

עץ חיים

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TORAH AND COMMENTARY

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CHAPTER 12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. blood purification Discharges of blood that

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

until her period of purification is completed

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

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

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

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

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

HALAKHAH L'MA·ASEH

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

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

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

6 וּבְמִלֵּאתָ | יְמֵי טְהוֹרָה לְבֵן א֥וֹ לְבַת
תָּבִיא כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן־שָׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה וּבֶן־יוֹנָה
אוֹתֶר לְחֹטָאת אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד
אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: 7 וְהִקְרִיבֹ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְכִפֵּר
עָלֶיהָ וְטָהַרָה מִמִּקְרַדְמִיָּה זֹאת תּוֹרַת
הַיְלָדוֹת לְזָכָר א֥וֹ לְנִקְבָּה: 8 וְאִם־לֹא
תִמְצָא יָדָהּ דֵּי שֶׁהָ וְלִקְחָה שְׁתֵּי־תוֹרִים
א֥וֹ שְׁנֵי בְנֵי יוֹנָה אֶחָד לְעֹלָה וְאֶחָד
לְחֹטָאת וְכִפֵּר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָהַרָה: 9

13 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

יג וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן
לֵאמֹר:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

lent in ancient Israel and was presumed to be contagious.

THE SYMPTOMS (13:1–8)

The priest’s initial problem was to determine

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

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

CHAPTER 13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹When a person has a scaly affection, it shall

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

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

אֶחָד מִבָּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים: ³ וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־
הַנִּגַּע בְּעוֹר־הַבָּשָׂר וְשֹׁעַר בְּנִגַּע הַפֶּה |
לָבָן וּמִרְאָה הַנִּגַּע עֲמֹק מֵעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ נִגַּע
צָרַעַת הוּא וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָמָא אֹתוֹ:
⁴ וְאִם־בִּהְרֹת לְבָנָה הוּא בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ
וְעֲמֹק אֵין־מִרְאָהּ מִן־הָעוֹר וְשֹׁעַרָה לֹא־
הַפֶּה לָבָן וְהִסְגִּיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַנִּגַּע שְׁבַעֵת
יָמִים: ⁵ וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְהִנֵּה
הַנִּגַּע עֲמֵד בְּעֵינָיו לֹא־פָשָׂה הַנִּגַּע בְּעוֹר
וְהִסְגִּירוֹ הַכֹּהֵן שְׁבַעֵת יָמִים שְׁנִית:
⁶ וְרָאָהּ הַכֹּהֵן אֹתוֹ בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שְׁנִית ^{שני}
וְהִנֵּה כִּהָה הַנִּגַּע וְלֹא־פָשָׂה הַנִּגַּע בְּעוֹר
וְטָהְרוֹ הַכֹּהֵן מִסַּפְּחַת הַיָּא וּכְבֹּס בְּגָדָיו
וְטָהַר: ⁷ וְאִם־פָּשָׂה תַפְּשָׂה הַמִּסְפַּחַת
בְּעוֹר אַחֲרֵי הָרְאָתוֹ אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן לְטַהֲרָתוֹ
וְנִרְאָה שְׁנִית אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן: ⁸ וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן
וְהִנֵּה פָשְׂתָה הַמִּסְפַּחַת בְּעוֹר וְטָמָא
הַכֹּהֵן צָרַעַת הוּא: פ
⁹ נִגַּע צָרַעַת כִּי תִהְיֶה בְּאָדָם וְהוּבָא

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

CHRONIC AILMENTS (vv. 9–17)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

שלישי

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TZARA-AT AS COMPLICATION (vv. 18–46)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29 ואיש או אשה פיייהיה בו נגע בראש חמישי
 או בזקן : 30 וראה הכהן את-הנגע והנה

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

24. the patch from the burn is a discoloration

The exposed skin is a pink or white shiny spot.

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

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

³⁸If a man or a woman has the skin of the body

מֵרֵאשׁוֹתָיו עֵמֶק מִן־הָעוֹר וּבוֹ שֵׁעַר צָהָב דָּק וְטָמֵא אֹתוֹ הִכְהֵן נִתְקַן הוּא צָרַעַת הָרֵאשׁוֹת אוֹ הַזָּקֵן הוּא: ³¹ וְכִי־יִרְאֶה הִכְהֵן אֶת־נֶגַע הַנֶּתֶק וְהִנֵּה אֵין־מֵרֵאשׁוֹתָיו עֵמֶק מִן־הָעוֹר וְשֵׁעַר שָׁחַר אֵין בּוֹ וְהִסְגִּיר הִכְהֵן אֶת־נֶגַע הַנֶּתֶק שְׁבַע־יָמִים: ³² וְרָאֶה הִכְהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּגַע בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְהִנֵּה לֹא־פָשָׁה הַנֶּתֶק וְלֹא־הָיָה בּוֹ שֵׁעַר צָהָב וּמֵרֵאשׁוֹתָיו הַנֶּתֶק אֵין עֵמֶק מִן־הָעוֹר: ³³ וְהִתְגַּלַּח * וְאֶת־הַנֶּתֶק לֹא יִגְלַח וְהִסְגִּיר הִכְהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּתֶק שְׁבַע־יָמִים שְׁנִית: ³⁴ וְרָאֶה הִכְהֵן אֶת־הַנֶּתֶק בְּיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וְהִנֵּה לֹא־פָשָׁה הַנֶּתֶק בְּעוֹר וּמֵרֵאשׁוֹתָיו אֵינְנוֹ עֵמֶק מִן־הָעוֹר וְטָהַר אֹתוֹ הִכְהֵן וּכְבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְטָהַר: ³⁵ וְאִם־פָּשָׁה יִפְשָׁה הַנֶּתֶק בְּעוֹר אַחֲרֵי טְהָרָתוֹ: ³⁶ וְרָאֶה הִכְהֵן וְהִנֵּה פָשָׁה הַנֶּתֶק בְּעוֹר לֹא־יִבְקַר הִכְהֵן לְשֵׁעַר הַצָּהָב טָמֵא הוּא: ³⁷ וְאִם־בְּעֵינָיו עָמַד הַנֶּתֶק וְשֵׁעַר שָׁחַר צָמַח־בּוֹ נִרְפָּא הַנֶּתֶק טָהוֹר הוּא וְטָהַר הִכְהֵן: **ס**

³⁸ וְאִישׁ אוֹ־אִשָּׁה פִּי־יְהִיָּה בְּעוֹר־בְּשָׂרָם

v. 33. ג' רבתי לפי נוסחים מקובלים

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

45. the person with a leprous affection

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

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

⁴⁰ וְאִישׁ כִּי יִמְרֹט רֹאשׁוֹ קָרַח הוּא טְהוֹר
הוּא: ⁴¹ וְאִם מִפְּאֵת פָּנָיו יִמְרֹט רֹאשׁוֹ
גִּבַּח הוּא טְהוֹר הוּא: ⁴² וְכִי־יִהְיֶה
בְּקָרְחָת אֹו בְּגִבַּחַת נִגַּע לְבָן אֲדָמָדִם
צָרַעַת פְּרִחַת הוּא בְּקָרְחָתוֹ אֹו בְּגִבַּחָתוֹ:
⁴³ וְרָאָה אֹתוֹ הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה שְׂאֵת־הַנֶּגַע
לְבַנָּה אֲדָמָדִמַת בְּקָרְחָתוֹ אֹו בְּגִבַּחָתוֹ
כְּמֵרְאָה צָרַעַת עוֹר בְּשָׂרָ: ⁴⁴ אִישׁ־צָרוּעַ
הוּא טָמֵא הוּא טָמֵא יִטְמָאנוּ הַכֹּהֵן
בְּרֹאשׁוֹ נִגְעוֹ:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

