



# Shabbat Table Talk Page

## Overview

- **Parashah: Tazria (תִּזְרִיעַ, "She conceives")**
- **Chapters: Leviticus 12:1-13:59**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

## Synopsis

Our Torah portion this week continues the discussion of the laws of “purity” and “impurity” that began with parashat Tzav. A new mother is regarded as a *niddah* (a menstruent woman) and is considered “impure” (*tamei*) regarding the sanctuary for 40 days (if a boy) or 80 days (if a girl). On the eighth day of life a boy must be circumcised. After the mother’s “period of impurity” had ended, she was required to bring a yearling sheep as a burnt offering and a dove for a sin offering (if she is poor, two doves sufficed for both offerings).

The portion next describes certain afflictions, collectively called *tzara’at*, that caused the affected person (or thing) to be both ritually impure (*tamei*) and in a state of uncleanness (*tumah*). Note that *tzara’at* is not to be identified with “leprosy” (as some English translations say), since the symptoms of *tzara’at* included not just the afflicted person’s skin, but sometimes his clothes, pottery vessels, and house.

When applied to people, *tzara’at* was a sort of a spiritual affliction (i.e., *yisur*: יִסּוּר) that could only be diagnosed by a *kohen* (priest), not a doctor. If white or pink patches appeared on a person’s skin, the afflicted person was required to contact a *kohen* for an examination. If the priest detected 1) two hairs that had turned white within the spot, or 2) a piece of healthy skin in the middle of the spot, he was declared *tamei* (unclean), and then had to follow the prescribed laws for the *metzora* (person affected with *tzara’at*); otherwise he was declared *tahor* (clean).

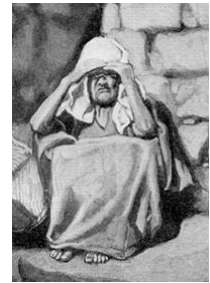
On the other hand, if the priest suspected *tzara’at* but was unsure, the afflicted person was quarantined and required to perform *teshuvah* (repentance). If a second evaluation indicated that the spot(s) had grown larger in size, the person was declared *tamei* and was subject to the laws for the *metzora* (i.e., dwelling “outside the camp” until the person was completely healed).

If someone was diagnosed with *tzara’at*, they were forced to leave the community and live in a state of exile. He had to tear his clothes like a mourner, put a shroud over his face (descending to his upper lip) and remain alone. If anyone came near, the *metzora* was required to cry out: “Unclean! Stay away! Do not become impure because of me!” (no one was permitted to come within eight feet of him). While so isolated, the person would have opportunity to perform *teshuvah* and seek spiritual “rebirth” (as described in the following Torah portion, parashat Metzora).



## Basic Questions

1. How long is a woman rendered “impure” (tamei) after the birth of a child? <sup>1</sup>
2. What additional time is required for the woman to “recover” from the birth? <sup>2</sup>
3. What restrictions were placed on the new mother during her recovery period? <sup>3</sup>
4. After the “period of her impurity” was over, what was required of the new mother? <sup>4</sup>
5. How old must a Jewish boy be when he is circumcised? <sup>5</sup>
6. What is “tzara’at”? <sup>6</sup>
7. Who was able to diagnose tzara’at? <sup>7</sup>
8. What were two sure signs of tzara’at in a person? <sup>8</sup>
9. What happened to a person diagnosed with tzara’at? <sup>9</sup>
10. According to the rabbis, tzara’at was caused primarily by evil speech (lashon hara). Why do they come to this conclusion? <sup>10</sup>
11. Who *first* spoke lashon hara? <sup>11</sup>
12. Can you list some cases of tzara’at mentioned in the Bible? <sup>12</sup>



## Discussion Topics

1. Blood is regarded as “holy” because it is the “carrier” of life (“the life of the flesh is in the blood”) and blood outside the body is symbolic of death (bloodshed). Sacrificed blood is applied to the altar to make atonement (Lev. 17:11). Because it is connected with life and death, various taboos are associated with it. Blood cannot be consumed; blood is a potential source of ritual impurity; women became impure because of its presence, and so on. Discuss.

<sup>1</sup> Seven days for a boy, 14 days for a girl (Lev. 12:2, 5). This is called “tumat yoledet.”

<sup>2</sup> 33 days for a boy, 66 days for a girl (Lev. 12:4-5). This is called the “blood of her purifying” (דְּמֵי טְהֻרָה).

<sup>3</sup> She was forbidden to enter the Tabernacle or to touch holy things (Lev. 12:4).

<sup>4</sup> She must bring a yearling lamb for burnt offering and a pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering so the priest can make atonement (kapparah) for her. If she cannot afford a lamb, she can offer a bird in its place (Lev. 12:6-8).  
<sup>5</sup> Eight days old (Lev. 12:3).

<sup>6</sup> A spiritual condition that rendered people or things impure and unclean. A person so afflicted is called metzora.

<sup>7</sup> Only a priest could diagnose and decide whether the condition was present.

<sup>8</sup> If the plague appeared deeper than the skin of the flesh and if there were white hairs in the plague (Lev. 13:3).

<sup>9</sup> He was forced to live in a state of exile, to tear his clothes like a mourner, and to shroud his face (descending to his upper lip), and to remain alone. If anyone came near, he was required to cry out: “Unclean! Stay away!”

<sup>10</sup> Because Miriam was afflicted with tzara’at after she spoke evil about Moses (Num. 12:1-10).

<sup>11</sup> The *nachash* (serpent) in the orchard who tempted Eve by slandering God. “Hath God said...?”

