

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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

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

יד וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ²זֹאת תְּהִי־הַתּוֹרָה הַמְצַרֵּעַ בַּיּוֹם טְהַרְתּוּ וְהוּבָא אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: ³וַיִּצְאֵהוּ אֶל־מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהָיָה נִרְפָּא נֹגַע־הַצִּרְעָת מִן־הַצִּרוּעַ: ⁴וַיִּצְוֶה הַכֹּהֵן וְלָקַח לַמִּטְהָר שְׁתֵּי־צִפְרִים חַיִּים טְהוֹרִים וְעֵץ אֲרָז וּשְׁנֵי תוֹלַעַת וְאַזָּב: ⁵וַיִּצְוֶה 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; ⁶and 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. ⁷He 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. ⁸The 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. ⁹On 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. ¹⁰On 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. ¹¹These 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.

¹²The 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. ¹³The lamb shall be slaughtered at the spot in the sacred area

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

¹² וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַכִּבְשֶׁה הָאֶחָד וְהִקְרִיב אוֹתוֹ לְאַשֶׁם וְאֶת־לֶג הַשֶּׁמֶן וְהִנִּיף אֹתָם שְׁנֵי תְנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ¹³ 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. ¹⁴The 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. ¹⁵The priest shall then take some of the *log* of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷Some 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. ¹⁸The 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. ¹⁹The 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, ²⁰and 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.

²¹If, 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 קָדֵשׁ קָדָשִׁים הוּא: ¹⁴ וְלָקַח
 הַכַּהֵן מִדַּם הָאֲשָׁם וְנָתַן הַכַּהֵן עַל-
 תְּנוּפָה אֲזָן הַמִּטְהָר וְעַל-בֶּהֱן
 יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בֶּהֱן רִגְלוֹ הַיְמָנִית:
¹⁵ וְלָקַח הַכַּהֵן מִלֶּגֶם הַשֶּׁמֶן וַיִּצַק עַל-כַּף
 הַכַּהֵן הַשְּׂמָאלִית: ¹⁶ וְטָבַל הַכַּהֵן אֶת-
 אֶצְבָּעוֹ הַיְמָנִית מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּפוֹ
 הַשְּׂמָאלִית וְהִזָּה מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ
 שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ¹⁷ וּמִיַּתֵּר הַשֶּׁמֶן
 אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּפוֹ יִתֵּן הַכַּהֵן עַל-תְּנוּפָה אֲזָן
 הַמִּטְהָר הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בֶּהֱן יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית
 וְעַל-בֶּהֱן רִגְלוֹ הַיְמָנִית עַל דָּם הָאֲשָׁם:
¹⁸ וְהִנּוֹתָר בַּשֶּׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּף הַכַּהֵן יִתֵּן
 עַל-רֹאשׁ הַמִּטְהָר וּכְפָר עָלָיו הַכַּהֵן לִפְנֵי
 יְהוָה: ¹⁹ וְעָשָׂה הַכַּהֵן אֶת-הַחֻטָּאת וּכְפָר
 עַל-הַמִּטְהָר מִטְּמֵאתוֹ וְאַחַר יִשְׁחַט אֶת-
 הָעֹלָה: ²⁰ וְהָעֹלָה הַכַּהֵן אֶת-הָעֹלָה וְאֶת-
 הַמִּנְחָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַה וּכְפָר עָלָיו הַכַּהֵן
 וְטָהַר: **ס**

וְאִם-יֵדֵל הוּא וְאִין יָדוֹ מִשְׁגֵּת וְלָקַח שלישי
[חמישי]
 כֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד אֲשֶׁם לְתִנּוּפָה לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו

for him, one-tenth of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in for a grain offering, and a *log* of oil;²² and two turtledoves or two pigeons, depending on his means, the one to be the purification offering and the other the burnt offering.²³ 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.²⁴ The priest shall take the lamb of reparation offering and the *log* of oil, and elevate them as an elevation offering before the LORD.²⁵ 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.²⁶ The priest shall then pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand,²⁷ 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.²⁸ 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;²⁹ 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.³⁰ He shall then offer one of the turtledoves or pigeons, depending on his means—³¹ 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.³² Such is the ritual for him who has a scaly affection and whose means for his purification are limited.

