



## ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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### PARSHAT TAZRIA-METZORA

The double parsha of Tazria-Metzora is challenging.

The theme is simple: certain things make one tamei. One who is tamei may not enter the Mikdash. There is a process by which one returns to being tahor.

We began this theme last week with tuma from contact with dead animals. The tuma in our parsha is what is called tuma whose source is our own body: childbirth, Tzaraat (loosely translated as leprosy), and emissions from procreative organs. In addition, while describing Tzaraat, which is a blight on the skin, there is also blight on clothing and on one's home.

In each type of tuma, there is a ritual process including sacrifices to restore tahara or purity.

The challenge is in understanding all the details. Why do these particular people become tamei? And how is the tuma lifted by these particular procedures?

I will offer a modest suggestion to frame the idea of tuma, though this suggestion will be inadequate in explaining all the details.

The Torah begins with a dramatic proposition. G-d created man in His Image. Created like Him? That is no small thing! What a grand proposition.

That is the foundation of the entire Torah. Man is not a fancy animal. He is in His Image. Well, what exactly does the image of G-d mean? We will have to learn through the stories of the Torah in what way we are like Him and in what way not.

We procreate, creators as He is a Creator. We communicate, as He Communicates to us. We make distinctions between holy and non, as He made a distinction between day and night. We are generous as He. Kind as He.

But. Unlike Him, we have physical bodies. We are animal-like, needing food. Illness. Death. Aggression. Violence.

We are not animals. Well, we are animal-like in some things. But we are in His Image. Physical, yes. But majestic, lofty, grand.

Man is a partner to the Divine. The notion of finite man as partner to the Infinite is frightening and humbling. But it is also grand, magnificent. If G-d creates us in His Image – well, He must think of us as worthy. What a compliment to us! Man is His worthy partner? Wow. Man is majestic. Noble. Elevated. Distinguished. Unique. G-d invites majestic, noble man to the Mikdash.

However, this life that we live sometimes causes us to feel less than majestic. Not so noble. We sometimes feel beaten down, rather

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pedestrian, glorified animals. And in particular, we feel beaten down by those things that we share with animals: food, procreation, illness, death. When confronted by our limitations, the physicality we share with animals, our mortality, we can lose the nobility of our station. We can feel like glorious animals.

That may be the meaning of tuma. Perhaps *Tuma is the state of bruised nobility*. When man feels unconvinced that he is created in the image of G-d, when he doubts his part in a grand covenant, when he questions the nobility of the invitation to be His partner; perhaps that is what Tuma is. Bruised nobility.

These very earthy parts of our being can damage our sense of majesty, making us feel closer to animals than to angels.

Tuma is generated by those experiences that bruise our majesty. The rituals that remove tuma are perhaps designed to restore that majesty. The invitation to approach G-d in the Mikdash requires man in the fullness of his majesty. That invitation is suspended for the one whose nobility is bruised, one who doubts his lofty station. That person needs nobility restored before approaching G-d. The process of becoming Tahor is the restoration of our lofty station. Man in the fullness of his majesty is required for the Divine rendezvous.



#### 1ST ALIYA (VAYIKRA 12:1-13:23)

**Childbirth** renders a woman tamei (tmeya). At the end of the tuma, 40 days for a male, 80 days for a female child, she brings an offering of an olah and a chatat. She may then enter the Mikdash. **Tzaraat** has different forms and different laws. It can be a white patch on the skin, with white hair, cover the entire body, or appear on a recovered inflammation. The kohen checks to determine if it is Tzaraat or if it is an innocuous skin condition. Some appearances are

unclear and require a 7-day interval to determine if Tzaraat or innocuous.

Childbirth is joyous; yet, the woman becomes tmeya, restricting her entry to the Mikdash. Along the theme mentioned above, experiences that we share with animals may damage our sense of the nobility of our station. Childbirth, though wonderful, is earthy. To recapture the higher nobility of humanity, the woman brings offerings, as a reboot, a reaffirmation of the higher calling in being human.

Tzaraat has many details. It appears as unusual colorations of the skin. The skin is the visible part of our bodies. The skin abnormalities of Tzaraat would make one self-conscious or embarrassed.

A unique aspect of humanity over animals is our social nature. Being self-conscious of our appearance would injure our social nature. This damage to our sense of nobility also demands a reboot in the form of a ceremony at the conclusion of the Tzaraat, outlined in the later aliyot.



#### 2ND ALIYA (13:24-39)

Tzaraat can also be found on skin that suffered a burn or on the head or beard. The kohen assesses the nature of the discoloration determining whether it requires 7-day quarantine and reassessment to determine if tamei or tahor.

Human intellect is another distinguishing feature of man over animal. Perhaps this blight on our head is symbolic of misuse of the power of our intellect.

