

עץ חיים

---

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



*Produced by* THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary  
Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly

*Copyright © 2001 by The Rabbinical Assembly*

*Hebrew text, based on Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,  
© 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society*

*English translation © 1985, 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society*

*First edition. All rights reserved*

*No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, except for brief passages in connection with a critical review, without permission in writing from:*

*The Rabbinical Assembly  
3080 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027*

*Blessings for the Torah and haftarot have been adapted from  
Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals, © 2000 by The Rabbinical Assembly.  
Maps © by Oxford University Press, supplied by Oxford Cartographers. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.  
Illustrations of the tabernacle and its furnishings by Joe Sikora.*

*Composition by VARDA Graphics, Skokie, Illinois  
Design by Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden  
Manufactured in the United States of America*

09 10 10 9 8

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

*Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. Hebrew. 2001.*

*Etz Hayim: Torah and commentary / senior editor, David L. Lieber; literary editor, Jules Harlow; sponsored by the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.*

*p. cm.*

*Text of the Pentateuch in Hebrew and English; commentary in English.*

*Includes the haftarot and commentary on them, p'shat and d'rash commentaries, comments on Conservative halakhic practice, topical essays, and other material.*

*Includes bibliographical references and index.*

*ISBN-10: 0-8276-0712-1 ISBN-13: 978-0-8276-0712-5*

*1. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Commentaries. 2. Haftarot—Commentaries. 3. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Theology. 4. Conservative Judaism—Customs and practices. I. Lieber, David L. II. Harlow, Jules. III. United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. IV. Rabbinical Assembly. V. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. English. Jewish Publication Society, 2001. VI. Title.*

*BS1222 .L54 2001*

*222'.1077—dc21*

2001029757

**Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary**  
**Copyright © 2001 by the Rabbinical Assembly**

## CHAPTER 12

After the previous chapter's discussion of how food entering our bodies can make us ritually impure, the Torah now discusses how that which comes out of our bodies can do the same.

Perhaps no concept in the Torah is less accessible to the modern reader than the notion of *tum-ah*, generally translated "uncleanness" (although it has no connection to one's physical sanitary condition) or "ritual impurity." One contracts *tum-ah* through contact with a dead body, by being afflicted with *tzara-at* ("leprosy," although not the disease known by that name today), or by contact with a bodily emission that touches on the generation of life, such as menstrual blood, semen, or a flow from the reproductive organs. A woman who has just given birth is likewise considered ritually impure. *Tum-ah* bars one from approaching God's sanctuary; *tzara-at* isolates one from human contact.

*Tum-ah* has unmistakable negative connotations. It is defined by what one may not do, and the Torah tells us how to be relieved of it. It need not, however, imply wrongdoing on the part of the affected person. (Admittedly, as some commentators have noted, the Torah itself provides a basis for that interpretation, when it calls for a purification offering to be part of its prescribed process of reintegration.) *Tum-ah* seems to be the result of coming in contact with an awesomely potent force that disqualifies one from approaching the sanctuary.

Proof that *tum-ah* is not a totally negative condition can be found not only in its association with such religiously affirmed activities as childbirth and caring for the dead but also from the rabbinic rule that scrolls of the biblical books convey *tum-ah* to those who touch them. (This finds its extension in the efforts we make today to avoid touching the Torah scroll with our bare hands, using a pointer when we read from it and a mantle when taking it from the Ark and returning it.)

It has been suggested that these categories of ritual impurity were a response to the anx-

xiety triggered by death, serious illness, and the "leaking" of life-generating fluids from the body. It has been noted further that natural flows require less purification than unnatural flows, which might indicate the presence of disease.

Although *tum-ah* bars a woman from the sanctuary, we need not see that condition as negative and certainly not as punishment. There is no reason to believe that God ordained menstruation or childbirth as punishment. We might postulate that there are two types of holiness in life, two ways of encountering the divine. There is a natural holiness found in the miracles of pregnancy, birth, and recovery from illness. And there is a stipulated holiness—the arbitrary designation of certain times, places, and activities as sacred. One meets God in the experiences of birth and death, sickness and health. But they are not everyday occurrences. The person who yearns for contact with God on a regular basis must rely on sanctuaries, worship services, and prescribed rituals, all of which are holy only because we have chosen to designate them as holy. Israelite society may have seen the two types of holiness as being mutually exclusive, so that it would not be appropriate for the woman or man who had encountered the vital holiness of childbirth, menstruation, or contact with a dead body to seek the designated holiness of the sanctuary. A woman who had just given birth might feel the presence of God so strongly in that experience that she would feel no need to go to the sanctuary to find God (although we might be more comfortable with that decision being left to the new mother rather than being written into law).

We can see the notion of *tum-ah*, then, as growing out of a sense of reverence for the miraculous nature of birth, the awesome power of death, and the mysteries of illness and recuperation. That this reverence would later be contaminated by superstitious fears related to menstrual blood and contact with the dead need not detract from our efforts to understand and appreciate these chapters of biblical law.

<sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people thus: When a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be impure seven days; she shall be impure as at the time of her menstrual infirmity.—<sup>3</sup>On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.—<sup>4</sup>She shall remain in a state of blood purification for thirty-three days: she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until her period of purification is completed. <sup>5</sup>If she bears a female, she shall be impure two weeks as during her menstruation, and she shall remain in a state of blood purification for sixty-six days.

2 דִּבֶּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִשָּׁה כִּי תִזְרִיעַ וְיִלְדָה זָכָר וְטָמְאָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים כִּימֵי נִדְתַּת דְּוֹתָהּ תִּטְמָא׃ 3 וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִמּוֹל בְּשָׂר עֶרְלָתוֹ׃ 4 וּשְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב בְּדַמֵּי טְהָרָה בְּכָל־קֹדֶשׁ לֹא־תִגָּע וְאֶל־הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לֹא תִבֹּא עַד־מִלֵּאת יְמֵי טְהָרָה׃ 5 וְאִם־נִקְבָה תֵּלֵד וְטָמְאָה שִׁבְעַיִם כְּנִדְתָּהּ וּשְׁשִׁים יוֹם וּשְׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּשֵׁב עַל־דַּמֵּי טְהָרָה׃

REGULATIONS CONCERNING THE NEW MOTHER (12:1–8)

**2. When a woman at childbirth bears a male** Literally, “When a woman is inseminated and bears a male.”

**she shall be impure as at the time of her menstrual infirmity** Not only the duration but the actual nature of the impurity resembles that of a menstruating woman (see 15:19–24).

**3.** Circumcision is first mandated in the context of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:10–14).

**4. blood purification** Discharges of blood that

occur after the initial period of impurity are unlike menstrual blood and are not regarded as impure.

**until her period of purification is completed**

Although the new mother was no longer impure because of discharges, she was still barred from entry into the sanctuary and from contact with consecrated objects. She had to wait until a specific period of time had elapsed before she could be declared pure.

**5.** The time periods are doubled for a female, but the provisions are the same.

**2.** Is the normal period of impurity after giving birth one week, and is it doubled after the birth of a daughter because the new mother has given birth to a child who will herself contain the divine gift of nurturing and giving birth to a new life? Or is the normal period two weeks, only to be reduced after the birth of a son to allow the mother to attend the *b'rit* in a state of ritual purity, or because *b'rit milah* on the eighth day is a purifying rite?

**3.** The unique ceremony of *b'rit milah* is performed on the male infant's generative organ to symbolize that the Covenant is passed on from generation to generation, from father

to son. Except in cases of conversion (e.g., when a non-Jewish mother wishes to raise the child as a Jew), circumcision does not make the child Jewish. It celebrates the fact that he is born into the Covenant. Ceremonies for the home and for the synagogue have been created to welcome newborn girls into the Covenant with the same sense of importance and celebration as welcoming boys. Many other societies circumcised young boys at adolescence, as an ordeal of passage and a preparation for marriage and sexual activity. By moving the ritual back to infancy, biblical tradition stripped it of its erotic element and transmuted it into a symbol of the Covenant.

HALAKHAH L'MA·ASEH

**12:2. as at the time of her menstrual infirmity** Traditionally, the woman waits for seven days after bleeding ceases and immerses in a *mikveh* (ritual bath) before resuming relations. Immersion in a *mikveh* is not required after caesarian delivery.

**12:3. On the eighth day** See Gen. 17:12. The covenant of circumcision (*b'rit milah*) takes place on the eighth day of the child's life. This includes *Shabbat* and holy days (S.A. YD 266:2), unless the child was born through caesarian section. The *b'rit milah* is postponed only out of consideration for the health of the child.

<sup>6</sup>On the completion of her period of purification, for either son or daughter, she shall bring to the priest, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a purification offering. <sup>7</sup>He shall offer it before the LORD and make expiation on her behalf; she shall then be pure from her flow of blood. Such are the rituals concerning her who bears a child, male or female. <sup>8</sup>If, however, her means do not suffice for a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a purification offering. The priest shall make expiation on her behalf, and she shall be pure.

וּבְמִלֵּאתָ אֶת יְמֵי טְהוֹרָה לְבֵן א֥וֹ לְבַת תָּבִיא כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן־שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה וּבֶן־יוֹנָה אוֹ-תֹר לְחֻטָּאת אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>7</sup>וְהִקְרִיבֹוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְכִפֶּר עָלֶיהָ וְטְהַרָה מִמִּקְרַדְמִיָּה זֹאת תּוֹרַת הַיִּלְדוֹת לְזָכָר א֥וֹ לְנִקְבָּה: <sup>8</sup>וְאִם־לֹא תִמְצָא יָדָהּ דֵּי שֶׁהָ וּלְקַחָה שְׁתֵּי־תוֹרִים א֥וֹ שְׁנֵי בְנֵי יוֹנָה אֶחָד לְעֹלָה וְאֶחָד לְחֻטָּאת וְכִפֶּר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן וְטְהַרָה: פ

**13** The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

**יג** וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר:

**6. On the completion of her period of purification** After the termination of the second period, rites are performed to readmit her into the sanctuary and into the religious life of the community.

**purification offering** Hebrew: *hattat*; needed here solely to remove impurity. All impurity, however contracted, could lead to sinfulness if not attended to, and failure to deal properly with impurity aroused God's anger. The purification of-

fering restored to the person the right of access to the sanctuary; and the burnt offering (*olah*) that followed immediately symbolized this renewed acceptability.

**8. If, however, her means do not suffice** The right to bring a less-expensive sacrifice is standard for a number of purifications and religious obligations. Without it, poor Israelites would have been deprived of expiation when they incurred impurity through no fault of their own.

#### THE PURIFICATION OF SKIN DISEASES (13:1–14:57)

Chapters 13 and 14 prescribe the role of the Israelite priesthood in diagnosing and purifying persons afflicted with a skin disease known as *tzara-at*. This disease also contaminated fabrics and leather as well as plastered or mud-covered building stones. The identification of biblical *tzara-at* with leprosy is unlikely, if by "leprosy" is meant Hansen's disease; the symptoms pre-

sented in this chapter do not conform to the nature or the course of that disease. The term "*tzara-at*" probably designated a complex of various ailments. The priest combined medical and ritual procedures in safeguarding the purity of the sanctuary and of the Israelite community. Precisely why skin diseases were singled out in the priestly codes is not certain. *Tzara-at* was preva-

6. The new mother's burnt offering is seen by some as a form of an offering of gratitude (*todah*) for having survived the experience of childbirth or on behalf of the newborn for having been released into life from the confinement of the womb (Lev. R. 14:3). Why a purification offering? Hoffman sees it as the sacrifice of one compelled by circumstance to stay

away from the sanctuary, who now brings a dove to symbolize her return to her spiritual home like a dove to its nest. The Talmud speculates that some women, because of the pain of childbirth, may have vowed to abstain from further sexual relations to avoid such pain. The offering is part of the process that releases her from that rash vow (BT Nid. 31b).

<sup>2</sup>When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest

אָדָם פִּי־יְהִיָּה בְעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ שְׂאֵת אֹ-  
סִפְחָת אֹו בְהֶרֶת וְהִיָּה בְעוֹר־בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֹגַע  
צָרַעַת וְהוּבֵא אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֹו אֶל-

lent in ancient Israel and was presumed to be contagious.

THE SYMPTOMS (13:1–8)

The priest’s initial problem was to determine

whether the sufferer had acute *tzara-at* or some less serious ailment with which it might be confused, but which would heal.