³³The 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: ²² וּשְׁתֵּי תוֹרִים אֹו שְׁנֵי בְּנֵי יוֹנָה
אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׂיֵג יָדוֹ וְהָיָה אֶחָד חֲטָאת וְהָאֶחָד
עֹלָה: ²³ וְהָבִיא אֹתָם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי
לְטַהֲרָתוֹ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ²⁴ וּלְקַח הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-כֶּבֶשׂ
הָאֵשֶׁם וְאֶת-לֹג הַשֶּׁמֶן וְהִנִּיף אֹתָם הַכֹּהֵן
תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ²⁵ וְשָׁחַט אֶת-כֶּבֶשׂ
הָאֵשֶׁם וּלְקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם הָאֵשֶׁם וְנָתַן
עַל-תְּנוּף אֶזְנוֹ-הַמִּטְהָר הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֶן
יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֶן רִגְלוֹ הַיְמָנִית:
²⁶ וּמִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן יִצֹק הַכֹּהֵן עַל-כַּף הַכֹּהֵן
הַשְּׂמָאלִית: ²⁷ וְהִזָּה הַכֹּהֵן בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ
הַיְמָנִית מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּפוֹ
הַשְּׂמָאלִית שֶׁבַע פַּעְמִים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:
²⁸ וְנָתַן הַכֹּהֵן מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּפוֹ
עַל-תְּנוּף אֶזְנוֹ הַמִּטְהָר הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֶן
יָדוֹ הַיְמָנִית וְעַל-בִּהֶן רִגְלוֹ הַיְמָנִית עַל-
מְקוֹם דָּם הָאֵשֶׁם: ²⁹ וְהִנּוֹתָר מִן-הַשֶּׁמֶן
אֲשֶׁר עַל-כַּף הַכֹּהֵן יִתֵּן עַל-רֹאשׁ הַמִּטְהָר
לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ³⁰ וְעָשָׂה אֶת-
הָאֶחָד מִן-הַתּוֹרִים אֹו מִן-בְּנֵי הַיּוֹנָה
מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּשְׂיֵג יָדוֹ: ³¹ אֶת אֶת אֲשֶׁר-תִּשְׂיֵג יָדוֹ
אֶת-הָאֶחָד חֲטָאת וְאֶת-הָאֶחָד עֹלָה עַל-
הַמִּנְחָה וְכַפֵּר הַכֹּהֵן עַל הַמִּטְהָר לִפְנֵי
יְהוָה: ³² זֹאת תּוֹרַת אֲשֶׁר-בָּו נָגַע צִרְעַת
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תִשְׂיֵג יָדוֹ בְּטַהֲרָתוֹ: פ
³³ 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.

³⁴When 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, ³⁵the owner of the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, "Something like a plague has appeared upon my house." ³⁶The 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. ³⁷If, 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, ³⁸the priest shall come out of the house to the entrance of the house, and close up the house for seven days. ³⁹On the seventh day the priest shall return. If he sees that the plague has spread on the walls of the house, ⁴⁰the priest shall order the stones with the plague in them to be pulled out and cast outside the city into an impure place. ⁴¹The 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: ³⁵ וּבֹא אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ הַבַּיִת וְהִגִּיד לַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר כְּנֹגַע נִרְאָה לִי בַּבַּיִת: ³⁶ וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וּפָנּוּ אֶת־הַבַּיִת בְּטָרִם יָבֵא הַכֹּהֵן לְרִאוֹת אֶת־הַנֹּגַע וְלֹא יִטְמָא כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת וְאַחֵר כֵּן יָבֵא הַכֹּהֵן לְרִאוֹת אֶת־הַבַּיִת: ³⁷ וְרָאָה אֶת־הַנֹּגַע וְהִנֵּה הַנֹּגַע בְּקִירַת הַבַּיִת שֶׁקְּעָרוּרֹת יִרְקָרְקֹת אוֹ אֲדָמָדָמָת וּמְרֵאִיהֶן שָׁפֵל מִן־הַקִּיר: ³⁸ וַיֵּצֵא הַכֹּהֵן מִן־הַבַּיִת אֶל־פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת וְהִסְגִּיר אֶת־הַבַּיִת שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: ³⁹ וְשָׁב הַכֹּהֵן בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְרָאָה וְהִנֵּה פָּשָׁה הַנֹּגַע בְּקִירַת הַבַּיִת: ⁴⁰ וְצִוָּה הַכֹּהֵן וְחִלְצוּ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶן הַנֹּגַע וְהִשְׁלִיכוּ אֹתָהֶן אֶל־מְחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־מְקוֹם טָמֵא: ⁴¹ 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.
⁴²They shall take other stones and replace those stones with them, and take other coating and plaster the house.

