

September 9, 2018 - Rosh Hashanah! - Lev. 15:1-24 - Uncleaness, Issues and Menstruation**Torah Reading: Rosh Hashanah! - Leviticus 15:1-24 - Uncleaness, Issues and Menstruation****Psalm 79****Haftarah: Hosea 6:1-11**

Being in a state of ritual impurity was not in itself sinful, because menstruation and ejaculation are part of normal physiology. Uncleaness mainly prevented you from entering the Tabernacle/Temple precincts for offerings, etc.

Leviticus 15:1-2 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses and to Aaron, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When any man hath a running issue out of his flesh, because of his issue he is unclean."

The chapter deals mainly with uncleaness caused by natural issues and discharges, as well as unusual ones caused by disease.

Most people were unclean most of the time. As we saw previously with childbirth, menstrual blood and semen are designed to cooperate in a new life of a child, but they cause uncleaness when they end up either outside the body or by themselves and not part of sex in a legal marriage relationship.

The first part of the chapter talks about a running issue in a man's "flesh," which commentators say is a euphemism for "private parts." - and what seems to be gonorrhea or some other STD.

Maimonides - "If it proceeded merely from innocent, accidental causes as a strain in the back, carrying too great a burden, or violent leaping, the man was not defiled with it, nor concerned in this law."

After a 7-day separation, washing of clothes and immersion - same as a menstruating woman - then:

Leviticus 15:14-15 - "And on the eighth day he shall take to him two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, and come before the LORD unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and give them unto the priest: And the priest shall offer them, the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him before the LORD for his issue."

Issues were a symbol of death - like leprosy, what was inside was erupting outside. What was designed for life inside was flowing or rapidly putrefying outside. The defilement required a sacrifice to atone for it.

Even natural bodily functions as well as disease could cause someone to be unclean, and require separation, washing and sacrifice.

The rabbis said this kind of defilement included something that was blocking a natural discharge from flowing freely:

"whether his flesh run with his issue; or salivates, or emits a flow of matter like a saliva, or in the manner of spittle: or his flesh be stopped from his issue; with it, or because of it; because it is gross, [as Jarchi says] it cannot come forth freely it is his uncleanness; whether it be one or the other, he is reckoned on account of it an unclean person."

Leviticus 15:16 - "And if any man's seed of copulation go out from him, then he shall wash all his flesh in water, and be unclean until the even."

Not as part of sexual relations, but as a nocturnal emission or any ejaculation outside of sex.

Although masturbation was forbidden by the rabbis, Maimonides claimed that it could not be punishable by the court because there was not an explicit negative commandment forbidding it. The public, ritual disqualifications of men after seminal emission described in this chapter fell into disuse after the Temple was destroyed.

Leviticus 15:18 - "The woman also with whom man shall lie with seed of copulation, they shall both bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the even."

Again, the woman is not his partner in a sexual act, but she is accidentally defiled, i.e. they are sleeping in the same bed, and the man has a nocturnal emission.

Although many scholars interpreted this to mean uncleanness resulted from every sexual act, the New Testament sees sex in marriage as the purity of the type of Christ and the Bride, offsetting any possible defilement:

Hebrews 13:4 - "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

See 'Is Sexuality Impure? An Alternative Interpretation of Leviticus'
<https://www.academia.edu/5483817>

Women - "Niddah" / menstruation

The Hebrew term used for menstruation in **Leviticus 15:19, 20, 24, and 33** is *niddatah*, which has as its root *ndh*, a word meaning "separation," usually as a result of impurity. It is connected to the root *ndd*, meaning "to make distant." This primary meaning of the root was extended in the biblical corpus to include concepts of sin and impurity. The term *niddah* was transformed into a metaphorical expression for sin and impurity in general.

— <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/female-purity-niddah>

Leviticus 15:19 - "And if a woman have an issue, and her issue in her flesh be blood, she shall be put apart seven days: and whosoever toucheth her shall be unclean until

the even."

The sages extended the period when sexual relations between a husband and wife are prohibited to seven "clean" days following the menstrual period. This means that the total period of separation is about twelve days a month assuming a menstrual period of five days.

The Mishnaic sages taught that women were exempt from religious ordinances whose fulfillment depended upon a certain time of the day or the year (Mishnah, Berachot 3:3; Kiddushin 1:7). Thus, the lengthy periods of seclusion mandated by their ritual uncleanness, as well as their responsibilities at home, led to a general non-participation of women in the public activities of community religious life. A woman's routine, however, could change somewhat at menopause. An "old woman," according to the Mishnah, is one who has missed three menstrual periods (Niddah 1:5).

Washing in a Mikvah was a requirement added later

By the time of Jesus, bathing in water was an established part of the purification process following menstruation, but nowhere in the Bible is there mention of the menstruant bathing in water. Instruction on purification through the use of the mikveh (ritual bath) by menstruants may be traced to the time of the sages. An entire tractate of the Mishnah, *Mikvaot*, is devoted to immersion pools. To this day, for Jewish women committed to *halachah* (religious law), immersion in the *mikveh* is considered obligatory before marital relations can resume.

Leviticus 15:24 - "And if any man lie with her at all, and her flowers (*niddah*) be upon him, he shall be unclean seven days; and all the bed whereon he lieth shall be unclean."

Sexual relations during a woman's period are strictly forbidden (**Leviticus 18:19; Ezekiel 18:6; 22:10**). So this is not talking about sexual intercourse. It describes a situation in which two are sleeping in the same bed, and the wife's period starts unexpectedly (or, referring to any man or woman in close contact because of a crisis like war, refugees, etc.)

