

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### **Parshat Metzora – Shabbat HaGadol**

#### Day Or Date

All Jewish festivals and commemorations are linked to the calendar date. We always celebrate Pesach on the fifteenth of Nissan, which this year falls out on a Tuesday even though at the time of the Exodus it was a Thursday.

The same is true of Sukkot, of Shavuot, of Chanuka, of Purim, of every Jewish remembrance – we always commemorate the calendar date not the day of the week - with one exception: Shabbat HaGadol.

What do we commemorate on Shabbat HaGadol and why don't we celebrate it on its calendar date?

Hashem commanded the Jews that five days before the Exodus, they should take their lambs and tie them to the bedposts in preparation for the lambs to be slaughtered on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. The Paschal Lamb.

When the Egyptians saw them leading their lambs through the streets, they asked: "What is the lamb for?" The Children of Yisrael answered: "It is to be slaughtered as a Passover sacrifice as G-d has commanded us." The Egyptians, for whom the lamb was a deity, gnashed their teeth in anger but miraculously could not utter a sound in protest or do anything to stop their gods being led away. This happened on the tenth of Nissan, which that year was Shabbat, and so we commemorate this miracle on the Shabbat before Pesach.

But this begs the question, why don't we celebrate this miracle on the Tenth of Nissan, whatever the day of the week is in any particular year?

The Ba'al HaTurim says in Parshat Va'era, that all the plagues ceased on Shabbat. The Tenth of Tevet was during the plague of darkness. If the Jews had led their sheep through the street on any other day than Shabbat, the Egyptians wouldn't have seen them, and there would have been no miracle.

But because it was Shabbat, and plague of darkness ceased temporarily, the Jews were in full view of the Egyptians, and nonetheless, they Egyptians were powerless to do a thing

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# Q & A

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## METZORA

### Questions

1. When may a *metzora* not be pronounced *tahor*?
2. In the *midbar*, where did a *metzora* dwell while he was *tamei*?
3. Why does the *metzora* require birds in the purification process?
4. In the purification process of a *metzora*, what does the cedar wood symbolize?
5. During the purification process, the *metzora* is required to shave his hair. Which hair must he shave?
6. What is unique about the *chatat* and the *asham* offered by the *metzora*?
7. In the *Beit Hamikdash*, when the *metzora* was presented "before G-d" (14:11), where did he stand?
8. Where was the *asham* of the *metzora* slaughtered?
9. How was having *tzara'at* in one's house sometimes advantageous?
10. When a house is suspected as having *tzara'at*, what is its status prior to the inspection by a *kohen*?
11. What happens to the vessels that are in a house found to have *tzara'at*?
12. Which type of vessels cannot be made *tahor* after they become *tamei*?
13. Where were stones afflicted with *tzara'at* discarded?
14. When a house is suspected of having *tzara'at*, a *kohen* commands that the affected stones be replaced and the house plastered. What is the law if the *tzara'at*:
  - a. returns and spreads;
  - b. does not return;
  - c. returns, but does not spread?
15. When a person enters a house that has *tzara'at*, when do his clothes become *tamei*?
16. What is the status of a man who is *zav* (sees a flow):
  - a. two times or two consecutive days;
  - b. three times or three consecutive days?
17. A *zav* sat or slept on the following:
  - a). a bed; b) a plank; c) a chair; d) a rock.If a *tahor* person touches these things what is his status?
18. What does the Torah mean when it refers to a *zav* who "has not washed his hands"?
19. When may a *zav* immerse in a *mikveh* to purify himself?
20. What is the status of someone who experiences a one-time flow?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. 14:2 - At night.
  2. 14:3 - Outside the three camps.
  3. 14:4 - *Tzara'at* comes as a punishment for *lashon hara*. Therefore, the Torah requires the *metzora* to offer birds, who chatter constantly, to atone for his sin of chattering.
  4. 14:4 - The cedar is a lofty tree. It alludes to the fact that *tzara'at* comes as a punishment for haughtiness.
  5. 14:9 - Any visible collection of hair on the body.
  6. 14:10 - They require *n'sachim* (drink offerings).
  7. 14:11 - At the gate of Nikanor.
  8. 14:13 - On the northern side of the *mizbe'ach*.
  9. 14:34 - The Amorites concealed treasures in the walls of their houses. After the conquest of the Land, *tzara'at* would afflict these houses. The Jewish owner would tear down the house and find the treasures.
  10. 14:36 - It is *tahor*.
  11. 14:36 - They become *tamei*.
  12. 14:36 - Earthenware vessels.
  13. 14:40 - In places where *tahor* objects were not handled
  14.
    - a. 14:44-45 - It is called "*tzara'at mam'eret*," and the house must be demolished;
    - b. 14:48 - the house is pronounced *tahor*;
    - c. 14:44 - The house must be demolished.
  15. 14:46 - When he remains in the house long enough to eat a small meal.
  16. 15:2 -
    - a. He is *tamei*;
    - b. he is *tamei* and is also required to bring a *korban*.
  17. 15:4-5 - Only a type of object that one usually lies or sits upon becomes a transmitter of tumah when a *zav* sits or lies on it. A *tahor* person who subsequently touches the object becomes *tamei* and the clothes he is wearing are also *tamei'im*. Therefore:
    - a. *tamei*;
    - b. *tahor*;
    - c. *tamei*;
    - d. *tahor*.
  18. 15:11 - One who has not immersed in a *mikveh*.
  19. 15:13 - After seven consecutive days without a flow.
  20. 15:32 - He is *tamei* until evening.
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# Q & A

