בס"ד

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**Tazria - Metzora** | **Man's Achievements Depend Upon Their Sanctity of Speech**

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# MESILOT
## *Pathways to the Soul*

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
**Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

פרשת תזריע מצורע | אנגלית

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Questions of the Angels . . . . . 1
The Greatness of Honoring Parents . . . . . 3
“Do Not Forsake Your Mother’s Teaching" . . . . . 7
A Great and Limitless Wisdom . . . . . 9
The Meaning of the Leper’s Purification . . . . . 10
Pride — The Root of All Evil . . . . . 12
The Expulsion of the Impure from the Camp . . . . . 13
Cedar and Hyssop — Only Two Cases . . . . . 19
Why Specifically a Cedar from Lebanon? . . . . . 21
The Cause of the Destruction of the First Temple . . . 23
The Foundation of Children's Education . . . . . 25
The Danger of Conflict . . . . . 26
Summary and Practical Conclusions . . . . . 28

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# Parshat Tazria-Metzorah

## The Questions of the Angels

Red flames soared to the heavens, and the sound of crackling wood and collapsing walls filled the empty expanse.

The young Kohanim ran in panic, back and forth across the roof and colonnades.

The burning of the First Temple marked the end of G-d's revealed presence in the world, and from that moment until the coming of the Moshiach, the divine illumination that once was, would never again be revealed.

In the celestial spheres, the spirits were turbulent. Angels of mercy flitted and swarmed from place to place, their hearts aghast and filled with anguish. They mustered the courage and approached G-d:

"Master of the Universe. We have three searing questions we must ask:[1]

1. In Your holy Torah, You commanded: "Any man from the Children of Israel or from the strangers who dwell among them who hunts a beast or bird that may be eaten — he shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth" (Leviticus 17:13). That is, after slaughtering a bird or a beast, one must cover its blood with earth (cattle are exempt from this requirement).

Yet now, during the destruction of the Temple, the enemies of the Jews have slaughtered Your nation of Israel — "they have shed their blood like water around Jerusalem" (Psalms 79:3) — and no one has covered their blood.

Wellsprings of Wisdom

**1.** 'Nitzutzei Shimshon' (by Rabbi Shimshon of Ostropoli) on Parshat Shoftim, and it similarly appears in Midrash Tehillim (22:17).

**Parshat Tazria-Metzorah - The Questions of the Angels**

Did You care for the blood of birds and animals but not for the blood of Your own people, the nation of Israel?

2. Master of the Universe, in Your Torah, You commanded:

"A bull or a sheep — you shall not slaughter it and its offspring on the same day" (Leviticus 22:28). It is forbidden to slaughter a female animal and its offspring on the same day.

Yet now, during this destruction, the enemies have killed Your nation of Israel — women and children — by the thousands and tens of thousands, all on the same day.

Do You care for the suffering of animals but not for Your own nation of Israel?

3. Master of the Universe, in Your Torah, on the subject of Metzora, You commanded:

"The Kohen shall command that they clear out the house before the Kohen comes to see the plague so that everything in the house will not become impure; and afterward, the Kohen shall come to see the house" (Leviticus 14:36).

When signs of tzara'at (a spiritual affliction) appear on a house, the Kohen instructs that all of the items in the house be removed before he comes to inspect it.

The reason being: If the Kohen were to declare the house impure, all items inside would become impure as well, and the Torah is concerned for the financial loss of the Jewish people.[2]

## Wellsprings of Wisdom

**2.** The Mishnah states (Negaim 12:5):

"The Kohen shall command that they clear out the house before the Kohen comes to see the plague, so that everything in the house will not become impure; and afterward, the Kohen shall come to see the house" (Leviticus 14:36).

Rabbi Meir said: 'What in the house would possibly become impure? If it is his wooden utensils, his garments, and his metal utensils — these can all be immersed and purified. What the Torah was then concerned about, is his earthenware vessels, his jugs, and his smaller vessels (since earthenware cannot be purified).

If the Torah shows such concern for one's cheapest possessions (earthenware were very inexpensive), all the more so for his valued possessions. And if this is so for one's possessions, then all the more so

Yet now, during the destruction, You have caused the Jewish people themselves to cast away their gold and silver, as it says:

"Their silver they shall cast into the streets, and their gold shall be distanced" (Ezekiel 7:19).

You always show deep concern for the Jewish people's property — so why not now ?

Before we reveal G-d's answer to the angels, let us first introduce the following idea:

## The Greatness of Honoring Parents

It is well known that 'G-d desired to bestow merit upon the Jewish people, and therefore He gave them many commandments' - 613 in number. Through these, He granted them the opportunity to perform mitzvot at all times and every moment. The mitzvot encompass all aspects of life, and in their merit, the Jewish people attain the World to Come.

Yet, although G-d revealed that observing the mitzvot is the key to eternal life, He, for the most part, did not disclose the specific reward for each and every mitzvah.

However, there are a few exceptions — certain mitzvot for which G-d did reveal part of their reward, and one such mitzvah is the honoring of one's parents.

As it is written: "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be lengthened upon the land that the L-rd your G-d is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

Thus, in addition to the eternal reward in the World to Come, honoring one's parents brings long life in this world.[3]

Wellsprings of Wisdom

for the lives of his sons and daughters. If even for the possessions of a wicked man (who therefore had leprosy upon his home) this is true, all the more so for those possessions and household of the righteous.'"

**3.** Concerning the important commandment of honoring one's parents, let us share the following stories:

Rabbi Yissachar Steinhaerter from Yeshivat Netivot Olam recounted the following:

**Parshat Tazria-Metzorah - The Greatness of Honoring Parents**

A Jewish man who prays in the yeshiva had a mother who survived the horrific Holocaust.

She was the only survivor of her entire town. By now over eighty years old, she flew a few months ago to the United States to attend her grandson's wedding.

In the midst of the wedding, a family member approached her and said, "Someone is waiting for you on the side, by the partition between the men's and women's sections."