**2. it shall be reported to Aaron the priest** The afflicted person must be brought before the priest.

CHAPTER 13

At least three things are worthy of note regarding the role of the *kohen* in treating leprous afflictions. First, in biblical Israel, the *kohen* was both the religious and the medical authority. The biblical mind saw the connection between the physical and the spiritual dimensions of illness and recovery (perhaps more clearly than we see it today). When the *kohen* visited the afflicted person in isolation and examined the person’s sores, the experience of being cared for by the most prestigious person in the community must have helped generate healing powers in the sick person.

Second, the role of the *kohen* was not simply to diagnose the ailment (and certainly not to treat it) but to reintegrate the person into the community as soon as possible. Religion sought to include, not to isolate, the afflicted person. If the laws of leprosy were fashioned for reasons of health and contagion, Hirsch notes, they would be stringent in borderline cases. Instead, doubtful cases are deemed ritually pure.

Finally, we note that the *kohen* performs the ritual only after the *tzara-at* has disappeared, to avoid the appearance of performing a magical cure.

2. Despite a posture of sympathy for afflicted persons and a commitment to ameliorate their condition, the Sages often could not resist the temptation to ask, “What moral or spiritual failing may have caused this illness?” They see the Torah’s discussion of illness in the abstract as an opportunity to make a moral point, although they caution us that it is insensitive to tell an ailing person, “You are suffering because of your sins.” Anticipating what we recently have come to know about the unity joining the physical and the emotional dimensions of illness, they could understand illness as the result of moral as well as physical causes. Their outlook has been summarized as seeing *tzara-at* “not as a bodily disease but as

the physical manifestation of a spiritual malaise.” The leper is isolated from human society not because of the contagious skin disease but as a punishment for antisocial behavior. Yet one of the Sages insists, “When a person is in pain, what does the divine Presence say? ‘It is My own head that aches, it is My own arm that aches’” (M Sanh. 6:5).

Playing on the linguistic similarity of the Hebrew for “leper” (*m’tzora*) and the Hebrew for “one who gossips” (*motzi shem ra*), the Sages considered leprosy to be a punishment for the sins of slander and malicious gossip (Lev. R. 16:1). They teach that gossip is like leprosy because it is highly contagious. One infected person can spread a malicious rumor to many others. They designate seven types of antisocial behavior that God punishes with *tzara-at*: “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood in secret, a mind that hatches evil, feet quick to do wrong, a witness who testifies falsely, and one who incites brothers to quarrel” (citing Prov. 6:16–19). Those types of behavior share the attribute of being hard to punish in a court of law. God exacts punishment in a variety of appropriate ways: “As your rumors separated husband from wife and brother from brother, you will now be separated from all human contact.” The Midrash adduces proof texts to show that people guilty of those misdeeds were punished with leprosy. Thus Miriam is stricken after speaking ill of her brother Moses (Num. 12:10). Even Moses is afflicted for speaking ill of the Israelites; when he is summoned by God at the Burning Bush to bring the Israelites news of their impending liberation, he hesitates, saying, “They will not believe me” (Exod. 4:1). As a result, his hand becomes leprous (4:6).

Today we recognize that it is medically inaccurate and psychologically cruel to tell someone that he or she is afflicted with illness as a punishment for behavior not organically related to the illness, or that failure to heal is

or to one of his sons, the priests.<sup>3</sup>The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of his body: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous affection; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce him impure.<sup>4</sup>But if it is a white discoloration on the skin of his 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.<sup>5</sup>On the seventh day the priest shall examine him, and if the affection has remained unchanged in color and the disease has not spread on the skin, the priest shall isolate him for another seven days.<sup>6</sup>On the seventh day the priest shall examine him again: if the affection has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him pure. It is a rash; he shall wash his clothes, and he shall be pure.<sup>7</sup>But if the rash should spread on the skin after he has presented himself to the priest and been pronounced pure, he shall present himself again to the priest.<sup>8</sup>And if the priest sees that the rash has spread on the skin, the priest shall pronounce him impure; it is leprosy.

<sup>9</sup>When a person has a scaly affection, it shall

**4. the priest shall isolate the affected person**

More precisely, “he shall confine, lock up” (*v'hisgir*) the affected person. A special dwelling was used for this purpose.

**6. he shall wash his clothes** Laundering one's garments was a procedure frequently included in purification rites.

אֶחָד מִבָּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים: <sup>3</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־  
הַנִּגַּע בְּעוֹר־הַבָּשָׂר וְשֹׁעַר בְּנִגַּע הַפֶּה |  
לָבֶן וּמִרְאָה הַנִּגַּע עֲמֹק מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ נִגַּע  
צָרַעַת הוּא וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמֵא אֹתוֹ:  
<sup>4</sup> וְאִם־בִּהְרֹת לְבָנָה הוּא בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ  
וְעֲמֹק אִין־מִרְאָהּ מִן־הָעוֹר וְשֹׁעֲרָה לֹא־  
הַפֶּה לָבֶן וְהִסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנִּגַּע שְׁבַעֲת  
יָמִים: <sup>5</sup> וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְהִנֵּה  
הַנִּגַּע עֲמֵד בְּעֵינָיו לֹא־פָשָׂה הַנִּגַּע בְּעוֹר  
וְהִסְגִּירוֹ הַכֹּהֵן שְׁבַעֲת יָמִים שְׁנִית:  
<sup>6</sup> וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן אֹתוֹ בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שְׁנִית <sup>שני</sup>  
וְהִנֵּה כִּהָה הַנִּגַּע וְלֹא־פָשָׂה הַנִּגַּע בְּעוֹר  
וְטָהְרוֹ הַכֹּהֵן מִסְּפַחַת הִיא וּכְבֹּס בְּגָדָיו  
וְטָהַר: <sup>7</sup> וְאִם־פָּשָׂה תִפְשָׂה הַמְּסַפַּחַת  
בְּעוֹר אַחֲרֵי הָרֵאָתוֹ אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן לְטַהֲרָתוֹ  
וְנִרְאָה שְׁנִית אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>8</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן  
וְהִנֵּה פָשְׂתָה הַמְּסַפַּחַת בְּעוֹר וְטָמֵאוּ  
הַכֹּהֵן צָרַעַת הוּא: פ

<sup>9</sup> נִגַּע צָרַעַת כִּי תִהְיֶה בְּאָדָם וְהוּבָא

**8. it is leprosy** That is, it is acute *tzara-at*.

CHRONIC AILMENTS (vv. 9–17)

If a person with a chronic ailment is brought to the priest, a different set of diagnostic criteria is applied. Exposed (“raw”) flesh in an infected area indicates that the old ailment never healed prop-

to be blamed on a lack of will. It should be noted that the Torah itself presents *tzara-at* as an affliction to be cured, not as a punishment to be explained. We might ask: What actions or conditions cause an individual to be isolated from the community today? And what can religious institutions do to restore that person to the community?

Salanter taught that the laws of leprosy and gossip follow immediately after the dietary laws to teach us to be as scrupulous about what comes out of our mouths as we are about what

goes into them. He saw the essential sin of gossip as focusing on the faults of others rather than looking to improve ourselves. Society says to the slanderer, “If you are so good at recognizing faults, go live by yourself and discover your own faults and shortcomings.”

**3. when the priest sees it** One commentator reads this as “when the priest sees him” (*Meshekh Hokhmah*). The priest is to examine the whole person, not only the diseased limb. He is to see what is whole and healthy about the person, not only what is afflicted.

be reported to the priest.<sup>10</sup> If the priest finds on the skin a white swelling which has turned some hair white, with a patch of undisclored flesh in the swelling,<sup>11</sup> it is chronic leprosy on the skin of his body, and the priest shall pronounce him impure; he need not isolate him, for he is impure.<sup>12</sup> If the eruption spreads out over the skin so that it covers all the skin of the affected person from head to foot, wherever the priest can see—<sup>13</sup>if the priest sees that the eruption has covered the whole body—he shall pronounce the affected person pure; he is pure, for he has turned all white.<sup>14</sup> But as soon as undisclored flesh appears in it, he shall be impure;<sup>15</sup> when the priest sees the undisclored flesh, he shall pronounce him impure. The undisclored flesh is impure; it is leprosy.<sup>16</sup> But if the undisclored flesh again turns white, he shall come to the priest,<sup>17</sup> and the priest shall examine him: if the affection has turned white, the priest shall pronounce the affected person pure; he is pure.

<sup>18</sup>When an inflammation appears on the skin of one's body and it heals,<sup>19</sup> and a white swelling

אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>10</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה שְׂאֵת־  
 לְבָנָה בְּעוֹר וְהָיָה הַפֶּכֶה שֶׁעַר לְבָן וּמַחִית  
 בְּשָׂר חַי בְּשֵׂאֵת: <sup>11</sup> צָרַעַת נוֹשֶׁנֶת הוּא  
 בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטִמְאֹ הַכֹּהֵן לֹא יִסְגְּרוֹנוּ כִּי  
 טָמֵא הוּא: <sup>12</sup> וְאִם־פָּרוּחַ תִּפְרַח הַצָּרַעַת  
 בְּעוֹר וְכִסְתָּהּ הַצָּרַעַת אֶת כָּל־עוֹר הַנֶּגַע  
 מִרֵּאשׁוֹ וְעַד־רַגְלָיו לְכָל־מְרֹאֵה עֵינָיו  
 הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>13</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה כִסְתָּהּ  
 הַצָּרַעַת אֶת־כָּל־בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטָהַר אֶת־הַנֶּגַע  
 כָּלּוֹ הַפֶּךָ לְכֵן טָהוֹר הוּא: <sup>14</sup> וּבַיּוֹם  
 הָרִאשׁוֹן בּוֹ בְּשָׂר חַי יִטְמָא: <sup>15</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן  
 אֶת־הַבְּשָׂר הַחַי וְטִמְאֹ הַבְּשָׂר הַחַי טָמֵא  
 הוּא צָרַעַת הוּא: <sup>16</sup> אִו כִּי יָשׁוּב הַבְּשָׂר  
 הַחַי וְנִהְפָּךְ לְלָבָן וּבָא אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן:  
 וְרָאָהוּ הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה נִהְפָּךְ הַנֶּגַע לְלָבָן  
 וְטָהַר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּגַע טָהוֹר הוּא: פ  
 וּבְשָׂר כִּי־יִהְיֶה בּוֹ־בְעוֹר שְׂחִין וְנִרְפָּא: <sup>18</sup> וְהָיָה בְּמָקוֹם הַשְּׂחִין שְׂאֵת לְבָנָה אִו

שלישי

erly. If, however, the exposed flesh is subsequently covered by new skin (referred to in the text as “turning completely white”), this indicates that the chronic *tzara-at* has healed.

**9. When a person has a scaly affection** That is, when a person shows the priest an old ailment of the skin that may represent the recurrence of chronic *tzara-at*.

**10. a white swelling which has turned some hair white** Literally, “a white inflammation, in which the hair has turned white.”

**undisclored flesh** That is, exposed flesh. When healing occurs, white, normal skin grows over the infected area. Recurrence of infection is indicated by the reappearance of raw flesh.

**11. it is chronic leprosy. . . he need not isolate him** No need for quarantine, because it is determined at the outset that acute *tzara-at* has recurred.

**12. wherever the priest can see** That is, after the priest's complete examination.

**13. for he has turned all white** Exposed, or raw, flesh is a reddish color—not white, like normal skin. This, then, is the criterion: Skin turned

white is new skin that has grown over the raw area.

**14. as soon as undisclored flesh appears in it** If exposed flesh reappears on it, the old infection has not been covered by new skin and will not heal properly, and the individual has chronic *tzara-at*.

**16. if the undisclored flesh again turns white** If the exposed flesh recedes and resumes its whiteness, then new (“white”) skin has grown over the infected, exposed flesh.

**TZARA-AT AS COMPLICATION** (vv. 18–46)

This section deals with *tzara-at* that arises as a complication, i.e., a secondary development, out of other conditions. These symptoms are (a) *sh'hin*, a term characterizing a number of conditions similar to dermatitis; (b) a burn that became infected; (c) diseases of the hair; (d) a skin condition identified as vitiligo; and (e) ailments of the scalp and forehead.

**18. an inflammation appears on the skin . . . and it heals** The primary condition, dermatitis, had healed, but a secondary infection had developed in the same area.

or a white discoloration streaked with red develops where the inflammation was, he shall present himself to the priest. <sup>20</sup>If the priest finds that it appears lower than the rest of the skin and that the hair in it has turned white, the priest shall pronounce him impure; it is a leprous affection that has broken out in the inflammation. <sup>21</sup>But if the priest finds that there is no white hair in it and it is not lower than the rest of the skin, and it is faded, the priest shall isolate him for seven days. <sup>22</sup>If it should spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him impure; it is an affection. <sup>23</sup>But if the discoloration remains stationary, not having spread, it is the scar of the inflammation; the priest shall pronounce him pure.

