

פרשת
תזריע מצרע
Parshiyot Tazria Metzora

*Vayikra / Leviticus 12:1-15:33, 2 Kings 7:3-20
Mark 9:14-50 / Luke 9:51-10:42*

The Call to Self Inspection

Parshat Tazria opens continuing the discussion on ritual impurity and purity. The Torah speaks of women who give birth, whether a male or female child, undergo a process of purification following having given birth. We also read about Tzaraat (צָרָעַת), which is often mistranslated as “*leprosy*.” Tzaraat is a supernatural plague which also may afflict garments and even the home. The Torah provides various signs for the kohen (priest) to be able to judge whether the afflicted person, material, or home is to be pronounced tamei (impure) or tahor (pure). The Torah says, *13:3 ‘The priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of tzaraat; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean. (NASB)* These instructions help the kohen to determine whether this is simply a surface affliction as opposed to something that goes much deeper. This form of affliction may only be healed with the help of the Lord God of Israel. The way the supernatural affliction of Tzaraat is described to us, these scriptures direct us to consider the deeper spiritual insights in the affliction of the body to the sinfulness of the soul. When considering the connection between the body and the soul, the rabbis in the *Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5A and 5B* speak of the

love of God in relation to affliction and this week's Torah portion on Tzaraat. Based upon the items that may be afflicted with Tzaraat (Person, Place, or Thing) in the different afflictions of the skin, the common denominator is that there are different shades of white for distinguishing one's affliction. According to the *Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5*, the only skin afflictions that may be viewed as God's reminder to improve our lifestyle are the four kinds that are mentioned here in Parashat Tazria. *Sforno on Vayikra / Leviticus 13:2 Part 2* states, "While they are not classified as afflictions revealing G'd's love for the person thus afflicted, they are however, described as *מזבח כפרה*, as "an altar of atonement" serving as a stepping stone to atonement for the character weakness that the afflicted person has to overcome. G'd does not employ any other medically well known skin diseases as His instrument to call us to order for the various sins committed." The reason these things are considered supernatural afflictions is because these skin diseases listed in the Torah are not in the medical text books. The conclusion is that these afflictions are the result of sin, and therefore one is being brought to the realization of one's need to repent, turn from sin, and seek the Lord God of Israel. This may be why the *Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5B* states saying, *ונגעים לא והתניא כל מי שיש בו אחד מארבעה*, *The Gemara asks: Is leprosy not an affliction of love? Didn't we learn in a baraita: If one has any of the four signs of leprosy (Vayikra / Leviticus 13) they are nothing other than an altar of atonement?* The rabbis suggest that Tzaraat may be an affliction of love. If the point of Tzaraat is repentance, then the Gemara asks a very good question that leads us to understand the infinite love of God for His people. Teshuvah (repentance) literally means, "return." At its core, it is a process designed to help us get back and to bring all of who we are to the Lord, first internally, then externally through our actions and our words. In the Torah, leprosy was used as a graphic sign that something was very wrong spiritually and teshuvah was in order. There are many reasons given as the underlying problem, i.e, lashon harah. Some reasons may be jealousy, anger and arrogance (domination). Rebellion, a complex action, is another powerful motivation for lashon harah that often results in great harm and destruction to both ourselves and to others. This is why when one was afflicted by Tzaraat, they were declared unclean and forced to leave the community

of believers as a protection for them. This is meant for us to place our lives before God because when we do, the Lord will change us from the inside out. The Lord God begins the process of perfecting us from the moment we place our faith in Him and in His Messiah Yeshua. The Lord sends His Spirit into our lives. He creates in us new hearts with new holy desires (*Ezekiel 36:26*). He transforms our stubborn will, and He opens our hearts to embrace the truth rather than to reject it, to believe rather than to doubt. He gives us a hunger for righteousness and a desire for Him. This is the transformation of the inner most person. It is from this perspective Tzaraat was meant as the end all of spiritual warnings. Based upon these Scriptures, everything that occurs in our lives, whether good or bad, the Lord uses to make us like His Messiah (*Romans 8:28–30*). Let's discuss these things further in this week's Torah portion.

This week we are looking at *Vayikra / Leviticus 13:1-17*.

