



# ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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RCA ISRAEL REGION

SHABBAT HAGADOL

## PARSHAT METZORA



### 1ST ALIYA (VAYIKRA 14:1-12)

#### Purification from Tzaraat:

When the Kohen determines that the Tzaraat of the skin has subsided, the Metzora undertakes a process to allow him to reenter the camp, though for 7 additional days he may not enter the Mikdash. Outside of the camp, 2 birds are taken, one slaughtered, the other dipped into its blood and water, along with cedar wood, a red thread and hyssop. The blood and water are sprinkled on the Metzora. The live bird is sent away. The Metzora immerses. **The 8th Day:** On the 8th day, his hair is shaved, he immerses and brings offerings.

The purification process of the Metzora has 2 stages. The first stage is done out of the camp, or city. After 7 days, a second process is done on the 8th day. This will be described in the next aliya.

The Metzora purification process is unique. It has 3 unusual elements. 1) 2 birds are taken, outside of the city, with one slaughtered, one sent away free. 2) Hyssop, a thread and wood, along with the bird are used to sprinkle upon the Metzora to purify him. 3) On the 8th day, blood and oil are placed on the ear, thumb and big toe of the Metzora.

Each of these unusual elements is found elsewhere. Yom Kippur. Para Aduma, the red heifer. And the inauguration of the Kohanim.

The 2 birds, one offered and one sent

free – well, that is Yom Kippur. 2 goats. One offered and one sent to the wilderness. The goats are instruments of atonement, kapara.

Hyssop used to sprinkle upon a person – well, that is the Para Aduma, the purification of a person after contact with the dead. The sprinkling is the instrument of purification, tahara.

The placing of oil on the ear, thumb and toe was the instrument of inauguration of the Kohanim, achieving holiness, kedusha.

The purification of the Metzora is the kapara of Yom Kippur, the tahara of Para Aduma and the kedusha of the inauguration of the Kohanim. Kapara, Tahara and Kedusha; atonement, purification, holiness.

The Metzora is the most dramatic tuma. He is sent out of the camp entirely. His re-entry to the camp and then to the Mikdash is also the most dramatic: Yom Kippur elements of kapara, atonement, Para Aduma elements of tahara, purity and inauguration elements of kedusha, of holiness.

We have a notion of tuma that we have been developing. The Mikdash is the encounter of man with the Shechina. The Divine invites us to this encounter. We are invited due to G-d's view of man as regal, noble, dignified. Worthy of invitation.

Tuma is the encounter of man with life situations that bruise our sense of nobility and dignity. Encounters with our mortality, our gross material corporeality, the part of our life we share with all the animal world. This

includes death, illness, procreation, food. Our nobility resides in our human uniqueness, our communication, our social nature.

The dignity and nobility of the Metzora is bruised by the public nature of the lesions or discoloration on his skin. His regal nature is further damaged by the need for isolation, the loss of social interaction. A double hit to his dignity: the shame of his visible skin blemishes and his need to socially isolate.

In order to regain his lofty dignity, he needs kapara and tahara, 2 processes of renewal, of Divine cleansing. Kapara and Tahara are Divine signals to us of Divine favor. The Divine love for man expresses itself in His willingness to reach for us, to forgive, to wipe clean the past. Kapara and Tahara are G-d's affirmation of man. Man's true nobility is the knowledge of G-d's love and affirmation; the essence of atonement and purity.



### 2ND ALIYA (14:13-20)

The offering is brought: its blood is placed on the right ear, thumb and big toe of the Metzora. Oil is sprinkled in front of the curtain and placed on the right ear, thumb, big toe and head of the Metzora. With these the Kohen has provided kapara for the Metzora and he becomes tahor.

The unusual placing of blood and oil on the ear, thumb and toe are elements borrowed from the inauguration of the Kohanim, the entry into Kedusha. The Metzora is being equated to or at least associated with the holiness of the Kohanim. In so doing he is affirming that we all are endowed with holiness, that our purpose is an elevated one. The Metzora emerges from his elaborate process of tahara having affirmed anew the dignified, lofty station of man, beloved of his Creator, endowed with kedusha. In this newly

affirmed state, he may rendezvous anew in the Mikdash, as the dignified being beckoned by the Shechina.



