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

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

THE PURIFICATION OF SKIN DISEASES (continued)

PURIFICATION RITES FOR INDIVIDUALS (14:1–32)

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

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

When it has been reported to the priest

The priest went out to the afflicted person who could not enter the camp, having been declared impure.

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

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

5. over fresh water in an earthen vessel Blood of the slaughtered bird not collected in the vessel would flow down into the earth. The Hebrew for “fresh water” (mayim hayyim) literally...
over fresh water in an earthen vessel; 6and he shall take the live bird, along with the cedar wood, the crimson stuff, and the hyssop, and dip them together with the live bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the fresh water. 7He shall then sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be purified of the eruption and purify him; and he shall set the live bird free in the open country. 8The one to be purified shall wash his clothes, shave off all his hair, and bathe in water; then he shall be pure. After that he may enter the camp, but he must remain outside his tent seven days. 9On the seventh day he shall shave off all his hair—of head, beard, and eyebrows. When he has shaved off all his hair, he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water; then he shall be pure. After that he may enter the camp, but he must remain outside his tent seven days. 10On the eighth day he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water; then he may enter the camp. 11These shall be presented before the L ORD, with the man to be purified, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting by the priest who performs the purification.

The priest shall take one of the male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish, three-tenths of a measure of choice flour with oil mixed in for a grain offering, and one log of oil. 12These shall be presented before the L ORD, with the man to be purified, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, by the priest who performs the purification. 13The lamb shall be slaughtered at the spot in the sacred area means “living water.” It is water that flows continually, like that of springs.

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

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

11. The person undergoing purification is stationed near the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, together with the material assembled for use in the purification.

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

13. at the spot in the sacred area That is, on the north side of the altar (see 1:11, 4:24, and 7:2).
where the purification offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered. For the reparation offering, like the purification offering, goes to the priest; it is most holy. The priest shall take some of the blood of the reparation offering, and the priest shall put it on the ridge of the right ear of him who is being purified, and on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. The priest shall then take some of the log of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. And the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in the palm of his left hand and sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before the Lord. Some of the oil left in his palm shall be put by the priest on the ridge of the right ear of the one being purified, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot — over the blood of the reparation offering. The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one being purified. Thus the priest shall make expiation for him before the Lord. The priest shall then offer the purification offering and make expiation for the one being purified of his impurity. Last, the burnt offering shall be slaughtered, and the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar, and the priest shall make expiation for him. Then he shall be pure.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The L ORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

TZARA'AT IN BUILDING STONES
(vv. 33–53)
This section deals with some sort of mold, blight, or rot, perhaps of a fungoid nature, that produced recessed lesions and discoloration in the plaster or mud used to cover building stones.
34 When you enter the land of Canaan that I give you as a possession, and I inflict an eruptive plague upon a house in the land you possess, the owner of the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, “Something like a plague has appeared upon my house.” The priest shall order the house cleared before the priest enters to examine the plague, so that nothing in the house may become impure; after that the priest shall enter to examine the house. If, when he examines the plague, the plague in the walls of the house is found to consist of greenish or reddish streaks that appear to go deep into the wall, the priest shall come out of the house to the entrance of the house, and close up the house for seven days. On the seventh day the priest shall return. If he sees that the plague has spread on the walls of the house, the priest shall order the stones with the plague in them to be pulled out and cast outside the city into an impure place. The house shall be scraped inside all around, and the coating that is scraped off shall be pulled out.

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

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

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

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

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

40 stones . . . to be pulled out From the heart of the selfish owner.
take other coating and plaster the house

42. The stones could be retained if the blight had not penetrated into them.

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

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

The house shall be torn down The Midrash sees this as an anticipation of the destruction of Solomon’s temple, a house that will have been corrupted by the behavior of its inhabitants [Lev. R. 17:7]. It then adds, “But it will not be forever, as it is stated, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation’” [Isa. 28:16].

49. The procedures for purifying the house that has “healed,” so to speak, are almost identical to those prescribed in verses 1–32 for purifying a diseased person. There is only one difference: Oil and blood are sprinkled on a person; water and blood are sprinkled on a house.
the house seven times. 52Having purified the house with the blood of the bird, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the crimson stuff, 53he shall set the live bird free outside the city in the open country. Thus he shall make expiation for the house, and it shall be pure.

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

Such is the ritual concerning eruptions.

15 The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 2Speak to the Israelite people and say to them:

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

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

DISCHARGES FROM SEXUAL ORGANS (15:1–33)

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

THE ISRAELITE MALE (vv. 1–18)

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

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

5. Anyone who touches his bedding shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. 

6. Whoever sits on an object on which the one with the discharge has sat shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. 

7. Whoever touches the body of the one with the discharge shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. 

8. If one with a discharge spits on one who is pure, the latter shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. 

9. Any means for riding that one with a discharge has mounted shall be impure; whoever touches anything that was under him shall be impure until evening; and whoever carries such things shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. 

10. If one with a discharge, without having rinsed his hands in water, touches another person, that person shall wash his clothes, bathe in water, and remain impure until evening. 

11. An earthen vessel that one with a discharge touches shall be broken; and any wooden implement shall be rinsed with water.

12. When one with a discharge becomes purified of his discharge, he shall count off seven days for his purification, wash his clothes, and bathe his body in fresh water; then he shall be pure. 

