

עץ חיים

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ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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**9** On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel. <sup>2</sup>He said to Aaron: “Take a calf of the herd for a purification offering and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and bring them before the LORD. <sup>3</sup>And speak to the Israelites, saying: Take a he-goat for a purification offering; a calf and a lamb, yearlings without blemish, for a burnt offering; <sup>4</sup>and an ox and a ram for an offering of well-being to sacrifice before the LORD; and a grain offering with oil mixed in. For today the LORD will appear to you.”

<sup>5</sup>They brought to the front of the Tent of Meeting the things that Moses had commanded, and the whole community came forward and stood before the LORD. <sup>6</sup>Moses said: “This is what the LORD has commanded that you do, that the Presence of the LORD may ap-

**ט** וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי קָרָא מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו וּלְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>2</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן קַח-לָךְ עֵגֶל בֶּן-בָּקָר לְחֻטָּאת וְאֵיל לְעֹלָה תְּמִימִם וְהִקְרֵב לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>3</sup>וְאֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּדַבֵּר לֵאמֹר קְחוּ שְׂעִיר-עִזִּים לְחֻטָּאת וְעֵגֶל וְכֶבֶשׂ בְּנֵי-שָׁנָה תְּמִימִם לְעֹלָה: <sup>4</sup>וְשׁוֹר וְאֵיל לְשִׁלְמִים לְזִבְחֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וּמִנְחָה בְּלוֹלָה בַשֶּׁמֶן כִּי הַיּוֹם יֵרָאֶה אֲלֵיכֶם: <sup>5</sup>וַיָּקָחוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה אֶל-פְּנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּקְרְבוּ כָל-הָעֵדָה וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>6</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה זֶה הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה תַּעֲשׂוּ וַיֵּרָא אֲלֵיכֶם כְּבוֹד יְהוָה: <sup>7</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן קְרֵב אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ

## THE INITIATION OF FORMAL WORSHIP (continued)

### THE FIRST CELEBRATION OF SACRIFICE (9:1–24)

This chapter describes what took place after the seven days of ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests.

**1. elders of Israel** The “elders” (*z’kenim*) represented the people. See Comment to 4:15.

**2. He said to Aaron: “Take a calf”** See Comments to 8:14–18, where only the priest-

hood is involved. Here all of the people are involved. The sequence of purification offering and burnt offering was ordained both for the priesthood and for the people.

#### **4. For today the LORD will appear to you**

The main purpose of the celebrations (v. 6).

**5. that Moses had commanded** Moses had an enhanced role in this celebration as the transmitter of God’s commands. In Leviticus, it is usually God who commands, not Moses.

## CHAPTER 9

This *parashah* begins by recalling a tragic incident that marred the installation ceremony of Aaron and his sons as *kohanim*. The focus of the text then shifts to the second of the major concerns of Leviticus, the avoidance of ritual impurity (*tum-ah*), which would separate the Israelite from contact with God and God’s sanctuary.

**1. eighth day** The seven-day week symbolizes a complete unit, and an eighth day represents starting over at a new level, concluding an octave and leading to “a higher

octave” (Hirsch). Thus a baby boy is circumcised and brought into the Covenant on the eighth day, beginning the second week of his life as a member of the Covenant. The Talmud compares the first seven days of celebrating the construction of the tabernacle to the seven days of Creation (BT Meg. 10b). On the eighth day, we are challenged to begin living in the day-to-day world of ordinary events.

**6.** All of our activities in the synagogue, not only at prayer but in classes and at meetings, should have a goal of experiencing the presence of God.

pear to you.” <sup>7</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron: “Come forward to the altar and sacrifice your purification offering and your burnt offering, making expiation for yourself and for the people; and sacrifice the people’s offering and make expiation for them, as the LORD has commanded.”

<sup>8</sup>Aaron came forward to the altar and slaughtered his calf of purification offering. <sup>9</sup>Aaron’s sons brought the blood to him; he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; and he poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. <sup>10</sup>The fat, the kidneys, and the protuberance of the liver from the purification offering he turned into smoke on the altar—as the LORD had commanded Moses; <sup>11</sup>and the flesh and the skin were consumed in fire outside the camp. <sup>12</sup>Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. Aaron’s sons passed the blood to him, and he dashed it against all sides of the altar. <sup>13</sup>They passed the burnt offering to him in sections, as well as the head, and he turned it into smoke on the altar. <sup>14</sup>He washed the entrails and the legs, and turned them into smoke on the altar with the burnt offering.

<sup>15</sup>Next he brought forward the people’s offering. He took the goat for the people’s purification offering, and slaughtered it, and presented it as a purification offering like the previous one. <sup>16</sup>He brought forward the burnt

וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת־חַטָּאתְךָ וְאֶת־עֹלֹתְךָ וְכַפֵּר בְּעֶדְךָ וּבְעֵד הָעָם וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת־קָרְבַּן הָעָם וְכַפֵּר בְּעֵדָם כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה:

<sup>8</sup> וַיִּקְרַב אֶהֱרֹן אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיִּשְׁחֹט אֶת־עֹגֶל הַחַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ: <sup>9</sup> וַיִּקְרְבוּ בָנָיו אֶהֱרֹן אֶת־הַדָּם אֵלָיו וַיִּטְבֹּל אֶצְבָּעוֹ בַּדָּם וַיִּתֵּן עַל־קַרְנוֹת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְאֶת־הַדָּם יָצַק אֶל־יְסוֹד הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>10</sup> וְאֶת־הַחֹלֶב וְאֶת־הַכֶּלִיט וְאֶת־הַיִּתְרֹת מִן־הַכֶּבֶד מִן־הַחַטָּאת הַקָּטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: <sup>11</sup> וְאֶת־הַבֶּשָׂר וְאֶת־הָעוֹר שָׂרָף בָּאֵשׁ מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: <sup>12</sup> וַיִּשְׁחֹט אֶת־הָעֵלָה וַיִּמְצְאוּ בָנָיו אֶהֱרֹן אֵלָיו אֶת־הַדָּם וַיִּזְרְקוּהוּ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: <sup>13</sup> וְאֶת־הָעֵלָה הִמְצִיאוּ אֵלָיו לְנִתְחִיהָ וְאֶת־הָרֹאשׁ וַיִּקְטֹר עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>14</sup> וַיִּרְחֹץ אֶת־הַקָּרֶב וְאֶת־הַפְּרָעִים וַיִּקְטֹר עַל־הָעֵלָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ:

<sup>15</sup> וַיִּקְרַב אֶת קָרְבַּן הָעָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת־שְׂעִיר הַחַטָּאת אֲשֶׁר לָעָם וַיִּשְׁחָטוּהוּ וַיַּחְטְאוּהוּ כְּרֹאשׁוֹן: <sup>16</sup> וַיִּקְרַב אֶת־הָעֵלָה וַיַּעֲשֶׂה

**7. Come forward to the altar** Moses turned over the conduct of the ritual to Aaron by inviting him to officiate at the altar for the first time.

**making expiation for yourself and for the people** The purification offering of the priesthood indirectly served the people as well; never-

theless, an additional purification offering on their behalf was required.

**9. Aaron’s sons brought the blood to him** This procedural detail is missing elsewhere. Practically speaking, the officiant needed the assistance of another priest.

**7. Moses said to Aaron: “Come forward”** There is a tradition that Aaron had to be urged to bring his purification offering, a calf, because he was embarrassed. It reminded him of his role in fashioning the Golden Calf. Moses, however, assured him: “Your sin has been forgiven because you were ashamed” (*M’norat*

*Ha-Ma-or*). The ability to feel shame is one of the defining characteristics of a moral human being. It arises from an awareness of the gap between who we are and who we might be. Furthermore, it recognizes the authority of God and the right of other people to judge us.

offering and sacrificed it according to regulation. <sup>17</sup>He then brought forward the grain offering and, taking a handful of it, he turned it into smoke on the altar—in addition to the burnt offering of the morning. <sup>18</sup>He slaughtered the ox and the ram, the people's sacrifice of well-being. Aaron's sons passed the blood to him—which he dashed against every side of the altar—<sup>19</sup>and the fat parts of the ox and the ram: the broad tail, the covering [fat], the kidneys, and the protuberances of the livers. <sup>20</sup>They laid these fat parts over the breasts; and Aaron turned the fat parts into smoke on the altar, <sup>21</sup>and elevated the breasts and the right thighs as an elevation offering before the LORD—as Moses had commanded.

<sup>22</sup>Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he stepped down after offering the purification offering, the burnt offering, and the offering of well-being. <sup>23</sup>Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Presence of the LORD appeared to all the people. <sup>24</sup>Fire came forth from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces.

שני כַּמִּשְׁפָּט: <sup>17</sup>וַיִּקְרַב אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה וַיִּמְלֵא כַּפּוֹ מִמֶּנָּה וַיִּקְטֹר עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִלֶּבֶד עֲלֵת הַבֶּקֶר: <sup>18</sup>וַיִּשְׁחַט אֶת־הַשּׁוֹר וְאֶת־הָאֵילָנִי וְנָחַ הַשְּׁלָמִים אֲשֶׁר לָעַם וַיִּמָּצְאוּ בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן אֶת־הַדָּם אֵלָיו וַיִּזְרְקֵהוּ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ סָבִיב: <sup>19</sup>וְאֶת־הַחֲלָבִים מִן־הַשּׁוֹר וּמִן־הָאֵילָנִי הָאֵלֶּיָּה וְהַמְכֶסֶה וְהַכְּלִיֹּת וְיִתְרַת הַכֶּבֶד: <sup>20</sup>וַיִּשְׁימוּ אֶת־הַחֲלָבִים עַל־הַחֲזוֹת וַיִּקְטֹר הַחֲלָבִים הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: <sup>21</sup>וְאֵת הַחֲזוֹת וְאֵת שׁוֹק הַיָּמִין הֵנִיף אֶהֱרֹן תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה:

<sup>22</sup>וַיִּשָּׂא אֶהֱרֹן אֶת־יָדָיו וַיְבָרֶכֶם וַיֵּרֶד מֵעֲשֵׂת הַחֲטָאֹת וְהָעֹלָה וְהַשְּׁלָמִים: <sup>23</sup>וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאֶהֱרֹן אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּצְאוּ וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת־הָעָם וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד־יְהוָה אֶל־כָּל־הָעָם: <sup>24</sup>וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וְהֹאכַל עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֶת־הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־הַחֲלָבִים וַיֵּרָא כָּל־הָעָם וַיִּרְגְּזוּ וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם:

## 10 וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי־אֶהֱרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ

**18.** The extent of the sacrifice was greater than usual on this occasion, requiring both an ox and a ram.

**22. Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them** Raising the hands toward God was a characteristic gesture of prayer. Here, Aaron faced the people and raised his hands over them as he blessed them.

