

# RED ALERT!

## TAZRI'A-M'TZORA - ROSH CHODESH

*by Rabbi Eddie Davis (RED)  
of the Young Israel of Hollywood -  
Ft. Lauderdale (Florida)*

### DIVREI TORAH

- The sidra begins with the law of the woman who has given birth. She is required to bring two sacrifices, an Olah (whole burnt offering) and a Chatat (sin offering). The Olah is explained by the Abravanel that it is a form of gratitude to Hashem for granting her a child and for sparing her life through the ordeal of childbirth. This reasoning is supported by a number of Midrashim that obligates the woman to acknowledge Hashem's beneficence during her involvement in the motherhood process. It makes more sense superficially to think that the Toda (thanksgiving offering) seems more appropriate for her than the Olah (whole burnt offering). Many commentators offer suggestions as to why she has the Olah and not the Toda. May I suggest that since the birthing process was one event for which she should be grateful and thankful of God's blessings, but the recovery is a much longer process. Maybe further down the road, if she is so inclined, she would actually bring a thanksgiving offering. But at this stage of the game the process is far from concluded and the Olah would

be more appropriate for surviving the great threat to her life which is incorporated within the birthing process.

- The Torah now goes on to a longer explanation of the law of the Biblical M'tzora. These afflictions have to be analyzed by a Kohen and determination of the M'tzora's status. The order of laws in the Torah is commented upon by several rabbis and well back even into the Midrashic and Talmudic periods. The laws of kosher foods which was dealt with last week forms a proper contrast to this law of Tzaraat, which our Sages firmly combine with the sin of Lashon HaRa (scandalous talk). Rabbi Yisrael Selanter (19th century Lithuania, founder of the Mussar movement) discusses the contrast in his own unique way. People are more scrupulous not to eat forbidden foods than they are to "devour" another human being by destroying the person's reputation through slander. The juxtaposition of these chapters teaches us that "consuming" your fellow man by means of gossip and slander is no less sinful than is eating pork. The ethical teachings of Torah are the hallmark of the Mussar movement and add a nice dimension to Torah commentary.

- The Kohen must look at the NEGA (affliction) in order to determine the person's status. There is repetition of

the expression, “the Kohen shall look”. It is possible for the skin to be examined by a learned non-Kohen and the declaration of Tzara’at to be made by even an unlearned Kohen who does not know the relevant laws. If so, we might think that the Kohen of this sort need not look at the affliction at all. The scholar would look at it and determine its halachic status, and the Kohen would simply pronounce the declaration TAMEI (defiled) or TAHOR (pure). Therefore, the Torah repeats several times, “the Kohen shall look”. Even if the Kohen does not know the status of the affliction except by consulting a learned non-Kohen, the Kohen must see the affliction. Perhaps this is simply the decree of the Torah. Or perhaps it is because even the unlearned Kohen cannot pronounce the declaration unless he at least knows the different types of Tzara’at and their names. The Kohen may act on the advice of a non-Kohen scholar but the Kohen himself must assume the role of the healer of the soul of the potential M'tzora. (Oznayim LaTorah)

- After discussing all of the conditions that could make a person a M'tzora, the Torah prescribes for him several obligations: his clothes must be ripped; his head must be wild, meaning that his hair grows long; he covers his lip (understood by many as not speaking); he must call out Tamei,

impure; he lives outside the encampment. The first two elements are reminiscent of death as a mourner rips his clothes and does not cut his hair. Indeed the Talmud (Mo'ed Katan 15) compares and contrasts the halachot of a mourner and that of M'tzora and lists a M'tzora as one of whose who is considered as if he is dead (Avoda Zara 5a). So he is in effect mourning for himself. Support is brought for the prayer that Moshe said for Miriam when the latter was afflicted by Tzara’at: “that she not be like a dead person.” (Eretz Hemda)