<sup>24</sup>When the skin of one's body sustains a burn by fire, and the patch from the burn is a discoloration, either white streaked with red, or white, <sup>25</sup>the priest shall examine it. If some hair has turned white in the discoloration, which itself appears to go deeper than the skin, it is leprosy that has broken out in the burn. The priest shall pronounce him impure; it is a leprous affection. <sup>26</sup>But if the priest finds that there is no white hair in the discoloration, and that it is not lower than the rest of the skin, and it is faded, the priest shall isolate him for seven days. <sup>27</sup>On the seventh day the priest shall examine him: if it has spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him impure; it is a leprous affection. <sup>28</sup>But if the discoloration has remained stationary, not having spread on the skin, and it is faded, it is the swelling from the burn. The priest shall pronounce him pure, for it is the scar of the burn.

<sup>29</sup>If a man or a woman has an affection on the head or in the beard, <sup>30</sup>the priest shall ex-

בהרת לבנה אדמדמת ונראה אל-הכהן: <sup>20</sup> וראה הכהן והנה מראה שפל מן-העור ושערה הפך לבן וטמאו הכהן נגע-צרעת הוא בשחין פרוחה: <sup>21</sup> ואם יראה הכהן והנה אין-בה שער לבן ושפלה איננה מן-העור והיא כהה והסגירו הכהן שבעת ימים: <sup>22</sup> ואם פשה תפשה בעור וטמא הכהן אתו נגע הוא: <sup>23</sup> ואם-תחתייה תעמד בהרת לא פשתה צרבת השחין הוא וטהרו הכהן: ס

<sup>24</sup> או בשר פיייהיה בערו מכות-אש והיתה מחית המכה בהרת לבנה אדמדמת או לבנה: <sup>25</sup> וראה אתה הכהן והנה נהפך שער לבן בבהרת ומראה עמק מן-העור צרעת הוא במכה פרוחה וטמא אתו הכהן נגע צרעת הוא: <sup>26</sup> ואם יראה הכהן והנה אין-בבהרת שער לבן ושפלה איננה מן-העור והוא כהה והסגירו הכהן שבעת ימים: <sup>27</sup> וראהו הכהן ביום השביעי אם-פשה תפשה בעור וטמא הכהן אתו נגע צרעת הוא: <sup>28</sup> ואם-תחתייה תעמד בהרת לא-פשתה בעור והוא כהה שאת המכה הוא וטהרו הכהן פיי-צרבת המכה הוא: פ

<sup>29</sup> ואיש או אשה פיייהיה בו נגע בראש או בזקן: <sup>30</sup> וראה הכהן את-הנגע והנה

**20.** The symptomatology here is essentially the same as that applicable to the diagnosis of an initial condition of *tzara-at*, in verses 1–8.

**24. the patch from the burn is a discoloration**

The exposed skin is a pink or white shiny spot.

**29.** The hair, which is rooted in layers of the skin, is directly affected by conditions (such as acne) that disturb the hair follicles.

amine the affection. If it appears to go deeper than the skin and there is thin yellow hair in it, the priest shall pronounce him impure; it is a scall, a scaly eruption in the hair or beard.<sup>31</sup> But if the priest finds that the scall affection does not appear to go deeper than the skin, yet there is no black hair in it, the priest shall isolate the person with the scall affection for seven days.<sup>32</sup> On the seventh day the priest shall examine the affection. If the scall has not spread and no yellow hair has appeared in it, and the scall does not appear to go deeper than the skin,<sup>33</sup> the person with the scall shall shave himself, but without shaving the scall; the priest shall isolate him for another seven days.<sup>34</sup> On the seventh day the priest shall examine the scall. If the scall has not spread on the skin, and does not appear to go deeper than the skin, the priest shall pronounce him pure; he shall wash his clothes, and he shall be pure.<sup>35</sup> If, however, the scall should spread on the skin after he has been pronounced pure,<sup>36</sup> the priest shall examine him. If the scall has spread on the skin, the priest need not look for yellow hair: he is impure.<sup>37</sup> But if the scall has remained unchanged in color, and black hair has grown in it, the scall is healed; he is pure. The priest shall pronounce him pure.

<sup>38</sup>If a man or a woman has the skin of the body

מֵרֵאשׁוֹתָיו עֵמֶק מִן־הָעוֹר וּבוֹ שֵׁעַר צָהָב דָּק וְטָמֵא אֹתוֹ הִכְהֵן נִתְקַן הוּא צָרְעַת הָרֵאשׁוֹת אוֹ הַזֶּקֶן הוּא: <sup>31</sup> וְכִי־יִרְאֶה הִכְהֵן אֶת־נֶגַע הַנֶּתֶק וְהִנֵּה אֵין־מֵרֵאשׁוֹתָיו עֵמֶק מִן־הָעוֹר וְשֵׁעַר שָׁחַר אֵין בּוֹ וְהִסְגִּיר הִכְהֵן אֶת־נֶגַע הַנֶּתֶק שְׁבַע־יָמִים: <sup>32</sup> וְרָאָה הִכְהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּגַע בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְהִנֵּה לֹא־פָשָׁה הַנֶּתֶק וְלֹא־הָיָה בּוֹ שֵׁעַר צָהָב וּמֵרֵאשׁוֹתָיו הַנֶּתֶק אֵין עֵמֶק מִן־הָעוֹר: <sup>33</sup> וְהִתְגַּלַּח \* וְאֶת־הַנֶּתֶק לֹא יִגְלַח וְהִסְגִּיר הִכְהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּתֶק שְׁבַע־יָמִים שְׁנִית: <sup>34</sup> וְרָאָה הִכְהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּתֶק בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְהִנֵּה לֹא־פָשָׁה הַנֶּתֶק בְּעוֹר וּמֵרֵאשׁוֹתָיו אֵינְנוֹ עֵמֶק מִן־הָעוֹר וְטָהַר אֹתוֹ הִכְהֵן וּכְבַס בְּגָדָיו וְטָהַר: <sup>35</sup> וְאִם־פָּשָׁה יִפְשָׁה הַנֶּתֶק בְּעוֹר אַחֲרֵי טְהָרָתוֹ: <sup>36</sup> וְרָאָהוּ הִכְהֵן וְהִנֵּה פָשָׁה הַנֶּתֶק בְּעוֹר לֹא־יִבְקַר הִכְהֵן לְשֵׁעַר הַצָּהָב טָמֵא הוּא: <sup>37</sup> וְאִם־בְּעֵינָיו עָמַד הַנֶּתֶק וְשֵׁעַר שָׁחַר צָמַח־בּוֹ נִרְפָּא הַנֶּתֶק טָהוֹר הוּא וְטָהַר הִכְהֵן: <sup>38</sup> וְאִישׁ אוֹ־אִשָּׁה פִּי־יְהִיָּה בְּעוֹר־בְּשָׂרָם

v. 33. ג' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

**30–31.** This passage is describing the progressive stages of a complication whose treatment differs somewhat from acute *tzara-at* because of the background condition involved. Verse 30 stipulates that if both positive symptoms appear, acute *tzara-at* is indicated. Verse 31 states that if only one symptom occurs—the absence of black, normal hair (which is equivalent to the presence of yellow, infected hair)—quarantine is imposed, because a final determination cannot yet be made.

**thin yellow hair** The symptoms are generally similar to those of skin ailments, except that yellow, not white, hair is the discoloration to be watched for.

**scall** Hebrew: *netek*, which refers to the condition of hair follicles, not of skin, and describes

the follicles as being “torn” from the scalp after “splitting.”

**32. On the seventh day the priest shall examine the affection** Three conditions must exist for a declaration of purity to be issued at this stage: no yellow hair, no enlargement of the lesions, and no recessed lesions. To allow for clearer observation, the hair is shaved around the infected areas, leaving the areas themselves unshaven.

**36. the scall has spread on the skin** Any enlargement of the lesions after 14 days is sufficient to warrant a diagnosis of acute *tzara-at*. The priest need look no further for yellow hair.

**37. the scall has remained unchanged** If normal-colored hair grows back in the infected area and there has been no subsequent enlargement of the lesions, the *netek* infection has healed.

streaked with white discolorations, <sup>39</sup>and the priest sees that the discolorations on the skin of the body are of a dull white, it is a tetter broken out on the skin; he is pure.

<sup>40</sup>If a man loses the hair of his head and becomes bald, he is pure. <sup>41</sup>If he loses the hair on the front part of his head and becomes bald at the forehead, he is pure. <sup>42</sup>But if a white affection streaked with red appears on the bald part in the front or at the back of the head, it is a scaly eruption that is spreading over the bald part in the front or at the back of the head. <sup>43</sup>The priest shall examine him: if the swollen affection on the bald part in the front or at the back of his head is white streaked with red, like the leprosy of body skin in appearance, <sup>44</sup>the man is leprous; he is impure. The priest shall pronounce him impure; he has the affection on his head.

<sup>45</sup>As for the person with a leprous affection, his clothes shall be rent, his head shall be left bare, and he shall cover over his upper lip; and he shall call out, "Impure! Impure!" <sup>46</sup>He shall be impure as long as the disease is on him. Being impure, he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

**38–39.** These verses deal with an ailment known as *bohak* (brightness), identified by some medical authorities as vitiligo. It is a rash that is not acute.

**40. If a man loses the hair of his head and becomes bald** This section (vv. 40–44) deals with cases in which a person was bald before the outbreak of the ailment in question.

**43.** If the inflamed infection is whitish on the bald pate or on the forehead, the person is suffering from acute *tzara-at*.

**45. the person with a leprous affection**

**45. he shall call out, "Impure! Impure!"** According to the Talmud, one does this not only to warn others of the contagion but also to elicit compassion and prayers on one's behalf (BT MK 5a). It is the responsibility of an afflicted person to recognize the illness and ask for help; and it is the responsibility of the com-

בְּהֵרֶת בְּהֵרֶת לְבַנְתָּ: <sup>39</sup> וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה  
בְּעוֹר־בְּשָׂרָם בְּהֵרֶת פִּהוֹת לְבַנְתָּ בְּהֵק  
הוּא פָּרַח בְּעוֹר טְהוֹר הוּא: ס

<sup>40</sup> וְאִישׁ כִּי יִמְרֹט רֹאשׁוֹ קָרַח הוּא טְהוֹר  
הוּא: <sup>41</sup> וְאִם מִפְּאֵת פָּנָיו יִמְרֹט רֹאשׁוֹ  
גִּבַּח הוּא טְהוֹר הוּא: <sup>42</sup> וְכִי־יִהְיֶה  
בְּקָרְחָת אֹו בְּגִבַּחַת נִגַּע לְבָן אֲדַמְדָּם  
צָרַעַת פְּרִחַת הוּא בְּקָרְחָתוֹ אֹו בְּגִבַּחָתוֹ:  
<sup>43</sup> וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה שְׂאֵת־הַנֶּגַע  
לְבַנָּה אֲדַמְדָּמַת בְּקָרְחָתוֹ אֹו בְּגִבַּחָתוֹ  
כְּמֵרְאָה צָרַעַת עוֹר בְּשָׂר: <sup>44</sup> אִישׁ־צָרוּעַ  
הוּא טָמֵא הוּא טָמֵא יִטְמָאנוּ הַכֹּהֵן  
בְּרֹאשׁוֹ נִגְעוּ:

<sup>45</sup> וְהִצְרוּעַ אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ הַנֶּגַע בְּגָדָיו יִהְיוּ  
פְּרָמִים וְרֹאשׁוֹ יִהְיֶה פְּרוּעַ וְעַל־שִׁפְם  
יַעֲטֶה וְטָמֵא | טָמֵא יִקְרָא: <sup>46</sup> כָּל־יָמֵי אֲשֶׁר  
הַנֶּגַע בּוֹ יִטְמָא טָמֵא הוּא בְּדָד יֵשֵׁב מִחוּץ  
לְמַחֲנֶה מוֹשְׁבּוֹ: ס

Namely, one who suffers from the acute condition stated in verse 8.

**his head shall be left bare** Baring the head so that the hair hung loose was a customary way of shaming a person, as was covering the upper lip.

**and he shall call out, "Impure!"** The sufferer must warn all who approach that he is impure.

**46. as long as the disease is on him** Thus, an individual suffering from acute *tzara-at* may be banished permanently.

munity to offer support and prayer rather than shun or ignore the afflicted.