Leviticus 15:25 - "And if a woman have an issue of her blood many days out of the time of her separation, or if it run beyond the time of her separation; all the days of the issue of her uncleanness shall be as the days of her separation: she shall be unclean"

Woman with an Issue of Blood

The Synoptic Gospels record an account of Jesus coming into contact with a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years (**Matt 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48**). Whatever the cause of her loss of blood, the Levitical restrictions (esp. **Lev. 15:19-33**) rendered her ritually unclean, and likewise anyone and anything she might touch, thus making her an exile among her own people. The moment the woman touched the cloak of Jesus, however, she was healed by the power of God, and her defilement removed. The New Testament is silent about whether the

woman's actions rendered Jesus ceremonially unclean and about her obligation to bring the prescribed offerings following cessation of her discharge (cf. **Lev. 15:28-30**).

Read **Mark 5:25-34**

One explanation:

Uncleanness as a loss or 'vacuum' of God's presence

<http://www.aish.com/tp/b/sw/48962456.html>

"Tahara" and "Tuma," = "purity" and "impurity."

The open presence of God is called "Tahara." A state of God's hiddenness is called "Tuma." "Tuma" is really a "Tahara-vacuum."

When the open presence of God – the soul, or life – leaves a man, woman or animal, that body becomes Tamay.

A dead human body is more Tamay than a dead dog. Because the human being, when it is alive and filled with a soul – the open manifestation of God's presence – has a much greater condition of Tahara.

Next in the ranks of "Tuma" is a Yoledet: a woman who gives birth (**Leviticus 12:2**). The reason she is Tamay is that a degree of spiritual vacuum is created by the departure of the extra life within her – the child.

It is interesting that when a woman gives birth to a girl, her state of "Tuma" is twice that of when she gives birth to a boy (**Leviticus 12:5**). That is because the presence of a female child within her gives her a greater state of "Tahara." The female bears within her the power to give life, a condition that is an open manifestation of Godliness, and a higher level of "Tahara." The departure of a female child, therefore, creates a greater spiritual vacuum. Hence, the woman is Tamay for a longer period of time.

Next amongst the degrees of Tuma is the loss of "potential life." This Tuma affects both men and women.

After having marital relations, men are in a state of Tuma, because of the loss of the "building blocks" of life within them (**Leviticus 15:16**). And women incur this state of Tuma when they menstruate, because of the loss of potential life within them (**Leviticus 15:19**).

The Talmud calls this a "whisper of death."

The laws of impurity and "issues" described in this chapter and the requirements of sacrifice atoning for it are "pleasing to the Lord" because they point to the sacrifice of His Son.

The rabbis recognized that these chapters are awkward and uncomfortable to discuss.

But they also saw there was a mystery concealing God's mercy.

R. Shim'on b. R. Yitzḥaq explained the verse [“(His locks are...) black as a raven” – **Song of Songs 5:11**] as referring to portions of the Torah. Even though they can seem as if they are ugly, as if they are too black to discuss in public – for example the laws of discharges and skin diseases – the Holy One blessed is He said: “They are pleasing (‘arevot) to me”. This is what is said: “Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing (‘arvah) to the Lord” (**Malachi 2:15**). You should know that this really is true. For the portion dealing with the zav and zava were not said as one, rather this one by itself and this one by itself: “When any man has a discharge issuing from his member” (**Leviticus 15:2**); “When a woman has had a discharge of blood” (**Leviticus 15:25**). - (Leviticus Rabbah 19.3 ed. Margalioth 424)

In rabbinic aesthetics, black is seen as unattractive. Yet this beauty judgment is simultaneously turned on its head. The classical interpretation of the Songs verse “I am black but beautiful” is not far from “black is beautiful” since it calls into question the original aesthetical claim that black is not beautiful.

God is depicted as lovingly lingering over the very topics that humans prefer to rush through. The message of this midrash is that human revulsion at menstruation is understandable, but ultimately misguided and immature. God is able to recognize the beauty of these topics which people incorrectly see as “black.”

Uncleanness as a Spiritual Type

The language of impurity was taken up by the prophets to describe Israel's rebellion and sin.

Ezekiel 36:17 - "Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman."

The Mishnah compares the uncleanness of an idol to the impurity of a menstruating woman (Shabbat 9:1).

Isaiah 64:6 - "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

“filthy” = *iddah* - a variation of *niddah*, menstrual cycle

Uncleanness required a washing

Baptism as a mikvah

1 Peter 3:19-21 - "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth (uncleanness) of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:"

A Gentile convert is "recreated" after his mikvah baptism:

"When he comes up after his immersion, he is deemed an Israelite in all respects." (Yevamot 47b)

Rabbi Yose says in the Talmud, "One who has become a proselyte is like a child newly born." (Yevamot 48b)

"A man must be born of water and spirit." (**John 3:5**)

The mikvah represents the mother's womb, which is called in Hebrew *rechem*. This comes from the same root as the Hebrew word for mercy (*rahamah*).

Peter said it was like Noah's flood. A person under water enters a death-like state, like a person descending into a grave. When he comes back out of the water, he comes back to life as a new creation.

Paul in **Romans 6:3-4** - "buried with Him through baptism."

Jeremiah 17:13 - "O LORD, the hope (*miqveh*) of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters."

"hope" = *mikvah* - hope, a collection of water - used for immersion in Jewish purity, The "40 seahs" of water required by tradition for immersion of the body to cleanse.

40 seahs = 152 gallons at least, for a mikvah. Enough water to cover the entire body of an average-sized person.

In Jesus, the true "once for all" cleansing for issues, menstrual blood, childbirth and all other uncleanness had come, and He became the "fountain of living waters" that fulfilled this law in us:

Zechariah 13:1 - "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness (*niddah*)."