

## Parshas Tazria

# Man’s Standing in the Universe

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*The name of this week’s Torah portion is Tazria. Seemingly, this name does not express the essence of the parsha. This Sicha delves into the difference between man and beast and discovers the reason why man was created with a proclivity towards evil.*

This week’s Torah portion, *Parshas Tazria*, opens with the following statement:

### Text 1

And the Lord spoke to Moshe saying: “Speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘If a woman conceives and gives birth to a male, she shall be unclean for seven days; as [in] the days of her menstrual flow, she shall be unclean.’”

*Vayikra 12:1-2*

As can be observed, the name of the *parsha* (Torah portion) is not based on its opening word, “*isha*,” (woman) but on the word “*tazria*,” meaning to conceive.

This designation is curious though, as names are not arbitrary, but are expressive of the essential character of the entity. This being the case, the name *Tazria* must be expressive of an essential theme of the *parsha*.

### What’s in a name?

The above idea can be understood through the following insight found in *Chassidic* thought:

### Text 2

Now, although the name “*even*” (stone) is not mentioned in the Ten Utterances recorded in the Torah, nevertheless, life-force flows to the stone through combinations and substitutions of the letters which are transposed in the “Two hundred and thirty-one gates,” either in direct or reverse order, as is explained in the *Sefer Yetzirah*, until the combination of the name “*even*” descends from the Ten Utterances, and is derived from them, and this is the life-force of the stone. And so it is with all created things in the world— their names in the Holy Tongue are the very “letters of speech” which descend, degree by degree, from the Ten Utterances recorded in the Torah.

*Tanya, Sh-aar Hayichud V’Ha’Emuna Ch. 1*

When something carries a certain name, it is because it is expressive of its essence. It is understood therefore, that the name of the *parsha* conveys the central character of the entirety of the *parsha*.

It is for this reason that many Torah portions are not referred to by the first word that the *parsha* begins with, but instead, with a later word that is more expressive of its content.

Accordingly, it is therefore important to clarify: what is special about the word *Tazria*, which

therefore expresses the theme of the entire *Parsha*?

### The “Torah” of Man

This question can be understood through prefacing a thought that Rashi brings from the Medrash<sup>1</sup>, as to the reason that the laws of purity concerning man follow the ritual laws of the animals:

#### Text 3

R. Simlai said: “Just as in the Creation, man was created after all domestic animals, wild beasts, and birds, so too, the law [concerning the cleanness] of man is stated after the law [concerning the cleanness] of domestic animals, wild beasts, and birds.”

*Rashi 12:2*

The difference between previous Torah portions and *Parshas Tazria*, is that the former dealt with animals, while this section deals with the laws of purity that concern mankind.

However, this seems to exacerbate the question regarding the choice of the *parsha*'s name.

Instead of the *parsha* being referred to as “woman”—which would seem to communicate that now the Torah is dealing with laws of human beings—we instead refer to the Torah portion as “Tazria,” which appears to have no significance to the idea that makes this *parsha* unique.

Conversely, from the very fact that the *Parsha* is indeed called “Tazria,” it must be that it is this

name truly is indicative of the content of this *parsha*—the ritual cleanliness of man.

### Man is at the end

The significance of this name can be appreciated through a deeper understanding of the words of R. Simlai.

R. Simlai stated, “*Just as* in the Creation, man was created after all domestic animals, wild beasts, and birds, *so too*, the law of man is stated after the law of domestic animals, wild beasts, and birds.”

From his statement it is clear, that the reason the laws of ritual cleanliness of man follow the ritual laws of the animals, is for the *very same intent* that man was created after beast.

It is therefore understood, that in order to truly appreciate the words of R' Simlai, as to why the instruction regarding man's ritual purity was prefaced by that of the beast, we must first comprehend the reason why man was *created* after the beast.

### Man and beast

There are various reasons given as to why in fact man was created last. Not all seem complimentary though:

The Medrash explains, that the reason why man was created last was in order to mitigate man's hubris. It states the following:

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<sup>1</sup> Vayikra Rabba 14:1.

#### Text 4

If man is meritorious, we tell him, "You prefaced all of creation." If not, we tell him, "A gnat [was created] before you, a worm [was created] before you."

*Vayikra Rabba 14:1*

There are others explanations as well, that are postulated in the Talmud:

#### Text 5

Our Rabbis taught: "Adam was created [last of all beings] on the eve of Shabbos. And why? — Lest the heretics say: 'The Holy One, blessed be He, had a partner [viz., Adam] in His work of creation.' Another answer is: In order that, if a man's mind becomes [too] proud, he may be reminded that the gnats preceded him in the order of creation. Another answer is: That he might immediately enter upon the fulfilment of a precept. Another answer is: That he might straightway go in to the banquet. The matter may be compared to a king of flesh and blood who built palaces and furnished them, prepared a banquet, and thereafter brought in the guests."

