



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT TAZRIA

The next 2 parshiot, Tazria and Metzora are challenging. Their theme is simple: one who is Tamei, ritually impure may not enter the Mikdash. There are a number of situations that render a person Tamei. The removal of the Tuma status allows re-entry to the Mikdash. Who becomes Tamei and how to remove the Tuma is outlined.

The idea that entry to the holiest place should have special rules makes sense. The challenge lies in why these specific people are Tamei and cannot enter. And more specifically, why a person with tzaraat, a kind of leprosy, should be restricted. But let's at least try to offer some approach to understanding why these people become Tamei. And why they are restricted from entering the Mikdash.

I will propose an approach and attempt to trace it through the aliyot. I think this approach has merit as a perspective though it does not answer all the details and complexity of the laws.

The Mikdash is the place of the rendezvous of man and G-d. The notion of finite man encountering the Infinite is frightening and humbling. But it is also grand. If He is inviting us to meet Him in His Home – well, He must think of us as worthy to meet. Wow. Man is His worthy partner. For man is created in His Image. Man is majestic. Noble. Elevated. Distinguished. Unique. G-d invites

majestic, noble man to His home, the Mikdash, the place of the meeting of the Infinite with man.

However, while *He* thinks of us as majestic, life sometimes causes *us* to feel less than majestic. Circumstances can cause us to lose a sense of our nobility. We can feel ordinary and not elevated, rather pedestrian. And in particular, our nobility is bruised by the things we share with animals: food, procreation, illness, death. When confronted with our bodies, the physicality we share with animals, our mortality, we can lose the nobility of our station. We can feel like glorious animals.

Perhaps this may be the meaning of tuma. 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. These very earthy parts of our being can damage our sense of nobility, making us feel closer to animals than to angels.

Man in his nobility is invited to approach G-d: man, when doubting his nobility needs to be restored before approaching G-d. The Tamei person is one with bruised nobility. The process of becoming Tahor is the process of reclaiming our nobility. Human nobility is required to rendezvous with the Divine in His home.



1ST ALIYA (VAYIKRA 12:1-13:5)

Childbirth renders a woman tamei (tmeya). A male child is

circumcised at 8 days. At the end of the tuma, 40 days for a male, 80 days for a female child, the new mother immerses and brings an offering of an olah and a chatat. She may then enter the Mikdash. **Tzaraat**: a patch of white skin may be tzaraat. A Kohen examines it to see if it is the requisite white and if the hairs on that skin are white. If so, the person is declared a Metzorah. If the signs are not the requisite, the person is quarantined for a week. The quarantine can be extended a second week.

Childbirth is joyous. Yet, the woman becomes tmeiya, restricting her entry to the Mikdash. Along the theme mentioned above, experiences that we share with animals bruise our sense of the nobility of being human. Childbirth, though wonderful, is earthy. The wonder of birth may be overshadowed by oppressive feelings of the physicality of birth and the early stage of child-care. To recapture the higher nobility of motherhood, the woman brings offerings, as a reboot, a reaffirmation of the higher calling of creating this new life.



2ND ALIYA (13:6-17)

The Kohen examines the skin following the 2 weeks of quarantine, and if it has not spread, the person is able to immerse and become tahor. If it spread, the tuma continues. If the white patch on the skin, with white hair, has healthy skin in its midst, it is tamei. If it covers the entire body, he is tahor. When healthy skin returns, he is tamei. The Kohen declares the tamei or tahor status of the tzaraat.

Tzaraat has many details. It appears as unusual colorations of the skin. The skin is the visible part of our bodies. In fact, if the tzaraat skin discoloration is on a part of the

body that the Kohen is unable to see, it is not tzaraat. It needs to be visible.

Visible skin blemishes are embarrassing. One manner in which mankind is distinct from animals is in our social nature. Being self-conscious of our appearance bruises our social nature; we'd rather not be seen in public. 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 next week's parsha.



3RD ALIYA (13:18-23)

White skin with white hairs that is found in skin recovering from a wound is tamei. If the Kohen does not find the requisite color or hair, the person is quarantined for 7 days. If it spreads, he is tamei. If not, he is tahor.

All the details of tzaraat are contained in one long chapter. However, the aliya breaks are deliberate. Aliyot 2, 3, 4, and 5 all end on verses declaring the person tahor.

When we have an opportunity in life to be positive, let's land on that, not a verse that declares the person tamei. Interesting that we often do the opposite: we will compliment a person and then launch into criticism. How about trying the reverse? Let the last thing said be positive, the compliments. Never land on the tamei; only the tahor.



4TH ALIYA (13:24-28)

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

There are normal skin conditions that are not tamei – a wound or a burn or boils. Tzaraat occurs when those conditions have

skin abnormalities in their healing.



