

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators presents

# An Interactive PARSHA EXPERIENCE



**Parsha:** Metzora

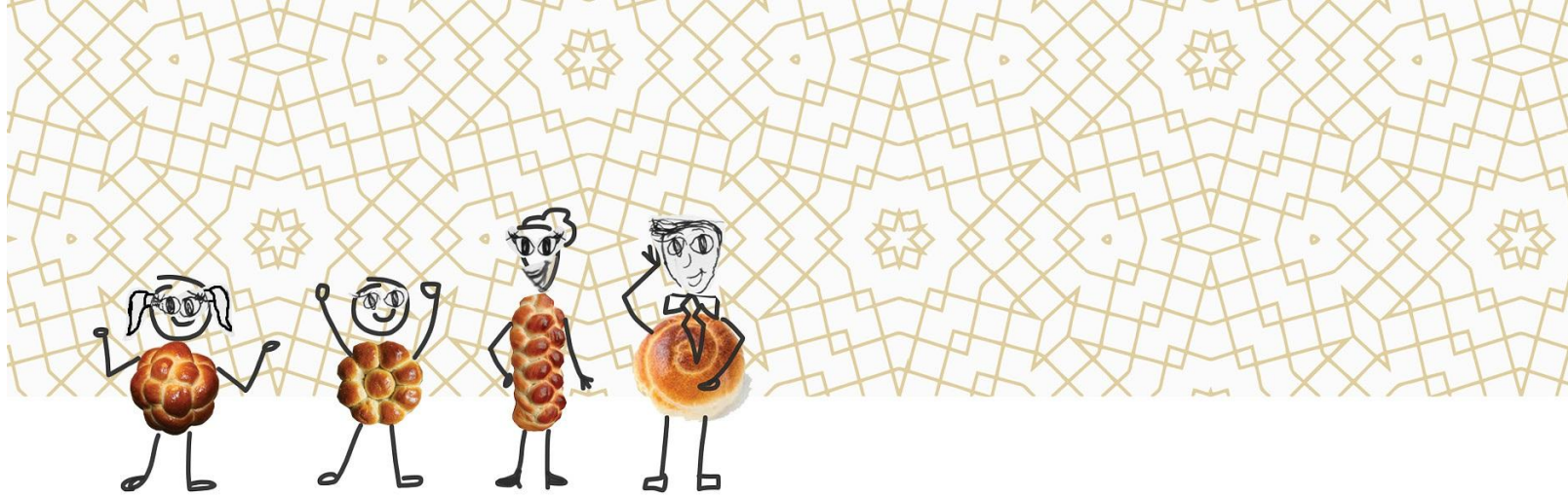
**Title:** Tzara'at and the Exodus Story: Connections, Community and a bundle of Hyssop

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## The Parsha at First Glance

### Spotlight on the Parsha:

This week's *parsha*, *Metzora*, is one of several in *Sefer Vayikra* which deals with things that seem rather strange and should no longer concern us today. After all, no one gets *tzara'at* (a skin disease similar to leprosy) any more, and we don't have a Temple to which we go to in order to bring sin offerings. This *parsha* (as



well as last week's parsha - *Tazria*) includes many peculiar details about tzara'at, what sacrifices to bring and what to do if the walls of one's house get tzara'at. And yet... there are some interesting lessons to be learned from the laws of tzara'at in this week's parsha that certainly are relevant to us today... especially the week before *Pesach*.

### Zooming In:

First, we will take a look at several strange details about tzara'at. Each one is a 'clue' that might help us better understand what this is all about... but you will have to be detectives! See if you can figure out what the four clues below all have in common (besides for tzara'at, of course!).

**Note:** Consider cutting out each of the clues and giving them to different members of the group to read aloud and consider.

#### Clue #1: Miriam

The only person in the whole Torah who actually gets tzara'at is Miriam. In Bamidbar 12:12, just after we are told that Miriam is now covered in tzara'at, Aharon says about his sister, "Don't let her be like one who is dead...". And so, Moshe prays on her behalf to be healed.