One commentator reads, "the impure shall call out, 'Impure!'" That is, people tend to project their own failings onto others. A corrupt person sees corruption all around (BT Kid. 70a).

47When an eruptive affection occurs in a cloth of wool or linen fabric, 48in the warp or in the woof of the linen or the wool, or in a skin or in anything made of skin; 49if the affection in the cloth or the skin, in the warp or the woof, or in any article of skin, is streaky green or red, it is an eruptive affection. It shall be shown to the priest; 50and the priest, after examining the affection, shall isolate the affected article for seven days. 51On the seventh day he shall examine the affection: if the affection has spread in the cloth—whether in the warp or the woof, or in the skin, for whatever purpose the skin may be used—the affection is a malignant eruption; it is impure. 52The cloth—whether warp or woof in wool or linen, or any article of skin—in which the affection is found, shall be burned, for it is a malignant eruption; it shall be consumed in fire. 53But if the priest sees that the affection in the cloth—whether in warp or in woof, or in any article of skin—has not spread, 54the priest shall order the affected article washed, and he shall isolate it for another seven days. 55And if, after the affected article has been washed, the priest sees that the affection has not changed color and that it has not spread, it is impure. It shall be consumed in fire; it is a fret, whether on its inner side or on its outer side. 56But if the priest sees that the affected part, after it has been washed, is faded, he shall tear it out from the cloth or skin, whether in the warp or

47וְהִבָּגַד פִּי־יְהִיָּה בּוֹ נֹגַע צָרַעַת בְּבִגְד צֹמֶר א֥וּ בְּבִגְד פִּשְׁתִּים׃ 48אוֹ בִּשְׂתֵי א֥וּ בְעֵרֵב לִפְשָׁתִים וְלִצְמֹר א֥וּ בְעוֹר א֥וּ בְכָל־מְלֹאכֶת עוֹר׃ 49וְהָיָה הַנֹּגַע יִרְקַק א֥וּ אֲדָמָדִם בְּבִגְד א֥וּ בְעוֹר א֥וּ־בִשְׂתֵי א֥וּ־בְעֵרֵב א֥וּ בְכָל־כְּלִי־עוֹר נֹגַע צָרַעַת הוּא וְהִרְאָה אֶת־הַפֶּהֶן׃ 50וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנֹּגַע שְׁבַע־יָמִים׃ 51וְרָאָה אֶת־הַנֹּגַע בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי פִי־פֶשֶׁה הַנֹּגַע בְּבִגְד א֥וּ־בִשְׂתֵי א֥וּ־בְעֵרֵב א֥וּ בְעוֹר לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה הָעוֹר לְמִלְאכָה צָרַעַת מִמְאָרֶת הַנֹּגַע טָמֵא הוּא׃ 52וְשָׂרַף אֶת־הַבִּגְד א֥וּ אֶת־הַשְּׂתִי א֥וּ אֶת־הָעֵרֵב בְּצֹמֶר א֥וּ בִּפְשָׁתִים א֥וּ אֶת־כְּלֵי הָעוֹר אֲשֶׁר־יְהִיָּה בּוֹ הַנֹּגַע פִּי־צָרַעַת מִמְאָרֶת הוּא בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרָף׃ 53וְאִם יִרְאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה לֹא־פֶשֶׁה הַנֹּגַע בְּבִגְד א֥וּ בִּשְׂתֵי א֥וּ בְעֵרֵב א֥וּ בְכָל־כְּלִי־עוֹר׃ 54וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וּכְבָּסוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ הַנֹּגַע וְהִסְגִּירוּ שְׁבַע־יָמִים שְׁנִית׃ 55וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אַחֲרָי א֥וּ הִכְבִּס אֶת־הַנֹּגַע וְהִנֵּה לֹא־הִפָּךְ הַנֹּגַע אֶת־עֵינָו וְהַנֹּגַע לֹא־פֶשֶׁה טָמֵא הוּא בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרָפוּנּוּ פָחַתָּת הוּא בְּקִרְחָתוֹ א֥וּ בְּגִבְחָתוֹ׃ 56וְאִם רָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה כָּהֵן הַנֹּגַע אַחֲרֵי הַכְּבִס אֹתוֹ וְקָרַע אֹתוֹ מִן־הַבִּגְד א֥וּ מִן־הָעוֹר

שביעי  
[רביעי]

**TZARA-AT IN FABRICS AND LEATHER**  
(vv. 47–59)  
This section deals with *tzara-at*-type infections

that damage fabrics and worked leather. They may have been some kinds of fungoid or sporoid infections.

47. Although most medieval and modern commentators see the eruption of *tzara-at* in clothing as a natural phenomenon, a form of rot or fungus, Maimonides and Ramban see it as supernatural, something that could take place only in the Land of Israel. Because of that land's sensitivity to immorality, even the clothes one wears would bear witness to the moral decay of the person wearing them.

Although the laws of *tum-ah* seem very foreign to us, they flow directly from the Israelites' sense that being able to come into God's presence is an irreplaceable privilege. This led them to be profoundly concerned with anything that might estrange them from the divine presence.

in the woof; <sup>57</sup>and if it occurs again in the cloth—whether in warp or in woof—or in any article of skin, it is a wild growth; the affected article shall be consumed in fire. <sup>58</sup>If, however, the affection disappears from the cloth—warp or woof—or from any article of skin that has been washed, it shall be washed again, and it shall be pure.

<sup>59</sup>Such is the procedure for eruptive affections of cloth, woolen or linen, in warp or in woof, or of any article of skin, for pronouncing it pure or impure.

מפסיר או מן-השתי או מן-הערב: <sup>57</sup> ואם-  
 תראה עוד בבגד או-בשתי או-בערב או  
 בכל-כלי-עור פרחת הוא באש תשרפנו  
 את אשר-בו הנגע: <sup>58</sup> והבגד או-השתי  
 או-הערב או-כל-כלי העור אשר תכבס  
 וסר מהם הנגע וכבס שנית וטהר:  
<sup>59</sup> זאת תורת נגע-צרעת בגד הצמר | או  
 הפשתים או השתי או הערב או כל-  
 כלי-עור לטהרו או לטמאו: \* פ

\* For the haftarah for this portion, see p. 671.

**14** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>This shall be the ritual for a leper at the time that he is to be purified.

When it has been reported to the priest, <sup>3</sup>the priest shall go outside the camp. If the priest sees that the leper has been healed of his scaly affection, <sup>4</sup>the priest shall order two live pure birds, cedar wood, crimson stuff, and hyssop to be brought for him who is to be purified. <sup>5</sup>The priest shall order one of the birds slaughtered

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup>זֹאת תְּהִי־הַתּוֹרָה הַמְצַרֵּעַ בַּיּוֹם טְהַרְתּוּ וְהוּבָא אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>3</sup>וַיֵּצֵא הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהָיָה נִרְפָּא נֹגַע־הַצִּרְעָת מִן־הַצִּרוּעַ: <sup>4</sup>וַיִּצְוֶה הַכֹּהֵן וְלָקַח לַמִּטְהָר שְׁתֵּי־צִפְרִים חַיִּים טְהוֹרִים וְעֵץ אֲרָז וּשְׁנֵי תוֹלַעַת וְאַזָּב: <sup>5</sup>וַיִּצְוֶה הַכֹּהֵן וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַצִּפּוֹר הָאֶחָת אֶל־כְּלִי־חָרָשׁ

THE PURIFICATION OF SKIN DISEASES (continued)

PURIFICATION RITES FOR INDIVIDUALS (14:1–32)

The rites ordained for the purification of a person who had suffered from *tzara-at* are among the most elaborate in the priestly laws. They demonstrate how seriously the *tzara-at* infections were regarded in ancient Israel.

**2. ritual** Hebrew: *torab*, which here means a manual of procedure for the priests, who administered the purification rites.

**When it has been reported to the priest** The priest went out to the afflicted person who

could not enter the camp, having been declared impure.

**4. two live pure birds** The birds must be physically sound and of a pure species.

**crimson stuff** Hebrew: *sh'ni tola-at*; literally, "the scarlet of the worm." A crimson dye is extracted from the eggs of an insect that lives in the leaves of oak trees. The cloth, most likely, was wool.

**5. over fresh water in an earthen vessel** Blood of the slaughtered bird not collected in the vessel would flow down into the earth. The Hebrew for "fresh water" (*mayim hayyim*) literally

CHAPTER 14

This *parashah* (read together with *Tazri-a* in most non-leap years) describes the ritual of purifying and reintegrating the recovered leper. We can read it as a description of the Israelites' attitude to the experience of recovering from illness. The text also discusses the appearance of a "plague" in the stones of a person's house and the implications of menstrual blood and seminal emissions as they relate to ritual impurity (*tum-ah*).

The formal description of the cleansing ritual masks the deep and possibly conflicted feelings of the person who has recovered from a serious illness. These might include feelings of relief and happiness together with a new appreciation of good health, perhaps resentment over what had been gone through as well as envy of people who had remained healthy. The offering of the recovered leper is sometimes referred to as "the sacrifice of one who has re-

turned from the dead," either because the illness was so grave or because a life cut off from all human contact, a life without friends and family, was not really a life.

**3. the priest shall go outside the camp** He is not to wait until people come to him with their concerns but must go to where the people are.

**4.** The offering included cedar wood, from the tallest and strongest of all plants, and hyssop, a kind of grass, the smallest and most vulnerable of all growing things. This was to symbolize the leveling power of illness, which afflicts the powerful and the powerless alike, and to teach the mighty a lesson about their vulnerability. The person recovered from illness may re-enter the camp but may not go home yet. Perhaps one who leaves the hospital or the isolation of serious illness with great relief is not yet fully oneself, not quite ready to resume the routines and responsibilities of normal life, home, and family.

over fresh water in an earthen vessel; <sup>6</sup>and he shall take the live bird, along with the cedar wood, the crimson stuff, and the hyssop, and dip them together with the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the fresh water. <sup>7</sup>He shall then sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be purified of the eruption and purify him; and he shall set the live bird free in the open country. <sup>8</sup>The one to be purified shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and bathe in water; then he shall be pure. After that he may enter the camp, but he must remain outside his tent seven days. <sup>9</sup>On the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair—of head, beard, and eyebrows. When he has shaved off all his hair, he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water; then he shall be pure. <sup>10</sup>On the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish, three-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in for a grain offering, and one *log* of oil. <sup>11</sup>These shall be presented before the LORD, with the man to be purified, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, by the priest who performs the purification.

<sup>12</sup>The priest shall take one of the male lambs and offer it with the *log* of oil as a reparation offering, and he shall elevate them as an elevation offering before the LORD. <sup>13</sup>The lamb shall be slaughtered at the spot in the sacred area

עַל־מִים חַיִּים: <sup>6</sup> אֶת־הַצִּפּוֹר הַחַיָּה יִקַּח אֹתָהּ וְאֶת־עֵץ הָאָרְזוֹ וְאֶת־שְׂנֵי הַתּוֹלְעֹת וְאֶת־הָאֹזֶב וְטָבַל אוֹתָם וְאֶת | הַצִּפּוֹר הַחַיָּה בְּדָם הַצִּפּוֹר הַשְּׁחֻטָּה עַל הַמַּיִם הַחַיִּים: <sup>7</sup> וְהִזָּה עַל הַמְּטַהֵר מִן־הַצִּרְעָתָה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וְטָהָרוֹ וְשָׁלַח אֶת־הַצִּפּוֹר הַחַיָּה עַל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה: <sup>8</sup> וְכָבַס הַמְּטַהֵר אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְגִלַּח אֶת־כָּל־שְׁעָרוֹ וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָהָר וְאַחֵר יָבֹוא אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֵּשֶׁב מִחוּץ לְאֹהֶלוֹ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: <sup>9</sup> וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי יִגֹּלַח אֶת־כָּל־שְׁעָרוֹ אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ וְאֶת־זַקְנוֹ וְאֶת גְּבַת עֵינָיו וְאֶת־כָּל־שְׁעָרוֹ יִגֹּלַח וְכָבַס אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ אֶת־בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְטָהָר: <sup>10</sup> וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִקַּח שְׁנֵי־כִבְשִׁיִּם תְּמִימִים וְכִבְשֶׁה אַחַת בַּת־שָׁנָתָה תְּמִימָה וְשִׁלְשָׁה עֶשְׂרִים סֹלֶת מִנְחָה בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן וְלֶג אֶחָד שֶׁמֶן: <sup>11</sup> וְהָעֹמֵד הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּטַהֵר אֶת הָאִישׁ הַמְּטַהֵר וְאֹתָם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה פָּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:

<sup>12</sup> וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַכִּבְשֶׁה הָאֶחָד וְהִקְרִיב אוֹתוֹ לְאַשֶׁם וְאֶת־לֶג הַשֶּׁמֶן וְהִנִּיף אוֹתָם שְׁנֵי תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>13</sup> וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַכִּבְשֶׁה בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁחַט אֶת־הַחֻטָּאת וְאֶת־

means “living water.” It is water that flows continually, like that of springs.

