

פרשת  
תזריע

פרשת תזריע  
Parshat Tazria  
פרשת החודש

Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



SHAME-CULTURE TACTICS

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We are taught at a young age that what others think of you is insignificant, rather you should do what you know is right. This ideal is strongly reinforced in Judaism. As Jews, we live in a culture that is

not one of shame, rather we act based on the knowledge that we follow the Torah, that which God has commanded us. Never would it cross our minds that we would be publicly humiliated and shamed for not keeping kashrut or any other mitzvah. For most of us, our mitzvot are kept with the knowledge that we are doing that which God has asked of us, not out of fear that society would shame us.

In this week's parsha, Parshat Tazria, the laws of *tzara'at* are introduced as a punishment for lashon hara, evil

speech. One can not help but read through the laws of the *metzora* and gasp at the publicity of the one afflicted with this disease. The *metzora*, by contracting the disease, has a public sign on his body, clothing, and even furniture announcing to everyone that he has the disease. The Torah paints a picture for us describing how the Kohen declares the *metzora*, "unclean, unclean" -- "וְטָמֵא טָמֵא, יִקְרָא" (Vayikra 13:45). Furthermore, we are told that the *metzora* is separated from society and "dwells outside the camp" -- "בְּדָד יֵשֵׁב, מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבוֹ" (Vayikra 13:46).

How do we wrap our heads around these laws? Since when is Judaism a religion that promotes publicly shaming and ostracising others?

To understand the punishment of *tzara'at*, it is imperative that we understand the crime of one who speaks lashon hara. Anthropologists agree that language is one of the most powerful tools society possesses. It is through language that communities form, work together, live together, and build together. Through language, society forms a trust, an overall camaraderie. It

is, therefore, no surprise that following the construction of the *migdal bavel*, the Babylonian Tower, God punishes the builders of the tower with a mixture of languages, thereby disabling their ability to communicate.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks explains that one who speaks lashon hara severs the harmony amongst his community. By speaking maliciously against a friend, co-worker or family member, the trust inherent in that relationship is broken. Therefore, says Rabbi Sacks, although Judaism does not usually invoke a public punishment, when it come to the *metzora*, the obvious consequence is to expose and shun them from the very society which they harmed. It is only through these tactics that the *metzora* will get a taste of the separation which he caused. Perhaps the feeling of being out of the camp helps one realize the profound value of community.

## PURE SPIRITUALITY

CHANA SCHANDELSON ('22)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Tazria, Hashem explains to Moshe the laws of *tzara'at*, a supra-natural plague that can cause a white discoloration to a person's body, clothing, or home. The parsha continues to describe the various ways to identify and treat the *tzara'at*. Hashem says to Moshe:

וְשֵׁעַר בְּנִגְעַת הַפֶּה לְבָנָן... נִגְעַת צִרְעָתָהּ הִוא וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמְא אֹתוֹ

"If hair in the plague is turned white... it is a plague of *tzara'at*; and the Kohen shall look on him and pronounce him unclean" (Vayikra 13:13).

We learn from this pasuk that *tzara'at* is not a medical affliction that a doctor can cure, but rather a spiritual affliction that can only be identified by a kohen. Other sources explain that *tzara'at* is caused by different negative actions such as lashon hara. It is interesting that this ailment appears as a shade of white instead of a normal color for a rash. The color white is usually a sign of purity and holiness, as seen with the Kohen Gadol's clothing on Yom Kippur. Why then is *tzara'at*, a sign of wrongdoing, manifested by the color white which is considered a color of purity?

There are different opinions as to the message of the

color white. Rav Aharon Lopiansky, Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington, explains that one should have the goal to be ruled by their neshama rather than the body. "When this takes place, the color white is an expression of purity and closeness to Hashem. The individual's *ruchniyut* is manifest and readily apparent even in and through his physical body."

Rabbi Nachman takes another approach. He teaches, in his book *Likutey Maharan*, that white is a state of mind and that, "the less our thinking is clouded by personal interests, the more clearly we can see the truth that surrounds us." This means that the individual with *tzara'at* should look at his *tzara'at* as a reminder to grow from his mistakes. Even though *tzara'at* is not relevant nowadays, this parsha can inspire us to be more aware and lead us in the direction of spiritual growth.

## KNOWING BETTER

ARIELLA GREENBERG ('22)

Parshat Tazria mainly discusses the laws of *tzara'at*, a spiritual ailment treated only by the Kohen Gadol. The Haftorah for Parshat Tazria is from Melachim II Perakim 4-5. This portion discusses two interesting stories about Elisha haNavi. The main story that is read is about Naaman, the general of Aram. Naaman was afflicted with *tzara'at* and was advised by his wife's Jewish servant to seek help from Israel. Naaman sent a letter to the king and was referred to Elisha. Upon coming to Elisha, he was told to wash himself in the Yarden River. Naaman scoffed at this suggestion and left. His servants advised him to listen to Elisha. Naaman did as he was told and was cured of *tzara'at*. Naaman was arrogant and thought he knew better than Elisha, the very person he was asking for help.