She approached the partition and saw an elderly man, who was even older than she was. "Ruchele!" the old man said excitedly. She looked at him, stunned.

"Ruchele?" No one had called her by that nickname in decades, not since the accursed Germans had torn her away from every member of her family, and murdered her entire town.

Her lips were dry, and she whispered, "Who are you?"

It turned out that the older man had lived near her parents' home in their hometown and knew her entire family well. Thus, it turned out that there had been another survivor.

Emotions in the room soon ran high. The old man walked slowly toward the band and asked them to pause the music, and he took the microphone and said:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to tell you all a story. When the accursed Germans arrived in our town, they forced the Jews into a ghetto. Very quickly, people began to die from starvation and disease. Then one day, huge notices were posted throughout the ghetto: "Whoever fails to appear at the train station by ten o'clock in the morning will have only himself to blame; he will be shot immediately."

Everyone knew the Germans would not hesitate to shoot anyone who disobeyed their orders. What they didn't realize was that the Germans intended to kill them all anyway, whether they obeyed their orders or not.

The people therefore all hurried and set out for the station well before the appointed time, just to be on the safe side.

My father, it seems, had no intention of arriving early. At nine-forty-five in the morning he called me and said, 'Please bring me my Shabbat shirt.' I was very surprised. My father was about to face the Germans, and he needed his elegant Shabbat shirt for that? But if he asked, of course I complied.

I brought him the shirt, and I assumed that he would quickly put it on and we would rush out, but then he said, 'Wait, it is not ironed, go and iron it for me please.'

I began to wonder whether, from all our troubles, G-d forbid, my father had possibly lost his mind.

Ironing clothes in those days wasn't a matter of plugging in an iron and running it quickly over the fabric. One had to heat coals, wait patiently for the iron to get hot, and then work with the garment.

By that time it was already a quarter past ten, and everyone knew the Germans would shoot anyone who disobeyed. But my father insisted, so I lit the coals and waited anxiously for the iron to heat.

**Parshat Tazria-Metzorah - The Greatness of Honoring Parents**

He looked at me and said, 'What's the matter with you — is that how you iron? Where's the starch?'

Industrious homemakers would apply starch so the cloth would become stiff. Ironing alone wasn't enough for my father; he wanted his shirt starched as well.

At that point, I was sure that my father had gone mad, heaven forbid, but I did as he asked. I brought the starch and labored to iron the shirt meticulously. At last, I had finished — and it was already ten-twenty-five; what pressure!

I handed the shirt to my father, but he inspected it and said, 'Not good enough. The crease on the shoulder isn't perfect, please iron it out again.'

I went over it once more, and at ten-thirty-five, when he finally put on the shirt, he said, 'Ah, that's very nice. Now the shoes.'

I ran to bring him his shoes, but he told me, 'Polish them.'

Today, polishing shoes is easy; you spread some liquid polish, and that's it.

In those days, it was a thick, greasy ointment that you had to rub in strenuously, and then wait for it to be absorbed before brushing and buffing it further.

My father told me to polish, so I did so, respectfully.

The trouble was that it was now a quarter to eleven, and my nerves were on edge. When I handed him the shoes, he said, 'Not good my son; the heel's polish is uneven. Do it again.'

Finally, at eleven o'clock, he was satisfied, and he put on the shirt and the shoes. 'Very good,' he said.

Then he added with great emotion: 'Listen carefully my dear boy. We're going to the staging area that the Germans designated, but no one knows where we'll be taken from there. We all understand that this may all end very badly.

Each and every parent wants their child to live and survive. Some people who have gold sew it into the hems of their children's clothes, so that if they're separated, at least the child has gold to use to bribe his way to survival.

Those who have bread give bread and foodstuffs to their children.

I have neither gold nor bread left to give to you, but I want very badly for you to live. So I am giving you a gift far greater: "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be lengthened" (Exodus 20:12).

I presented you with this gift which you performed most beautifully and with great self-sacrifice, because this hour was so excruciatingly difficult for you — and it is this merit that will, G-d willing, protect you.'

The old man concluded, "I was in Auschwitz under the Germans, I was in Siberia under the Russians — and it is through this merit of honoring my parents, that I now stand here in the United States, sharing this tale with all of you" (U'Matok Ha'Or – Brit Milah, p. 240).

**Parshat Tazria-Metzorah - The Greatness of Honoring Parents**

We typically measure human life in years, considering someone who lived many years as having been blessed with longevity.

But in truth, the length of a person's life should not be measured in years — but rather in moments. G-d assigns each person a fixed number of moments to live in this world, and true longevity is defined by how many of those moments a person succeeds to utilize properly.

When a Jew makes great efforts and merits divine assistance, they are able to make

## Wellsprings of Wisdom

We bring another tale, this time from 'Otzar Peninim Ve-Uvda'ot' (vol. 2, p. 634):

Rabbi Gamliel Rabinovitch Shlita, related an incident he heard from his father, the 'Ma'adanei HaShulchan':

A young married man in Jerusalem was struck with severe stomach pains about a month after his wedding.

He went to a doctor for thorough examinations and was shocked to learn that he was suffering from a terminal illness and, under normal circumstances, had no chance of living more than another month.

His wife urged him to undergo the treatments the doctors recommended, hoping there might be some chance. But he decided it would be best to go to the Chazon Ish, of blessed memory, and to request his blessing.

He traveled for several hours to Bnei Brak — quite a trip in those days — and entered the Chazon Ish's chamber. He described his dire medical condition, and asked for a blessing.

The Chazon Ish responded briefly: "What do you need my blessing for ? We have a clear verse in the Torah: 'Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be lengthened on the land that G-d your L-rd gives you' (Exodus 20:12)."

Immediately, the young man left Bnei Brak and went straight to his parents' home to fulfill the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother, and he asked his father how he could best help him.