⁴³If the plague again breaks out in the house, after the stones have been pulled out and after the house has been scraped and replastered, ⁴⁴the priest shall come to examine: if the plague has spread in the house, it is a malignant eruption in the house; it is impure. ⁴⁵The 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.

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

⁴⁸If, 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. ⁴⁹To purify the house, he shall take two birds, cedar wood, crimson stuff, and hyssop. ⁵⁰He shall slaughter the one bird over fresh water in an earthen vessel. ⁵¹He 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: ⁴² וְלָקְחוּ אֲבָנִים אַחֲרוֹת וְהִבְיִאוּ אֶל־תַּחַת הָאֲבָנִים וְעָפְרָה אַחֲרַיִךְ וְטָח אֶת־הַבַּיִת:

⁴³ וְאִם־יָשׁוּב הַנֶּגַע וּפְרַח בַּבַּיִת אַחֲרֵי חֲלָץ אֶת־הָאֲבָנִים וְאַחֲרֵי הַקְּצוֹת אֶת־הַבַּיִת וְאַחֲרֵי הַטּוֹחַ: ⁴⁴ וּבֹא הַכֹּהֵן וְרָאָה וְהִנֵּה פָּשָׁה הַנֶּגַע בַּבַּיִת צָרְעַת מִמְאֶרֶת הוּא בַּבַּיִת טָמֵא הוּא: ⁴⁵ וְנָתַץ אֶת־הַבַּיִת אֶת־אֲבָנָיו וְאֶת־עֵצָיו וְאֶת כָּל־עֹפֶרֶת הַבַּיִת וְהוֹצִיא אֶל־מְחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־מִקְוֹם טָמֵא:

⁴⁶ וְהָבֵא אֶל־הַפֶּה כָּל־יְמֵי הַסְּגִיר אֹתוֹ יְטָמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: ⁴⁷ וְהִשְׁכַּב בַּבַּיִת יְכַבֵּס אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְהֵאֵכַל בַּבַּיִת יְכַבֵּס אֶת־בְּגָדָיו:

⁴⁸ וְאִם־בָּא יָבֵא הַכֹּהֵן וְרָאָה וְהִנֵּה לֹא־פָּשָׁה הַנֶּגַע בַּבַּיִת אַחֲרֵי הַטּוֹחַ אֶת־הַבַּיִת וְטָהַר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַבַּיִת כִּי נִרְפָּא הַנֶּגַע: ⁴⁹ וְלָקַח לְחֹטֵא אֶת־הַבַּיִת שְׁתֵּי צִפְרִים וְעֵץ אֲרָז וְשֵׁנִי תוֹלַעַת וְאֹזֵב: ⁵⁰ וְשָׁחַט אֶת־הַצִּפֹּר הָאֶחָד אֶל־כְּלֵי־חֶרֶשׁ עַל־מִים חַיִּים: ⁵¹ וְלָקַח אֶת־עֵץ־הָאֲרָז וְאֶת־הָאֹזֵב וְאֶת שְׁנֵי הַתּוֹלַעַת וְאֶת הַצִּפֹּר הַחַיָּה וְטָבַל אֹתָם בְּדַם הַצִּפֹּר הַשְּׁחוּטָה וּבַמִּים 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. ⁵²Having purified the house with the blood of the bird, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the crimson stuff, ⁵³he 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.

