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בּוֹאוּ נְדַבֵּר עַל זֶה • Tell Me More About This!

In the Torah, people can be either טָמֵא (tamei, impure) or טָהוֹר (tahor, pure). This can mean many things. It can be a way to describe a person's character, like if a person is kind and good, we sometimes call that person "pure of heart" or we say they have a pure character.

But purity and impurity can also be something much more technical, and unrelated to a person's heart or character. For example:

- You could become tamei by coming in contact with a dead body. Our Rabbis call this אֲבִי אֲבוֹת הַטֻּמְאָה (avi avot ha-tum'ah), "the granddaddy of all impurity."
- You could also become tamei through certain things happening in your body, like having a kind of skin disease called צָרַעַת (tzara'at). This kind of tum'ah is the topic of our parashah.
- You could even become tamei by coming in contact with someone or something tamei (like someone else who's tamei or a dead animal).

כֹּהֲנִים (kohanim, priests) had to be extra careful not to become tamei. And no one tamei could enter the מִשְׁכָּן (Mishkan, sanctuary for God). (This was also true later, in the Beit HaMikdash.)

Does this all still apply today? Yes, but because there's no Beit HaMikdash, it's not like it was in the Torah. Still, we do have some halakhot that are connected to טֻמְאָה וְטָהֳרָה (tum'ah ve-taharah, impurity and purity). One example is נְטִילַת יָדַיִם (netilat yadayim), handwashing before eating bread.



מָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah



- We no longer know what blemishes really are צָרַעַת (tzara'at), and we're even not sure if it exists at all anymore. But if you lived in the time of the Torah...
- You would become טָמֵא (tamei, impure) if you had tzara'at. You would have to stay alone, outside of the community, with your hair uncovered and clothes torn.
- The כֹּהֵן (kohen, priest) would determine whether you had tzara'at or not, based on the rules in our parashah.
- A **נֶגַע (nega, wound)** on your body could be tzara'at, if it was white and the hair on the nega turned white, and it appeared deeper than your skin.
- Sometimes it wasn't obvious! The kohen would quarantine you, and then check the signs again later.
- If your whole body was covered in this kind of white all over, you would actually be טָהוֹר (tahor, pure)!
- A **נֶתֶק (netek)** is the name for tzara'at that appeared in your hair or beard.
- Your clothing could get tzara'at, too. It would look like red or green staining in the fabric.
- Stay tuned for next week where we learn how you could become tahor again after having tzara'at.



שְׁאֵלוֹת הַשָּׁבוּעַ • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

aliyot:
1) Vayikra 12:1 to 13:5
2) 13:6 to 13:17
3) 13:18 to 13:23
4) 13:24 to 13:28
5) 13:29 to 13:39
6) 13:40 to 13:54
7) 13:55 to 13:59

haftarah: Melakhim Bet 4:42 to 5:19

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. **The answers to questions 8 and 9 are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah. The answer to question 10 is in this week's haftarah.**

Good luck!

1. What does a person do if it looks like they have צָרַעַת (tzara'at), but the rash is only on the surface, and their hair isn't white?

2. When are you considered טָהוֹר (tahor, pure), but you just have to wash your clothing?

3. What מַכָּה (makkah, plague) from Egypt appears in this week's parashah?

4. If you get a burn, which colors might your skin turn if you have tzara'at?

5. What special Hebrew word is used to describe tzara'at in someone's hair or beard?

6. What new color appears in this aliyah, that hasn't yet come up in the parashah?

7. What happens to clothing if the tzara'at reappears after it is cut out, and the clothing is washed and quarantined?

8. How many times does the phrase שִׁבְעַת יָמִים (shivat yamim, 7 days) appear in our parashah?

9. What two colors can tzara'at be in clothing?

10. **From the haftarah:** According to Naaman, which rivers would cure tzara'at even more effectively than all the waters of Israel?

* Look for the answers on page 8!

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מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Our parashah teaches that when a Jewish baby boy is eight days old, he gets a בְּרִית מִילָה (brit milah, circumcision) (Vayikra 12:3).