### 3RD ALIYA (14:21-32)

#### The less expensive alternative:

If one is unable to afford the above offerings that are brought on the 8th day for the Metzora, a less expensive alternative is offered, including birds in place of one of the animal offerings. The entire process outlined above is then done to provide kapara and tahara for the Metzora.

The sliding scale of offerings perhaps expresses this theme: it is not *what* you bring, but *that* you bring.



### 4TH ALIYA (14:33-53)

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.

We have been arguing that entry into the Mikdash requires a person to recognize their noble station in life. Life can damage our nobility, causing us to underestimate our nobility. But life may also be served to us on a golden platter, inflating our self-perception. Noble we are. But not by virtue of what we have. Rather by virtue of what we are. Our houses may be the source not of *diminished* dignity but of *inflated* self-image. Oh, we moderns know all too well how the fantastic

wealth of our times can distort healthy self-perception. Man's dignity lies not in the grandness of his home, but in the grandeur of his person. A pox on your house if your home has inflated healthy human dignity to become hubris.



#### 5TH ALIYA (14:54-15:15)

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.

Perhaps procreation may also lead to inflated self-perception. After all, we are creators of life. Perhaps the zav needs to re-orient his perception and cede to the real Creator proper deference. Hence, the zav becomes tamei and requires the re-orientation that the offerings express.



#### 6TH ALIYA (15:16-28)

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

**Nida:** A woman's regular menstrual bleeding renders her temeya for 7 days, transferring her tuma to others including through touch.

**Zava:** A woman who has bleeding inconsistent with her regular period is a Zava, a similar Tuma to the male Zav. She counts 7 days before becoming tahor.

Procreation may lead to an inflated self-image for both men and women. 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. Perhaps these laws, relating to abnormalities in organs of procreation relate to the possibility or perhaps tendency of human beings to ascribe inflated views of themselves as creators, in place of the Creator.



#### 7TH ALIYA (15:29-33)

Offerings are brought following the cessation of this unusual bleeding.

The laws of tuma and tahara are not a part of our world. The laws are complex. Life in the times of the Mikdash, the world of tuma and tahara would be unrecognizable to us. We would be lost in that world, not knowing what to do. We have vestiges – the washing of hands before bread. And washing our hands at the seder before karpas. The seder is perhaps the only time we really dip our toe into the world of tuma and tahara, just a tad, to transport ourselves, even for a moment to the world of the Mikdash, the world of tuma and tahara.

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## HAFTORAH SHABBAT HAGADOL MALACHI 3:4-24

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The Shabbat before Pesach is referred to as *Shabbat Hagadol*, or The Great Shabbat. Though it is not absolutely certain why *Shabbat HaGadol* was given this name, some suggest that it is based on a *pasuk* at the end of the haftorah of this Shabbat. A day will come in the future, says that prophet, that will



be 'gadol', or awesome. "Lo, I will send the prophet Eliyahu to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the Lord." (3:23)

The message of Malachi is clear: The people have been committing various sins. He warns the people that there will be a day of reckoning. Every act, every word, we engage in is judged by God. Now is the time to return.

There is a subtle hint in the haftorah to our celebration of the Seder with the reference to the coming of Eliyahu Hanavi. The haftorah ends with a reference to Eliyhau who will come at the end of days to herald the coming of the Mashiach. An uplifting message tops off the haftorah. In the final *pesukim* the powerful notion is conveyed that just as the people of Israel were redeemed from Egypt after generations of slavery, so too will the people be redeemed with the coming of the Mashiach in the time to come.

May that day come soon be"H! ■

## STATS - METZORA

28th of 54 sedras; 5th of 11 in Vayikra.

Written on 159 lines in a Torah (40th).

7 Parshiot; 4 open, 3 closed.

90 pesukim (42nd), 5th in Vayikra.

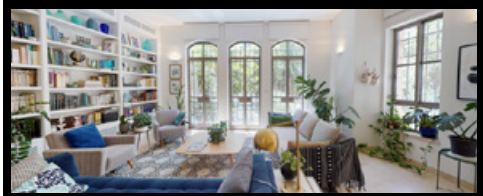
1274 words (39th), 4th in Vayikra.

