his finest wheat flour and his purest olive oil. 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*. 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.

Moving on from the restored person, who may now return to full participation in family, tribal, and community life, the Holy One turns his attention to the protocols pursuant to which He wants us to deal with *houses* and vessels contaminated with *tzara'at*.

Finally, the Holy One relates to us His instructions for and with regard to a person who, as part of an encounter with things, circumstances, or people of the *tamei* realm, have either a normal or abnormal fluid discharge from their bodies. In connection with these latter protocols, the Holy One introduces specific instructions for *Tahorat Ha-Mishpachah* – i.e 'the family's purity'. The people of the Holy One are thereby reminded to approach the entire realm of human sexuality in a way unlike other nations and ethnicities – a way that honors both the Creator of life and one another.

The Holy One then brings the parsha's revelation flow to a close by explaining why the protocols He has been laying out are so critically important – indeed are to be considered matters of life and death - for His Covenant people:

***This is how you will guard B'nei Yisrael
against the adverse effects/impacts of tumah.***

*Otherwise they would die, and the tumah they had embraced
would make tamei My dwelling in their midst.*

[Leviticus 15:31]

A Brief Look at the Haftarah

II Kings 7:3-20 & Malachi 4:1-6

The haftarah readings for our *parsha ha shavua* begin in II Kings 7. The inspired writer of the Books of the Kings is going to relate to us a fascinating story about four Hebrew *metzorim* – our English Bibles call them ‘lepers’. The setting for this particular story is the city of Samaria, capital of the ‘Northern Kingdom’ of Israel, during the reign of *Y’horam*⁵ [Jehoram], the son of the apostate king Ahab. While Y’horam ruled the Northern Kingdom, a military crisis arose which threatened the very survival of his nation. Ben-Hadad, the king of neighboring Syria, amassed a great army, invaded the land, and besieged Samaria. As the siege continued, food became very scarce inside the city. The author of Bible portrays the depth of the crisis vividly as follows: *... a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove droppings brought five shekels of silver.* II Kings 6:25.

The main human characters of the passage we will read will be four men with *tzara’at* who had, prior to the siege, sat in the gate of Samaria, begging for food. These men were some of the first – and worst – affected by the siege. What, they wondered to themselves, would they do to survive? No one had alms to give them. Even if they were given the usual small amounts of silver, the price of what little food was left in the city was so high there was no way they could purchase enough to sustain them. So, they weighed their options and decided: *... let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they keep us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us - well, we are going to die anyway.* II Kings 7:4. Then, as darkness fell, four desperate and sickly men walked away from everything they had ever known – and headed fearfully into the camp of the Syrians. What they found – and what they did – when they got there is the subject of our readings.

We will conclude our readings from the prophets this week with Malachi 4. We will receive inspiration and hope from the promise of a future day when *the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in his wings*; when we will go forth leaping and dancing *as calves released from the stall*, and when the Holy One will send Eliyahu to us again to *turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.*

An Overview of the Apostolic Scripture Readings for the Week

Romans 6:19-23; Romans 1:24-32;

The B’rit Chadasha readings this week are taken from the letter Shaul of Tarsus’

⁵ *Y’horam*, spelled *yod, hey, cholem vav, resh, mem sofit*, means ‘Yah arises’, or ‘Yah is exalted’.

wrote to those he hoped to visit Roman. In this letter Shaul, a self-proclaimed ‘Hebrew of Hebrews’, speaks to the people of Rome in whose homes he hopes to visit concerning the process by which followers of Yeshua become *kedoshim* [holy ones, saints]. Shaul will liken the process of sanctification for followers of Messiah to ‘the *torah of the Metzora*’ we will read about in the second parsha of the week. As the Holy One teaches us in the Torah that every body part of the *metzora* affected by *tzara’at* has to be voluntarily submitted to the priest for inspection and “cleansing” to be made *tahor*, Shaul will teach us that, in the same manner, every part of our body which we have used for [a] things that our Divine Bridegroom 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* – i.e. *whole* and fitting agents of the King’s *shalom*.

*May you know the beauty of relating to the Holy One
as Adam as Chava did in the Garden.*

The Rabbi’s son

Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week

Petition #3: S’lach - Forgiveness

S’lach lanu Avinu, ki chataeinu

Forgive us, Our Father, for we have sinned

m’chal lanu, Malkeinu, ki fasha’einu

Pardon us, Our King, for we have done wrong

ki m’chel v’slach Atah

Pardon and forgive

Baruch Atah Adonai chanun ha-marve l’sloach

Blessed are You, O Holy One, Who graciously forgives