

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHIOT TAZRIA-METZORAH AND ACHAREI MOT-KEDOSHIM · VOL. 8 NO. 27

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Tazria-Metzora

WYSIWYG

“This is the law of the Metzora.” (14:2)

When computers emerged from the dark ages of machine code, the buzz word which sold large numbers of those grey boxes was WYSIWYG. This was not a character with a long pointed hat out of a children’s fairy story. It meant “what-you-see-is-what-you-get” — the way things look on the screen will be the way they look on the paper.

In our world, spiritual events go largely unnoticed. We can’t see our dining room table becoming spiritually elevated when we learn Torah on it or welcome guests around it for a Shabbat meal. We can’t see the world becoming a holier place when we pray to G-d with devoted concentration. Similarly, we can’t see hundreds of thousands of incorporeal beings perishing when a word of slander emerges from our lips.

These events are so removed from our eyes that they stretch our credulity to the maximum. And yet they are happening around us all the time. This is not a WYSIWYG world.

There was a time, however, where spiritual realities were more manifest in the physical world.

This week we read a double Torah reading — *Tazria* and *Metzora*. They both deal with a spiritual affliction called

tzara’at which was caused by various kinds of anti-social behavior. *Tzara’at* was not a physical disease but a malaise of the spirit. It was merely the physical symptom of a chronic spiritual illness. If we do not see such a disease today, it is because our bodies have become so desensitized to our spiritual state that they can no longer act as a barometer to our spiritual well-being.

Someone afflicted with *tzara’at* is called a *metzora*. The word *metzora* is a contraction of *motzei ra* — literally “to bring forth evil.” This evil was principally the evil of speaking

slander. However, *tzara’at* was also a punishment for other forms of anti-social behavior, notably, bloodshed, false oaths, sexual immorality, pride, robbery and selfishness.

What do these acts have in common? They are all instances of the failure to be sensitive to the needs of others and to share their plight.

The essence of society from the Jewish perspective is not that society should run smoothly for the sake of society, but that each individual should take up the yoke of their neighbor. In other words society exists so that man may exercise his kindness and his caring.

When someone fails in these fundamental areas, he demonstrates that he has failed to understand the purpose of society itself. Thus he

has no place in society until he can cure himself of this failing.

It is for this reason that he is exiled until he comes to the realization that WYSIWYG — what you see is what you get.

The body is not only capable of spiritual elevation, but it is created for this purpose. The body’s deepest satisfaction comes from being correctly used in the service of the soul.

Sources:

- Talmud Arachin 15b, 16a
- Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch

TAZRIA

The Torah commands a woman to bring a *korban* after the birth of a child. A son is to be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. The Torah introduces the phenomenon of *tzara'at* (often mistranslated as leprosy) — a miraculous affliction that attacks people, clothing and buildings to awaken a person to spiritual failures. A *kohen* must be consulted to determine whether a particular mark is *tzara'at* or not. The *kohen* isolates the sufferer for a week. If the malady remains unchanged, confinement continues for a second week, after which the *kohen* decides the person's status. The Torah describes the different forms of *tzara'at*. One whose *tzara'at* is confirmed wears torn clothing, does not cut his hair, and must alert others that he is ritually impure. He may not have normal contact with people. The phenomenon of *tzara'at* on clothing is described in detail.

METZORA

The Torah describes the procedure for a *metzora* (a person afflicted with *tzara'at*) upon conclusion of his isolation. This process extends for a week and involves *korbanot* and immersions in the *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 it reappears, the entire building must be razed. The Torah details those bodily secretions that render a person spiritually impure, thereby preventing 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* 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" 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 abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing, and marital relations.

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 4th year; awe for the Temple; respect for Torah scholars, the blind and the deaf.

Family life must be holy. We are warned again not to imitate gentile behavior, lest we lose the Land of Israel. We must observe *kashrut*, thus maintaining our unique and separate status.

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

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THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Published by
OHR SOMAYACH
 TANENBAUM COLLEGE
 POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • 02-581-0315

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Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications
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I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"He shall shave, but the netek-affliction he shall not shave..." (13:33)

When a *netek*-affliction, a particular form of *tzara'at* on a person's hair, requires that he shave, the actual *netek* itself was left unshaved. This hints to the idea that a person should accept Divine punishment and not try to deny it or hide it.

• *Sefer Hachinuch*

Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

EAT, MY CHILD!