47וְהִבָּגַד פִּי־יְהִיָּה בּוֹ נִגַע צָרַעַת בְּבִגְד
צֹמֶר א֥וּ בְּבִגְד פִּשְׁתִּים׃ 48 א֥וּ בְּשֵׁתִי א֥וּ
בְעֵרֵב לִפְשָׁתִים וְלִצְמֹר א֥וּ בְעוֹר א֥וּ
בְכָל־מְלֹאכֶת עוֹר׃ 49 וְהָיָה הַנִּגַּע יִרְקַק
א֥וּ אֲדָמָדִם בְּבִגְד א֥וּ בְעוֹר א֥וּ־בְשֵׁתִי
א֥וּ־בְעֵרֵב א֥וּ בְכָל־כְּלִי־עוֹר נִגַּע צָרַעַת
הוא וְהִרְאָה אֶת־הַפֶּהֶן׃ 50 וְרָאָה הַפֶּהֶן
אֶת־הַנִּגַּע וְהִסְגִּיר אֶת־הַנִּגַּע שִׁבְעַת
יָמִים׃ 51 וְרָאָה אֶת־הַנִּגַּע בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׂבִיעִי
פִּי־פֶשֶׁה הַנִּגַּע בְּבִגְד א֥וּ־בְשֵׁתִי א֥וּ־
בְעֵרֵב א֥וּ בְעוֹר לְכָל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה הָעוֹר
לְמִלְאכָה צָרַעַת מִמְּאֲרֵת הַנִּגַּע טָמֵא
הוא׃ 52 וְשָׂרַף אֶת־הַבִּגְד א֥וּ אֶת־הַשֵּׁתִי
א֥וּ אֶת־הָעֵרֵב בְּצֹמֶר א֥וּ בִפְשָׁתִים א֥וּ
אֶת־כָּל־כְּלִי הָעוֹר אֲשֶׁר־יְהִיָּה בּוֹ הַנִּגַּע
פִּי־צָרַעַת מִמְּאֲרֵת הוּא בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרָף׃
53 וְאִם יִרְאָה הַפֶּהֶן וְהִנֵּה לֹא־פֶשֶׁה הַנִּגַּע
בְּבִגְד א֥וּ בְשֵׁתִי א֥וּ בְעֵרֵב א֥וּ בְכָל־כְּלִי־
עוֹר׃ 54 וְצִוָּה הַפֶּהֶן וְכִבְּסוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־
בּוֹ הַנִּגַּע וְהִסְגִּירוּ שִׁבְעַת־יָמִים שְׁנִית׃
55 וְרָאָה הַפֶּהֶן אַחֲרָי אֶת־הַנִּגַּע
וְהִנֵּה לֹא־הִפָּךְ הַנִּגַּע אֶת־עֵינֹו וְהַנִּגַּע
לֹא־פֶשֶׁה טָמֵא הוּא בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרָפֶנּוּ
פָחַתָּת הוּא בְּקִרְחָתוֹ א֥וּ בְּגִבְחָתוֹ׃ 56 וְאִם
רָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהִנֵּה כָּהֵן הַנִּגַּע אַחֲרֵי הַכִּבְּס
אֹתוֹ וְקָרַע אֹתוֹ מִן־הַבִּגְד א֥וּ מִן־הָעוֹר

שביעי
[רביעי]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

times the offerings of food due Me, as gifts of pleasing odor to Me.

³Say to them: These are the gifts that you are to present to the LORD:

As a regular burnt offering every day, two yearling lambs without blemish. ⁴You shall offer one lamb in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. ⁵And as a grain offering, there shall be a tenth of an *ephah* of choice flour with a quarter of a *hin* of beaten oil mixed in—⁶the regular burnt offering instituted at Mount Sinai—a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD.

⁷The libation with it shall be a quarter of a *hin* for each lamb, to be poured in the sacred precinct as an offering of fermented drink to the LORD. ⁸The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, preparing the same grain offering and libation as in the morning—a gift of pleasing odor to the LORD.

⁹On the sabbath day: two yearling lambs without blemish, together with two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in as a grain offering, and with the proper libation—¹⁰a burnt offering for every sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its libation.

DAILY OFFERING (vv. 3–8)

Called “*tamid*” from biblical times on, the daily offering consisted of a burnt offering of a lamb together with its grain and wine adjuncts. It was offered twice daily, morning and evening.

3. The *tamid* offering is to be financed by all the people, not merely by the leaders or by the rich (Neh. 10:34).

4. at twilight The time between sunset and darkness.

5. ephah See Comment to Exod. 16:36.

hin See Comment to Exod. 29:40.

קָרְבָּנֵי לַחֲמֵי לְאִשֵּׁי רִיחַ נִיחֹחַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ
לְהַקְרִיב לִי בְמוֹעֵדוֹ:

³וְאָמַרְתָּ לָהֶם זֶה הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ
לַיהוָה

כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה תְּמִימִם שְׁנַיִם לַיּוֹם
עֹלָה תְּמִיד: ⁴אֶת־הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה
בַּבֹּקֶר וְאֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין
הָעֶרְבִים: ⁵וְעֵשִׂירִית הָאֵיפָה סֵלֶת
לְמִנְחָה בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן פְּתִית רְבִיעֵת
הַהֵיזֶן: ⁶עֹלֹת תְּמִיד הַעֲשֶׂה בָהֶרְ סִינֵי
לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה:

⁷וְנִסְכּוֹ רְבִיעֵת הַהֵיזֶן לְכֶבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד בְּקֹדֶשׁ
הַסֵּף נִסֵּף שֶׁכֶר לַיהוָה: ⁸וְאֵת הַכֶּבֶשׂ
הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים כְּמִנְחַת הַבֹּקֶר
וּכְנִסְכּוֹ תַעֲשֶׂה אִשָּׁה רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ
לַיהוָה: ^פ

⁹וּבַיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת שְׁנֵי־כִבְשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה
תְּמִימִם וּשְׁנֵי עֵשְׂרִים סֵלֶת מִנְחָה
בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן וְנִסְכּוֹ: ¹⁰עֹלֹת שַׁבָּת
בְּשַׁבְּתוֹ עַל־עֹלֹת הַתְּמִיד וְנִסְכָּה: ^ס

beaten Hebrew: *katit*, “pressed in a mortar.” Hence it was pure oil.

7. with it Refers to the lamb (v. 4, as in v. 8).

SHABBAT OFFERING (vv. 9–10)

The sacrifice for a special day, called *musafin* Rabbinic Hebrew, is in addition to the daily *tamid* and is offered immediately after it. Because the *Shabbat* offering is the same as the *tamid*, adding *musaf* gives *Shabbat* double the number of offerings of a weekday.

