



March 27 - April 2, 2022 כ"ד אדר ב' - א' ניסן תשפ"ב



בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

In the Torah, people can be either טָמֵא (tamei, impure) or טָהוֹר (tahor, pure). This can mean one of two things. It can be a way to describe a person's character. If a person is kind and good, we sometimes call that person "pure of heart" or we say they have a pure character.

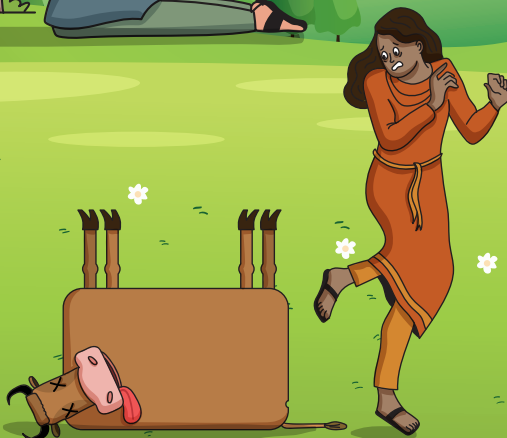
But purity and impurity can also be something much more technical, triggered by something outside a person, unrelated to a person's heart or character. For example:



You could become tamei by coming in contact with a dead body. Our rabbis call this אָבִי אַבוֹת הַטְּמֵאָה (avi avot ha-tum'ah), best translated as "the granddaddy of all impurity."



You could also become tamei through certain unusual things happening in your body, like having a kind of skin disease called צִרְעָת (tzara'at). This kind of tum'ah is the topic of our parashah.



You could even become tamei by coming in contact with someone or something tamei (like someone else who's tamei or a dead animal).

Tum'ah mattered a lot in the מִשְׁכַּן (mishkan, sanctuary for God in the wilderness). The כֹּהֲנִים (kohanim, priests) had to be extra careful not to become tamei, because no one tamei could enter the mishkan (or, later in time, the Beit Ha-Mikdash). Someone tamei also couldn't eat or touch certain holy foods, like sacrifices or gifts for the kohanim.

Does this all still apply today? Yes, but because there's no Beit Ha-Mikdash, it's not like it was in the Torah. Still, we do have some halakhot that can be traced back to טְהוּרָה/טְמֵאָה (tum'ah/taharah, impurity/purity) practices (see the הֲלָכָה/Halakhah section, p. 6).



מה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

We no longer know what blemishes really are צָרַעַת (tzara'at), and we're even not sure if it exists at all anymore. But if you lived in the time of the Torah...

You would become טָמֵא (tamei, impure) if you had tzara'at. You would have to stay alone, outside of the community, with your hair uncovered and clothes torn.



The כֹּהֵן (kohen, priest) would determine whether you had tzara'at or not, based on the rules in our parashah



If you had a white נֶגַע (nega, wound) on your body, and the hair on the nega turned white, and it appeared deeper than your skin, it was likely tzara'at.

Sometimes it wasn't obvious! The kohen would quarantine you, and then check the signs again later.



If your whole body was covered in this kind of white all over, you would actually be טָהוֹר (tahor, pure)!



Tzara'at could appear in your hair or beard, and that would be called a נֶתֶק (netek).



Your clothing could get tzara'at, too. It would look like red or green staining in the fabric.

Stay tuned for next week where we learn how you could become tahor again after having a nega.



מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Our parashah opens with a discussion of what happens when a woman gives birth:

Midrashim are ideas or stories that explain the Torah. They often come from listening very carefully to what the Torah says and how it says it. Here, we will look for what clues this midrash sees in the Torah's words, and try to understand its messages.