Vayikra / Leviticus 13:1-17

13:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 13:2 'When a man has on the skin of his body a swelling or a scab or a bright spot, and it becomes an infection of leprosy on the skin of his body, then he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests. 13:3 'The priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of leprosy; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean. 13:4 'But if the bright spot is white on the skin of his body, and it does not appear to be deeper than the skin, and the hair on it has not turned white, then the priest shall isolate him who has the infection for seven days. 13:5 'The priest shall look at him on the seventh day, and if in his eyes the infection has not changed and the infection has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall isolate him for seven more days. 13:6 'The priest shall look at him again on the seventh day, and if the infection has faded and the mark has not spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a scab. And he shall wash his clothes and be clean. 13:7 'But if the scab spreads farther on the skin after he has shown

himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again to the priest. 13:8 'The priest shall look, and if the scab has spread on the skin, then the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is leprosy. 13:9 'When the infection of leprosy is on a man, then he shall be brought to the priest. 13:10 'The priest shall then look, and if there is a white swelling in the skin, and it has turned the hair white, and there is quick raw flesh in the swelling, 13:11 it is a chronic leprosy on the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean; he shall not isolate him, for he is unclean. 13:12 'If the leprosy breaks out farther on the skin, and the leprosy covers all the skin of him who has the infection from his head even to his feet, as far as the priest can see, 13:13 then the priest shall look, and behold, if the leprosy has covered all his body, he shall pronounce clean him who has the infection; it has all turned white and he is clean. 13:14 'But whenever raw flesh appears on him, he shall be unclean. 13:15 'The priest shall look at the raw flesh, and he shall pronounce him unclean; the raw flesh is unclean, it is leprosy. 13:16 'Or if the raw flesh turns again and is changed to white, then he shall come to the priest, 13:17 and the priest shall look at him, and behold, if the infection has turned to white, then the priest shall pronounce clean him who has the infection; he is clean. (NASB)

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: ב אָדָם כִּי-יְהִיָּה בְּעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ שָׂאת אוֹ-סַפְּחַת אוֹ בַּהֲרַת וְהָיָה בְּעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֹגַע צָרְעַת וְהוּבֵא אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל-אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים: ג וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַנֹּגַע בְּעוֹר-הַבְּשָׂר וְשָׁעַר בְּנֹגַע הַפֶּה | לָבָן וּמְרֹאָה הַנֹּגַע עֲמַק מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ נֹגַע צָרְעַת הוּא וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמֵא אֹתוֹ: ד וְאִם-בַּהֲרַת לְבָנָה הוּא בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ וְעֲמַק אֵין-מְרֹאָה מִן-הָעוֹר וְשָׁעֲרָה לֹא-הַפֶּה לָבָן וְהִסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַנֹּגַע שְׁבַעַת יָמִים: ה וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי וְהִנֵּה הַנֹּגַע עֲמַד בְּעֵינָיו לֹא-פָשָׂה הַנֹּגַע בְּעוֹר וְהִסְגִּירוֹ הַכֹּהֵן שְׁבַעַת יָמִים שְׁנִית: [שְׁנִי] ו וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֹתוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי שְׁנִית וְהִנֵּה כְּהָה הַנֹּגַע וְלֹא-פָשָׂה הַנֹּגַע בְּעוֹר וְטָהֲרוּ הַכֹּהֵן מִסַּפְּחַת הוּא וְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְטָהֲרָ: ז וְאִם-פָּשָׂה תִּפְשָׂה הַמִּסַּפְּחַת בְּעוֹר אַחֲרֵי הָרְאֹתוֹ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן לְטָהֲרָתוֹ וְנִרְאָה שְׁנִית אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן: ח וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה פְּשֻׁתָּה הַמַּ-