10. regular burnt offering Refers to the

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28:4. in the morning . . . at twilight The Sages determined that prayer, specifically the *Amidah*, substitutes for the communal sacrifices mandated in the Torah (BT Ber. 26b). *Shaharit* and *Minḥah* (the morning and afternoon services) are thus based on the requirements articulated in this verse.

28:10. in addition to the regular burnt offering The requirement in this chapter for an additional sacrifice offered on *Shabbat*, festivals, and *Rosh Ḥodesh* (New Moon) is fulfilled today through the additional *Amidah* of *Musaf* recited on these days (BT Ber. 26b–27a).

¹¹On your new moons you shall present a burnt offering to the LORD: two bulls of the herd, one ram, and seven yearling lambs, without blemish. ¹²As grain offering for each bull: three-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in. As grain offering for each ram: two-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in. ¹³As grain offering for each lamb: a tenth of a measure of fine flour with oil mixed in. Such shall be the burnt offering of pleasing odor, a gift to the LORD. ¹⁴Their libations shall be: half a *hin* of wine for a bull, a third of a *hin* for a ram, and a quarter of a *hin* for a lamb. That shall be the monthly burnt offering for each new moon of the year. ¹⁵And there shall be one goat as a purification offering to the LORD, to be offered in addition to the regular burnt offering and its libation.

¹⁶In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, there shall be a passover sacrifice

11 וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֳדָשֵׁיכֶם תִּקְרִיבוּ עֹלָה לַיהוָה פָּרִים בְּנֵי־בָקָר שְׁנָיִם וְאֵיל אֶחָד כְּבָשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה שִׁבְעָה תְּמִימִם: 12 וּשְׁלֹשָׁה עֶשְׂרֹנִים סֹלֶת מִנְחָה בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן לַפָּר הָאֶחָד וּשְׁנַי עֶשְׂרֹנִים סֹלֶת מִנְחָה בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן לְאֵיל הָאֶחָד: 13 וְעֶשְׂרֹן עֶשְׂרֹן סֹלֶת מִנְחָה בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן לַכֶּבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד עֹלָה רֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ אִשָּׁה לַיהוָה: 14 וְנִסְפִיָּהֶם חֲצִי הַהֵינִן יִהְיֶה לַפָּר וּשְׁלִישֶׁת הַהֵינִן לְאֵיל וּרְבִיעֵת הַהֵינִן לַכֶּבֶשׂ יַיִן זֹאת עֹלֹת חֹדֶשׁ בְּחֹדְשׁוֹ לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה: 15 וּשְׁעִיר עֲזִים אֶחָד לְחֹטְאֵת לַיהוָה עַל־עֹלֹת הַתָּמִיד יַעֲשֶׂה וְנִסְכּוֹ: ס

16 וּבַחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם

morning *tamid*, because there could be no offering after the *tamid* of the evening. It should be noted that purification sacrifices are never brought on *Shabbat*, because intimations of human wrongdoing are not permitted on this joyous day.

ROSH HODESH, THE NEW MOON (vv. 11–15)

In early Israel, this was an important festival celebrated by families and clans in a state of ritual purity at the local sanctuary.

14. Only here are the libation quantities

specified. Because they are always the same, they need not be repeated.

burnt offering Use of this term implies the auxiliary grain offering and libation.

new moon Hebrew: *hodesh*, “new moon,” as in 29:6. (The word can also mean “month.”)

PASCHAL SACRIFICE AND UNLEAVENED BREAD (vv. 16–25)

The day of the paschal offering and the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread originally were separate and distinct holidays (cf. Lev. 23:5–6). The fact that the paschal offering is mentioned here

15. **purification offering to the LORD** Hebrew: *hattat l’Adonai*. Noting that this is the only place in the Torah where this phrase occurs, the Talmud understands it to mean “a purification offering for the LORD.” It is brought on God’s behalf on *Rosh Hodesh* (when the new moon appears) as an apology to the moon for having made it smaller and less consequential

than the sun (BT Hul. 60b). Did the Sages here picture God apologizing for all the unfairness of life—to people who are born less healthy, gifted, or fortunate than others? Given the traditional identification of *Rosh Hodesh* as a woman’s festival, did the Sages imagine God expressing regret to women for having a less prominent role than men for so much of history?

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28:11. new moons The Jewish calendar is based on the cycles of the moon. An extra month (Adar I) is added 7 times in 19 years to make the lunar calendar conform to the solar year. Each Hebrew month begins with the New Moon (*Rosh Hodesh*); it is announced in synagogue (except for the month of *Tishrei*) on the preceding *Shabbat*, in the Blessing of the Month (*Birkat Ha-Hodesh*). See Comment on Exod. 12:2.

of Pharaoh so that he would not let the Israelites go from his land.

יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא-שָׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ: פ

12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. ³Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: ² הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רֵאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לְכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה: ³ דַּבְּרוּ אֶל-כָּל-עַדַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם

THE LAST ACT (12:1–51)

This chapter, a composite of several strands of tradition, contains a number of literary units. Each unit centers on an aspect of the Exodus events. Some of these units deal with immediate concerns, such as the last-minute preparations for the departure from Egypt; others relate to the enduring effect of the events in shaping the future course of Israel’s life as a people.

REFORM OF THE CALENDAR (v. 2)

The impending Exodus is visualized as the start of a new order of life that will be dominated by the consciousness of God’s active presence in history. The religious calendar of Israel is henceforth to reflect this reality by numbering the months of the year from the month of the Exodus.

This month Elsewhere it is called “the month of Abib,” meaning literally “when the ears of barley ripen,” referring to the spring (March and April). The month of Abib is nowadays known as Nisan.

first of the months The Hebrew months, like the days of the week in Hebrew, are called by

numbers. The absence of names may be due to the desire to avoid any connection with the ancient calendars that associated days and months with heavenly bodies or pagan deities and rituals. There is evidence that at least some Israelite months once had Canaanite-Phoenician names, because the Bible refers to the months of Ziv (1 Kings 6:1), Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2), and Bul (1 Kings 6:38). The names of months now used by Jews were borrowed from the Babylonian calendar during the first exile.

THE PASCHAL OFFERING (vv. 3–13)

The laws relating to the sacrificial meal that is to take place immediately before the Exodus are now set forth in detail.

3. community of Israel The word translated as “community” (*edah*, from a root meaning “to come together”) was the term used to designate the people Israel acting as a covenant community, in relation to worship.

tenth of this month The completion of the first 10 days of the lunar month apparently held

CHAPTER 12

2. This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months One of the first steps in the process of liberation was for the Israelites to have their own calendar, their own way of keeping track of time and recalling the most important days of their people’s history. A slave does not control his or her own time; it belongs to someone else. Hirsch wrote that “the Jewish calendar is the Jewish catechism,” for it is the most concise summary of what we remember and what we stand for. Why does Israel count by the moon, with each month start-

ing when the new moon emerges? Because the moon, unlike the sun, waxes and wanes, nearly disappears and then grows bright again. So the Jewish people go through cycles of prosperity and suffering, knowing that even in darkness there are brighter days ahead (*S’fat Emet*). “Just as God showed Noah the rainbow as a sign of the covenant, God shows Moses the sliver of the new moon as a symbol of Israel’s capacity for constant renewal” (Hirsch).