Vayikra 12:2

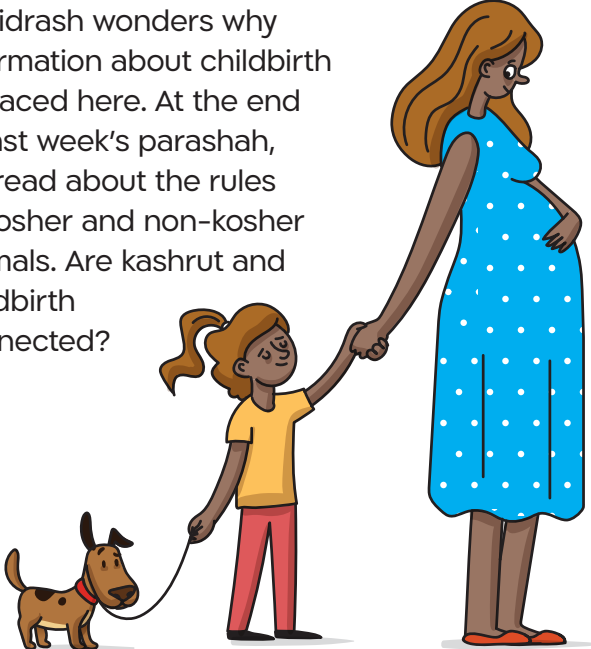
Speak to Benei Yisrael: when a woman becomes pregnant and gives birth...

ויקרא יב:ב

דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר
אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וַיֵּלְדָה...

This kind of question has a special name: פְּרָשִׁיּוֹת (semikhut parashiyyot). It's what happens when we wonder about the connection between side-by-side sections of the Torah. Sometimes, we can learn a lesson from the order that things are told. One well-known example is in last week's parashah, which goes straight from the deaths of Nadav and Avihu to forbidding the kohanim from drinking wine. An explanation, based on semikhut parashiyyot, is that what Nadav and Avihu did wrong was drink wine before going to the mishkan.

A midrash wonders why information about childbirth is placed here. At the end of last week's parashah, we read about the rules of kosher and non-kosher animals. Are kashrut and childbirth connected?



Vayikra Rabbah 14:1

Rabbi Simlai said: People were created after animals, and the laws for people also come after the laws for animals. That's why it says "This is the law about animals..." (Vayikra 11:46), and only afterwards, "When a woman becomes pregnant..." (Vayikra 12:2).

ויקרא רבה יד:א

אמר רבי שמלאי, בשם שיצירתו של אדם אחר בהמה חיה ועוף, כן תורתו אחר בהמה חיה ועוף, הדין הוא דכתיב (ויקרא יא, מו): זאת תורת הבהמה, ואחר כן אשה כי תזריע.

According to Rabbi Simlai, the Torah's rules appear in this particular order in order to keep us humble. We human beings might think (and act!) like we are the center of the universe, but in fact we came last in the creation story. Similarly, the rules that govern our human lives come **after** the rules about animals.



Send us your thoughts or questions from learning the parashah. We'll write back to you, and some will get published in future issues of Devash! Write to us at devash@hadar.org

- ◆ Does being last in line mean we're least important? Or is it possible that God saved the best for last? We thought about these questions back in Devash for Bereishit. Could these two ideas work together? Which one speaks to you more?
- ◆ How can we act with more humility when it comes to our interaction with the rest of creation?



פְּרָשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

צָרַעַת (tzara'at) could affect your body, and also your clothes:

Vayikra 13:47

When a tzara'at wound occurs in wool or linen fabric...

ויקרא יג:מז

וְהִבְגֵּד בִּי־יְהִיֶּה בּוֹ נֹגַע צָרַעַת בְּבֶגֶד צֹמֵר אוֹ בְּבֶגֶד פְּשָׁתִים:

Our פְּרִשְׁנָיִם (parshanim, commentators) wondered about the kinds of tzara'at that aren't on the human body (in next week's parashah we'll read about houses that get tzara'at). Where do they come from, and what do they mean?



Ralbag

Tzara'at on these objects is caused by moisture and heat... this causes them to be damaged and destroyed... the discoloration is what you'd find in moldy places, like water near a dump, where things turn green or red.

רלב"ג

וענין הצרעת באלו הדברים הוא שיגבר בהם הלחות הנכרי והחם הנכרי... באפן שידרכו אל הפלוי והפסד ההרפכה... כמו זה העפוש הוא הירק או האדם; כבר תמצא זה במקומות העפוישים כמו מימי האשפות.



Sforno

There is no doubt that this is supernatural... This miracle can sometimes strike clothing or houses, in order to make their owners aware of their sins...

And all this is because of God's compassion for us...

