

Parshat Tazria

The Spiritual Potency of Our Changing Bodies

Arielle Krule

As a child, I loved waking up early on Sunday mornings. I remember feeling the urgency to brush my teeth quickly, in time for Entenmann's and coffee with my mom, my aunt, and their friends. At 6:30 in the morning, surrounded by pastries and women decked in gold hoops, I would listen to my elders discuss the important things: menstrual cycles, menopause, and the neighbors' health.

"What are you talking about?" My curiosity always piqued. They would reply, "our lives."

The answer still lives within me – of course – "our lives," the changes that we undergo as we grow.

These were my favorite childhood moments. I reveled in these sacred hours as the sun was rising, and we did not yet have to face a world that did not make room for our full selves – including our bodies.

This deep, open discussion of bodies and selves was such a poignant part of my history. Yet, for the last sixteen years, whenever I have told someone about my Bat Mitzvah portion – Tazria – they would meet my excitement with pity. Instead of feeling shame at the content, I understood my inauguration into adulthood as a powerful integration of the spiritual and physical self.

This week's parsha, Tazria, gives us instructions as a community, for how we should handle enormous physical changes among our members: menstruation, childbirth, leprosy, skin lesions, rashes and discoloration. While the description of this parsha is grounded in that which is earthly – of distinct descriptions of skin lesions and commentary on afterbirth, its orientation is spiritual.

The parsha shouts loudly: our bodies are ensconced in spiritual meaning, wrapped in relationship with others. **In the lines that ensue, Hashem offers choreography for how to engage with that which is foreign, and yet so intimate: experiences that are both in our bodies and out of our control.** Hashem's first offering to Moshe in this parsha is the post-natal process. After a woman gives birth, she is considered to be in a state of *tumah*, spiritual impurity, and is given space. In our world, we think of "giving space" as a way for someone to find healing – and yet, the text creates this association of impurity with one of life's most essential moments – the one where it begins. On the completion of this separation, a sacrifice is made to mark the experience.

The second offering invites a process of recovering from *tzaraat*, a scaly affliction of the skin. After a period of separation, those afflicted are given a way back into communal participation, which creates opportunity for a sustainable spiritual re-integration.

At its most basic level, the term תִּזְרִיעַ means "you will produce" or "you will grow." Rashi reads its meaning as "if you bring forth seed." In my life's experience, this type of germination is often accompanied by unexpected change, and intimate experiences of vulnerability. That process is messy. While many focus on the leprosy and symbolism itself, I offer that our tradition invites us to consider ways in which we might envision spiritually metabolizing big changes and the needs we and our communities have as we do. In its grounded, earthly descriptions, the text reveals to

us that spiritual growth is built into the essence of human nature and experience. “עֵמֶק מְעוֹר בְּשֵׁרוֹ” – the mark is deeper than the skin (Vayikra 13:3).

In all of these significant moments of physicality, we are acutely reminded that being alive means having our vulnerable moments – that which is beneath the skin is brought into light. Perhaps, it is in those unique moments of physical and spiritual intertwinement and revelation that we are most in connection with the Divine. Throughout this discussion of our most vulnerable corporeal moments, there is a distinct Divine presence. In discussing the laws of tzaraat in houses, Hashem indicates:

כִּי תֵבֹאוּ אֶל-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם לְאֻחְזָה וְנִתְּנִי נֶגַע צָרַעַת בְּבַיִת אֶרֶץ אֲחֻזַּתְכֶם:

When you enter the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I inflict an eruptive plague upon a house in the land you possess, (Vayikra 14:34)

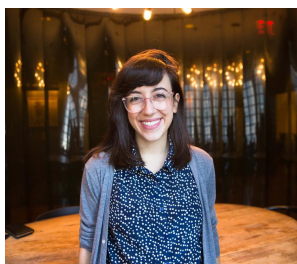
“When” not “If.” The text suggests that there is certainty to this strangeness, and that to be human is to experience it. We turn to tradition to navigate our way through, and to community to build back together.

I have received many gifts from this parasha throughout my life, including bearing witness to brokenness, marveling in physical function, and feeling vulnerability as an inherent part of what it means to be human. It has allowed me the empathy to imagine the writers of the Talmud grappling with bodily processes they couldn’t understand, but perhaps they knew were either dangerous, elevated, or both. Finally, it reminds me of the power of standing in our experiences and continuing to elevate them as sacred instead of relegating them to the shadows.

As my teacher, Dr. Brene Brown, shares in her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*:

Owning our story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy – the experiences that make us the most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light.

Perhaps it is okay for us to explore the darkness, to be bold enough to stand in our truth in a world that prioritizes isolation of experience and vulnerability. Perhaps it is also okay for us to strive towards integrating these moments into our spiritual elevation. May we merit the feeling of innate spiritual and physical merging and transformation that Parashat Tazria has to offer us each and every day.



Arielle Krule is a student in the core semikha track at Yeshivat Maharat (2025). She comes to Maharat after directing the Jewish Learning Fellowship, the largest Jewish educational program on campus in North America. Arielle is the Rabbinic Intern at the Prospect Heights Shul, an educator for the Springboard Fellowship at Hillel International, and the Fellowship Manager at the Center for Rabbinic Innovation. She is a clinician for adolescents and adults at a local clinic and was the director of the CUNY Hillel Social Work Fellowship for MSW candidates across the New York City area and was later a JCRIF grant recipient. Arielle is a Wexner Graduate Fellow and UJA Graduate Fellow. She has her BSW, MSW, SIFI certification, and certificate in Spirituality and Social Work from NYU and a certificate in Experiential Education from M2: The Institute for Experiential Jewish Education. Arielle was formerly a BBYO

International Teen President, birth doula, yoga teacher, and women’s health educator. Arielle and her husband, Jackson, live in Brooklyn, where you can find them in the park with their dog, Frida, and inviting you over for Shabbat.