⁵⁴Such is the ritual for every eruptive affection—for scalls, ⁵⁵for an eruption on a cloth or a house, ⁵⁶for swellings, for rashes, or for discolorations—⁵⁷to 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: ²Speak to the Israelite people and say to them:

When any man has a discharge issuing from his member, he is impure. ³The 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: ⁴Any 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
וּבִשְׂנֵי הַתּוֹלְעֹת: ⁵³וְשָׁלַח אֶת־הַצִּפּוֹר
הַחַיָּה אֶל־מְחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה
וּכְפָר עַל־הַבַּיִת וְטָהַר:

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

טו ויִדְבַר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן
לֵאמֹר: ²דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתֶּם
אֲלֵהֶם
אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי יִהְיֶה זָב מִבְּשָׁרוֹ זָוָב טָמֵא
הוּא: ³וְזֹאת תִּהְיֶה טְמֵאתוֹ בְּזָוָבוֹ רָר
בְּשָׁרוֹ אֶת־זָוָבוֹ אוֹ־הַחֲתִים בְּשָׁרוֹ מְזֻזָּבוֹ
טְמֵאתוֹ הוּא: ⁴כָּל־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. ⁵Anyone who touches his bedding shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. ⁶Whoever 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. ⁷Whoever touches the body of the one with the discharge shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. ⁸If one with a discharge spits on one who is pure, the latter shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. ⁹Any means for riding that one with a discharge has mounted shall be impure; ¹⁰whoever 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. ¹¹If 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. ¹²An earthen vessel that one with a discharge touches shall be broken; and any wooden implement shall be rinsed with water.

¹³When 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. ¹⁴On 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: ⁵ וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִגַּע בְּמִשְׁכָּבוֹ יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרוּחָן בַּמַּיִם וְיִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ⁶ וְהִישִׁב עַל-הַפְּלִי אֲשֶׁר-יִשֵּׁב עָלָיו הַזֵּב יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרוּחָן בַּמַּיִם וְיִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ⁷ *וְהִנְגַּע בְּבֶשֶׂר הַזֵּב יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרוּחָן בַּמַּיִם וְיִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ⁸ וְכִי-יֵרֶק הַזֵּב בְּטָהוֹר וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרוּחָן בַּמַּיִם וְיִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ⁹ וְכָל-הַמְרֻכָּב אֲשֶׁר יִרְכַּב עָלָיו הַזֵּב יִטְמָא: ¹⁰ וְכָל-הַנִּגָּע בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה תַּחְתָּיו יִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב וְהַנוּשָׂא אוֹתָם יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרוּחָן בַּמַּיִם וְיִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ¹¹ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִגַּע-בּוֹ הַזֵּב וְיָדָיו לֹא-שָׁטַף בַּמַּיִם וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרוּחָן בַּמַּיִם וְיִטְמָא עַד-הָעֶרֶב: ¹² וְכָל-יְחָרָשׁ אֲשֶׁר-יִגַּע-בּוֹ הַזֵּב יִשְׁבֵּר וְכָל-כְּלֵי-עֵץ יִשְׁטַף בַּמַּיִם:

¹³ וְכִי-יִטְהַר הַזֵּב מִזֹּבוֹ וְסָפַר לוֹ שִׁבְעַת יָמִים לְטָהָרְתוֹ וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרוּחָן בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם חַיִּים וְטָהַר: ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵The 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.

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

¹⁹When 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. ²⁰Anything that she lies on during her menstrual impurity shall be impure; and anything that she sits on shall be impure. ²¹Anyone who touches her bedding shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening; ²²and anyone who touches any object on which she has sat shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. ²³Be it the bedding or be it the object on which she

וַיִּתְּנֶם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: ¹⁵ וְעָשָׂה אֹתָם הַכֹּהֵן אֶחָד חַטָּאת וְהָאֶחָד עֹלָה וְכִפָּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לְפָנָי יְהוָה מְזוּבֹו: ט
¹⁶ וְאִישׁ כִּי־תֵצֵא מִמֶּנּוּ שִׁכְבַּת־זָרַע וְרֵחַץ בְּמִים אֶת־כָּל־בְּשָׂרוֹ וְטָמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: ¹⁷ וְכָל־בְּגָד וְכָל־עוֹר אֲשֶׁר־יְהִיָּה עָלָיו שִׁכְבַּת־זָרַע וְכִבֵּס בְּמִים וְטָמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: פ ¹⁸ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכַּב אִישׁ אִתָּהּ שִׁכְבַּת־זָרַע וְרֵחַצוּ בְּמִים וְטָמְאוּ עַד־הָעֶרֶב:

ששי
[שבועי]