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## ACHAREI MOT

### Questions

1. Why does the Torah emphasize that *Parshas Acharei Mos* was taught after the death of Aaron's sons?
2. What is the punishment for a *Kohen Gadol* who inappropriately enters the *Kodesh Kodashim*?
3. How long did the first *Beis Hamikdash* exist?
4. What did the *Kohen Gadol* wear when he entered the *Kodesh Kodashim*?
5. How many times did the *Kohen Gadol* change his clothing and immerse in the *mikveh* on Yom Kippur?
6. How many times did he wash his hands and feet from the *Kiyor* (copper laver)?
7. The *Kohen Gadol* offered a bull *Chatat* to atone for himself and his household. Who paid for it?
8. One of the goats that was chosen by lot went to *Azazel*. What is *Azazel*?
9. Who is included in the "household" of the *Kohen Gadol*?
10. For what sin does the goat *Chatat* atone?
11. After the Yom Kippur service, what is done with the four linen garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol*?
12. Where were the fats of the *Chatat* burned?
13. Who is solely responsible for attaining atonement for the Jewish People on Yom Kippur?
14. From one point in history, installation of the *Kohen Gadol* through anointing was no longer used but was conducted by donning the special garments of that office. From when and why?
15. What is the penalty of *karet*?
16. Which categories of animals must have their blood covered when they are slaughtered?
17. When a person eats a kosher bird that was improperly slaughtered (a *neveilah*), at what point does he contract *tumah*?
18. The Torah commands the Jewish People not to follow the "*chukim*" of the Canaanites. What are the forbidden "*chukim*"?
19. What is the difference between "*mishpat*" and "*chok*"?
20. May a man marry his wife's sister?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. 16:1 - To strengthen the warning not to enter the *Kodesh Kodashim* except on Yom Kippur.
2. 16:2 - Death.
3. 16:3 - 410 years.
4. 16:4 - Only the four linen garments worn by an ordinary *Kohen*.
5. 16:4 - Five times.
6. 16:4 - Ten times.
7. 16:6 - The *Kohen Gadol*.
8. 16:8 - A jagged cliff.
9. 16:11 - All the *Kohanim*.
10. 16:16 - For unknowingly entering the *Beit Hamikdash* in the state of *tumah*.
11. 16:23 - They must be put into *geniza* and not be used again.
12. 16:25 - On the outer *Mizbe'ach*.
13. 16:32 - The *Kohen Gadol*.
14. 16:32 - Anointing ceased during the kingship of *Yoshiahu*. At that time, the oil of anointing was hidden away.
15. 17:9 - One's offspring die and one's own life is shortened.
16. 17:13 - Non domesticated kosher animals and all species of kosher birds.
17. 17:15 - When the food enters the esophagus.
18. 18:3 - Their social customs.
19. 18:4 - A "*mishpat*" conforms to the human sense of justice. A "*chok*" is a law whose reason is not given to us and can only be understood as a decree from Hashem.
20. 18:18 - Yes, but not during the lifetime of his wife.

