

Bar-Ilan University

**Rites of Replenishment:
Observations on Priestly Purification**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree
in the Zalman Shamir Department of Bible, Bar-Ilan University

Ramat Gan, Israel

2022

This work was carried out under the supervision of
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Acknowledgements

I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Raanan Eichler, whose guidance, knowledge, and incisive comments on my initial drafts contributed greatly to this thesis. I also thank Professor Jonathan Grossman for reading the thesis, and for offering not only encouragement but also detailed and constructive feedback.

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Abstract

This study sets out to understand the priestly concept of impurity by examining rites of purification. Attempts by modern scholars to identify the rationale for biblical impurity have typically focused on seeking a common denominator among the impurity sources delineated in P: animal carcasses, genital flux (relating to childbirth, menstruation, and pathological discharges), the surface disease *צָרַעַת*, human corpses, and specific cult items used in purification (e.g., ashes of the red cow). Since many of these cases can be understood as pertaining to the spread of disease, a long-held approach is that P's impurity laws are primarily centered around hygiene. Another line of thinking, based on comparative data, ties the cases to demonic invasion. A separate proposal argues that reactions of disgust and fear determine which phenomena are considered impure.

Others take a more symbolic approach, viewing the laws of impurity as communicating societal norms and ideals, pertaining to morality or social boundaries. A subset of this approach understands impurity as signifying death. Jacob Milgrom is a noted proponent of this argument, describing impurity and holiness as antonyms and as symbolizing death and life respectively. In this vein, he interprets all cases of impurity as being in some way associated with death. Skeptics of this argument point out that not all of P's impurity cases so easily fit the "life-death" model, contending that no one rationale is capable of accounting for all cases. Others go further, saying that P's cases comprise a set of eclectic inherited traditions, and therefore not even multiple rationales on the part of P can be said to account for them.

The first point to note is that these theories are not necessarily in competition with one another but rather occupy different strata within an impurity tradition: At the base are the phenomena themselves that human beings encounter in life. Above that are visceral (and societally reinforced) reactions to those phenomena—disgust, fear, or repulsion. These

reactions then drive social norms, taboos, measures of separation, and rites of purification. On top of this foundation come further explanatory layers, ways of making sense of this set of experiences.

The most widespread explanation in the ancient world for impurity is that it stems from the demonic realm. Demons, denizens of the underworld, are the purveyors of death and disease, and seize on vulnerability. P, however, advocates a theological framework wherein YHWH is the sole supernatural agent, and scholars point to P's impurity laws as a rejection of demonology. What then, if anything, is P's replacement for demons as the explanation for impurity?

Unlike Milgrom, who understands P's excision of demons as also ridding impurity of its potential to harm human beings, I propose that P's chief innovation is simply to depersonalize impurity, to rid it of supernatural agency apart from YHWH. However, there is still a realm of death, and the ancient world understood that there are deathly forces associated with phenomena such as childbirth, certain pathologies, and death itself. According to P, then, impurity is not seen as the invasion of demons but rather of a non-personified "deathly force." I agree, then, that there is a death component to impurity. However, contra Milgrom, I would say that death is not a characteristic of P's cases; rather, impurity is linked to the deathly underworld.

The textual evidence in P that impurity is conceived of as a deathly force is found not in the impurity cases but in P's remedial rituals for impurity. Scholars have pointed out the leitmotif of "life" that pervades P's purification rites, generally characterized as life banishing death, wherein purification is a rite of purgation. I concur with this aspect of purification but propose that in addition to purgative effects, purification in most cases is intended to *replenish*. Forces of death, apart from being something to remove, sap life from the subjects they afflict. Ancient Near Eastern texts attest to the harm, disease, and life-diminishing

effects caused by demonic invasion. Purification replenishes and fills the void of life left by the deathly presence, infusing the purification candidate with renewed life and vitality.

The bulk of this study is a survey of P's purification rites and procedures. It begins by examining the most pervasive element in P's purification, auspicious time intervals: evening, three days, multiples of seven days, the eighth day, and forty days. These are typological numbers known in the Bible and ancient world to possess the magical capacity for conferring wholeness and regeneration. From there, we discuss the household hygienic rites of washing and laundering. The element of water is central to these rites, and we look at the way water is conceptualized in the ancient Near East, both as a cleansing agent and as a life-substance capable of endowing revitalization and renewal. Shaving is in the same category of personal hygiene, and its function in P appears to be mainly purgative, prescribed only in rare cases.

Next, we discuss the red cow rite prescribed for corpse contamination, and the two-bird rite prescribed for *צִרְעָת* (of the skin or house), including the ingredients common to both: cedar wood, red yarn, hyssop, and *מַיִם חַיִּים* (spring water). The motif of blood, life, movement, and strength runs through these elements, and they combine to create potent sprinkling formulas for driving out deathly forces and imbuing the purification candidate with life. We also look at the red cow rite and explore the anomalous feature of its ashes imparting impurity to its handlers while at the same time purifying a person exposed to a corpse.

After this, we examine the role of sacrifices in purification. I argue that the stage of sacrifices occurs only after impurity has been resolved, and that their purpose (as indicated by the accompanying verb *כִּפֶּר*) is to cover or clear various forms of personal liability with respect to YHWH. Finally, we look at applications of sacrificial blood and oil, performed only in the case of skin *צִרְעָת* and in priestly consecration. Blood is thought to carry the life-force, and oil is a substance that vitalizes and elevates status. I argue that transformations from impure to pure and from pure to holy take place along the same

continuum of life-amplification. Both involve supplementing vitality, what I call adding “plus.” In the case of impurity, plus cancels out minus—vitality counteracts the diminishing effects of deathly forces.

This survey of P’s purification rites should provide a contribution on its own, as to my knowledge there is no similar treatment in modern scholarship. What I hope to further demonstrate is that the components, rites, and language used in P’s purification texts point to an overarching “life” motif, wherein life-infused rites overcome the forces of death. Purification surely has a purgative function, but I argue—based on biblical and ancient Near Eastern examples—that these rites are also designed to revitalize and replenish.

1. Introduction: Impurity and Purification in Priestly Texts

The root *א.נ.ט*, referring to impurity or the act of defiling, appears 286 times in the Hebrew Bible, with over sixty-five percent of instances occurring within a relatively small group of priestly texts in the books of Leviticus and Numbers.¹ The Priestly Source (P) discusses various cases of impurity in its legislation, and both it and the Holiness Code (H)² make occasional mention of the harm impurity is capable of inflicting. However, we have little to go on as to what impurity actually *is* according to the priestly authors. This study attempts to offer insight into the nature of priestly impurity, first by discussing its probable origins and then by surveying the purification rites prescribed in P. By examining the remedies, we can shine light on the malady.

1.1 Thesis and Scope

Three main arguments make up the core of this thesis: (1) Priestly impurity is conceived as a deathly force, owing to the ancient conception of impurity as demonic and stemming from the underworld. (2) The linkage between impurity and death is evidenced by the leitmotif of “life” that permeates P’s purification rites. (3) Priestly purification serves both a purgative function, life banishing death, as well as a replenishing function, life-imbuing ingredients and rites countering the effects of the deathly presence.

This study will focus primarily on the evidence found in P (mainly Lev 11–16 and Num 19) but will also consider H. Where relevant, it will look at other biblical witnesses to

¹ Leviticus contains 150 instances; Numbers has 37 (chs. 5, 6, 9, 18, 19 and 35, all identified as P texts; see R. E. Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*). Outside the Pentateuch, the next highest concentration is in Ezekiel, with 43 instances, or fifteen percent of all occurrences.

