

Parshat Tazria-Metzora
Letting the Light In
Nomi Kaltmann - Class of 2023

This week we commemorated Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day. Growing up in Melbourne, Australia the Holocaust was something that was always magnified in our community due to the very high number of survivors that live here and the very personal connections that so many people had and still have with survivors. My grandfather who passed away just a few years ago was my personal connection to the Holocaust and it was through him I came to understand why it was that our family did not have any other extended family on his side, only him.

We are last generation of people who have had personal experiences with Holocaust survivors. As the years go on and the Holocaust survivors move on from this world to the next, we have to start grappling and preparing for describing to future generations what it was like to have met someone who had survived some of the darkest years in Jewish history. Unfortunately, Jewish history contains many different traumas that befell our communities over thousands of years, and we have constructed ancient and solemn events to remember them.

Whenever Yom Hashoah occurs I often take a moment to thank God each day that I have never had any firsthand experience with anti-Semitism and baseless hatred. It is not something that should be taken for granted and I appreciate the fact that my family and I and the wider Jewish community have always enjoyed prosperity and success in this lucky country so far from the atrocities of Europe.

This week I watched [a video](#) released in Israel with 600 Holocaust survivors and their descendants singing “Chai” by Ofra Haza. It was very moving. This famous Hebrew song represents the life, elation, and optimism of those who survived the Holocaust. When we look around to thriving Jewish communities across the world we too can see the optimism of the Jewish people who emerged from the ashes.

My grandfather never dwelled on the sadness of losing his family and chose to seek out positivity, even when it hurt to remember all he had lost. Once when I questioned him about what had happened to his parents and siblings who all perished, he answered me: “This is God’s business, I don’t question it, I stay silent.”

During this enduring crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, which has permeated the world and caused so much devastation and sickness, I was trying to make sense of an applicable meaning from this week’s parsha to the world’s current context. When reading the double portion of Tazria-Metzora I read with interest the laws of tzaraat (leprosy) which is a particularly unpleasant skin disease. The commentators inform us that tzaraat was caused by gossip and slander.

The parsha describes in great detail the disease of tzaraat and how it can affect one’s body, clothing and home. The Torah describes that failure to address suspected tzaraat can result in it spreading to all three of these areas and advises that the disease is best treated by isolating oneself for seven days, repenting and then purifying ourselves through immersion in a Mikveh.

In many ways, this week’s parsha shows that the three layers that can be affected by tzaraat are the essence of a person: their body, their clothing and their home. However, tzaraat reminds us that these layers are delicate and that when we gossip about others we permeate these layers with an evil that affects all levels of our being and our society. So these layers remind us that we have a unique place in our community where we must balance what we give and what we take, in understanding what we destroy through gossip and what we build in unity.

In contrast, the things that we can achieve when we work to build each other up with kindness, compassion and a sense of community cannot be understated. As people across the globe who are isolated in our homes and unable to do the regular indulgent things we have always done as part of our routines, we can take this time to consider some of the things that unite us. Small acts of kindness which help to unite us as a people are going viral as people seek comfort in the caring and resilient side of humanity.

When facing darkness, light stands out in contrast and even small acts of kindness can feel magnified. Reflection upon death leads us to have an appreciation of life. The stories of Holocaust survivors, if nothing else, enable us to appreciate that we will emerge from this crisis with strength despite the personal costs we may endure.



Nomi Kaltmann lives in Melbourne, Australia and comes to Maharat after earning her Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Liberal Arts in Politics and Jewish Civilizations from Monash University. She also holds a Masters degree in Legal Practice from the Australian National University. Nomi has worked for the Shadow Attorney General of Australia and as an advisor to the former Minister for Small Business in the Victorian Legislative Assembly. Specialising in charities and not-for-profit law, Nomi has worked for the Australian Charities Commission. Nomi was one of the founding members of the Women's Orthodox Tefillah Group in Victoria. She has previously studied at Midreshet HaRova and completed a Masters research unit that looked at the current state of Australian family law and issues relating to Agunot and Gett.