

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## PARSHAT TAZRIA-METZORA

### DVAR TORAH: WE'VE GOT IT ALL BACKWARDS

Rashi's comment on the opening of this week's parshah takes on new meaning in light of an explanation of the "Echad Mi Yodea" ("Who Knows One?") song at the end of the Seder night.

Rashi notes the progression from the last two aliyot of Parshat Shemini, listing the kosher and non-kosher fish, birds, and animals, to Tazria-Metzora, that outlines the rules of purity and impurity for humans. Says Rashi: Just as the creation of Man followed that of the animals, so does Man's Torah. Tazria and Metzora, the Torah of Man, follows Shemini, the Torah of fish, birds, and animals.

The last comment printed in the Shem Mishmuel Haggadah analyzes the text of "Echad Mi Yodea." It illuminates the parallel between the physical world's creation story of Bereishit and the detailed halachic presentation of Torat Kohanim, Vayikra.

"Who knows one, two, three ... thirteen?" asks the song, and for each number answers with a Torah concept associated with that particular number. The Shem Mishmuel explains the song's question as follows: Who knows why these numbers appear in the world? The answer: because there is a Torah concept attached to them.

His proof-text is a Midrash. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Bereishit 1:2) says: When a king builds a palace he doesn't just do it himself, he gets a craftsman. And the craftsman doesn't just do it himself. He has plans and descriptions written out to direct him how to design the rooms and the gateways. Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and created the world. The Torah is the ideal; the world its realization.

So, for instance, our common conception of the halachot of theft is: there is a phenomenon of theft in the world, and the Torah thus needs to relate to this with a prohibition. We usually think: there is a parshah about *gezel* (stealing) in the Torah because there is such an unfortunate phenomenon in the world.

The Shem Mishmuel says, based on the Midrash, that we've got it all backwards. Because there is a Torah concept called *gezel* Hashem had to construct a world with possession and private property, with jealousy and theft. The world, Creation, is the realization of the Divine ideal, the Torah. Who knows why there is a seven in the world? I know that it is because there is a concept in the Torah called Shabbat (The Shem Mishmuel ends, "And there is certainly a reason [in the Torah] for all of the numbers in the world").

There is a parallel between the order of the creation story and the corresponding halachic parshiot – man follows animal – but, the Shem Mishmuel based on his Midrashic proof text would say, creation was dictated by halachah, not halachah by creation.

# SOURCE GUIDE: DIAGNOSING KING UZIAHU'S TZARA'AT PLAGUE

When a biblical figure is stricken with the tzara'at plague, midrashim search for the moral or spiritual diagnosis. This source guide explores two directions that appear in Chazal to explain why tzara'at plague broke out on King Uziah's forehead.

## Background – King Uziah

King Uziah was an extremely successful King of Judaea. Fifteen verses in the Tanach (Divrei Hayamim II 26:1-15) list his accomplishments. His fifty-two year reign (starting at age sixteen) was both prosperous and secure. He was a mighty warrior, victorious over enemies, and led an army with 375,000 troops. King Uziah built up the country, digging wells, building towers, and developing its agriculture. Above all, this descendant of King David "did that which was just in God's eyes, like his father Amatziah" (Divrei Hayamim II 26:4).

## King Uziah's Tzara'at: Dramatic Scene in the Temple

So how do we explain the following line in the book of Kings?

<b>1. Kings II 15:5</b> God smote the king and he was a metzora (smitten with the tzara'at plague) until the day of his death.	<b>מלכים ב' טו:ה</b> וַיִּגַע ה' אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיְהִי מְצֻרָע עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ...
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The Book of Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles) elaborates by describing a dramatic scene:

<b>2. Divrei Hayamim II 26:16-21</b> (16) And when he became strong, his heart became haughty until he became corrupt, and he betrayed Hashem his God, and he came into the Temple of God to burn incense on the incense altar. (17) And Azaryahu the Kohen came after him, and with him were Kohanim to God, eighty mighty men. (18) And they stood beside King Uziah and said to him, "It is not for you, Uziah, to burn incense to God, but for the priests, sons of Aaron, who are sanctified to burn [incense]. Leave the Sanctuary, for you have trespassed, and it will not bring glory to you from Hashem, God." (19) And Uziah became furious, and in his hand was a censer to burn, and in his fury with the priests, the tzara'at shone upon his forehead before the Kohanim in the House of God, over the incense altar. (20) And Azaryahu, the chief priest, and all the priests, turned to him, and behold he was stricken with tzara'at on his forehead; so they rushed him out of there, and he too hastened to leave, for God had smitten him. (21) And King Uziah was stricken with tzara'at until the day of his death, and he lived in a house of "freedom", for it had been decreed from the House of God, and Yotam his son was over the king's house; he judged the people of the land.	<b>דברי הימים ב' כו:טז-כא</b> (טז) וַיִּתְחַזַּק וַיִּגְבַּה לְבוֹ עַד לְהַשְׁחִית וַיִּמְעַל בַּה' אֱלֹהָיו וַיִּבֹא אֶל הַיֵּכָל ה' לְהַקְטִיר עַל מִזְבַּח הַקְּטֹרֶת: (יז) וַיִּבֹא אַחֲרָיו עֲזַרְיָהוּ הַכֹּהֵן וְעַמּוּ פִּהְנִים לֵה' שְׂמוֹנִים בְּנֵי חֵיל: (יח) וַיַּעֲמְדוּ עַל עֲזַרְיָהוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֹא לָךְ עֲזַרְיָהוּ לְהַקְטִיר לֵה' כִּי לַפִּהְנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן הַמְּקַדְּשִׁים לְהַקְטִיר צֵא מִן הַמִּקְדָּשׁ כִּי מְעַלְתָּ וְלֹא לָךְ לְכַבֹּד מֵה' אֱלֹהִים: (יט) וַיִּזְעַף עֲזַרְיָהוּ וּבְיָדוֹ מִקְטֹרֶת לְהַקְטִיר וַיִּבְזְעֵפוּ עִם הַפִּהְנִים וַהֲצִרְעַת זָרְחָה בְּמִצְחוֹ לִפְנֵי הַפִּהְנִים בְּבַיִת ה' מְעַל לְמִזְבַּח הַקְּטֹרֶת: (כ) וַיִּפֹּן אֵלָיו עֲזַרְיָהוּ כֹהֵן הָרֹאשׁ וְכָל הַפִּהְנִים וַהֲנִיחָהּ הוּא מְצֻרָע בְּמִצְחוֹ וַיִּבְהַלּוּהוּ מִשָּׁם וְגַם הוּא נִדְחַף לְצֵאת כִּי נִגְעוּ ה': (כא) וַיְהִי עֲזַרְיָהוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ מְצֻרָע עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ וַיֵּשֶׁב בֵּית הַחֲפְשִׁית מְצֻרָע כִּי נִגְזַר מִבַּיִת ה' וַיֹּתֶם בָּנוּ עַל בַּיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ שׁוֹפֵט אֶת עַם הָאָרֶץ.
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Why was tzara'at plague the chosen Divine sign of disapproval? Here are two main directions:

## A. Entering Another's Realm

The ketoret, the incense, is the hallmark of the Kohen. When Korach's 250 men challenged the exclusivity of Aharon's Kehunah, they were proven non-Kohanim when they did not successfully offer the incense. The Sfas Emes (see Korach 5644) explains that Aharon's quality of connectedness was necessary to offer the ketoret (the letters of the word קטר have a secondary meaning of tying together). Korach and his group lacked this essential quality and the ketoret (that includes the potion of death) consumed them. Uziahu met a similar, though less extreme, fate. He is the example of the ninth of 11 possible sins leading to the plague:

<p><b>3. Tanchuma Metzora 4</b> Teach us, our rabbi: How many things cause plagues to come upon a man? Our rabbis have taught – for 11 things plagues come: idolatry, desecrating the Divine Name, sexual immorality, different types of theft, evil speech, false testimony, a judge who perverts justice, false oaths, one that enters a realm that is not his, one who thinks thoughts of falsehood, and for creating dissent between people. Some say even for the evil eye ... One that enters a realm that is not his: What is the source for this? It is from Uziahu who entered the realm of Kehunah, for it says, "The tzara'at broke out on his forehead.</p>	<p><b>תנחומא מצורע פרק ד'</b> ילמדנו רבינו על כמה דברים נגעים באים על האדם כך שנו רבותינו על אחת עשרה דברים הנגעים באים על האדם: על ע"ג ועל חלול השם ועל ג"ע ועל הגנבות ועל לשון הרע ועל המעיד עדות שקר ועל הדיין המקלקל את הדין ועל שבועת שוא ועל הנכנס בתחום שאינו שלו ועל החושב מחשבות של שקר ועל המשלח מדנים בין אחים ויש אומרים אף על עין רעה .... ועל הנכנס בתחום שאינו שלו מנין מן עוזהו שנכנס בתחום הכהונה שנאמר (ד"ה ב כו) והצרעת זרחה במצחו.</p>
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## B. Haughtiness

The Gemara lists seven possible causes of the plague, and King Uziahu is the example of the fifth:

<p><b>4. Erchin 16a</b> Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani quoted Rabbi Yochanan: Seven things cause plagues to come – evil speech, murder, false oaths, sexual immorality, haughtiness, theft, and stinginess ... Haughtiness, as it is written, "And when he became strong, his heart became haughty until he became corrupt, and he betrayed Hashem his God ... and the tzara'at shone upon his forehead.</p>	<p><b>ערכין טז.</b> א"ר שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יוחנן על שבעה דברים נגעים באין על לשון הרע ועל שפיכות דמים ועל שבועת שוא ועל גילוי ערות ועל גסות הרוח ועל הגזל ועל צרות העין ... ועל גסות הרוח דכתיב ובחזקתו גבה לבו עד להשחית וימעול בה' אלהיו והצרעת זרחה במצחו."</p>
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### The Meshech Chochmah: This explains why the tzara'at broke out on Uziahu's forehead:

See the Meshech Chochmah on Vayikra 13:40, who suggests that **where** tzara'at attacks corresponds to **why** it attacks. Stinginess brings about a plague on possessions; misusing the body results in tzara'at on the body; but sins of mind bring about a plague on the head. Haughtiness, arrogance, conceit, egotism – gasut haruach – results in tzara'at harosh, and caused God to splash Uziahu's forehead with shiny tzara'at. Tzara'at teaches us not to misuse our highest faculties: not to think thoughts of falsehood, and not to soar into arrogance.

### Rav Tzadok: King Uziahu drifted from greatness to haughtiness:

See Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin's passage in the Pri Tzadik (Section 2 of Parshat Tazria) that gets into King Uziahu's mindset. King Uziahu, a truly great and successful descendant of King David, thought he was greater than the Kohanim and therefore worthy of burning the incense, that possesses the unique power of bringing evil into the service of good. Being proud to serve God is praiseworthy and essential; a positive self-image is necessary to act and think with true greatness and power. But King Uziahu didn't check his greatness with the extreme humility that characterized King David, Moshe, and Avraham. He should have heeded the Divine warning (Devarim 8:14): ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה' אלקיך, watch out that when your heart soars upwards you don't forget the true king, God Himself. This explains three strange items needed for the metzora's purification process: he must dip the blood of his sacrifice in cedar wood, hyssop, and red thread. As Rashi quotes (Vayikra 14:4): Because he let himself become as haughty as the lofty cedar tree, he must now become as humble as a hyssop (a lowly plant) and a worm (red thread is referred to as תולעת, the word for worm).

## FOUR STEPS OF A NEW MOTHER BY RABBI ANTHONY MANNING

Parshas Tazria introduces us to a new concept, tumah and taharah, achieving spiritual purity. Just as there are physical pollutants in our world, the Torah wishes us to be sensitive to aspects of life which, even though we may not be at fault, can still damage our Divine soul.

The Torah is a source of life, and it is usually contact with death which causes tumah. Even the process of birth still represents for the mother the loss of a life force which had been inside her. The Torah therefore prescribes a four stage clean-up operation to restore her neshamah to its pristine state and her connection with God.

For the first seven days after the birth the tumah is most intense. She must separate from her husband and may not eat any type of food with special kedushah. After seven days she passes through the purifying waters of a mikveh and then enters a second stage when the tumah has decreased. For the next thirty-three days she may eat maaser sheni, the second tithe, which is a step in holiness above mundane food. Then she enters stage three. Now she has regained much of her former spiritual purity and can even eat terumah, a food with even higher kedushah. However, her return to full purity can only come once she has brought her korban, the special sacrifice for new mothers. Only then has the fourth and final stage of her spiritual recovery been achieved.

The Shem Mishmuel connects this process with the spiritual journey of the Jews following their exodus from Egypt. In Egypt they were exposed to the worst of all negative spiritual influences. Recovery from this can only be achieved in stages. First they had the seven day period of flight from Egypt across the desert. Then they passed through the mikveh waters of the Red Sea, and threw off any lingering fetters of their physical bondage. This began stage two, and with a new found connection to God they sang Shirah and were soon able to eat the Manna. On Rosh Chodesh Sivan they arrived at Sinai and they accepted their new destiny as God's chosen nation. This propelled them to stage three, their preparation for receiving the Torah. Finally, they offered their korbanot at Sinai and were totally and intimately reunited with Hashem.

Spiritual growth must be achieved in stages. This is the lesson of the new mother in Parshas Tazria and the journey of the Jews to Sinai. For us, it is also the lesson of the Sefiras Haomer. If we take full advantage of this wonderful opportunity for incremental growth we will then be ready to truly appreciate the simchah of Shavuos.

This issue is dedicated in memory of  
Chaim Leib Ben Laibel ל"ת

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*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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[rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com](mailto:rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com)

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