His father said he wished to study Torah with him at night after the day's work in his store, and they set up a daily study session in the evenings. He also assisted his mother in any way he could, honoring both of them with various kinds of assistance and support.

Before long, he returned to the doctor for a checkup, but to the doctors' astonishment, the illness had completely disappeared, as though it had never existed. It was a complete wonder !

The man went on to live until the age of ninety, and was blessed with length of days and many good long years.

use of every moment of their life for the service of G-d.

Who can possibly describe the immeasurable value of a Jew who departs this world and returns to his Creator with all of their moments intact — countless moments, spanning an entire lifetime, that are often carried deep within one's heart?

This great merit and level can be attained through fulfilling the mitzvah of honoring one's parents properly in accordance with G-d's will, as we find in the teachings of the holy Divrei Chaim, Rabbi Chaim of Sanz of blessed memory.

He revealed that beyond the blessing of quantitative longevity, there is also a reward and blessing of qualitative longevity — meaning, a Jew is able to elevate himself so profoundly that his soul transforms from being an individual soul into a universal soul. Then, not only will every moment of one's life be fully utilized, but furthermore, the quality of life's many moments will be of an entirely different nature — elevated and utilized moments imbued with the essence of a universal soul.

To quote the Shefa Chaim of Sanz, of blessed memory ('Torah u'Mo'adim', vol. 14, p. 366):

"It is well known that when the tzaddik of Radomishl, of blessed memory, was still a young child, he was orphaned from his father. He came before the great Rabbi Chaim of Sanz, of blessed memory, who sat with him, educated him, and cautioned him about many matters. Among them, he emphasized the utmost importance of honoring one's parents (in this case, his mother) — saying that even King Solomon merited the throne merely because he treated his mother with great honor."

## "Do Not Forsake Your Mother's Teaching"

These words are quite profound. The reason that King Solomon merited to inherit his father's throne was because he honored his mother! King Solomon must have surely known how to properly honor his parents.

Let us examine one of the verses he taught related to this

subject: "Listen, my son, to the discipline of your father, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother" (Proverbs 1:8).

Many commentators ask: Why does the verse say "the discipline of your father" and "the teaching of your mother"?

Shouldn't it be the other way around? After all, the father teaches Torah, while the mother instills discipline and is commonly more involved in childrearing.

Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Halberstam, the Rebbe of Sanz-Klausenburg, once explained as follows:[4]

In the natural order of the world, a father teaches Torah — Chumash, Gemara, and the like — while a mother teaches good character traits and proper manners.

What King Solomon teaches us here is that the lessons that a mother instills in her child form the foundation for the father's Torah learning. Without the mother's guiding and foundational influence, the child's Torah is not the same.

To quote his words:

"This is why the verse says, 'Do not forsake the teaching of your mother' — to show that the customs and good character traits that a mother instills in her son are a complete Torah in and of themselves. It is only through them that a child can truly grasp the words of the Torah, and his entire conduct depends on this foundation.

In our generation, the minds have become contracted, and confusion abounds. Few people truly reflect on the great care that is required to have proper manners and good character.

Even those who accept upon themselves the yoke of Torah — to study, teach, and practice — fail to realize that their efforts are in vain unless they first focus on interpersonal relationships.

Only when a person follows the path of righteousness and pays careful attention to their



**4.** 'BeChatzrot HaChaim' booklet (no. 25, p. 32).

character traits does their Torah become an elixir of life, enabling them to reach true Torah understanding. However, if a person does not walk on the straight path and does not concern themselves with good and proper character, their Torah turns into a 'poisonous potion', and their learning is then forgotten."

Thus, ultimately, everything depends on the mother's education and teachings.

Now, let us reflect on the first and foremost lesson a mother must teach her children.

## A Great and Limitless Wisdom

The Book of Kings describes the wisdom of King Solomon:

"Solomon's wisdom was greater than all the wisdom of the people of the East and all of the wisdom of Egypt.

He was wiser than all men — more than Eitan the Ezrahite, Heman, Kalkol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol — and his fame spread among all the nations.

He spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs numbered 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall. He spoke of beasts, birds, creeping creatures, and the fish.

People from all nations came to hear Solomon's wisdom, from all of the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom" (I Kings 5:10-14).

The Midrash explains[5] that Solomon interpreted every single verse in the Torah with 3,000 parables, and for each parable, he provided 1,005 deeper explanations.

Thus, upon the 5,888 verses in the Torah,[6] he expounded countless insights to an indescribable depth.



**5.** Bamidbar Rabbah (19:3).

**6.** As we find stated in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30a): "The Rabbis have taught: There are 5,888 verses in the Torah. The book of Psalms has eight more verses than that, and the book of Chronicles has eight verses fewer."

Yet, after emphasizing Solomon's incredible wisdom, the verses immediately highlight some very specific things:

"He spoke of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall."

What is the significance and greatness of the knowledge in these topics that highlight and emphasize King Solomon's wisdom ?

## The Meaning of the Leper's Purification

This week, we read two Torah portions — Tazria and Metzora.

These portions contain 124 verses: 67 verses in Tazria and 57 verses in Metzora.

The two Torah portions can be generally divided into two main parts: The first eight verses of Tazria discuss the laws of ritual purity concerning a woman who gives birth to a male or a female child.

The rest of the two Torah portions detail the laws of leprosy (tzara'at) and its purification process — spanning more than 100 verses: Tazria covers leprosy on people and garments, and Metzora covers leprosy on houses.[7]

There is another point of connection between these portions: Metzora is the conclusion and seal of the subject

Wellsprings of Wisdom

**7.** As Rabbeinu Bachya describes in his commentary on the verse: "And behold, the plague is in the walls of the house" (Leviticus 14:37):

"Ten types of afflictions have been mentioned: six which appear and affect a person's body: se'eit, sapachat, baheret, shechin, netek, and marit ha-rosh; four that are external to one's body: in a woolen garment, a linen garment, a leather article, and in the walls of a house.