² Chiefly Lev 17–27, and possibly insertions elsewhere. On H insertions, see I. Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*.

the concept of impurity, ancient Near Eastern cognates and parallels, biblical era material finds, as well as Second Temple literature and rabbinic writings.³

1.2 Sources of Impurity in P

P's purity legislation can be broadly grouped into five categories of impurity: animal carcasses, genital flux, *צִרְעָת* (surface diseases/outbreaks), corpse contamination, and several cultic items used as part of purification.⁴

Table 1. Main sources of impurity

Category	Source/Impure Substance	Duration of Impurity	Verses
Animal carcasses	Carcasses of non-permitted animals	Until evening	Lev 11:24, 25, 27, 28, 31, 32
	Carrion of permitted animals	Until evening	Lev 11:39, 40
Genital flux	Childbirth/lochia	7 + 33 days (boy), 14 + 66 days (girl)	Lev 12:2, 4, 5
	Pathological male discharge	After cessation, 7 + 1 days	Lev 15:13–14
	Semen, sexual intercourse	Until evening	Lev 15:16, 18
	Menstrual blood	7 days	Lev 15:19
	Irregular vaginal blood	After cessation, 7 + 1 days	Lev 15:28–29
<i>צִרְעָת</i>	Skin outbreaks	After healing, 7 + 1 days	Lev 14:8, 10
	Cloth/leather outbreaks	After fading, laundering	Lev 13:58
	House outbreaks	If no recurrence, after sprinkling	Lev 14:48, 53
Corpse contamination	Human corpses, bones, graves	7 days	Num 19:11, 14, 16
Cultic items	Burned red cow/ashes/אֵי נֶדֶה	Until evening	Num 19:7, 8, 10, 19, 21, 22

³ Biblical verses and rabbinic citations are accessed from *alhatorah.org*. Translations of biblical verses are NJPS with adjustments.

⁴ Cf. Jacob Milgrom, who groups human and animal death together and offers a three-part division: “scale disease, pathological flux, and corpse contamination” (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 44; also pp. 732–733). David P. Wright includes “cultic impurity” as a category; see D. P. Wright, “Unclean and Clean.” I place animal and human death in separate categories, since the cases are not presented together, their purification rites are not similar, and the concern with animal carcasses may not be “death” but rather the consumption of taboo meat.

1. Impurity and Purification in Priestly Texts

Category	Source/Impure Substance	Duration of Impurity	Verses
Cultic items (cont.)	Burned אֶזָּזִים bull and goat of Lev 16	After washing/laundrying (?)	Lev 16:28
	Azazel goat ⁵	After washing/laundrying (?)	Lev 16:26

Some observations on the data above:

1. *Primary versus secondary sources* — Genital flux and skin צָרַעַת are the only impurities sourced on/within a person. Other impurities are secondary, i.e., contracted via contact with or proximity to a source of impurity. This is not to say that secondary impurity is necessarily less severe. Corpse contamination is secondary and requires seven days of purification (Num 19:11), and sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman gives a man the status of a menstruant for seven days (Lev 15:24). Seminal/sexual impurity is a primary source but lasts only until evening (Lev 15:16, 18).⁶

Whether the cult items mentioned above are primary or secondary sources of impurity is less clear. Concerning the Azazel goat, the text explicitly states that the priest places the sins of Israel on the goat's head, and that the goat "carries" them into an uninhabited area (Lev 16:21–22). This may imply that sin, or at least a concentration of it, is a source of impurity according to P. The אֶזָּזִים (bull and goat of Lev 16, and red cow) may also carry people's sins and/or impurities.⁷

⁵ David P. Wright suggests that the water mixture of the מִצְרַעַת rite should also be understood as generating impurity, based on the analogous rites of the Azazel goat and the מִי נִדָּה; see D. P. Wright, "Unclean and Clean."

⁶ Regarding the apparent difference in severity of impurity between seminal emission and menstruation, Milgrom explains, "Menstrual blood is more polluting than semen... for the obvious reason that menstruation can last up to a week, but the ejaculation of semen is instantaneous" (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, p. 2457). However, in both cases, the impurity ends on the day the flow ceases (with menstrual flow presumed to last seven days); thus, one is not necessarily more "polluting" than the other.

⁷ Questions remain, however, as to why it is only the *burning* of the Day of Atonement אֶזָּזִים that imparts impurity (Lev 16:28), as opposed to other types of handling, and why no mention is made of impurity associated with burning in the primary instructions for the אֶזָּזִים (Lev 4:12, 21).

1. Impurity and Purification in Priestly Texts

2. *Residual impurity* — In most cases, whether of short or long duration, the purification period ends the evening after (or in some cases immediately after) cessation or contact with the impurity. But in three cases—*צָרַעַת* of the skin, abnormal genital discharge (male and female), and corpse contamination—the purification period extends seven (+1) days following healing or contact with the impurity. This indicates that for these three cases only, even after the source of impurity is gone, there is “residual” impurity upon the person requiring a week to resolve.⁸ These three cases also involve the use of special purification measures (e.g., *מַיִם חַיִּים*, “spring water”).⁹

3. *Waiting times and relation to realia* — The seven-day duration for menstruation roughly matches the maximum number of days for a typical menstrual flow. The forty-day duration following the birth of a boy is approximately equivalent to the typical six weeks of lochial discharge following childbirth. Both these durations correspond to physiological realia. The eighty-day total following the birth a girl, however, does not match the duration of flow, though it may match ancient conceptions of realia (see Sec. 4.5.1). Waiting until evening, and seven days following corpse contamination, skin *צָרַעַת*, or abnormal genital discharge, are not in any apparent way tied to physiological phenomena.

4. *Waiting periods for people vs. objects* — Objects are sometimes rendered pure without any waiting period, e.g., *צָרַעַת* on cloth or on walls, once it dissipates and is pronounced pure by the priest (Lev 13:58; 14:48, 53). The same, it seems, is the case for vessels sprinkled with *מֵי נֶדֶה* (Num 19:18, 31:23). Other objects require a wait until evening

⁸ In an alternative interpretation, one might suggest that this extended duration does not imply any “residual impurity” left on the person but rather is simply intended to create a time buffer for recuperation following contact with impurity. However, the prohibition from entering an overhang applies to the *מְצַרְעֵת* after being healed (Lev 14:8), and according to Num 5:2–3, for these three cases specifically—the *מְצַרְעֵת*, the *בֵּן*, and the corpse-contaminated person—the person may not reside in the camp until seven days have elapsed (see also Num 31:19). This strongly implies that the person is considered impure and contagious during the seven days, and although this time may also be recuperative, it is not merely a distancing buffer.

⁹ Additionally, two of these cases of residual impurity—corpse contamination and skin/house *צָרַעַת*—are the only ones to employ a sprinkling rite using roughly the same ingredients (see Ch. 8).

to become pure, e.g., bedding with semen on it (Lev 15:17) or a food vessel onto which the carcass of a creeping animal (צרפ) fell (Lev 11:32). As for people, there is always some waiting period, at least until evening, with the possible exception of impurity from handling the Day of Atonement scapegoat or תִּטָּאֵת.¹⁰

1.3 Purification Rites in P

For the above cases of impurity, several rites are employed in the purification process: washing, laundering, shaving, sprinkling with water-based formulas (or with blood, in the case of sancta), offering sacrifices, and daubing with blood and oil. Note, however, that not all of these strategies are necessarily intended to “purify”—that is, directly remove or counteract impurity. Some, such as sacrifices, oil, and shaving may serve other functions as part of a person’s full restoration following impurity.