¹⁹ וְאִשָּׁה כִּי־תִהְיֶה זָכָה דָּם יְהִיָּה זָכָה בַּבְּשָׂרָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּהְיֶה בְּנִדְתָּהּ וְכָל־הַנֹּגַע בָּהּ יִטָּמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: ²⁰ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁכַּב עָלָיו בְּנִדְתָּהּ יִטָּמֵא וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר תִּשָּׁב עָלָיו יִטָּמֵא: ²¹ וְכָל־הַנֹּגַע בְּמִשְׁכַּבָּהּ יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרֵחַץ בְּמִים וְטָמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: ²² וְכָל־הַנֹּגַע בְּכָל־כְּלִי אֲשֶׁר־תִּשָּׁב עָלָיו יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרֵחַץ בְּמִים וְטָמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: ²³ וְאִם עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּב הוּא אֹו עַל־הַכְּלִי אֲשֶׁר־הוּא יִשְׁבַּת־עָלָיו בְּנִגְעוֹ־

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.

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.

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. ²⁴And 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.

²⁵When 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. ²⁶Any 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: ²⁷whoever touches them shall be impure; he shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening.

²⁸When she becomes purified of her discharge, she shall count off seven days, and after that she shall be pure. ²⁹On 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. ³⁰The 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.

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

בו יטמא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: ²⁴וְאִם שָׁכַב יִשְׁכַּב אִישׁ אִתָּהּ וְתָהִי נִדְתָּהּ עָלָיו וְטָמֵא שְׁבַע־יָמִים וְכָל־הַמְּשָׁכָב אֲשֶׁר־יִשְׁכַּב עָלָיו יִטְמָא: פ

²⁵וְאִשָּׁה כִּי־יִזְוֵב זֹבֵב דָּמָה יָמִים רַבִּים בְּלֹא עֵת־נִדְתָּהּ אוֹ כִּי־תִזְוֵב עַל־נִדְתָּהּ כְּלִי־יָמֵי זֹבֵב טָמֵאֲתָהּ כִּי־יָמֵי נִדְתָּהּ תִּהְיֶה טָמֵאָה הוּא: ²⁶כָּל־הַמְּשָׁכָב אֲשֶׁר־תִּשְׁכַּב עָלָיו כְּלִי־יָמֵי זֹבֵה כְּמִשְׁכַּב נִדְתָּהּ יִהְיֶה־לָּהּ וְכָל־הַכְּלִי אֲשֶׁר תִּשָּׁב עָלָיו טָמֵא יִהְיֶה כְּטָמֵאת נִדְתָּהּ: ²⁷וְכָל־הַנוֹגֵעַ בָּם יִטְמָא וְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרָחַץ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב:

²⁸וְאִם־טָהְרָה מִזֹּבֵהּ וְסִפְרָה לָּהּ שְׁבַע־יָמִים וְאַחַר תִּטְהַר: ²⁹וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי תִקַּח־לָּהּ שְׁתֵּי תֹרִים אוֹ שְׁנֵי בָנִי יוֹנָה וְהִבִּיֵּאתָ אוֹתָם אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: ³⁰וְעָשָׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הָאֶחָד חֲטָאת וְאֶת־הָאֶחָד עֹלָה וְכִפֹּר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה מִזֹּב טָמֵאתָה:

³¹וְהוֹרַתָּם 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.

³²Such is the ritual concerning him who has a discharge: concerning him who has an emission of semen and becomes impure thereby, ³³and 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 :
³²זֹאת תּוֹרַת הַזָּב וְאֲשֶׁר תֵּצֵא מִמֶּנּוּ
 שְׂכַבְתָּ-זֶרַע לְטִמְאַה־בָּהּ : ³³וְהַדָּוָה
 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 לַשַּׁבָּת הַגָּדוֹל

HAFTARAH FOR SHABBAT HA-GADOL

MALACHI 3:4–24

This *haftarah* contains God's promise to the people in the period after the rebuilding of the Temple in 516–15 B.C.E. The prophet announces that sacrificial offerings will again be favorably received by God, as in ancient times. First, however, God will contend with the nation's breach of moral and ritual law and bring sinners to judgment. Hope lies in repentance and in observance of the Torah. God's call to the people through Malachi, the healing mission of Elijah, and the teaching of Moses all show God's continual concern for reconciliation and human welfare.