The passages are arranged in this order, making for a total of ten afflictions that correspond to the Ten Commandments; when the Jewish people observed the Torah and the commandments in the Holy Land, they were spared from these afflictions; but if they did not do so, they were struck by them."

that begins in Tazria because the laws of leprosy described in Tazria culminate in Metzora with the verse: "This shall be the law of the metzora on the day of his purification" (Leviticus 14:2).

Among the many details of these laws, we will now focus on the purification process of a metzora, as is relevant to our discussion.

The Rambam describes it as follows:[8]

"Purifying a metzora is a positive commandment. How is the leper purified?

A new earthenware vessel is brought and filled with a 'quarter-lug' measure of spring water.

Then, two pure birds are taken, one of which is slaughtered over the vessel, and its blood is mixed with the water, and the slaughtered bird is then buried.

The Kohen takes a cedar branch, a hyssop branch, and a scarlet thread and binds them together. He attaches the live bird to them, dips all of them into the blood-and-water mixture, and sprinkles it seven times upon the metzora, and finally, he releases the live bird to fly away."

Now, a cedar tree is extremely tall and majestic, while hyssop is a small and lowly plant. To purify a metzora, one was required to take both — the highest and the lowest plant — and to bind them together.

We may now understand some of the depth and greatness of King Solomon's Wisdom: "He spoke of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall" (I Kings 5:13).

This highlights King Solomon's understanding and insight into the purification process of a metzora. He grasped why the metzora must use a cedar and hyssop for purification:

Leprosy (tzara'at) is a consequence of speaking lashon



**8.** Laws of Leperosy (Chapter 11, Halachah 1).

hara (evil speech), which itself stems from the evil trait of arrogance. And since the metzora raised himself high like a cedar, he must now humble himself like hyssop, as the Midrash states:

"And he spoke of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall."

Can a person speak to the trees ? Rather, Solomon explained: Why is a metzora purified using both the tallest and the smallest of plants — the cedar and the hyssop ?

Because a person who exalted himself like a cedar is then afflicted with leprosy, but when he humbles himself like hyssop, he is then able to be healed.

## Pride — The Root of All Evil

In the laws of tzara'at, the words "and his head" (וראשו) appear, as stated: "And the leper who has the plague — his clothes shall be torn, and his head shall be unshorn, and he shall cover his mouth and cry out: 'Impure, impure'" (Leviticus 13:45).

The words "and his head" (וראשו) appear three other times in the Tanach:

1. The sin of the Tower of Babel: "And they said: 'Come, let us build ourselves a city and tower 'and his head' in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves'" (Genesis 11:4).

2. Jacob's dream: "And he dreamed, and behold: A ladder was set up on the earth, 'and his head' reached the heavens" (Genesis 28:12).

3. In the book of Job: "Though his loftiness ascends to the heavens, 'and his head' reaches the clouds" (Job 20:6).

As is well known, when identical words appear in different places in Tanach, they share an inner connection.

The Ba'al HaTurim (Leviticus 13:45) thus explains:

"Because one's pride 'reached the heavens' (as in Jacob's dream), therefore, plagues came upon the person, and his head must be unshorn and lowered."

The reason for this is that the undesirable trait of pride is the root of leprosy (tzara'at).

The Torah also details that since the leper exalted and removed and raised himself from others, he must now sit in isolation, as it says:

"All of the days that the plague is upon him, he shall remain impure. He is impure; he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside of the camp" (Leviticus 13:46).

The leper is thus placed in isolation because his primary sin is one of arrogance — he viewed himself as superior to all others, believing "I am the best, I am above them all." Thus, he is then expelled and made to sit alone, devoid of distractions, forcing him to confront his own inner world.

It is through this that he will ultimately come to realize that he has nothing to ultimately be proud of.

## The Expulsion of the Impure from the Camp

The following is an excerpt of a talk by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel, of saintly memory:[9]

"In Parshat Naso, it is stated:

"Command the children of Israel, and they shall send out of the camp every leper, every one who has an impure discharge, and all who are impure due to contact with the dead" (Numbers 5:2).[10]

Immediately in the next verse, this idea is repeated again:

"Send them outside the camp, so they do not defile their camps, where I dwell among them" (Numbers 5:3).

Wellsprings of Wisdom

**9.** 'Imrei Noam' (Naso – Ma'amar 1).

**10.** In this verse, the Torah commands to send these three types of impure individuals out of the Jewish community. The extent of their expulsion varies in accordance with the severity of their impurity.

The "camp," in its entirety, was composed of three parts, and this

**Parshat Tazria-Metzorah - The Expulsion of the Impure from the Camp**

If we examine these verses carefully, we notice an apparent redundancy; why does the Torah first say, "send out of the camp," and then repeat this again, "send them outside the camp"?

To explain this, we must first understand that these three types of impurity-the tzara'at (leprosy), the zav (one with an impure discharge), and tum'at met (impurity due to contact with the dead) correspond to three flaws of the soul — three negative character traits that cause impurity:

The Mishnah (Avot 5:19) states:

"Whoever possesses these three qualities is a disciple of Abraham, our forefather, but whoever possesses three of the opposite qualities is a disciple of Balaam the wicked:

A good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul — are the disciples of Abraham.

An evil eye, a haughty spirit, and a greedy soul — are the disciples of Balaam."

These three negative traits correspond to the three types of impurity mentioned above:

1. "An evil eye" corresponds to ritual impurity that results from contact with the dead:

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 107b) states that 99 out of 100 deaths are caused by the evil eye.

Rabbi Shalom Mashash, of blessed memory, clarified that

*Wellsprings of Wisdom*

corresponds to various areas in the future site of the Temple in Jerusalem:

The Machaneh Shechinah — the area of the Temple itself, the Machaneh Leviya — the Temple Mount, and Machaneh Yisrael — the city of Jerusalem.