3. The next step toward liberation was to slaughter a lamb publicly, something no Egyptian would do, and mark the doorpost with its blood. In this way, they would proclaim their

⁴But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a yearling male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day

אִישׁ שֶׁהָ לְבֵית־אָבֹת שֶׁהָ לְבֵיתוֹ: ⁴ וְאִם־ יִמְעַט הַבֵּית מֵהֵיטֵב מִשֶּׁהָ וְלֶקַח הוּא וְשִׁכְנֵו הַקָּרֹב אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ בְּמִכְסֵת נִפְשֹׁת אִישׁ לְפִי אֲכָלוֹ תִכְסּוּ עַל־הַשֶּׁהָ: ⁵ שֶׁהָ תָמִים זָכָר בֶּן־שָׁנָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם מִן־ הַבְּבָשִׁים וּמִן־הָעִזִּים תִּקְחוּ: ⁶ וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמַרְתָּ עַד אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ

some sort of special significance now lost to us. Yom Kippur, the most sacred day in the religious calendar, falls on the 10th of the seventh month, and in ancient times this same date ushered in the jubilee year. Joshua chose the 10th of the first month to cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan.

a lamb See verse 5 and Deut. 14:4. The Hebrew word *seh* can mean both “a lamb” and “a kid of the goats.” In light of the fear expressed in Exod. 8:22, this act broke the sense of dread felt by the enslaved Israelites and removed the psychological barrier to liberation.

a family The Hebrew phrase *beit avot* literally means “a house of fathers” and is a subunit of a clan (the biblical *mishpahah*). It is made up of a husband, his wife or wives, his unmarried daughters and sons, and his married sons with their wives and unmarried children.

a household Originally, the paschal celebration was a domestic experience. Later it became a pilgrimage festival.

4. too small In Second Temple times, a minimum quorum of 10 participants was required for this ritual. The actual slaughtering of the animal was performed in the presence of no fewer than 30.

will eat The eating of the animal is an essential part of the ritual. By means of this sacrificial meal, kinship ties are strengthened, family and neighborly solidarity is promoted, and communion with God is established.

5. without blemish A defective gift is an insult to the recipient; hence the harmony between the one who brings the gift and God would be impaired by such a gift.

6. keep watch The animal, selected on the 10th of the month, is to be carefully protected

psychological liberation from fear of Egyptian opinion and from an eagerness to imitate Egyptian customs, a necessary prerequisite to physical liberation. The Sages see the lamb as a symbol of idol worship, and its public slaughter as a repudiation of idolatry. It has also been noted that in times of drastic change people need specific, action-oriented advice. This gives them a sense of control over a chaotic situation, as we see with mourning customs in the wake of a death.

The shared meal, with *matzah* and bitter herbs (v. 8), will become the prototype of the *Pesah Seider*, when we not only remember but strive to re-enact our ancestors' deliverance from Egypt. Members of some communities come to the *Seider* table with sandals on their feet and a staff in their hand (v. 11), as if they were setting out on a journey to freedom.

Although we celebrate *Rosh ha-Shanah*, beginning a new year, in the fall, the Hebrew calendar actually begins in the spring with *Nisan*, the month of *Pesah*, as the first month. *Tishrei*, the month of *Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*, is the seventh month (see Lev.

23:23ff.). Some scholars see this as a compromise among ancient cultures, those who celebrated the beginning of the new year in the spring when the harsh winter rains were over and the plants and flowers re-emerged, versus those who celebrated the new year in the fall when the rains returned to replenish the land after summer's harsh drought. We can see it as analogous to our beginning a new calendar year in January but marking our personal age on our birthday. Thus *Rosh ha-Shanah* is seen as the anniversary of the creation of the world, marking our shared humanity with other peoples; *Pesah* is the birthday of the people Israel, symbolizing our special destiny as Jews.

4. Like so much of Judaism, *Pesah*, although a family celebration, is not to be observed in isolation. It is an occasion for families to join with other families and create a community. More than the poor need the rich, the rich need the poor. Let those whose households are too small to absorb all the blessings that God has given them seek out their neighbors and share the bounty with them (Hirsch).

of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw, or cooked in any way with water, but roasted—head, legs, and entrails—over the fire. ¹⁰You shall not leave any of it over until morning; if any of it is left until morning, you shall burn it.

¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff

הַזֶּה וְשָׁחֲטוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל קֵהַל עֲדַת-יִשְׂרָאֵל
בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים: ⁷ וְלָקְחוּ מִן-הַדָּם וְנָתְנוּ
עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וְעַל-הַמַּשְׁקוּף עַל
הַבְּתִימִים אֲשֶׁר-יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם: ⁸ וְאָכְלוּ
אֶת-הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי-אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת
עַל-מֵרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ: ⁹ אַל-תֹּאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
זָא וּבָשָׂל מִבָּשָׂל בַּמַּיִם כִּי אִם-צְלִי-אֵשׁ
רֹאשׁוֹ עַל-כַּרְעָיו וְעַל-קִרְבּוֹ: ¹⁰ וְלֹא-
תוֹתִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר וְהִנְתַּר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-
בֹּקֶר בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרְפוּ:
¹¹ וְכַכֵּה תֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ מִתְּנִיכֶם חֲגָרִים
נְעִלְיֶכֶם בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם וּמִקְלָכֶם בְּיַדְכֶם

from blemish for four days until it is slaughtered. No reason for the interval is given.

7. According to verses 13 and 23, the daubing at the entrances served to identify the houses of the Israelites, for the blood is designated “a sign.” Blood was a readily available coloring substance; it also possessed symbolic significance because it was looked on as the life essence. The lintel and doorposts form the demarcation between the sacred Israelite interior and the profane world outside.

8–9. Unlike other offerings, this one (called *pesah* in v.11) is roasted. Roasting may have been required here because it is the quickest means of preparation when time is short, or because it is the most effective way of extracting the blood. Deut. 16:7 instructs that this passover offering is to be boiled like a normal sacrifice.

8. **unleavened bread** The Hebrew for “unleavened bread” (*matzot*, singular *matzah*) is introduced without definition or explanation, implying that it is already well known and, hence, independent of the Exodus events. The contexts suggest a kind of flat cake that can be prepared

quickly for unexpected guests (see Gen. 19:3). This verse witnesses the integration of the originally separate *matzot* festival with the Passover celebration. See Comments to Exod. 12:14–20.

bitter herbs The Hebrew word *m'rorim* (singular *maror*) probably referred originally to the kind of pungent condiment with which pastoral nomads habitually season their meals of roasted flesh. In rabbinic tradition, the plant referred to five different species of herbs, including lettuce (*hassah*), a vegetable known to have been cultivated in ancient Egypt.

10. A sacrificial animal is devoted in its entirety to a sacred purpose. This is so even when the offering is eaten by the worshipers and not wholly burned on the altar. The intentional act of eating at the designated time is an indispensable part of the ritual. Any leftovers retain their sacred status but may no longer be consumed and must be burned.