“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them ‘You shall be holy — for Holy am I, Hashem, Your G-d.’ ” (19:2)

In “How I Became Fat,” Alan Sherman recalls his mother urging him to eat. “Eat! Eat!” she would say, “People are starving in Asia!” Thus, as his patriotic duty to ease world hunger, he learned to clean his plate 4, 5, or 6 times a day...

How many Jewish jokes are there about eating! The caricature Jewish mother complains continually that her offspring are dying of hunger in spite of the fact that their daily calorie intake would support a thoroughbred racehorse.

Behind every joke lies a truth, however distorted. Judaism is unique in that it views the body neither as an enemy nor as a bacchanalian banquet — but as a resource. The body is not only *capable* of spiritual elevation, but it is

created for this purpose. The body’s deepest satisfaction comes from being correctly used in the service of the soul.

To the secular mind, holiness means abstinence. The body is incapable of spiritual elevation and must be mortified or transcended.

This week’s parsha begins with G-d saying to Moshe: “Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them ‘You shall be holy — for I am Holy, Hashem, Your G-d.’ ” Since G-d instructed Moshe to speak to the entire assembly, we know that this commandment was to be spoken in public to all the Jewish People together. Why? What is it about the command to be holy that it needed to be communicated in this fashion?

The holiness that the Torah seeks from us is not a holiness of separation and denial, of monasticism and seclusion, rather it is a holiness which is to be lived in an *assembly*; a holiness where the body is elevated by the soul and where its greatest potential is only realized in our interaction with our fellow beings.

Sources:

- Chatam Sofer in *Iturei Torah*

HAFTARAH

The *haftara* opens with the plight of four men afflicted by *tzara’at*. The King of Aram had besieged Shomron, the capital city of the northern ten tribes. As a result, a tremendous famine waxed through the city. When all seemed lost and people were paying exorbitant prices for “food” not fit for rodents, Elisha prophesied that the next day there would be a plentiful food supply at inexpensive prices. One of the king’s servants who had come to seize Elisha quipped: “If Hashem would make windows in heaven, could this really happen?” Elisha replied, “you will see the food, but you will not be privileged to eat any of it.”

When the four men afflicted with *tzara’at* saw that the

TAZRIAH-MEZORAH • KINGS II 7:3 - 20

army of Aram had fled for no apparent reason (the army had in fact been miraculously driven away by Hashem) they brought the news to Shomron. Elisha’s prophecies were fulfilled. Hashem provided the promised prosperity, and the skeptical servant who ridiculed Elisha’s prophecy about the price (*sha’ar*) of the food was trampled to death in the gate (*sha’ar*) of the city.

Although a *haftara* does not normally end with retribution, perhaps this *haftara* which shows how Hashem treats people “measure for measure” provides us with confidence that when we are righteous we will be suitably rewarded.

- Based on the *Me’am Lo’ez*

ACHREI MOT-KEDOSHIM • AMOS 9:7-9:15

This *haftara* is related to the Parsha of *Acharei Mot* where G-d warned the people of Israel not to imitate the immoral ways of the Canaanites lest the land regurgitate them into exile (*Vayikra 18:28*). The prophet Amos warns them that they now resemble the Canaanites and will soon be ejected from the Land. Yet, the prophet tells of the redemption when G-d will return them to the bountiful Land and rebuild the kingdom of David. Then, desolate cities will be rebuilt and the populace prosperous

and peaceful forever.

TOIL AND REWARD

Amos foresees the future golden age in Israel: “Days will come, says Hashem, when the plowman will be reached by the reaper” (9:13).

The Maggid of Dubno explains this: Today, we see people who toil and others who enjoy; not always does a person enjoy the fruit of his labor.

Especially in exile when the Jews are oppressed continuously, one can toil in anticipation for the future but someone else steals the profits. In the future utopia, the plowman who toils will be the reaper who harvests the grain, as King David says, “Those who tearfully sow will reap in glad song” (*Psalms 126:5*). Also, this will be the era when everyone who toiled and suffered as a Jew will merit the Divine reward and understand that nothing was in vain.

REMEDIES OF THE RABBIS

A wide variety of remedies for physical and psychological disorders is offered by our Sages in the first part of the seventh perek.