**23. Moses and Aaron then went inside the**

**Tent of Meeting** Perhaps they went in to pray for the anticipated appearance of God's Presence (*Sifra*) or for the miraculous ignition of the altar fire (Ibn Ezra).

**24. Fire came forth from before the LORD** The fire issued from God's Presence (the *Kavod*), which itself was a fire enveloped in a thick cloud that pervaded the tent.

### ADMONITIONS ON PRIESTLY CONDUCT (10:1–20)

To emphasize the necessity of precise compliance with all the ritual laws and regulations for priestly conduct, this chapter begins with the

untimely death of two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who made an improper incense offering.

each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the LORD alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. <sup>2</sup>And fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them; thus they died at the instance of the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD meant when He said:

Through those near to Me I show Myself holy,

THE DEATH OF NADAB AND ABIHU:  
A DRAMATIC PRECEDENT (vv. 1–7)

**1. put fire in it** Each placed coals or embers on his fire pan.

**alien fire** Hebrew: *esh zarah*, the incense itself. They brought "an alien [incense offering by] fire," one that had not been specifically ordained.

**2. fire came forth from the LORD** This may

מִחֲתָתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בָּהֶן אֵשׁ וַיִּשִּׂמוּ עָלֶיהָ  
קֹטֶרֶת וַיִּקְרְבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר  
לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם: <sup>2</sup>וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה  
וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>3</sup>וַיֹּאמֶר  
מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן הוּא אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה |  
לֵאמֹר  
בְּקִרְבִּי אֶקְדֹּשׁ

refer to the fire mentioned in 9:24, which came forth from inside the Tent of Meeting and consumed the sacrifices offered at the dedication of the tabernacle (Rashbam).

**3. Through those near to Me I show Myself holy** Priests who adhere to the regulations of their office and protect the purity of the sanctuary are "near" to and sanctify God; in turn, the sanctuary is favored by God's Presence. When, as in

CHAPTER 10

The Torah narrates the death of Nadab and Abihu very briefly, never telling us explicitly what they did to cause them to be struck down. Therefore, commentators over the generations have used their imaginations to speculate about what grave sin they might have committed. One explanation is that they brought the instruments for making a fire into the Tent, not realizing that on this special occasion God was going to send fire miraculously from heaven (9:24). Because they were too close to that fire, they were killed. Their sin, if any, was a lack of faith, trying to help God in a situation in which God did not need their help (Mekh.).

Most of the Sages, however, judge them less charitably. Some find them guilty of egotism (each took his own fire pan, consulting neither with each other nor with their father, Aaron) or of entering the sanctuary drunk (for which reason priests are told in verse 9 not to drink wine before entering the sanctuary, Lev. R. 12:1) or of entering so casually dressed that they showed disrespect for their surroundings (ibidem). Others accuse them of impatience to succeed Moses and Aaron as leaders of the people. The "strange fire" they bore was the fire of ambition, which prompted them to say, "When will these old men, our father and our uncle, die already so that we can take their place?" Based on the comment of the *Sifra* that their sin was not consulting with their father, Hirsch, champion of modern Orthodoxy, iden-

tifies their sin as making themselves the highest authority and disregarding the tradition of their elders.

One intriguing interpretation sees them as motivated by excessive piety. Out of their love for the divine, they tried to come too close to God who is like a raging fire (*Or Ha-Hayyim*). They were motivated by a passion for closeness to God that God did not command because it was too dangerous. (Nadab means "willing," and Abihu means "[God] is my Father.") They could not be satisfied with rituals and sacrifices but had to draw so close to God that they were consumed by the strange fire in their souls. Perhaps Aaron is warned so often and so sternly about when and how to enter the tabernacle lest he too be struck down in his desire to be one with God.

A homiletic interpretation fastens on the rabbinic legend (BT Sanh. 52a) that the fire consumed their souls but left their bodies intact. (Thus they could be removed from the site by dragging them by their garments, verse 5.) It suggests that their fate was to suffer a spiritual death in their lifetime. In direct contrast to the previous interpretation, it sees them as no longer feeling reverence or holiness in carrying out their sacred tasks. They were emotionally burned out. Their souls had shriveled even as they continued to go through the motions of religious ritual.

**3. Through those near to Me I show Myself holy** Hirsch pictures God as saying, "The more a person stands out from among the peo-

And gain glory before all the people.”  
And Aaron was silent.

<sup>4</sup>Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, “Come forward and carry your kinsmen away from the front of the sanctuary to a place outside the camp.” <sup>5</sup>They came forward and carried them out of the camp by their tunics, as Moses had ordered. <sup>6</sup>And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Do not bare your heads and do not rend your clothes, lest you die and anger strike the whole community. But your kinsmen, all the house of Israel, shall bewail the burning that the LORD has wrought. <sup>7</sup>And so do not go outside the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, lest you die, for the LORD’s anointing oil is upon you.” And they did as Moses had bidden.

וְעַל-פָּנָי כָּל-הָעָם אֶפְבֹּד

וַיֵּדֶם אֶהֱרֹן:

<sup>4</sup> וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל-מִישָׁאֵל וְאֶל אֶלְצָפָן בְּנֵי עֲזִיזֵאל דֹּד אֶהֱרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם קִרְבוּ \* שְׂאוּ אֶת-אֲחֵיכֶם מֵאֵת פְּנֵי-הַקֹּדֶשׁ אֶל-מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: <sup>5</sup> וַיִּקְרְבוּ וַיִּשְׂאֻם בְּכַתְּנֵתָם אֶל-מַחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה: <sup>6</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אֶהֱרֹן וְלֶאֱלֶעָזָר וְלִיִּיתָמָר | בָּנָיו רְאִשֵׁיכֶם אֶל-תִּפְרְעוּ | וּבְגְדֵיכֶם לֹא-תִפְרְמוּ וְלֹא תָמְתוּ וְעַל כָּל-הָעֵדָה יִקְצֹף וַאֲחֵיכֶם כָּל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יִבְכּוּ אֶת-הַשְׂרִפָּה אֲשֶׁר שָׂרַף יְהוָה: <sup>7</sup> וּמִפֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֹא תֵצְאוּ פֶן-תָּמְתוּ כִּי-שֶׁמֶן מִשְׁחַת יְהוָה עָלֵיכֶם וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כַּדְבַר מֹשֶׁה: פ

4. v. שני טעמים

this case, priests flout the divine will, God exercises punitive power, compelling all to recognize God’s authority.

**Aaron was silent** Hebrew: *va-yiddom Aharon*. The traditional interpretation has it that Aaron accepted God’s harsh judgment and did not cry out or complain at his painful loss.

**4. from the front of the sanctuary** The two priests had entered the Tent of Meeting. They probably were struck down as they were departing, when they were already in the courtyard outside the tent.

**to a place outside the camp** The corpses had to be removed from the camp, a requirement for any ritually impure object. Relatively little is known of ancient Israelite burial customs, except that the dead were buried away from the settled areas, because their bodies were deemed ritually impure.

**5. by their tunics** Apparently, the bodies of

the two priests were not completely consumed by God’s fire. The flame that killed them probably blasted their faces and left their clothing intact.

**6. bare** Hebrew: *para*, “to dishevel” the hair, which involves baring the head as well.

**lest you die** At the hand of God, as a punishment.

**and anger strike the whole community** The circumstances surrounding the deaths of Nadab and Abihu—occurring at the time of their consecration and purification—prevented, indeed forbade, their father and brothers from mourning for them, because their sanctification took precedence over their bereavement. The rest of the people, however, were to mourn.

**7. do not go outside the entrance of the Tent of Meeting** The priests were forbidden to leave the sacred precinct of the inner court.

ple as a teacher and a leader, the less will I show indulgence when that person does wrong.” Prominence leads not to privilege but to responsibility.

**Aaron was silent** The Torah usually does not call attention to someone’s not speaking. What, then, is the unusual significance of Aaron’s silence? That he accepted God’s decree

without protest? That his anguish was too great for him to put into words? That he was tempted to burst out in anger at the unfairness of what had happened to his family but was able to restrain himself? Perhaps the text is suggesting that there are more possibilities—and more power—in silence than in any words.

<sup>8</sup>And the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying:  
<sup>9</sup>Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages, <sup>10</sup>for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the impure and the pure; <sup>11</sup>and you must teach the Israelites all the laws which the LORD has imparted to them through Moses.

<sup>12</sup>Moses spoke to Aaron and to his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar: Take the grain offering that is left over from the LORD's gifts and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. <sup>13</sup>You shall eat it in the sacred precinct, inasmuch as it is your due, and that of your children, from the LORD's gifts; for so I have been commanded. <sup>14</sup>But the breast of elevation offering and the thigh of gift offering you, and your sons and daughters with you, may eat in any pure place, for they have been assigned as a due to you and your children from the Israelites' sacrifices of well-being. <sup>15</sup>Together with the fat of fire offering, they must present the thigh of gift offering and the breast of elevation offering, which are to be elevated as an elevation offering before the LORD, and which are to be your due and that of your children with you for all time—as the LORD has commanded.