- Mourning the dead and mourning one’s affliction with Tzara’at are quite different. A dead person has died permanently (at least until Techiyat HaMeitim, the Revival of the Death, which is a new existence). In stark contrast, a M'tzora is expected to heal. This difference may be able to be explained by a halachic distinction between the types of M'tzora'im: a Musgar (quarantined until further determination), and a Muchlat (one with a definite status of M'tzora). The difference between the two is that only a Muchlat wears the ripped clothes and lets his hair grow (Megila 8b). We can suggest that a Muchlat is considered to be a permanent M'tzora in a way that makes him as one who died. The person who was separated from society has ceased to exist as we once knew him. Any recovery contains elements of

rebirth. (Eretz Hemda)

- The Torah states an unusual circumstance of the Tzaraat invading the walls of a house. Rashi explains that the verb V'NATATI implies a gift, meaning that the people of Canaan hid treasures in the walls of the house, and when the Jews removed the Tzara'at in the house they found the hidden riches. Why would there possibly be a reward for somebody who has committed the sin of Lashon HaRa? Perhaps we should interpret Rashi's comments allegorically. Maybe this potential M'tzora has realized the sin of his actions and in the process of healing himself he breaks down the walls of his home but the joy he experiences is a cleansing of his soul in the process. When the impurity is removed, the surrounding environment becomes enhanced and it is no longer burdened by the contamination. The gift is the removal of the sin and the uplifting of the entire neighborhood and its inhabitants to reach a greater level of what it means to live in a Torah society. The gift involved is the law of Tzara'at. Imagine if God were to send us signs enabling us to individually realize our mistake and improve upon it. This is a divine directive tailored to the individual sinner. That Hashem really is looking at you is a true bracha and an understanding that divine providence is tailor-made for each one of us.

## Questions by RED

### From the text

1. For how many days is a birthing mother impure, after giving birth to a boy, before she may bring a sacrifice in the Holy Temple? (12:2,4)
2. What two sacrifices does a birthing mother eventually bring? (12:6)
3. Who is the professional who is designated to decide whether a person has developed Tzaraat? (13:3)
4. What is the status of a person whose whole body turned white? (13:13)
5. What is the damaging color to declare a person impure with a contamination on his scalp or beard? (13:30)

### From Rashi

6. A person is quarantined by the Kohen, and after a week is declared pure. Why must he and his clothes be immersed in a Mikva? (13:6)
7. What color hair (on his scalp or beard) will render him pure?(13:37)
8. Why is the purification ritual for a M'tzora with birds? (14:3)
9. Who shaves the M'tzora and what part of his body is he shaved? (14:9)
10. What is the hidden gift of having a house contaminated with Tzaraat HaBayit? (14:34)

## From the Rabbis

11. What two laws do we learn from the verse concerning a Brit Mila “On the the 8th day...”? (Sifra and Shabbat 132a)

12. Why is the mother declared pure after only seven days when she gives birth to a boy, in contrast to fourteen days after a girl? (Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman)

13. What city was exempted from the law of a contaminated house? (Ramban)

## Haftara of Shabbat Rosh Chodesh from the book of Yishayahu

14. What war will precede the coming of Mashiach?

### Relationships

- a) Aharon-Itamar
- b) Miriam-Elazar
- c) Moshe-Pinchas
- d) Uziel-Aharon
- e) Amram-Nadav

### ANSWERS

1. Forty days.
2. An Olah (whole burnt sacrifice) and a Chatat (sin offering).
3. A Kohen
4. He is (ironically) declared pure.
5. Yellow

6. Being quarantined by the Kohen rendered him impure enough to require a Mikva immersion.

7. Any color other than yellow.

8. Since his malady was caused by speaking Slander, birds are used for his purification. They make a lot of noise.

9. The Kohen shaves the M'tzora's entire body.

10. When he breaks the walls of the house, he will discover the gold that the Amorites hid there (when Bnei Yisrael were coming.)

11. 1) The Brit must be during the day, and 2) the baby is circumcised even on Shabbat (if it is his 8th day).

12. The Torah declares her pure so that she may participate in her son's circumcision.

13. Yerushalayim

14. The War of Gog and Magog.

### Relationships

- a) Father & Son
- b) Aunt & Nephew
- c) Great Uncle & Great Nephew
- d) Uncle & Nephew
- e) Grandfather & Grandson