The most severe impurity of the three is the leper, who was sent out of all three camps. A level below this stringency is the zav (including all kinds of impure bodily discharges) who was sent out of only two camps (Machaneh Shechinah and Machaneh Leviya) yet was permitted to remain in Machaneh Yisrael (i.e., inside Jerusalem). The least severe of the three is the impurity due to contact with the dead, who is allowed even on the Temple Mount and is only barred from the Machaneh Shechinah (i.e., the Temple area) itself (Mishneh Torah, 'Biat Hamikdash' 3:1–4).

this does not mean 99% of people die because others cast an evil eye upon them, but rather, it is they themselves who possess an evil eye, constantly envying others.

Their own jealousy and bitterness consumed them and led to their demise.[11]

Thus, the trait of an "evil eye" is what brings about the impurity of death, and this was the wicked trait of Balaam, the evildoer, who could not begrudge the success of the Jewish people and instead sought to harm them.

But the trait befitting the holy people of Israel is the trait of our forefather Abraham, of blessed memory — the trait of having a "good eye" (ayin tova) — to rejoice in the joy and success of others and to always look upon them with a positive and benevolent eye. And this positive trait serves as a protection for a long and healthy life.

2. "A haughty spirit" corresponds to leprosy:

The Torah commands that a metzora must bring cedarwood and hyssop for purification (Leviticus 14:4).

Rashi on the verse explains: "Leprosy comes as a punishment for arrogance. The cedar, which is tall and mighty, represents pride. The hyssop, which is lowly, is then needed, and this teaches us that one must humble himself to be healed."

Likewise, the Gemara (Arachin 16a) states that tzara‘at comes as a punishment for lashon hara, and the term “metzora” is an

Wellsprings of Wisdom

**11.** Indeed, we need not stray from the straightforward meaning of the statement: most people die because others cast an evil eye upon them.

Even so, this aligns with the explanation of Rabbi Mashash, since another person’s evil eye can only harm someone who himself looks upon others with an evil eye, as the saying of the sages goes, “one finds its own kind, and is itself reawakened.”

However, one who views others with a generous and benevolent eye cannot be harmed by the evil eye of others.

acronym for "motzi shem ra" (one who spreads slander).[12]

What causes a person to slander others? Arrogance. A person speaks negatively about others because they view themselves as superior and view others as having lesser value.

In contrast to this negative trait, the trait befitting the Jewish people is that of our forefather Abraham, of blessed memory —

## Wellsprings of Wisdom

**12.** In this world, nothing is perfect; everything requires refinement, and there often are many problems and hardships. One of these hardships is people who habitually speak lashon hara, and King David prayed to G-d that he be spared from them. We quote from a talk by my father, Rabbi Yoram Abargel (Imrei Noam, Metzora – Ma'amar 4):

"The main lesson derived from the weekly portions of Tazria and Metzora is the importance of instilling in one's own heart, and the hearts of one's household, the important trait of guarding one's speech.

A person should accustom himself and his household to never speak negatively about any Jew, whoever they may be.

In the merit of practicing this quality, the Divine Presence will rest in their home; they will be protected from all harm and will witness extraordinary divine assistance in everything they do — especially in the education of their children.

Moreover, these two Torah portions of Tazria and Metzora are juxtaposed to the previous portion Shemini, which speaks of the prohibition of eating non-kosher foods, to hint that just as one is often extremely vigilant with regard to the kosher status of one's food — buying products with the most stringent kosher certifications, and so forth — so too, and even more so, must one be vigilant in guarding one's speech and to avoid causing any hurt or distress to others, Heaven forbid.

In other words: just as a person is very cautious about what goes into his mouth, likewise — and even more so — he should be cautious and careful about what comes out of his mouth.

Unfortunately, there are many people who are very strict in areas of kosher food, yet at the very same time, often end up 'consuming' and devouring others.

They may speak lashon hara about others, humiliate them, and sully their good name. Therefore, these two Torah portions appear next to Shemini to remind such individuals that just as they take care not to eat insects and to carefully adhere to the Torah's kosher laws, so too must they be careful not to 'devour' their fellow Jew."

the trait of having a humble spirit and exceptional humility before every person in the world.

3. "A greedy soul" corresponds to impurity from bodily discharges, an impurity which stems from overindulgence in material desires.

In contrast to this negative trait, the trait befitting the holy offspring of Israel is that of our forefather Abraham, of blessed memory — the trait of a humble soul. Abraham was full of modesty and self-restraint and distanced himself from indulgence in all worldly desires.

Thus, each type of impurity originates and corresponds to a distinct corrupt character trait:

With this we can now understand why the Torah repeats the command to expel the impure from the Jewish camp.

The first command, to "send out of the camp," refers to the literal expulsion of impure individuals.

But the second verse, "send them outside the camp," alludes to an internal purification — the need to expel these three negative traits from within ourselves.

The Torah thus teaches us:

Not only must the impure individuals be removed physically from the camp, but we must also purge our own hearts of the related undesirable character traits.

For G-d dwells within every Jew, as it is written: “And I shall dwell among them.” (Exodus 25:8).

The Alshich HaKadosh explains: "The verse does not say ‘I will dwell in it’ (the Tabernacle), but ‘I will dwell in them’ — within every individual Jew." Therefore, we must safeguard the purity of our hearts from any trace of a trait that is unworthy of a Jewish soul.

Similarly, Rabbi Elazar Azkari, of blessed memory, writes (Sefer Charedim, Chapter 66, Section 21):

"The primary dwelling place of the Shechinah is in the heart of the Jewish person, as it is written: 'And I shall dwell among them' (Exodus 25:8).

Likewise, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai explains in the Zohar (Acharei Mot, 75a) regarding the verse: 'For the L-rd your G-d walks in the midst of your camp' (Deuteronomy 23:15) — 'in the midst' refers to one's heart, which is at the center of 'your camp,' meaning the body of a person.