But since we never reached a spiritual level worthy of this kind of communication from God, there is no record of any house ever having tzara'at.

ספורנו

אין ספק בו שלא יהיה זה בטבע בשום פנים... אמנם העיד הפתוב שלפעמים יהיה זה כפלא בבגדים ובבתים, וזה להעיר און הבעלים על עברות שבידם...

וכל זה בחמלת ה' על עמו...

וכאשר לא עלו הדורות למדרגה ראויה לחמלה זו, אין זכרון לראשונים שנמצאו לעולם נגעי בתים.



- ◆ When you read our parashah, does tzara'at on clothing (or anywhere) seem natural, like Ralbag suggests, or supernatural, like Sforno thinks? What evidence can you find?
- ◆ Is it possible for Ralbag and Sforno to both be right?
- ◆ What do you think of Sforno's idea? How would you act differently if you knew that God could give you physical feedback on your actions, in the form of a rash on your skin or weird stuff growing on your clothing or home? Why would that be an example of God's compassion?



הַלְכָּה • Halakhah



How does **טִמְאָה** (tum'ah, impurity) connect to our lives?

One important way is in **the mitzvah of נְטִילַת יָדַיִם (netilat yadayim)!**

Back in the time of the mishkan and the Beit Ha-Mikdash, the **כֹּהֲנִים** (kohanim, priests) received special gifts called **תְּרוּמָה** (terumah). Terumah had a holy status, and in order to be sure they weren't touching it with hands that were **טָמֵא** (tamei, impure), the kohanim had to wash before eating it.

According to the Gemara, this led to the rule that **all** people should wash their hands before eating bread. This widespread practice would ensure that the kohanim would follow the rules (Talmud Bavli Hullin 106a).

The concerns about tum'ah and eating have changed over time, but the mitzvah of netilat yadayim remains. Here are some specifics:

What blessing should you make?

Blessed are You, God our Lord, Ruler of the world, Who has made us holy with God's commandments, and commanded us about washing hands.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.