Table 2. Purification rites by case

Category	Impurity Case	Wash	Launder	Shave	Sprinkle	Sacrifice	Daub	Verses
Animal carcasses	Contact with prohibited carcasses	x ¹¹	x					Lev 11:25, 28, 40
Genital flux	Childbirth					x		Lev 12:6–8
	Pathological male genital discharge	x	x			x		Lev 15:13–14
	Seminal emission, sex	x						Lev 15:16, 18
	Menstruation							

¹⁰ In Lev 16, those who dispatch the Azazel goat (v. 26) and burn the bull and goat תִּטָּאֵת (v. 28) are told to launder and wash, after which they may reenter the camp, but no mention is made of being “impure until evening.” This differs from typical cases of one-day impurity, and also from Num 19:7 regarding the handlers of the red cow, where a wait is specified. It is unclear in Lev 16 whether waiting until evening is implied in these cases or whether the omission is deliberate. For a discussion on this issue, see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 1050–1051.

¹¹ Washing the body is not mentioned in Lev 11; it is, however, prescribed in two H texts: Lev 17:15, regarding eating carrion of permitted animals, and 22:6, regarding a priest who touches a creeping creature (צרפ).

1. Impurity and Purification in Priestly Texts

Category	Impurity Case	Wash	Launder	Shave	Sprinkle	Sacrifice	Daub	Verses
Genital flux (cont.)	Irregular vaginal blood discharge					x		Lev 15:29
צָרַעַת	Skin outbreaks	x	x	x	x	x	x	Lev 14:7–9, 14, 25, 28
	Cloth/leather outbreaks		x					Lev 13:58
	House outbreaks				x			Lev 14:51
Corpse contamination	Contact with human corpses, bones, graves	x	x ¹²		x			Num 19:18, 19; 31:19, 24
Cultic items	Handling red cow ashes/ מִי הַדָּהָב	x	x ¹³					Num 19:7, 8, 10, 21
	Burning the bull/goat of Lev 16	x	x					Lev 16:28
	Dispatching the Azazel goat	x	x					Lev 16:26
	Sanctuary/altar				x	x	x	See Ch. 10, Table 8.

Notes on the data above:

1. *Implied purification* — This table indicates only explicit mentions in the text and not possible implied rites. With menstruation, for example, apart from a wait of seven days, no washing or other purification procedures are explicitly prescribed. Similarly, for the postpartum mother and woman with an irregular vaginal discharge, no purification is mentioned apart from time durations and sacrifices. Scholarship is mixed as to whether and in which cases to assume implied purification such as washing.¹⁴

¹² Washing and laundering here may be prescribed due to contact with the red cow ashes/מִי הַדָּהָב rather than for corpse contamination itself (see Sec. 8.6.2).

¹³ Washing is explicitly prescribed only for throwing ingredients into the fire (Num 19:7) and burning the red cow (v. 8), and neither washing nor laundering is explicitly prescribed for touching the מִי הַדָּהָב (v. 21).

¹⁴ See the discussion in Sec. 5.1.

contamination is lack of scrupulous purification,¹⁸ though unnecessary/gratuitous secondary contraction of impurity may play a role.¹⁹

Sanctuary contamination lacks notable characteristics of other cases: (a) It is not generated by any discrete instances of transmission, nor even necessarily by direct/physical contact with the sanctuary.²⁰ Rather, the impurity collects on the sanctuary and altar from people inside the camp. (b) No time duration is specified for the impurity—it accumulates over time and requires continual purification. (c) The sacrifices prescribed for sanctuary purification consist of those brought by purification candidates (postpartum mother and recoverees from skin *צִרְעָת* and abnormal genital discharge) as well as daily and festival sacrificial rites (see Ch. 9). Purification of the sancta is achieved by blood rites of sprinkling and daubing (see Ch. 10).

1.4 Non-Ritual Forms of Impurity

In addition to the cases above, there are instances of impurity terminology elsewhere in priestly texts, including numerous occurrences in H (especially Lev 18–20). These include:

- Illicit sexual relations (Lev 18:20, 23–25)
- Necromancy (Lev 19:31)
- Molech worship (Lev 20:3)²¹

¹⁸ This is explicit for corpse contamination: *כָּל הַנִּגַע בְּמֵת בְּנֶפֶשׁ הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָמוּת וְלֹא יִתְחַטָּא אֶת מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה טָמֵא* (Num 19:13; see also v. 20).

¹⁹ This is as opposed to required contraction of impurity (e.g., tending to the dead) or impurity that is beyond a person's control (e.g., menstruation). To warn against these impurities would make little sense.

²⁰ Milgrom calls the phenomenon of sanctuary contamination “an aerial miasma” that “assaults the sacred realm even from afar” (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 257). That the concept of airborne impurity exists in P is explicit in the case of corpse contamination, where merely being in the same tent as a corpse imparts impurity, i.e., without necessarily having direct contact with the corpse (see Num 19:14–15; also cf. Lev 14:8, 36, 46–47, where airborne impurity is implied in cases of *צִרְעָת*).

²¹ Such worship appears to involve casting one's son or daughter into fire (see 2 Kgs 23:10).

1. Impurity and Purification in Priestly Texts

- Shedding of innocent blood (Num 35:33–34)²²

These acts are said to defile:

- The people who engage in them (Lev 18:23–24, 30; 19:31)
- The sanctuary (Lev 20:3; cf. Ezek 5:11, 23:38)
- The land (Lev 18:25, 27; Num 35:34)

Some scholars characterize this category as “metaphorical” or “moral” impurity.²³

However, it is not clear that the priestly authors understood the impurity generated by idolatry, bloodshed, or illicit sexual relationships—including the idea of defiling the land—to be metaphorical; it may have been construed as a very real and dangerous force.²⁴ As for calling it “moral” impurity, this distinction is potentially misleading, since P’s impurity legislation also expresses moral concerns. For instance, P uses the morally-tinged term *שֶׁקֶץ* (“detestable,” as well as the verb *תִּשְׁקָצוּ*) eleven times in Leviticus 11, many in precise parallel with *טִמָּא*,²⁵ just as H uses these and similar derogatory terms (*תוֹעֵבָה, חֲסִיד, זִמָּה, תִּבְבֵּל*) in parallel (see Lev 18, 20).²⁶

²² I would identify Num 35:34 as H on the following grounds: (1) The phrase *וְלֹא תִטְמָא* only has parallels in H (*וְלֹא תִטְמָאוּ*, Lev 11:43–44, 18:30). (2) The phrase *כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה* is found exclusively in H texts (Lev 11:44–45 and nine instances in Lev 20–26; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 686). (3) The phrase *אֲנִי שֶׁבַח* appears only here and Num 5:3, identified by Knohl as part of an H insertion; see *Sanctuary of Silence*, p. 86. Knohl identifies the whole of Num 35 as an H text; see *ibid.*, p. 106.

²³ Jacob Neusner distinguishes between “cultic impurity” and “moral impurity”; see J. Neusner, *The Idea of Purity* (1973). Milgrom uses the terms “metaphoric” and “moral” to describe this type of impurity; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, pp. 1326, 1573–1574. Jonathan Klawans speaks about “ritual impurity” versus “moral impurity”; see J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, pp. 21–32.