#### Clue #2: The "grandfather" of ritual impurities

There are different levels of ritual impurity (טומאה/*tum'ah*). Of the many different ways and things that can become impure, there are only two, which have the highest level of ritual impurity, which are called the 'grandfather' of ritual impurities (אבי אבות הטומאה). These two are someone with tzara'at and a dead body.





### Clue #3: White scales

When someone has tzara'at, they are covered in white scales. They appear white, almost like someone who is bloodless.

### Clue #4: "נגע"/Nega

The word נגע/*nega* (plague or a strike) appears only two times in the entire Torah. You guessed it, one time is our parsha (14:3), when it describes the healing of someone's nega tzara'at. Interestingly, the other time the word appears is in reference to the 10th plague in Egypt (the word מכה/*makah* is usually used for the other plagues) - which is the death of the first born of the Egyptians.

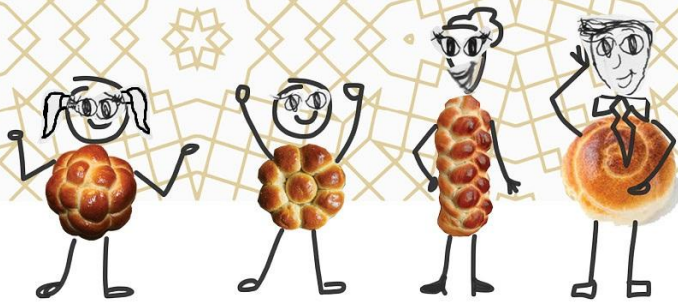
## Questions for Consideration:

- So, detectives, what do all four clues seem to have in common? Based on these four clues, what might you compare tzara'at to?

[O.K., so here is the answer... did you notice that 'death' was a common thread?]

- But now we have another question to ask: In what way is someone with tzara'at 'dead'? After all, they can be purified from the affliction and then resume their life afterwards!? Why would there be these strong connections between death and tzara'at?

*Rabbi David Fohrman and the medieval commentator Ramban team up to try and answer this last question. Keep reading...*



## The Parsha Through Another Lens

### Torah Match-up:

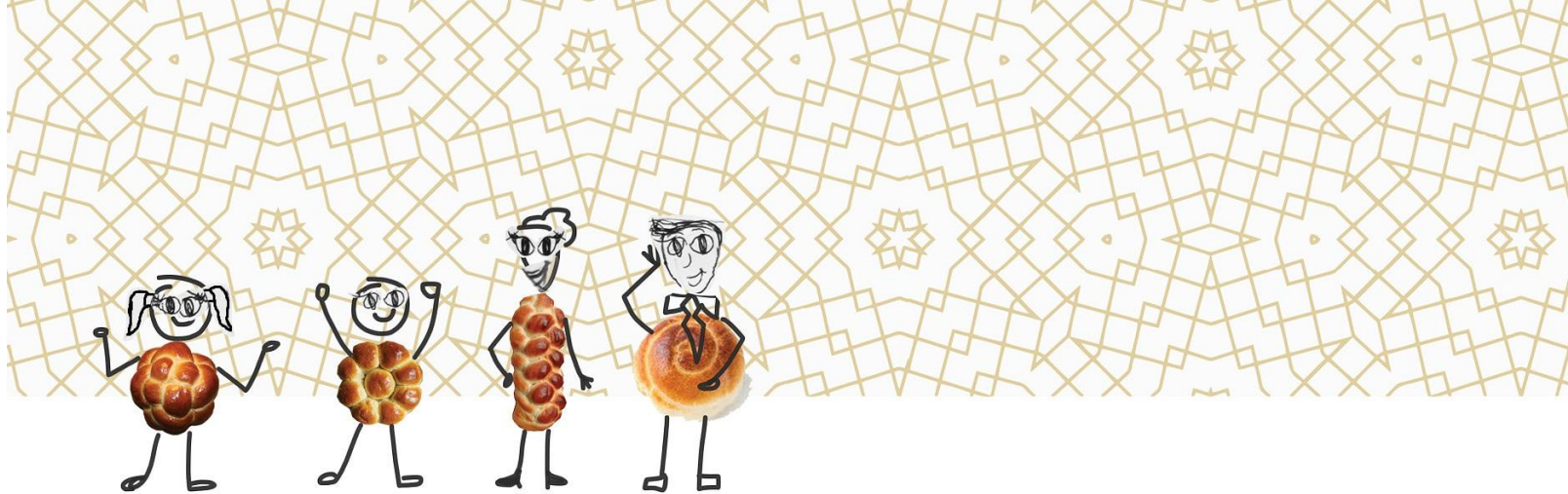
The Ramban and Rabbi David Fohrman notice some interesting similarities between the purification process for someone with tzara'at and the events that took place just before and during the exodus story. Check out the 'Torah Match-up' below to see this for yourselves.