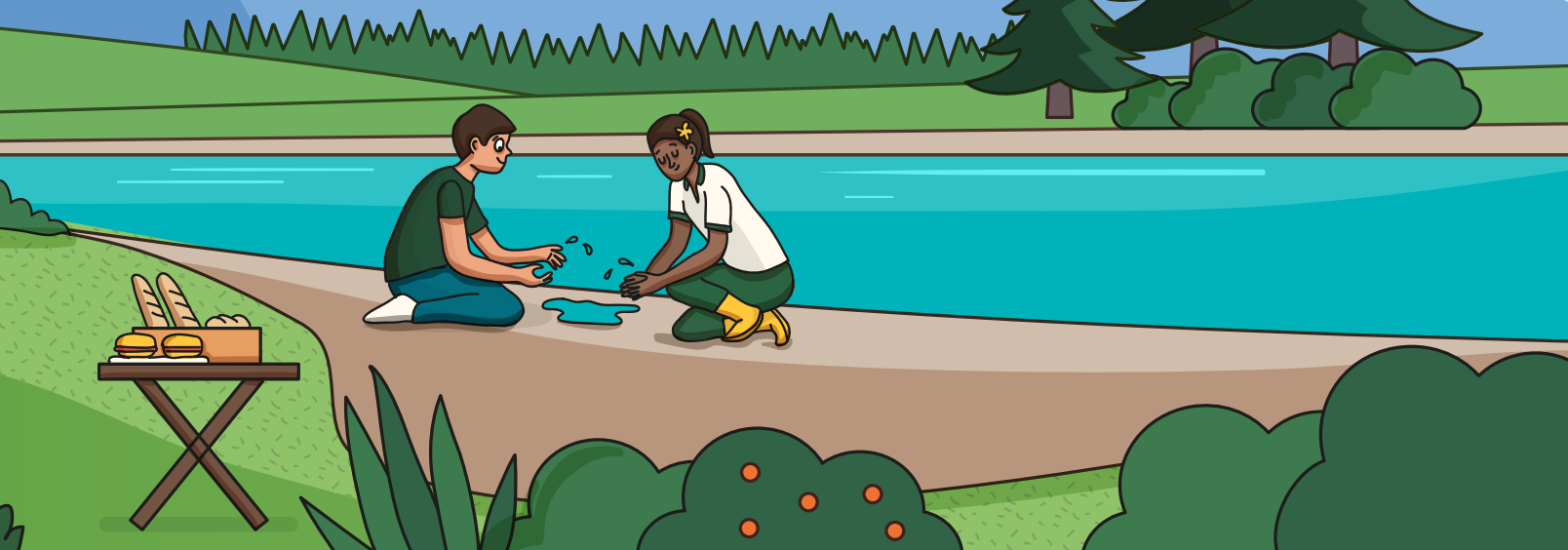




- ◆ Netilat yadayim is done before eating bread, and also when waking up in the morning, as preparation for prayer (Talmud Bavli Berakhot 15a).
- ◆ For most mitzvot, a blessing is said before doing the action. However, netilat yadayim is different. It's common to say the blessing after you wash your hands but before or while drying them (Mishnah Berurah 158:41).



- ◆ The Shulhan Arukh says you should pour the water on your hands with an item that is supposed to hold water (Orah Hayyim 159:4). So use a cup rather than a baseball cap! You can also dip your hands into a natural body of water, like a spring or mikveh (Talmud Bavli Hullin 106).
- ◆ How many pours? There are different customs! The Shulhan Arukh says to wash each hand three times in the morning (Orah Hayyim 4:2). Before bread, the most common practice is two times on each hand, with some people adding a third pour. Mishnah Berurah (OH 160:66) writes: "if you pour an entire רביעית (revi'it, around 3-4 ounces), once on each hand, they also become tahor."





NOTE: This is the division for normal years, and the questions are organized according to this division. But this year aliyot 6 and 7 are combined into one alivah in shul. See page 10 to find out why!

aliyot:

- 1) Vayikra 12:1 to 13:5
- 2) 13:6 to 13:17
- 3) 13:18 to 13:23
- 4) 13:24 to 13:28
- 5) 13:29 to 13:39
- 6) 13:40 to 13:54
- 7) 13:55 to 13:59

שְׂאֵלוֹת הַשְּׁבוּי • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. **The answers to the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.**

Good luck!

1 What does a person do if it looks like they have **צָרַעַת** (tzara'at), but the rash is only on the surface, and their hair isn't white?

2 What happens to a person if their **WHOLE** body is covered in tzara'at?

3 What **מַכָּה** (makkah, plague) from Egypt appears in this week's parashah?

4 If you get a burn, which colors might your skin turn if you have tzara'at?



5 What Hebrew word is used to describe tzara'at in someone's hair or beard?

6 Where must someone who has tzara'at live?

7 What happens to clothing if the tzara'at reappears after it is cut out, and the clothing is washed and quarantined?

8 How many times does the phrase **שִׁבְעַת יָמִים** (shivat yamim, seven days) appear in our parashah?

9 How many different musical notes appear on the word **הַכֹּהֵן** (ha-kohen, the priest) in our parashah?

10 What two colors can tzara'at be in clothing?

Look for the answers on page 12!



קְרִיאַת הַתּוֹרָה • Torah Reading

Hey, remember when we talked about certain letters in the Torah that are small? Well, there are some big ones too! Check out this one from this week's parashah:

Vayikra 13:33

And he shall shave

ויקרא יג:לג
וְהִתְגַּלַּח

That's right, the gimmel is bigger than the other letters! In most of our Torah scrolls there are 11 letters like this in the Torah. It is a very old tradition and there is no agreement on the reason for this. But each place where it happens leads people to wonder why.

In our parashah, we talk about the different ways you figure out if you have צָרַעַת (tzara'at). One of the things you might get is a spot of discolored hair on your head or your beard. Sometimes, to figure out if the discolored hair is actually tzara'at, the Torah says you have to use a razor to shave off all the hair on your head and beard, except for the part with the disease.

But the author of the Meshekh Hokhmah points out that the Torah tells us elsewhere that this is often forbidden! If you are a נַזִּיר (nazir) or נְזִירָה (nezirah), someone who has promised to be extra holy, you aren't allowed to cut your hair at all (see Bemidbar 6). If you are a man with a beard, you aren't supposed to shave it with a razor (see Vayikra 19). And if you are a כֹּהֵן (kohen, priest), you are extra warned never to shave your beard with a razor (see Vayikra 21)!