²⁴ For a critique on the term “metaphorical” describing this impurity, see J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, pp. 34–35.

²⁵ Examples include *שֶׁקֶץ הוּא לָכֶם* (vv. 12, 20, 23) and *טִמָּא הוּא לָכֶם* (vv. 4, 5, 7, 38). V. 43, containing the parallel phrases *אֶל תִּשְׁקָצוּ* and *וְלֹא תִטְמָאוּ*, is identified by Knohl and Milgrom as an H insertion (see I. Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*, p. 69; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 696–697), but every other instance of *שֶׁקֶץ* in Lev 11 they identify as P (and in Milgrom’s classification, P₁, the oldest P stratum; see *ibid.*, p. 697).

²⁶ This is not to say that the terms *שֶׁקֶץ* and *טִמָּא* are synonymous. Milgrom, for instance, makes a compelling case that in Lev 11, *שֶׁקֶץ* refers to animals whose consumption is prohibited yet whose carcasses do not impart impurity on contact; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 656–658. Milgrom cites numerous biblical examples pointing to *שֶׁקֶץ* as referring to something detestable or reprehensible but concludes that in Lev 11 it bears “a more precise, technical meaning” (*ibid.* p. 656). However, there is no reason to believe, even according to Milgrom, that the term *שֶׁקֶץ* loses its basic, derogatory meaning when used in a technical context.

1. Impurity and Purification in Priestly Texts

Instead, I refer to this category simply as “non-ritual” impurity, since there are no purification rites prescribed for acts of idolatry, illicit sex, or bloodshed, the consequences for which are exile from the land (Lev 18:28, 20:22) and participating individuals being “cut off” from the people (Lev 18:29; 20:5, 18). This study examines purification rites and therefore will focus on ritual rather than non-ritual forms of impurity.

2. Literature Review: Theories of Impurity

What is the organizing principle for cases of impurity in P, and how is purification to be viewed? This chapter will survey some approaches offered by modern critical scholars.

2.1 Disease, Demons, and Disgust

One long-held explanation of priestly impurity is that it is focused on disease.²⁷ Threat of disease potentially covers a broad swath of cases: human corpses and animal carcasses, meat of certain animals (e.g., pig, hare, and scavenger birds) known to be disease-carriers, pathological genital discharges, and skin disease. In addition, menstruation and childbirth are described by the priestly authors using the root *ח.ו.ד* (Lev 12:2, 15:33, 20:18), connoting infirmity and weakness.²⁸ Purification in a hygienic framework involves distancing, quarantine, cleansing, recovery, and healing, which overlap with purification procedures in P. Less obviously pertaining to disease, however, are cases of seminal emission, including sexual intercourse, and cultic impurity, including sanctuary pollution.²⁹

Others understand impurity as stemming from the invasion of demonic or malevolent forces.³⁰ Cases thought to carry demonic attachment include seminal emission, menstruation, childbirth, *צָרְעָת*, human corpses, and the Azazel goat.³¹ To purify from

²⁷ This explanation has been advanced by Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed* 3.48) and Nahmanides (on Lev 11:9). Early critics of the theory include Abrabanel, who comments on Lev 11:13 that if health were the rationale, it places the Torah *במדורגת ספר קטן מספרי הרפואה*, “on the level of any minor book of medicine.” He also objects that if health were the concern, why did it not forbid contact with dangerous animals and plants as well?

²⁸ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 745–746; see also HALOT, s.v. *ח.ו.ד*.

²⁹ For a discussion and critique of the hygienic hypothesis, see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 719; *idem*, “Rationale for Biblical Impurity,” p. 109.

³⁰ See e.g., Lucien Levy-Bruhl’s anthropological study, where he defines the term impure as “exposed to an evil influence” (L. Levy-Bruhl, *Primitives and the Supernatural*, p. 235). Baruch Levine views sanctuary impurity as a demonic contagion, see B. A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, pp. 55–91.

³¹ On demonic possession in childbirth, see S. R. Driver, *Book of Leviticus*, p. 75; in menstruation, see J. Milgrom, “Rationale for Biblical Impurity,” p. 107; in sex/semen, see K. Elliger, *Leviticus*, p. 197; E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, “Discharges in Men” (15:1–18); in *צָרְעָת*, see A. Bertholet, *Leviticus*, p. 43; in human corpses, see Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, p. 55; in the Azazel goat, see J. K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, “Demons.”

demonic forces involves rites of purging and exorcism. This explanation of impurity is attested in Second Temple, New Testament, and rabbinic literature.³² One difficulty, however, is that if the priestly authors had a concern about dark spirits at the root of their purity legislation, they left little if any evidence to that effect.³³

Another approach views impure substances and persons as objects of disgust and societal taboo,³⁴ wherein purification consists of rites of riddance and cleansing. This could in theory apply to most cases of priestly impurity, including human corpses, forbidden meat, genital fluxes, and *צִרְעָת*. The impurity of the *מִי נִדָּה*, however, would be more difficult to frame in terms of disgust or taboo, since the red cow ashes if anything would have been valued and sought after for their purifying power. Also, this approach does not account for other materials arguably worthy of disgust, such as vomit or feces, that are not included in P's legislation.

Rationales of disease, demons, and disgust are not mutually exclusive, and some suggest applying different rationales across cases.³⁵

2.2 Symbolic Approaches

A separate group of approaches to purity and impurity sees P's system as containing moral, allegorical, or symbolic significance, a line of thinking that goes back to ancient

³² Jacob Neusner cites a Second Temple *Yahad* sectarian law stating that “the *zab* may not go to war because he may offend the angels,” as well as New Testament depictions of Jesus exorcising demons, as evidence for the conception of impurity as a “material force” based on a belief in demons; see J. Neusner, “The Idea of Purity” (1975), p. 22. The rabbis clearly held a belief in demons and evil spirits (e.g., *מְזִיקִין* and *שְׂדֵימִים*), as evidenced by frequent mentions in Talmud and Midrash.

³³ Two possible exceptions are the Azazel goat (Lev 16:8, 10, 26) and *שְׂעִירִים*, “goat demons” (Lev 17:7). Even if Azazel is understood as a demon (as Milgrom suggests, see *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 1020–1021), and even if the sin carried by the goat is understood as “impurity” (though Lev 16:21 says *עֲוֹנָת*, not *טְמֵאָת*), this hardly suffices as proof that P views demons as the rationale for its impurity system as a whole. As for *שְׂעִירִים*, this is a warning against foreign worship, and although it may indicate a popular belief in demons, the priestly writer is clearly trying to separate people from such belief, not support it.

³⁴ See e.g., T. Kazen, “Disgust in Body, Mind, and Language,” pp. 98–99.