**9. of head, beard, and eyebrows** It was normally forbidden to shave the beard or the side-locks of the head (19:27). Exceptions are made for these rites of purification.

**10. log** About 10 fluid ounces (0.3 L).

**11.** The person undergoing purification is stationed near the entrance of the Tent of Meet-

ing, together with the material assembled for use in the purification.

**12. reparation offering** This provided sacrificial blood to be sprinkled on the extremities of the individual who was being purified; blood from the burnt offering or from the purification offering could not be applied to the human body.

**13. at the spot in the sacred area** That is, on the north side of the altar (see 1:11, 4:24, and 7:2).

**9. bathe his body in water** This was not simply to cleanse oneself. It symbolized rebirth and re-creation—just as an infant is born out of water, just as a convert emerges out of water to a new life and a new identity, just as the

world was created out of water (Gen. 1:2). The experience of illness and recovery has made the leper a new person—that is, someone who now looks at life differently (*Seifer Ha-Hinnukh*).

where the purification offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered. For the reparation offering, like the purification offering, goes to the priest; it is most holy. <sup>14</sup>The priest shall take some of the blood of the reparation offering, and the priest shall put it on the ridge of the right ear of him who is being purified, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. <sup>15</sup>The priest shall then take some of the *log* of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. <sup>16</sup>And the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in the palm of his left hand and sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before the LORD. <sup>17</sup>Some of the oil left in his palm shall be put by the priest on the ridge of the right ear of the one being purified, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot—over the blood of the reparation offering. <sup>18</sup>The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one being purified. Thus the priest shall make expiation for him before the LORD. <sup>19</sup>The priest shall then offer the purification offering and make expiation for the one being purified of his impurity. Last, the burnt offering shall be slaughtered, <sup>20</sup>and the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar, and the priest shall make expiation for him. Then he shall be pure.

<sup>21</sup>If, however, he is poor and his means are insufficient, he shall take one male lamb for a reparation offering, to be elevated in expiation

**14. on the ridge of the right ear** The person was treated literally from head to foot.

**18.** The rites were essential to securing expiation, or purification. The purification offering and the burnt offering were also parts of the purification rites. The purification offering served to place the individual in good standing with God.

The burnt offering symbolized renewed acceptability as a worshiper and full reinstatement in the community.

**21–32.** These verses repeat the rites prescribed in verses 1–20, except that birds are substituted for animals in the burnt offering and in the purification offering.

**17.** The oil is placed on the leper's head, hand, and foot and sprinkled on the altar, to convey the idea that recovery from illness is

the combined result of our actions, our attitudes, and divine grace.

הָעֹלָה בַּמָּקוֹם הַקָּדוֹשׁ כִּי פִּחְטָאת הָאֲשָׁם  
 הוּא לְכַהֵן קָדֹשׁ קָדָשִׁים הוּא: <sup>14</sup> וְלָקַח  
 הַכַּהֵן מִדָּם הָאֲשָׁם וְנָתַן הַכַּהֵן עַל-  
 תְּנוּפָה אֲזָן הַמִּטְהָר וְעַל-בִּהֵן  
 יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֵן רִגְלוֹ הַיְמָנִית:  
<sup>15</sup> וְלָקַח הַכַּהֵן מִלֶּגֶם הַשֶּׁמֶן וַיִּצַק עַל-כַּף  
 הַכַּהֵן הַשְּׂמָאלִית: <sup>16</sup> וְטָבַל הַכַּהֵן אֶת-  
 אֶצְבָּעוֹ הַיְמָנִית מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּפוֹ  
 הַשְּׂמָאלִית וְהִזָּה מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ  
 שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>17</sup> וּמִיַּתֵּר הַשֶּׁמֶן  
 אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּפוֹ יִתֵּן הַכַּהֵן עַל-תְּנוּפָה אֲזָן  
 הַמִּטְהָר הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֵן יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית  
 וְעַל-בִּהֵן רִגְלוֹ הַיְמָנִית עַל דָּם הָאֲשָׁם:  
<sup>18</sup> וְהִנּוֹתָר בַּשֶּׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּף הַכַּהֵן יִתֵּן  
 עַל-רֹאשׁ הַמִּטְהָר וּכְפָר עָלָיו הַכַּהֵן לִפְנֵי  
 יְהוָה: <sup>19</sup> וְעָשָׂה הַכַּהֵן אֶת-הַחֻטָּאת וּכְפָר  
 עַל-הַמִּטְהָר מִטְּמֵאתוֹ וְאַחַר יִשְׁחַט אֶת-  
 הָעֹלָה: <sup>20</sup> וְהָעֹלָה הַכַּהֵן אֶת-הָעֹלָה וְאֶת-  
 הַמִּנְחָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַה וּכְפָר עָלָיו הַכַּהֵן  
 וְטָהַר: **ס**

וְאִם-יֵדֵל הוּא וְאִין יָדוֹ מִשְׁגֵּת וְלָקַח <sup>21</sup>  
 כֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד אֲשֶׁם לְתִנּוּפָה לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו שלישי  
[חמישי]

for him, one-tenth of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in for a grain offering, and a *log* of oil;<sup>22</sup> and two turtledoves or two pigeons, depending on his means, the one to be the purification offering and the other the burnt offering.<sup>23</sup> On the eighth day of his purification he shall bring them to the priest at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, before the LORD.<sup>24</sup> The priest shall take the lamb of reparation offering and the *log* of oil, and elevate them as an elevation offering before the LORD.<sup>25</sup> When the lamb of reparation offering has been slaughtered, the priest shall take some of the blood of the reparation offering and put it on the ridge of the right ear of the one being purified, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.<sup>26</sup> The priest shall then pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand,<sup>27</sup> and with the finger of his right hand the priest shall sprinkle some of the oil that is in the palm of his left hand seven times before the LORD.<sup>28</sup> Some of the oil in his palm shall be put by the priest on the ridge of the right ear of the one being purified, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot, over the same places as the blood of the reparation offering;<sup>29</sup> and what is left of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one being purified, to make expiation for him before the LORD.<sup>30</sup> He shall then offer one of the turtledoves or pigeons, depending on his means—<sup>31</sup> whichever he can afford—the one as a purification offering and the other as a burnt offering, together with the grain offering. Thus the priest shall make expiation before the LORD for the one being purified.<sup>32</sup> Such is the ritual for him who has a scaly affection and whose means for his purification are limited.

<sup>33</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

*TZARA-AT* IN BUILDING STONES  
(vv. 33–53)

This section deals with some sort of mold, blight,

וְעִשְׂרוֹן סֹלֶת אֶחָד בְּלוּל בְּשֶׁמֶן לְמִנְחָה  
וְלֹג שֶׁמֶן: <sup>22</sup> וּשְׁתֵּי תוֹרִים אֹו שְׁנֵי בְּנֵי יוֹנָה  
אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׂיֵג יָדוֹ וְהָיָה אֶחָד חֲטָאת וְהָאֶחָד  
עֹלָה: <sup>23</sup> וְהָבִיא אֹתָם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי  
לְטַהֲרָתוֹ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד  
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>24</sup> וּלְקַח הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-כֶּבֶשׂ  
הָאֵשֶׁם וְאֶת-לֹג הַשֶּׁמֶן וְהִנִּיף אֹתָם הַכֹּהֵן  
תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>25</sup> וּשְׁחַט אֶת-כֶּבֶשׂ  
הָאֵשֶׁם וּלְקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם הָאֵשֶׁם וְנָתַן  
עַל-תְּנוּף אֶזְנוֹ-הַמִּטְהָר הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֶן  
יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֶן רִגְלוֹ הַיְמָנִית:  
<sup>26</sup> וּמִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן יִצַק הַכֹּהֵן עַל-כַּף הַכֹּהֵן  
הַשְּׂמָאלִית: <sup>27</sup> וְהִזָּה הַכֹּהֵן בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ  
הַיְמָנִית מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּפוֹ  
הַשְּׂמָאלִית שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:  
<sup>28</sup> וְנָתַן הַכֹּהֵן מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּפוֹ  
עַל-תְּנוּף אֶזְנוֹ הַמִּטְהָר הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֶן  
יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֶן רִגְלוֹ הַיְמָנִית עַל-  
מְקוֹם דָּם הָאֵשֶׁם: <sup>29</sup> וְהִנּוֹתָר מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן  
אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּף הַכֹּהֵן יִתֵּן עַל-רֹאשׁ הַמִּטְהָר  
לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>30</sup> וְעָשָׂה אֶת-  
הָאֶחָד מִן-הַתּוֹרִים אֹו מִן-בְּנֵי הַיּוֹנָה  
מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּשְׂיֵג יָדוֹ: <sup>31</sup> אֶת אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תִּשְׂיֵג יָדוֹ  
אֶת-הָאֶחָד חֲטָאת וְאֶת-הָאֶחָד עֹלָה עַל-  
הַמִּנְחָה וְכַפֵּר הַכֹּהֵן עַל הַמִּטְהָר לִפְנֵי  
יְהוָה: <sup>32</sup> זֹאת תּוֹרַת אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ נָגַע צִרְעַת  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִשְׂיֵג יָדוֹ בְּטַהֲרָתוֹ: פ  
<sup>33</sup> וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן  
לֵאמֹר:

רביעי  
[ששי]

or rot, perhaps of a fungoid nature, that produced recessed lesions and discoloration in the plaster or mud used to cover building stones.

<sup>34</sup>When you enter the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I inflict an eruptive plague upon a house in the land you possess, <sup>35</sup>the owner of the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, "Something like a plague has appeared upon my house." <sup>36</sup>The priest shall order the house cleared before the priest enters to examine the plague, so that nothing in the house may become impure; after that the priest shall enter to examine the house. <sup>37</sup>If, when he examines the plague, the plague in the walls of the house is found to consist of greenish or reddish streaks that appear to go deep into the wall, <sup>38</sup>the priest shall come out of the house to the entrance of the house, and close up the house for seven days. <sup>39</sup>On the seventh day the priest shall return. If he sees that the plague has spread on the walls of the house, <sup>40</sup>the priest shall order the stones with the plague in them to be pulled out and cast outside the city into an impure place. <sup>41</sup>The house shall be scraped inside all around, and the coating that is scraped off shall

כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל־אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְכֶם לְאֶחְזָה וְנִתְּתִי נֹגַע צָרְעַת בְּבַיִת אֶרֶץ אֲחֻזְתְּכֶם: <sup>35</sup> וּבֹא אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ הַבַּיִת וְהִגִּיד לַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר כְּנֹגַע נִרְאָה לִי בַבַּיִת: <sup>36</sup> וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וּפָנּוּ אֶת־הַבַּיִת בְּטָרִם יָבֵא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הַנֹּגַע וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת וְאַחֵר כֵּן יָבֵא הַכֹּהֵן לִרְאוֹת אֶת־הַבַּיִת: <sup>37</sup> וְרָאָה אֶת־הַנֹּגַע וְהִנִּיחַ הַנֹּגַע בְּקִירַת הַבַּיִת שִׁקְעוֹרוֹת יִרְקָרְקֹת אוֹ אֲדַמְדָּמֹת וּמְרֵאִיהֶן שָׁפָל מִן־הַקִּיר: <sup>38</sup> וַיֵּצֵא הַכֹּהֵן מִן־הַבַּיִת אֶל־פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת וְהִסְגִּיר אֶת־הַבַּיִת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: <sup>39</sup> וְשֵׁב הַכֹּהֵן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְרָאָה וְהִנִּיחַ פָּשָׁה הַנֹּגַע בְּקִירַת הַבַּיִת: <sup>40</sup> וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וְחִלְצוּ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶן הַנֹּגַע וְהִשְׁלִיכוּ אֹתָהֶן אֶל־מְחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־מְקוֹם טָמֵא: <sup>41</sup> וְאֶת־הַבַּיִת יִקְצַע מִבַּיִת סָבִיב וְשָׁפְכוּ אֶת־הָעֶפֶר אֲשֶׁר הִקְצִו אֶל־מְחוּץ לְעִיר

**36.** Once the priest arrives and quarantines the house, everything inside it becomes impure as well.

**37. streaks that appear to go deep into the wall** Literally, "lesions that appear to be recessed within the surface of the wall."