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# Q & A

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## Kedoshim

### Questions

1. Why was *Parshat Kedoshim* said in front of all the Jewish People?
2. Why does the Torah mention the duty to honor one's father before it mentions the duty to honor one's mother?
3. Why is the command to fear one's parents followed by the command to keep Shabbat?
4. Why does Shabbat observance supersede honoring parents?
5. What is "*leket*"?
6. In *Shemot* 20:13, the Torah commands "Do not steal." What does the Torah add when it commands in *Vayikra* 19:11 "Do not steal"?
7. "Do not do wrong to your neighbor" (19:13). To what "wrong" is the Torah referring?
8. By when must you pay someone who worked for you during the day?
9. How does Rashi explain the prohibition "Don't put a stumbling block before a sightless person"?
10. In a monetary case involving a poor person and a rich person, a judge is likely to wrongly favor the poor person. What rationale does Rashi give for this?
11. When rebuking someone, what sin must one be careful to avoid?
12. It's forbidden to bear a grudge. What example does Rashi give of this?
13. The Torah forbids tattooing. How is a tattoo made?
14. How does one fulfill the mitzvah of "*hadarta p'nei zaken*"?
15. What punishment will never come to the entire Jewish People?
16. What penalty does the Torah state for cursing one's parents?
17. When the Torah states a death penalty but doesn't define it precisely, to which penalty is it referring?
18. What will result if the Jewish People ignore the laws of forbidden relationships?
19. Which of the forbidden relationships listed in this week's Parsha were practiced by the Canaanites?
20. Is it proper for a Jew to say "I would enjoy eating ham"?

### Answers

1. 19:2 - Because the fundamental teachings of the Torah are contained in this Parsha.
2. 19:3 - Since it is more natural to honor one's mother, the Torah stresses the obligation to honor one's father.
3. 19:3 - To teach that one must not violate Torah law even at the command of one's parents.
4. 19:3 - Because the parents are also commanded by Hashem to observe Shabbat. Parents deserve great honor, but not at the "expense" of Hashem's honor.
5. 19:9 - "*Leket*" is one or two stalks of grain accidentally dropped while harvesting. They are left for the poor.
6. 19:11 - The Torah in *Vayikra* prohibits monetary theft. In *Shemot* it prohibits kidnapping.
7. 19:13 - Withholding wages from a worker.
8. 19:13 - Before the following dawn.
9. 19:13 - Don't give improper advice to a person who is unaware in a matter. For example, don't advise someone to sell his field, when in reality you yourself wish to buy it.
10. 19:15 - The judge might think: "This rich person is obligated to give charity to this poor person regardless of the outcome of this court case. Therefore, I'll rule in favor of the poor person. That way, he'll receive the financial support he needs without feeling shame."
11. 19:17 - Causing public embarrassment.
12. 19:18 - Person A asks person B: "Can I borrow your shovel?" Person B says: "No." The next day, B says to A: "Can I borrow your scythe?" A replies: "Sure, I'm not stingy like you are."
13. 19:28 - Ink is injected into the skin with a needle.
14. 19:32 - By not sitting in the seat of elderly people, and by not contradicting their statements.
15. 20:3 - "*Karet*" - being spiritually "cut off."
16. 20:9 - Death by stoning.
17. 20:10 - *Chenek* (strangulation).
18. 20:22 - The land of Israel will "spit them out."
19. 20:23 - All of them.
20. 20:26 - Yes.

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 22)

### BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

*“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”*  
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

The final paragraph of Birkat HaMazon begins: **Fear Hashem, you His holy ones, for there is no deprivation for His reverent ones. Young lions may want and hunger, but those who seek Hashem will not lack any good. Give thanks to G-d for He is good. His kindness endures forever.**

The Eitz Yosef explains that one who has a healthy fear of Hashem is able to feel content even if they do not have everything that they want, because they trust that whatever Hashem has given them is what they need right now. On the other hand, someone who does not fear Hashem will never be able to feel a sense of real, absolute contentment because whatever Hashem blesses them with simply feeds their desire for more. However, when it comes to spiritual aspirations and growth we should never be satisfied.