11. **loins girded** The standard dress consisted of a flowing shirtlike garment that was tightened by a sash wrapped around the waist when greater maneuverability was called for. The

7. Was the blood on the doorpost a sign that this family had the courage to defy their Egyptian neighbors and demonstrate an inner liberation? Was it perhaps a sign that this family has already suffered and should be spared? Or was it simply that this family had complied with

God's command? Could God not distinguish between Israelite and Egyptian homes? The Talmud says that once a plague has begun, it does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked (BT BK 60a). Some means was needed to mark the homes that merited being spared.

in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly: it is a passover offering to the LORD. ¹²For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I the LORD. ¹³And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the

וְאֶכְלֹתֶם אֹתוֹ בְּחֶפְזוֹן פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה :
 וְעִבְרָתִי בְּאֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם בְּלַיְלָה הַזֹּה ¹²
 וְהַפִּיתִי כָּל-בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם
 וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה
 שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי יְהוָה : ¹³וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם
 לְאֵת עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם שָׁם וְרָאִיתִי
 אֶת-הַדָּם וּפָסַחְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם וְלֹא-יְהִיָּה בְּכֶם
 נֹגֵף לְמִשְׁחִית בְּהַפְתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם :
 וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן וְחֻגְתֶּם ¹⁴
 אֹתוֹ חֹג לַיהוָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם

climactic moment of liberation is imminent, and the Israelites must be prepared for immediate departure.

a passover offering The Hebrew noun “*pesah*” has given rise to the English adjective “paschal,” used to designate the Passover lamb, the Passover holiday, and Easter. Like the word “*matzah*,” *pesah* is assumed in this narrative to be an immediately understandable term, so it too must have a history that predates the Exodus. The etymology of the word is uncertain, although it may be related to an Akkadian root meaning “to appease.” Three traditions about the meaning of the stem פסח have survived: “to have compassion,” “to protect,” and “to skip over” (see 12:13). Strictly speaking, as noted in the Comments to verses 14–20, only the 14th day of the month can be called *Pesah*; but in the course of time, this term was extended to cover the entire week of the festival.

12. I will go through An example of anthropomorphism, attributing a human activity to God. Here it may be used to make His active presence in history more vividly and dramatically perceived. Despite this emphatic statement, however, tradition frequently speaks of the Angel of Death, not God, as “the destroyer.”

to all the gods of Egypt God’s power to take Israel out of Egypt manifests His own exclusivity, mocks the professed divinity of Pharaoh, and exposes the deities of Egypt as non-gods.

13. The first section of the chapter concludes with an assurance that no harm will befall the

Israelites. This is necessary because fulfillment of the preceding instructions is fraught with peril, and the coming period of inaction will allow anxiety to surface.

THE FESTIVAL OF MATZOT (vv. 14–20)

The previous rites deal with a specific time and situation—the Passover of Egypt. The Exodus now becomes an experience stamped for all time on Israel’s memory and imagination, shaping forever its religious consciousness and traditions. Verse 14 establishes an annual festival of remembrance; the subsequent verses explain how it is to be observed.

The focus is on the festival of *matzot*, “unleavened bread.” Without doubt, throughout the biblical period this celebration remained distinct from the one-day paschal rite. Indeed, the next chapter (13:6–8) establishes the laws of *matzot* and makes no mention of the paschal sacrifice. Lev. 23:5–6 similarly differentiates the one from the other: “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the LORD, and on the fifteenth day of that month the LORD’s Feast of Unleavened Bread.” Special Passovers were celebrated in the reigns of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah of Judah, both of whom were associated with major reformations (see 2 Chron. 30, 35). We are told in Ezra 6:19–22 that when the exiles returned from Babylon they “celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month,” and then “joyfully celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.”

14. The topic and tone of the Torah narrative now shifts seamlessly but significantly from instructions to Moses’ contemporaries to

listing *mitzvot* to be followed by Jews in later generations—not so as to effect the Exodus but in order to remember it.

LORD throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time. ¹⁵Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the very first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day to the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

¹⁶You shall celebrate a sacred occasion on the first day, and a sacred occasion on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them; only what every person is to eat, that alone may be

תִּחְגְּלוּ: ¹⁵שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מִצֹּת תֹּאכְלוּ
אֶף בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן תִּשְׁבִּיתוּ שָׂאֵר
מִבֵּיתְכֶם כִּי אֶל-אֲכָל חֵמֶץ וְנִכְרַתְהָ
הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן
עַד-יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי:

¹⁶וּבַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ וּבַיּוֹם
הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל-
מְלָאכָה לֹא-יַעֲשֶׂה בָהֶם אֶף אִשֶׁר
יֹאכַל לְכָל-נֶפֶשׁ הוּא לְבָדוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם:

14. throughout the ages That is, for future annual celebration.

15. The characteristics of the newly ordained festival are now stated: one week's duration, the eating of *matzot*, and the removal of leaven. It is a new season of the year and a new era for the people Israel. One should not enter it with yeast collected from a previous time.

unleavened bread Stringent regulations govern the manufacture of *matzot*. The only ingredients are flour and water. The flour may be made only from grains that are susceptible to fermentation: wheat, barley, emmer, rye, and oats.

on the very first day Because festivals begin in the evening, this injunction traditionally has been taken to mean that the leaven must have been removed on the previous evening, before the time for the paschal offering on the 14th of the month.

remove leaven The positive command to eat *matzah* is supplemented by the strict prohibition against retaining or eating leaven or leavened food throughout the entire festival. This rule is repeated below in verses 19–20 and again in 13:7. Leaven (*s'or*) is the leavening agent known as sourdough; "leavened food" (*hametz*) is food to which sourdough has been added to accelerate the rising of the dough.

shall be cut off This punishment, known as *karet*, is largely confined to those who transgress in certain matters of religious worship and sexual behavior. Its nature is uncertain. Various biblical passages lead to the conclusion that *karet* is not a penalty enforced by the courts but a punishment left to divine execution.

16. The first and the last days of the festival possess special sanctity, but not to the same degree

15. shall be cut off *Pesah* is a fundamental statement of Jewish identity and the meaning and purpose of Jewish existence—so much so

that those who choose not to observe it can be seen as cutting themselves off from the Jewish people.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

12:15. remove leaven On the night before the *Seider*, there is a ritual search of the home (*B'dikat Hametz*) by candlelight. A feather and a spoon are used to collect pieces of bread or other leaven that had been hidden to stimulate the search. The next morning, any leavened product not otherwise stored and sold is disposed of, traditionally by burning (*Bi-ur Hametz*) (see Lev. 2:11; Deut. 16:3).

