

4-11-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – Tazria-Metzorah (she conceives – one who has tzaraat)

Torah: Lev 12:1-15:33.

Haftara: 2 Kings 7:3-20

Suggested Brit Hadeshah: Luke 17:11-19

Birth, a Holy Event, and Holy Consecration.

Central question of this message: Giving birth isn't a sin, is it?

Today we are in a double portion, *Tazria-Metzorah*. This double portion contains a large number of health-related commandments. It provides much of G-d's medical school. It focuses mainly on two conditions – childbirth, and what is commonly translated into English as “leprosy.” *Tazria* gets its name from the 18th and 19th words in the English, and the 13th word in the original Hebrew.

Lev 12:1-3

12 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'When a woman **gives birth** and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. 3 'And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

12:1					וַיִּדְבֹר	יְהוָה	אֶל־	מֹשֶׁה	לֵאמֹר:
					And spake	the Lord	unto	Moses,	saying,
					<u>1696</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>4872</u>	<u>559</u>
2					דִּבֹר	אֶל־	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לֵאמֹר
					Speak	unto	the children of	Israel,	saying,
					<u>1696</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>1121</u>	<u>3478</u>	<u>559</u>
					תִּזְרֶיעַ	וְיָלְדָה	זָכָר	וְטִמְאָהָ	שִׁבְעַת
					have conceived seed,	and born	a man child:	then she shall be unclean	seven
					<u>2232</u>	<u>3205</u>	<u>2145</u>	<u>2930</u>	<u>7651</u>
					יָמִים	כִּימֵי	נִדָּת	דִּוְתָהּ	הַטִּמְאָה:
					days;	according to the days of	the separation for	her infirmity	shall she be unclean.
					<u>3117</u>	<u>3117</u>	<u>5079</u>	<u>1738</u>	<u>2930</u>
3					וּבַיּוֹם	הַשְּׁמִינִי	יִמּוֹל	בָּשָׂר	עֶרְלָתוֹ:
					And in day	the eighth	shall be circumcised.	the flesh of	his foreskin
					<u>3117</u>	<u>8066</u>	<u>4135</u>	<u>1320</u>	<u>6190</u>

I wish to speak about the issue of childbirth, but on the way to that teaching, I need to address briefly the matter of what is translated into English as “leprosy” in parasha *metzorah*. I want to focus on two verses, which feature this very translational choice.

Lev 13:7-8

7 "But if the scab spreads farther on the skin, after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again to the priest. 8 And the priest shall look, and

if the scab has spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; **it is leprosy**.

Let's see what the Hebrew says.

אֲחֵרֵי	בְּעוֹר	הַמִּסְפַּחַת	תִּפְשָׁה	פָּשָׁה	וְאִם־ ⁷
after	in the skin,	the scab	abroad	spread much	But if
<u>310</u>	<u>5785</u>	<u>4556</u>	<u>6581</u>	<u>6581</u>	<u>518</u>
וְנִרְאָה	לְטַהֲרָתוֹ	הַכֹּהֵן	אֶל־	הָרֵאיוֹתָו	
he shall be seen	for his cleansing,	the priest	of	that he hath been seen	
<u>7200</u>	<u>2893</u>	<u>3548</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>7200</u>	
			הַכֹּהֵן:	אֶל־	שֵׁנִית
			the priest	of	again:
			<u>3548</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>8145</u>
הַמִּסְפַּחַת	פָּשְׁתָּהּ	וְהִנֵּה	הַכֹּהֵן	וְרֵאָה ⁸	
the scab	spreadeth	that, behold,	the priest	if	And see
<u>4556</u>	<u>6581</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>3548</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>7200</u>
צָרַעַת	הַכֹּהֵן	וְטָמְאוֹ	בְּעוֹר		
a leprosy.	is	the priest	then shall pronounce him unclean:	in the skin,	
<u>6883</u>	<u>9999</u>	<u>3548</u>	<u>2930</u>	<u>5785</u>	
				הָיָא:	
				it	
				<u>1931</u>	

The Hebrew word translated all through this passage as “leprosy” is *tzaraat*. But even the Strong's Concordance insists upon calling it “leprosy” even when it is not.

OT:6883 צָרַעַת **tsara`ath** (tsaw-rah'-ath);
from OT:6879; leprosy:

OT:6879 צָרַע **tsara`** (tsaw-rah'); a primitive
root; to scourge, i.e. (intransitive and
figurative) to be stricken with leprosy:

There is no English equivalent to the Hebrew word *tzaraat*, neither is there in Greek. But the current translation as “leprosy” actually finds its origin all the way back in the Septuagint.