The conclusion of the verse states: 'And He shall not see in you any unseemly thing and turn away from you', meaning that if a person does not sanctify their limbs, even with regard to what is permitted to them, in thought, speech, and action, they effectively destroy G-d's Temple. And woe to the one who destroys the King's Sanctuary."

He further adds (ibid., Section 27):

"How fitting it is for a person to sanctify their limbs, and their heart and soul, for they are a sanctuary for the Holy King, as it is written: 'The Holy One is within you' (Hosea 11:9); and 'They are the Temple of the L-rd' (Jeremiah 7:4); and 'You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd, am holy' (Leviticus 19:2), meaning, because I dwell among you, as it is written: 'And I shall place My dwelling among you' (Leviticus 26:11)."

Based on all of the above, we can now explain the final verses on this subject:

"And the children of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp, as the L-rd had spoken to Moses, so did the children of Israel do" (Numbers 5:4).

This verse also seemingly contains an unnecessary repetition — it already states at the beginning, "And the children of Israel did so and sent them." Why then does it repeat this idea at the end with, "So did the children of Israel do" ?

But in light of what we previously explained, this is not difficult at all.

The first part of the verse, "And the children of Israel did so and sent them", refers to the literal fulfillment of the commandment to remove the impure individuals from the camp.

But the repetition at the end, "So did the children of Israel do", alludes to a deeper, hidden aspect

of this mitzvah: the people of Israel also purified their inner camp — the depths of their hearts — and expelled from it the three negative traits of Balaam the wicked: an evil eye, a haughty spirit, and a greedy soul, and in their place, they cultivated the three positive traits of our forefather Abraham: A good eye, a humble spirit, and a modest soul

## Cedar and Hyssop — Only Two Cases

As abovementioned, three types of impure individuals were sent outside of the Jewish camp: The leper, the one who was impure due to contact with the dead, and the one with an impure bodily discharge.

However, only the first two — the Metzora and the one who was impure due to contact with the dead — required cedarwood and hyssop for their purification, the one with an impure bodily discharge did not require them.

Why is this ?

According to the words of my father, Rabbi Yoram, the answer is clear:

Cedar and hyssop are needed only when the root of the particular impurity stems from arrogance.

Since the impurity of one with an impure bodily discharge stems from unholy desire rather than pride, there is no need for cedarwood and hyssop in their purification process.

To quote Rabbi Yoram:[13]

"To purify a person from impurity due to contact with the dead, a red heifer was slaughtered and burned until it turned to ashes. While the brighter was burned, cedarwood and hyssop were thrown into the fire, as it is written:

'And the Kohen shall take cedarwood, hyssop, and scarlet thread and cast them into the burning of the heifer.' (Numbers 19:6).

The entire process of the red heifer symbolizes humility:



**13.** 'Imrei Noam' (Chukat – Ma'amar 1).

The heifer was burned to ashes, representing submission and lowliness. Cedarwood and hyssop were both thrown into the fire, and they symbolize the nullification of arrogance with humility.

Rabbi Moshe HaDarshan, who is cited by Rashi (Numbers 19:22) explained:

"Why did the Torah command to throw cedarwood — from the tallest of trees — and hyssop — the lowest plant — into the fire?

To teach us that one who is arrogant and sins must humble himself like hyssop and a worm, and then he will be atoned for."

This concept is emphasized specifically in the red heifer, which purifies from the impurity of death, to indicate that arrogance is compared to the ultimate impurity, and it is the very root of all impurity.

Thus, the first step in repentance and self-improvement is to eliminate arrogance and cultivate humility and submission.

A person must never assume that after repenting for years, they have reached the level of the completely righteous, rather, they must continue repenting throughout their entire life.

Even if one has done complete repentance, nonetheless, as they grow in their service of G-d and perceive His greatness more deeply, they realize their previous repentance was insufficient.

This aligns with the teaching of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Moharan 6:3):

"Even if a person knows that they have done complete repentance, they must still commit to repentance in addition to their previous repentance. For when they first repented, they did so according to their level of understanding at the time. But now that they have grown spiritually, they perceive G-d's greatness even more, and in comparison, their first level of understanding greatly materialized and minimized G-d's greatness.

Thus, they must now repent for their previously limited perception of G-d's greatness."[14]

## Why Specifically a Cedar from Lebanon?

When the Chatam Sofer, of blessed memory, studied this Midrash, he asked several questions:[15]

1. The Metzora's purification requires "cedarwood" — without specifying where it grows, yet, in the verse about Solomon's wisdom, it says: "the cedar of Lebanon."

Why does it matter where the cedar grows?

2. Similarly, why does the Torah specify "the hyssop that grows in the wall"? What difference does it make where it grows?

3. Why is Solomon's insight into the commandments considered exceptional wisdom? It is great wisdom that any Torah sage can offer.

4. The Metzora only brings the cedar and hyssop after he is already healed.

The cedar makes sense — he must recognize that it was his arrogance that caused his affliction.

Wellsprings of Wisdom

**14.** The author of 'Chovot HaLevavot' writes similarly (Sha'ar Avodat HaElohim, Chapter 3):

"The commandments of the Torah have a finite number — 613 in total. But the commandments of reason are practically limitless, and each day a person increases their understanding of them.

The more a person grows in their awareness and recognition of G-d's goodness, His boundless power, and His sovereignty, the more he will humble himself and become lowly before Him.

Indeed, it has been said of certain pious ascetics that they spent all of their days in repentance, because each day they experienced a 'new' level and degree of repentance — on account of their ever-deepening recognition of G-d's greatness, and the realization of how lacking their past service had been.

As King David said: 'Day to day speech is uttered, and night to night knowledge is expressed' (Psalms 19:3).

**15.** Chatam Sofer (Parshat Metzora).

But why does he still require hyssop? If he is already cured of his leprosy, surely his haughtiness is no longer, and he has already attained humility. Wouldn't bringing hyssop now make him unduly proud of his newfound humility?