4697 letters (48th), 8th in Vayikra.

## MITZVOT - METZORA

11 mitzvot; 11 positives, 0 prohibitions.

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PESACH



## 1ST DAY PESACH FROM PARSHAT BO EXODUS 12:21-51

The Torah reading is the description of the night of the 15th of Nissan, the night of the Exodus from Egypt. The people place the blood of the Pesach on their doorposts, consuming it with expectation. The first-born Egyptians die at midnight. Paro orders the Jewish people to leave. They travel into the wilderness, after a sojourn of 430 years on the night so anticipated.

This Torah reading is brief but dramatic. It is the moment of the Exodus. The abruptness of the Exodus is emphasized – that very night. Revolutions take time. Uprisings have trajectories. Although the 10 plagues led to this moment, the abruptness, the dramatic and total reversal of fortune, from slavery to freedom in a heartbeat – this haste is a signature of Divine involvement. Hence, the haste of Matza – it is the holiday of dramatic and total change of destiny, at the snap of a finger.

But at the same time, the Jews in Egypt celebrated their Exodus – before it happened. They took the lamb a few days before. Then offered it on the 14th of Nissan. They celebrated that night with matzah and consuming the Pesach, shoes on, walking stick at the ready. In spite of this anticipation, we celebrate the abruptness of the redemption, the speed and the drama of slavery to freedom at the drop of a hat.

Anticipation tempers the shock. But when the moment finally comes it is still wondrous. We can know something is about to happen while still being overwhelmed by the moment itself. We experience this on the other extreme of emotion, in death. We can know the end is near, but the moment of death remains searing in its pain. Here, we know the end of slavery is near, but the redemption nonetheless is shocking.

## 7TH DAY PESACH FROM PARSHAT BESHALACH EXODUS 13:17–15:26

We read the story that occurred on the 7th day after leaving Egypt, the splitting of the Sea. The crossing of the sea closed the book on the sojourn in Egypt. Exodus is now complete. The song of Az Yashir is sung by Moshe and all the people upon this full redemption.

The song at the Sea creates a religious paradigm; redemption, salvation demands a human response of appreciation and song. In halachic lingo – redemption is a mecha-yev – it demands a religious response. And that response is song. When He pulls us from the dust, we sing. We, the privileged, blessed ones who dwell in Jerusalem, we too are a generation who have seen redemption. Our redemption too demands a human response by us of song, at the good fortune of our lot. ■



# ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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ACHAREI MOT

## PARSHAT ACHAREI MOT



### 1ST ALIYA (VAYIKRA 16:1-17)

Aharon is instructed to enter the Holy of Holies only through an elaborate process of offerings. He is to bring a private sin offering. And a communal sin offering of 2 identical goats, one as an offering, one sent to the wilderness, determined by lottery. The smoke of the incense fills the Holy of Holies. The blood of both his offering and the communal shall be brought into the Holy of Holies.

Entry to the Holy of Holies requires an elaborate ceremony of unique offerings; including the scapegoat ceremony and the incense offered in the Holy of Holies. And it is all performed by the Kohen Gadol.

This continues the powerful and crucial theme of the entire section following Mount Sinai. In G-d's reach for man, His love of man, He has created a place of rendezvous; the Mishkan. However, it is rendezvous with care, with reservation, with humility. The building design is with great detail. The offerings are with great detail; when they are brought, how they are brought, the Kohanim's role in bringing them. G-d says: You may approach Me, I *want* you to approach Me, but with care.

The previous parshiot have described how to approach G-d in the Mikdash.

Here, He invites man to rendezvous in the Holy of Holies – the inner, intimate chamber, with the Aron and the tablets, covered by angels. This is something special. This

intimate invitation requires a very elaborate procedure; unique offerings like the scapegoat and the incense, sin offerings, olah offerings. The closer, the more intimate; but also the more care and preparation required.