When the 70 rabbis translating the Septuagint into Greek were faced with trying to find a single Greek word to describe a condition which only appears described by a uniquely Hebrew term, they faced the problem that all translators have – to find the closest translational equivalent.

They settled on the koine Greek cognate "Λέπρα", pronounced “lepra”, which was a Greek word meaning any disease causing scaly skin.

So, Greek speakers began to equate the Greek classification of scaly-skin afflictions called *lepra* with the far different condition known in the Hebrew as *tzaraat*.

As English-speakers began to struggle with the translation of this uniquely Hebrew word into English, they took the easy way out, and simply adopted the Greek word instead. So *lepra* soon made the translational jump to the word we find in our English Bibles today - “leprosy”.

But even the most casual medical student can quickly determine that *tzarat* cannot be what we have traditionally seen as “leprosy.” The characteristics of *tzaraat* are not at all similar to the characteristics of leprosy.

Tzaraat –

- Is an affliction caused by sin, in particular *loshan hara*.
- Comes upon the person quickly, sometimes instantaneously.
- Is not contagious
- Causes the hair in an abnormal white skin area to turn white.
- Affected area visibly grows in size over 7-14 days.
- Is not “curable” by medicine, but can be removed by repentance, or a miracle.

- Clothing and houses can be afflicted by *tzaraat*.

Leprosy –

- G. H. Hansen in Norway 1873, discovered leprosy was a bacterial infection.
- The bacteria can be cultured in a petri dish.
- Causes red, blotchy patches on the skin, and occasionally considerable disfigurement.
- Has a slow progression. The bacteria can remain dormant for up to 5 years before skin lesions begin.
- Is spread between humans by coughing or sneezing bacteria-laden particles into the air.
- Only 5% of the world's population are susceptible to this infection, and the remainder are naturally immune.
- Is curable by using antibiotic therapy.

This disease got its name from the same Greek word that the translators of the Septuagint used to invoke *tzaraat* in the mind of a Greek speaker. So, there is the persistent, although erroneous, linguistic connection between the disease of leprosy, and the spiritual affliction called *tzaraat*. This connection has caused confusion regarding *tzaraat* until this very day.

Our sages established a number of “signs of the messiah”, which should be demonstrated by the true anointed one. They included the ability to make correct judgments in seemingly impossible situations because He could “smell” truth; the ability to heal a man born blind and restore his sight; and the ability to heal those afflicted with *tzarat*.

How many people were cured of *tzarat* in Scripture? One can argue that Miriam was cured, although the Scriptures never clearly make that statement. She was readmitted to the camp, so it is a presumption.¹ And she never showed herself to the priest.

But she was the first... and the last. Other than her, there is not one recorded instance, in any of the records of our people, of a Hebrew person being cured of *tzaraat*. Naaman the Aramean was cured, but at that time he was not a believer, and not under obligation to show himself to the priest.² And it is doubtful that his affliction was actually *tzaraat*, but might have been a curable disease, which responded to the mineral-laden waters of the Jordan.

¹ Num 12:1-15

² 2 Kings 5:1-27

Isn't it odd that a substantial portion of this week's double portion is dedicated to the procedure for the priests when someone has been cured, but it was never used?

The priests passed-down from generation to generation the information on what they were to do, but they all died without ever once having the opportunity to offer a declaration of "clean" (*tahor*) to any person so afflicted.

That is, until this happened.

Luke 17:11-19

11 And it came about while He was on the way to Jerusalem, that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as He entered a certain village, ten leprous (*m'tzorum*) men who stood at a distance met Him; 13 and they raised their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 And when He saw them, He said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And it came about that as they were going, they were cleansed. 15 Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud

voice, 16 and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine — where are they? 18 "Was no one found who turned back to give glory to God, except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Rise, and go your way; your faith has made you well."

Yeshua, in this passage, is demonstrated conclusively as the Messiah. He has performed one of the three signs of the Messiah — ten times over!

And He sent these fellows to the priest, as our portion for today says they should do. I am confident that all ten went to the priest, and the priest greeted them with shock and amazement.

And what happened next? We aren't told in Scripture, but we can surmise with a degree of certainty. That priest, and all the other priests who simply had to stand in a circle and see this amazing sight for themselves, failed to do their job.