<sup>16</sup>Then Moses inquired about the goat of purification offering, and it had already been

<sup>8</sup>וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: <sup>9</sup>וְשָׁכַר אֶל-תְּשֻׁבָּתְךָ אֶתְּךָ וּבְנֶיךָ אִתְּךָ בְּבֹאֲכֶם אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלֹא תָמְתוּ חֵקֶת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: <sup>10</sup>וְלִהְבִּיל בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַחֹל וּבֵין הַטָּמֵא וּבֵין הַטָּהוֹר: <sup>11</sup>וְלִהְיוֹת אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת כָּל-הַחֻקִּים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיהֶם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה: פ

רביעי <sup>12</sup>וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל אֶלְעָזָר וְאֶל-אִיתָמָר בְּנָיו הַנּוֹתָרִים קָחוּ אֶת-הַמִּנְחָה הַנּוֹתֶרֶת מֵאֲשֵׁי יְהוָה וְאִכְלוּהָ מִצֹּת אֶצֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כִּי קֹדֶשׁ קִדְשִׁים הוּא: <sup>13</sup>וְאִכְלֹתֶם אֹתָהּ בְּמָקוֹם קֹדֶשׁ כִּי חֻקֶּךָ וְחֻק־בְּנֶיךָ הוּא מֵאֲשֵׁי יְהוָה כִּי־כֵן צֻוֵּיתִי: <sup>14</sup>וְאֵת חֵזֶה הַתְּנוּפָה וְאֵת שׁוֹק הַתְּרוּמָה תֹאכְלוּ בְּמָקוֹם טָהוֹר אֶתְּךָ וּבְנֶיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ אִתְּךָ כִּי־חֻקֶּךָ וְחֻק־בְּנֶיךָ נִתְּנוּ מִזִּבְחֵי שְׁלָמֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: <sup>15</sup>שׁוֹק הַתְּרוּמָה וְחֵזֶה הַתְּנוּפָה עַל אֲשֵׁי הַחֹלְבִּים יָבִיאוּ לַהֲנִיף תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְהָיָה לָךְ וּלְבְנֶיךָ אִתְּךָ לְחֻק־עוֹלָם כַּאֲשֶׁר צֻוָּה יְהוָה:

חמישי <sup>16</sup>וְאֵת שְׁעִיר הַחַטָּאת דָּרַשׁ\* דָּרַשׁ מֹשֶׁה וְהִנֵּה שָׂרָף וַיִּקְצַף עַל-אֶלְעָזָר

v. 16. במסורה מסומנת "חצי התורה בתיבות", ולא אמת היא אבל יש ב"דרש דרש" רמז על אופן קריאה של התורה

#### RULES FOR THE PRIESTHOOD (vv. 8–15)

**9–10.** Drinking intoxicants would impair the faculties of the priests, who would then be unable to distinguish between the sacred and the profane.

#### MOSES MONITORS THE PRIESTS AND THE CULT (vv. 16–20)

**16. Moses inquired about the goat of purification offering** This refers to the purification offering provided by the people as part of the ded-

**9. drink no wine** This prohibition resulted not from Nadab and Abihu having been drunk but from the danger that the bereaved relatives would drown their sorrows in intoxicants and not be fit to carry on their responsibilities (Hoffman). Although wine "cheers the heart"

(Ps. 104:15), *kohanim* were to avoid it. When we come before God, our joy should stem from serving God, without the use of external stimulants (Simḥah Bunem).

**16. Moses inquired** The word translated as "inquired" (*darash*) is said to be the middle



burned! He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and said, <sup>17</sup>"Why did you not eat the purification offering in the sacred area? For it is most holy, and He has given it to you to remove the guilt of the community and to make expiation for them before the LORD. <sup>18</sup>Since its blood was not brought inside the sanctuary, you should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded." <sup>19</sup>And Aaron spoke to Moses, "See, this day they brought their purification offering and their burnt offering before the LORD, and such things have befallen me! Had I eaten purification offering today, would the LORD have approved?" <sup>20</sup>And when Moses heard this, he approved.

וְעַל־אִיתָמָר בְּנֵי אֶהֱרֹן הַנּוֹתָרִם לֵאמֹר:  
<sup>17</sup> מִדּוּעַ לֹא־אָכַלְתֶּם אֶת־הַחֻטָּאת  
 בַּמָּקוֹם הַקֹּדֶשׁ כִּי קֹדֶשׁ קְדָשִׁים הוּא  
 וְאֵתָּה | נָתַן לָכֶם לִשְׂאֵת אֶת־עוֹן הָעֵדָה  
 לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: <sup>18</sup> הֵן לֹא־הוּבָא  
 אֶת־דָּמָהּ אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ פְּנִימָה אָכֹל  
 תֹּאכְלוּ אֹתָהּ בַּקֹּדֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר צֻוֵּיתִי:  
<sup>19</sup> וַיִּדְבֹּר אֶהֱרֹן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֵן הַיּוֹם הִקְרִיבוּ  
 אֶת־חֻטָּאתָם וְאֶת־עֹלֹתָם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה  
 וְתִקְרָאנָה אֹתִי כָּאֵלֶּה וְאָכַלְתִּי חֻטָּאת  
 הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְיִטֵּב בְּעֵינַי יְהוָה: <sup>20</sup> וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה  
 וַיִּיטֵב בְּעֵינָיו: פ

## 11 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron,

## וַיִּדְבֹּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אֶהֱרֹן שִׁי

ication rites in 9:3,15. Moses discovered that on this occasion the priestly portions of the purification offering had been burned on the altar—the priests had not eaten them as they were obliged to do. Having disobeyed instructions, they incurred Moses' anger. He spoke directly to Aaron's sons in deference to Aaron.

**17.** Although the blood rites incorporated in the purification offering (*hattat*) constituted the primary means of expiation, the sacred meals of

the priests were also essential. It was the duty of the priests to eat their assigned portions of the *hattat* brought by the people.

**18.** *Since its blood was not brought inside the sanctuary* This refers to the rule in 6:23.

**19.** Aaron sought to excuse the failure of the priests to eat their portions of the sacrifice by explaining to Moses that his sons thought they should not eat of the sacrifice because they were in mourning.

word of the Torah. The essence of the Torah is continued inquiry and study. "The ideal Jew is not so much a *learned Jew* as a *learning Jew*" (*Emet Ve-Emunah*).

**He was angry** The Midrash teaches: Look at what anger can do, even to a person as wise and pious as Moses. When Moses became angry, his knowledge of the law left him, and he forgot that a priest in mourning was not permitted to eat of the sacrifice (Lev. R. 13:1). It may be that Moses was speaking out of his own pain and sense of loss or perhaps even out of a sense of guilt at not having been able to prevent the calamity. What Aaron needed at that moment, however, were not words of rebuke but words of comfort, validating his feelings of loss, pain, and even outrage. Jewish law counsels us against trying to comfort people immediately after they have suffered a loss ("when the dead body is still before them").

**19. Had I eaten purification offering today** Aaron responds that because his family had sinned and had been punished publicly, identifying them publicly as sinners, it was not appropriate for them to stand before God bearing the people's prayers for atonement.

**20.** Moses is not too proud to admit that he was wrong (Rashi). This exchange between Moses and Aaron reflects the conflict in the life of any person who must simultaneously be public servant, officiating at public ceremonies, and private individual with personal grief and concerns. Aaron must leave his public role temporarily to deal with his grief, whereas Moses, who sometimes seems to have compromised his personal life in favor of his public role (see Comments to Exod.18:6 and Num. 12:1), urges him to give his public responsibilities priority because people depend on him.

saying to them: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the Israelite people thus:

These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the land animals: <sup>3</sup>any animal that has true hoofs, with clefts through the hoofs, and that chews the cud—such you may eat. <sup>4</sup>The following, however, of those that either chew the cud or have true hoofs, you shall not eat:

לֵאמֹר אֲלֵהֶם: <sup>2</sup>דַּבְּרוּ אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר  
זֹאת הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר תֹּאכְלוּ מִכָּל-הַבְּהֵמָה  
אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאָרֶץ: <sup>3</sup>כָּל | מִפְּרֹסֶת פְּרֹסָה  
וְשִׁסְעַת שִׁסְעַת מַעֲלַת גֵּרָה בְּבֵהֶמָה  
אֹתָהּ תֹאכְלוּ: <sup>4</sup>אֲךָ אֵת-זֶה לֹא תֹאכְלוּ  
מִמַּעֲלֵי הַגֵּרָה וּמִמְּפִרְסֵי הַפְּרֹסָה אֵת-

THE LAWS OF KASHRUT: PROPER FOODS AND VESSELS (11:1–47)

This chapter is one of two major collections of dietary laws in the Torah. The other collection is found in Deut. 14.

PERMITTED AND FORBIDDEN  
FOOD SOURCES (vv. 1–23)

LAND ANIMALS (vv. 2–8)

**2. creatures . . . land animals** Hebrew: *hayyah . . . b'hemah*; here the former is used as a

general term, while the latter refers specifically to that which lives on the land.

**3. any animal that has true hoofs** To qualify as pure, an animal's hoofs must be split all the way through, producing two toes, of a sort, so that the animal in question does not walk on paws.

**4. you shall not eat** The list of four impure land animals comprises borderline cases, animals that exhibit one but not both of the required phys-

CHAPTER 11

The basis for one major pillar of the Jewish dietary code, the separation of meat and dairy products, is enunciated in Exod. 34:26. Now the Torah adds a second pillar, the distinction between the living creatures that may be eaten and those that are forbidden.

An attentive reading of this chapter clearly shows that the dietary laws are not based on considerations of health, neither in terms of the animals permitted or forbidden nor out of concern for meat spoiling in the desert heat. (Does one need a law that prohibits eating spoiled meat?) "There is nothing intrinsically 'impure' about pigs or camels, except that the Torah forbids them to Israelites" (Hoffman). There may be moral or aesthetic considerations for shunning some creatures because of undesirable traits, e.g., flesh-eating animals and birds of prey; if we are forbidden to ingest blood (Lev. 17), we should avoid the flesh of animals and fowl that ingest blood.

The overriding purpose of the dietary code is explicit: "You shall sanctify yourselves and be

holy, for I am holy" (v. 44). The dietary laws constitute a way of sanctifying the act of eating. The eating of meat requires killing a living creature, constantly seen by the Torah as a compromise. These laws elevate the eating of meat to a level of sanctity by introducing categories of permitted and forbidden. For animals, eating is a matter of instinct; only human beings can choose on moral or religious grounds not to eat something otherwise available.