Restoration is the recurrent theme of this *haftarah*: the restoration of acceptable offerings in the Temple (3:4), the repair of the Covenant through repentance (v. 7), the renewal of trust in divine justice (v. 18), and the reconciliation of parents and children (v. 24). Most of these statements include variations of the verb *shuv* (turn, return). Presumably, a crisis of trust in God's just providence has perverted the people's soul, leading to callous indifference in the moral and cultic realms. The *haftarah* is thus pervaded by a deep sense of estrangement from the right order of things, whether in the family, in society, or in the divine-human relationship.

In a rebuke that precedes the *haftarah*, the people are quoted as saying that "All who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD." Indeed, they mockingly jibe, "Where is the God of justice [*mishpat*]?" (Mal. 2:17). In response, God comes to redress the cause of *mishpat* (judgment) in verse 3:5, in which the literal "bring to judgment" is understood as "to contend against you." God will also attend to the sense of the God-fearers that "It is useless to serve God" (v. 14). Actions have consequences. If the people repent and serve God fully, they will receive the riches of heavenly blessing. Otherwise, they will be blasted to ash—root and branch. So deep is the people's resistance that God finally announces He will send His prophet

Elijah to renew their hearts. This unilateral act is proof of God's love of Jacob (announced at the beginning of the collected prophecies of Malachi).

This is Malachi's message of hope. The framers of the biblical canon, placing Malachi as the last of the prophets, believed it to be a final prophetic word to those for whom Scripture teaches divine truth.

RELATION OF THE *HAFTARAH* TO THE CALENDAR

The phrase *shabbat ha-gadol* (the great Sabbath) is a fixed formulation of rabbinic liturgy, found in the Grace after Meals in the special supplication for *Shabbat* (beginning *r'tzei*). In that context, it emphasizes the special holiness of each *Shabbat*. The term also traditionally designates the *Shabbat* before *Pesah*. Its meaning in this setting is uncertain, which has elicited much speculation.

One likely explanation for the choice of Mal. 3:4–24 as the *haftarah* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* is the old tradition that the future redemption will occur on *Pesah*, the prototype of redemption (BT RH 11a). Because the *haftarah* could be construed to herald God's great day, it is to be proclaimed in hope and in warning before the festival itself. The term *shabbat ha-gadol* would then simply be a shorthand designation for saying that on this *Shabbat* the *haftarah* proclaiming the final "great" (*gadol*) day is read. This is very much like the formulation *Shabbat Shuvah*, which is one way to designate the *Shabbat* before *Yom Kippur*, when the theme of repentance (*t'shuvah*) is stressed through a *haftarah* selection beginning with the word *shuvah* (repent; Hos. 14:2).

The *haftarah's* focus on the tithe obligations would have reinforced the rabbinic selection. Indeed, according to the Mishnah, "on Passover

(the people) are judged with respect to (their) produce” (M RH I:2). Because the law required tithes from agricultural produce gathered before *Pesah*, recitation of the *haftarah* on the *Shabbat* before the festival would duly warn the people to fulfill their obligations to God and to the poor, and thus merit divine favor in the ensuing year. Our custom of charitable giving (*ma-ot hittim*) at this time, ini-

tiated so that the needy would have grain for *matzah*, continues the relationship between philanthropy and piety at the *Pesah* season. The *haftarah* thus signals that gifts have a divine dimension. From this perspective, *Shabbat ha-Gadol* calls attention to an ultimate or “great” accountability that all creatures bear for the resources of the earth and the sacred task of their redistribution.

3⁴Surely the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of yore and in the years of old. ⁵But [first] I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me: Who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert [the cause of] the widow, orphan, and stranger, said the LORD of Hosts.