The Meshekh Hokhmah says that the big gimmel here is meant to make clear: we don't care if you are a man with a beard, a nezirah, or a kohen. Figuring out whether this is tzara'at is more important than any of those other things, so get out your razor and scissors and cut that hair off!

Why do you think answering the tzara'at uncertainty is more important than those other rules?

Did you ever see someone write a message in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS TO MAKE SURE YOU GOT THE POINT? Seems like the Torah does that too!





מְנוּחָה • Customs

Three Sifrei Torah Again!

Back at Parashat Miketz, we took out three Torah scrolls. Heads up, this is happening again this week!



SCROLL #1:

We read our parashah, Tazria. Instead of dividing it into seven aliyot, like we normally would, we combine the last two aliyot into one long one. So that takes up six aliyot.



SCROLL #2:

Since this Shabbat is also Rosh Hodesh, we read the section from Parashat Pinhas that talks about the sacrifices on these days. This is aliyah number seven.

SCROLL #3:

We read the section for Parashat Ha-Hodesh which gets us ready for Pesah. (We talked about this special reading in Devash for Vayakhel). This aliyah is the מַפְטִיר (maftir) and goes to the person reading the הַפְּטָרָה (haftarah), the special section from נְבִיאִים (Nevi'im, the Prophets), that we read each week.



▶▶▶ Hope you enjoy this week's three-Torah parade!



רִמָּע שֶׁל עֵבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Vayikra 13:4

But if it is a white discoloration on the skin of their 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.

ויקרא יג:ד

וְאִם־בִּהְרֹת לְבִנָּה הוּא בְּעוֹר
בְּשָׂרוֹ וְעֵמֶק אֵין־מְרָאָה מִן־הָעוֹר
וְשַׁעֲרָה לֹא־הָפִיךְ לָבָן וְהַסְּגִיר
הַבִּהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּגַע שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

לְהַסְּגִיר (שָׂרֵשׁ ס.ג.ר.)



- ◆ To turn someone in (like to the authorities)
- ◆ To isolate (le-hasgir)





דְּבָרָה שֶׁל דֵּינָא • One-Minute Debate

How to play:

Here is a topic for debate along with some suggested arguments, but feel free to come up with your own.

- ◆ Assign people to the "true" or "false" sides.
- ◆ Each side gets 30 seconds to make their case.
- ◆ At the end, the group votes on a winner.

Debate: being in quarantine for צָרְעָת (tzara'at) wouldn't be so bad.