The dietary laws are given incrementally in the Torah, forbidding boiling a kid in its mother's milk; then prohibiting the ingestion of blood; then declaring certain species of mammal, fish, and fowl unfit for consumption. Similarly, many Jews who begin from a position of limited observance can commit themselves to sanctifying their mealtimes in an incremental manner. They may begin by avoiding pork and shellfish, continue by separating meat and dairy products, and so on. No one need feel like a hypocrite for not keeping all of the commandments immediately. What is important is to be on the path of observance, to be, in the words of *Emet Ve-Emunah*, a "striving" Jew.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**11:3. any animal** For meat to be *kasher* ("kosher," fit for consumption under Jewish law), it must not only come from the animals designated in this chapter (e.g., cows, sheep, goats, buffalos, and deer) but must also be slaughtered, soaked, salted, and prepared according to Jewish law. See Comments to Lev. 17:10; Deut. 12:21, 14:7.

the camel—although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is impure for you; <sup>5</sup>the daman—although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is impure for you; <sup>6</sup>the hare—although it chews the cud, it has no true hoofs: it is impure for you; <sup>7</sup>and the swine—although it has true hoofs, with the hoofs cleft through, it does not chew the cud: it is impure for you. <sup>8</sup>You shall not eat of their flesh or touch their carcasses; they are impure for you.

<sup>9</sup>These you may eat of all that live in water: anything in water, whether in the seas or in the streams, that has fins and scales—these you may eat. <sup>10</sup>But anything in the seas or in the streams that has no fins and scales, among all the swarming things of the water and among all the other living creatures that are in the water—they are an abomination for you <sup>11</sup>and an abomination

הַגָּמֶל כִּי־מַעֲלֶה גֵרָה הוּא וּפְרָסָה אֵינָנּוּ מִפְּרִי־טֶמֶא הוּא לָכֶם: <sup>5</sup>וְאֶת־הַשָּׁפָן כִּי־מַעֲלֶה גֵרָה הוּא וּפְרָסָה לֹא יִפְרִי־טֶמֶא הוּא לָכֶם: <sup>6</sup>וְאֶת־הָאַרְנֶבֶת כִּי־מַעֲלֶה גֵרָה הוּא וּפְרָסָה לֹא הִפְרִיסָה טֶמֶאָה הוּא לָכֶם: <sup>7</sup>וְאֶת־הַחֲזִיר כִּי־מִפְּרִי־פְרָסָה הוּא וְשֹׁסֵעַ שֹׁסֵעַ פְּרָסָה וְהוּא גֵרָה לֹא־יִגַּר טֶמֶא הוּא לָכֶם: <sup>8</sup>מִבְּשָׂרָם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ וּבְנִבְלָתָם לֹא תִגָּעוּ טִמְאִים הֵם לָכֶם:

<sup>9</sup>אֵת־זֶה תֹאכְלוּ מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם כָּל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ סִנְפִיר וְקַשְׂקֶשֶׁת בַּמַּיִם בַּיָּמִים וּבְנִחָלִים אֵתֶם תֹאכְלוּ: <sup>10</sup>וְכָל אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לוֹ סִנְפִיר וְקַשְׂקֶשֶׁת בַּיָּמִים וּבְנִחָלִים מִכָּל שָׂרֵץ הַמַּיִם וּמִכָּל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם שָׂקָץ הֵם לָכֶם: <sup>11</sup>וְשָׂקָץ יִהְיֶה

ical criteria. There was a likelihood of mistaking such creatures for pure animals.

**camel** The hoof of the camel (an English word that derives from the Semitic word *gamal*) is split in its upper part, but bound together in its lower part.

**5. daman** A small mammal, the Syrian hyrax. It does not actually chew its cud, but gives that impression because of the protrusions in its stomach, which suggest that its stomach might have compartments, as is characteristic of the ruminants (who chew their cud).

**6. hare** It gives the impression of being a ruminant because it munches its food noticeably.

**7. swine** Hebrew: *hazir* (pig, swine), widely domesticated in ancient Canaan and raised for food. It was the only domesticated animal used as food in biblical times that had a truly split hoof

but did not chew its cud. No distinction is made here between wild and domesticated species.

**8.** One is prohibited not only from eating the meat of forbidden animals but also from touching or handling any part of their bodies, which normally would occur when preparing meat as food. This rule probably was intended as a safeguard against any possible situation that might inadvertently lead to the consumption of meat from such prohibited animals.

#### WATER CREATURES (vv. 9–12)

**10. all the swarming things of the water** All water creatures that do not swim by the usual means of using fins, but crawl instead, are considered impure.

**11.** As in verse 8, the prohibition affects both eating and touching.

7. Only twice in the Torah are we commanded not to eat pork, yet every Jew knows that it is forbidden. The Torah commands us many more times to refrain from gossip and

hurtful speech, yet many observant Jews do not sense that they are violating the Torah when they speak ill of others (Salanter).

**13.** The forbidden seem to share certain

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**11:7. swine** Based on this verse, bacon, ham, and all pork by-products are forbidden. This includes baked goods containing lard.

**11:9. fins and scales** This is the source for the ruling that only sea creatures with fins and scales may be eaten.

for you they shall remain: you shall not eat of their flesh and you shall abominate their carcasses.<sup>12</sup> Everything in water that has no fins and scales shall be an abomination for you.

<sup>13</sup>The following you shall abominate among the birds—they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, and the black vulture; <sup>14</sup>the kite, falcons of every variety; <sup>15</sup>all varieties of raven; <sup>16</sup>the ostrich, the night-hawk, the sea gull; hawks of every variety; <sup>17</sup>the little owl, the cormorant, and the great owl; <sup>18</sup>the white owl, the pelican, and the bustard; <sup>19</sup>the stork; herons of every variety; the hoopoe, and the bat.

<sup>20</sup>All winged swarming things that walk on fours shall be an abomination for you. <sup>21</sup>But these you may eat among all the winged swarming things that walk on fours: all that have, above their feet, jointed legs to leap with on the ground—<sup>22</sup>of these you may eat the following: locusts of every variety; all varieties of bald locust; crickets of every variety; and all varieties

לכם מבשרם לא תאכלו ואת־נבלתם תשקצו: <sup>12</sup>כל אשר אין־לו סנפיר וקשקשת במים שקץ הוא לכם: <sup>13</sup>ואת־אלה תשקצו מן־העוף לא יאכלו שקץ הם את־הנשר ואת־הפרס ואת־העזניה: <sup>14</sup>ואת־הדאה ואת־האיה למינה: <sup>15</sup>את כל־ערב למינו: <sup>16</sup>ואת־בת היענה ואת־התחמס ואת־השחף ואת־הנץ למינהו: <sup>17</sup>ואת־הפוס ואת־השלף ואת־הינשוף: <sup>18</sup>ואת־התנשמת ואת־הקאת ואת־הרחם: <sup>19</sup>ואת־החסידה האנפה למינה ואת־הדוכיפת ואת־העטלף:

<sup>20</sup>כל שרץ העוף ההלך על־ארבע שקץ הוא לכם: <sup>21</sup>ס אך את־זה תאכלו מבול שרץ העוף ההלך על־ארבע אשר לא לו כרעים ממעל לרגליו לנתר בהן על־הארץ: <sup>22</sup>את־אלה מהם תאכלו

## CREATURES OF THE SKY (vv. 13–19)

**13. The following . . . among the birds** No overall physical criteria distinguish pure birds from impure birds. Rather, a long list of prohibited birds is provided, implying that all others would be permitted. The list of prohibited birds given here is virtually identical with that in Deut. 14. It does not correspond exactly to zoologic classifications and even includes a winged rodent, the bat (*atallef*). Virtually all of the impure birds are birds of prey.

## WINGED INSECTS (vv. 20–23)

**20.** The section begins with a general statement, repeated with only slight variations in verse 23. Both are prohibitive, whereas the intervening two verses (vv. 21–22) state exceptions to the overall prohibition.

**21.** Four types of locusts, each in turn comprising several varieties, are permitted.

characteristics, including a sharp talon on their feet for hunting and a tendency to prey on living creatures. Hoffman adds that, because the translation of some of these names is uncertain, “we may eat only fowl that are traditionally eaten in Jewish homes.”

**16.** The Sages offer homiletic explanations as to why certain birds are considered abominations. Thus the hawk is ruled out

because of its excellent eyesight. “It can live in Babylon and see everything that people are doing wrong in the Land of Israel.” The stork is called “the pious bird” (*ha-hasidah*) because it takes such solicitous care of its young. Why, then, is it listed among the abominations? Because it cares only for its own young and not for anyone else’s (BT Hul. 63a).

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**11:12. no fins and scales** Shark, catfish, and all shellfish, for example, are prohibited. Authorities disagree on the permissibility of eating sturgeon and swordfish.

of grasshopper. <sup>23</sup>But all other winged swarming things that have four legs shall be an abomination for you.

<sup>24</sup>And the following shall make you impure—whoever touches their carcasses shall be impure until evening, <sup>25</sup>and whoever carries the carcasses of any of them shall wash his clothes and be impure until evening—<sup>26</sup>every animal that has true hoofs but without clefts through the hoofs, or that does not chew the cud. They are impure for you; whoever touches them shall be impure. <sup>27</sup>Also all animals that walk on paws, among those that walk on fours, are impure for you; whoever touches their carcasses shall be impure until evening. <sup>28</sup>And anyone who carries their carcasses shall wash his clothes and remain impure until evening. They are impure for you.