⁶For I am the LORD—I have not changed; and you are the children of Jacob—you have not ceased to be. ⁷From the very days of your fathers you have turned away from My laws and have not observed them. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you—said the LORD of Hosts. But you ask, “How shall we turn back?” ⁸Ought man to defraud God? Yet you are defrauding Me. And you ask, “How have we been defrauding You?” In tithe and contribution. ⁹You are suffering under a curse, yet you go on defrauding Me—the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said the LORD of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you; ¹¹and I will banish the locusts from you, so that they will not destroy the yield

ג ⁴וְעִרְבָה לַיהוָה מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּבְשָׁנִים קְדָמֵינוּת: ⁵וְקִרְבַּתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם לְמִשְׁפָּט וְהִיִּיתִי אֶעֱד מִמְהֵר בְּמִכְשָׁפִים וּבְמִנְאָפִים וּבְנִשְׁבָּעִים לְשָׁקֵר וּבְעֹשֵׂי שְׂכָר־שְׂכִיר אֶלְמָנָה וַיִּתְּנוּ וּמִטִּי־גֵר* וְלֹא יִרְאוּנִי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

⁶כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה לֹא שָׁנִיתִי וְאַתֶּם בְּנֵי־יַעֲקֹב לֹא כָלִיתֶם: ⁷לְמִימֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם סִרְתֶּם מִחֻקִּי וְלֹא שְׁמַרְתֶּם שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי וְאֲשׁוּבָה אֵלֵיכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמֶה נָשׁוּב: ⁸הֲיִקְבַּע אָדָם אֱלֹהִים כִּי אַתֶּם קֹבְעִים אֹתִי וְאַמַּרְתֶּם בְּמֶה קֹבְעֵנוּךְ הַמַּעֲשֵׂר וְהַתְרוּמָה: ⁹בְּמֶאֱרָה אַתֶּם נֹאֲרִים וְאַתִּי אַתֶּם קֹבְעִים הֲגוֹי כָלוּ: ¹⁰הֲבִיאוּ אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשֵׂר אֶל־בֵּית הָאוֹצָר וַיְהִי טָרֶף בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֻנוּנֵי נֶאֱבָאֵת אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אִם־לֹא אֶפְתַּח לָכֶם אֶת אַרְבּוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהִרִיקְתִּי לָכֶם בָּרֶכֶת עַד־בְּלִי־דֵי: ¹¹וְגַעַרְתִּי לָכֶם בְּאֹכֵל וְלֹא־יִשְׁחַת לָכֶם אֶת־פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה וְלֹא־

v. 5. י' במקום ה'

Malachi 3:5. Who practice sorcery Condemnation of witches and false oaths and of the abuse of widows, orphans, and strangers finds echoes in Exod. 22:17,19–21.

7. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you Malachi’s exhortation assumes the people’s ability to respond to God’s initiative.

of your soil; and your vines in the field shall no longer miscarry—said the LORD of Hosts. ¹²And all the nations shall account you happy, for you shall be the most desired of lands—said the LORD of Hosts.

¹³You have spoken hard words against Me—said the LORD. But you ask, “What have we been saying among ourselves against You?”

¹⁴You have said, “It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His charge and walking in abject awe of the LORD of Hosts? ¹⁵And so, we account the arrogant happy: they have indeed done evil and endured; they have indeed dared God and escaped.” ¹⁶In this vein have those who revere the LORD been talking to one another. The LORD has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at His behest concerning those who revere the LORD and esteem His name. ¹⁷And on the day that I am preparing, said the LORD of Hosts, they shall be My treasured possession; I will be tender toward them as a man is tender toward a son who ministers to him. ¹⁸And you shall come to see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him who has served God and him who has not served Him.

¹⁹For lo! That day is at hand, burning like an oven. All the arrogant and all the doers of evil shall be straw, and the day that is coming—said the LORD of Hosts—shall burn them to ashes and leave of them neither stock nor boughs.

16. those who revere the LORD Hebrew: *yir-ei YHVH*. Used as a technical designation for those who revere God’s name (3:20), in contradistinction to those who despise it (1:6). They shall be vindicated on the day of judgment (3:20–21). Presumably, this refers to a group of particularly pious people.

