

## מצורה Leviticus 14:1-4

**Context:** Parshat Metzarah completes the part of Leviticus that deals with laws of impurity. The portion begins with a unit on purifying an individual who has been diagnosed with what is called a *nega tzaraat*. This diagnosis was previously discussed in chapter 13 of Parshat Tazria. In that chapter, we learned that a person who is afflicted with *tzaraat* must live outside of the camp. The only person they will be able to have contact with is the priest. In Chapter 14, Leviticus instructs the priest on how to perform the purifying ritual for the one who has *tzaraat*. (TAWC, 659)

**skin affliction.** Heb. *m'tzora* refers to the person suffering from one of several skin diseases. Traditionally the term for those diseases, *tzaraat*, has been translated as "leprosy," but in English that word nowadays refers to something other than the conditions that the Torah describes; these are now called "scalded disease," "scaly disease," or also simply "affection" or "eruption." (TAWC, 661)

**if the priests looks and behold, the one who has a skin affliction has been healed.** The priest is not a healer; rather, he facilitates the removing of ritual impurity once the person is healed. (TAWC, 660)

### Questions for Discussion

1. Should we have rituals for marking the restoration of the previously excluded/isolated?
2. How is a priest a "boundary crosser" and what is the priest's role in the healing process?
3. In what ways are the *Levitical* priests similar to contemporary Jewish rabbis?

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:זֹאת תְּהִי־הַתּוֹרַת הַמְצֻרָע בְּיוֹם טְהֻרָתוֹ וְהוּבָא אֶל־הַכֹּהֵן:וַיִּצָּא הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־מַחֲוֹץ לְמַחֲנֶה וְרָאָה הַכֹּהֵן וְהָיָה נִרְפָּא נִגְעֵ־הַצָּרַעַת מִן־הַצָּרוּעַ:וַיִּצְוֶה הַכֹּהֵן וּלְקַח לְמִשְׁחָה שְׁתֵּי־צִפְרִיִּים חַיִּוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת וְעֵץ אֶרְזוֹ וְשְׁנֵי תוֹלַעַת וְאֵזֶב

God spoke to Moses saying: This will be the instruction for the one who has a skin affliction at the time of purification. He will be brought to the priest, and the priest will go outside of the camp and if the priest looks and behold, the one who has a skin affliction will be healed from the skin affliction, the priest will order two live pure birds, cedar wood, crimson stuff, and hyssop to be brought for the one to be purified.

**the priest will go outside of the camp and if the priest looks.** Both priestly rituals and pastoral counseling present opportunities for the exploration and mapping of mysterious and perhaps untraversed territory, whether this is our relationship with the transcendent or the inner workings of our own minds and hearts...ritual provides an occasion for reflection on and rationalization of the fact that what ought to have been done

was not, what ought to have taken place did not...In his role as "pastor," meanwhile, the levitical priest entered into an intimate relationship with the *metzora* centered on accompaniment, witnessing, and boundary crossing. This role is captured with the word "presence," which Barbara Breitman defines as the simple act of "being with another person," adding that "one of the greatest mysteries of pastoral caregiving is the healing power of presence"...A key aspect of presence is the ability to look and to notice. (Nancy Weiner and Jo Hirschmann, *Maps and Meaning*, 54-55)

**Commentary:** For anthropologist Mary Douglas, all of the aberrant bodily conditions described in Leviticus deal with "a breach of the body's limits." A healthy body contains and releases its fluids appropriately; the skin of a healthy body maintains its integrity. In Leviticus's worldview, unexplained genital discharges, the blood of the parturient, and eruptions of the skin all indicated that something was wrong. They were signs that the body, as a container, had been breached. These atypical discharges were *tamei*; they threatened everyone's well-being and undermined God's ability to dwell in the camp. Douglas stresses that all of these discharges were involuntary, plainly stating that, "Nowhere does Leviticus say that the disease can be attributed to sin of the victim." (Mary Douglas in *Maps and Meaning*, 61)