

GUARD YOURSELF

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The laws of plagues, purity and impurity are purely chukim - laws that defy our limited rational capabilities to understand. But this is perhaps the very message that the Torah wishes us to learn and internalize. Much of life is not rational and does not fit into our accustomed schedules and plans. And even the most hardened secularist and/or rationalist must admit that much of life is inexplicable.

Weird things happen to all of us. There are forces in the world, dreams, inspirations, as well as strangers that suddenly appear that are present in our lives and are real to us though we have no idea how or why they influence us.

The whole subject of purity and impurity occupies great sections of the Torah. In the real but purely spiritual world of the Torah, purity and impurity are sensations that are real and can be felt and experienced. The rabbis decreed that the "land of the nations" meaning the part of the world that is not within the biblical boundaries, carries with it automatic impurity.

The air of the Land of Israel is purity in itself. The rabbis said that the air of the Land of Israel is one of wisdom and knowledge. It is its purity that leads to its atmosphere of true wisdom and knowledge. We are all aware that in cases of illness, God forbid, the medical treatment for the patient is oftentimes the inhalation of pure oxygen. In the world of the spirit, pure oxygen is the air of the Land of Israel.

There are plagues that descend upon individuals. There are other plagues that infest a human being's clothing. And, there are plagues that can infect one's home and dwelling. Thus no part of human existence, that is exempt or immune from the possibility of plagues and impurity.

Many of the family laws of the Jewish home are constructed on the basis of injecting purity into the relationship and into the family and home. There are no medical or physical rationales extant to these laws that are readily justifiable to the rational thinker. But the existence and observance of those laws is unquestionably what has preserved the Jewish home and family structure throughout the millennia.

It is the unseen and intangible that truly carries us through life and its vicissitudes. And that is why the Torah devotes so much space and teachings to such a seemingly esoteric subject. Someone who is shrouded in impurity and whose life is dominated by the plagues that exist all around, will find life unrewarding and depressing.

It is the latent purity and holiness within us that gives us a feeling of nobility and satisfaction in our lives. So, our task in life is to guard ourselves from the plagues that surround us, from the impurities that infiltrate the very core of our being, and to try and breathe the pure air of holiness that the Torah attempts to pump into our very beings.

Shabat shalom,
Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com