

THE DAY OF HIS CLEANSING*

זאת תהיה תורת המצרע

ביום טהרתו

והובא אל־הכהן:

This shall be the law of the leper [metsora]
in the day of his cleansing;
he shall be brought to the priest.

This shall be the law of the leper [metsora]—Torah treats leprosy (not the disease we know now by that name) as a spiritual rather than medical problem—which the Sages linked to evil talk, as Rabbi Yose said, “Whoever retails evil talk is visited by plague. . . .” (Arakhin 15b). *In the day of his cleansing*—The effects of the metsora’s offerings for atonement went beyond the afflicted individual, unlike other offerings, since “any object he touches becomes טמא [ritually impure] not only for him but for the whole community . . .” (S.R. Hirsch); and so, too, the damage done by evil talk has no boundaries—like the feathers of a pillow let into the wind, which can never be regathered—because it touches every member of a community. *He shall be brought to the priest*—The sacred duty of the priest was to guide the process of ritual cleansing and atonement, not to cure the individual but to protect the commonweal by declaring that the necessary spiritual realignment of the metsora had taken place and that return to the community would pose no further threat; as we, too, must create sacred time and space—through Torah study, prayer, and mitzvot—to realign ourselves when we have engaged in evil talk.

* Leviticus 14:2 (in Metsora)