Maharsha raises an interesting problem in regard to this: King Chizkiyahu was praised by the Sages for hiding the “Book of Remedies” (*Mesechta Berachot 10b*). Rashi explains that his motive was to encourage people to pray to Hashem for recovery. Why then did the Sages Ravina and Rabbi Ashi, who redacted the Babylonian Talmud, include these remedies? Might this not defeat the purpose of Chizkiyahu’s concealment?

Maharsha’s explanation is that since Hashem gave man the right to heal himself (*Shemot 21:19*) there is nothing wrong with having a knowledge of remedies for illnesses. Publicizing all of them for the general public, however, is problematic because there may be some people who will put all of their faith in the remedy rather than in Hashem. This is why Chizkiyahu put away the Book of Remedies and left their knowledge to those who received them via oral tradition.

But just as the Sages saw the need to write down the Oral Law — which was initially supposed to be transmitted orally — because the weakening memories in later generations posed a danger that this information would be forgotten (*Gittin 60a*), so too did the Sages find it necessary to record the remedies lest they likewise be forgotten by everyone, even those who should know them.

Maharsha concludes with these words:

“Thus you see that the Talmud lacks no area of wisdom, for you will find a true and effective remedy for any illness if you fully understand the language of the Sages. Let not any scorners scoff at the Sages that they were deficient in medical knowledge.”

The compilation “Ta’amei Haminhagim” quotes the Maharil to the effect that one should refrain from using any of the remedies and chants mentioned in the Talmud because a failure to fully understand and administer them may lead to a person losing faith in the Sages. The only exception, he notes, is the treatment mentioned in *Mesechta Shabbat (67a)* for one who has a fish or meat bone stuck in his throat because experience has proven its effectiveness.

• *Gittin 69b*

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IS IT THE GESTURE THAT COUNTS?

If a man gives his wife a *get* on the condition that she give him a specific sum of money, the *get* is valid, says the *mishna*, only if she fulfills the condition. Rabbi Asi posed the following question to his master, Rabbi Yochanan:

What if the husband subsequently waives the need for giving him the money — is this considered fulfillment of the condition or not?

When Rabbi Yochanan replied that this is *not* considered fulfillment since she did not actually give him the money, he was challenged from a *beraita* concerning vows:

If a man told his friend that he would take a vow prohibiting himself from having any benefit from that friend unless that friend provided the man’s son with a certain amount of grain and wine, it is the opinion of the majority of the Sages that, should he change his mind, he need not apply to a sage for nullification of the vow. Rather, he can waive his demand and declare that he considers it *as if* his son had received the goods.

Rabbi Yochanan’s response was that in the case of divorce it may be assumed that bitter feelings motivated the man to make his condition, in order to make things difficult for his wife. Therefore, if she is spared this difficulty it is not considered fulfillment of the condition. In the case of the vow, on the other hand, the father’s only motivation was to improve his son’s financial situation. If his situation improved in a manner which rendered such a gift unnecessary, the waiving of the demand can readily be considered a fulfillment of the condition.

An interesting halachic question arises regarding the gift of two food items that one is obligated to give another Jew on Purim. If the recipient refuses the gift and declares that he considers the gesture of giving *as if* he had actually received the gift — does this qualify as fulfillment of the mitzvah?

Rema (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 695:4*) rules that in such a case the giver is considered as having fulfilled his obligation.

Mishna Berura (*ibid.*), however, cites the view of later authorities who disagree. Their objection can be understood in light of the reason that the Sages commanded the sending of gifts on Purim. Since the purpose was to improve relations between Jews by providing one another with food for the Purim feast, this goal cannot be achieved unless one accepts the gift.

On the other hand the language of the command in Megillat Esther (9:22) is the “sending of gifts” rather than “giving of gifts.” This can be interpreted as a requirement only to make the *gesture* of sending, and the mitzvah would be thus fulfilled even if the intended receiver doesn’t accept it.

• *Gittin 74b*

WEEK HEART OF WEEK END

If a man divorces his wife with a *get* on the condition that he will be away until after Shabbat, when is it considered that this condition has been fulfilled?

This question was pondered by the sages against the background of a *beraita*. The *beraita* states that a condition to be away “until after *shemita*” (the seven-year agricultural cycle) is considered fulfilled only if he is still away for one entire year after *shemita*; that a condition to be away until “after a year” is fulfilled by being away for one month after the year; and being away until “after a month” means a week after the month. The resolution of this question is that the first three days of the week are called “after Shabbat,” while the second set of three days are called “before (the next) Shabbat.”