<sup>29</sup>The following shall be impure for you from among the things that swarm on the earth: the mole, the mouse, and great lizards of every variety; <sup>30</sup>the gecko, the land crocodile, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. <sup>31</sup>Those are for you the impure among all the swarming things; whoever touches them when they are dead shall be impure until evening. <sup>32</sup>And anything on which one of them falls when dead shall be impure: be it any article of wood, or a

אֶת־הָאַרְבֶּה לְמִינֹו וְאֶת־הַסֹּלֶעַם לְמִינֵהוּ  
וְאֶת־הַחֲרָגָל לְמִינֵהוּ וְאֶת־הַחֲגָב  
לְמִינֵהוּ: <sup>23</sup>וְכָל־שָׂרָץ הָעוֹף אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ  
אַרְבַּע רַגְלִים שָׁקֵץ הוּא לָכֶם:

<sup>24</sup>וְלֹא־אֵלֶּה תִטְמְאוּ כָּל־הַנִּגְעַנָּה בְּנִבְלָתָם  
יִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: <sup>25</sup>וְכָל־הַנֶּשֶׂא מִנִּבְלָתָם  
יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְיִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: <sup>26</sup>לְכָל־  
הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר הוּא מִפְּרֹסֶת פְּרָסָה וְשֹׁסֵעַ |  
אֵינָנָה שֹׁסֵעַת וְגִרָה אֵינָנָה מַעֲלָה טְמֵאִים  
הֵם לָכֶם כָּל־הַנִּגְעַנָּה בָּהֶם יִטְמָא: <sup>27</sup>וְכָל־  
הוֹלֵךְ עַל־כַּפָּיו בְּכָל־הַחַיָּה הַהֹלֶכֶת עַל־  
אַרְבַּע טְמֵאִים הֵם לָכֶם כָּל־הַנִּגְעַנָּה  
בְּנִבְלָתָם יִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: <sup>28</sup>וְהַנֶּשֶׂא  
אֶת־נִבְלָתָם יִכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְיִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב  
טְמֵאִים הֵמָּה לָכֶם: ס

<sup>29</sup>וְזֶה לָכֶם הַטְּמֵא בַּשָּׂרָץ הַשָּׂרָץ עַל־  
הָאָרֶץ הַחֹלֵד וְהָעֹכֵב וְהָצָב לְמִינֵהוּ:  
<sup>30</sup>וְהָאֲנָקָה וְהַכָּח וְהַלְטָאָה וְהַחֲמָט  
וְהַתְּנַשְׁמָת: <sup>31</sup>אֵלֶּה הַטְּמֵאִים לָכֶם בְּכָל־  
הַשָּׂרָץ כָּל־הַנִּגְעַנָּה בָּהֶם בְּמָתָם יִטְמָא  
עַד־הָעֶרֶב: <sup>32</sup>וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־יַפֹּל־עָלָיו מֵהֶם |  
בְּמָתָם יִטְמָא מִכָּל־כְּלִי־עֵץ אוֹ בַּגָּד אוֹ־

#### THE CONDUCTIVITY OF IMPURITY (vv. 24–40)

This part of chapter 11 deals with the impurity that results from several kinds of contact—such as touching, carrying, or containing—that render persons, vessels, and foodstuffs impure in varying degrees.

**27.** The body of a person who touches the carcass of an impure creature is rendered impure. The clothing of a person who carries something impure is rendered impure or contaminated as well.

**29. The following** Eight types of swarming

land creatures are listed, including four types of lizards.

**32–38.** Under priestly law, vessels made of wood, leather, and certain types of cloth become impure by means of exterior contact with a contaminating substance, whereas ceramic vessels (with the exception of stoves and ovens) become impure only if that substance enters their interior space. (This later developed into an elaborate system of ritual purity in ancient rabbinic Judaism, affecting vessels and foodstuffs.)

**32. article** Any vessel of wood, cloth, skin, or sackcloth. Such vessels may be cleansed in water, and they remain impure only until evening.

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**11:23. swarming things that have four legs** The commandment not to eat insects includes taking care not to inadvertently ingest insects in our food. A careful washing of all fruits and vegetables, with special attention to leafy greens such as romaine lettuce and broccoli, is sufficient. *Hashgahah* (kosher supervision) of fruits and vegetables is not required.

cloth, or a skin, or a sack—any such article that can be put to use shall be dipped in water, and it shall remain impure until evening; then it shall be pure. <sup>33</sup>And if any of those falls into an earthen vessel, everything inside it shall be impure and [the vessel] itself you shall break. <sup>34</sup>As to any food that may be eaten, it shall become impure if it came in contact with water; as to any liquid that may be drunk, it shall become impure if it was inside any vessel. <sup>35</sup>Everything on which the carcass of any of them falls shall be impure: an oven or stove shall be smashed. They are impure and impure they shall remain for you. <sup>36</sup>However, a spring or cistern in which water is collected shall be pure, but whoever touches such a carcass in it shall be impure. <sup>37</sup>If such a carcass falls upon seed grain that is to be sown, it is pure; <sup>38</sup>but if water is put on the seed and any part of a carcass falls upon it, it shall be impure for you.

<sup>39</sup>If an animal that you may eat has died, anyone who touches its carcass shall be impure until evening; <sup>40</sup>anyone who eats of its carcass shall wash his clothes and remain impure until evening; and anyone who carries its carcass shall wash his clothes and remain impure until evening.

Food contained in such contaminated vessels is also impure.

**33.** A ceramic vessel does not become impure until the dead swarming creatures are inside it; should this happen, there is no remedy but to smash the vessel.

**34.** Solid food that has been dampened by water and then comes into contact with dead swarming creatures becomes impure because water conducts impurity. Similarly, liquids inside contaminated vessels become impure.

**35.** Ceramic ovens and stoves—like vessels of wood, cloth, leather, and animal hair, but unlike ceramic vessels in general—become contaminated as soon as dead swarming creatures fall onto them. There is no remedy; impure stoves and ovens must be smashed. (Metal vessels may be purified in fire [Num. 31:22–23]. Stone vessels are not susceptible to impurity.)

עור או שק כל-כלי אשר-יעשה מלאכה בהם במים יובא וטמא עד-הערב וטהר: <sup>33</sup> וכל-כלי-חרש אשר-יפל מהם אל-תוכו כל אשר בתוכו יטמא ואתו תשברו: <sup>34</sup> מכל-האכל אשר יאכל אשר יבוא עליו מים יטמא וכל-משקה אשר ישתה בכל-כלי יטמא: <sup>35</sup> וכל אשר-יפל מנבלתם עליו יטמא תנור וכירים יתץ טמאים הם וטמאים יהיו להם: <sup>36</sup> אף מעין ובור מקוה-מים יהיה טהור ונגע בנבלתם יטמא: <sup>37</sup> וכי יפל מנבלתם על-פל-זרע זרוע אשר יזרע טהור הוא: <sup>38</sup> וכי יתן-מים על-זרע ונפל מנבלתם עליו טמא הוא להם: <sup>39</sup> וכי ימות מן-הבהמה אשר-היא להם לאכלה הנגע בנבלתה יטמא עד-הערב: <sup>40</sup> והאכל מנבלתה יכבס בגדיו וטמא עד-הערב והנשא את-נבלתה יכבס בגדיו וטמא עד-הערב:

**36.** Water that comes from a vessel that is detached from the earth generally renders foodstuffs susceptible to impurity. By contrast, neither rainwater in a cistern nor natural bodies of water transmit impurity.

**38.** Water renders seed susceptible to impurity. Dampened seed—but not dry seed—becomes impure if the dead body of a forbidden swarming creature falls onto it.

**39.** Physical contact with the carcass of even a permitted animal, renders a person impure until evening.

**40.** This statement repeats the prohibition (v. 8) against eating meat of any animal, even a permitted one, that has died a natural death. Similarly, carrying the carcass or any part of it transmits impurity. In both cases the clothes of the person involved must be laundered.

<sup>41</sup>All the things that swarm upon the earth are an abomination; they shall not be eaten. <sup>42</sup>You shall not eat, among all things that swarm upon the earth, anything that crawls on its belly, or anything that walks on fours, or anything that has many legs; for they are an abomination. <sup>43</sup>You shall not draw abomination upon yourselves through anything that swarms; you shall not make yourselves impure therewith and thus become impure. <sup>44</sup>For I the LORD am your God: you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not make yourselves impure through any swarming thing that moves upon the earth. <sup>45</sup>For I the LORD am He who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God: you shall be holy, for I am holy.

<sup>46</sup>These are the instructions concerning animals, birds, all living creatures that move in water, and all creatures that swarm on earth, <sup>47</sup>for distinguishing between the impure and the pure, between the living things that may be eaten and the living things that may not be eaten.

<sup>41</sup>וְכָל-הַשָּׂרֵץ הַשָּׂרֵץ עַל-הָאָרֶץ שֶׁקֶץ הוּא לֹא יֵאָכֵל: <sup>42</sup>כָּל הַחֹלֵף עַל-גֻּחוֹן\* וְכָל הַחֹלֵף עַל-אַרְבַּע עַד כָּל-מִרְבָּה רַגְלִים לְכָל-הַשָּׂרֵץ הַשָּׂרֵץ עַל-הָאָרֶץ לֹא תֹאכְלוּם כִּי-שֶׁקֶץ הֵם: <sup>43</sup>אַל-תִּשְׁקְצוּ אֶת-נַפְשֵׁיכֶם בְּכָל-הַשָּׂרֵץ הַשָּׂרֵץ וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ בָהֶם וְנִטְמַתֶּם\* בָּם: <sup>44</sup>כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְהִתְקַדְשְׁתֶּם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ אֶת-נַפְשֵׁיכֶם בְּכָל-הַשָּׂרֵץ הָרָמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ: <sup>45</sup>כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה הַמַּעֲלֶה אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי: <sup>46</sup>זֹאת תּוֹרַת הַבְּהֵמָה וְהָעוֹף וְכָל נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת בַּמַּיִם וְלְכָל-נֶפֶשׁ הַשָּׂרֶצַת עַל-הָאָרֶץ: <sup>47</sup>לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַטָּמֵא וּבֵין הַטָּהוֹר וּבֵין הַחַיָּה הַנֹּאֲכָלֶת וּבֵין הַחַיָּה אֲשֶׁר לֹא תֹאכָל: פ

v. 42. ר' רבתי, ובמסורה היא "חצי התורה באותיות"

v. 43. חסר א'

**44. you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy** See Comment to 19:2.

POSTSCRIPT (vv. 46–47)

**46. These are the instructions** This post-

script typically appears at the conclusion of a major code of law.

**47. for distinguishing between the impure and the pure** A similar admonition occurs in 20:25.

**42. crawls on . . . belly** In the word translated as "belly" (*gaḥon*), the letter *vav* is written large, for it is said to be the middle letter of the entire Torah. The large *vav* symbolizes the unique upright posture of a human being. There is something repugnant about a person who crawls instead of standing up for what he or she believes, foregoing the unique upright posture of a human being which is symbolized by the enlarged letter *vav*.

The Book of Leviticus is concerned with

our use of words (vows, false oaths, hurtful speech), teaching us to sanctify what goes forth from our mouths. In its exposition of the rules of *kashrut*, it teaches us to sanctify what goes into our mouths as well. It would also remind us that there is a moral difference between eating an apple and eating a slice of meat; the latter requires taking the life of one of God's creatures. The Jew who lives by the dietary laws is constantly kept aware of that.