**38. close up the house** A diseased person is closed up in a house. Here, the house itself is locked up to keep people out.

**39.** If the lesions became enlarged, it is likely that the blight, or fungus, has penetrated to the stones themselves.

**41.** The mud coating is scraped off the interior facing of the rest of the stones to ascertain whether the infection had penetrated the stones themselves.

**34.** The appearance of *tzara-at* in the stones of a house was a mysterious event. Some Sages doubted it ever happened, and others consigned it to a distant past. Commentators consider the afflicted house (*ha-bayit ha-m'nugga*) to be a moral warning rather than a natural occurrence, even more emphatically than they consider cases of skin disease to be a moral warning. They fasten on the word for "I inflict" to deduce that this was a plague sent by God. A home is a family's private refuge. Thus a home afflicted by plague represents the breakdown of the social values that kept a family safe and united. It was a cause for concern if the problems of society at large had come to infect the home. Most commentators suggest

that the antisocial behavior that brought the plague to the house was selfishness, a blindness to the needs of others.

**35. owner of the house** Literally, "one whose house it is," leading the Sages to conclude that the owner sinned by saying, "the house and everything in it are mine and I don't have to share it with anyone else" (BT Yoma 11b). As punishment, the house is torn down. The Midrash pictures such owners claiming that they cannot help the poor because they are poor themselves. When their houses are dismantled, all will see what they were hoarding (Lev. R. 17:2).

**40. stones . . . to be pulled out** From the heart of the selfish owner.

be dumped outside the city in an impure place.  
<sup>42</sup>They shall take other stones and replace those stones with them, and take other coating and plaster the house.

<sup>43</sup>If the plague again breaks out in the house, after the stones have been pulled out and after the house has been scraped and replastered, <sup>44</sup>the priest shall come to examine: if the plague has spread in the house, it is a malignant eruption in the house; it is impure. <sup>45</sup>The house shall be torn down—its stones and timber and all the coating on the house—and taken to an impure place outside the city.

<sup>46</sup>Whoever enters the house while it is closed up shall be impure until evening. <sup>47</sup>Whoever sleeps in the house must wash his clothes, and whoever eats in the house must wash his clothes.

<sup>48</sup>If, however, the priest comes and sees that the plague has not spread in the house after the house was replastered, the priest shall pronounce the house pure, for the plague has healed. <sup>49</sup>To purify the house, he shall take two birds, cedar wood, crimson stuff, and hyssop. <sup>50</sup>He shall slaughter the one bird over fresh water in an earthen vessel. <sup>51</sup>He shall take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the crimson stuff, and the live bird, and dip them in the blood of the slaughtered bird and the fresh water, and sprinkle on

אֶל־מִקְוֹם טָמֵא: <sup>42</sup> וְלָקְחוּ אֲבָנִים אַחֲרוֹת וְהִבְיִאוּ אֶל־תַּחַת הָאֲבָנִים וְעָפַר אַחֲרֵי יָקַח וְטָח אֶת־הַבַּיִת:

<sup>43</sup> וְאִם־יָשׁוּב הַנֶּגַע וּפְרַח בַּבַּיִת אַחֲרֵי חֲלֵץ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים וְאַחֲרֵי הַקְּצוֹת אֶת־הַבַּיִת וְאַחֲרֵי הַטּוּחַ: <sup>44</sup> וּבֹא הַכֹּהֵן וְרָאָה וְהִנֵּה פָּשָׁה הַנֶּגַע בַּבַּיִת צָרְעַת מִמְאֶרֶת הוּא בַּבַּיִת טָמֵא הוּא: <sup>45</sup> וְנָתַץ אֶת־הַבַּיִת אֶת־אֲבָנָיו וְאֶת־עֵצָיו וְאֶת כָּל־עֹפֵר הַבַּיִת וְהוֹצִיא אֶל־מְחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־מִקְוֹם טָמֵא:

<sup>46</sup> וְהָבֵא אֶל־הַפֶּה כָּל־יְמֵי הַסְּגִיר אֹתוֹ יְטָמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: <sup>47</sup> וְהִשְׁכַּב בַּבַּיִת יִכְבֵּס אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְהֵאֲכֵל בַּבַּיִת יִכְבֵּס אֶת־בְּגָדָיו:

<sup>48</sup> וְאִם־בָּא יָבֵא הַכֹּהֵן וְרָאָה וְהִנֵּה לֹא־פָּשָׁה הַנֶּגַע בַּבַּיִת אַחֲרֵי הַטּוּחַ אֶת־הַבַּיִת וְטָהַר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַבַּיִת כִּי נִרְפָּא הַנֶּגַע: <sup>49</sup> וְלָקַח לְחֹטֵא אֶת־הַבַּיִת שְׁתֵּי צִפְרִים וְעֵץ אֲרָז וְשֵׁנִי תוֹלַעַת וְאֹזֵב: <sup>50</sup> וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַצִּפֹּר הָאֶחָד אֶל־כְּלֵי־חֶרֶשׁ עַל־מִים חַיִּים: <sup>51</sup> וְלָקַח אֶת־עֵץ־הָאֲרָז וְאֶת־הָאֹזֵב וְאֶת שְׁנֵי הַתּוֹלַעַת וְאֶת הַצִּפֹּר הַחַיָּה וְטָבַל אֹתָם בְּדַם הַצִּפֹּר הַשְּׁחוּטָה וּבַמַּיִם הַחַיִּים וְהִזָּה אֶל־הַבַּיִת שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים:

**42. take other coating and plaster the house** The stones could be retained if the blight had not penetrated into them.

**46–47.** These verses deal with the transmission of an impurity that is present in a closed structure to people who are inside the structure while it is impure.

**49.** The procedures for purifying the house that has “healed,” so to speak, are almost identical to those prescribed in verses 1–32 for purifying a diseased person. There is only one difference: Oil and blood are sprinkled on a person; water and blood are sprinkled on a house.

**43–45.** Is the problem superficial, easily cleared up, or has it entered the structure of the institution, so that the institution is beyond saving?

**The house shall be torn down** The Midrash sees this as an anticipation of the destruc-

tion of Solomon’s temple, a house that will have been corrupted by the behavior of its inhabitants (Lev. R. 17:7). It then adds, “But it will not be forever, as it is stated, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation’” (Isa. 28:16).

the house seven times. <sup>52</sup>Having purified the house with the blood of the bird, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the crimson stuff, <sup>53</sup>he shall set the live bird free outside the city in the open country. Thus he shall make expiation for the house, and it shall be pure.

<sup>54</sup>Such is the ritual for every eruptive affection—for scalls, <sup>55</sup>for an eruption on a cloth or a house, <sup>56</sup>for swellings, for rashes, or for discolorations—<sup>57</sup>to determine when they are impure and when they are pure.

Such is the ritual concerning eruptions.

**15** The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people and say to them:

When any man has a discharge issuing from his member, he is impure. <sup>3</sup>The impurity from his discharge shall mean the following—whether his member runs with the discharge or is stopped up so that there is no discharge, his impurity means this: <sup>4</sup>Any bedding on which the one with the discharge lies shall be impure, and every object on which he sits shall be im-

**54–57.** These verses are a postscript to the entire contents of chapters 13 and 14.

DISCHARGES FROM SEXUAL ORGANS (15:1–33)

Most of this chapter deals with discharges from the sexual organs as a result of illness or infection, not the normal menstruation of females or seminal emissions of males. Little was known about their treatment, apart from bathing, laundering clothing, and carefully observing the course taken by the ailment itself. All the impurities dealt with in this chapter, like any prevailing impurity

within the Israelite community, threatened, directly or indirectly, the purity of the sanctuary, which was located within the area of settlement.

THE ISRAELITE MALE (vv. 1–18)

**2. member** Hebrew: *basar* (body, flesh); here it is a euphemism for the male sex organ.

**4. lies . . . sits** Two sorts of objects are ren-

וְחִטָּא אֶת־הַבַּיִת בְּדָם הַצִּפּוֹר וּבַמַּיִם  
הַחַיִּים וּבַצִּפּוֹר הַחַיָּה וּבַעֵץ הָאֲרָז וּבְאֵזֹב  
וּבִשְׁנֵי הַתּוֹלְעוֹת: <sup>53</sup>וְשִׁלַּח אֶת־הַצִּפּוֹר  
הַחַיָּה אֶל־מְחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה  
וּכְפָר עַל־הַבַּיִת וְטָהַר:

חמישי <sup>54</sup>זאת התורה לכל־נגע הצרעת ולנֹתק:  
<sup>55</sup>ולצרעת הבגד ולבית: <sup>56</sup>ולשאת  
ולספחת ולבהרת: <sup>57</sup>להורת ביום  
הטמא וביום הטהר  
זאת תורת הצרעת: ט

**טו** ויִדְבַר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן  
לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup>דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתֶּם  
אֲלֵהֶם  
אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי יִהְיֶה זָב מִבְּשָׁרוֹ זָוָב טָמֵא  
הוּא: <sup>3</sup>וְזֹאת תִּהְיֶה טְמֵאתוֹ בְּזָוָבוֹ רָר  
בְּשָׁרוֹ אֶת־זָוָבוֹ אוֹ־הַחֲתִים בְּשָׁרוֹ מְזוּזָבוֹ  
טְמֵאתוֹ הוּא: <sup>4</sup>כָּל־הַמְּשָׁכָב אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב  
עָלָיו הֲזָב יִטְמָא וְכָל־הַכְּלִי אֲשֶׁר־יִשָּׁב

CHAPTER 15

**2ff.** Once again we encounter the notion of *tum-ah* not as uncleanness or contamination but as an encounter with the mysterious

life-engendering power of certain bodily fluids and with the life-endangering dimension of disease. This encounter with the primal forces of life and death rule out (or may possibly replace) other ways of entering into the divine presence.

pure. <sup>5</sup>Anyone who touches his bedding shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. <sup>6</sup>Whoever sits on an object on which the one with the discharge has sat shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. <sup>7</sup>Whoever touches the body of the one with the discharge shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. <sup>8</sup>If one with a discharge spits on one who is pure, the latter shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. <sup>9</sup>Any means for riding that one with a discharge has mounted shall be impure; <sup>10</sup>whoever touches anything that was under him shall be impure until evening; and whoever carries such things shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. <sup>11</sup>If one with a discharge, without having rinsed his hands in water, touches another person, that person shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. <sup>12</sup>An earthen vessel that one with a discharge touches shall be broken; and any wooden implement shall be rinsed with water.

<sup>13</sup>When one with a discharge becomes purified of his discharge, he shall count off seven days for his purification, wash his clothes, and bathe his body in fresh water; then he shall be pure. <sup>14</sup>On the eighth day he shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and come before the LORD at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and

עָלָיו יִטְמָא: <sup>5</sup> וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִגַּע בְּמִשְׁכָּבוֹ יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>6</sup> וְהִישִׁב עַל-הַפְּלִי אֲשֶׁר-יִשֵּׁב עָלָיו הִזָּב יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>7</sup> \*וְהִנְגַּע בְּבֶשֶׂר הִזָּב יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>8</sup> וְכִי-יֵרֶק הִזָּב בְּטָהוֹר וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>9</sup> וְכֹל-הַמְרֻכָּב אֲשֶׁר יִרְכַּב עָלָיו הִזָּב יִטְמָא: <sup>10</sup> וְכֹל-הַנִּגַּע בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה תַּחְתָּיו יִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב וְהַנּוֹשֵׂא אוֹתָם יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>11</sup> וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִגַּע-בּוֹ הִזָּב וְיָדָיו לֹא-שָׁטַף בַּמַּיִם וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>12</sup> וְכֹל-יְחֻרָשׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִגַּע-בּוֹ הִזָּב יִשְׁבֵּר וְכֹל-כְּלֵי-עֵץ יִשְׁטַף בַּמַּיִם:

<sup>13</sup> וְכִי-יִטְהַר הִזָּב מִזֹּבָבוֹ וְסָפַר לוֹ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לְטָהֳרָתוֹ וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחֵץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם חַיִּים וְטָהַר: <sup>14</sup> וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יִקַּח-לוֹ שְׁתֵּי תְרִים אוֹ שְׁנֵי בָנֵי יוֹנָה וּבָא | לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד

v. 7. חצי הספר בפסוקים

dered impure by contact with a person who has a discharge: those on which one lies, and those on which one sits. These objects must be purified.

