



## Tazria

*VaYikra* (Leviticus) 12:1 - 13:59

Laws dealing with purification of the body follow the laws regarding purity of food. These laws deal with leprosy, bodily secretions, and rites of purification following childbirth. Most of them applied only to the sanctuary and people and holy objects connected with it; they did not apply to ordinary life or to people not intending to enter the sanctuary.

Following childbirth, a mother was forbidden to enter the sanctuary for forty days after delivering a boy or for eighty days if she had had a girl. At the end of this time, she was to bring a burnt offering and a sin offering, thereby becoming ritually clean and able to resume normal life. The sin offering signified the act of spiritual cleansing, while the burnt offering symbolized rededication to G-d after a period of abstention from the sanctuary.

Leprosy was given prominence because of the prevalence of the disease in the Middle East during Biblical times. No one suffering from leprosy was permitted in the sanctuary, and anyone showing symptoms of it was brought before the priest for examination. In cases of doubt, seven days (and seven more, if necessary) were to pass before the sufferer was re-examined.

When a person was cured, he or she was first inspected by the priest and then underwent a series of cleansing ceremonies, which lasted for eight days. Sacrifices were offered up and the former leper was restored as a full member of the community.

This Shabbat is known as *Shabbat Hachodesh*, the last of the four special Shabbats preceding the month of Nisan. The *Maftir*, the reading from the second Torah, is Exodus 12:1 - 12:20, which details the eating of the Passover sacrifice, the bitter herbs and the unleavened bread. It also deals with putting blood on the doorposts and the laws of Passover.



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