*Talmud, Sanhedrin 38a*

Essentially, there are four reasons given for man being created last:

- A) In order that one not presume that G-d had a partner in the creation of the world he was created after all the rest of creation.

- B) To remind man that he was created last after all other animals, lest he become proud.
- C) In order that immediately after his creation he can fulfill a commandment the world was already prepared.
- D) In order that the world will be prepared for him like a banquet.

Now, R. Simlai stated, "Just as in the Creation, man was created after all domestic animals, wild beasts, and birds, so too, the law of man is stated after the law [concerning the cleanness] of domestic animals, wild beasts, and birds."

As explained, the implication of this statement is that for the *same* reason that man was created last, so too, for that *very* reason man's Torah was said last as well.

According to all the reasons enumerated above though, this statement of R. Simlai is not understood.

All of the abovementioned reasons justify why man was created last, but do not adequately explain why his Torah, his laws of purity, should come last as well. Placing man's Torah last does not preclude man's partnership in creation, remind him that he was the final step in creation, give him the ability to fulfill a *mitzvah* (G-dly commandment) as soon as he is created, nor have the world prepared for him as a banquet.

Why then, does R. Simlai employ the words, "just as in the creation... so too, the law of man," implying that both are enumerated last for the same reason?! The explanations given for man being created last seem to have no relevance to man's Torah being mentioned last!

#### Man's lowliness

This can be understood through the following:

The Medrash stated that if man is not meritorious, "we tell him, "A gnat [was created]

before you, a worm [was created] before you.” The implication is not only that the lowliness of man begins when he sins, but implies that even prior to man sinning, he was created with an inherent disadvantage over all other creations.

This is expressed in Tanya in the following manner:

### Text 6

If so, he is removed from G-d with utmost remoteness, for the lusting drive in his animal soul is capable of lusting also after forbidden things which are contrary to His blessed Will, even though he does not crave their actual fulfillment, G-d forbid; yet they are not truly scorned by him...In this he is inferior and more loathsome and abominable than unclean animals and insects and reptiles...

*Tanya Ch. 29*

Man’s inferiority over beast is not only when man sins, but his *proclivity* towards sin is, in and of itself, what makes man more lowly than beast.

### Text 7

“The gnat was [created] before you [man],” ...All the more so the other unclean living creatures, and even the fierce beasts, all of which do not deflect from their purpose but obey His blessed command, even though they cannot perceive it.

*Tanya Ch. 24*

Whereas animals are unable to transgress G-d’s will, man is able to, and this itself causes him to be, in a sense, lower than all other creations.

It because of this inferiority of man, which arises even *before* he sins, that the reason for the Torah placing the laws of man after the laws that concern animals, is understood.

### Start with the basics

The succession of a person’s development in Torah is in a progressive manner. This is true both of the learning itself and the approach to it as well.

Concerning the study of Torah, the Mishna gives the prescription:

### Text 8

Five years is the age for the study of Scripture. Ten, for the study of Mishna. Thirteen, for the obligation to observe the *mitzvos*. Fifteen, for the study of Talmud.

*Mishna Avos 5:22*

A person cannot begin mastering the intricacies of Talmud study before they have mastered Scripture and Mishna.

Just as this is true regarding the subject matter—that one must begin studying a simple subject before a difficult one—the same is true regarding one’s *approach* to learning. One first begins *learning* for his own benefit and only later can one learn purely for G-d.

## Text 9

R. Sheshes used to revise his studies every thirty days, and he would stand and lean at the side of the doorway and exclaim: “Rejoice, O my soul, Rejoice. O my soul; for you have I read [the Torah], for you have I studied [the Mishna].” But that is not so, for R. Eliezer said, “But for the Torah, heaven and earth would not endure, for it is said, ‘If not for My covenant by day and by night, I had not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth?’” — In the first place when a man does it [sc. studies], he does so with himself in mind.

*Talmud, Pesachim 68b*

While eventually one’s goal of study is to reach a point where his study is for G-d, when he begins studying he does so with ulterior motives.

Just as this is true regarding man’s development, it is also true regarding the order of the *parshiyos*. First comes matters that are more easily rectified, and only afterwards can come things that are more difficult to uplift. First comes the Torah portions that deal with the animal and only afterwards comes the *parsha* that speaks of the laws of man.

Being that an animal cannot transgress G-d’s desire, it is easier to rectify them and therefore prefaces the Torah of the animal to the Torah of man. Man is able to sin and lusts to transgress G-d’s wishes and is therefore more difficult to uplift. The Torah therefore starts with those things that are easily rectified and only afterwards discusses the Torah of man.