³⁵ See e.g., Yitzhaq Feder, who suggests that impurity cases fall into three categories: infection (pathological genital discharges, corpse contamination, and *צִרְעָת*), uncleanness/disgust (normal genital discharges), and transgression (bloodguilt and sexual immorality); see Y. Feder, “Contagion and Cognition,” p. 165.

writings.³⁶ A notable advocate of the symbolic approach in more recent times is Mary Douglas, whose insights have had a significant impact on subsequent scholarship of impurity. In *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas describes impurity as a symbolic system expressing danger to the social order, where compromise to the wholeness of the body (e.g., body fluids out of place) represents a violation of societal boundaries. Purification is framed in terms of reintegration, restoration of wholeness, and completeness.³⁷ In her later work, Douglas depicts priestly purification (from impurity as well as sin) as an act of mending or repairing.³⁸

Tikva Frymer-Kensky surveys P's impurity cases in "Pollution, Purification and Purgation in Biblical Israel" (1983), citing Douglas and understanding the cases to symbolize "boundaries between life and death," wherein impurity involves a brush with death and constitutes "a no-man's land between two realms that must be kept rigidly apart." As examples, she points to contact with human corpses, skin *צָרַעַת* resembling decomposition and accompanied by rites of mourning,³⁹ the two-bird purification rite of the *מִצְרַע* wherein one bird is slaughtered while the other lives, and postpartum impurity, where the mother "has been at the boundaries of life/non-life and therefore cannot directly reenter the community." Frymer-Kensky characterizes purification rites in terms of cleansing, healing, curing, and readmission.⁴⁰ However, she stops short of equating purity with life and impurity with death.

2.3 The Life-Death Hypothesis

August Dillmann's Exodus-Leviticus commentary (1897) is an early modern example of the theory linking priestly impurity with death. Because YHWH is a deity of "life,"

³⁶ Early examples of a moral-symbolic approach to dietary laws can be found in the *Letter of Aristeas* (153–54) and Philo (*Laws*, 4.105–119).

³⁷ See M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 46–57, 124; *idem*, "Atonement in Leviticus," pp. 120–123.

³⁸ See M. Douglas, "Atonement in Leviticus," pp. 117–118.

³⁹ The *מִצְרַע* is instructed: *וְעַל שָׂפָם יִעָטָה*, "his clothes shall be rent, his head shall be left bare, and he shall cover over his upper lip" (Lev 13:45). These are customs for mourning over the dead attested elsewhere in P (Lev 10:6) and in Ezekiel (24:17).

⁴⁰ T. Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification and Purgation," pp. 400–403.

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Dillmann contends, death and decomposition must be excluded from the divine realm. Such exclusion pertains first and foremost to human corpses but extends also to death-like skin afflictions and even to genital flows and diseases that produce temporary weakness.⁴¹ Several scholars in the 1960–70’s similarly assert an association between impurity and death.⁴²

Gordon Wenham in his *Leviticus* commentary (1981) associates holiness with life and impurity with death. He graphically charts out statuses in the priestly system, grouping “life/normality” together with “holy” on one end of the spectrum, moving to “less holy,” to “blemished holiness,” to “unclean,” and finally to “death/total disorder.”⁴³ In his essay “Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile?” (1983), Wenham argues that loss of semen or blood constitutes a loss of “life-liquids” and imparts impurity because it moves a person closer to the “death” side of the spectrum.⁴⁴

Edward Greenstein in “Biblical Law” (1984) describes impurity as “blemishes in the condition of createdness” and interprets the priestly impurity of Lev 12–15 as constituting “leaks” of blood or a life-sustaining fluid. Defilement, he suggests, is induced by contact with “death or a life-leak.”⁴⁵ Greenstein interprets purification in line with the life-leaks approach, as rites to restore life that is lost/depleted, describing a postpartum mother’s period of impurity as rehabilitation and stating regarding blood rites that “blood, symbolizing life, serves as an instrument of purification.”⁴⁶

Jacob Milgrom, in an early article (1981) discussing the prohibition of boiling a kid in its mother’s milk (Exod 23:19, 34:26; Deut 14:21), states that “The comingling of holiness

⁴¹ A. Dillmann, *Exodus und Leviticus*, p. 523.

⁴² See e.g., G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 272; W. Kornfeld “Reine und Unreine,” pp. 134–147; N. H. Snaith, *Leviticus & Numbers*, p. 106; W. Paschen, *Rein und Unrein*, p. 63; E. Feldman, *Defilement and Mourning*, pp. 35–37; N. Füglistner, “Sühne durch Blut,” pp. 143–165. (Most of these are cited by Milgrom as precursors to his own theory; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 1002.)

⁴³ See G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 77 n. 34; see also pp. 25–26.

⁴⁴ See G. J. Wenham, “Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev. 15,18)?”, pp. 432–434.

⁴⁵ E. Greenstein, “Biblical Law,” p. 95. The “life-leaks” interpretation is adopted by Baruch Schwartz in his JSB commentary; see B. J. Schwartz, “Leviticus,” p. 232.

⁴⁶ E. Greenstein, “Biblical Law,” p. 95.

and impurity is forbidden on pain of death; so the comingling of life and death is equally disastrous”—referring to milk, “the symbol of life,” being used as an agent of death.⁴⁷ Later, in the first of his three-volume Leviticus commentary (1991), Milgrom builds off of Dillmann and others⁴⁸ to more fully develop the idea that priestly impurity is equated with death. Holiness and impurity are portrayed as antonyms, representing the “forces of life” and “forces of death” respectively.⁴⁹ A human corpse is thus an obvious prime source of impurity, but Milgrom argues that other impurities are death-tinged as well: Genital discharges of blood and semen “represent the life force; their loss represents death.” Skin *צִרְעָת* (which extends to *צִרְעָת* on other surfaces) has the “appearance” of death.⁵⁰ As for animal carcasses, Milgrom explains that animal life is inviolable as a general rule, and their death imparts impurity. The few animals permitted for food are exceptions to this rule, and even then, their blood/life-force must be drained before consumption.⁵¹

2.4 Critiques of the Life-Death Approach

The life-death hypothesis of impurity as well as Milgrom’s thesis have had their critics. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz in *The Savage in Judaism* (1990) challenges Milgrom based on cases where signs of life are equated with impurity. His examples include the laws of skin *צִרְעָת*, where the appearance of *בֶּשֶׂר חַי*, “living flesh,” renders a person impure (Lev 13:10, 14), and postpartum blood, which he terms “a sign par excellence of reproductive success.” Eilberg-Schwartz proposes an alternative theory: the less controllable a bodily fluid

⁴⁷ J. Milgrom, “A Kid in Its Mother’s Milk,” pp. 7–8.

⁴⁸ See notes 41–42. Note that Milgrom (1991) does not cite Greenstein (1985), nor does Greenstein cite Milgrom’s 1981 article.

⁴⁹ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 46–47, 686, 767–768, 1002–1003.

⁵⁰ Milgrom cites the example of Moses praying that the *צִרְעָת*-afflicted Miriam should not be “like the dead” with her flesh partly eaten away: *אֵל נָא תְהִי כַמֵּת אֲשֶׁר בְּצִאֲתוֹ מִרְחֹם אֱמוֹ וַיֵּאכַל חֲצִי בֶּשֶׂרוֹ* (Num 12:12).

⁵¹ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 46.

