

Torah Portion Preview for Tazria and M'tzora

Shabbat beginning April 21, 2023

This week includes two portions for dealing with “Seed Bearing” and “Leprosy.” Those translations are rough labels for childbirth and for skin diseases. They include infectious discoloring and bodily fluids on people, clothing, and objects. These natural events are treated in the context of the spiritual events of purity and impurity. The priests observe the natural events to judge when to quarantine or re-admit affected persons.

Commentators have much difficulty with the portions. The ancients used them to diminish the spiritual engagement of women. Some modern commentators ignored them (as Mark Washofsky did in his *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*) but many others tried to wedge a small opening of relevance in the text. Modern psychology can help us connect to the feelings and thoughts of our ancestors. Their instructions are based on fear of great harm through natural or spiritual processes, which they allayed through careful observation and avoidance. Lack of knowledge bred overgeneralization, which unfairly stigmatized large segments of the population. But even so, they tried to re-unite the stigmatized persons into their community. Our efforts to accept members of minority races and sexual preferences show that we have not yet mastered this process.