The Talmud relates (*Moed Katan* 9b) that Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai sent his son to Rabbi Yonatan and Rabbi Yehuda for a blessing. They blessed him with what sounded like a very strange blessing. Among other things they blessed him, “May your home be destroyed, and may you dwell in a temporary lodging.” In explanation Rabbi Tzadok of Lublin writes (*Pri Tzaddik*) that sometimes people become content with the level of Torah and *Tefillah* they have achieved. Their contentment stems from their imagining that they have achieved as much as they are capable of achieving. And, instead of spurring them onwards, their satisfaction in their accomplishments actually serves as a damper to stop them from aspiring to reaching higher and to becoming greater. Rabbi Tzadok of Lublin explains that Rabbi Yonatan and Rabbi Yehuda were blessing Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai’s son that he should always be able to recognize what needs improvement. That he should be able to “destroy his home” – to identify the areas that he feels comfortable in – because they will be the cause of his not being able to attain even deeper levels of understanding Hashem’s Torah and to reach even loftier levels of closeness to Hashem.

Perhaps the greatest awareness that a person can be blessed with is the knowledge that when it comes to spiritual matters there is always room for more. However high a person has reached, it is simply a “temporary lodging” that will give them the strength to push forwards and to reach even higher levels. Because, ultimately, there is nothing more fulfilling – nothing that brings more satisfaction into a person’s life – than the pursuit of spiritual perfection.

Determined to unearth an unknown story about the Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Shimshon Pincus had tracked down the Chofetz Chaim’s granddaughter who was living in a non-religious kibbutz

in Israel. Rabbi Pincus asked her if she might have any stories about her saintly and revered grandfather that were not generally known. The Chofetz Chaim's granddaughter thought for a few moments and then began to relate a personal story.

“When I was a young woman, I traveled to Russia to attend one of the great universities. I missed Radin, my home and my family, and I missed my grandfather. So when I had a chance to return home, I did so. The journey began with a train ride, away from the university, which was a hub of science, literature and technology. As we traveled into Poland, it was as if we were going back in time. I switched from a train to a horse-drawn carriage. As we continued, there was no electricity. And then we reached a village where the only water was drawn from a communal pump. By the time I got to Radin, it was past midnight. I didn't want to wake up my parents but I knew that the Zeidy - the Chofetz Chaim - would still be awake, so I went to him. He greeted me fondly, gave me to eat and drink, and then he sat down again to continue learning. I watched him for a few moments and then the question burst out of me. ‘Zeidy, I have come from the university where they are studying the latest technological findings. They are at the forefront of all change, whether in science or medicine or technology. And you are still studying these dusty old *sefarim* [books], which are thousands of years old!’ My Zeidy looked up at me for a long moment. And then he said, ‘In the universities, they are learning how to make the world.’ He pointed to his Gemara. ‘But we...we are learning how to make man.’”

Because, as King David so poetically writes (Tehillim 119:72), “*Tov li Torat picha me'alfei zahav vakesef* - I prefer the Torah of Your mouth to thousands in gold and silver.”

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“*Chag kasher v'somyach.*”  
May you all enjoy a festive, meaningful, safe and kosher  
Passover!**

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Pesach

### *The Matzah Meal of Freedom and Purity*

Rabban Gamliel would say, “Whoever does not explain the reason behind the mitzvah for these three things on Pesach, does not fulfill his obligation, and they are: the korban Pesach, matzah and maror (bitter herbs).”

This *mishna* is likely to be familiar to everyone as part of the *Hagaddah Shel Pesach* that is read at the Seder. Historically, when the Beit Hamikdash stood, the *korban Pesach* was eaten on Pesach night together with matzah and *maror*. There are two views regarding how they were eaten: all at once, as a “sandwich,” which is the opinion of Hillel, or these three food items of mitzvah could even be eaten separately, which is the ruling of the *Chachamim*. Nowadays, when we do not have a *korban Pesach*, eating *maror* is a rabbinic mitzvah, and eating matzah is a Torah mitzvah. This is since the Torah teaches, “In the evening, they will eat matzah,” meaning that the obligation to eat matzah is independent of the *korban Pesach* and is a Torah mitzvah even in our time (*Shemot 12:18*). Nowadays, we eat the matzah and the maror separately, with separate blessings, with the matzah being eaten first.