19. the day that is coming References to the future “day” of judgment punctuate the prophet’s speech (3:2, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23). A complex scenario is envisaged, dominated by the advent of an angelic messenger, the admonition of sins, the in-

תִּשְׁבֹּל לְכֶם הַגֶּפֶן בַּשָּׂדֶה אָמַר יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת: ¹² וְאִשְׁרוּ אֶתְכֶם כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם כִּי־
תִּהְיוּ אֲתָם אֶרֶץ חֲפֹץ אָמַר יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת: ס

¹³ חֲזָקוּ עָלַי דְּבַרְיֵכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה וְאִמַּרְתֶּם
מִה־נִּדְבַרְנוּ עֲלֶיךָ: ¹⁴ אִמַּרְתֶּם שׁוֹא עֵבֶד
אֱלֹהִים וּמִה־בְּצַע כִּי שָׁמְרָנוּ מִשְׁמֵרְתּוֹ
וְכִי הִלְכְנוּ קְדֻרָנִית מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:
¹⁵ וְעַתָּה אֲנַחְנוּ מֵאֲשֵׁרִים וְזָדִים גַּם־נִבְנוּ
עֲשֵׂי רָשָׁעָה גַם בָּחֲנוּ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּמְלְטוּ:
¹⁶ אִזּוּ נִדְבְּרוּ יִרְאֵי יְהוָה אִישׁ אֶל־
רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּקְשַׁב יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּכְתַּב סֵפֶר
זְכָרוֹן לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי יְהוָה וּלְחֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ:
¹⁷ וְהָיוּ לִי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר
אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה סִגְלָה וְחִמְלָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם
כְּאֲשֶׁר יַחְמֵל אִישׁ עַל־בְּנוֹ הָעֶבֶד אֹתוֹ:
¹⁸ וְשִׁבְתֶּם וְרֵאִיתֶם בֵּין צְדִיק לְרָשָׁע בֵּין
עֶבֶד אֱלֹהִים לְאֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲבָדוּ: ס

¹⁹ כִּי־הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם בָּא בְּעַר פְּתִנּוֹר וְהָיוּ
כָּל־זָדִים וְכָל־עֹשֵׂה רָשָׁעָה קֵשׁ וְלֵהִט
אֲתָם הַיּוֹם הַבֹּא אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יֵעֹזֵב לָהֶם שָׂרֵשׁ וְעֵנֶף: ²⁰ וְזָרְחָה

terventions of Elijah, the fiery purgation of sinners, the vindication of the pious, and the visible distinction between the righteous and evildoers. This scenario was variously explicated and ordered by medieval Jewish commentators, in light of other biblical and Rabbinic evidence. In turn, the images were understood in either literal or figurative terms. The prophet Malachi was himself the heir to a long tradition of this rhetoric, produced in a period of more than 300 years and in various patterns.

²⁰But for you who revere My name a sun of victory shall rise to bring healing. You shall go forth and stamp like stall-fed calves, ²¹and you shall trample the wicked to a pulp, for they shall be dust beneath your feet on the day that I am preparing—said the LORD of Hosts.

²²Be mindful of the Teaching of My servant Moses, whom I charged at Horeb with laws and rules for all Israel.

²³Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD. ²⁴He shall reconcile parents with children and children with their parents, so that, when I come, I do not strike the whole land with utter destruction.

Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the LORD.

24. He shall reconcile parents with children
The language is difficult. The act of reconciliation here is literally “restore the heart” (*heshiv lev*). Different meanings of the preposition translated “with” (*al*), however, make it an open question whether the prophet envisions the reconciliation

לְכֶם יִרְאֵי שָׁמַי שְׁמֵשׁ צְדָקָה וּמִרְפָּא
בְּכַנְפֵיהָ וַיֵּצֵאתֶם וּפְשָׁתֶם כְּעַגְלֵי מִרְבֵּק:
²¹וַעֲסוֹתֶם רְשָׁעִים כִּי־יְהִי אֶפֶר תַּחַת
כַּפּוֹת רַגְלֵיכֶם בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה אָמַר
יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת: פ

²²זְכוּרוּ תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי
אוֹתוֹ בְּהַרְבֵּ עַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֻקִּים
וּמִשְׁפָּטִים:

²³הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלַח לְכֶם אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיא
לְפָנַי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא:
²⁴וְהִשִּׁיב יָלֵב־אֲבוֹת עַל־בְּנֵים וְלֵב בְּנִים
עַל־אֲבוֹתֶם פֶּן־אָבּוֹא וְהִפִּיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
חֵרֵם:

[הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלַח לְכֶם אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיא
לְפָנַי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהוָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא: *]

end. במסורת הקריאה נשנה הפסוק לפני האחרון

of parents “with” their children or “along with” them. In the first case, divine wrath will be forestalled by intergenerational reconciliation; in the other, both generations together will return to God.