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is, the more it pollutes.⁵² Hayam Maccoby in *Ritual and Morality* (1999) contends with several aspects of Milgrom's impurity theory, among them the notion that because blood symbolizes life, its loss is equated with death and thus generates impurity.⁵³ Maccoby points out that only vaginal blood is a source of impurity, not blood loss in general (e.g., from a wound),⁵⁴ a point which Milgrom later concedes.⁵⁵ Regarding seminal emission representing a loss of life, Maccoby grants this as a possibility for involuntary ejaculation (i.e., nocturnal emission) but says that this can hardly be the case for sexual intercourse, where the emission produces new life. He states further that no single rationale, including death, is equipped to encompass all the different cases of impurity.⁵⁶

Others have argued further, contra Milgrom, Douglas, and others, that any attempt to systematize P's impurity legislation is an interpretive misstep. Tracy Lemos, for instance, casts doubt on whether P possesses a consistent purity system, due to the fact that rituals continually evolve, and given the likelihood that differing perspectives on impurity were held contemporaneously.⁵⁷ Lemos also points out that P does not provide reasons as to why specific phenomena or substances defile and suggests that P presumes that the reasons were obvious to the audience and simply went without saying.⁵⁸ William Gilders, on the use of blood in purification rites, argues that P does not offer an explanation because the writers themselves did not know it, having inherited a set of social conventions already in place in ancient Israel. For this reason, the text reflects a focus on praxis rather than any ideology or

⁵² See H. Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism*, pp. 186–187, 248 n. 19; *idem*, "Israel in the Mirror of Nature," p. 26. Milgrom rebuffs Eilberg-Schwartz's critiques as well as his theory; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, pp. 2456–2458.

⁵³ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 767.

⁵⁴ See H. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, pp. 30–31.

⁵⁵ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, p. 2463.

⁵⁶ See H. Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality*, pp. 31–32.

⁵⁷ See T. M. Lemos, "Where There Is Dirt, Is There System?," pp. 288–290.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 290.

systematic understanding.⁵⁹ If there is no system to P's impurity laws, then looking for one or more principles accounting for P's cases constitutes a methodological error.

2.5 A Place for Multiple Theories

Theories of disease, disgust, dirt, demons, and death each strain in the effort to apply them across all of P's cases. Even mixing and matching rationales across cases has the mark of artifice in light of the argument that P's cases constitute inherited traditions rather than being based on one or more principles. However, I would suggest that impurity traditions are multi-layered and that the various theories often occupy different strata.

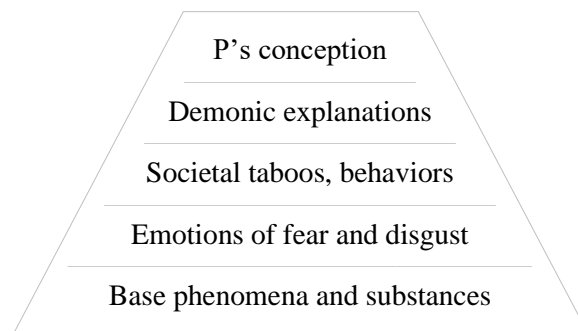


Figure 1. Strata in the experience of impurity

At the foundation are raw experiences—phenomena such as illness, menstruation, and death, and material substances such as blood, semen, and carcasses. Encounters with these phenomena and substances elicit emotions such as fear or disgust, reactions that may in part be instinctual but are also societally reinforced. These emotions give rise to behaviors—taboos, bans, rules of separation, and purification procedures. To make sense of this set of experiences, people develop explanatory overlays, and the nature of the explanation then feeds back into behavior, further shaping purification rites. The dominant explanation

⁵⁹ See W. K. Gilders, "Blood as Purificant," pp. 77–83.

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package in the ancient world for impurity—of which ancient Israel would certainly have been aware—is the presence of demonic and malevolent forces. Scholars such as Yehezkel Kaufmann argue that the biblical authors rejected demonology,⁶⁰ and Milgrom and others have suggested “death” as an alternative explanation underlying P’s concept of impurity.

Many of the above theories of impurity are therefore not in competition but rather complement one another to form a picture of impurity traditions, coexisting simultaneously in different strata. Interpretations of P’s understanding of impurity are not necessarily incompatible with the demonic theory (indeed, P may be responding to or adapting it), just as the demonic theory is not incompatible with theories of disgust and disease. Whatever explanations of impurity the priestly writers or their contemporaries possessed, this would not prevent them from also experiencing emotions such as fear or disgust.

In a similar vein, the study undertaken here is not an argument against anthropological theories about the origins of impurity traditions, nor against those who emphasize the prevalence of the demonic explanation in the ancient world. Indeed, my proposal is that the pervasive belief in demons, in a demythologized form, underlies P’s impurity cases, in what will be shown to be a modified version of the life-death hypothesis.

⁶⁰ See Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, pp. 63–67.

3. Replenishment from Deathly Forces

3.1 Impurity: A Deathly Force

Among ancient Israel's neighbors, impurity is associated with demonic incursion. For instance, one Babylonian incantation reads: "An evil spirit . . . hath overcome him... something impure for the body hath seized upon him..."⁶¹ Another states: "an evil demon, a god that roameth by night, whose unclean hands know no reverence..."⁶² Demons are inhabitants of the underworld, the domain of death,⁶³ with the power to inflict harm upon the world of the living.⁶⁴ The Mesopotamian demons *lilû* (incubus, male) and *lilîtu* (succubus, female) suck the life out of their victims by sexually assaulting them during sleep.⁶⁵ Demons are entities "Who take away the wife from the loins of man, who take away the child from the [. . .] of the nursemaid."⁶⁶ They are also deemed to be the cause of illness.⁶⁷ Ancient Egyptian texts liken disease to demonic possession, as exemplified in the greeting, "Welcome, O great god who expels disease-demons!"⁶⁸ They make a person weak, e.g., "(the demons) have compressed my chest, weakened my inside, bound my arms."⁶⁹

Being a widespread belief in the ancient Near East, demonic associations with impurity would certainly have been known in Israel. Indeed, as noted previously, P's cases

⁶¹ *Utukki Limnûti*, Tablet V; translation by R. C. Thompson, *Devils and Evil Spirits*, p. 79.

⁶² *Utukki Limnûti*, Tablet "B," obverse; *ibid.*, p. 131. Note, however, the view that in Assyro-Babylonian texts, demonic possession is a "symptom" of impurity rather than a cause; see e.g., I. Cranz, "Priests, Pollution and the Demonic," pp. 79–80.

⁶³ The underworld or realm of the dead is thought to be the birthplace of demons; see D. P. Wright, *Disposal of Impurity*, p. 250 n. 48.

⁶⁴ See H. Frey-Anthes, "Concepts of 'Demons' in Ancient Israel," pp. 38–43; J. K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, "Demons."

⁶⁵ See S. Bhayro and C. Rider, *Demons and Illness*, p. 164. Lilith is known in ancient Semitic folklore (and later in rabbinic literature) as a demonic presence that seduced and killed men and posed a danger to nursing mothers and infants; see B. D. Sommer, "Isaiah," p. 851.

⁶⁶ From "Inanna's Descent to the Nether World," *ANET3*, p. 57.

⁶⁷ See H. Frey-Anthes, "Concepts of Demons in Ancient Israel," pp. 41–42; J. K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, "Demons."

⁶⁸ From "The Legend of the Possessed Princess," *ANET3*, p. 30 (n 13).

⁶⁹ See *CADe*, p. 167, s.v. *enēšu*.

