

The Weekly Message of Torah from Rabbi Rheins

Shabbat Tazria-Metzora

The Wisdom of Torah:

What to do after the Quarantine

This week there is double Torah portion, Tazria and Metzora (Leviticus 12:1-15:33). In leap years, when we add an extra month of *Adar*, these *parashiot* are read separately on succeeding weeks. This year, they are combined.

The theme of both portions focuses on ritual purity as well as certain physical maladies that strike fear in the community with concerns for contagiousness.

As you can imagine, it is not uncommon for a Bar or Bat Mitzvah student to cringe when they are assigned these passages. Indeed, at first glance, the marvelous stories about our ancestors are far more appealing to read. But then again, as we look closer, we see that these Torah portions teach us how to handle the challenges of reintegrating those who survived terrible diseases back into society. We can learn a great deal from our Jewish ancestors who established ethical and moral standards for the social and spiritual rehabilitation of those who have endured emotional and/or physical illnesses. Those lessons are especially poignant today as we go through the COVID-19 crisis.

One of the principle lessons is that the political and religious leadership must take a personal role in the rehabilitation. For instance:

If the priest finds on the skin a white swelling which has turned some hair white, with a patch of undischolorated flesh in the swelling; It is chronic leprosy on the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean; he need not isolate him, for he is unclean. If the eruption spreads out over the skin so that it covers all the skin of the affected person from head to foot, wherever the priest can see; If the priest sees that the eruption has covered the whole body -- he shall pronounce the affected person clean; he is clean, for he has turned all white. But as soon as undischolorated flesh appears in it, he shall be unclean. When the priest sees the undischolorated flesh, he shall pronounce him unclean. The undischolorated flesh is unclean; it is leprosy. But if the undischolorated flesh again turns white, he shall come to the priest, and the priest shall examine him: if the affection has turned white, the priest shall pronounce the affected person clean; he is clean. (Lev 13:10-17)

Today, each of us is called upon to help welcome back to the community those who have gone through traumatic experiences. Those who have endured painful illness and emotional setbacks have suffered enough. Unfortunately, many feel an added anxiety while trying to get their lives back; they fear that they will be shunned or rejected.

This week's double Torah portion comes at an auspicious time; we need the double reminder to be personally welcoming and supportive to those who have suffered.

B'vrakhah- With Blessings,

Rick

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