The Chatam Sofer offers a novel explanation:

When a person speaks lashon hara, they deny G-d's providence, acting as if G-d is unaware of human affairs.

However, once they are struck with tzara'at, they are forced to acknowledge that G-d observes everything — even their speech.

Therefore, the purification process involves cedarwood and hyssop:

The cedar represents G-d's supervision over the higher realms, while the hyssop represents G-d's supervision over the lower realms as well.

By bringing both, the metzora publicly affirms his belief that G-d oversees all levels of creation and every action of mankind.

With regard to leprosy, the Torah discusses three types of afflictions:

Afflictions on a person, on garments, and on houses.

The Torah states that with regard to contaminated garments, there is no other solution, and they must be burned:

"And he shall burn the garment, the warp or the woof, whether of wool or linen, or any leather article in which the plague is found, because it is a malignant leprosy; it shall be burned in fire" (Leviticus 13:52).

A house with leprosy, however, can be purified, as the Rambam states:[16]

"How is a contaminated house purified? After removing the affected stones and replastering, the purification follows the same procedure as for a person — spring



**16.** Laws of Leprosy, 15:8.

water, two birds, cedarwood, hyssop, and scarlet thread.

The difference is that, while a person is sprinkled seven times on the back of his hand, the house is sprinkled seven times on its entrance lintel."

Thus, the purification of a house parallels that of a person.

Now, it isn't necessary to explain why a person requires the lesson of cedar and hyssop; the reason is clear — he must acknowledge G-d's providence.

But why must a house require cedar and hyssop? Because a house, too, can be afflicted on account of the arrogance of its owner and his pride over the members of his household.[17]

## The Cause of the Destruction of the First Temple

On the Ninth of Av in the year 3,338 to the creation of the world, the First Temple was destroyed.

The Gemara states (Yoma 9b): "Why was the First Temple destroyed? Because of three sins that were present then: idolatry, illicit relationships, and bloodshed."

Towards the end of the First Temple era, the Jewish nation's undesirable passions flared, and they stumbled in these three grave transgressions.

Wellsprings of Wisdom

**17.** Indeed, the foundation of true peace is love for one's fellow Jew.

We bring an excerpt on this subject from 'Toward a Meaningful Life' (p. 27):

"In a certain sense, we have all grown distant from our true self. Birth, marks the beginning of the soul's journey, dispatched from its sacred and holy origins to dwell in the unnatural reality of the material world. For this reason, we spend our entire lives longing to reconnect with our authentic selves. We essentially are searching for connection to our soul, that divine spark within. We yearn to rejoin our source from anew."

And our Sages have revealed that the surest path to reconnect with our authentic self is through fulfilling the commandment "Love your fellow as yourself."

**Parshat Tazria-Metzorah - The Cause of the Destruction of the First Tempıe**

In connection with our Torah portion, we find in the Midrash[18] that the verses concerning leprosy on houses are interpreted as referring to the destruction of the Temple:

"'When you come into the land of Canaan... and I will place the leprosy affliction upon the house in the land of your possession' (Leviticus 14:34) — this refers to the Holy Temple. 'And the one to whom the house belongs shall come' — this refers to the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said: 'Because My house is in ruins' (Haggai 1:9). 'And he shall tell the priest' — this refers to the prophet Jeremiah. 'An affliction-like sign has appeared to me in the house' — this refers to the defilement of idolatry. 'And the priest shall command that the house be cleared out' — refers to the ransacking of the Temple- 'And he took the treasuries of the House of the L-rd' (I Kings 14:26). 'And he shall dismantle the house' — as the verse states about the destruction wrought by Nebuchadnezzar 'And they tore down that house' (Ezra 5:12). 'And he shall remove it outside the city, to an unclean place' — 'And the people were exiled to Babylonia' (ibid.).

The Midrash continues, "One might think this destruction will last forever and that the Temple would never again be rebuilt, and therefore the verse continues: 'And they shall take other stones' — which refers to its rebuilding as it says: 'Therefore, thus said G-d, the L-rd: Behold, I lay in Zion a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a well-founded foundation; whoever believes shall not hasten' (Isaiah 28:15)."

We thus can gather from the Midrash that the primary reason for the Temple's destruction was the presence of the impurity of leprosy upon it - "'And I shall place a tzara'at affliction upon a house in the land of your possession' — this refers to the Temple."



**18.** Vayikra Rabbah 17:7.

And since the affliction of leprosy stems from arrogance, it follows that a main cause for the destruction of the First Temple was arrogance and pride.

## The Foundation of Children's Education

Now we understand that the first and most essential lesson we must instill in our children is to stay far away from arrogance.

The way to achieve this is by constantly repeating in their ears the ten principles written by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, of blessed memory:[19]

1. Do not interact with people solely based on cold logic — always consider their emotions and character traits.

2. Everyone believes they excel at something more than you do — and they are probably right. Acknowledge this, and they will love you. (Recall the words of the Ramban in his famous letter: If you are wiser than someone, recognize that they may be more righteous than you, since their sins are out of ignorance while you may sin knowingly).

3. Each person is more concerned with their own needs than with yours — so show them how your interests also serve their interests.

4. Do not merely try to make someone do something — make them want to do it and feel happy about it.

5. Avoid heated arguments with your peers, as they will only distance you from them.

6. Do not talk too much about yourself — talk to your friend about themselves, and they will enjoy the conversation. (Most people's most commonly used word is "I," and the most cherished sound is that of their own name).

7. Listen to others, remember their names and details, and they will love you.



**19.** 'Michtav M'Eliyahu' (Vol. 4, p. 244).

8. Never openly criticize someone, as it will only make them more stubborn. Even the worst criminals do not truly admit their guilt to themselves.

9. When speaking to others, always acknowledge the truth — otherwise, they may dislike you (and justifiably so).

10. As doctors say, understanding the illness is less important than understanding the patient. Many illnesses, or even all of them, originate from a person's state of mind. If you can support them with love and connection, you may heal them.