In this midrash, R. Akiva is having a conversation with a Roman general named Tineius Rufus. R. Akiva explains to him a lesson that circumcision teaches: God creates us incomplete, and we have to finish the job!

מדרש תנחומא תזריע ה

מַעֲשֶׂה שֶׁשָּׁאַל טוֹרְנוּסְרוּפוּס הָרָשָׁע אֶת רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: אֵיזוֹ מַעֲשִׂים נָאִים, שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אוֹ שֶׁל בָּשָׂר וָדָם?

אָמַר לוֹ: שֶׁל בָּשָׂר וָדָם נָאִים.

אָמַר לוֹ טוֹרְנוּסְרוּפוּס: הֲרֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ יָכוֹל אָדָם לַעֲשׂוֹת כַּיּוֹצֵא בָּהֶם?!

...אָמַר לוֹ: לָמָּה אַתֶּם מוּלִין?

...הֵבִיא לוֹ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא שִׁבֳּלִים וּגְלוֹסְקָאוֹת. אָמַר לוֹ: אֵלּוּ מַעֲשֵׂה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, וְאֵלּוּ מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי אָדָם. אָמַר לוֹ: אֵין אֵלּוּ נָאִים יוֹתֵר מִן הַשִּׁבֳּלִים?!

אָמַר לוֹ טוֹרְנוּסְרוּפוּס: אִם הוּא חָפֵץ בְּמִילָה, לָמָּה אֵינוֹ יוֹצֵא הַוָּלָד מָהוּל מִמְּעֵי אִמּוֹ?

אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: ...לְפִי שֶׁלֹּא נָתַן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת הַמִּצְוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶלָּא לְצָרֵף אוֹתָם בָּהֶם.

Midrash Tanhuma

The wicked Tineius Rufus asked R. Akiva: "Which is better—the works of God or the works of human beings?"

R. Akiva said to him: "Human beings!"

Tineius Rufus said to him: "Can a person make anything like heaven and earth?!"

...Tineius Rufus said to him: "Why are you Jews circumcised?"

...R. Akiva brought him sheaves of wheat and loaves of bread, saying, "These sheaves are the work of God, and these loaves are the work of people. Aren't these loaves of bread better than the sheaves?!"

Tineius Rufus said to him: "If circumcision is something God wants, why aren't babies born circumcised?"

R. Akiva said to him: "...It's because God gave the mitzvot to Jews in order for us to be refined through them."







דַּקָּה שֶׁל דִּיוּן • One-Minute Debate

Debate: Babies are perfect.

How to play:

- Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!
- For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.





Agree!

- They never sin, so that makes them perfect.
- Tiny fingers, tiny toes, round bellies, squishy cheeks, cooing noises... that's perfection.
- Newborns are exactly the way God made them. Nothing is more perfect than that.



Disagree!

- Babies don't understand the world around them. So they can't actually make good and moral choices. They may be adorable, but they can't be perfect.
- They cry a lot.
- The whole point of being created is to improve through life. Nobody can be perfect at birth.

- If we don't have God's powers to create heaven and earth, what power do we have? In what way is bread better than wheat? How does that represent what's special about what human beings can do in the world?

  According to R. Akiva, we are created incomplete—on purpose! The brit milah is a model for all mitzvot: Just like a baby boy has to be "improved" through that mitzvah, we all have to improve and refine ourselves with mitzvot throughout our lives.



- How does it feel to know that nobody is perfect? Can this help you accept the imperfections of others? Can this help you face your own imperfections without being afraid or embarrassed about them? How so?

- How can mitzvot help us improve ourselves?



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דִּקְדּוּק • Grammar

The holam vowel makes an o sound. It can appear in two ways:

together with the letter vav

יוֹנָה (yonah, pigeon)

תֹּר (tor, turtledove)

as a dot over the letter; no vav

These two vowels are pronounced exactly the same way. When there's a vav under a holam, it's silent.

But there are some rare times that you actually pronounce the vav under a holam! Here's an example from the beginning of our parashah:

דִּוֹתָהּ (ויקרא יב:ב)

You might want to pronounce this word "dotah," but actually it's pronounced de-vo-tah! In this case, the vav is not just a vowel to carry a holam, it's also a consonant that makes the sound "v"!

