

TORAHSCOPE: Tazria-Metzora (She Conceives-Infected One)

by Mark Huey posted 24 April, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Leviticus 12:1-13:59; 14:1-15:33

“Clean! Clean!”

“As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:45-46).

Every year, in a systematic fashion through the consistent study of the Torah, we have an excellent opportunity to review one of the most devastating transgressions that plagues the community of faith. With the double portion of *Tazria-Metzora*, the issues regarding unclean and clean and their relationship to leprosy, is once again considered. **This is commonly connected to an age old problem that the Sages of Judaism refer to as *lashon hara* (לִשׁוֹן הָרַע), meaning the “evil tongue.”**

For centuries the Rabbis have faithfully taught that this text, which addresses a wide array of physical commandments, actually reaches beyond the physical dimension and reflects on a person’s spiritual condition. One of the challenges that faces all of humanity is the reality of our fallen nature. Whether a person believes the fact that he or she is a recipient of the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the empirical evidence speaks for itself:

“To the woman He said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’ Then to Adam He said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat from it”; cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:16-19).

Fallen humanity is burdened with various degrees of understanding (or misunderstanding) inherited from tasting the forbidden fruit. **The problems that are generated affect all of us**, and Israel was not exempted, even though chosen by God as His special people. Israel was chosen by the Lord, however, to obey Him and thus be a light to the rest of the world so that all might be redeemed. The Bible is a Divine chronicle of what the Creator wants to convey to the world that will give people eternal life. The problem is that all of us have to constantly battle with a proclivity to follow the ways of our flesh instead of turning toward God for our salvation and deliverance.

Speak No Evil

One of the most prevalent calamities that can infect the human soul is the inherent need to build oneself up, when in the deep recesses of the mind, a person can attempt to justify, or at the very least, cover up his or her sin nature. One of the most frequent ways to enhance one’s personal image is to put other people down. This can occur by leveling insults against someone, thinking oneself to be superior, or simply hating another person. By doing so, this allows the sinner to believe that he or she is better than the one being disparaged. The Scriptures are replete with admonitions against this. Consider this quote from Proverbs regarding how vile the Holy One considers improper use of the tongue:

“There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness *who* utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers” (Proverbs 6:16-19).

Upon reading this, we may classify that there are six major causes of *lashon hara* or the evil tongue. They all originate with “A mind that hatches evil plots” (NJPS), because what comes forth from our mouths somehow originates *with us*. Yeshua taught that what comes out of one’s mouth is often a reflection on the wicked nature of one’s inner person:

“But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (Matthew 15:18-19).

As you read this instruction from the Messiah, did you notice His use of the words “false testimonies [and] blasphemies” (HCSB)? These are two of the most vicious forms of killing that our present in our age today—and go far beyond homicide. In fact, when you compare the difference between physical murder and the chronic character assassination perpetrated by a false witness against a person by slander, you might conclude that to be murdered is preferred over the possible perpetual consequences of lies.

The classic example of this is in a description that the Rabbis commonly give that compares slander to a feather pillow that has been cut open and cast to the wind. Imagine fallacious statements made about you and how these words have a tendency to float in all directions landing at different times and in different places. Due to the fallen nature of humans, with our proclivity to want to feel better about ourselves than what reality often dictates, when gossip or rumor or slander of false witness is heard, there is a natural inclination to want to share such “juicy news” with others. This innate problem in our psyche has the effect of not only spreading a bad word, but it often goes in every direction and lands at almost any unexpected time. Even though attempts can be made to stop such sinful news, it is impossible for it to stop, just like it is impossible to collect all the feathers from a pillow that has been ripped in two.

The problem with *lashon hara* or the evil tongue is considered by the Rabbis to even be more damaging to a person than murder. At least with murder, the event occurs only one time and it is over. The result of slander and false witness can go on without end, and continue to damage a person for not only the remainder of his lifetime, but even when he is dead.