13. On the eighth day he shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and come before the Lord at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and

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

5. bathe in water One must bathe completely.

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

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

spittles Spittle was thought to carry infection and disease.

means for riding Hebrew: merkav, denoting “an object on which one rides,” such as a saddle or other appurtenance located under the rider. If someone with a discharge rides on these objects, they become impure.

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

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

13. seven days for his purification Seven consecutive days must pass after the termination of the ailment before ritual purification can be undertaken.
give them to the priest. 15 The priest shall offer them, the one as a purificatory offering and the other as a burnt offering. Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf, for his discharge, before the Lord.

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

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

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

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

19. The enforced separation of husband and wife during her menstrual period parallels the dietary laws. Both sets of regulations inculcate holiness by introducing rules of what is permitted and what is forbidden into what are matters of instinct for all other living creatures. Once again, the Torah defines the uniqueness of the human being as the ability to control instinct instead of being controlled by it.

HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH

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

15:20. shall be impure Jewish law places no restrictions on a menstruant’s touching a Torah scroll or reciting or leading prayers.
has sat, on touching it he shall be impure until evening. 24 And if a man lies with her, her menstrual impurity is communicated to him; he shall be impure seven days, and any bedding on which he lies shall become impure.

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

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

31 You shall put the Israelites on guard against their impurity, lest they die through their impurity, lest they die through their impurity, lest they die through their impurity, lest they die through their impurity.
purity by defiling My Tabernacle which is among them.

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

31. **My Tabernacle which is among them**

Even when Israelites are impure, God’s presence is found among them. Abravanel understands “My Tabernacle” as referring to the human body. Thus “defiling My Tabernacle” refers to rendering our bodies impure. Because each person is created in God’s image, his or her body is a temple of God.
This haftarah contains God’s promise to the people in the period after the rebuilding of the Temple in 516–15 B.C.E. The prophet announces that sacrificial offerings will again be favorably received by God, as in ancient times. First, however, God will contend with the nation’s breach of moral and ritual law and bring sinners to judgment. Hope lies in repentance and in observance of the Torah. God’s call to the people through Malachi, the healing mission of Elijah, and the teaching of Moses all show God’s continual concern for reconciliation and human welfare.

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

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

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

RENEWAL OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE CALENDAR

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

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

The haftarah’s focus on the tithe obligations would have reinforced the rabbinic selection. Indeed, according to the Mishnah, “on Passover
Surely the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of yore and in the years of old. 5But [first] I will step forward to contend against you, and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me: Who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert [the cause of] the widow, orphan, and stranger, said the Lord of Hosts.

For I am the Lord—I have not changed; and you are the children of Jacob—you have not ceased to be. 7From the very days of your fathers you have turned away from My laws and have not observed them. Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you—said the Lord of Hosts. But you ask, “How shall we turn back?” 8Ought man to defraud God? Yet you are defrauding Me. And you ask, “How have we been defrauding You?” In tithe and contribution. 9You are suffering under a curse, yet you go on defrauding Me—the whole nation of you. 10Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, and let there be food in My House, and thus put Me to the test—said the Lord of Hosts. I will surely open the floodgates of the sky for you and pour down blessings on you; 11and I will banish the locusts from you, so that they will not destroy the yield.
of your soil; and your vines in the field shall no longer miscarry—said the Lord of Hosts. 12And all the nations shall account you happy, for you shall be the most desired of lands—said the Lord of Hosts.

13You have spoken hard words against Me—said the Lord. But you ask, “What have we been saying among ourselves against You?” 14You have said, “It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His charge and walking in abject awe of the Lord of Hosts? 15And so, we account the arrogant happy: they have indeed done evil and endured; they have indeed dared God and escaped.” 16In this vein have those who revere the Lord been talking to one another. The Lord has heard and noted it, and a scroll of remembrance has been written at His behest concerning those who revere the Lord and esteem His name. 17And on the day that I am preparing, said the Lord of Hosts, they shall be My treasured possession; I will be tender toward them as a man is tender toward a son who ministers to him. 18And you shall come to see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him who has served God and him who has not served Him.

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

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

19. the day that is coming References to the future “day” of judgment punctuate the prophet’s speech (3:2,17,19,21,22,23). A complex scenario is envisaged, dominated by the advent of an angelic messenger, the admonition of sins, the interventions of Elijah, the fiery purgation of sinners, the vindication of the pious, and the visible distinction between the righteous and evildoers. This scenario was variously explicated and ordered by medieval Jewish commentators, in light of other biblical and Rabbinic evidence. In turn, the images were understood in either literal or figurative terms. The prophet Malachi was himself the heir to a long tradition of this rhetoric, produced in a period of more than 300 years and in various patterns.
20But for you who revere My name a sun of victory shall rise to bring healing. You shall go forth and stamp like stall-fed calves, and you shall trample the wicked to a pulp, for they shall be dust beneath your feet on the day that I am preparing—said the Lord of Hosts.

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

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

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

24. He shall reconcile parents with children
The language is difficult. The act of reconciliation here is literally “restore the heart” (heshiv lev). Different meanings of the preposition translated “with” (al), however, make it an open question whether the prophet envisions the reconciliation of parents “with” their children or “along with” them. In the first case, divine wrath will be forestalled by intergenerational reconciliation; in the other, both generations together will return to God.