So when you have a vav with a holam, how do you know when to say "o" and when to say "vo"?

The answer is to look at the letter before the vav. If it has a sh'va (two dots) under it, like there are under the dalet of דִּוֹתָהּ, then the sound is "vo."

Check out this pair of words:

Devarim 6:17	Melakhim Alef 2:3
וְעֵדֹתָיו (ve-ei-**do**-tav)	וְעֵדוֹתָיו (ve-ei-**de-vo**-tav)

See the two dots under the dalet that give it away?



פַּרְשָׁנוּת • Commentary

ויקרא יג:יג	**Vayikra 13:13**
וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה כִסְּתָה הַצָּרַעַת אֶת כָּל בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטִהַר אֶת הַנָּגַע כֻּלּוֹ הָפַךְ לָבָן טָהוֹר הוּא:	If the kohen sees that tzara'at has covered a person's whole body, the kohen shall say that this nega is tahor (pure). **Having turned everything white, it's tahor.**

A little bit of white tzara'at makes a person טָמֵא (tamei, impure), but if their whole entire body turns white they are tahor. How does that work?!

A midrash (Tanhuma Hukkat) says this is an example of a strange law that can't be explained. We just have to accept it, because God said so! But still, some of our פַּרְשָׁנִים (parshanim, commentators) have suggested explanations. Here are two.

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (Germany, 150 years ago)

If the tzara'at spread all over a person during their quarantine time, that's a sign that being in isolation made them lose all moral feelings. So calling this person tamei would not lead them to improve their behavior.

According to R. Hirsch, the purpose of isolating a person with a nega is only to give them a chance to reflect on their past behavior and make the decision to become better. But when tzara'at spreads over an entire body, that's a sign the person will never learn or change their ways! So there's no point in making them tamei.

- According to this, what does tum'ah really mean about a person? Would it be better to become tamei, or to remain tahor? Why?
- What's good about having opportunities to improve? What's challenging about those times? Why might it be bad to not have those challenges?

Netziv (Eastern Europe, 150 years ago)

It (turning entirely white) is a sign that the person began to wake up to do teshuvah (returning to God).

נצי"ב

אוֹת הוּא שֶׁהֵחֵל לְהִתְעוֹרֵר לִתְשׁוּבָה.

- If a person was already starting to do teshuvah, why would it make sense for them to not be considered tamei?
- What's the purpose of tum'ah according to the Netziv and according to R. Hirsch?





הַפְטָרָה • Haftarah

Our haftarah tells two stories about miracles performed by Elisha the prophet.

1. The miracle of the loaves

A man offers food to Elisha, but Elisha says to give the food to the people. Elisha's attendant says, "There's no way this amount of food will feed everyone!" Elisha assures him that God will make a miracle. And sure enough, there's more than enough food for all.