19

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: <sup>2</sup>This is the ritual law that the LORD has commanded:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן  
לֵאמֹר: זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה  
יְהוָה לֵאמֹר

*The Generation of the Exodus: The March to Transjordan (continued)*

#### PURIFICATION FROM CONTAMINATION BY A CORPSE (19:1–22)

Contamination that results from contact with a corpse is mentioned elsewhere in the Torah (see, e.g., Lev. 21:1–4; Num. 6:6–13). Here, the Torah prescribes the method of purification. In this rite, the blood of an all-brown (“red”) cow is not of-

fered on the altar; it is burned together with the cow’s body, so that the ashes may be used as an ongoing instrument of purification. As in all purification offerings, the man who burns the cow becomes impure himself.

In the course of this *parashah*, Miriam dies, Aaron dies, and Moses is sentenced to die without reaching the Promised Land. A transition of generations is taking place. The narrative’s center of gravity is moving farther from Sinai and closer to the challenge of conquering the Promised Land. Soon there will be no Israelites left who actually stood at Sinai, only Israelites who have heard about it from parents and grandparents.

#### CHAPTER 19

Before continuing with the narrative, the Torah offers us the strange ritual of the brown (“red”) cow. It is the classic example of a law that defies rational explanation. Indeed, the general tenor of the commentaries asks us to accept this law without understanding it, as a sign of love for and trust in God. The commentators hold that it would be almost unseemly to search for a rational explanation, implying that God’s word would be acceptable only if it fit our canons of reasoning. Human failure to understand a truth does not make it any less true. The Midrash pictures King Solomon, the wisest man in the Bible, saying, “I have labored to understand the word of God and have understood it all, except for the ritual of the brown cow” (Num. R. 19:3). “These laws are decrees from God and we have no right to question them” (Num. R. 19:8). “It is more praiseworthy to do something solely because God commands it than because our own logic or sense of morality leads us to the same conclusion” (*Sifra K’doshim*). The Tosafot compare this commandment to a lover’s kiss which cannot be explained but can only be experienced (BT Av. Zar. 35a).

Yet there have been persistent efforts to uncover the lessons taught to us by this ritual. Although the Torah describes the ritual as purifying a person of contamination from contact with a dead body and nothing else, the Midrash widens the scope to include moral contamination, especially idolatry, viewing this special cow as the antidote for the sin of the Golden Calf. “Let the mother come and repair the damage the offspring has caused” (Num. R. 19:8). Ramban, noting that the passage comes immediately after the completion of the tabernacle and the challenge to Aaron’s priesthood, understands it as a way of preventing ritually unfit people from violating the sanctity of the tabernacle. Israel of Ruzhin points out that this cow purifies the impure but renders the pure impure; God similarly purifies those who approach the sanctuary in a spirit of humility with knowledge of their own inadequacies, but condemns those who come in a spirit of arrogance and a claim to perfection. A modern commentator suggests that the ritual’s purpose is psychological. To heal a person burdened by a sense of wrongdoing, who feels the purity of his or her soul has been compromised, we take an animal completely without blemish and sacrifice it, as if to imply that perfection does not belong in this world. Perfect creatures belong in heaven; this world is given to the inevitably flawed and compromised.

Because this rite is inoperative today, so that there is no way to purify the ritually contaminated, some halakhic authorities consider all Jews ritually unfit to enter the Temple Mount lest they inadvertently tread on the site where the holiest precincts of the temple once stood in Jerusalem.



Instruct the Israelite people to bring you a red cow without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid. <sup>3</sup>You shall give it to Eleazar the priest. It shall be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. <sup>4</sup>Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the front of the Tent of Meeting. <sup>5</sup>The cow shall be burned in his sight—its hide, flesh, and blood shall be burned, its dung included—<sup>6</sup>and the priest shall take cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson stuff, and throw them into the fire consuming the cow. <sup>7</sup>The priest shall wash his garments and bathe his body in water; after that the priest may reenter the camp, but he shall be impure until evening. <sup>8</sup>He who performed the burning shall also wash his garments in water, bathe his body in water, and be impure until evening. <sup>9</sup>A man who is pure shall gather up the ashes of the cow and deposit them outside the camp in a pure place, to be kept for water of lustration for the Israelite community. It is for purification. <sup>10</sup>He who gathers up the ashes of

דִּבֶּר | אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלָיו פָּרָה  
אֲדָמָה תְּמִימָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין-בָּהּ מוֹם אֲשֶׁר  
לֹא-עֵלָה עָלֶיהָ עַל: <sup>3</sup> וַנִּתֶּנָּה אֵתָּה אֶל-  
אֱלֶעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן וְהוֹצִיא אֹתָהּ אֶל-מִחוּץ  
לַמַּחֲנֶה וַשְׁחַט אֹתָהּ לִפְנָיו: <sup>4</sup> וְלָקַח  
אֱלֶעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּמָהּ בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ וְהִזָּה אֶל-  
נֹכַח פְּנֵי אֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד מִדָּמָהּ שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים:  
<sup>5</sup> וְשָׂרַף אֶת-הַפָּרָה לְעֵינָיו אֶת-עֹרָהּ וְאֶת-  
בָּשָׂרָהּ וְאֶת-דָּמָהּ עַל-פְּרִשָּׁה יִשְׂרָף:  
<sup>6</sup> וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן עֵץ אֲרֵז וְאֵזוֹב וּשְׁנֵי תוֹלַעֶת  
וְהִשְׁלִיךְ אֶל-תּוֹךְ שַׂרְפַּת הַפָּרָה: <sup>7</sup> וְכִבֵּס  
בְּגָדָיו הַכֹּהֵן וְרֵחַץ בָּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְאַחֵר  
יָבוֹא אֶל-הַמַּחֲנֶה וְטָמֵא הַכֹּהֵן עַד-  
הָעֶרֶב: <sup>8</sup> וְהִשְׂרָף אֹתָהּ יַכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו בַּמַּיִם  
וְרֵחַץ בָּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמֵא עַד-הָעֶרֶב:  
<sup>9</sup> וְאִשָּׁף | אִישׁ טָהוֹר אֶת אֶפֶר הַפָּרָה  
וְהִנִּיחַ מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה בְּמָקוֹם טָהוֹר  
וְהִיתָה לְעֹדֶת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁמַרְתָּ לַמַּיִ  
נֹדֶה חֲטָאת הוּא: <sup>10</sup> וְכִבֵּס הָאִשָּׁף אֶת-

#### THE BROWN ("RED") COW (vv. 1–13)

**2. red** Hebrew: *adom*, which here probably means "brown"—for which there is no word in the Bible. The idea is to increase, symbolically, the amount of blood in the ashes.

**red . . . without blemish** Better: "unblemished brown." A cow completely uniform in color, without specks of white or black or without even two black or white hairs, is extremely rare.

**no yoke has been laid** It must not have been used for profane purposes.

**3. in his presence** The cow will also be burned in the presence of Eleazar, indicating that it is imperative for the officiating priest to supervise the entire ritual.

**4. sprinkle it seven times** This act consecrates the cow as a purification offering.

**6. priest** Any priest, not just Eleazar.

**hyssop, and crimson stuff** Hyssop, an aromatic plant, is widespread in the land of Israel. Crimson yarn refers to the dye extracted from a "crimson worm," used in the weaving of the sa-

cred garments of the high priest and the inner curtains of the tabernacle.

**7. wash his garments and bathe his body** If he bathed first, his unwashed garments would recontaminate him.

**until evening** Whoever handles a burnt *hattat* offering may enter the camp as soon as he has laundered his clothing and bathed (see Lev. 16:26,28), provided he does not partake of sacred food until the evening.

**8. He who performed the burning** It is also presumed that he who gathers up the ashes remains outside the camp until after he has laundered and bathed, precisely as the contaminated priest has done.

**9. A man** Not necessarily a priest.

**to be kept** The ashes of the brown ("red") cow must be guarded scrupulously lest they become contaminated.

**It is for purification** These ashes mixed with water will be sprinkled on corpse-contaminated individuals to remove the impurity.

**10. wash his clothes** It is understood that he will also bathe his body.

the cow shall also wash his clothes and be impure until evening.

This shall be a permanent law for the Israelites and for the strangers who reside among you.

<sup>11</sup>He who touches the corpse of any human being shall be impure for seven days. <sup>12</sup>He shall purify himself with [the ashes] on the third day and on the seventh day, and then be pure; if he fails to purify himself on the third and seventh days, he shall not be pure. <sup>13</sup>Whoever touches a corpse, the body of a person who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the LORD's Tabernacle; that person shall be cut off from Israel. Since the water of lustration was not dashed on him, he remains impure; his impurity is still upon him.

<sup>14</sup>This is the ritual: When a person dies in a tent, whoever enters the tent and whoever is in the tent shall be impure seven days; <sup>15</sup>and every open vessel, with no lid fastened down, shall be impure. <sup>16</sup>And in the open, anyone who touches a person who was killed or who died naturally, or human bone, or a grave, shall be impure seven days. <sup>17</sup>Some of the ashes from the fire of purification shall be taken for the im-

אֶפְרַיִם הַפָּרָה אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וְטָמֵא עַד־הָעֶרֶב  
וְהִיטָהּ לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִגְרַם הָגֵר בְּתוֹכָם  
לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם:

<sup>11</sup>הַנֶּגַע בְּמַת לְכָל־נֶפֶשׁ אָדָם וְטָמֵא  
שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: <sup>12</sup>הוּא יִתְחַטֵּא־בּוֹ בְּיוֹם  
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי יִטְהַר וְאִם־לֹא  
יִתְחַטֵּא בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי  
לֹא יִטְהַר: <sup>13</sup>כָּל־הַנֶּגַע בְּמַת בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם  
אֲשֶׁר־יָמוּת וְלֹא יִתְחַטֵּא אֶת־מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה  
טָמֵא וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל כִּי  
מִי נָדָה לֹא־זָרַק עָלָיו טָמֵא יִהְיֶה עוֹד  
טָמֵאֲתוֹ בּוֹ:

<sup>14</sup>זֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אָדָם כִּי־יָמוּת בְּאֹהֶל  
כָּל־הַבָּא אֶל־הָאֹהֶל וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בְּאֹהֶל  
יְטָמֵא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: <sup>15</sup>וְכָל־כֵּל פְּתוּיָה  
אֲשֶׁר אֵין־צִמִּיד פְּתִיל עָלָיו טָמֵא הוּא:  
<sup>16</sup>וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יָגַע עַל־פְּנֵי הַשֹּׂדֶה בַּחֲלָל־  
חֶרֶב אוֹ בְּמַת אוֹ־בְעֵצָם אָדָם אוֹ בַקֶּבֶר  
יְטָמֵא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים: <sup>17</sup>וְלָקְחוּ לְטָמֵא

**strangers** All those who dwell in the Holy Land, Israelites and non-Israelites alike, must purify themselves of corpse contamination lest they defile the sanctuary by bearing their impurity within the community.

