

Tazria-Metzora

THE WEISS EDITION

*Light
points*

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



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תזריע

Tazria

יב:ב | 12:2

אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וַיֵּלְדָה

If a woman conceives and gives birth...

Seeds of Rebirth

Parshas Tazria derives its name, “*Tazria*—she conceives,” from the brief discussion about childbirth at its start.

The bulk of the Parshah, however, deals with the laws pertaining to *tzaraas*, a spiritual condition that affects a person’s skin, clothing or home. Being afflicted with *tzaraas* is so miserable that the Talmud¹ likens it to death!

So how do these laws come under the name and banner of *Tazria*, which signifies birth and new life?

This unlikely name provides profound insight into the true objective of *tzaraas* and Divine retribution in general.

“*Tzaraas*,” writes Maimonides,

1. Nedarim 64b.

is a sign and a wonder prevalent among the Jewish people to warn them against *lashon hara*, “undesirable speech.” For when one speaks *lashon hara*, the walls of his house change color. If he repents, the house will become pure again. If, however, he persists in his wickedness until his house requires demolition, the leatherwear in his house upon which he sits and lies will change color.... If he persists in his wickedness until they require burning, the clothes he wears will change color.... If he persists in his wickedness until they require burning, his skin will change and develop *tzaraas*. He will be isolated and made known to the public until he ceases to engage in the talk of the wicked, namely mockery and *lashon hara*.²

The ordeal of *tzaraas* is thus essentially G-d’s way of rehabilitating a person from habitually speaking *lashon hara*. Its purpose is to warn the affected to amend their speaking habits, or, when necessary, to force them into isolation in order to completely retrain them. The experience of *tzaraas* ultimately gives a person a new lease on life, freeing him from the wretched and pathetic life of a gossipmonger. Hence, the name of the Parshah, “*Tazria*—she conceives,” because *tzaraas*, and likewise all the other punishments described in the Torah, are G-d’s compassionate means of providing a sinner the seeds for renewal.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 22, pp. 70–73

2. Mishneh Torah, Hil. Tum’as Tzaraas 16:10.

 יב:ב | 12:2

אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וַיֵּלֶדָה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים

If a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be unclean for seven days.

The Hardest Thing to Change is Yourself

Parshas Tazria discusses several types of impurity associated with the human body, and teaches us how to purify ourselves from them. Rashi notes that this follows the previous Parshah's discussion concerning which animals are "pure" (kosher) and which are not. Quoting from the Midrash, Rashi explains: "Just as man's creation was after the creation of all animals, beasts and birds, likewise the Torah states the laws concerning the status of man after the laws regarding animals, beasts and birds."

Why indeed did G-d create man on the sixth day of creation, after everything else? The Midrash explains: "So that if he is not meritorious, we say to him, 'A gnat preceded you, a snail preceded you.'"³ Man was created last to indicate that, in a certain sense, humankind is *inferior* to all the animals that preceded us in the order of creation. As explained in Tanya,⁴ the inferiority the Midrash refers to is man's inherent ability to *desire* what G-d forbids—let alone actually disobey G-d's commands. Animals and beasts are incapable of defying the G-dly mission and purpose for which G-d created them;

3. Vayikra Rabbah 14:1

4. Likkutei Amarim, chapter 29.

only the human being is capable of being drawn to behavior that G-d despises and forbids. In this sense, the innate nature of the human being is lowlier than that of insects, beasts and fowl.