**Condolences to  
Dr. Josh Daniel and family  
on the passing of his brother**

**Stewie ז"י**

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים



### 3RD ALIYA (13:40-54)

Tzaraat can also appear on the head or beard, with hair loss and skin discoloration. When a person is declared to have Tzaraat, he rends his garments, lets his hair grow, covers himself to his lips and dwells outside of the camp. **Garments** displaying specific discoloration are deemed to have garment Tzaraat. The kohen assesses the color and shape, quarantining if necessary. If determined to have Tzaraat, the garment is burned.

After the detailed description of when a person has Tzaraat and when not, the consequence of Tzaraat is described. The person acts as a mourner would act: garment torn, hair grown, head covered (a practice we no longer generally observe as mourners). But more dramatically: he is sequestered out of the populated area.

This isolation is one of the things that prompts the midrashic comment that Tzaraat is for lashon hara – the punishment fits the transgression. If you can't treat people respectfully, then spend some time alone. Or, in line with the approach outlined above: the nobility of man is expressed in social interaction.

Tzaraat, an embarrassing discoloration that makes us feel self-conscious, diminishes our sense of self. Isolation allows us to reflect on our self-worth. Self-worth has nothing to do with how we look to others, whether our skin looks good or whether our dress looks fine. Self-worth is intrinsic; we have self-worth simply because we are created in the image of G-d.

Clothing too is uniquely human. Clothing is an expression of human dignity. The tumah of a garment restricts the wearer from entry to the Mikdash, as human dignity is diminished by this oddly blemished garment.



### 4TH ALIYA (13:55-14:20)

The regulations of tuma of

garments are completed. The **process of becoming tahor** following Tzaraat of the body is outlined. When the kohen determines that the Tzaraat of the skin has subsided, the person with the Tzaraat may reenter the camp though for 7 additional days he may not enter the Mikdash. 2 birds are taken, one slaughtered, the other dipped into its blood, along with cedar wood, a red thread and hyssop. His hair is shaved. On the 8th day he brings offerings. Blood and oil are placed on his right ear, thumb and toe.

The details of the Tzaraat and the purification from it are numerous; too numerous to properly outline here. One detail though is worth mentioning. At the beginning of the return from quarantine of the person with Tzaraat, 2 birds are taken; one slaughtered, one sent free. This is not done in the Mikdash, as the person is out of the entire camp.

We have heard of the 2, one slaughtered, one not before. The 2 goats of Yom Kippur; one slaughtered, one sent to the wilderness.

In addition, the end of the Tzaraat process requires blood and oil placed on the right ear, thumb and toe. That echoes what was done to the kohanim in their inauguration – also on their 8th day.

Perhaps this is a nod to our human condition. The dominant mood of Yom Kippur is contrition, disappointment in our failings. But at the same time, we are angelic, a kingdom of kohanim, a holy nation. Hence the parallel; Yom Kippur and the inauguration of the kohen. The human condition of contrition and of grandeur.



### 5TH ALIYA (14:21-32)

If one is unable to afford the above offerings, a less expensive alternative is offered, including birds in place of one of the animal offerings. A similar process to the one with 2 animals is performed.

It makes perfect sense to have a sliding scale to accommodate the less wealthy people. After all, when our nobility is bruised in our external trappings – how we appear to others, how our clothing appears – our reintegration will emphasize not what we *have* but who we *are*. Animals for those who can afford, birds for those who can't. Not *what* you bring, but *that* you bring.



#### 6TH ALIYA (14:33-15:15)

In the Land of Israel, **homes** will be subject to Tzaraat as well. The kohen will examine the marks. If declared Tzaraat, all that is in the home becomes tamei, hence all shall be removed before the kohen's declaration. If the marks spread over the next 7 days, the kohen shall order stones removed and replaced. If the spread persists, the kohen may order the home demolished. If the kohen declares the home tahor, 2 birds are taken, one slaughtered, the other dipped in its blood with cedar wood, a crimson thread and hyssop. The bird is set free. A **Zav**, a male, has a discharge from his organ of procreation that is unusual. He renders others tamei and requires a purification process of 2 bird offerings at the end of 7 days.

Continuing our theme that tuma is associated with those parts of our lives that may hinder our sense of dignity, our home can be the source not of diminished dignity but of excess, of hubris.

Oh, we moderns know all too well how the fantastic wealth of our times can inflate our sense of self-worth. Man's dignity lies not in the grandness of his home, but in the grandeur of his person. A pox on your house if the grandeur of your home inflates human dignity to become hubris.



#### 7TH ALIYA (15:16-33)

A regular sexual discharge of a man renders a low level of tuma. A



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woman's regular menstrual bleeding renders her temeya for 7 days, transferring her tuma to others including through touch. A woman who has bleeding inconsistent with her regular period is a Zava, a similar Tuma to the male Zav. Offerings are brought following the cessation of this unusual bleeding.

Procreation may also lead to an inflated self image; creation is not just His, but is ours. He gives life. We give life. Healthy self image of our dignity and majesty can be damaged by our physicality in both directions; deflated and inflated. Too low a view, that we are nothing more than animals. Or too high, as creators, leaving less room for the Creator. ■

**The Haftorah is for**  
**Shabbat Rosh Chodesh**