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have known parallels elsewhere in the ancient world involving demonic invasion.⁷⁰ How does P relate to this belief? Baruch Levine suggests that the concept is to some extent retained, with blood rites in the sanctuary designed to counteract demonic forces.”⁷¹ Milgrom claims that some purification rites in P retain their original exorcistic features, describing the two-bird rite for the *מְצַרֵּעַ* as a “a rite of exorcism... preserved in nearly pristine form.”⁷² However, he argues that these are essentially ritual artifacts, and that the priestly writers have rooted out the demonic from their religious ideology,⁷³ including stripping impurity of its potency and ability to do harm.⁷⁴ He cites Kaufmann, who points out that whereas the rules regarding the realm of the holy are often presented as a danger to life and limb, those pertaining to impurity “are nowhere represented as intrinsically dangerous.”⁷⁵ Kaufmann’s conclusion about impurity, after being stripped of the demonic layer, is its being “no more than a condition—one might almost say a religious-aesthetic state.”⁷⁶

According to Milgrom, impurity is viewed by P not merely as a condition but as symbolic of death and thus as an important component within P’s theology. Proponents of the life-death hypothesis of impurity typically presume that death (or leaked life) is the common denominator across P’s impurity cases. While human corpses certainly qualify, and animal carcasses (albeit only those unfit for consumption) might be understood to be impure on account of death, other cases such as *מְצַרֵּעַ*, genital discharges, and cultic impurity require more interpretive effort to link them to death. Indeed, childbirth and sexual relations, even if

⁷⁰ See Sec. 2.1.

⁷¹ See B. A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord*, pp. 77–80.

⁷² See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 275.

⁷³ Says Milgrom, “In the Bible, impurity has been thoroughly eviscerated of any mythological or demonic content” (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 316; see also pp. 42–44, 259).

⁷⁴ For Milgrom, impurity is potent with respect to the sancta but poses no harm to people; see *ibid.*, pp. 43, 316.

⁷⁵ Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, pp. 103–104. See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 259. However, impurity is what creates a danger in sacred spaces: *וְלֹא יָמָתוּ בְּטַמְאֹתָם בְּטַמְאֹתָם אֶת מִשְׁכַּנִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכָם* (Lev 15:31).

⁷⁶ Y. Kaufmann, , *The Religion of Israel*, p. 103.

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they involve a loss of life-fluids (blood and semen), are parade examples of “life” events, and interpretations characterizing them in terms of death suffer from considerable strain.

Linking impurity cases with death, I would argue, is close to but ultimately misses the mark. Rather than assert that death is a feature of P’s *cases*, I propose that the death component stems from impurity being sourced in the deathly, underworldly realm whence the demons hail. Yes, priestly ideology denies independent power of supernatural agents apart from YHWH, a point which Kaufmann makes repeatedly.⁷⁷ However, the rejection of demonic autonomy does not necessitate adopting the position that there is nothing whatsoever demonic or foreboding about impurity. In fact, a much more natural transformation from demon belief is to say that there are indeed dark forces at play in the world, only they are not independent agents, and their existence and ability to act is entirely dependent upon YHWH’s will.

This is a point Kaufmann maintains as well. Demons and angels, rather than being connected to antecedents in the old Israelite pantheon, are described as nameless destructive agents of YHWH, such as אַנְּגָל (e.g., Exod 30:12, Num 8:19), מְשֻׁחֵי (e.g., Exod 12:13), אֲשֵׁרַי and כְּטָב (Deut 32:24).⁷⁸ There are also forces Kaufmann refers to as “spirits of impurity,” such as אֲשֵׁרֵי (Deut 32:17), אֲשֵׁרֵי (Lev 17:7), אֲשֵׁרֵי (e.g., Lev 16:8), and לִילִית (Isa 34:14), which even when named hold no autonomous power separate from YHWH.⁷⁹

When this same principle is applied to impurity, it does not tell us that demons associated with pollution simply vanish into oblivion. Rather, they are no longer autonomous; they lose their mythological character. What is left, therefore, is impurity as a nameless, underworldly, deathly force that surrounds the same cases of impurity, and over which YHWH maintains exclusive control. Priestly impurity lacks the ravaging, destructive force of a אַנְּגָל or

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 60–121, passim. See also, R. E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible*, pp. 191–192; *idem*, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 12.

⁷⁸ The term אֲשֵׁרַי, says Kaufmann, is indeed the name of a Canaanite and Syrian god but is “a verbal reminiscence only, without mythological overtones” See Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, pp. 63–65.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

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מִשְׁחִית; it is a deathly force rather than deadly one. At the same time, however, it does leave in its wake a sense of degraded or eroded life, loss of vital force. Physical symptoms of illness or weakness are associated with cases such as צָרַעַת, childbirth, menstruation, seminal emission, and pathological discharge. These reinforce the belief that underworldly, life-sapping forces have invaded the impure person.

P's impurity thus retains its potency as a dark and deathly force, and this is what links impurity to death—not P's cases. The deathly presence, as perhaps expected, surrounds instances of human death (leading to the misconception that impurity cases somehow all pertain to death/erosion of life), but it also attaches to situations that have little or nothing to do with death, such as childbirth, menstruation, and sexual intercourse. The common denominator among P's cases, then, is the fact that they are phenomena that have been designated as impure—and associated with deathly, underworldly forces—from Israel's antiquity. Thus, we can say two things at once about P's cases: (1) they are inherited by tradition, not the product of one or more principles, and (2) they possess a deathly character due to impurity being linked to the forces of the underworld.

How then do we understand items P deems not susceptible to impurity: springs or cisterns (Lev 11:36), or food that does not come into contact with water (v. 34), including dry seeds meant to be sown (vv. 37–38)? Some explain these rules based on practical, life-and-death considerations. Drinking water is such a basic and vital (and often scarce) commodity that it could not be allowed to become impure,⁸⁰ which could of course be said for food and seed stores. In other words, deathly forces have no effect in these instances because believing otherwise would place people's lives at considerable risk.⁸¹

⁸⁰ See, E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, "Defilement (vv. 24-47)"; G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, "Swarming Creatures and the Pollution They Cause (29–38)."

⁸¹ Rabbinic tradition details countless rules regarding the transmissibility of impurity, including what items and materials are susceptible and which are not, but such a survey is well beyond the scope of this study.

3.2 Purification: Rites of Riddance and Replenishment

In the ancient world, where impurity is understood as a demonic incursion, purification entails exorcism, as exemplified by a Babylonian incantation: “Nin-Anna, the mighty Scribe of the Underworld, reciteth a purifying incantation before me. By Ningirsu, master of the sword, mayest thou be exorcised! Evil Spirit, evil Demon, evil Ghost... unto my body may they not draw nigh...”⁸² In addition to the claim made by Milgrom and others that purification procedures such as the two-bird rite have exorcistic origins, P’s language also implies that impurity, albeit without reference to demons, is something to be excised. Phrasing such as *וְטִמְאַתּוֹ עָלָיו*, “his impurity is upon him” (Lev 7:20), and *עוֹד טִמְאַתּוֹ בּוֹ*, “his impurity is yet on him” (Num 19:13), indicate that impurity is conceived by P as a presence “upon” a person. Resolving impurity involves purging it “from” a person or object, as in *וְכִפֶּרְתָּ* *עַל הַמִּטְהָר מִטִּמְאַתּוֹ*, “and he will clear the purification candidate of (from) his impurity” (Lev 14:19), and *וְקִדְשׁוּ מִטִּמְאַתּוֹ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “and sanctify it from the impurities of the children of Israel” (16:19).⁸³

Because impure forces are seen as agents of disease and death, purity becomes associated with life. This includes cult sites, as a Babylonian text describes: “That man at a lucky shrine... a pure dwelling, the abode of life...”⁸⁴ The dwelling of the immortal gods must be pure, deathly forces kept away. Thus, on one side are gods, purity, and life, and on the other are demons, impurity, and death. Human beings possess life but are mortal and susceptible to demons, whose presence can hasten death. Therefore, people must strive to be pure in order to maximize life. As we will see ahead, the language, ingredients, themes, and procedures of P’s purification program carry a leitmotif of “life.”