The Maharsha makes a fascinating observation in the teaching of Rabban Gamliel. In this *mishna*, Rabban Gamliel teaches a requirement to explain the reasons for the need to eat each of these specific foods, including the *korban Pesach* when it was possible. Otherwise, we have not fulfilled the mitzvah. This requirement to explain the reason for the mitzvah in order to fulfill it is unique to these three mitzvahs, explains the Maharsha. For any other mitzvah in the Torah that involves eating, no reason is required to be enunciated. At most, a blessing is said, before or after the act of eating – or both. But no explanation is necessary. What makes the mitzvahs of Pesach, matzah and *maror* unique to require that we state the reason for our eating them in order to fulfill the mitzvah? This question seemingly provides “food for thought” for our upcoming Pesach *Sedarim*, with the help of Heaven.

The Maharsha offers an answer to this question, which I will try to state briefly, and I heartily suggest the readers to learn the Maharsha’s explanation in full, if possible. It is certainly, in my opinion, to be on any respectable “Recommended Reading List” when learning this *daf* or when learning the Pesach Hagaddah in preparation for the Seder.

The theme that serves as the common denominator for these three mitzvahs is a fundamental theme of Pesach, and is essential to understand in order to truly appreciate what Pesach really means to us as individuals and as a nation. Pesach is a time when Hashem not only took us out of physical slavery in Egypt to physical freedom. More importantly, He took us out of a spiritual slavery-state of the impurity of Egypt, from the horrific spiritual slavery of knowing nothing

other than idolatry. He “took us out,” and step-by-step brought us closer to the pinnacle of spiritual purity, drawing us closer and closer to Him and His holy Torah.

This is the running theme of the Pesach, mitzvah and *maror* mitzvahs, which highlight our recalling and reliving the Pesach experience: Hashem brought us out of a place of spiritual impurity in a way that gave us the opportunity to discard this impurity and follow the will of Hashem in purity and holiness.

*Pesach*: “The *korban* Pesach that our ancestors ate was on account of Hashem passing over the houses of the Jewish People in Egypt (when he killed the firstborn Egyptians during the tenth plague). As the Torah says, ‘It is a Pesach offering to Hashem, for He passed over the houses of the Jewish People in Egypt when He killed the Egyptians – and He saved our houses.’” (*Shemot* 12:27) This reason expresses the theme that Hashem – while killing the idolatrous Egyptians who worshipped the lamb as a deity – told us to slaughter the lamb in view of the Egyptians to signal that it was time to stop the impure, idolatrous practices of the past, and move toward the holiness of being close to Hashem, Who would give us the holy Torah and sanctify us with its commandments.

*Maror*: “These bitter herbs that we eat are because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt, as the Torah says, “And they (the ancient Egyptians) embittered their (the Jewish people’s) lives with hard labor, with clay and with bricks and with all kinds of labor in the fields, all their work that they worked with them with back-breaking labor.”” (*Shemot* 1:14) In taking us out from Egyptian slavery, Hashem not only saved us from the bitter hardship of torturous labor, but also saved us from the bitter impurity of idolatrous Egypt, in order to bring us to the sweetness of becoming close to the One Almighty by receiving the Torah and living according to its wisdom.

*Matzah*: (Here it gets a bit “tricky.”) According to the text in our *gemara*, Rabban Gamliel says that “matzah is *because our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt*. As the Torah says, ‘They (the Jewish People) baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as matzah cakes, for it had not become chametz, as they were driven out of Egypt and could not tarry – and, also, they had not made provisions for themselves.’” (*Shemot* 12:39) The Maharsha explains how the reason for matzah, based on this verse, should be understood as following the same theme of spiritual purity as explained for the *korban* Pesach and *maror*. Eating matzah on Pesach – with no chametz for seven days – is eating “bread” that has not risen, leavening being a symbolic sign for haughtiness – which leads to impure and forbidden thoughts, words and deeds. This is why the *korban mincha* – the meal-offering eaten by the *kohen* – is made as matzah and not chametz. When the *kohen* serves Hashem in eating the *korban mincha*, he certainly does so in the utmost purity and holiness. Likewise, is our Divine service in eating unleavened matzah on Pesach.