Unclean and Clean

I hope that you can see some of the reasons why these Torah passages deal with the condition of unclean versus being clean. When you really analyze the statements made about skin conditions and different conditions because of natural excretions from the body, you should see that the point being made in these passages is that for a considerable amount of time during the normal course of our lives, men and women are simply in a state of “uncleanness.” Our tendency to be unclean is something we cannot do very much about. **This is why we need to be covered by the atoning blood of the Messiah Yeshua.**

There is one prophetic picture that the Prophet Ezekiel gives that does an excellent job of describing some of the inherent problems associated with being unclean. Ezekiel is moved by the Lord to prophecy how sinfully unclean Israel has been, but in the end how He will restore Israel and they will all be clean once again:

“Son of man, when the house of Israel was living in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds; **their way before Me was like the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.** Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols. Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them. When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.’ But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am

the LORD,' declares the Lord GOD, 'when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. **Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.** You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you" (Ezekiel 36:17-29).

In this passage, Ezekiel compares Israel to a woman in a major state of uncleanness. Because Israel did not walk in obedience before the Lord, it was scattered to the nations. In spite of this sin, however, God Himself will restore His people and declare them to be clean before Him. Israel will be forgiven of their idolatrous sins of filth.

When I think of the process of God making us clean, I cannot help but be prompted to consider Paul's words about Yeshua dying for us as the *ekklēsia*, and us being washed by the water of the Word:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Messiah also loved the [assembly] and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word" (Ephesians 5:26).

What is perhaps important to note here is that the "word" being referred to here is *rhēma* (ῥῆμα), meaning "that which is said or spoken, a word, saying" (LS).¹ While we all must be made clean by the continual study of God's written Word, has He spoken the words "Clean, clean!" over us as a result of our being convicted by Scripture? Paul's words here add dimensions that many are unaware of.

As Ezekiel continues his prophecy, he talks about the new heart of flesh that God is going to give Israel in order for His people to be able to fully obey Him and experience all of the blessings that He has in store:

"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

As I contemplated these verses in light of what *Tazria* and *Metzora* admonish us this week, I have readily concluded that a heart of flesh, washed by the Word, with the Spirit of God indwelling us, **may be the only way to enter into a degree of being clean before a holy and righteous God.** Attaining "cleanness" by human means is something that is almost impossible to be obtained in the sinful world that we live in. The Apostle Paul understood the absolute need for us to be made into new creatures, so that we might be made into those vessels able to function in the Master's service:

"Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Messiah according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer. **Therefore if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come**" (2 Corinthians 5:16-17).

The Apostle Peter also reflects on this, indicating that we can partake of Messiah Yeshua by exhibiting His Divine qualities in the world around us:

"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, **applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness,**

¹ LS, 717.

brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love. For if these *qualities* are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah. For he who lacks these *qualities* is blind *or* short-sighted, **having forgotten his purification from his former sins**" (2 Peter 1:4-9).

Both Peter and Paul were urging the First Century saints to take their purification seriously via Yeshua. When you see the character traits that we are to be evidencing as a result of being made clean, you will find that they are the exact opposites of the evil sins that cause malicious gossip and slander.

Those who perpetually operate in *lashon hara* may still have a fallen nature with a heart of stone. We need to pray that they are convicted by God's Word so that they can be cleansed and He can pronounce "Clean!" over them. Some might be reading the Word, but things are not changing in their stony hearts. Instead, they continue to evidence the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). These are the people who speak words of destruction from their mouths, rather than words of life.

The only solution to all of these maladies, whether they are spots on one's skin, lips that attempt to praise God when the heart is far removed from Him, or speaking slander and false witness against one's brethren, is **only embodied in the faithful decision to confess the inherent need a person has for a Divine Savior.**

Understand your lost condition and need for a Redeemer. Confess and repent of your individual sins and transgressions and cry out to the Lord for mercy! In His mercy to you, as a result of the blood sacrifice of His Son, you can be transformed into a new creature and be made clean (Revelation 7:14). With your new heart of flesh, you will be compelled by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to continue washing yourself by the water of the Word as you grow in your love for God because of the work He has done to make you eternally clean.

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