This is a powerful and crucial theme: G-d invites man, wants man, but demands man's understanding of his inadequacy and his human foibles (sin offerings). And while man is invited to the Holy of Holies it is with great limitation. Not every person, not every day; it is one person, the Kohen Gadol, only one time a year. G-d remains mysterious, ineffable, infinite, unknowable. This is the delicate balance the Torah is creating; G-d wants man. Man is noble, the invitee of G-d Himself. But with enormous deference, enormous humility of man's limited station. Nobility and humility; the majesty in being the invitee of G-d, hand in hand with the reality of our woeful inadequacy.



### 2ND ALIYA (16:18-24)

The blood of Aharon's private sin offering and of the people's sin offering is sprinkled in front of the curtain. After Aharon confesses the sins of all the people, the second (scape) goat is sent to the wilderness. Aharon offers the olah offerings.

Aharon cannot seek atonement for the people before he seeks atonement for himself. And for the Kohanim.

It is assumed that in the course of the regular service in the Mikdash errors will be made. Those tamei will enter, perhaps accidentally. And the Talmud assumes the



Kohanim are “zrizim”, meticulous. Even so, errors occur.

No one is immune from errors. Even in the holiest of places.



### 3RD ALIYA (16:25-34)

This entire ceremony is done once a year on Yom Kippur, to gain atonement and purity. Through it the holy places as well as the people receive atonement.

Only at the end of the entire description of how one is to enter the Holy of Holies does the Torah tell us that this is to be done on Yom Kippur. As if to say: the goal of Yom Kippur is to enter the Holy of Holies. It is through man's approach to G-d that he gains atonement and purity.

The offering of the incense in the Holy of Holies as part of this atonement process, echoes of Mt. Sinai. Maybe a reenactment of Mt. Sinai is being performed here. The Holy of Holies houses the Aron with the 10 commandments. At Sinai no one was allowed to ascend the mountain except Moshe; here no one is to enter the Holy of Holies except Aharon. At Sinai, a thick cloud covered the mountain; here, Aharon brings incense to fill the place with smoke.

Perhaps that is the message of atonement. It is the connection, the descent of the Creator on Sinai that symbolizes atonement. Because Sinai is the descent of the Infinite to the finite. We are nothing, sinful, inadequate, puny. Yet. He met us at Sinai. Sinai is the symbol of the desire of the Infinite to embrace finite man, while oh, so aware of our frailty. And that is atonement. Enter the place that will remind both of us of Sinai, fill it with smoke as at Sinai. And as I embraced you there, I again will embrace you here.



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#### 4TH ALIYA (17:1-7)

Tell the entire people: all sacrifices are to be brought to the Mikdash. The Kohen is to offer them, so they are pleasing. We are to no longer offer sacrifices to spirits.

The centrality of the Mikdash is to emphasize monotheism: one place, one G-d.



#### 5TH ALIYA (17:8-8:5)

Blood is not to be consumed, for life is in the blood. I have given it to you to use for atonement on the altar, not to consume. The blood of an undomesticated animal or bird that is killed for consumption, that blood is to be covered with earth. Do not do what the Egyptians or Canaanites do. Do My commands; and live.

The prohibition of blood is related to the value we place on life. Blood is our life force. We value life over all else. Hence give deference to blood.



#### 6TH ALIYA (18:6-21)

Sexual relations with relatives are forbidden: including spouses of parents, half siblings, grandchildren, step-siblings, aunts, in-laws. In addition, marrying 2 women who are related. Or a married woman.

The listing of forbidden relationships

changes the subject from the laws concerning the Mishkan. It is not the first such change of subject. The laws of Kashrut of Parshat Shemini were also a change of subject. Thus, the first 2 subjects of laws unrelated to our approach to G-d in the Mishkan are food and family. These are the first things said to the first man and woman on the 6th day of creation: be fruitful and multiply. And eat of the herbs. Family and food were said to Adam and Eve. Family and food are the first laws of holiness outside of the Mikdash to be outlined in detail to the Jewish people.



#### 7TH ALIYA (18:22-30)

A man shall not lie with a man. Sexual relations with an animal are forbidden. These things (all the above) defile the Land: it will spit you out. ■

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