The laws of identifying kosher and non-kosher, pure and impure, represent the spiritual refinement of various aspects of creation through the guidance of the Torah. As a rule, the Torah gradually advances the learner from lighter topics and easier tasks to those that are more difficult to grasp and accomplish.⁵ The final task that the Torah addresses is therefore the refinement of the coarse human body. Creation of man came after the creation of the animals, because man alone has the potential to directly oppose G-d's will, unlike any other creation. For that very reason, his "laws" and refinement are the most difficult task of all.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, pp. 74-76

5. See Mishnah, Avos 5:22; Talmud, Pesachim 68b, et al.

מצורע

Metzora

יד:ב|14:2

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע ביום טהרתו

*This shall be the law of the metzora,
on the day of his purification.*

Skin Deep

The Talmud records a conversation between Eliyahu Hanavi and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi regarding the whereabouts of Moshiach. Eliyahu tells Rabbi Yehoshua that Moshiach can be found at the entrance to the city,¹ sitting among the poor and sickly.² According to Rashi, and as is implied elsewhere in the Talmud,³ “the sickly” refers to people suffering from *tzaraas*, and Moshiach himself is also a *metzora*—a person afflicted with *tzaraas*.

Why is Moshiach said to be a *metzora*?

1. Rome, according to some variants of the text.

2. Sanhedrin 98a.

3. Ibid. 98b.

The Torah calls *tzaraas* an affliction “*in the skin of his flesh*,”⁴ not a disease of the flesh itself. This indicates, says the Alter Rebbe,⁵ that a person can develop *tzaraas* only when he has eradicated his deep internal character flaws, and his spiritual blemishes are solely skin-deep. Since the person has already refined himself entirely “from within,” and his shortcomings are only superficial, G-d afflicts him with a supernatural skin condition to prompt him to perfect even these slight and uncharacteristic imperfections.⁶

Accordingly, we can understand why the Talmud identifies Moshiach as someone suffering from *tzaraas*. Moshiach’s condition reflects the collective state of the Jewish people in the final days of our exile. Over the generations, the Jewish nation has been effectively refined, both in body and in soul; any remaining imperfections are largely only external. Therefore, in the final days before the redemption, Moshiach, the collective soul of the Jewish people, is comparable to a *metzora*, whose deficiencies are only slight and superficial. It is only a matter of moments until we perfect even these final details and merit our complete and final redemption.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 22, pp. 75–79

4. Vayikra 13:2.

5. Likkutei Torah, Vayikra 22b.

6. The Alter Rebbe thereby explains why *tzaraas* is virtually nonexistent nowadays—because people with no internal imperfections are difficult to find.

 יד:ב | 14:2

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע ביום טהרתו והובא אל הכהן

This shall be the law of the metzora, on the day of his purification; he shall be brought to the Kohen.

Ready or Not

A *metzora*, a person afflicted with *tzaraas*, must remain outside the community encampment until his *tzaraas* heals. The isolation reflects his sorry spiritual state. *Tzaraas* is a punishment for *lashon hara*, speaking derogatorily about others, which causes strife and conflict.⁷ Holiness, in contrast, is characterized by unity and harmony. The *metzora's* association with strife, the polar opposite of holiness, requires that he be separated and isolated from the rest of Bnei Yisrael's holy camp.

This gives even more depth to the Torah's statement that the *metzora* "will be brought to the Kohen." The verse is difficult to understand literally, for it is the Kohen who approaches the *metzora* and not vice versa, as the impure *metzora* may not enter the camp. Moreover, why does the verse specify that the *metzora* and not vice versa, "shall be brought," instead of saying that he will go on his own?

With these words, however, the Torah is hinting that the *spiritual* rehabilitation of the *metzora* is not merely a possibility, but an *eventuality*: "He shall be brought to the Kohen" whether he desires to be purified or not.

7. See Rashi, Vayikra 13:46.

The *metzora*, completely distanced from the Jewish camp, is also symbolic of a person so utterly removed from holiness that to willingly return to a Jewish lifestyle seems entirely unnatural for him. In fact, he may desire just the opposite. Nevertheless, the Torah foretells and guarantees that “he *shall* be brought to the Kohen”—even a person as distant as a *metzora* will ultimately do *teshuvah* and return to G-d and His ways. For, as is explained in Tanya,⁸ before the coming of Moshiach, G-d will arouse a spirit of *teshuvah* in the heart of every single Jew, bringing him to the “Kohen,” as it were, for purification, even if he is not on the level of seeking *teshuvah* on his own.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, pp. 100–102



8. Chapter 39.



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