Rabbi Dessler concludes:

"A person who follows these principles will gradually find it easier to let go of personal grievances, as they will become accustomed to seeing things from the perspective of others."

## The Danger of Conflict

We return to our original question. The heavenly angels approached G-d and asked:

"Master of the Universe. Why did You not have mercy on Your nation of Israel during the destruction ?"

G-d answered them as follows:[20]

"In the final years before the First Temple's destruction, the Torah scholars became arrogant, and as a result, every halachic debate among the sages of Israel turned into a personal conflict filled with ego."

To elaborate upon this point:

G-d granted the sages of Israel a powerful ability — the ability to rule and decide in areas of halacha, Jewish law.

A Torah scholar delves deeply into the sacred wisdom of the Torah, carefully analyzing its laws, and based on their understanding, issue halachic



**20.** 'Nitzutzei Shimshon', Shoftim.

rulings, revealing G-d's will in the specific circumstances.

Naturally, scholars may disagree in their interpretation of the sources. One may declare something permitted, while the other declares it forbidden. One may purify, while the other deems it to be impure.

However, they must never forget that their sole purpose is to uncover G-d's will — there is no personal stake in their rulings.

They must love and respect one another, for both are united in their pursuit of divine truth.

However, when halachic debate turns into personal conflict, G-d takes no pleasure in such Torah learning. And that is precisely what happened in that generation: They turned halachic disputes into personal battles — and this led to the destruction of the Temple.

To quote the 'Nitzutzei Shimshon':

"If a matter becomes incomprehensible" - the angels may wonder;

"And if there is a dispute between blood and blood" — Why did G-d command the covering of the blood of animals but not the blood of the Jewish people during the destruction?

"And if there is a dispute between laws" — Why did G-d forbid slaughtering an animal and its offspring on the same day but allow our enemies to slaughter the Jewish people, children and parents together?

"And if there is a dispute between afflictions' — Why did G-d protect the Jewish people's property from the impurity of leprosy, yet not protect their wealth during the destruction?

The reason for all of this was:

"And there is conflict within your gates," the Jewish people were conflicted and locked in battle.

This is why we pray every day:

"He who makes peace in His celestial heights, may He, in His mercy, make peace upon us and upon all Israel.

And let us all say, Amen."

# Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. G-d gave Torah scholars the great responsibility of issuing halachic rulings. They must immerse themselves in Torah, carefully extracting the divine truth from among its treasures of wisdom.

They may disagree on rulings, yet they must never let their personal bias interfere. They must love and respect each other, for they all are seeking the divine truth.

2. Every person is like a diamond:

A diamond may appear dirty, but beneath the dust and grime lies beauty and brilliance, and its value remains, regardless of its outward appearance.

We must treat every person as a precious diamond, respecting their inner worth and helping them refine themselves.

If their exterior is rough, we must gently encourage them to improve — not break them or cause them to despair.

True love means recognizing and nurturing the potential in every person.

3. Arrogance is the root cause of tzara'at.

This is why the metzora must bring cedarwood — which represents arrogance.

And his cure is to be humble and lower himself like a hyssop.

Pride causes people to speak negatively about others; they think that they are superior while others are worthless.

In contrast, the proper Jewish trait is humility — as embodied by Abraham our forefather.

4. Just as we are cautious about what we put into our mouths, we must be even more careful about what comes out of them.

Some are meticulously strict about not having the smallest chance of possibly eating an insect, yet at the same time, they "devour" other people through gossip and slander.

This is why the laws of tzara'at are placed near the laws of kosher food — to teach that just as we avoid non-kosher food, so too, we must avoid non-kosher speech.

5. Even a person who learns Torah and prays with devotion is harmed if they engage in gossip. Every time someone speaks lashon hara, spiritual impurity spreads like dust over their Torah and prayers.

Their words of Torah and tefillah then become tainted and are rejected when they rise and appear before Heaven.

6. This is the first thing we must teach our children: the importance of interpersonal relationships.

Torah is only a "potion of life" when it is accompanied by good character.

Only when we treat others with love and respect does our Torah learning truly thrive.

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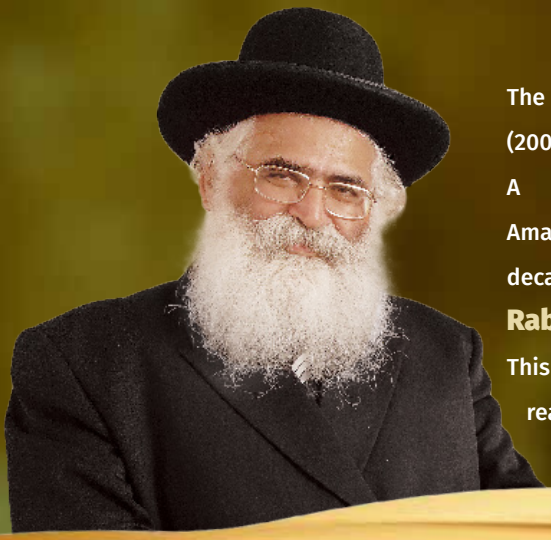

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*A person is naturally very sensitive to embarrassment and shame, and suffers from it greatly. Revenge is naturally sweet and gives rest to one's resulting anger.*

*Therefore, when one summons the power to resist their natural inclination and forgoes the temptation to repay evil, hatred, and revenge upon one who committed the same to them, they are truly to be considered strong and courageous.*

*One is then similar to the celestial angels who do not have these inferior characteristics, and thereby elevated from the beings who dwell upon the earth.*

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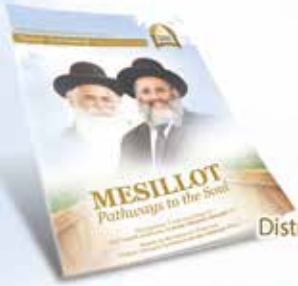


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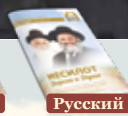

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