This ruling in regard to the fulfillment of a time-oriented condition in divorce is applied by the *gemara* (*Mesechta Pesachim 106a*) to the law of *havdala* made at the conclusion of Shabbat. If one failed to make *havdala* then, says the *gemara*, he can do so during the following weekdays. In determining how late in the following week *havdala* can be made, reference is made to our *gemara*; according to the text we have, *havdala* can be made for the first three days after Shabbat.

Other commentaries had a different text which concluded that *havdala* can only be made the first day of the week. Both opinions are cited by the Shulchan Aruch (*Orach Chaim 299:6*) but Rema rules that it can be done for three days. In regard to *havdala* after Yom Tov, however, Mishna Berura (*ibid. 16*) points out that this concept is inapplicable, and *havdala* can be done only the first day following the holiday.

(There is a puzzle why Rashbam, in his commentary on Pesachim, gives a different example of the condition made regarding the divorce than the one cited in our *gemara*, even though the reference there is to our *gemara*. Readers are invited to offer their solutions.)

This idea of the six weekdays being divided between before and after Shabbat is a dramatic refutation of the characterization of Shabbat as the “weekend.” Shabbat is not the end but the heart of the week around which all the other days revolve.

• *Gittin 77a*

AN UNWORTHY KINGDOM

In Talmudic times the date written into the *get* document was in accordance with the year of the reign of the king in whose country it was written. This was instituted by our Sages as a way of maintaining good relations with the local government, which would certainly resent any other dating system. (Today, Tosefot points out this is no longer the dat-

ing system of nations, so we write the year from creation.)

Should someone in Babylon write the date according to the years of the ruler of the “unworthy kingdom,” says the *mishna*, the *get* is considered invalid because it is in violation of this rabbinical decree. The “unworthy kingdom” is identified by the *gemara* as the Roman Empire, so characterized because “it lacks its own script and language.” Rashi explains that this is a reference to the eclectic nature of its national tongue.

Tosefot (*Mesechta Avoda Zara 10a*) challenges this explanation based on the existence of nations such as the children of Yishmael and Ketura, the Ammonites and the Moabites. These nations came into being after Hashem introduced pluralistic language to the world as a means of dispersing the people who sought to rebel against Heaven by building the Tower of Babel. Since they were not around when the multiplicity of languages began, we must conclude that they, too, borrowed their languages from other nations. Why, then, is Rome singled out as “unworthy” for not having its own language?

Tosefot therefore concludes that not having its own language is not the issue. What Rome was lacking was a special language which was reserved for royal use, such as we find “Greek wisdom” as a name for such an aristocratic form of expression. This, Tosefot points out, is what is meant in *Mesechta Megilla (10b)* when the prophet says that Hashem will punish the Babylonians for destroying the *Beit Hamikdash* by cutting off their language. Even though their language is Aramaic and they long continued to speak that tongue, they did lose the royal language they once used.

• *Gittin 80a*

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Tazria

1. "Any holy thing she shall not touch." In this context, what does "touch" mean?
2. After a woman gives birth she is required to offer two types of *korbanot*. What are they?
3. Who declares whether an affliction of *tzara'at* is impure or pure?
4. How many hairs in a suspected area must turn white before the *kohen* can declare a person *tamei*?
5. What disqualifies a *kohen* from being able to give a ruling in a case of *tzara'at*?
6. In areas of the body where collections of hair grow (e.g., the head or beard), what color hair indicates *tumah*?
7. What is the name for *tzara'at* of the scalp or beard area?
8. What signs of mourning must a *metzora* display?
9. Why must a *metzora* call out, "Tamei! Tamei!"?
10. Why is a *metzora* commanded to dwell in isolation?

Metzora

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 a *metzora* require birds in the purification process?
4. In the purification process of a *metzora*, what does the cedar wood symbolize?
5. When the *metzora* was presented "before Hashem" (14:11) in the *Beit Hamikdash*, where did he stand?
6. Toward what direction does the *kohen* sprinkle the oil from the *metzora's korban*?
7. How was having *tzara'at* in one's house sometimes advantageous?
8. When a person enters a house that has *tzara'at*, when do his clothes become *tamei*?
9. 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?
10. What does the Torah mean when it refers to a *zav* who "has not washed his hands"?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

Tazria

1. 12:4 - Eat.
2. 12:6 - An *olah* and a *chatat*.
3. 13:2 - A *kohen*.
4. 13:3 - At least two.
5. 13:12 - Poor vision.
6. 13:29 - Golden.
7. 13:30 - *Netek*.
8. 13:45 - He must tear his garments, let his hair grow and enshroud his face.
9. 13:45 - So people will know to keep away from him.
10. 13:46 - Since *tzara'at* is a punishment for *lashon harah* (evil speech) which divides people, he is isolated measure-for-measure.

Metzora

1. 14:2 - At night.
2. 14:3 - Outside the three camps.
3. 14:4 - *Tzara'at* comes as punishment for *lashon harah*.

- The *metzora* offers birds, who chatter constantly, to atone for his sin of chattering.
4. 14:4 - The cedar is a lofty tree, hinting that *tzara'at* is a punishment for haughtiness.
 5. 14:11 - At the gate of Nikanor.
 6. 14:16 - Westward, toward the Holy of Holies.
 7. 14:34 - Fearing Jewish conquest, the Amorites hid their valuables in their walls. After the conquest, *tzara'at* would afflict a house and the Jewish owner would tear down the wall and find the treasure.
 8. 14:46 - When he remains in the house long enough to eat a small meal.
 9. 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 upon it. A *tahor* person who subsequently touches the object becomes *tamei* and the garment he is wearing also becomes *tamei*. Therefore: a) *tamei*; b) *tahor*; c) *tamei*; d) *tahor*.
 10. 15:11 - One who has not immersed in a *mikveh*.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

TAZRIA

- Ramban*
12:2 Procreation
12:7 The "Sin" of Childbirth
13:47 The Greatness of *Tzara'at*

Sefer Hachinuch

- 167 Respect for *Kedusha*
168 A Gift of Thanks
Sforno
12:8 Self Involvement
13:47 Garments

METZORA

- Ramban*
14:2 Compulsive Cleanliness
15:11 The *Zav*
Sefer Hachinuch
174 Purification and Rebirth

175 Cleansing Waters

- Sforno*
14:12 The *Asham* of the *Metzora*
14:36 The Reason for Waiting
15:2 The *Zav*

Acharei Mot

1. Why does the Torah emphasize that *Parshat Acharei Mot* was taught after the death of Aharon's sons?
2. How long did the first *Beit Hamikdash* stand?
3. What did the *kohen gadol* wear when he entered the Holy of Holies?
4. How many times did the *kohen gadol* change his clothing and immerse in the *mikveh* on Yom Kippur?
5. One of the goats that was chosen by lot went to *azazel*. What is *azazel*?
6. After the Yom Kippur service, what is done with the four linen garments worn by the *kohen gadol*?
7. What is the penalty of *karet*?
8. Which categories of animals must have their blood covered when they are slaughtered?
9. What is the difference between "*mishpat*" and "*chok*"?
10. May a man marry his wife's sister?

Kedoshim

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. The Torah obligates one to leave the "*leket*" for the poor. What is "*leket*"?
5. 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"?
6. In verse 19:13, the Torah commands, "Do not wrong your neighbor." To what "wrong" is the Torah referring?
7. When rebuking someone, what sin must one be careful to avoid?
8. How does one fulfill the command "*v'hadarta p'nei zakein*"?
9. What punishment will never come to the entire Jewish People?
10. When the Torah states a death penalty but doesn't define it precisely, to which type of death penalty is it referring?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Achrei Mot-Kedoshim's Questions!

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

Acharei Mot

1. 16:1 - To strengthen the warning not to enter the Holy of Holies except on Yom Kippur.
2. 16:3 - 410 years.
3. 16:4 - Only the four linen garments worn by an ordinary *kohen*.
4. 16:4 - Five times.
5. 16:8 - A jagged cliff.
6. 16:23 - They must be put into *geniza* and not be used again.
7. 17:9 - The person's life is shortened and his offspring die.
8. 17:13 - Non-domestic kosher animals and all species of kosher birds.
9. 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 Hashem's decree.
10. 18:18 - Not during his wife's lifetime.

Kedoshim

1. 19:2 - Because it contains the fundamental teachings of the Torah.
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. 19:9 - "*Leket*" is one or two stalks of grain that are accidentally dropped while harvesting.
5. 19:11 - The Torah in *Vayikra* prohibits monetary theft. In *Shemot* it prohibits kidnapping.
6. 19:13 - Withholding wages from a worker.
7. 19:17 - Causing embarrassment.
8. 19:32 - By not sitting in their seat nor contradicting them.
9. 20:3 - "*Karet*" — the entire Jewish People will never be "cut off."
10. 20:10 - "*Chenek*" (strangulation).