**11. seven days** Similarly, in ancient Babylonia, one who came into contact with dust from a place of mourning was required to offer sacrifices to the god Shamash, to bathe, change clothing, and remain inside the house for seven days.

**13. defiles the LORD's Tabernacle** Severe impurity is dynamic and can attack the sanctuary through the air. Corpse-contaminated individuals who prolong their impurity have defiled the sanctuary from afar, even without entering it.

**shall be cut off** If the neglect was deliberate

(see 15:30–31). (If the neglect was accidental, a purification offering is brought.)

#### PURIFICATION BY SPRINKLING (vv. 14–22)

**14. enters the tent** The impurity emitted by the body is trapped by the roof, so to speak, and cannot rise. Hence, every person and object under the roof is contaminated.

**15. every open vessel** A tightly closed vessel made entirely of earthenware, however, will not admit the “vapors” of impurity given off by the corpse; its contents remain pure.

**fastened down** The lid is attached by cords passing through holes in it and through the handles of the vessel. Such a lid would keep the vessel tightly closed and preserve it from defilement.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**19:14. When a person dies** Once the Temple was destroyed, we could not purify ourselves from this type of ritual impurity. Now all but *kohanim* may attend funerals (see Lev. 21:2). We rinse our hands upon leaving the cemetery or upon entering a house of mourning after the funeral, in symbolic recollection of this law.

pure person, and fresh water shall be added to them in a vessel. <sup>18</sup>A person who is pure shall take hyssop, dip it in the water, and sprinkle on the tent and on all the vessels and people who were there, or on him who touched the bones or the person who was killed or died naturally or the grave. <sup>19</sup>The pure person shall sprinkle it upon the impure person on the third day and on the seventh day, thus purifying him by the seventh day. He shall then wash his clothes and bathe in water, and at nightfall he shall be pure. <sup>20</sup>If anyone who has become impure fails to purify himself, that person shall be cut off from the congregation, for he has defiled the LORD's sanctuary. The water of lustration was not dashed on him: he is impure.

<sup>21</sup>That shall be for them a law for all time. Further, he who sprinkled the water of lustration shall wash his clothes; and whoever touches the water of lustration shall be impure until evening. <sup>22</sup>Whatever that impure person touches shall be impure; and the person who touches him shall be impure until evening.

## 20

The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon, and

מֵעֵפֶר שֶׁרֶפֶת הַחֹטָאֹת וְנָתַן עָלָיו מִיִּם שְׁנֵי חַיִּים אֶל־כֹּלִי: <sup>18</sup> וְלָקַח אֶזּוֹב וְטָבַל בְּמִים אִישׁ טָהוֹר וְהִזָּה עַל־הָאֹהֶל וְעַל־כָּל־הַכֵּלִים וְעַל־הַנִּפְשׁוֹת אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ־שָׁם וְעַל־הַנֶּגַע בְּעֶצֶם אֹו בְּחֹלֶל אֹו בַּמָּת אֹו בַּקֶּבֶר: <sup>19</sup> וְהִזָּה הַטָּהוֹר עַל־הַטָּמֵא בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וּבְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְחָטְאוּ בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרָחַץ בְּמִים וְטָהַר בָּעֶרֶב: <sup>20</sup> וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־יִטְמָא וְלֹא יִתְחַטֵּא וְנִכְרְתָה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִתּוֹךְ הַקֹּהֶל כִּי־אֶת־מִקְדָּשׁ יְהוָה טָמָא מִי נִדָּה לֹא־זָרַק עָלָיו טָמָא הוּא:

<sup>21</sup> וְהִיתָה לָהֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם וּמִזָּה מִי־הַנֶּדָּה יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְהַנֶּגַע בְּמִי הַנֶּדָּה יִטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: <sup>22</sup> וְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יִגַּעֲבוּ הַטָּמֵא יִטְמָא וְהַנֶּפֶשׁ הַנִּגְעָת תִּטְמָא עַד־הָעֶרֶב: פ

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל־הָעֵדָה מִדְּבַר־

**shall be impure** Open earthenware vessels are impure forever and must be broken.

**18. A person who is pure** This obvious condition is made explicit to bar those who had already handled the ashes and were thereby contaminated.

**on all the vessels** Afterward these must undergo washing, as people must.

**19.** Full purification comes only after laundering and bathing.

**21.** See Comment to 19:10.

**22. Whatever** That is, anything or anyone.

### FROM KADESH TO THE STEPPES OF MOAB (20:1–22:1)

THE SIN OF MOSES AND AARON (20:1–13)

After Miriam's death, the people complain about the lack of water. Moses and Aaron are com-

manded to bring forth water from the rock. They produce the water but in so doing commit a sin akin to heresy and are condemned by God to die in the wilderness.

#### CHAPTER 20

**1.** The Talmud connects Miriam's death to the preceding passage. "Just as the ashes of the

brown cow atone for sin, the death of a righteous person does the same" (BT MK 28a). In the wake of a good person's death, we are moved to re-examine our own lives.

# הפטרות פרשת פרה

## HAFTARAH FOR PARASHAT PARAH

EZEKIEL 36:16–38 (*Ashk'nazim*)

EZEKIEL 36:16–36 (*S'fardim*)

This *haftarah* is one of the prophecies of hope and consolation that Ezekiel addressed to the Judean exiles in Babylon. These oracles, whose larger theme is the reversal of failures in Israelite history, begin in Ezek. 33 (dated *Tevet* 585 B.C.E., according to 33:21). Chapters 35 and 36:1–15 in particular provide consolation to the nation after the taunts of their enemies (see Ezek. 35:10–12, 36:2–3, 5, 13). The nations mocked Israel, saying: “These are the people of the LORD, yet they had to leave His land.” Because of this, God’s holy name was profaned among the nations (36:20–21). God determines to act for His own honor, promising the nation redemption from exile and restoration to its ancestral homeland (vv. 22–28). God is determined to sanctify His great name through a unilateral act of redemption, described in verses 22–32. As Eliezer of Beaugency noted, this entire unit is framed by a sharply worded statement of divine motivation: “Not for your sake will I act, O House of Israel” (v. 22).

Ezekiel gives particular emphasis to issues of purification and spiritual renewal along with the theme of national redemption. Ritually purified by divine action, the people will dwell in their homeland and observe the Covenant (36:25–28). This topic heralds concern for the approaching festival of *Pesah*, because certain impurities could bar a worshiper from its celebration (see Num. 9:1–14). Echoing this matter, a special passage is added to the regular Torah portion for this *Shabbat*. In that selection, taken from Num. 19:1–22, in which the ashes of the so-called red heifer (*parah adumah*) are used in a priestly ceremony of ritual bathing and purification from defilement. Through these readings, the ongoing community of Israel is reminded that one must begin the holiday in a proper physical and spiritual state.

By custom, *S'fardim* conclude the *haftarah* at verse 36, thus ending on a positive note after the divine call to Israel to “Be ashamed and humiliated because of your ways” (v. 32). The practice for *Ashk'nazim* concludes the *haftarah* with the next oracle (vv. 37–38), comparing the vast throngs of people in the homeland to the multitude of sheep in Jerusalem on a festival day. This image was interpreted in antiquity as a reference to the flock of Israel “coming to Jerusalem at the time of the feast of Passover” (Targ. Jon.).

Part of the national transformation, unilaterally performed by God for His own sake, is a revivification of heart and spirit. God will give the people a new heart to know Him and will put His spirit within them as a concrete act of inspiration. Israel will thus be re-created, a new Adam to be restored to a land that “has become like the garden of Eden” (v. 35).

This re-creation is the core of national purification and the climax of the divine acts of sanctification. The destiny of God and Israel are thus mysteriously linked. The defilement of Israel leads to the profanation of God’s name, and the purification of Israel results in the sanctification of God’s name on earth. Their relationship is marked positively at the end of this prophetic passage by the forecast of a renewal of the Covenant. Reborn in heart and spirit, Israel will again serve God and His law: “Then you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers, and you shall be My people and I will be your God” (v. 28). The return to the homeland is thus also a symbolic return to Mount Sinai and its spiritual demands.

### RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

*Parashat Parah* (Num. 19:1–22) is the third of

four special Torah passages added to the regular *Shabbat* portion in the weeks before *Pesah*. The theme of each reading is different, yet rabbinic tradition correlated each of the four readings with prophetic selections that reinforce the main theme of purification. (For details on the scheduling of the special Torah portions, see the introduction to the *haftarah* for *parashat Sh'kalim*.)

Clear links exist between this special Torah reading and the *haftarah*. Thematically speaking, the Torah passage presents an ancient rite of detoxification whereby individuals who have become impure through contact with the dead are purified and restored to the community; the cor-

responding prophetic passage announces Israel's revivification (a new heart and a new spirit) as well as its purification by God. Meanwhile, both the technical language of purity-impurity and the terms for sacred ritual bathing (among others) connect these two texts verbally.

*Parashat Parah* was recited at this season from early Rabbinic times (M Meg. 3:4) and was understood to signal to the entire community that the *pesah* sacrifice should be performed in ritual purity (see Rashi on BT Meg. 29a). The *haftarah* invigorates the present preparations for *Pesah* by envisioning a new era of purification and of transformed religious consciousness.