ספחת בעור וטמאֹו הפֶּהֶן צָרַעַת הוּא: פ ט נָגַע צָרַעַת כִּי תִהְיֶה בְּאֶדָם וְהוּבָא אֶל-הַפֶּהֶן: י וְרָאָה הַפֶּהֶן וְהִנֵּה שְׂאֵת-לִבְנָה בְּעוֹר וְהִיא הַפֶּכָה שְׂעוֹר לָבֵן וּמִחֵית בְּשׂוֹר חֵי בְשֵׂאֵת: יא צָרַעַת נוֹשֶׁנֶת הוּא בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטִמְאֹו הַפֶּהֶן לֹא יִסְגְּרוּ כִּי טִמְאֹו הוּא: יב וְאִם-פְּרוּחַ תִּפְרַח הַצָּרַעַת בְּעוֹר וְכִסְתָּהּ הַצָּרַעַת אֶת כָּל-עוֹר הַנֶּגַע מֵרֵאשִׁוֹ וְעַד-רִגְלָיו לְכָל-מְרָאָה עֵינֵי הַפֶּהֶן: יג וְרָאָה הַפֶּהֶן וְהִנֵּה כִסְתָּהּ הַצָּרַעַת אֶת-כָּל-בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטִהַר אֶת-הַנֶּגַע כִּלּוֹ הַפֶּהֶן לָבֵן טָהוֹר הוּא: יד וּבְיוֹם הַרְאֹוֹת בּוֹ בְּשׂוֹר חֵי יְטִמְאֹו: טו וְרָאָה הַפֶּהֶן אֶת-הַבְּשָׂר חֵי וְטִמְאֹו הַבְּשָׂר חֵי טִמְאֹו הוּא צָרַעַת הוּא: טז אוֹ כִּי יָשׁוּב הַבְּשָׂר חֵי וְנִהְפָּךְ לְלָבֵן וּבָא אֶל-הַפֶּהֶן: יז וְרָאָהּ הַפֶּהֶן וְהִנֵּה נִהְפָּךְ הַנֶּגַע לְלָבֵן וְטִהַר הַפֶּהֶן אֶת-הַנֶּגַע טָהוֹר הוּא:

The Torah instructions to the priest who is responsible to inspect the one afflicted with tzaraat are given in the following way, the Lord says, *13:3 'The priest shall look at the mark on the skin of the body, and if the hair in the infection has turned white and the infection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is an infection of tzaraat; when the priest has looked at him, he shall pronounce him unclean. (NASB)* These instructions help the kohen to determine whether this is simply a surface affliction as opposed to something that goes much deeper. This form of affliction may only be healed with the help of the Lord God of Israel. The way the supernatural affliction of Tzaraat is described to us, these scriptures direct us to consider the deeper spiritual insights in the affliction of the body to the sinfulness of the soul. This idea of self inspection is a part of who we are as the children of God. The *Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5A* speaks of these things in the following way.

Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5A

א"ר יצחק כל הקורא ק"ש על מטתו כאלו אוהז חרב של שתי פיות בידו שנאמר (תהלים קמט, ו) רוממות אל בגרו- נם וחרב פיפיות בידם מאי משמע אמר מר זוטרא ואיתי- מא רב אשי מרישא דענינא דכתיב (תהלים קמט, ה) יעלזו חסידים בכבוד ירננו על משכבותם וכתיב בתריה רוממות *The Gemara continues its treatment of the recitation of Shema upon one's bed.*

Rabbi Yitzhak said: Anyone who recites Shema on his bed, it is as if he holds a double-edged sword, guarding him from all evil, as it is stated: “High praises of God in their mouths, and a double-edged sword in their hands” (Psalms 149:6). The Gemara asks: From where is it inferred that this verse from Psalms refers to the recitation of Shema? Mar Zutra, and some say Rav Ashi, said: We derive it from the preceding verse, as it is written: “Let the pious exult in glory; let them joyously sing upon their beds.” The praise of God from one’s bed is the recitation of Shema. And it is written thereafter: “High praises of God in their mouths, and a double-edged sword in their hands.”

The rabbis of the Talmud speak of the Shema (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 6:4*) and the significance of reciting the Shema saying that the one who recites the Shema is as if he holds a double edged sword that guards him from all evil. Why do the rabbis consider the recitation of the Shema in this way? Why do you think the rabbis place such emphasis upon the recitation of the Shema? The context for the Shema is found in the following verses: *6:4 ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! 6:5 ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6:6 ‘These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 6:7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 6:8 ‘You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 6:9 ‘You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* (*NASB*, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, ד יהוה אלהינו יהוה | אָחָד: ה וְאַהֲבַתְּ אֶת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכֹל-לְבָבְךָ וּבְכֹל-נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכֹל-מְאֹדֶךָ: ו וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי מְצַוְּךָ הַיּוֹם עַל-לְבָבְךָ: ז וְשִׁנְתָם לְבָנֶיךָ וְדַבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְלֶכְתְּךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ וּבְקוּמְךָ: ח וְקָשַׁרְתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ וְהָיוּ לְטֹטְפֹת בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ: ט וְכָתַבְתָּם עַל-מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ: (וּבְשַׁעֲרֶיךָ) Notice the context of the Shema, believing in the oneness of God and how we are to hold onto the Lord, to love the Lord with all our heart and soul. The Word of God is to become a part of our lives that