### For the same reason

R. Simlai stated that, “*Just as* in the Creation, man was created after all domestic animals, wild beasts, and birds, *so too*, the law of man is stated after the law of domestic animals, wild beasts,

and birds.” It was not clear though, what possibly could be the correlation between the creation of man and the Torah (the ritual laws) of man.

None of the explanations for man being created last seemed to explain why his Torah should follow them as well.

According to the above explanation however—that of man’s condition being more difficult to refine than a beast, and therefore his Torah is last—this can be understood.

The intent of why man’s Torah was placed after the Torah of the beast is not—according to R, Simlai—because he is *greater* than the animal species, but because, in a sense, he is worse off than the beast.

Just as in regards to the creation of man, he was created last “in order that, if a man’s mind becomes [too] proud, he may be reminded that the gnats preceded him in the order of creation,” so too, man’s Torah was last because he is reminded that, in a way, he is lower than even a gnat and that because of his coarse make-up he is more difficult to refine.

Specifically *due to* man’s shortcoming and his inclination towards evil—more so than other creatures—the process of refining and changing him is more difficult.

It is for this reason that the Torah first begins with a discussion of those that are more easily rectified (i.e. the animals) and only afterwards, does the Torah give directives of how to uplift man.

### Advantage vs. disadvantage

Based on the above explanation as to the reason why the Torah of man follows that of beast, the relation between the author, R. Simlai, and his statement can also be appreciated.

This connection is recognized through the following preface:

The virtue of any given thing can come about in one of two ways:

- a. The advantage one possesses is not a result of his own efforts, but is endowed from Above. This could be something that the person was born with, or which was bequeathed to him as a gift afterwards. In both cases, it comes without any efforts on the part of the recipient.
- b. The advantage comes as a result of one's own work. The individual toils in order to achieve a certain quality, and as a result of his efforts he attains this admirable trait.

In each type there lies an inherent advantage and a disadvantage:

- a. Regarding that which is a gift from G-d, the gift possesses an infinite nature. Being that the quality was divinely received by an infinite G-d, it has no limitations. However, at the same time, this trait will not permeate the individual internally. Since he did not work to attain this quality, and it is a birthright, it is entirely possible that he will never fully appreciate the gift that he was granted. Because of this, he may have a great gift, but he *himself* as an *individual* may not be changed from it.
- b. A quality attained by one's own efforts will become ingrained in him and will be apparent in his full being. However, unlike the gift received from Above, its features will be limited, based on the individual's ability to achieve these traits, and the efforts that he put in to do so.

This is the underlying difference between the various reasons stated as to why the human being was formed last in order.

Man, who was created as a composite of body and soul, has an advantage and a disadvantage over beast. It is because of each respective quality that man contains a certain dichotomy.

Man's soul is a part of G-dliness, and in this regard he is higher than all other creatures. His body though, is created from earth, which creates within him a coarseness that no other animal possesses.

When speaking of the qualities that come as an endowment from the Almighty, in this case, man stands *higher* than all other creations, already from the moment that he comes into being.

### Text 10

The second soul of a Jew is truly a part of G-d above, as it is written, "And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," and "You did breathe it [the soul] into me." And it is written in the *Zohar*, "He who exhales, exhales from within him,"...So, allegorically speaking, have the souls of Jews risen in the [Divine] thought, as it is written, "My firstborn son is Israel," and "You are children unto the Lord your G-d".

*Tanya Ch. 2*

From the moment that a Jewish person is born, even before he puts in any efforts in this world, he is bequeathed with a G-dly soul—a soul which is literally a part of G-d above. That gives him an advantage over all other creations.

Though after his entrance into this world, he has the potential to rebel against the Almighty, and transgress His will, G-d forbid—a trait which is

not present by any other creature—nevertheless, notwithstanding this tremendous disadvantage, it does not in any way diminish his incredible *advantage*. Even when a person sins, his soul is still connected with the Almighty.

### Text 11

The divine soul...believes in One G-d, and remains faithful to Him even at the time when the sin is committed, except that it is then in a state of veritable "exile," as it were, within the animal soul of the *sitra achra*, which has caused the body to sin and has dragged it down with itself into the depths of *Sheol*.

*Tanya Ch. 24*

When man sins, he does not destroy his soul, but instead causes it to be unexpressed in his body. These are the two aspects that exist in man's gift of his G-dly soul: On one hand, he granted a veritable piece of G-d, but on the other, his soul cannot in the least bit, be expressed in his person.

This advantage of man over beast is due to the soul that he was bestowed with when he was born. However, in regards to man's body which he must toil to refine as a result of its coarseness and corporeality, he was created lower than the beast.