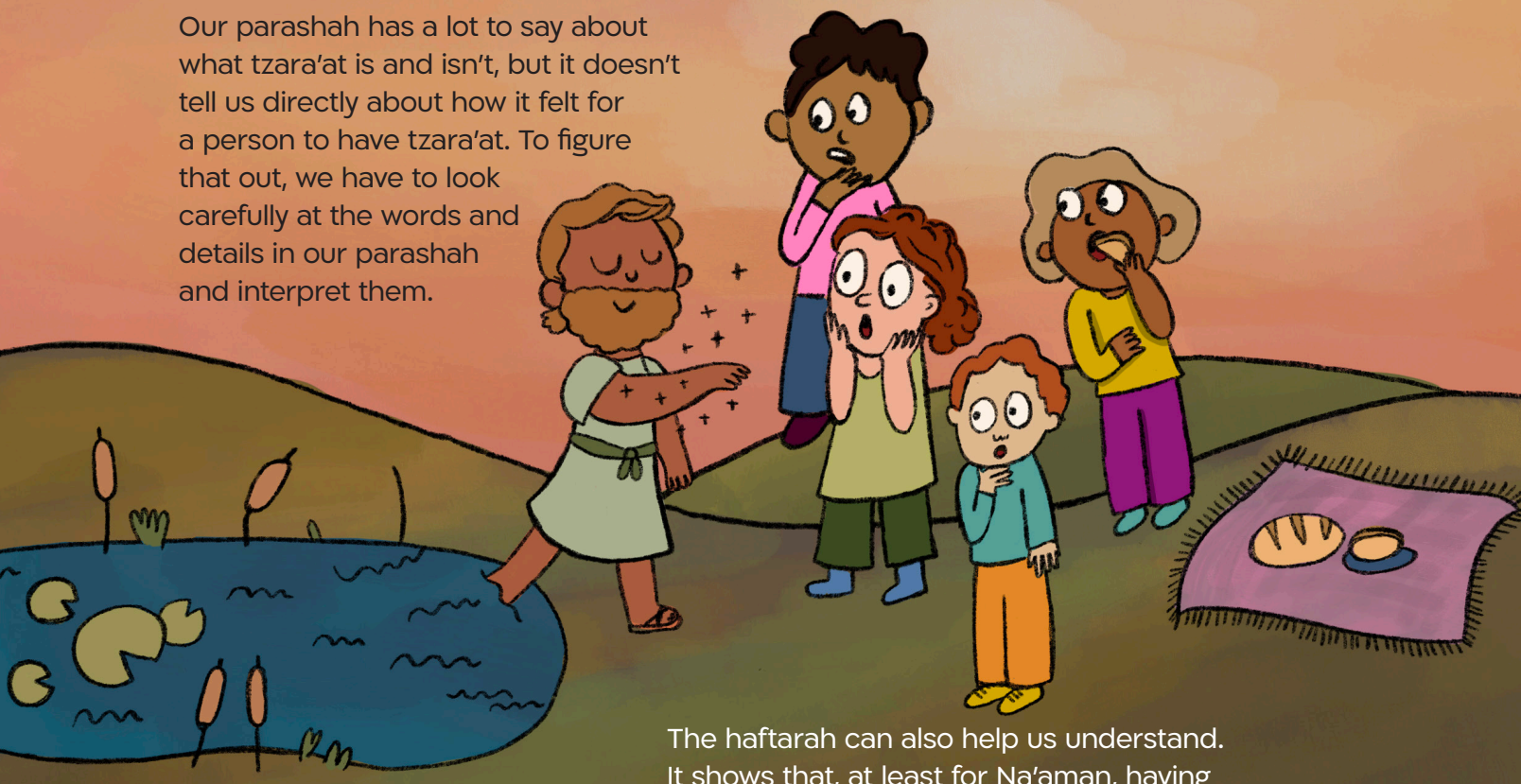
2. The miracle cure

Na'aman, the commander of the army of Aram, has the skin disease צָרַעַת (tzara'at). He comes to Elisha for healing. When Elisha tells him to bathe seven times in the Jordan River, Na'aman gets angry. He expected Elisha to come up with more impressive magical words or actions!

But Na'aman's servants encourage him to try Elisha's suggestion anyway. Na'aman does, and he is cured. Na'aman returns to Elisha to express his praise and new loyalty to the God of Israel.

Connection to the parashah

Our parashah has a lot to say about what tzara'at is and isn't, but it doesn't tell us directly about how it felt for a person to have tzara'at. To figure that out, we have to look carefully at the words and details in our parashah and interpret them.



The haftarah can also help us understand. It shows that, at least for Na'aman, having tzara'at and then being healed from it was a spiritual experience that transformed him.

Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Quarantine for seven days (13:4)
2. After two rounds of seven-day quarantines, if you have a נֶגַע (nega, wound) that begins to fade and hasn't spread (13:6)
3. שְׁחִין (sh'hin, boils) (13:18-23)
4. Reddish white or just white (13:24)
5. נֶתֶק (netek) (13:30)
6. Greenish (13:49)
7. It is burned (13:57)
8. Nine
9. יְרַקְרַק (yerakrak, greenish) or אֲדַמְדָּם (adamdam, reddish) (13:49)
10. The Amana and the Parpar, which are the rivers of Damascus (Melakhim Bet 5:12)