**5. bathe in water** One must bathe completely.

**7.** Direct contact with the affected person renders one impure.

**8–9.** Verses 8–9 deal with contact initiated by the affected person.

**spits** Spittle was thought to carry infection and disease.

**means for riding** Hebrew: *merkav*, denoting “an object on which one rides,” such as a saddle or other appurtenance located under the rider. If

someone with a discharge rides on these objects, they become impure.

**10. whoever touches anything that was under him** That is, under the affected person. In this case, the impurity extends only to the body of the person who touches such objects, not to the clothing.

**whoever carries such things** Contact by carrying objects entails the usual severe restrictions in response.

**13. seven days for his purification** Seven consecutive days must pass after the termination of the ailment before ritual purification can be undertaken.

give them to the priest. <sup>15</sup>The priest shall offer them, the one as a purification offering and the other as a burnt offering. Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf, for his discharge, before the LORD.

<sup>16</sup>When a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and remain impure until evening. <sup>17</sup>All cloth or leather on which semen falls shall be washed in water and remain impure until evening. <sup>18</sup>And if a man has carnal relations with a woman, they shall bathe in water and remain impure until evening.

<sup>19</sup>When a woman has a discharge, her discharge being blood from her body, she shall remain in her menstrual impurity seven days; whoever touches her shall be impure until evening. <sup>20</sup>Anything that she lies on during her menstrual impurity shall be impure; and anything that she sits on shall be impure. <sup>21</sup>Anyone who touches her bedding shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening; <sup>22</sup>and anyone who touches any object on which she has sat shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. <sup>23</sup>Be it the bedding or be it the object on which she

וַיִּתְּנֶם אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן: <sup>15</sup> וְעָשָׂה אֹתָם הַכֹּהֵן אֶחָד חַטָּאת וְהָאֶחָד עֹלָה וְכִפָּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לְפָנָי יְהוָה מְזוּבֹו: ט  
<sup>16</sup> וְאִישׁ כִּי-תֵצֵא מִמֶּנּוּ שִׁכְבַּת-זָרַע וְרֵחֶץ בְּמִים אֶת-כָּל-בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטָמֵא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ששי [שבועי]  
<sup>17</sup> וְכָל-בְּגָד וְכָל-עוֹר אֲשֶׁר-יִהְיֶה עָלָיו שִׁכְבַּת-זָרַע וְכִבֵּס בְּמִים וְטָמֵא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: פ  
<sup>18</sup> וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אִישׁ אִתָּהּ שִׁכְבַּת-זָרַע וְרֵחֶצוּ בְּמִים וְטָמְאוּ עַד-הָעֶרֶב:

<sup>19</sup> וְאִשָּׁה כִּי-תִהְיֶה זָכָה דָּם יִהְיֶה זָכָה בַּבְּשָׂרָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּהְיֶה בְּנִדְתָּהּ וְכָל-הַנֹּגַע בָּהּ יִטָּמֵא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>20</sup> וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁכַּב עָלָיו בְּנִדְתָּהּ יִטָּמֵא וְכָל-אֲשֶׁר תִּשָּׁב עָלָיו יִטָּמֵא: <sup>21</sup> וְכָל-הַנֹּגַע בְּמִשְׁכַּבָּהּ יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרֵחֶץ בְּמִים וְטָמֵא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>22</sup> וְכָל-הַנֹּגַע בְּכָל-כְּלֵי אֲשֶׁר-תִּשָּׁב עָלָיו יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרֵחֶץ בְּמִים וְטָמֵא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: <sup>23</sup> וְאִם עַל-הַמִּשְׁכָּב הוּא אֹו עַל-הַכְּלֵי אֲשֶׁר-הוּא יִשְׁבַת-עָלָיו בְּנִגְעוֹ-

**15.** A purification offering is required not because the person in question offended God by any act on his or her part, but because the impurity (i.e., the ailment) threatened the purity of the sanctuary.

**18.** Both the man and the woman are ritually impure after the sex act, and both must bathe.

THE ISRAELITE FEMALE (vv. 19–30)

The subjects of the law in this section are a woman’s normal menstruation and her abnormal discharges of blood.

**19. menstrual impurity** Better: “menstrual condition.” Hebrew: *niddah*, denoting the physiological process of the flow of blood.

**19.** The enforced separation of husband and wife during her menstrual period parallels the dietary laws. Both sets of regulations inculcate holiness by introducing rules of what is permitted and what is forbidden into what

are matters of instinct for all other living creatures. Once again, the Torah defines the uniqueness of the human being as the ability to control instinct instead of being controlled by it.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**15:19. discharge being blood** This and the following verses are the basis for *taharat ha-mishpahah*, the “family purity” laws that prohibit sexual contact during a woman’s menstrual period until after her subsequent immersion in a *mikveh* (ritual bath). The biblical requirement for a man to immerse after a seminal emission (Lev. 15:16–17) fell into disuse by talmudic times (BT Ber. 21b–22a).

**15:20. shall be impure** Jewish law places no restrictions on a menstruant’s touching a Torah scroll or reciting or leading prayers.

has sat, on touching it he shall be impure until evening. <sup>24</sup>And if a man lies with her, her menstrual impurity is communicated to him; he shall be impure seven days, and any bedding on which he lies shall become impure.

<sup>25</sup>When a woman has had a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her menstrual impurity, or when she has a discharge beyond her period of menstrual impurity, she shall be impure, as though at the time of her menstrual impurity, as long as her discharge lasts. <sup>26</sup>Any bedding on which she lies while her discharge lasts shall be for her like bedding during her menstrual impurity; and any object on which she sits shall become impure, as it does during her menstrual impurity: <sup>27</sup>whoever touches them shall be impure; he shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening.

<sup>28</sup>When she becomes purified of her discharge, she shall count off seven days, and after that she shall be pure. <sup>29</sup>On the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, and bring them to the priest at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. <sup>30</sup>The priest shall offer the one as a purification offering and the other as a burnt offering; and the priest shall make expiation on her behalf, for her impure discharge, before the LORD.

<sup>31</sup>You shall put the Israelites on guard against their impurity, lest they die through their im-

בו יטמא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: <sup>24</sup>וְאִם שָׁכַב יִשְׁכַּב אִישׁ אִתָּהּ וְתָהִי נִדְתָּהּ עָלָיו וְטָמֵא שְׁבַעַת יָמִים וְכָל־הַמְּשָׁכָב אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁכַּב עָלָיו יִטְמָא: פ

<sup>25</sup>וְאִשָּׁה כִּי־יִזְוֹב זֹבֵב דָּמָהּ יָמִים רַבִּים בְּלֹא עֵת־נִדְתָּהּ אוֹ כִּי־תִזְוֹב עַל־נִדְתָּהּ כְּלִי־יָמֵי זֹבֵב טָמֵאֲתָהּ כִּי־יָמֵי נִדְתָּהּ תִּהְיֶה טָמֵאָה הוּא: <sup>26</sup>כָּל־הַמְּשָׁכָב אֲשֶׁר־תִּשְׁכַּב עָלָיו כְּלִי־יָמֵי זֹבֵהּ כְּמִשְׁכַּב נִדְתָּהּ יִהְיֶה־לָּהּ וְכָל־הַכְּלִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשָּׁב עָלָיו טָמֵא יִהְיֶה כְּטָמֵאת נִדְתָּהּ: <sup>27</sup>וְכָל־הַנוֹגֵעַ בָּם יִטְמָא וְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרָחַץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:

<sup>28</sup>וְאִם־טָהְרָה מִזֹּבֵהּ וְסִפְרָה לָּהּ שְׁבַעַת שְׁבִיעֵי יָמִים וְאַחַר תִּטְהַר: <sup>29</sup>וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי תִקַּח־לָּהּ שְׁתֵּי תְרִים אוֹ שְׁנֵי בָנִי יוֹנָה וְהִבִּיֵּאתָ אוֹתָם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: <sup>30</sup>וְעָשָׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הָאֶחָד חֲטָאת וְאֶת־הָאֶחָד עֹלָה וְכִפֹּר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה מִזֹּב טָמֵאתָ:

<sup>31</sup>וְהוֹרַתָּם אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִטָּמֵאתָם

**24. he shall be impure seven days** He must bathe and launder his clothing after seven days.

**25.** A woman who has discharges of blood not caused by menstruation bears the same impurity as a menstruating woman for as long as the discharges last.

**28.** Like the male in verse 13, the female must count off seven days after the termination of her abnormal discharge of blood.

**29–30.** This is the essential difference between abnormal and normal conditions: Abnormalities ultimately require ritual expiation as part of the purification process, whereas normal con-

ditions, though they induce impurity, require only bathing and laundering of clothing and observance of the proper period of waiting. Such normal conditions do not of themselves involve the sanctuary directly, unless a person in such a state actually enters the sacred precincts.

#### CONCLUSION (vv. 31–33)

**31. lest they die through their impurity** It is not the condition of impurity itself that brings on God's punishment, but the failure to correct that condition so as to restore a state of purity.

purity by defiling My Tabernacle which is among them.

<sup>32</sup>Such is the ritual concerning him who has a discharge: concerning him who has an emission of semen and becomes impure thereby, <sup>33</sup>and concerning her who is in menstrual infirmity, and concerning anyone, male or female, who has a discharge, and concerning a man who lies with an impure woman.

וְלֹא יִמְתּוּ בְטִמְאַתָּם בְּטִמְאַם אֶת־מִשְׁכַּנִּי  
 אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכָם :  
<sup>32</sup>זֹאת תּוֹרַת הַזָּב וְאֲשֶׁר תֵּצֵא מִמֶּנּוּ  
 שְׂכַבְתָּ-זֶרַע לְטִמְאַה־בָּהּ : <sup>33</sup>וְהַדָּוָה  
 בְּנִדְתָּהּ וְהַזָּב אֶת־זוּבוֹ לְזָכָר וּלְנִקְבָה  
 וּלְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב עִם־טִמְאַהּ : פ

**31. My Tabernacle which is among them**  
 Even when Israelites are impure, God's presence is found among them. Abravanel understands "My Tabernacle" as referring to the hu-

man body. Thus "defiling My Tabernacle" refers to rendering our bodies impure. Because each person is created in God's image, his or her body is a temple of God.

# הַפְּטָרָה מִצְרָע

## HAFTARAH FOR M'TZORA

2 KINGS 7:3–20

(When Tazri-a and M'tzora are combined, recite this haftarah.)

The power of prophecy is a main teaching of this *haftarah*, as indicated by its conclusion (vv. 16–20). The story presented here is incomplete, however, because certain phrases (“as the LORD has spoken” and “just as the man of God had spoken” in vv. 16–17) refer to matters stated in the first verses of chapter 7, not included in the *haftarah*. Because of this, the symmetry of a complete narrative, with fulfillment following prediction, is lost because the *haftarah* is only part of a cycle of legends and prophecies related to the prophet Elisha and Israel’s wars against Aram. The *haftarah* constitutes the final section of 2 Kings 6:24–7:20 that begins when “King Ben-hadad of Aram mustered his entire army and marched upon Samaria and besieged it” (6:24).

The siege is described as brutal. Famine and cannibalism were rampant, and the price of food was out of control. “A donkey’s head sold for eighty [shekels] of silver and a quarter of a *kab* of [carob pods] for five shekels” (6:25). The king of Israel, utterly helpless, sent his messenger to threaten the prophet Elisha who replied that by “this time tomorrow” all would change (see 6:26–33). “A *seah* of choice flour shall sell for a shekel at the gate of Samaria, and two *seahs* of barley for a shekel” (7:1). The royal messenger scoffed at this prediction of plenty; and in response, Elisha swore that the aide would die before partaking of it (v. 2). It is important to remember that the *haftarah* begins only after this prologue.

Yet the *haftarah*, in and of itself, has its own literary drama, beginning in the midst of a crisis (famine and siege) and ending with its termination (food and the opening of the gates). The fulfillment formulas (“as,” “just as” in 7:16–20, at

the end of the *haftarah*) suggest that the external course of events is more than it seems: Hidden within is the fulfillment of divine predictions. Although one who reads only the *haftarah* is not aware of the predictions, the fulfillment of the divine word is announced at the end of it as the inner truth of the historical events. History is thus presented as the dramatic shape of divine will, as revealed through God’s prophets.