12:16. the seventh day This last day is considered to be as holy as the first; all restrictions apply equally to both. Outside Israel, two days are traditionally observed for each day defined as a *mikra kodesh* (sacred occasion) in the Torah, except for *Yom Kippur* (because the Sages judged that fasting for two days would be too burdensome). Before the calendar was established, news of the *Sanhedrin's* announcement of the new moon would not necessarily reach diaspora communities in time before a holiday, and so diaspora Jews observed a second day to be sure not to violate holy day prohibitions. Despite the subsequent creation of the Jewish calendar, adding a second day for each day the Torah designates as a sacred occasion remains the most widespread practice (MT Festivals 1:21). Therefore, the first and last days of *Pesah* are each observed for two days (for a total of eight days); the first day of *Sukkot* and *Sh'mini Atzeret* are each observed for two days (for a total of nine days); and *Shavuot* is observed for two days. The intermediate days of *Pesah* and *Sukkot* have some of the aspects of the festival's first and last days and some aspects of a weekday; hence the name *hol ha-mo'ed*, "the ordinary part of the festival." *Rosh ha-Shanah* is observed for two days even in Israel, because it occurs at the very beginning of the month and even the Jews of Jerusalem could not determine when the new moon would be sighted and the holiday would begin.

prepared for you. ¹⁷You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day throughout the ages as an institution for all time. ¹⁸In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days. For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country. ²⁰You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

²¹Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover offering. ²²Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the

17 וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַמִּצְוֹת־זֶה בְּעֶצְמָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־עַבְדְּכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם: 18 בְּרֵאשִׁון בְּאַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב תֹּאכְלוּ מִצֵּת עַד יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעֶשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב: 19 שִׁבְעַת יָמִים שְׂאֵר לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּבֵיתְכֶם כִּי כָל־אֶכָּל מִחֻמֶּצֶת וְנִכְרַתָּה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מֵעַד־תֵּת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר וּבְאִזְרַח הָאָרֶץ: 20 כָּל־מִחֻמֶּצֶת לֹא תֹאכְלוּ בְּכָל־מוֹשְׁבֵיתְכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ מִצֵּת: פ
21 וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְכָל־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מִשְׁפַּחְתֵיכֶם וְשַׁחֲטוּ הַפֶּסַח: 22 וְלָקַחְתֶּם אֶגְדַּת אֵזוֹב וְטַבַּלְתֶּם בָּדָם אֲשֶׁר־בַּסֶּף חַמְשִׁי

as do *Shabbat* and the Day of Atonement. Hence the preparation of food on those festival days is permitted, exempted from the prohibition against labor.

17. The rationale for this springtime festival is now given.

You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread Understanding the phrase “*u-sh’martem et ha-matzot*” (literally, “guard the *matzot*”) in this way is based on the next phrase—“on this very day”—which takes the word “*matzot*” to mean the festival (*Hag ha-Matzot*). (For a parallel passage, see 23:15.)

I brought Better: “I am bringing.”

18. As specified in Lev. 23:32, the duration of all festivals is from evening to evening.

19. a stranger The Hebrew word *ger* is a foreigner who has taken up permanent residence

among the people Israel. Like his Israelite neighbor, he is required to abstain from possessing leaven for this one week, because its presence within the closely knit community interferes with the ability of others to fulfill their religious obligation. Only the Israelite, however, has the duty to eat *matzah*.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PESAH ARE RELAYED (vv. 21–28)

Moses conveys to the people the divinely given instructions and supplements them with some clarifications.

21. Go, pick out Either select a lamb from your flock or purchase one.

22. a bunch of hyssop A brushlike plant. This explains how the directive of verse 7 is to be carried out. Three of the hyssop’s thin, woody

17. observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread Literally, “guard the *matzot*” (pl. of *matzah*). Traditional postbiblical Jewish interpretation

takes this to mean that one should supervise the process of making *matzot* to ensure that no fermentation occurs at any stage.

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

12:19. No leaven shall be found Because disposing of foods prohibited on *Pesah* could impose financial hardship, Jewish law permits food to be stored away in the home of the owner provided that for the duration of *Pesah* it is neither seen nor used and its ownership is transferred to a non-Jew. This sale of *hametz* (*M’khirat Hametz*) can be arranged through a rabbi. All foods prohibited during *Pesah* that are not sold in this manner must be disposed of before the holiday; otherwise they may not be used after *Pesah* (*hametz she-avar alav ha-Pesah*).

הַפְּטָרָה פְּרִשְׁת הַחֹדֶשׁ

HAFTARAH FOR PARASHAT HA-HODESH

EZEKIEL 45:16–46:18 (*Ashk'nazim*)

EZEKIEL 45:18–46:15 (*S'fardim*)

This *haftarah* presents regulations that pertain largely to worship in a rebuilt Temple, with a major emphasis on offerings to make expiation for the House of Israel. For *Ashk'nazim*, the reading opens with the requirement of regular contributions for the Temple service to be brought by the “entire population” and prepared by the prince (45:16–17, per the interpretation that best suits the passage when excerpted as a *haftarah*). Their reading ends with matters of gifts to be distributed by the prince to his heirs (46:16–18). A long passage in between focuses on details of Temple purification and sacrificial offering. Among *S'fardim*, the reading consists solely of that passage, which also includes regulations governing entry to the inner court for the common people and for the prince, as well as offerings for fixed occasions.

A series of purification rites are to be performed in the first and the seventh months of the year (45:18–25). The rites of purification in the first month are given in special detail, together with the command that the people offer the *pesah* sacrifice on the 14th day of the month (of *Nisan*) and eat unleavened bread during the next 7 days. Correspondingly, detailed rules for the *pesah* sacrifice and unleavened bread are included in the special Torah reading for this *Shabbat* (Exod. 12:1–20). Moses delineates requirements for the inaugural *pesah* ceremony in Egypt, and anticipates subsequent celebrations of the festival. Ezekiel’s proclamation envisions rituals and practices in the rebuilt Temple of the future. These occasionally are at variance with the older laws.

Particularly problematic is the account of purifying the Temple in the first and the seventh months. Nothing of the sort is mentioned in the Torah. Perplexed, some rabbinic commentators have associated this purification with the altar con-

secration mentioned in Ezek. 43:18–26 (Rashi, Radak). They consider this rite to be a one-time event, like the tabernacle purification of old, which also occurred on the first day of the first month (see Exod. 40:2). In this way, they tried to resolve any possible conflict between this ceremony and the great day of Temple purification on *Yom Kippur*, 10 days after the New Year in the seventh month (Lev. 16:29). Notably, there is no reference to *Yom Kippur* in Ezekiel’s teaching. Also absent is any reference to the festival of *Sukkot*, which begins on the 15th day of the seventh month. The cultic traditions found in this *haftarah* also contradict specific sacrificial regulations found in the Torah (see the *haftarah* for *Emor*).

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

Parashat ha-Hodesh (Exod. 12:1–20) is the last of four special Torah passages added to the regular *Shabbat* portion in the weeks before *Pesah*. (Specifically, it is recited on the last *Shabbat* of Adar—unless the forthcoming New Moon of *Nisan* falls on a *Shabbat*, in which case this *haftarah* is recited rather than the *haftarah* otherwise read whenever a New Moon falls on *Shabbat*.) The passage gets its designation from the opening proclamation: “This month [*ha-hodesh ha-zeh*] shall mark for you the beginning of the months”; it contains the laws concerning a paschal offering and thus anticipates the ritual of the 14th of *Nisan* (see Rashi on BT Meg. 29a).

That special Torah reading and this *haftarah* are clearly linked. Both passages stress the *pesah* ceremony and the festival of unleavened bread. The Torah describes the inaugural *pesah* ceremony in Egypt as well as provisions for subsequent enactments; the *haftarah* describes the festival for the envisioned new Temple period,

stressing the formal purifications that will take place at that time (Ezek. 45:21–24). These two descriptions reflect two historical poles. The *Pesah* of Egypt recalls that ancient time when Israel experienced liberation from bondage and was called by God to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). The *Pesah* of the future anticipates a time when Israel will be restored to its homeland and its sacred duties. In the first ceremony, blood was smeared on the doorpost of each clan dwelling for the people’s protection (Exod. 12:13). In the complex ritual detailed by Ezekiel, blood is to be smeared on the doorpost of the Temple, among other places, for the purification of the Temple itself (Ezek. 45:19).