**Instructions:** See if you can match up the following elements from the exodus story with elements from the tzara'at purification process.

**Note:** The matching cards below could be cut out and cut in half, giving participants the chance to have to physically match up the connections between the Pesach story and tzara'at. Someone could read a "Pesach" card aloud and the other participants could try to match it with the tzara'at card that they are holding.

Pesach/Exodus story	Tzara'at
The Israelites paint the wooden lintels (doorposts) of their homes with the blood of a sacrifice on the night of the 10th plague.	A piece of cedar wood is brought by the person afflicted with tzara'at and it gets dipped in the blood of a sacrifice as part of the purification process.

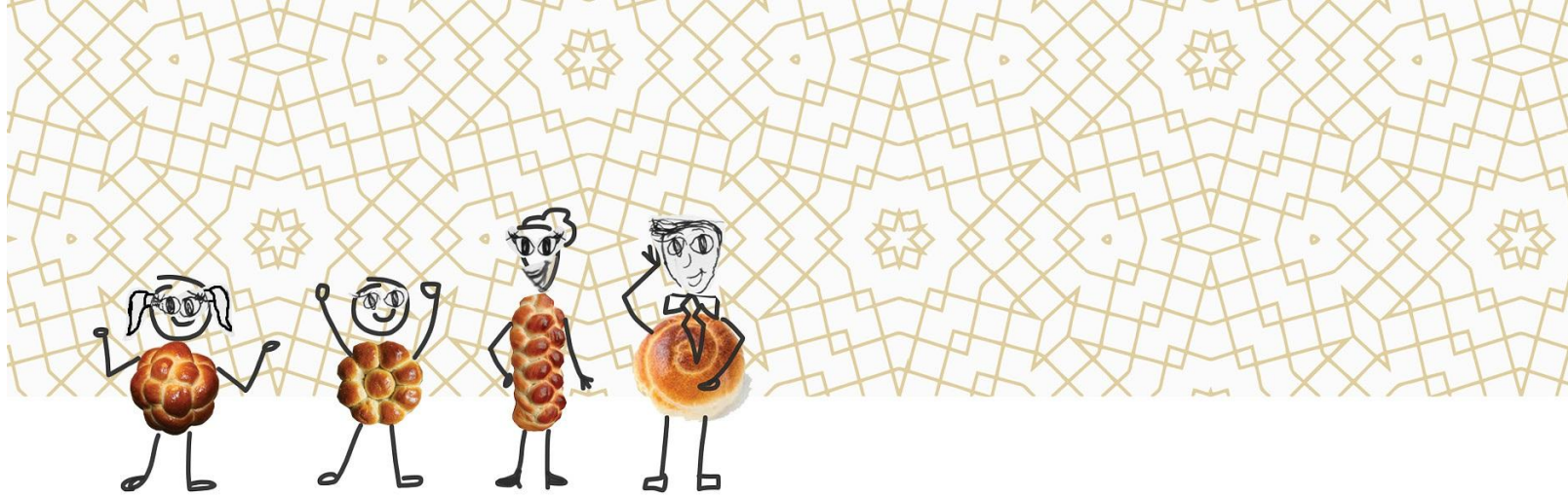




Pesach/Exodus story	Tzara'at
<p>The first born of the Egyptian families are killed in the 10th plague, but the 'corresponding' Jewish first born are allowed to live and sent out of Egypt (אתכם מזה ישלח - "He will send you out from here" - Exodus 11:1).</p>	<p>Two birds are brought as part of the purification process; one bird is killed while the other bird is sent away alive (את הציפור החיה ושלח - "And send away the live bird" - Leviticus 14:7).</p>

Pesach/Exodus story	Tzara'at
<p>The Israelites use a bundle of hyssop (אזוב)* to paint the blood on their doorposts - Exodus 12:22.</p> <p>*The exodus story and the tzara'at purification ritual are the only two times in the Torah where hyssop is mentioned.</p>	<p>As part of the purification process, the person afflicted with tzara'at would have to bring a bundle of hyssop (אזוב)* which would be dipped in blood.</p>

Pesach/Exodus story	Tzara'at
<p>As part of our commemoration of the exodus from Egypt, Jews take all <i>hametz</i> (leavened food products) out of their home for seven days.</p>	<p>As part of the purification process, a person with tzara'at would have to remove him or herself from the entire encampment and wait for seven days before returning back home.</p>



## Tying It All Together:

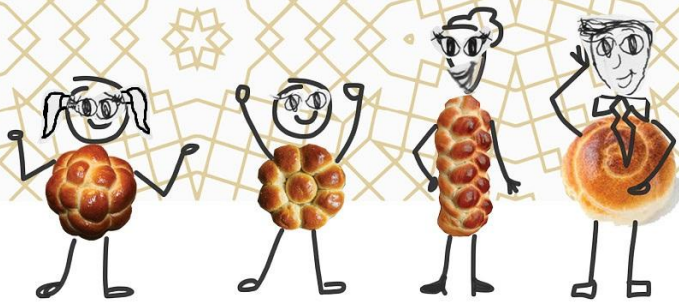