Two themes frame the development of the story in the *haftarah*. One theme has to do with the location of the lepers, who at the beginning are “outside the gate” (*sha-ar*) of Samaria. Their location marks the boundary of the siege, as well as the tension between the hunger within the city walls and the provisions of the Aramean camp in the field. The other theme involves the lepers’ split status. They belong both to the city and to the field, both to the starving (native) Israelites within the walls and to the (alien) world beyond the walls. Ritually contaminated and thus prohibited from entering the city, they choose to defect. Thus they move the action to the Aramean camp.

Among the empty tents of the enemy, the lepers find food and wealth; they repeatedly “ate and drank . . . carried off silver and gold . . . and buried it.” The turning point of the narrative is the lepers’ recognition that they “are not doing right [*ken*].” Thus they return to the city and inform its rulers of the Aramean flight. At first, only a few of the king’s men follow the lepers out to the camp. With the return of the positive report, however, the whole population streams out of Samaria to fill their needs. With that, the boundaries determined by location are opened and the crisis of the lepers’ status is resolved. Elisha’s forecast concerning the low price of “barley” in the “gate” of Samaria is gradually fulfilled. In the end, food is in the gates—not only in the lepers. The scoffing

aide-de-camp is punished, “exactly (*ken*)” as the prophet had predicted.

The constant movement between the city and the camp gives the illusion of an extended time frame. This sense is reinforced by the variety of scenes that make up the account. Because the original situation had been grave, and Elisha’s prophecy was meant to assuage the people’s fears, he began his economic prediction with the words “This time tomorrow” (7:1). Accordingly, we must assume that the time narrated in 7:3–20 covers only one day. The many comings and goings are intended to dramatize the successive stages of transformation.

It is intriguing that the fulfillment of the divine oracle begins with the defection of the four lepers, who dramatize the polarities and precariousness of the situation as a whole. What is more, it is precisely their social and ritual marginality that puts them beyond the walls and in a position to flee to the Aramean camp. As aliens among the

aliens, they bring “good news” back to the city once they overcome their private desires and think of their starving compatriots in Samaria. Their moral turning is at the core of the narrative.

#### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The formal and explicit connection between the passages hinges on the term *m'tzora*. This is the Rabbinic title of the *parashah* and refers to a “leper” (Lev. 14:2) with “a leprous affection” (*tzara-at*) on the skin (Lev. 13:45) who must “dwell apart . . . outside the camp” (v. 46) until permitted to undergo the ritual of cleansing. The previous *parashah* (Lev. 12–13), which is sometimes combined with this one, includes the detailed diagnostics of the disease (Lev. 13); *M'tzora* (Lev. 14–15) focuses on the rites of personal purification (14:1–32), with an appendix on diagnosing and purging the plague in buildings (vv. 33–57).

**7** <sup>3</sup>There were four men, lepers, outside the gate. They said to one another, “Why should we sit here waiting for death? <sup>4</sup>If we decide to go into the town, what with the famine in the town, we shall die there; and if we just sit here, still we die. Come, let us desert to the Aramean camp. If they let us live, we shall live; and if they put us to death, we shall but die.”

<sup>5</sup>They set out at twilight for the Aramean camp; but when they came to the edge of the Aramean camp, there was no one there. <sup>6</sup>For the Lord had caused the Aramean camp to hear a sound of chariots, a sound of horses—the din of a huge army. They said to one another, “The king of Israel must have hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Mizraim to attack us!” <sup>7</sup>And they fled headlong in the twilight, aban-

**ו** <sup>3</sup> וַיֵּרְבְּעָה אֲנָשִׁים הָיוּ מִצָּרְעִים פָּתַח  
הַשָּׁעַר וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-רֵעֵהוּ מַה אֲנַחְנוּ  
יֹשְׁבִים פֹּה עַד-מָוֶתנוּ: <sup>4</sup> אִם-אֲמַרְנוּ נָבוֹא  
הָעִיר וְהָרָעַב בָּעִיר וּמָתְנוּ שָׁם וְאִם-  
יֹשְׁבָנוּ פֹּה וּמָתְנוּ וְעַתָּה לְכוּ וּנְפַלֵּה  
אֶל-מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם אִם-יַחְיִינוּ נַחֲיֶה וְאִם-  
יָמִיתְנוּ וּמָתְנוּ:

<sup>5</sup> וַיִּקְוּמוּ בְנֶשֶׁף לָבוֹא אֶל-מַחֲנֵה אֲרָם  
וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד-קִצְהַ מַּחֲנֵה אֲרָם וְהִנֵּה אֵינֶ-  
שָׁם אִישׁ: <sup>6</sup> וַאֲדֹנָי הַשָּׁמַיִם | אֶת-מַחֲנֵה  
אֲרָם קוֹל רֶכֶב קוֹל טוֹס קוֹל חֵיל גָּדוֹל  
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אָחִיו הֲנֵה שָׂכַר-עָלֵינוּ  
מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-מַלְכֵי הַחִתִּים וְאֶת-  
מַלְכֵי מִצְרַיִם לָבוֹא עָלֵינוּ: <sup>7</sup> וַיִּקְוּמוּ

**2 Kings 7:3. lepers, outside the gate** Medical analysis indicates that the disease as described in the Bible is neither what we know as leprosy (Hansen’s disease) nor what we know as psoriasis.

The general term “scale disease” has been suggested. People who were diagnosed with active symptoms of this malady were segregated from society (Lev. 13:4–5).

doning their tents and horses and asses—the [entire] camp just as it was—as they fled for their lives.

<sup>8</sup>When those lepers came to the edge of the camp, they went into one of the tents and ate and drank; then they carried off silver and gold and clothing from there and buried it. They came back and went into another tent, and they carried off what was there and buried it. <sup>9</sup>Then they said to one another, “We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, and we are keeping silent! If we wait until the light of morning, we shall incur guilt. Come, let us go and inform the king’s palace.” <sup>10</sup>They went and called out to the gatekeepers of the city and told them, “We have been to the Aramean camp. There is not a soul there, nor any human sound; but the horses are tethered and the asses are tethered and the tents are undisturbed.”

<sup>11</sup>The gatekeepers called out, and the news was passed on into the king’s palace. <sup>12</sup>The king rose in the night and said to his courtiers, “I will tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know that we are starving, so they have gone out of camp and hidden in the fields, thinking: When they come out of the town, we will take them alive and get into the town.” <sup>13</sup>But one of the courtiers spoke up, “Let a few of the remaining horses that are still here be taken—they are like those that are left here of the whole multitude of Israel, out of the whole multitude of Israel that have perished—and let us send and find out.”

<sup>14</sup>They took two teams of horses and the king sent them after the Aramean army, saying, “Go and find out.” <sup>15</sup>They followed them as far as the Jordan, and found the entire road full of clothing and gear which the Arameans had thrown away in their haste; and the messengers returned and told the king. <sup>16</sup>The people then went out and plundered the Aramean camp. So a *seah* of choice flour sold for a shekel, and two

וַיִּנּוּסוּ בַּנֶּשֶׁף וַיַּעֲזְבוּ אֶת־אֹהֲלֵיהֶם וְאֶת־סוּסֵיהֶם וְאֶת־חֲמֹרֵיהֶם הַמַּחֲנֶה בְּאֶשֶׁר־הִיא וַיִּנּוּסוּ אֶל־נַפְשָׁם:

<sup>8</sup> וַיָּבֹאוּ הַמְצֹרְעִים הָאֵלֶּה עַד־קִצְחַת הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־אֹהֶל אֶחָד וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיִּשְׂאוּ מִשָּׁם כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וּבְגָדִים וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיִּטְמְנוּ וַיָּשׁוּבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־אֹהֶל אֶחָד וַיִּשְׂאוּ מִשָּׁם וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיִּטְמְנוּ: <sup>9</sup> וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ לֹא־כֵן | אֲנַחְנוּ עֹשִׂים הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יוֹם־בְּשׂרָה הוּא וְאֲנַחְנוּ מַחֲשִׁים וְחַפְּנוּ עַד־אֹר הַבֶּקֶר וּמִצְאָנוּ עֹוֹן וְעַתָּה לָכוּ וּנְבָאָה וּנְגִידָה בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ: <sup>10</sup> וַיָּבֹאוּ וַיִּקְרְאוּ אֶל־שַׁעַר הָעִיר וַיִּגִּידוּ לָהֶם לֵאמֹר בָּאנוּ אֶל־מַחֲנֶה אַרְם וְהִנֵּה אֵין־שָׁם אִישׁ וְקוֹל אָדָם כִּי אִם־הַסּוֹס אֲסוּר וְהַחֲמֹר אֲסוּר וְאֹהֲלִים בְּאֶשֶׁר־הֵמָּה:

<sup>11</sup> וַיִּקְרָא הַשַּׁעֲרִים וַיִּגִּידוּ בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּנִימָה: <sup>12</sup> וַיָּקָם הַמֶּלֶךְ לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עַבְדָּיו אֲגִידָה־נָא לָכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ לָנוּ אַרְם יָדְעוּ כִּי־רַעֲבִים אֲנַחְנוּ וַיֵּצְאוּ מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה לְהַחֲבֶה בַּשָּׂדֶה לֵאמֹר כִּי־יֵצְאוּ מִן־הָעִיר וְנִתְפָּשׂם חַיִּים וְאֶל־הָעִיר נָבֵא: <sup>13</sup> וַיַּעַן אֶחָד מֵעַבְדָּיו וַיֹּאמֶר וַיִּקְחוּ־נָא חֲמֹשֶׁה מִן־הַסּוּסִים הַנִּשְׁאָרִים אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאָרוּ־בָהּ הַנֶּם כְּכֹל־הַחֲמֹר הַמּוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאָרוּ־בָהּ הַנֶּם כְּכֹל־הַמּוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־תָּמוּ וְנִשְׁלַחַה וְנִרְאָה:

<sup>14</sup> וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי רֶכֶב סוּסִים וַיִּשְׁלַח הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲרֵי מַחֲנֶה־אַרְם לֵאמֹר לָכוּ וּרְאוּ: <sup>15</sup> וַיֵּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם עַד־הַיַּרְדֵּן וְהִנֵּה כָל־הַדֶּרֶךְ מְלֹאָה בְּגָדִים וּבְכֵלִים אֲשֶׁר־הִשְׁלִיכוּ אַרְם בַּחֲפֹזִים בְּחַפְּזוֹם וַיָּשׁוּבוּ הַמְּלָאכִים וַיִּגִּדוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ: <sup>16</sup> וַיֵּצֵא הָעָם וַיָּבֹזוּ אֶת מַחֲנֶה אַרְם וַיְהִי סָאֵה־טֹלַת

*seahs* of barley for a shekel—as the LORD had spoken.

<sup>17</sup>Now the king had put the aide on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate; and he was trampled to death in the gate by the people—just as the man of God had spoken, as he had spoken when the king came down to him. <sup>18</sup>For when the man of God said to the king, “This time tomorrow two *seahs* of barley shall sell at the gate of Samaria for a shekel, and a *seah* of choice flour for a shekel,” <sup>19</sup>the aide answered the man of God and said, “Even if the LORD made windows in the sky, could this come to pass?” And he retorted, “You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat of it.” <sup>20</sup>That is exactly what happened to him: The people trampled him to death in the gate.

בְּשֶׁקֶל וְסָאִתִּים שְׁעָרִים בְּשֶׁקֶל כֹּדֶבֶר  
יְהוָה:

<sup>17</sup>וְהַמֶּלֶךְ הִפְקִיד אֶת־הַשְּׁלִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־  
נִשְׁעַן עַל־יָדוֹ עַל־הַשַּׁעַר וַיִּרְמָסֵהוּ הָעָם  
בַּשַּׁעַר וַיָּמָת כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים  
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּרַדְתַּת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלָיו: <sup>18</sup>וַיְהִי  
כַּדִּבֶּר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לֵאמֹר  
סָאִתִּים שְׁעָרִים בְּשֶׁקֶל וְסָאֵה־סֵלֶת  
בְּשֶׁקֶל יִהְיֶה כְּעֵת מָחָר בַּשַּׁעַר שְׁמֶרוֹן:  
<sup>19</sup>וַיַּעַן הַשְּׁלִישׁ אֶת־אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר  
וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה אַרְבּוֹת בַּשָּׁמַיִם הֲיִהְיֶה  
כַּדִּבֶּר הַזֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּבִי רְאֵה בְּעֵינַיִךְ  
וּמִשָּׁם לֹא תֹאכַל: <sup>20</sup>וַיְהִי־לּוֹ כֵּן וַיִּרְמָסוּ  
אֹתוֹ הָעָם בַּשַּׁעַר וַיָּמָת: ס