36

<sup>16</sup>The word of the LORD came to me:  
<sup>17</sup>O mortal, when the House of Israel dwelt on their own soil, they defiled it with their ways and their deeds; their ways were in My sight like the impurity of a menstruous woman. <sup>18</sup>So I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they shed upon their land, and for the fetishes with which they defiled it. <sup>19</sup>I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries: I punished them in accordance with their ways and their deeds. <sup>20</sup>But when they came to those nations, they caused My holy name to be profaned, in that it was said of them, "These are the people of the

לו

<sup>16</sup> וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר:  
<sup>17</sup> בֶּן־אָדָם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יֹשְׁבִים עַל־  
אֲדָמָתָם וַיִּטְמְאוּ אוֹתָהּ בְּדַרְכָּם  
וּבַעֲלִילוֹתָם כְּטִמְאַת הַנִּזְהָה הִיְתָה דַּרְכָּם  
לִפְנֵי: <sup>18</sup> וַאֲשַׁפֵּן חֲמָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם עַל־הַדָּם  
אֲשֶׁר־שָׁפְכוּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וּבִגְלוּלֵיהֶם  
טִמְאוּהָ: <sup>19</sup> וַאֲפִיץ אֹתָם בְּגוֹיִם וַיִּזְרוּ  
בְּאֶרְצוֹת בְּדַרְכָּם וּכְעֲלִילוֹתָם שִׁפְטֵתִים:  
<sup>20</sup> וַיִּבְאוּ\* אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ שָׁם  
וַיַּחֲלִלוּ אֶת־שֵׁם קֹדְשִׁי בְּאֵמֹר לָהֶם עַם־

v. 20. סבירין ומטעין לשון רבים

**Ezekiel 36:17–19.** The prophet's priestly orientation shows through his presentation of moral sins as the cause of the Land's ritual impurity. Similarly, the purification of the nation in verse 25 is portrayed in cultic terms. (Likewise, the vocabulary of defilement, purification, sprinkling, and pure water is employed in connection with the rite of the heifer—the special Torah portion read on this *Shabbat*; see Num. 19:11–13, 17.) The punishment of exile is presented here as recompense for ritual and moral crimes.

**O mortal** Hebrew: *ben adam*; literally, "O son of man." A common characterization in the vocabulary of this prophet. Ezekiel's mortal nature is emphasized, perhaps counterpointing his

humanity to the divinity of the beings he communes with; chapters 1, 8–11, 40–42).

**like the impurity of a menstruous woman** Refers to her ritual impurity (see Lev. 15:19ff.). Hebrew: *ha-niddah*; literally, "the menstruous woman." The definite article personifies the simile, rather than indicating a general state of impurity. The link between ritual impurity in this verse and bloodshed in verse 18 suggests that the figure here alludes to moral and ritual crimes elsewhere denounced by the prophet (18:6, 22:3–13). For Ezekiel, the theme has real cultic consequences. As a result of its "menstrual impurity," the nation is banished from the Land.

**20. they caused My holy name to be profaned** By referring to God in a demeaning way. The na-

LORD, yet they had to leave His land.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore I am concerned for My holy name, which the House of Israel have caused to be profaned among the nations to which they have come.

<sup>22</sup>Say to the House of Israel: Thus said the Lord God: Not for your sake will I act, O House of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have caused to be profaned among the nations to which you have come. <sup>23</sup>I will sanctify My great name which has been profaned among the nations—among whom you have caused it to be profaned. And the nations shall know that I am the LORD—declares the Lord God—when I manifest My holiness before their eyes through you. <sup>24</sup>I will take you from among the nations and gather you from all the countries, and I will bring you back to your own land. <sup>25</sup>I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure: I will purify you from all your impurities and from all your fetishes. <sup>26</sup>And I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit into you: I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh; <sup>27</sup>and I will put My spirit into you. Thus I will cause you to follow My laws and faithfully to observe My rules. <sup>28</sup>Then you shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers, and you shall be My people and I will be your God.

<sup>29</sup>And when I have delivered you from all your impurity, I will summon the grain and make it abundant, and I will not bring famine upon you. <sup>30</sup>I will make the fruit of your trees and the crops of your fields abundant, so that you shall never again be humiliated before the nations because

יהוה אלה ומאֲרָצוֹ יֵצְאוּ: <sup>21</sup>וְאֶחָמֶל עַל־שֵׁם קְדֹשִׁי אֲשֶׁר חִלְלוּהוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּאוּ שָׁמָּה: ס

<sup>22</sup>לֵאמֹר לְבֵית־יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה לֹא לְמַעַנְכֶם אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה בֵּית יִשְ�רָאֵל כִּי אִם־לְשֵׁם־קְדֹשִׁי אֲשֶׁר חִלְלֹתֶם בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בָּאתֶם שָׁם: <sup>23</sup>וְקִדְשְׁתִּי אֶת־שְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל הַמְּחֻלָּל בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר חִלְלֹתֶם בְּתוֹכָם וַיִּדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוִה נֹאֵם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בְּהַקְדִּשִׁי בָכֶם לְעֵינֵיהֶם: <sup>24</sup>וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם מִן־הַגּוֹיִם וּקְבַצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל־הָאֲרָצוֹת וַהֲבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־אֲדֹמְתְכֶם: <sup>25</sup>וְזִרְקֹתִי עֲלֵיכֶם מִים טְהוֹרִים וּטְהַרְתֶּם מִכָּל טִמְאוֹתֵיכֶם וּמִכָּל־גִּלּוּלֵיכֶם אֲטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם: <sup>26</sup>וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֶּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת־לֵב הָאֶבֶן מִבְּשָׁרְכֶם וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב בָּשָׂר: <sup>27</sup>וְאֶת־רוּחִי אֶתֶּן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם וְעָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר־בָּחֳקִי תֵּלְכוּ וּמִשְׁפָּטִי תִשְׁמְרוּ וְעָשִׂיתֶם: <sup>28</sup>וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם וְהָיִיתֶם לִי לְעָם וְאֲנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים:

<sup>29</sup>וְהוֹשַׁעְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל טִמְאוֹתֵיכֶם וּקְרָאתִי אֶל־הַדָּגָן וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא־אֶתֶּן עֲלֵיכֶם רָעָב: <sup>30</sup>וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶת־פְּרִי הָעֵץ וְתִנְיֹבַת הַשָּׂדֶה לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא תִקְחוּ עוֹד חֶרֶפַת רָעָב בְּגוֹיִם: <sup>31</sup>וְזִכְרֹתֶם

tions interpreted Israel's exile as a sign of divine impotence, not as punishment (Rashi, Radak).

**22. Not for your sake** Or: “Not on account of your merits” (Abravanel). The motivation for divine action is regard for God's own name alone.

**26. I will give you a new heart** Along with Ezek. 11:19, other prophecies contemplate a radical transformation of Israel's religious spirit, after the exile, through sovereign and unilateral divine fiat (see Jer. 24:7, 31:32–33). In its focus on a

unilateral divine action, this image seems to reflect some of the despair in the exilic period over the independent incapacity of the human spirit to return faithfully to God, or at least a strong feeling that without divine initiative true repentance could not take place.

**28. you shall be My people and I will be your God** A technical covenant formula (see Jer. 11:4). Also in 16:60 and 37:26, Ezekiel anticipates a new covenant after the exile.

of famine. <sup>31</sup>Then you shall recall your evil ways and your base conduct, and you shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abhorrent practices. <sup>32</sup>Not for your sake will I act—declares the Lord God—take good note! Be ashamed and humiliated because of your ways, O House of Israel!

<sup>33</sup>Thus said the Lord God: When I have purified you of all your iniquities, I will people your settlements, and the ruined places shall be rebuilt; <sup>34</sup>and the desolate land, after lying waste in the sight of every passerby, shall again be tilled. <sup>35</sup>And men shall say, “That land, once desolate, has become like the garden of Eden; and the cities, once ruined, desolate, and ravaged, are now populated and fortified.” <sup>36</sup>And the nations that are left around you shall know that I the LORD have rebuilt the ravaged places and replanted the desolate land. I the LORD have spoken and will act.

<sup>37</sup>Thus said the Lord God: Moreover, in this I will respond to the House of Israel and act for their sake: I will multiply their people like sheep. <sup>38</sup>As Jerusalem is filled with sacrificial sheep during her festivals, so shall the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. And they shall know that I am the LORD.

אֶת־דִּרְכֵיכֶם הָרָעִים וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר  
לֹא־טוֹבִים וְנִקְטַתֶּם בְּפִנְיֹכֶם עַל עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם  
וְעַל תּוֹעֲבוֹתֵיכֶם: <sup>32</sup>לֹא לְמַעַנְכֶם אֲנִי־  
עֹשֶׂה נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה יוֹדַע לָכֶם בּוֹשׁוּ  
וְהִכָּלְמוּ מִדִּרְכֵיכֶם בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל: ס  
<sup>33</sup>כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בְּיוֹם טַהֲרִי אֶתְכֶם  
מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם וְהוֹשַׁבְתִּי אֶת־הָעִירִים  
וְנִבְנוּ הַחֲרֻבוֹת: <sup>34</sup>וְהָאֶרֶץ הַנִּשְׁמָה תַעֲבֹד  
תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר הִיְתָה שְׂמֵמָה לְעֵינַי כָּל־  
עוֹבֵר: <sup>35</sup>וְאָמְרוּ הָאֶרֶץ הַלְזוּ הַנִּשְׁמָה  
הִיְתָה כְּגֹן־עֵדֶן וְהָעִירִים הַחֲרֻבוֹת  
וְהַנִּשְׁמֹת וְהַנִּהְרָסוֹת בְּצוּרוֹת יִשְׁבּוּ:  
<sup>36</sup>וְיִדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁאָרוּ סְבִיבוֹתֵיכֶם  
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוִה בְּנִיתִי הַנִּהְרָסוֹת נִטְעַתִּי  
הַנִּשְׁמָה אֲנִי יְהוִה דִּבַּרְתִּי וְעָשִׂיתִי: ס  
<sup>37</sup>כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה עוֹד זֹאת אֲדַרְשׁ  
לְבֵית־יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם אֲרָבָה אֲתֶם  
כְּצֹאן אָדָם: <sup>38</sup>כְּצֹאן קִדְשִׁים כְּצֹאן  
יְרוּשָׁלַם בְּמוֹעֲדֶיהָ כֵּן תִּהְיֶינָה הָעִירִים  
הַחֲרֻבוֹת מְלֵאוֹת צֹאן אָדָם וְיִדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי  
יְהוִה: ס