5TH ALIYA (13:29-39)

Tzaraat can also appear on the head or beard, with hair loss and skin discoloration. The Kohen assesses the spread of the discoloration to determine if it requires quarantine and if it is tamei.

The list of locations of tzaraat concludes with the head, the most visible and hence self-conscious location for the tzaraat.



6TH ALIYA (13:40-54)

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.

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 grows, covered head (a practice we no longer generally observe as mourners). But more dramatically: he is sequestered out of the populated area.

This isolation 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 my approach outlined above: proximity to G-d demands that we display the nobility of man. Tzaraat is an embarrassing discoloration, in a place of the body that everyone can see. It makes us feel self-conscious, diminishing 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. Isolation engenders those feelings; there is no one to impress, no one with whom to interact. Save One.



7TH ALIYA (13:55-59)

If determined to have tzaraat, the garment is burned. The regulations of tuma of garments are completed.

Clothing too is uniquely human. Animals do not wear clothes. Clothing is an expression of human dignity. The tumah of a garment restricts the wearer from entry to the Mikdash; human dignity is diminished by this oddly blemished garment.

The theory we offered in this parsha is that tuma and tahara restrict people from entering the Mikdash, as they are moments when human dignity and uniqueness are sullied. G-d invites majestic man of dignity to the Mikdash. While we share aspects of life with animals - food, procreation, illness and death – we are oh so much more glorious than animals. And the uniqueness of man is displayed in the fullness of his social interactions and in the dignity of his clothing, both absent from the animal world (the social nature of some animals does not reach the richness of human society with its communication and robust and sophisticated structure of cities, business and education). The majesty of the invitation to man to rendezvous with G-d in the Mikdash demands the fullest dignity and majesty of man. When that dignity is bruised by confrontation with our earthy, animal nature, or by injury to the dignity

of our uniqueness in society and clothing, we need to reaffirm our majesty through purification and offerings. That perhaps can give meaning to the laws of tuma and tahara.

HAFTORAH MELACHIM BET 4:42-5:19

This week's *haftorah* describes how a prophet miraculously cured an Aramite general of his *tzara'at* ailment. The *haftorah* begins with a brief mention of one of the prophet Elisha's miraculous feats. He received a paltry gift of twenty loaves of bread and a sack of grain. At Elisha's insistence, this gift was shared amongst his hundred students. The food was enough for all—and there were even leftovers.

Naaman, general of the powerful Aramite armies, contracted *tzara'at*. A young captive Israelite maid advised him to seek the assistance of the “prophet in Samaria.” Acting on this suggestion, the king of Aram dispatched a message to the king of Israel, “Behold I have sent Naaman my servant to you, and you shall cure him of his *tzara'at*!”

The king of Israel panicked, until Elisha sent him a message: “Why have you rent your garments? Let him come to me now, and let him know that there is a prophet in Israel!”

Elisha advised Naaman to immerse in the Jordan River. Despite his initial reluctance to do so, Naaman carried out the prophet's orders, and was immediately healed.

Elisha refused to accept any gifts from Naaman. The general promised Elisha that he would no longer serve any deity other than the One G-d, and he departed. ■



STATS

27th of 54 sedras; 4th of 10 in Vayikra.
128 lines in a Sefer Torah, rank: 48th.
9 Parshiyot, 5 open, 4 closed.
67 pesukim - ranks 48th (8th in Vayikra).
1010 words - 48th (8th in Vayikra).
3667 letters - 48th (8th in Vayikra).



MITZVOT

9 mitzvot; 7 positive; 2 prohibitions.

A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES
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אשה כי תזריע וילדה זכר וטמאה שבעת ימים (יב:)

“If a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy, she shall be ritually unclean for seven days” (12:2)

After reading last week's parsha, Parshat Shemini, which dealt with the impurity and purity amongst animals, this week's parsha will deal with impurity and purity amongst people.

Why does the Torah discuss these issues with animals prior to discussing these issues with man?

The *Ktav Sofer* (Rabbi Avraham Shmuel Sofer 1815-1871) answers that mankind, in principle is weaker and more vulnerable physically than any other living creature. Animals in the wild can obtain food without toil and preparations. Man, on the other hand, must work for his food and needed clothing. On a different perspective, man is on a higher level, being entrusted to serve G-d. This special relationship is only retained as long as man remains worthy to fulfill the ways of the Divine.

Once man squanders this spiritual level, he regresses to being lower than all other creatures in this world.

As quoted in the *Midrash Vayikra Rabbah*: “If man is worthy of it, they shall say of him: You come before all the works of creation. But if he is not worthy, they shall say of him: even the gnat comes before you.”

- Shabbat Shalom