There are two more important details which you might need to be reminded of before you can try to make sense of all these seemingly strange connections.

1. Why does someone get tzara'at? According to the Torah, for speaking *lashon hara* (gossip, spreading rumors, slandering someone). Rabbinic commentators also suggest that when someone acts in a haughty manner, as if they were better than others, s/he would get tzara'at.
2. In addition to our freedom, another core element that we are celebrating on Pesach is that this is when we became a nation - a cohesive people. All of the Israelites were spared from the plagues, freed together and were united by God's covenant at Mt. Sinai.

Finally, let's see if we can bring this all together. Read the 'tying it all together' statement below and use the questions beneath it to help you fill in the dots.

**Tying it all together: In the Torah, when someone gossips about someone in their community or acts haughtily... they get afflicted with tzara'at... which makes them appear dead and have the impurity status of someone who died... then they have to wait for seven days away from community... they come back into the encampment but then have to perform a purification ritual... which has many similarities to the exodus story... which was the time when the Israelites became a unified people...**

1. When someone gossips about someone in their community or acts haughtily, how would you describe their relationship with the people around them?
2. Why do you think it might be a suitable punishment for someone who speaks lashon hara or acts haughtily to appear to be dead and have to be removed from their society (for seven days)?



3. When someone is brought back into their community, why would they have to perform a ritual which will remind them of the exodus story? What do you think the strange purification ritual is supposed to make them think or feel?
4. How might the strange connections between tzara'at and the exodus story - which you just uncovered! - impact the way you celebrate Pesach next week?

**Shabbat Shalom!**