I don't doubt that they declared the ten *m'tzorim* to be *tahor*. The religious pressure of the masses would have required that.

What I am saying is that they refused to proclaim to the world the ten-fold demonstration that Yeshua was Messiah! If they had done so, and if they had bothered to further investigate the other signs of the Messiah that Yeshua demonstrated as well... would things have been different?

I believe it was fore-ordained that these priests would get this wrong. It was not Yeshua's time to be crowned as King. He was at this time coming as the Moshiach ben Yoseph – the suffering servant. He would die for our sins, and by His stripes we would be healed.

Now, with that being said, let's turn to the topic of childbirth.

As we do so, I want you to consider one of the most G-dly things we can do in this world. That is to give. Giving is one of the attributes of G-d, and since we are created in His image, that is one of our highest attributes as well.

Men are wired to give. In a general sense, men give in specific ways. They give their lives to earn money to provide for all the needs of their family. Men give protection to their family by standing between them and danger. Men will fight fires, clear forests, and

build skyscrapers. Men will step into rocket ships launching to where no man has gone before. Men will go to war to protect family, people group, and nation. Men will build with their hands and backs to fashion a home. Men will plow and plant, then tend the land to bring home food. Men will fix things that need fixing and make things that need to be made. Men are explorers and are always looking over the horizon to see what the next adventure might bring. Men will lay down their lives for a friend.

As lofty as these characteristics are, they pale in comparison to one single characteristic of a woman. She can partner with G-d to bring into this world a human life. And she can nurture that life like no other person can. A woman can nurture far better than any man can.

Someone once said that if you give a woman something, she will give back something beautiful. Give her land, she will give you a garden. Give her a house, she will give you a home. Give her some ingredients, and she will provide a meal. Give her clutter, and she will give you order. Give her dirt, and she will give you cleanliness. And if a man will give her only the tiniest part of himself, not even a complete cell, she will give him the most beautiful thing ever created – a child. Women give. It's their nature

Parasha *Tazria* begins with a discussion of the event of childbirth, and directions regarding the mother who gave birth.

Lev 15:19-20

19'When a woman has a discharge, if her discharge in her body is blood, she shall continue in her menstrual impurity for seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening.

Lev 12:1-5

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'When a woman ~~gives birth~~ (becomes pregnant) and bears a male [child], then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. 3 'And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. 4 'Then she shall remain in the **blood of [her] purification** for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary, until the **days of her purification** are completed. 5 'But if she bears a female [child], then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her

menstruation; and she shall remain in the **blood of [her]**
purification for sixty-six days.

I believe these passages have been the foundation of a number of misguided opinions that women are somehow an inferior subset of mankind generally. In fact, these passages are used by those who criticize a faith in G-d as being “sexist”, and “oppressive”.

I hope to show you today that the Torah actually give women an exalted status, which not only serves to bring life into the world (as Yeshua did at creation), but also serves as a reminder to men of the truth of life and death in the physical as well as the spiritual world.

Lev 12:1-2

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'When a woman **gives birth** (becomes pregnant) and bears a male [child], then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean.

The word translated as “gives birth” is *tzara*.

OT:2232 זָרָא **zara'** (zaw-rah'); a
primitive root; to sow;
figuratively, to disseminate,
plant, fructify:

It carries with it the idea of seed. Rarely is it used to refer to human life, and then its best meaning is “to become pregnant”.

So, the sequence shown in this passage is that she first conceives, then carries life, and then she bears life. This shows us that life begins at conception, not birth. Consider another source which says the same thing.

Ps 22:8-10

8 "Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him."

9 Yet You are He who brought me forth from the **womb**;
You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts.

10 Upon You I was cast from **birth**;
You have been my God from my mother's **womb**.

The first word translated as “womb” there is the Hebrew word *beton*. In the most ancient Hebrew characters, the letters *beit tet* and *nun* have important meanings.

Beit – house

Tet – surrounding

Nun – life

House that surrounds life.

The words “from birth”, is literally, another word for “womb” *rachum* – meaning “mercy”. The last use of the word “womb” in the passage goes back to the Hebrew word *beton*.

The time of separation for a woman is called the *niddah*. The *niddah* is not a rabbinic law. It is G-d’s command. The word *niddah* can mean “unclean”, but the root *nadad* gives us a far better meaning. It means to “distance oneself”.

A woman is to “distance herself” from many things during certain times. One is the monthly cycle, and the other is following childbirth.

