



The Parasha with Rabbi Dweck

Highlights for

Tazria-Metsora: Healing Through Gratitude

SUMMARY

Parshiot Tazria and *Metsora* deal with *tsara'at*—a miraculous affliction loosely translated as leprosy but bearing no relation to the modern disease. The *Hakhamim* identify its primary cause as *lashon hara*: the evil language. But *lashon hara* is not mere gossip—it is a fundamentally distorted way of seeing and framing the world, always through a negative lens. This week's class explores how that distortion corrodes individuals and society alike, why the Torah's remedy involves isolation and reflection, and how the antidote begins with something deceptively simple: gratitude.

tsara'at: A Miraculous Signal

Tazria-Metsora centres on *tsara'at*, an affliction that manifested—in the times of the *Beit Hamikdash*—as lesions on skin, stains on clothing, and discolourations on the walls of homes. It was not a natural illness but a divine signal: something was spiritually and morally wrong with the person affected. The *Hakhamim*, led by the Rambam, identify its primary cause as *lashon hara*. The precedent is Miriam (Numbers 12), who spoke about her brother Moshe without malice—yet the frame she placed him in was negative, and she was immediately struck with *tsara'at*. The lesson is stark: the frame matters as much as the intention.

What *Lashon Hara* Actually Is

Lashon hara is distinct from *rekhilut*—the general prohibition on spreading private information. *Lashon hara* is *slanting*: taking a world that contains both positives and negatives and insisting on presenting it in purely negative terms. The facts are usually true—but the frame is always dark. The Rambam in the end of *Hilkhos Tsara'at* calls it a terrible transgression, closely tied to *leitsanut*—cynicism. The Gemara in Megillah 25b states *kol leitsanut*

asura: all cynicism is forbidden, because cynicism is inherently destructive. It tears down in moments what has taken years to build, and corrupts the way an entire society thinks and speaks.

'All cynicism is prohibited. A person is not allowed to look at the world and speak about it through a cynical lens—because cynicism destroys.'

The Spreading Sickness—and the Quarantine

The Rambam describes *tsara'at* as a staged warning: it moves outward-in, from the walls of the home to clothing to the body itself. A key sign is that it is *malignant*—it expands. Once declared *tame'* by the *kohen*, the *Metsora* was sent outside the encampment—not primarily because he was contagious, but because his speech was infecting the communal fabric. He needed isolation and silence to reconsider how he engaged with the world. The *Hakhamim* say *lashon hara* kills three: the speaker, the

listener, and the one spoken about.

Today's Detox—and the Antidote

We no longer have the miraculous *tsara'at*, but the illness is alive. Today our 'society' includes the social media accounts we follow, the news we consume, the commentators who fill our minds daily. When those frames are systematically negative, it makes us ill. The Torah's pre-

scription is a detox: scrutinise who and what you are listening to; observe conversations before reflexively joining them.

The antidote is not rosy optimism—it is *seeing things whole*. The practical starting point is gratitude. When we push ourselves to ask what in our lives is genuinely good, we begin to reorient the mind. Consider what you would give to have back everything you currently have, if you lost it. That reframing does not erase difficulty; it contextualises it—and that, says Rabbi Dweck, is what heals us.

Questions for the Table

1. **Lashon Hara as Framing:** The Torah's concern with *lashon hara* is not that facts are false, but that the frame is always negative. Where in your life—in conversation, in news consumption, in how you talk about others—do you notice the pull towards negative framing?
2. **The Media Detox:** Rabbi Dweck applies the *Metsora's* quarantine to our relationship with social media and news. What would it look like to audit and, if necessary, detox from the voices that fill your mind? What would you be willing to step away from?
3. **Gratitude as Medicine:** The class ends with gratitude as the antidote to a cynical orientation. Is gratitude something you practise deliberately? How might intentional gratitude—for people, circumstances, and the world—change the way you speak?

About Rabbi Joseph Dweck: Rabbi Dweck has held rabbinic leadership roles in the US and the UK. He is the Rosh Bet Midrash of TheHabura.com and the Rabbi Levy Chair of Jewish Wisdom at the London School of Jewish Studies. For more, visit the Office of Rabbi Dweck (rabbijosephdweck.com).

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