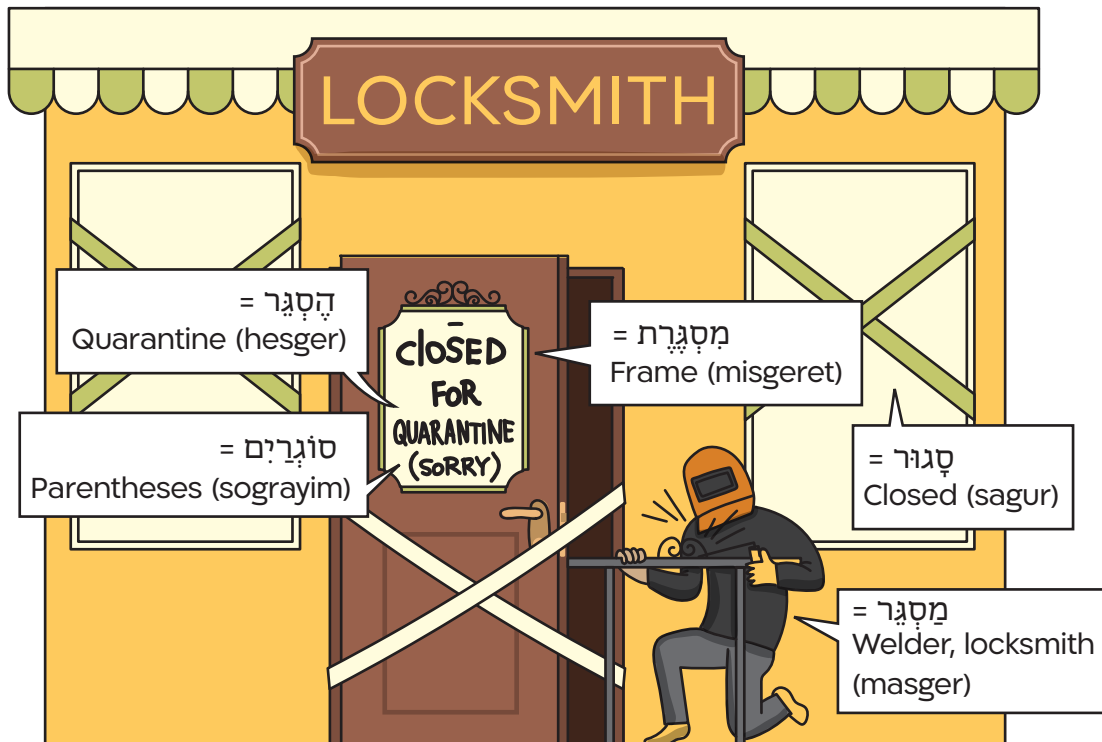


True!

- ◆ No annoying siblings around to touch your stuff!
- ◆ It's a way to protect the community and contain the tum'ah so it doesn't keep spreading.

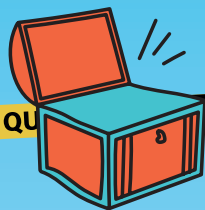
False!

- ◆ Being all alone away from your family and community would be isolating and lonely.
- ◆ Can you imagine quarantine without any electronics?
- ◆ How many hikes can you take in the desert? After a while, all that sand would get pretty boring.



Find the Word!

After Benei Yisrael leave מִצְרַיִם (Mitzrayim, Egypt), Pharaoh uses a word from this שָׁרֵשׁ (shoresh, root) to describe the difficult situation that Benei Yisrael were facing at the יַם סוּף (Yam Suf, Reed Sea). Can you find this word in Shemot 14?



QUARANTINE QUARANTINE QUARANTINE

קֶהָהָ • What's Going On Here?

When a person had **צָרַעַת** (tzara'at), they needed to live outside the community (Vayikra 13:46). Why was this necessary?

Hazal explain that one of the causes of tzara'at was speaking **לְשׁוֹן הָרַע** (lashon hara, gossip and slander). By speaking improperly, a person might have made other people feel ashamed and alone. So tzara'at makes them get separated, too. The punishment fits the crime (Arakhin 16b).



Bekhor Shor says the person had to live alone to make sure that they didn't spread tzara'at to other people.

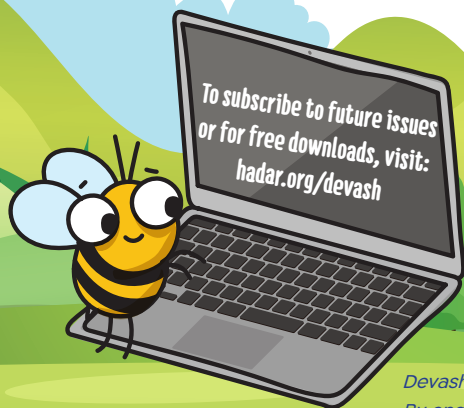
It's likely that what was contagious was the person's **טִמְאָה** (tum'ah, impurity), not their tzara'at (see page 1). A person with tzara'at could spread tum'ah to other things or people under the same roof, so that could explain the need for isolation.



QUARANTINE QUARANTINE QUARANTINE

Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Quarantine for seven days (13:4)
2. They are טָהוֹר (tahor, pure) (13:12-13)
3. שְׁחִין (sh'hin, boils) (13:18-23)
4. Reddish white or just white (13:24)
5. נֶטֶק (netek) (13:30)
6. Outside of the camp (13:46)
7. It is burned (13:57)
8. Nine
9. 14! (sof pasuk; tip'ha; zakeif katan; munah; tevir; zarka; kadma; pashta; rev'i'i; etnahta; pazeir; azla; darga; segol—we will learn about more of these in future editions of Devash)
10. יֵרַקְרַק (yerakrak, greenish) or אֲדָמָדָם (adamdam, reddish) (13:49)



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