

Leprosy

These chapters we now read officially deal with leprosy but it is not the disease of that name we are familiar with today. After all there is no such disease as leprosy of clothes or buildings. Rather it symbolizes any infection or decay that affects our bodies, our fabrics and our structures. The priest had to identify a problem and then prescribe the cure.

The lesson we learn is that we need to take care of ourselves and our environment. The physical and the spiritual are interconnected. The role of the priest in ancient times, ideally was to bring both aspects together in the life of the community. We no longer expect priests to do these things. Instead we all need to recognize and deal with these issues ourselves and delegate where necessary to experts.

The Torah goes on to discuss other things that affect the human body outwardly like diseases of the skin, limbs and body. They are all occurrences that change us as we feel ourselves and as we are perceived by others. Because in Judaism we look at the world holistically we realize that the body affects the mind and vice versa. That is why the priests sought to heal emotionally and spiritually as well as physically. And that is why in addition to the medical steps taken to heal and cure, there were also ceremonies and procedures to help one's mind and spirit recover too.

We never took the view, like some Christian denominations, that we should not try to cure but leave it all to God and prayer. We always believed in both. One needs the best medical treatment available but one also needs to be spiritually healthy too.

We are so very aware nowadays how things like stress and pressure can themselves cause the body to deteriorate and decline. It has taken thousands of years for us to realize that psychological illnesses are as significant as physical ones, that they interact and need treatment too. The Torah teaches that the other dimension, the spiritual one, also needs to be nurtured and be healthy. Otherwise simply treating the physical symptoms will not lead to a permanent cure, only a temporary one. We need doctors of the soul as well as of the body.