

**Holy Thumbs (Tazria-Metzora)**

*“The hand is the cutting edge of the mind.” — Jacob Bronowski*

A well-known study found that the vast majority of infants suck their thumbs. The explanations are typically straightforward. It is a natural reflex, a source of comfort, and part of early self-soothing behavior.

In the Torah, however, the thumb appears in a very different context. In the purification process of the *metzora* (a skin discoloration), described in Leviticus chapter 14, part of the ritual involves placing blood from a sacrifice on three specific points of the body: the right earlobe, the right thumb, and the right big toe. Each of these locations seems deliberate, not incidental.

Ibn Ezra raises the question of why the thumb is included in this process. His explanation points to the thumb as central to human function. The opposable thumb is what enables the hand to act with precision. It allows a person to grasp, to shape, to build, and to execute intention in the physical world. Without it, the gap between thought and action becomes much wider.

In that sense, the placement of the blood on the thumb can be understood as part of a broader symbolic framework. The ear represents what a person hears and takes in. The foot represents where a person goes. The thumb represents what a person does. Together, they map a progression from input, to movement, to action.

The ritual does not isolate the spiritual from the physical. It integrates them. The *metzora*'s return is marked not only by a change in status, but by a reorientation of how he listens, how he moves, and how he acts in the world.

Seen this way, the thumb is not incidental. It is a focal point of human capability. It is where intention becomes execution.

May we always use our thumbs and all our body parts for good purposes.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

*Dedication*

*To the nearly 20,000 Olim (Jewish immigrants) that have made Israel their home in the past year. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-891730>*