When referring to those traits acquired by the individual himself, in this perspective, man is not greater than the other creations. On the contrary, in his revealed and natural state, he is coarse, and susceptible to great sin.

Therefore, when discussing what man must labor to accomplish, it is indeed in place to state, that the reason man was created last was for this purpose—so that he could be reminded that

even a worm precedes him in their advantage over man.

### R. Simlai

Accordingly, it can now be understood why it was R. Simlai that made the above statement, which expresses the perspective of man's natural state, and he must accomplish on his own.

R. Simlai was a sage who was did not come from a prestigious family.

### Text 12

R. Simlai came before R. Yochanan [and] requested from him, "Let the Master teach me the Book of Genealogies." He said to him, "From where are you?" He replied, "From Lod." "And where is your dwelling?" "In Nehardea." He said to him, "We do not discuss it either with the Lodians or with the Nehardeans, and how much more so with you, who are from Lod and live in Nehardea!"

*Talmud, Pesachim 62b*

Being that he did not come from high birth, R. Simlai could not rely on others as a stimulus for who he was to become. That which he accomplished was from his own efforts and not through something that he inherited from others before him.

Since he needed to work hard to accomplish, he therefore viewed the advantage of everything not according to the qualities which it inherently possessed, but according to what it toiled to accomplish.

Consequently he explained, that the reason man was created last was so that he accomplish

through his own efforts, and not that he merely be given something as a gift. In R. Simlai's eyes, man was not great merely because he was granted a G-dly soul; man was great because he uplifted the tremendous negativity that he was created with.

It is because of this that R. Simlai explained that the Torah of man follows that of the beast so that he be reminded that he must toil to refine himself through his own efforts.

### A fitting title

According to all that has been clarified above, we can appreciate why the *parsha* dealing with the laws of man's ritual purity bears the name "Tazria," instead of the name "Isha."

In Chassidic thought it is explained, that the act of *tazria* (conceiving) is expressive of man's personal toil in his service of G-d.

### Text 13

It is known that the congregation of Israel is called "woman" and the Holy One blessed be He is called "man."...Just as with [physical] man and woman, that when the woman is first to conceive a male is born, so too is it [in the relationship] between the congregation of Israel and the Holy One blessed be He. When the woman i.e. the congregation are the first to conceive through an awaking from below...and only afterwards comes the awaking from above...then a male is born. This means to say that a male love is born, which is the level of *Ahava Rabba* (great love).

*L'kutei Torah 20a*

It is for this reason that the Torah portion is called "Tazria," (meaning conception) as

opposed to "Isha." For, the idea of conception is expressive of the type of man's service to the Almighty that is not as a result of a Divine awakening, but is rather from his own efforts.

### A deeper reality

The final goal in a given plan, which is carried out last, is indeed the person's *original* intent and wish. This principle is stated in our *Shabbos* prayers:

### Text 14

Last in production, first in thought.

*Siddur, L'cha Dodi*

Though the act was done last, it fulfills the person's deepest wish. So too, although man may indeed be, in a certain sense, *lower* than all other creations, he was created last, because through the creation of man, G-d's intention for the creation of the world is fulfilled.

Based on this rule (that of "last in production, first in thought,") it is understood, that according to all the opinions regarding the reason man was formed after all else—even the explanation which states that it was for the purpose of saying that "even a worm precedes you,"—it must be that man being created after all other creatures is due to a certain *advantage* as well; his existence fulfills the *ultimate intent* of the entire creation of the universe.

Both opinions of the positive and negative perspectives of man express this advantage of the human being. The difference is only in the following:



- According to the explanation that man's place in the order of creation was "in order so that he could enter the banquet immediately," man's advantage is expressed in something that he was born with—his G-dly soul.
- According to the opinion that states it is in order to remind him that even "a worm precedes you," this shows his advantage as well. Namely, that because he was created with the lowest corporeal form, with a proclivity to evil, he can, through his *own* efforts, attain the *highest* heights.

Instead of being a person that was created from "adama," (earth) which is drawn towards coarseness, he can become a person that is "adame l'elyon," compared to the supernal G-d. This phenomenon is similar to a rebirth of his *entire identity*, in that he can transform his very essence.

## Birth

With the above understanding it can be explained, that the name "Tazria" (conception) not only reflects the general idea of self-earned work in this world, but also the unique *accomplishment* of this effort.

The idea of conceiving, the impetus for birth, which expresses the idea of bringing about a brand new existence to the world, is expressive of the tremendous potential and accomplishment of man's own toil. Man is able to bring about the greatest revelation of G-dliness, in which he can "conceive" and "give birth" to an entirely *new* identity through his personal efforts!

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 7, Tazria 1, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: [www.Neirot.com](http://www.Neirot.com). )*