The Maharsha acknowledges that the reason for matzah that we find in our Hagaddah is different from that which we see on our *daf*. He writes that the text we have in our Hagaddahs

is the correct text according to most copies of the Talmud Bavli that he had seen, and is the text accepted by many *Rishonim*. This alternate text reads, “This matzah that we eat is because *there was insufficient time for the dough that our ancestors took out from Egypt to rise*, before the King who reigns over kings – *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* – revealed Himself to them and immediately redeemed them. As the Torah says, “They (the Jewish People) baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as matzah cakes, *for it had not become chametz since they were driven out of Egypt and could not tarry* – and, also, they had not made provisions for themselves.” (*Shemot 12:39*)

According to our Haggadah’s text, the Maharsha has two new questions. One: If the matzah was baked *after* leaving Egypt, it was after midnight at that time, and why is the mitzvah to eat matzah to be fulfilled specifically *before* midnight? Two: Why were the Jewish People in Egypt commanded to eat unleavened matzah (with the *korban Pesach* and *maror*) on the *first* Pesach *before they had hurriedly left Egypt with their dough*, without time for it to rise? He answers both of these questions in accordance with the same theme he proposed for understanding the essence of three Pesach food mitzvahs. In the context of this Torah verse, matzah is a food of purity and humility, and Hashem – in His great kindness – took the Jewish People out of the unimaginable impurity of Egypt *before* they had a chance to “become chametz” – i.e. before they became too steeped in the Egyptian impurity. Hashem did this in order to purify the Jewish nation, bring us close to Him, and, ultimately, sanctify us by giving us His holy Torah at Mount Sinai.

*Pesachim 116b*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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### Metzora

The Torah describes the procedure for a *metzora* (a person afflicted with *tzara'at*) upon the conclusion of his isolation period. This process extends for a week and involves *korbanot* and immersions in a *mikveh*. Then, a *kohen* must pronounce the *metzora* pure. A *metzora* of limited financial means may substitute lesser offerings for the more expensive animals. Before a *kohen* diagnoses that a house has *tzara'at*, household possessions are removed to prevent them from also being declared ritually impure. The *tzara'at* is removed by smashing and rebuilding that section of the house. If the *tzara'at* signs reappear, the entire building must be razed. The Torah details which bodily secretions render a person spiritually impure, and thereby prevent his contact with holy items. And the Torah defines how one regains a state of ritual purity.

## Acharei Mot

Hashem instructs the *kohanim* to exercise extreme care when they enter the Mishkan. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) is to approach the holiest part of the Mishkan after special preparations and wearing special clothing. He brings offerings unique to Yom Kippur, including two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is "for Hashem, and is offered in the Temple, while the other is "for Azazel," to be in the desert. The Torah states the individual's obligations on Yom Kippur: On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must "afflict" oneself. We are to abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing and marital relations.

Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a woman's monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited.

## Kedoshim

The nation is enjoined to be holy. Many prohibitions and positive commandments are taught:

**Prohibitions:** Idolatry; eating offerings after their time-limit; theft and robbery; denial of theft; false oaths; retention of someone's property; delaying payment to an employee; hating or cursing a fellow Jew (especially one's parents); gossip; placing physical and spiritual stumbling blocks; perversion of justice; inaction when others are in danger; embarrassing; revenge; bearing a grudge; cross-breeding; wearing a garment of wool and linen; harvesting a tree during its first three years; gluttony and intoxication; witchcraft; shaving the beard and sideburns; tattooing.

**Positive:** Awe for parents and respect for the elderly; leaving part of the harvest for the poor; loving others (especially a convert); eating in Jerusalem the fruits from a tree's fourth year; awe for the Temple; respect for Torah scholars, the blind and the deaf.

# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Metzora/Shabbat HaGadol: Veggies for the Dipping

Every Jewish schoolboy knows that after reciting Kiddush at the Passover Seder (Kadesh), the next steps involve washing hands (Urchatz), and then dipping a vegetable and eating it (Karpas). The source for that custom of dipping a vegetable and eating it before the formal meal on Passover Night is the Mishna (Pesachim 10:3), which refers to a first dipping as something distinct from the second dipping involving the marror. In his commentary there, Rashi (to

Pesachim 114a) actually explains that the first dipping is done with yerakot – the plural form of yerek. That term refers to any generic “vegetable,” yet we colloquially call the vegetable used in the first dipping karpas. In this essay, we explore the words yerek and karpas, showing how these two terms are not actually synonyms, because yerek means “vegetable,” while karpas actually means something more specific.

The word yerek and its close cognate yarak appear altogether eleven times in the Bible (Gen. 1:30, 9:3, Num. 22:4, Deut. 11:10, I Kgs. 21:2, II Kgs. 19:26, Isa. 15:6, 37:27, Ps. 37:2, and Prov. 15:17). Various inflections of yerek also appear countless times in the Mishnah. For example, when the Mishnah (Pesachim 10:4) refers to the first dipping in the Four Questions (Mah Nishtanah), it calls the foodstuff dipped “other yerakot” (as opposed to marror, which is a specific subset of yerakot). Another famous Mishnah (Brachot 6:1) rules that one recites the blessing Borei Pri HaAdamah before eating vegetables.

The early Hebrew lexicographers (i.e., Menachem Ibn Saruk, Yonah Ibn Janach, and Radak) trace the word yerek to the trilateral root YOD-REISH-KUF. As Ibn Saruk explains it, this particular root gives way to three related sets of words: “vegetable,” “greenish gem” (emerald?), and “green” (the color). Ibn Janach and Radak add that it also gives way to the verb for “spitting” and the noun for “spittle,” but Ibn Saruk sees those words as derived from the separate biliteral root REISH-KUF.

Rabbi Avraham Bedersi in Chotam Tochnit writes that vegetables are called yerakot because they are typically green (yarok). Technically speaking, though, in Rabbinic Hebrew, the term yarok can refer to an array of colors ranging from yellow to green to blue (see Rabbi Tanchum HaYerushalmi’s HaMadrach HaMaspik, Teshuvos Maharam M’Rothenberg Prague ed. §631, and Beior HaGra to Tikkun HaZohar Tikkun #21).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740–1814) actually traces yarok itself to the biliteral root REISH-KUF. He identifies the core meaning of that root as “emptying/depleting.” To explain how yerek relates to that core meaning, Rabbi Pappenheim delves into botany to describe how plants are comprised of both solid and liquid components. The solid components form the structural elements of the plant such as roots, stems, branches, and leaves, while the liquid components contribute to its sap, flavor, scent, and overall quality. The remaining liquid parts inside the plant contribute to taste and scent, while those externally expelled contribute to the plant’s appearance and color. Accordingly, he attributes the green appearance of live plants to the expulsion of those inner liquids, thus accounting for the connection between the green coloration and the “emptying” out of those liquids. In a borrowed sense, the term yarok can also refer to the coloration of less fresh plants that turn yellowish upon drying. Rabbi Pappenheim also ties the concept of “spitting” to this biliteral root because it entails “emptying” one’s mouth of excess spittle or mucous.

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh of Carpentras (an 18<sup>th</sup> century grammarian and dayan) in Aholei Yehuda likewise connects the word yerek to the word rok (“spit”), explaining that because vegetables typically grow faster than fruits, it appears as though the ground “spits out” yerakot. Alternatively, he sees yerek as related to reik (“empty”), explaining that the Halachic definition of a yerek is vegetation whose stems or main trunks are not perennial (meaning they do not

have the ability to renew themselves over time, but rather must be replanted each year). Such plants grow in a way that all its nutrients are concentrated in (i.e., “emptied out into”) the vegetable itself – as opposed to a fruit (which uses some of its nutrients to maintain a tree that lasts from year to year).

\*To read about the fascinating story of the word karpas, visit us online and access the full version of this article: [http://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)

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## TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

### Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

#### *Matzah and Chametz* Mitzvos #9-12; #19-20

#### ***MATZAH***

The Torah clearly explains several times that we must eat *matzah* on Pesach to recall how, when the time for the Exodus arrived, Hashem led us to freedom in a hurry before our dough could rise. According to this, *matzah* is a celebratory symbol. In one place, though, the Torah indicates a seemingly opposite idea. The verse states, “eat along with [the Pesach offering] bread of affliction” (*Devarim* 16:3), which *Rashi* explains to mean, “bread that reminds us of our affliction in the Egyptian bondage.” As is well-known, *matzah* is the type of simple bread prepared by a pauper who lacks the tools, the ingredients, and the time to bake anything more substantial. It thus reminds us of our slavery in Egypt when we endured destitution and affliction, and in fact, according to several Commentators, we ate *matzos* during that time. The verse that calls *matzah* “bread of affliction” proceeds to mention the other idea, “because you left Egypt in a hurry.” But is there any connection between our hurry to leave Egypt and our affliction as slaves?