<sup>12</sup> Miriam, Naaman and Gehazi (2 Ki. 5); King Uzziah (2 Chron. 26); the leper healed by Yeshua (Matt. 8:2) and the ten lepers healed by Yeshua (Lk. 17:12-19).



2. The Torah makes clear that the realm of the holy must be separate from the realm of the unclean: “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean” (Lev. 10:10). But how are we to make sense of the realms of *tumah* (uncleanness) and *tahora* (cleanness)? In particular, the various laws concerning childbirth, “emissions” (*zav*), *niddut* (menstruation), and *tzara’at* seem be irrelevant to our lives, and yet “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching...” (2 Tim. 3:16). *Discuss...*
3. The sages state that the “father” of all uncleanness is contact with death (i.e., a corpse), since that immediately results in a *separation* from the Sanctuary (Num. 19:13). But why is death regarded as inherently unclean and defiling? Here are a few suggested reasons:
  - a. Unlike other religions that reverence the dead (e.g., Egyptian cults of the dead; Greek cults of the netherworld), God wants us to be life-focused.
  - b. Unlike religions that engage in ancestor worship, God wants us to respect our heritage but understand it with an eye to a future good.
  - c. Unlike occult practices of spiritism and sorcery, God wants us to be in a personal relationship with Him.
  - d. Though it is a common occurrence, death is a “stopping place” for life and therefore needs to be invested with special sanctity and taboos.
  - e. The laws of *tumah* were intended to regard death as an anomaly, an aberration, and even an obscenity. Death is the “ultimate profanity.” Put the other way, the laws against contact with the dead were intended to instill sanctity and reverence of life.
  - f. Death is the opposite end of the continuum of Life. The Sanctuary (and therefore the Divine Presence) is set apart as a place of life, healing, and *shalom*.
  - g. Death itself is regarded as an enemy (1 Cor. 15:55). Eventually, *bila ha-mavet la-netzach* (בְּלֹא הַמָּוֶת לְנֶצַח) “death is swallowed up in victory” (Isa. 25:8). Such is our great hope - eternal life - the freedom from the presence of sin, pain, and sorrow, and (best of all) enjoying the Presence of God as our Eternal Love forever.

Discuss how you think God wants us to regard physical death, especially in light of the resurrection and promise of Yeshua...

4. Why does childbirth make a mother unclean? Moreover, why does the Torah require a sin offering to be given after the period of her impurity? Is this meant to atone for the original sin of Eve (Gen. 3:16)? Even King David said, “I was born with iniquity; with sin my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Is the sin offering meant to remind us of an inherited sin nature that is present even at the moment of birth, or is it meant to atone for the mother’s inherited guilt that derives from her relationship with Eve? Even Mary, the mother of Yeshua, offered the prescribed sacrifices after the birth of Yeshua (Luke 2:22-24). *Discuss.*
5. Why is the period of impurity twice as long when a woman bears a girl rather than a boy? Moreover, is the mother in a state of uncleanness when her son is circumcised? Does the boy’s circumcision on the 8th day somehow reduce the amount of time of the mother’s *tumah*?



6. Impurity (tumah) is not about hygiene as much as it about meeting the “spiritual conditions” for participation in ritual. For instance, since blood is regarded as holy, its presence must be carefully controlled at the Sanctuary, and therefore women in a state of niddah were excused from participating at the altar during that time. Nonetheless, there is some ambiguity surrounding the case of a person afflicted with *tzara’at*. In physical terms, the *metzora* (person afflicted with the disease) was quarantined from the camp, perhaps to minimize the risk of infecting others, but in spiritual terms the *metzora* was regarded to be in a protracted state of “impurity” that made him or her unfit for fellowship with the community. Unlike other entirely *natural* causes that rendered someone impure, however, the sages associated the *metzora* with the phrase “one who brings forth [speaks] evil” (from *motzi ra*), and they thereby concluded that evil speech (i.e., *lashon hara*) was the principal cause of the disease itself.

*Lashon hara* is traditionally defined as saying something bad about another person *even if it happens to be true*. In other words, “evil speech” involves spreading evil (even if true) reports, or expressing a negative or critical spirit about others. Yeshua told us that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34), and further warned us about the unthinking use of our words: “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall account for in the day of judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by you words you shall be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37, see also Matt. 5:37).

Life and death are in the tongue (Prov. 18:21). Since words are the result of our thinking, discuss how negative thinking can create sickness and *tsuris* in your own life...

7. In the New Testament we read how Yeshua healed various “lepers” and even touched them (Matt. 8:2-3, Mark 1:40-41). The healing by Yeshua is *paradoxical*, since anyone who touches someone afflicted with *tzara’at* became (ritually) unclean themselves, and yet we know that Yeshua was entirely without sin or impurity. He alone is the Healer of our uncleanness before God, and through His touch we are made acceptable for true spiritual worship. Thank the LORD God of Israel! The Lord Yeshua visits and heals us outside the camp! It is the prerogative of the LORD God of Israel to “touch” those afflicted with *tzara’at* and heal them based on their *teshuvah*, and in like measure, Yeshua entered the “leper colony” of humanity to heal those who cried out to Him. Discuss....

שַׁבַּת שְׁלוֹם

*S h a b b a t S h a l o m !*



## For Next Week:

- Read parashat **Metzora** (i.e., Leviticus 14:1-15:33)
- Read the Haftarah (2 Kings 7:3-20)
- Read the New Testament (Matthew 8:1-17)