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

ACHAREI MOT

	Ramban
16:21	The Scapegoat
17:2	Meat in the <i>Midbar</i>
17:7	Demons
17:11	Prohibition Against Eating Blood

Sefer Hachinuch

184	The Sanctity of the <i>Mishkan</i>
185	Yom Kippur
187	Covering the Blood

Sforno

16:30	Repentance
17:7	Demons

KEDOSHIM

	Ramban
19:2	Be Holy
19:14	Who May Not Be Cursed
19:17	Love and Rebuke
19:18	Love Your Neighbor
19:30	Shabbat
19:32	Honoring the Elderly

Sefer Hachinuch

227	Swearing Falsely
236	Tale Bearing
237	Standing Idly
238	Hatred
239	Rebuke

HOW DOES G-D DEAL WITH TAXES?

From TLA

<tlawork@yahoo.com>

Dear Rabbi,

Could you please give me any insight you may have regarding the proper role of government regarding taxation? As an example, here in America the top 5% of the taxpayers paid 54% of the federal income tax revenue. The top 50% of taxpayers paid 95.8%. The bottom 50% paid 4.2%. How does G-d address this perceived inequity?

Dear TLA,

I imagine G-d addresses taxes the same way I do:

Internal Revenue Service
Philadelphia, PA 15217

My own personal observation about taxes comes from Genesis, where the starving Egyptians approach Pharaoh's viceroy, Joseph. Having nothing left to sell, they offer themselves as slaves in exchange for food. The deal is done, and all Egypt become Pharaoh's slaves. How was their slavery expressed? They needed to give 20 percent of their land's produce to Pharaoh. So, it's easy to understand why someone paying tax of 20% or more feels like he is a slave in Egypt. (Ironic, isn't it, that U.S. tax season comes out around Passover?)

Still, according to Jewish law, a percentage system where people with more money pay more tax is not a perceived inequity:

If a community builds a wall to protect against theft, says the Talmud, those with more money must give more toward the wall's construction. The more a person has, the more he benefits from the wall.

So, today, someone who owns large parts of Downtown Dallas (speaking of Taxes) benefits dozens of times more from the Dallas Police Force than does the average Joe. Did you buy stock in Coca Cola ten years ago? Your black gold was delivered to the thirsty on roads paved with tax-money.

The Torah also mandates a charity system, where field-

owners and owners of livestock must give specified gifts and percentages to the needy. People below a certain economic line are exempt from some of these requirements. So we see a precedent for a "graduated" system whereby wealthier people are required to give more.

Sources:

- Genesis 47:18-24 (However, this likely was 20% before deducting expenses.)
- Nedarim 28a
- Baba Batra 7b

EMERGENCY CREMATION

From: Name@Withheld in Baltimore, MD

Dear Rabbi,

A while ago, I was talking with my children about the terrifying earthquakes that had then struck India & El Salvador. We were discussing the very unpleasant topic of why all the dead must be disposed of quickly (spreading of disease), and the children found a photo of a funeral pyre fully engaged. So here's the question: How does the halacha deal with this very serious and sensitive issue of "disposing of the remains of the dead?" We are taught that the Torah eschews cremation as a choice under ordinary circumstances. Does the Torah specifically mention a situation such as the one that was dealt with recently in India?

Dear Name@Withheld,

Honor for the dead is an important mitzvah, sometimes even superceding other *mitzvot*. But saving a life is even more important. You are not required to risk your life for the honor of the dead.

So, if avoiding an epidemic required cremation — even if a single soul was in danger — then the obligation would be to perform the cremation rather than risk a single life.

I don't know of any examples dealing with cremation specifically, but we know that Judaism allows organ transplants from the dead where the organ will save a life. This, despite that otherwise taking an organ from a dead body is a desecration. The above answer presents only the most general information. In an actual situation, a question should be asked to a halachic authority (except in a case of immediate danger).

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Thanks to Ohr.edu:

As a Jewish Secondary School teacher it is often difficult to have all the answers to the many questions which students ask — you are therefore invaluable to me, and I appreciate your help greatly. Best wishes,

Name@Withheld

Dear Ohr Somayach,

I am an 11 year old boy who loves your Parsha Q&A project. Every week I print out the Q&A and read it to my family at Shabbos supper.

Name@Withheld