These thematic connections suggest some theological correlations. Daubing the entrances to the

home and to the Temple with blood marks them off as two types of space. The first embodies the family, whose bonds are biologic. The family, the nuclear core of personal history and religious rite, preserves a parochial character by virtue of its intimacy and common name. The space within the Temple is communal; its rites have an official, public status. The Temple as the sanctuary of God opens its doors for collective worship, thus transcending the private histories of its worshipers. The conjunction of the two readings sharpens the distinctions between the two dwellings. How one may live in both homes—standing firm in loyalty to hearth and blood but open to the enlargement of commitments that a divine Temple dwelling symbolizes—is a question each individual must answer repeatedly.

45

¹⁶The entire population shall give this offering to the prince in Israel. ¹⁷And the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the libations on festivals, new moons, sabbaths—all fixed occasions—of the House of Israel shall be the obligation of the prince; he shall prepare the purification offerings, the grain offerings, the burnt offerings, and the offerings of well-being, to make expiation for the House of Israel.

¹⁸Thus said the Lord GOD: On the first day of the first month, you shall take a bull of the herd without blemish, and you shall purify the Sanctuary. ¹⁹The priest shall take some of the blood of the purification offering and apply it to the doorposts of the Temple, to the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and to the doorposts of the gate of the inner court. ²⁰You shall do the same on the seventh day of the month to purge the Temple from impurity caused by unwitting or ignorant persons.

Ezekiel 45:17. prince Hebrew: *nasi*. An ancient tribal title (Gen. 23:6), frequently used by Ezekiel to refer to Israelite kings (Ezek. 22:6) and

מה ¹⁶ בַּל הָעַם הָאָרֶץ יִהְיוּ אֶל-
הַתְּרוּמָה הַזֹּאת לְנָשִׂיא בְיִשְׂרָאֵל: ¹⁷ וְעַל-
הַנָּשִׂיא יִהְיֶה הָעוֹלוֹת וְהַמִּנְחָה וְהַנִּסְכִּי
בַחֲגִים וּבַחֲדָשִׁים וּבַשַּׁבָּתוֹת בְּכָל-מוֹעֲדֵי
בַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת-הַחֻטָּאת
וְאֶת-הַמִּנְחָה וְאֶת-הָעוֹלָה וְאֶת-
הַשְּׁלָמִים לְכַפֵּר בְּעֵד בַּיִת-יִשְׂרָאֵל: ¹⁸
כֹּה-אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בְּרִאשׁוֹן בְּאֶחָד
לְחֹדֶשׁ תִּקַּח פָּרִי-בָקָר תָּמִים וְחֻטָּאת
אֶת-הַמִּקְדָּשׁ: ¹⁹ וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִדָּם
הַחֻטָּאת וְנָתַן אֶל-מִזְבֹּחַ הַבַּיִת וְאֶל-
אַרְבַּע פְּנוֹת הָעֶזְרָה לְמִזְבֵּחַ וְעַל-מִזְבֹּחַ
שַׁעַר הַחֹצֵר הַפְּנִימִית: ²⁰ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה
בַּשַּׁבָּע בַּחֹדֶשׁ מֵאִישׁ שְׂגָה וּמִפְּתֵי
וְכַפְּרָתֶם אֶת-הַבַּיִת:

the future scion of David (34:24, 37:25). In Ezek. 44:3, 45–46, and 48, the prince is the future leader. This leader has a special role in the new

²¹On the fourteenth day of the first month you shall have the passover sacrifice; and during a festival of seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten. ²²On that day, the prince shall provide a bull of purification offering on behalf of himself and of the entire population; ²³and during the seven days of the festival, he shall provide daily—for seven days—seven bulls and seven rams, without blemish, for a burnt offering to the LORD, and one goat daily for a purification offering. ²⁴He shall provide a grain offering of an *ephah* for each bull and an *ephah* for each ram, with a *hin* of oil to every *ephah*. ²⁵So, too, during the festival of the seventh month, for seven days from the fifteenth day on, he shall provide the same purification offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, and oil.

21 בְּרֵאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַפֶּסַח חֹג שִׁבְעוֹת יָמִים מִצּוֹת יֹאכְלוּ: 22 וְעָשָׂה הַנָּשִׂיא בַיּוֹם הַהוּא בַעֲדוֹ וּבַעֲד כָּל-עַם הָאָרֶץ פֶּר חֲטָאת: 23 וְשִׁבַּעַת יְמֵי-הַחֹג יַעֲשֶׂה עוֹלָה לַיהוָה שִׁבַּעַת פְּרִים וְשִׁבַּעַת אֵילִים תְּמִימִם לַיּוֹם שִׁבַּעַת הַיָּמִים וְחֲטָאת שְׁעִיר עֲזִים לַיּוֹם: 24 וּמִנְחָה אֵיפָה לַפָּר וְאֵיפָה לְאֵיל יַעֲשֶׂה וְשֶׁמֶן הַיֵּין לְאֵיפָה: 25 בַּשְּׁבִיעִי בַחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּחֹג יַעֲשֶׂה כָאֵלֶּה שִׁבַּעַת הַיָּמִים כַּחֲטָאת כַּעֲלָה וְכַמִּנְחָה וְכַשֶּׁמֶן: ס

46 Thus said the Lord God: The gate of the inner court which faces east shall be closed on the six working days; it shall be opened on the sabbath day and it shall be opened on the day of the new moon. ²The prince shall enter by way of the vestibule outside the gate, and shall attend at the gatepost while the priests sacrifice his burnt offering and his offering of well-being; he shall then bow low at the threshold of the gate and depart. The gate, however, shall not be closed until evening. ³The common people shall worship before the LORD on sabbaths and new moons at the entrance of the same gate.

מו כֹּה-אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה שְׁעַר הַחֲצַר הַפְּנִימִית הַפְּנִיָה קָדִים יִהְיֶה סָגוּר שֵׁשֶׁת יָמֵי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה וּבַיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת יִפְתָּח וּבַיּוֹם הַחֹדֶשׁ יִפְתָּח: 2 וּבָא הַנָּשִׂיא דְרָוֹ אוֹלָם הַשְּׁעַר מִחוּץ וְעָמַד עַל-מְזוֹזֹת הַשְּׁעַר וַעֲשׂוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת-עוֹלָתוֹ וְאֶת-שְׁלָמָיו וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה עַל-מִפְתָּן הַשְּׁעַר וַיֵּצֵא וְהִשְׁעַר לֹא-יִסָּגַר עַד-הָעֶרֶב: 3 וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ עַם-הָאָרֶץ פֶּתַח הַשְּׁעַר הַהוּא בַשְּׁבָתוֹת וּבַחֲדָשִׁים לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: 4 וְהָעֲלָה אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרַב הַנָּשִׂיא לַיהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת שֵׁשֶׁה כִּבְשִׂים תְּמִימִם וְאֵיל תְּמִים: 5 וּמִנְחָה אֵיפָה לְאֵיל וְלִכְבָּשִׂים מִנְחָה מִתַּת יָדוֹ וְשֶׁמֶן הַיֵּין לְאֵיפָה:

⁴The burnt offering which the prince presents to the LORD on the sabbath day shall consist of six lambs without blemish and one ram without blemish—⁵with a grain offering of an *ephah* for the ram, a grain offering of as much as he wishes

Temple service, which may explain the choice of this term (see Lev. 4:22).