is said to be “*upon our hearts,*” we are to diligently teach God’s word to our children, speaking of God’s word always when raising up and when laying down, and God’s Word is to become a part of our homes, to the very foundation of who we are, as the Scriptures say, God’s word is written upon the doors of our homes and are to be placed upon our foreheads and as a sign on our hands. This describes the position of the Word of God in our lives as going before us directing our minds (forehead) and being at our right hand, a place of power and authority in our lives for discerning between what is right as opposed to what is wrong. When the Talmud speaks of the Shema being a double-edged sword capable of protecting one from evil; this is the context of the rabbis statements. These instructions on the Shema speak of something that is more than a superficial recitation of the Shema. The rabbis are speaking of having a deep love for the Lord God and for His Word. The instructions in Parashat Tazria parallel the instructions on the inspection of tzaraat as something more than simply a surface affliction as opposed to something that goes much deeper. Tzaraat is a disease that speaks to a deeper spiritual issue that only the Lord is able to heal and set the one afflicted on the correct path where we are told to seek the Lord with all of our mind, soul, and heart. These scriptures direct us to consider the deep spiritual insights in the affliction of the body to the sinfulness of the soul. We are called as the children of God to carefully inspect ourselves so that we do not end up in this situation.

This is the context of the Psalmist when he said the following, ג אֶפְפוּנִי | חֲבַלֵי-מָוֶת וּמְצָרֵי שְׁאוֹל מְצָאוּנִי צָרָה וַיְגוֹן אֶמְצָא: ד וּבָשָׁם-יִהְיֶה אֶקְרָא אָנָּה יִהְיֶה מִלְטָה נַפְשִׁי: ה חַנּוּן יִהְיֶה וְצַדִּיק וְאֱלֹהֵינוּ מְרַחֵם: *116:3 The cords of death encompassed me And the terrors of Sheol came upon me; I found distress and sorrow. 116:4 Then I called upon the name of the Lord: ‘O Lord, I beseech You, save my life!’ 116:5 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; Yes, our God is compassionate. (NASB) The Lord preserves the simple (116:6), when we seek the Lord we return to His rest (שְׁלוֹם, peace, 116:7), and the Lord rescues us from death (116:8). Notice what it means to call upon the name of the Lord. This follows what Paul wrote to the Romans saying, “*Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*” (Romans 10:13) According to *Bereshit / Genesis 4:26*, the Torah tells us the practice of calling on the Lord began long ago, by the third generation of mankind in the time*

with what we read the rabbis saying in the *Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5A* as the rabbis continue to discuss the topic of the Shema.

Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5A

ואמר רבי יצחק כל הקורא קריאת שמע על מטתו מזיקין בדילין הימנו שנאמר (איוב ה, ז) ובני רשף יגביהו עוף ואין עוף אלא תורה שנאמר (משלי כג, ה) התעִיף עיניך בו ואי־ננו ואין רשף אלא מזיקין שנאמר (דברים לב, כד) מזי רעב ולחומי רשף וקטב מרירי. *And Rabbi Yitzhak said: Anyone who recites Shema upon his bed, demons stay away from him. This is alluded to, as it is stated: "But man is born into trouble, and the sparks [reshef] fly [uf] upward" (Job 5:7). The verse is explained: The word fly [uf] means nothing other than Torah, as Torah is difficult to grasp and easy to lose, like something that floats away, as it is stated: "Will you set your eyes upon it? It is gone; for riches certainly make themselves wings, like an eagle that flies into the heavens" (Proverbs 23:5). The word "sparks" means nothing other than demons, as it is stated: "Wasting of hunger, and the devouring of the sparks [reshef] and bitter destruction [ketev meriri], and the teeth of beasts I will send upon them, with the venom of crawling things of the dust" (Deuteronomy 32:24). Here we see reshef listed along with ketev meriri, both of which are understood by the Sages to be names of demons.*

According to the rabbis, the recitation of the Shema upon one's bed keeps demons away because a man is born into troubles and it is the Word of the Lord that sets us free from our troubles and from the evil one. This is consistent with the conclusions that the Study of God's Word keeps suffering away from the man that does so. The reason being, the one who studies God's Word and seeks to apply God's Word to his life seeks to live in righteousness, holiness, justice, and truth. The one who determines himself to study God's word distances himself from trouble and suffering by staying away from the works of sin in his life. So we see that one must hear the Word of the Lord, and after hear-

ing the word, placing it upon our hearts, we are “*pricked in the hearts*” (*Acts 2:37*) to turn from our sins in Teshuvah and to seek to apply God’s Word to our lives. The Word of the Lord produces faith in our hearts. The *Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5A* continues saying the following.

אמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש כל העוסק בתורה יסורין בדילין
הימנו שנאמר ובני רשף יגביהו עוף ואין עוף אלא תורה
שנאמר התעיף עיניך בו ואיננו ואין רשף אלא יסורין שנא-
מר מר מצי רעב ולחומי רשף
Regarding this unclear verse, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: If one engages in Torah study, suffering stays away from him, as it is stated: “And the sparks fly upward.” And fly means nothing other than Torah, and sparks means nothing other than suffering, as it is stated: “Wasting of hunger, and the devouring of the sparks,” equating devouring sparks with wasting hunger, as both are types of suffering. From here, we derive that through Torah, fly, one is able to distance himself, upward, from suffering, sparks.

This is why the rabbis say that for those who study God’s Word they will see God (*Talmud Bavli Berekhot 5A*). Note what happened when Peter spoke the Word of God to the people, these people heard the message, believed, and then were told what to do to be saved. Peter said, “*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins*” (*Acts 2:38*). What did these people do when they “*called upon the name of the Lord?*” First they heard the Word of God, believed the Word of God, repented of their sins, confessed Yeshua as the Messiah, as the Son of God, and as Lord of their lives, and were baptized into the Messiah for the forgiveness of sins (*Acts 2:38*). The reason these Scriptures are written in this way is because without repentance (Teshuvah) there is no forgiveness of sins. The ritual bath (mikvah / baptism) is the physical act of repenting and turning one’s life towards God’s ways. Notice something here, one is rendering obedience to the “*Lord of Lords*” by doing these things. Yeshua said, “*16:16 ‘He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.’*” (*Mark 16:16*). This lays down the simple principle, obey the Lord and be saved. The point

of studying the Torah is to not get to the point where extreme measures are needed to draw us back to repentance. The Talmud considers the disease of Tzaraat as purposed to lead one to repentance. If the point of Tzaraat is repentance, then the Gemara asks a good question. According to the Torah, leprosy was used as a graphic sign that something was very wrong spiritually and Teshuvah was in order. Rebellion may manifest itself in complex ways in our lives that result in great destruction to our selves and to others. This is why when one was afflicted by Tzaraat, they were declared unclean and forced to leave the community of believers as a protection for them and for the community. Upon the manifestation of Tzaraat, sin has been firmly rooted in the person, place, or thing. This is meant for us to place our lives before God daily because when we do, the Lord will change us from the inside out. The Lord God begins the process of perfecting us from the moment we place our faith in Him and in His Messiah Yeshua, and this is the point we should be at all times of our lives. The Lord sends His Spirit into our lives to guide and direct us while He is creating in us new hearts with new holy desires (*Ezekiel 36:26*). He transforms our stubborn wills. He opens our hearts to embrace the truth rather than to reject it, to believe rather than to doubt. He gives us a hunger for righteousness and a desire for Him. This is the transformation of the inner most person. It is from this perspective Tzaraat was meant as the end all of spiritual warnings. Based upon these Scriptures, everything that occurs in our lives, whether good or bad, the Lord uses to make us like His Messiah (*Romans 8:28–30*). As we remain in the Messiah Yeshua, we are warned to stay away from sin and from the ways of the nations. The Lord established these examples in the Scriptures to learn from. The warning to stay away from the nations was not simply to avoid astrology, occult, mediums and sorcery. Parashat Tazria warns us using the spiritual malady of Tzaraat saying that the inspection of our lives should be something more than simply superficial as opposed to something that goes much deeper. As the children of God we are called to inspect our lives daily; not just the superficial but to look deep within ourselves and seek out the motivations of our hearts for the reasons why we do the things that we do. All things should be done for the glory of God!

