



# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Vayikra

Parshat Tazria-Metzora

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## Born Again

By Rabbi Will Yeamans

*Tazria*, conception, is a curious name for this week's *parsha*. Although the *parsha* begins with a brief description of the purification process related to childbirth, the crux of the *parsha* focuses on the seemingly unrelated affliction of *tzaraas*. Wouldn't *Tzaraas* be a more appropriate name than *Tazria*?

The Rambam is of the opinion that *tzaraas* is not merely a contagious skin disease known as leprosy. The fact that *tzaraas* can also appear on one's clothing and home, indicates it is not natural and defies all science and logic. Rather, *tzaraas* is a miraculous occurrence and is a way in which God communicates with man.

The *Gemarah* in *Berachos* (5B) states that *tzaraas* is a *mizbeach kaparah*, an altar of atonement—a sign indicating a flaw in one's character that must be rectified. Many commentaries explain this is why the *metzora* (the afflicted person) must remain outside the camp and completely isolated. A period of solitude provides the

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opportunity to silently reflect on past behavior and resolve to live a more moral life.

After spending requisite time in introspection and offering selected *korbanos*, the *metzora* has one last thing to do prior to rejoining the community. He must immerse in a *mikvah*. The *Sefer Hachinuch*, a highly authoritative 13th century compilation of the *mitzvot*, describes the transformative purpose of this immersion:

קְדֵי שְׂרָאָה הָאָדָם אֶת עֲצָמוֹ אַחֲרֵי הַטְּבִילָה כְּאִלּוּ נִבְרָא בְּאוֹתָהּ שְׁעָה, כְּמוֹ שֶׁהִיָּה הָעוֹלָם  
בְּלוֹ מַיִם טָרָם הָיִיתָ בּוֹ אָדָם, וְכִמוֹ שֶׁכְּתוּב [בְּרֵאשִׁית א', ב'] וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי  
הַמַּיִם, וַיִּתֵּן אֵל לִבּוֹ בְּדַמְיוֹן כִּי כְּמוֹ שֶׁנִּתְחַדֵּשׁ בְּגוּפוֹ יִחַדֵּשׁ גַּם בֶּן פְּעֻלוֹתָיו לְטוֹב, וַיִּכְשִׁיר  
מֵעַשָׂיו, וַיִּדְקֹדֵק בְּדַרְכֵי הַשֵּׁם בְּרוּךְ הוּא. (סְפָר הַחִינוּךְ מִצְוֵה קַעַג)

*It is in order that a man see himself with the immersion **as if he is created at that time**, [just] like the whole world was water before man was upon it - as it is written (Genesis 1:2), "and the spirit of God floated upon the face of the waters." And through this comparison which he places upon his heart - that [just] like he is renewed in his body, he is also renewed his actions for the good, fix his actions and be exacting in the way of God, blessed be He.*

The truly repentant individual must break away from one's previous self-image and create a new sense of self. A rebirth must occur. Reentering the community is a new start in life. Perhaps this is why our *Parsha* is called *Tazria*. Like the process of childbirth, the purification process for a *metzora* is long and arduous. But it culminates with the creation of a brand new being. It is a new start, a moment of rebirth and reawakening.

Life's circumstances can sometimes dictate feelings of isolation and feeling "outside the camp." But these moments of solitude can provide a unique opportunity for introspection so that our ultimate return to the community will be a rebirth and reawakening in our relationships with God and with others.

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**Will** lives with his family in Northeast Philadelphia, where he serves as Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel Ohev Zedek. Will has only fond memories of growing up in the Scarsdale community and insists he is the tallest person to ever walk through the shul's doors.

*Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?  
Please contact Steve Smith at [LivingTorahFund@gmail.com](mailto:LivingTorahFund@gmail.com)*

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