It would appear that the idea behind leaving Egypt in a hurry is twofold: Firstly, Hashem demonstrated His might by hurrying the Egyptians to release His people. Secondly, one of the main reasons we had to undergo the Egyptian bondage was to train us how to be slaves to Hashem (see *Devarim* 4:20). We served Pharaoh for generations, serving him every waking hour with backbreaking labor building cities that immediately collapsed and left us feeling bitterly empty. The rights to that unconditional slavery – symbolized by the “bread of affliction” – would now pass over to our Redeemer, Master, and eternal God, Hashem. He did not just hurry the Egyptians when He redeemed us, He also hurried *us*, similar to how a slave driver makes his charges move. He thereby indicated that He was not granting us total independence, but rather He was redeeming us for Himself (see *Berachos* 9a). This may be what the Torah means when it commands us to eat “bread of affliction *because* you left Egypt in a hurry.” In stark contrast, after

experiencing the lowly and bitter subjugation under the Egyptians, we can appreciate our servitude to Hashem as an exalted privilege and everlasting pleasure.

## *CHAMETZ*

One of the questions of the *Mah Nishtanah* is why we eat only *matzah* and no *chametz*. If it is the wise son who is asking this question, he means as follows: Was it not enough for Hashem to command us to eat *matzah* so that we remember the Exodus? Why did He also have to command us not to eat *chametz*? The wise son may also mean to ask why Hashem commanded us with the time-consuming task of removing any hint of *chametz* from our property.

On a simple level of understanding, if not for the prohibition against eating *chametz*, people would prefer to eat it as usual instead of eating *matzah* (*Chizkuni*). The prohibition of retaining *chametz* in our possession is a safeguard for the prohibition against eating *chametz*. If we would not remove *chametz* from our possession, it would be difficult to avoid eating it during Pesach, especially since we are used to eating it throughout the year.

On a deeper level of understanding, *chametz* symbolizes the *yetzer hara*, which manifests in puffed-up arrogance (see *Berachos* 17a). At the time of the year that we recall our subjugation to Hashem, it is imperative to also take to heart that we cannot compromise an inch with the *yetzer hara* – or it will take a mile. Sly as the primeval Serpent that tricked Adam and Eve into forfeiting their Divinity, the *yetzer hara* encourages people to maximize permitted pleasures. Once it has worn out their spiritual sensitivities, it leads them a step further to commit minor transgressions, thereby whetting their appetite for greater transgressions, and so on. We have to stop the enemy by the border. If we can avoid *chametz*-like feelings of arrogance and remain humbly satisfied with our lots, we can succeed in keeping focused on spiritual pursuits that bring lasting satisfaction. Then we will not feel compelled to follow the *yetzer hara* in hot pursuit after physical satisfaction that invariably ends in some measure of sin and, ironically, dissatisfaction.

With regard to the prohibition against retaining *chametz* in our possession on Pesach, we may note that there is a similar prohibition against keeping an idol in one's possession, which applies throughout the year. By treating *chametz* on Pesach with the same stringency, the Torah indicates that arrogance is abominable like idol worship (see *Sotah* 4b). The prohibition against keeping the slightest bit of *chametz* in sight reminds us that we cannot “see,” or consider, the *yetzer hara*'s twisted perspective in the slightest.

The obvious question that follows is that if *chametz* symbolizes the *yetzer hara*, why is there no prohibition against eating *chametz* throughout the year? The answer is straightforward: we need the *yetzer hara*. Without it, people would not feel driven to engage in the essential earthly pursuits of commerce and marriage, and the world would lie desolate. However, we have to remember the dictum of the Sages, “Draw the *yetzer hara* near with your right hand, but push it back with your left hand.” In other words, make use of it but exercise moderation. If we start at Pesach *chametz*-free, with a firm, uncompromising resolve to serve Hashem with humble alacrity, we can hope to stay on course until the following Pesach, next year in Yerushalayim.

*Based on Taamei HaMitzvos by Rav Menachem HaBavli*