21. festival of seven days Hebrew: *ḥag sh'vu-ot yamim* (unusual formulation); literally, “a festival of weeks of days.”

Ezekiel 46:1. six working days Hebrew: *sheisbet y'mei ha-ma-aseh*. This unique biblical expression is a well-known phrase in Jewish liturgy. It is used in the concluding benediction of the final *Shabbat* ceremony, the *Havdalah* service.

for the lambs, and a *hin* of oil with every *ephah*.
 6And on the day of the new moon, it shall consist of a bull of the herd without blemish, and six lambs and a ram—they shall be without blemish. 7And he shall provide a grain offering of an *ephah* for the bull, an *ephah* for the ram, and as much as he can afford for the lambs, with a *hin* of oil to every *ephah*.

8When the prince enters, he shall come in by way of the vestibule of the gate, and he shall go out the same way.

9But on the fixed occasions, when the common people come before the LORD, whoever enters by the north gate to bow low shall leave by the south gate; and whoever enters by the south gate shall leave by the north gate. They shall not go back through the gate by which they came in, but shall go out by the opposite one. 10And as for the prince, he shall enter with them when they enter and leave when they leave.

11On festivals and fixed occasions, the grain offering shall be an *ephah* for each bull, an *ephah* for each ram, and as much as he wishes for the lambs, with a *hin* of oil for every *ephah*.

12The gate that faces east shall also be opened for the prince whenever he offers a freewill offering—be it burnt offering or offering of well-being—freely offered to the LORD, so that he may offer his burnt offering or his offering of well-being just as he does on the sabbath day. Then he shall leave, and the gate shall be closed after he leaves.

13Each day you shall offer a lamb of the first year without blemish, as a daily burnt offering to the LORD; you shall offer one every morning.

14And every morning regularly you shall offer a grain offering with it: a sixth of an *ephah*, with a third of a *hin* of oil to moisten the choice flour, as a grain offering to the LORD—a law for all time. 15The lamb, the grain offering, and oil shall be presented every morning as a regular burnt offering.

6 וּבַיּוֹם הַחֹדֶשׁ פֶּר בֶּן־בֶּקָר תְּמִימִם וְשֵׁשׁ כִּבְשִׁים וְאֵיל תְּמִימִם יְהִיוּ: 7 וְאֵיפָה לֶפֶר וְאֵיפָה לְאֵיל יַעֲשֶׂה מִנְחָה וּלְכִבְשִׁים כַּאֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁיג יָדוֹ וְשֶׁמֶן הָיִן לְאֵיפָה:

8 וּבָבֹא הַנְּשִׂיא דָרֶךְ אֹלָם הַשַּׁעַר יָבֹא וּבְדַרְכּוֹ יֵצֵא:

9 וּבָבֹא עִם־הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה בְּמוֹעֲדִים הֵבֵא דָרֶךְ־שַׁעַר צֶפוֹן לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת יֵצֵא דָרֶךְ־שַׁעַר נֹגֵב וְהֵבֵא דָרֶךְ־שַׁעַר נֹגֵב יֵצֵא דָרֶךְ־שַׁעַר צְפוֹנָה לֹא יָשׁוּב דָרֶךְ הַשַּׁעַר אֲשֶׁר־בָּא בּוֹ כִּי נִכְחוּ יֵצְאוּ יֵצֵא: 10 וְהַנְּשִׂיא בְּתוֹכֶם בְּבֹאֵם יָבֹא וּבִצְאתֶם יֵצְאוּ:

11 וּבַחֲגִים וּבְמוֹעֲדִים תַּהֲיֶה הַמִּנְחָה אֵיפָה לֶפֶר וְאֵיפָה לְאֵיל וּלְכִבְשִׁים מִתַּת יָדוֹ וְשֶׁמֶן הָיִן לְאֵיפָה: 12

וְכִי־יַעֲשֶׂה הַנְּשִׂיא נִדְבָה עוֹלָה אֹו־שְׁלָמִים נִדְבָה לַיהוָה וּפְתַח לוֹ אֶת־הַשַּׁעַר הַפְּנִי קֳדָיִם וַעֲשֶׂה אֶת־עֲלֹתוֹ וְאֶת־שְׁלָמָיו כַּאֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה בַיּוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיֵּצֵא וְסָגַר אֶת־הַשַּׁעַר אַחֲרֵי צֵאתוֹ:

13 וּכְבָשׁ בֶּן־שָׁנָתוֹ תְּמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה עוֹלָה לַיּוֹם לַיהוָה בֶּבֶקָר בֶּבֶקָר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ: 14 וּמִנְחָה תַעֲשֶׂה עָלָיו בֶּבֶקָר בֶּבֶקָר שְׁשִׁית הָאֵיפָה וְשֶׁמֶן שְׁלִישִׁית הַהֵינן לָרֶס אֶת־הַסֶּלֶת מִנְחָה לַיהוָה חֲקוֹת עוֹלָם תִּמְיֵד: 15 וְעָשׂוּ יַעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַכֶּבֶשׁ וְאֶת־הַמִּנְחָה וְאֶת־הַשֶּׁמֶן בֶּבֶקָר בֶּבֶקָר עוֹלָת תִּמְיֵד: 16

¹⁶Thus said the Lord God: If the prince makes a gift to any of his sons, it shall become the latter's inheritance; it shall pass on to his sons; it is their holding by inheritance. ¹⁷But if he makes a gift from his inheritance to any of his subjects, it shall only belong to the latter until the year of release. Then it shall revert to the prince; his inheritance must by all means pass on to his sons.

¹⁸But the prince shall not take property away from any of the people and rob them of their holdings. Only out of his own holdings shall he endow his sons, in order that My people may not be dispossessed of their holdings.

18. the prince shall not take property away are feared in 1 Sam. 8:11–18 and documented in A regulation to curb such monarchic outrages as 1 Kings 21.

16 כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה כִּי־יִתֵּן הַנָּשִׂיאַ
מִתְּנָהּ לְאִישׁ מִבְּנָיו נַחֲלָתוֹ הִיא לְבְנָיו
תִּהְיֶה אַחְזָתָם הִיא בְּנַחֲלָה: 17 וְכִי־יִתֵּן
מִתְּנָהּ מִנַּחֲלָתוֹ לְאַחַד מֵעַבְדָּיו וְהִיְתָה
לוֹ עַד־שְׁנַת הַדְּרוֹר וְשָׁבַת לְנָשִׂיא אֶף
נַחֲלָתוֹ בְּנָיו לָהֶם תִּהְיֶה:
18 וְלֹא־יִקַּח הַנָּשִׂיא מִנַּחֲלַת הָעָם
לְהוֹנֵתָם מֵאַחְזָתָם מֵאַחְזָתוֹ יִנַּחֵל אֶת־
בְּנָיו לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִפְצוּ עִמִּי אִישׁ
מֵאַחְזָתוֹ: