

## Parshat Tazria: Objective Truth vs. Halachic Truth

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### Leviticus 13:1-8

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: ב אִדָּם כִּי-יִהְיֶה בְעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ שָׂאת אֹרֶס-פֹּחַת אוֹ בַהֲרַת וְהָיָה  
בְעוֹר-בְּשָׂרוֹ לִנְגַע צִרְעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל-אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים: ג וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַנְּגַע  
בְעוֹר-הַבְּשָׂר וְשָׁעַר בִּנְגַע הַפֶּדָּה | לָבֹן וּמְרָאָה הַנְּגַע עֲמַק מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ נָגַע צִרְעַת הוּא וְרָאָהוּ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמְא אֹתוֹ:  
ד וְאִם-בַּהֲרַת לָבֹן הוּא בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ וְעֲמַק אִיוּ-מְרָאָה מִן-הָעוֹר וְשָׁעֲרָה לֹא-הָפֵדָה לָבֹן וְהִסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַנְּגַע  
שְׁבַעַת יָמִים: ה וְרָאָהוּ הַכֹּהֵן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְהָיָה הַנְּגַע עֲמֹד בְּעֵינָיו לֹא-פָשָׁה הַנְּגַע בְּעוֹר וְהִסְגִּירוֹ הַכֹּהֵן שְׁבַעַת  
יָמִים שֵׁנִית: ו שֵׁנִי | וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֹתוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שֵׁנִית וְהָיָה כִּתְּחִלָּה הַנְּגַע וְלֹא-פָשָׁה הַנְּגַע בְּעוֹר וְטָהַרוּ הַכֹּהֵן  
מִסַּפְּחַת הוּא וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְטָהַר: ז וְאִם-פָּשָׁה תִּפְשָׁה הַמִּסַּפְּחַת בְּעוֹר אַחֲרֵי מְרָאָתוֹ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן לְטַהַרְתּוֹ וְרָאָה  
שֵׁנִית אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן: ח וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהָיָה פְּשִׁתָּהּ הַמִּסַּפְּחַת בְּעוֹר וְטָמְאוּ הַכֹּהֵן צִרְעַת הוּא: ט  
ט נָגַע צִרְעַת כִּי תִהְיֶה בְּאִדָּם וְהוּבָא אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן: י וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהָיָה שָׂאת-לָבֹן בְּעוֹר וְהָיָה הַפֶּדָּה שָׁעֵר לָבֹן  
וּמְחִינַת בְּשָׂר חַי בְּשָׂאת: יא צִרְעַת נוֹשְׁנַת הוּא בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטָמְאוּ הַכֹּהֵן לֹא יִסְגְּרוּ כִּי טָמֵא הוּא: יב וְאִם-פָּרוּחַ  
תִּפְרַח הַצִּרְעַת בְּעוֹר וְכִסְתָּהּ הַצִּרְעַת אֶת כָּל-עוֹר הַנְּגַע מֵרֵאשִׁיו וְעַד-רִגְלָיו לְכָל-מְרָאָה עֵינֵי הַכֹּהֵן: יג וְרָאָה  
הַכֹּהֵן וְהָלַךְ כִּסְתָהּ הַצִּרְעַת אֶת-כָּל-בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטָהַר אֶת-הַנְּגַע בְּלוֹ הַפֶּדָּה לָבֹן טָהוֹר הוּא: יד **וּבָלוֹם הַרְאֹת בּוֹ  
בְּשָׂר חַי יִטְמָא:** טו וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַבְּשָׂר חַי וְטָמְאוּ הַבְּשָׂר חַי טָמֵא הוּא צִרְעַת הוּא: טז אוֹ כִּי יָשׁוּב  
הַבְּשָׂר חַי וְנִהְפָּד לָלָבֹן וַיָּבֹא אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן: יז וְרָאָהוּ הַכֹּהֵן וְהָיָה נִהְפָּד הַנְּגַע לָלָבֹן וְטָהַר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַנְּגַע טָהוֹר  
הוּא:

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, **he shall be brought to Aaron** the priest or to one of his sons, the priests. The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of his body: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is *tzara'at*; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce him unclean. But if it is a white discoloration on the skin of his body which does not appear to be deeper than the skin and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall isolate the affected person for seven days. On the seventh day the priest shall examine him, and if the affection has remained unchanged in color and the disease has not spread on the skin, the priest shall isolate him for another seven days. On the seventh day the priest shall examine him again: if the affection has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean. It is a rash; he shall wash his clothes and he shall be clean. But if the rash should spread on the skin after he has presented himself to the priest and been pronounced clean, he shall present himself again to the priest. And if the priest sees that the rash has spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is leprosy.

When a person has a scaly affection, it shall be reported to the priest. If the priest finds on the skin a white swelling which has turned some hair white, with a patch of undischored flesh in the swelling, it is chronic leprosy on the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean; he need not isolate him, for he is unclean. If the eruption spreads out over the skin so that it covers all the skin of the affected person from head to foot, wherever the priest can see -- if the priest sees that the eruption has covered the whole body -- he shall pronounce the affected person clean; he is clean, for he has

tuned all white. **But as soon as undiscolorated flesh appears in it [Literally: “on the day undiscolorated flesh appears...], he shall be unclean;** when the priest sees the undiscolorated flesh, he shall pronounce him unclean. The undiscolorated flesh is unclean; it is leprosy. But if the undiscolorated flesh again turns white, he shall come to the priest, and the priest shall examine him: if the affection has turned white, the priest shall pronounce the affected person clean; he is clean.

### Abraham Ibn Ezra, Leviticus 13:2

והובא ברצונו ושלא ברצונו, כי הרואה בו אחד מסימנים אלו יכריחנו שיבא.

*He shall be brought -- Whether he wants to or not. For anyone who sees any of these signs is compelled to come [to a priest].*

### Leviticus 14:34-45

לג וידבר יהוה אל־משה וא־אֶהֱרֹן לֵאמֹר: לֹד כִּי תֵבֵאוּ אֶל־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם לְאֶחְזָה וַתִּתְּלֵי נִגַע צְרָעַת בְּבַיִת אֶרֶץ אֲחֵזְתְּכֶם: לֹה וּבֵא אֲשֶׁר־לּוֹ הַבַּיִת וְהִגִּיד לַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר כִּנְנַע נִרְאָה לִי בְּבַיִת: לֹו וּצְרָה הַכֹּהֵן וּפְנֵי אֶת־הַבַּיִת בְּטָרָם יֵבֵא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הַנִּגַּע וְלֹא יִטְמֵא כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בְּבַיִת וְאַחַר כֵּן יֵבֵא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הַבַּיִת: לֹו וּרְאָה אֶת־הַנִּגַּע וְהִנֵּה הַנִּגַּע בְּקִירֵת הַבַּיִת שֶׁקְצֵרוֹתָיִךְ יִקְרָקוֹת אוֹ אֲדָמָתָיִךְ וּמְרֵאִיתוֹ שֶׁפֶל מִן־הַקִּיר: לֹח וּצָא הַכֹּהֵן מִן־הַבַּיִת אֶל־פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת וְהִסְגִּיר אֶת־הַבַּיִת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: לֹט וְשָׁב הַכֹּהֵן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וּרְאָה וְהִנֵּה פֶּשֶׁה הַנִּגַּע בְּקִירֵת הַבַּיִת: מ וּצְרָה הַכֹּהֵן וְחִלְצוּ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹךְ הַנִּגַּע וְהִשְׁלִיכוּ אֹתָהֶן אֶל־מַחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־מְקוֹם טָמֵא: מֵא וְאֶת־הַבַּיִת יִקְצַע מִבַּיִת סָבִיב וְשִׁפְכוּ אֶת־הַעֲפָר אֲשֶׁר הִקְצֹו אֶל־מַחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־מְקוֹם טָמֵא: מֵב וְלִקְחוּ אֲבָנִים אַחֲרוֹת וְהִבִּיאוּ אֶל־תַּחַת הָאֲבָנִים וְעָפָר אַחַר יִקַּח וְטַח אֶת־הַבַּיִת: מֵג וְאִם־יָשׁוּב הַנִּגַּע וַיִּפְרַח בְּבַיִת אַחַר חִלְצוֹ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים וְאַחֲרֵי הַקְּצוֹת אֶת־הַבַּיִת וְאַחֲרֵי הַטּוֹחַ: מֵד וּבֵא הַכֹּהֵן וּרְאָה וְהִנֵּה פֶּשֶׁה הַנִּגַּע בְּבַיִת צְרָעַת מִמְאֲרַת הוּא בְּבַיִת טָמֵא הוּא: מֵה וְנָתַץ אֶת־הַבַּיִת אֶת־אֲבָנָיו וְאֶת־עֲצָיו וְאֶת־כָּל־עֲפָר הַבַּיִת וְהוֹצִיֵא אֶל־מַחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־מְקוֹם טָמֵא:

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron saying: 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, the owner of the house shall come and tell the priest saying, “**Something like a plague has appeared upon my house.**” **The priest shall order the house cleared before the priest enters to examine the plague, so that nothing gin the house may become unclean; after that the priest shall enter to examine the house.** If, when he examines the plague, the plague in the walls of the house is found to consist of greenish or reddish streaks that appear to go deep into the wall, the priest shall come out of the house to the entrance of the house and close up the house for seven days. On the seventh day the priest shall return. If he sees that the plague has spread on the walls of the house, the priest shall order the stones with the plague in them to be pulled out and cast outside the city into an unclean place. The house shall be scraped inside all around, and the coating that is scraped off shall be dumped outside the city into an unclean place. The house shall be scraped inside all around and the coating that is scraped off shall be dumped outside the city in an unclean place. They shall take other stones and replace those stones with them, and take other coating and plaster the house.

If the plague again breaks out in the house after the stones have been pulled out and after the house has been scraped and replastered, the priest shall come to examine: if the plague has spread in the house, it is a malignant eruption in the house; it is unclean. The house shall be torn down -- its stones and timber and all the coating on the house -- and

taken to an unclean place outside the city.

### Rashi, Leviticus 14:36

בטרם יבא הכהן וגו' - שכל זמן שאין כהן נזקק לו, אין שם תורת טומאה:

*Before the priest enters to examine the plague -- As long as the priest is not engaged with him, there is no law of impurity.*

### Midrash Sifra, Metzora, 5:10

נגע מה תלמוד לומר כנגע אפילו תלמיד חכם ויודע שהוא נגע וודאי לא יגזור ויאמר נגע נראה לי בבית אלא כנגע נראה לי בבית

Why does it say, "something like a plague," [it should say "a plague"]? Even if someone is a sage, and knows for certain that it is an impure plague, he should not declare it such by saying "a plague has appeared upon my house." Rather, he should say "something like a plague.

### Babylonian Talmud, Moed Katan 7a-7b

משנה. רבי מאיר אומר: רואין את הנגעים (בתחילה) להקל, אבל לא להחמיר. וחכמים אומרים: לא להקל ולא להחמיר.

גמרא. תניא, רבי מאיר אומר: רואין את הנגעים להקל, אבל לא להחמיר. רבי יוסי אומר: לא להקל ולא להחמיר. שאם אתה נזקק לו להקל - נזקק לו אף להחמיר. אמר רבי: נראין דברי רבי מאיר במוסגר, ודברי רבי יוסי במוחלט. אמר רבא: בטחור - כולי עלמא לא פליגי דלא חזו ליה, בהסגר ראשון - דכולי עלמא לא פליגי דחזו ליה, כי פליגי - בהסגר שני. מר סבר: בכהן תליא מילתא, אי טחור - אמר ליה טחור, ואי טמא - שתיק. ומר סבר: +ויקרא י"ג+ לטהרו או לטמאו כתיב...

למימרא דבכהן תליא מילתא? - אין, והתניא: +ויקרא י"ג+ וביום הראות בו - יש יום שאתה רואה בו, ויש יום שאי אתה רואה בו. מכאן אמרו: חתן שנולד בו נגע - נותנין לו שבעה ימי המשתה, לו ולביתו ולכסותו. וכן ברגל, נותנין לו שבעת ימי הרגל, דברי רבי יהודה.

Mishnah: Rabbi Meir says: We examine plagues to be lenient, but not to be strict. And the sages say, neither to be lenient or strict.

Gemara: It is taught in a *braita*: Rabbi Meir says: We inspect plagues to be lenient, but to be strict. Rabbi Yossi says neither to be lenient or strict, because once you become engaged with him to be lenient you must also be engaged with him to be strict. Rebe says: It seems that Rabbi Mayer is talking about an infected person who is secluded, and Rabbi Yossi in a case of definite leprosy.

Rava says, everyone agrees that if the person is pure we don't examine him [on Yom Tov], and if he is secluded for the first time, everyone agrees that we examine him. The argue only in the case of one who is secluded for the second time. One holds [Rabbi Meir] that the matter depends on the priest: If the person is pure, the priest will tell him so, and if the person is impure the priest will remain silent. The other [Rabbi Yossi] holds that the Torah says "for pronouncing it clean or unclean" (Lev. 13:59)...

Is that to say that the matter depends on the priest? Yes. But does it not say "on the day undischored flesh appears" -- there are days that you examine it and days that you don't examine it. From here it was taught: If a groom who has a new plague, we give him the seven days of celebration, whether the plague affects him or his house or his clothing. Similarly on Yom Tov, we give [an affected person] all seven days of the holiday,

according to Rabbi Yehuda.

**Exodus 12:1-2**

א וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לֵאמֹר: ב הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רִאשׁוֹן חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first of the month of the year for you.

**Maimonides, Laws of Sanctifying the New Month 2:8-10**

ח. ואחר כך אחר שתתקיים העדות ראש בית דין אומר מקודש וכל העם עונים אחריו מקודש מקודש ואין מקדשין את החדש אלא בשלשה ואין מחשבין אלא בשלשה ואין מקדשין אלא שני ראש חודש שנראה בזמנו ואין מקדשין אלא ביום ואם קדשוהו בלילה אינו מקודש אפילו ראוהו בית דין וכל ישראל ולא אמרו בית דין מקודש עד שחשכה ליל אחד ושלשים או שנחקרו העדים ולא הספיקו בית דין לומר מקודש עד שחשכה ליל אחד ושלשים אין מקדשין אותו ויהיה החדש מעובר ולא יהיה ראש חודש אלא יום אחד ושלשים אע"פ שנראה בליל שלשים שאין הראייה קובעת אלא בית דין שאמרו מקודש הם שקובעין:

י. בית דין שקדשו את החדש בין שוגגין בין מוטעין בין אנוסים הרי זה מקודש וחייבין הכל לתקן המועדות על יום שקדשו בו אע"פ שזה ידע שטעו חייב לסמוך עליהם שאין הדבר מסור אלא להם ומי שצוה לשמור המועדות הוא צוה לסמוך עליהם שנאמר אשר תקראו אותם וכו':

8. After Rosh Chodesh has been declared [based on the testimony of witnesses], the head of the *beit din* says, "it is sanctified" and the entire nation responds "it is sanctified, it is sanctified!" We only sanctify the new moon with 3 judges, and we only calculate [if it will be visible] with three judges, and we only sanctify a month that was seen by witnesses in its proper time, and we only sanctify it in the day. If it was sanctified at night, it is not sanctified. Even if the entire *beit din* saw the new moon, and all of Israel saw it, but the *beit din* did not say "it is sanctified" before it became dark to begin the 31st day. Or if the witnesses were interrogated but the *beit din* did not have time to say "it is sanctified" before it gets dark, they cannot sanctify it. It is a "pregnant month" and Rosh Chodesh will only be one day, on the 31st, even though the new moon appeared on the night of the 30th. Because the testimony of the new month is established only by *beit din* which says "it is sanctified."

10. If a *beit din* sanctifies the month, whether they were mistaken or few in number or compelled, it is nonetheless sanctified and everyone is obligated to set holiday according to the day that *beit din* sanctified, even though it is known that they were mistaken. One must rely on them because the matter of sanctifying the new moon is only given to them, and the One Who commanded us about the holidays is the One Who commanded us to obey them, as it says, "These are the set times of the Lord, the sacred occasions, which you shall celebrate each at its appointed time" (Leviticus 23:4).

# Tazria @ the DC Beit Midrash

Monday, March 31, 2003; 28 Adar II

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Welcome to the DC Beit Midrash!

The *Chumash* (Five Books of Moses) is divided into 54 portions, which Jews read sequentially each week in services. This Shabbat, we will be reading Parshat *Tazria* from the book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus). Tonight, a member of our community will lead us in a text-study of this portion. The voices of both past and contemporary interpreters will inform our discussion.

Below you will find a summary of this week's Torah portion, along with brief biographies of the commentators cited. The presentation will be followed by *chevruta* (paired) study on a subject of your choice.

## ***This week's parsha (Torah portion): Tazria, Vayikra (Leviticus) 12:1-13:59***

*Parshat Tazria* presents the rituals of purification for a woman after childbirth and the methods for diagnosing and treating a variety of skin diseases.

(Excerpted from Harvey Fields, *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, p 120)

### ***This week's sources:***

#### **Abraham Ibn Ezra**

1092-1167

A poet, physician, philosopher, and astrologer, Ibn Ezra spent the first part of his life in native Spain. From about 1140, he resided for brief periods in France, England, Egypt, Ethiopia, Italy, and finally again in Spain, where he died. Ibn Ezra wrote a comprehensive commentary on the Torah. His interests in both science and grammar, along with his experiences as a traveler, are expressed within his commentary. He often includes discussions on mathematics, astrology, and linguistics within his explanations.  
(Excerpted from Harvey J. Fields, *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, 10-11).

#### **Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Ben Isaac)**

1040-1105

This French sage is regarded as medieval Judaism's greatest teacher. Since his death almost nine hundred years ago, Jews who study either the Torah or the Talmud invariably do so with the help of his commentary. As a young man, Rashi studied Talmud in Mayence (Mainz) and Worms. When he was about twenty-five, he returned to Troyes, France and opened his own Jewish school. However, Rashi refused to draw a salary for his work, earning his living instead from several vineyards that he owned. The last years of his life were marred by the anti-semitic Crusades that swept over France and Germany starting in 1096. In his Torah commentary, Rashi explains terms both on the basis of *peshat* (literal meaning) and *derash* (homiletical or sermonic meaning). He also makes use of words in his vernacular, Old French, for clarification. Rashi's Torah commentary achieved such wide acceptance that some Jews consider it mandatory to review the weekly Torah portion with his commentary. In 1475, Rashi's commentary became the first book printed in Hebrew even before the Torah itself was.

(Excerpted from Fields, *TCFOT*, p 10-12, and Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy*, p 180-183)

#### **Midrash Sifra**

Midrash c. 300-1200

*Midrash* comes from a Hebrew root which means "to search out, to investigate." Thus, this is a Jewish method of exegesis which sought to discover deeper meanings in the text beyond the literal one. Since the rabbis greatly venerated every letter of the Hebrew Scriptures as of Divine origin, every detail was seen to be significant. *Midrash Sifra* is a comprehensive legal commentary on *Vayikra* (Leviticus). The core of this text developed in the mid-3rd century as a critique and commentary of the Mishnah, although subsequent additions and editing went on for some time afterwards.

#### **Moed Katan**

Talmud c. 500

Moed Katan is the tractate of the Talmud concerned with the laws regarding minor festivals. Among other things, it takes up the issue of which activities are permissible during the intermediate days of Passover and Succoth.

#### **Pesachim**

Talmud c. 500

Pesachim (Paschal lambs, "Passover") is the tractate of the Talmud that deals with the laws of Pesach: it deals with the laws of matzah and maror ("bitter herbs"), and also with the prohibition of hametz ("leavened matter") in all its aspects, and also with the

(over)

detailed laws of the Paschal sacrifice. It also deals with the laws of Pesach Sheni. One chapter is devoted to the order of service on Pesach eve. (Adapted from Steinsaltz, Talmud Reference Guide, p. 40).

### **Rambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon)/Maimonides**

**1135-1204**

Maimonides was the first person to write a systematic code of all Jewish law, the *Mishneh Torah*; he produced one of the great philosophic statements of Judaism, *The Guide to the Perplexed*; published a commentary on the entire Mishna; served as physician to the sultan of Egypt; wrote numerous books on medicine; and, in his spare time, served as leader of Cairo's Jewish community. Despite sometimes intense opposition, the *Mishneh Torah* became a standard guide to Jewish practice: It later served as the model for the *Shulkhan Arukh*, the sixteenth century code of Jewish law that many Jews still regard as authoritative. (adapted from [www.us-israel.org/biography/Maimonides](http://www.us-israel.org/biography/Maimonides))

### ***This week's teacher:***

**Elliot Kaplowitz**

**EKaplowitz@hillel.org**

Elliot graduated from Brandeis, where he earned a BA and MA in Near Eastern and Judaic Studies. He currently serves as the Iyyun ("to dive deeply into texts") Fellow at Hillel's International Center. Next year he will begin learning at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, a Modern Orthodox Rabbinical School in New York.

### ***This week's food sponsor:***

Anonymous

### ***This week's food shlepper:***

Ethan Merlin

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Wanna teach, think about teaching, or suggest a teacher? [jnovey@post.harvard.edu](mailto:jnovey@post.harvard.edu)

Wanna sponsor food? [Ariellabock@hotmail.com](mailto:Ariellabock@hotmail.com)

Questions, feedback, wanna join our email list? Anything else? Email [DCBeitMidrash@hotmail.com](mailto:DCBeitMidrash@hotmail.com)

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