The Talmud states that there are seven reasons one gets *tzara'at*: speaking slander, murder, perjury, adultery, arrogance, theft, and envy. While gossiping is the commonly-identified cause of *tzara'at* in Tanach, in this case, Naaman most likely got *tzara'at* because of his arrogance. In *Pirkei Avot* 4:4 we are taught to be, "exceedingly humble in spirit, for the hope of man is worms." The Rambam comments on the words "man is worms," that this is teaching us where we came from and where we will return to in reference

to the ground. The Rambam also quotes the pasuk which says:

וְיָרֵם לְבַבְךָ וְשַׁכַּחַת אֶת־ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַמוֹצִיאֲךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים

“Beware lest your heart grow naughty and you forget the Lord, your God, who freed you from Egypt” (Devarim 8:14).

This teaches us that arrogance can quickly become dangerous when we begin to credit ourselves with our own success, rather than realize that all success truly comes from Hashem.

Naaman acted with gross arrogance towards Elisha, mocking the idea of bathing in the Yarden. He acted as if he knew better than Elisha on this matter, even though he had gone to seek out Elisha’s help. This is applicable to our daily lives. Sometimes we think we know better than God, or we know what’s best for us more than He does. Just like Naaman, we can easily lose sight of who the real Master is and what our positions are. There is a very valuable lesson to be learned from Parshat Tazria and its Haftorah. Even when we think we know better, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that Hashem is ultimately in control and puts us on the path which we are supposed to be on. Arrogance can sometimes get in the way, but we must remember Hashem’s presence in our lives and strive for humility.

## KEEPING PURITY PURE

SARA DEICHMAN ('19)

After hearing about the Mishkan and Nadav and Avihu’s downfall, the Torah diverts from the storyline as it turns to this week’s parsha, which is significant due to its detail regarding impurity. The story of Aharon’s sons is not continued until chapter 16. The question is, “Why is this segment here?”

“As Hashem commanded Moshe,” is constantly repeated throughout the building of the Mishkan. Rashi claims that since the Mishkan was built to contradict the evil worship of the Golden Calf, God created a way for the Jews to “bounce-back” and connect with Him in a way that He approved of. Through Torah and mitzvot, God allows us to connect with him in

the way that He requested. This is our way of noting that we do our actions, “as Hashem commanded us.”

Nadav and Avihu foil this phrase that continuously appears in the previous parshiyot. The wording of Nadav and Avihu’s sin explicitly states, “which God had *not* commanded them.” Their burnt offering stands out because it was done *not* according to God. The Torah connects impurity to the infamous tale of Aharon’s sons; we are prohibited from entering the Mishkan when impure. Being impure is not the sin, but entering the Mishkan in such a state is a clear sin.

After we built the Golden Calf, Hashem removed His *Shechinah*. This shows that assuming the desires of God has major ramifications. However, there is time for redemption. When God rebuilds the Mishkan, the *Shechinah* returns. Nadav and Avihu did not warrant a relationship with God due to their failure to enter the Mishkan in a state of purity. This week’s parsha draws upon the intricacies of purity so that we can follow, “the thing which the Lord commanded” after the grave sin of Aharon’s sons and in the midst of the Mishkan which hands us our relationship with God Himself.

## BRIDGING THE GAP

MORDECHAI SHEKHTER ('20)

There are three areas of halacha that, although one might be an expert on a certain subject, require someone else to declare whether the matter is permissible or forbidden. One of these areas is the declaration of whether or not somebody is *tahor* or has *tumat tzara’at*. If a kohen, who is an expert in *nega’im*, believes that he may have *tzara’at*, he is not allowed to declare *tumah* but rather he has to get somebody else to confirm.

*Nega tzara’at* is very closely related to *lashon hara*, which is no coincidence. When a person speaks *lashon hara*, they are using their speech to lower the perception of another *yid* in *Klal Yisroel*. That person believes that their speech has a certain authority. There seems to be a connection between the *halacha* that a Kohen cannot declare himself *tamei* or *tahor* and the fact that a person who speaks *lashon hara* gets *tzara’at*. The connection is that even though one

may be an expert on a certain subject, whether it be confirming the purity status of someone or believing that they know a certain person better than that person knows themselves, they still are unable to make unbiased opinions because although they think they might know, they do not. A person must believe that they do not know everything, and certainly must not judge what other people are going through. This connection teaches us to be sensitive to other people and to judge the entirety of every person favorably, without being biased.

Interestingly, out of all the *tumot* listed in the Torah, the distance from a person's dwelling place is the farthest regarding lashon hara. The lesson we can take from this is that there are many repercussions for speaking lashon hara, and speaking lashon hara in order to gain popularity among peers will only widen the gap and limit the commonality between people if all they can talk about is others. If we remain diligent in keeping the mitzvah of not speaking lashon hara we will be happier people with much more meaning in our lives.



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