But is that distancing, and the subsequent sacrifice, due to some unworthiness? No. Quite the opposite.

As we saw in a couple of parashiot ago, Aaron and his sons were required to be separated for seven days at the doorway of the Tent of Meeting. Then they made sacrifices.³

Were Aaron and his sons making a sacrifice for their sins? Is that why they were separated for seven days? They were being sanctified by that separation.

Yeshua distanced Himself. After His mikvah, he went into the wilderness for a time of *niddah*.⁴ Yeshua was without sin, so why would He enter the waters of purification, then distance Himself? Sanctification.

The common theme regarding the priests, the Messiah, and the mother... is the same. The distancing was for purposes of sanctification upon entering a holy calling.

³ Ex 29: 35-36

⁴ Mat 3:13 - 4:4

Why the command that any man who touches her should also be “unclean”. That is easy. G-d knows that men might take dominion over their wives and other women during this time of sanctification – and for that reason G-d established a penalty for any man who would touch such a woman. And it was for the same reason that a priest must not touch a woman during the time of his sanctification.

When Miriam (Mary) was awaiting the days when the prophecy spoken by the angel would come true, did she not observe the *niddah*? I submit that Miriam observed the *niddah* carefully, and fully, and thereby presented herself in purity to be the vessel from which the Messiah would soon be delivered.

She distanced herself from certain earthly pursuits, in accordance with the commandment, so as to be sanctified and purified for the privilege of miraculous conception.

After Yeshua’s birth, did she observe the commandments of the *niddah* following birth? Scripture tells us she did. She distanced herself again, for a period of 33 days following the birth of Yeshua – to be ready for the holy task that only she could fulfill.

Then, what spiritual light can a modern woman see in the *niddah*?

The L-rd forces a distancing of the woman during her monthly cycle from contact with others. Her body cleanses itself and readies itself as a fresh, newly created vessel, sanctified to the holy office of motherhood.

Thus the woman is sanctified for the purposes of preparing to partake in the holy act of conception, leading to the infusion of a holy soul into human flesh. This holy task of preparation is so vital that it even surpasses the commandments to go to the Temple.

So, each lady who follows the commandment of the *niddah*, commemorates the very same work by Miriam who likewise presented herself to the L-rd as a pure vessel. She goes to the *mikveh* at the end of the *niddah* as a sign to demonstrate that her sanctification, her cleanliness is now complete, and she is prepared for the holy task ahead.

Following childbirth, the longer *niddah* commemorates the time that Miriam prepared for the holy task of raising the Messiah in the way that He should go, so that when He was old He would not depart from it.

Do you see how the forced separation of Yeshua into the wilderness accomplished the very same task, and for the very same reason?

He is the source of our spiritual life as well as our physical life. He took the time to be separated – even from the Temple – so that He could be properly sanctified for the task ahead of Him.

The woman, during the times of *niddah*, serves as a reminder to all of society of the necessity of a holy time of separation, and sanctification. We are reminded of the exalted status of women.

We men would be well-served to pay attention to those days, and to honor our wives by facilitating their distancing with joy and support.

No one who has seen a newborn child can deny that the purest form of human life appears when a baby is born. Tiny children epitomize innocence and represent miracles.

The highest miracle of life is the introduction of a spiritual *noshoma* into the body of a human being. It is nothing less than the partnership that G-d has with a woman who bears a child. She joins hands with the Creator, as she brings into the world one stamped with the seal of the divine.

No man can claim partnership in such a miracle.

Why does the passage dictate that the woman who has just had a boy is to be distanced for 33 days, and a girl for 66 days? By seeing the time of *niddah* as a time of sanctification we can have understanding.

In Jewish understanding, G-d impacts the world He made in two ways. First, in Divine strength and secondly, in Divine goodness.

Men provide the world with the vessels of Divine strength.

Women provide the world with the vessels of Divine goodness.

When a boy is born, he is established as yet another guardian of the realms of holiness.

But when a girl is born, she is established as a special creature – one who has the potential to partner with G-d in the introduction of new souls into the world – a far higher honor than that accorded to men.

This parasha proves the consecration required for a mother to be prepared to pass along this high task to another generation of women is twice as great as it is for a boy.

With this understanding, it is clear that G-d does not prefer men over women. Nor are women some sort of lesser version of a man. They are in fact exalted in position both in the earthly and in the spiritual realm.

Only when we operate in our respective gifts in concert, each in a celebration of the contributions of the other, can we fully become the salt and light of the fallen world.