⁸² *Utukki Limnûti*, Tablet III; R. C. Thompson, *Devils and Evil Spirits*, p. 11.

⁸³ The prefix *מ* (= *מן*) is privative; see R. Gane, *Cult and Character*, p. 116.

⁸⁴ *Utukki Limnûti*, Tablet “F”; R. C. Thompson, *Devils and Evil Spirits*, p. 173.

To purify a person is both to expel the impure force and to counter its deathly effects, replenishing and making the individual whole once again. Such an interpretation of purification resonates with Douglas, who characterizes purification as restoration of wholeness,⁸⁵ as well as Milgrom, who acknowledges the life-symbolism of purification rites.⁸⁶ However, P's impurity, I would contend, is not merely "symbolic" of death but is understood to be a tangible, dark force. Against this backdrop, purification according to P is not just a symbolic measure but has concrete effects,⁸⁷ life serving to banish death and replenish from its effects.

3.2.1 Classes of Purification

P's purification procedures can be grouped into several classes:

Life-infusing rites — These include the use of מַיִם חַיִּים (lit. "living water"), blood (the life-force), and other ingredients of vital potency. Such rites are reserved for the most severe forms of impurity, i.e., those with "residual" impurity lasting for a week after contact with the source of impurity. Apart from the בַּיִת who washes using מַיִם חַיִּים, all such rites are administered by the priests. The function of these rites, as we will discuss, is both purgative and regenerative (see Chs. 8, 10).

Refreshing and cleansing rites — These include washing with water, laundering clothes, and shaving the body or head. While washing and laundering are typically characterized as purgative rites, as we will see, they also act to refresh and renew, and as such are geared toward readmission to public and family life (see Chs. 5–6). Whole-body shaving is limited to cases of skin צָרַעַת and Levite purification. These, I would argue, are purgative

⁸⁵ See M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 46–57, 124; *idem*, "Atonement in Leviticus," pp. 120–123.

⁸⁶ Milgrom states regarding מַיִם חַיִּים, "Since impurity is symbolic of death, its antidote, appropriately, is that which gives life" (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 924; see also *ibid.*, p. 832, regarding מְצִרְעַת purification).

⁸⁷ See R. Gane, *Cult and Character*, pp. 7–8.

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measures, designed to remove a locus of impurity. Shaving the head is done in the case of a nazirite who inadvertently becomes impure, the purpose being disposal of a desecrated sanctum, and possibly removal of the impurity (see Ch. 7).

Auspicious time intervals — These include evening, the third day, seven/fourteen days, the eighth day, and forty/eighty days. As we will discuss, these are typological numbers used in the Bible and ancient Near East to express ideas of completion, fullness, and regeneration (see Ch. 4).

Sacrifices — Sacrificial offerings are prescribed as the final rite of purification for several cases: childbirth, skin *צָרַעַת*, abnormal genital flux, and the impure nazirite. We will see, however, that sacrifice differs from other classes of purification, being intended not to replenish people or purge their impurity but to clear them of liability with respect to YHWH, a function indicated by the verb *כָּפַר* (see Ch. 9).

Table 3. Purification rites by class

Purification Class	Rite/Procedure	Impurity Case	Verses
Life-infusing rites	Washing with מֵי חַיִּים	Abnormal genital discharge (m)	Lev 15:13
	Sprinkling with מֵי חַיִּים/ blood-based formulas	Skin/house <i>צָרַעַת</i>	Lev 14:7, 51
		Corpse contamination	Num 19:18–19
		Levite purification	Num 8:7
	Daubing with blood and oil	Skin <i>צָרַעַת</i>	Lev 14:14, 17, 25, 28
Sprinkling with blood	Sancta	e.g., Lev 4, 16	
Refreshing and cleansing rites	Washing	Skin <i>צָרַעַת</i>	14:8–9
		Corpse contamination	Num 19:19
		Most one-day impurities	e.g., Lev 15, 16; Num 19
	Laundering	Skin <i>צָרַעַת</i>	Lev 14:8–9
		Corpse contamination	Num 19:19

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Purification Class	Rite/Procedure	Impurity Case	Verses
Refreshing and cleansing rites (cont.)	Laundering (cont.)	Abnormal genital discharge (m)	Num 15:13
		Levite purification	Num 8:7
		Most one-day impurities	e.g., Lev 11, 15, 16; Num 19
	Shaving/haircutting	Skin צרעת	Lev 14:8–9
		Levite purification	Num 8:7
		Contaminated nazirite	Num 6:9
Auspicious time intervals	Evening	One-day impurities	e.g., Lev 11, 15; Num 19
		Corpse contamination (after 7 days)	Num 19:19
	3 days	Corpse contamination	Num 19:12, 19
	7 days (x2)	Skin צרעת	Lev 14:8
		Corpse contamination	Num 19:11, 14, 16
		Abnormal genital discharge (m/f)	Lev 15:13, 28
	7 days (x2)	Menstruation	Lev 15:19
		Childbirth: initial period	Lev 12:2, 5
	8th day	Skin צרעת	Lev 14:10, 14, 23, 29
		Abnormal genital discharge (m)	Lev 15:14, 29
	40 days (x2)	Childbirth: total	Lev 12:4–5 (implied)
	Sacrifices	עֹלָה and חֲטָאתָּ offering	Skin צרעת
Childbirth			Lev 12:6, 8
Abnormal genital discharge (m/f)			Lev 15:15, 30
Contaminated nazirite			Num 6:11
זֶבַח offering		Skin צרעת	Lev 14:12–14
		Contaminated nazirite	Num 6:12

3.2.2 Sequence of Purification

In addition to the elements of purification, there is significance to the order in which they are performed.

Table 4. Sequence of purification rites by case

	Heal/Cease	Wait (# days)	Sprinkle	Shave	Launder	Wash	Sacrifice/Daub	Evening
Animal carcass					1	2		3
Corpse contamination		1	2		3	4		5 ⁸⁸
Red cow					1	2		3
Childbirth		1					2	
Discharge (male)	1	2			3	4	5	
Discharge (female)	1	2					3	
Seminal emission						1		2
Menstruation		1						
Skin צרעת	1	3	2	4 ⁸⁹	5	6	7	

Several observations: (1) Even though different elements are prescribed across cases, they nearly always occur in the same sequence. (2) Healing or cessation of flow always precedes any active purification rites. I would argue that healing is a part of the purification procedure, albeit owing to a natural process rather than a rite.⁹⁰ (3) When sacrifices are prescribed, they are the final rite in the purification process. (4) When waiting until evening

⁸⁸ The requirement to launder, wash, and wait until evening after corpse contamination may stem from contact with the *תמי נדה*/red cow mixture rather than from corpse contamination (see Sec. 8.6.2).

⁸⁹ Shaving, laundering, and bathing are prescribed twice for the *תמי צרעת*. Before waiting seven days, the sequence is launder, shave, and wash (Lev 14:8); after the seven days: shave, launder, and wash (14:9).

⁹⁰ See Sec. 4.7.1. This is contra Milgrom, who argues that the person “undergoes purification only after he is cured” (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 43).

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is prescribed, this is the final stage of purification. (5) For cases of residual impurity (corpse contamination, abnormal genital discharge, and skin צרעת), laundering and washing take place at the end of the waiting period, not at the beginning.⁹¹ This indicates that their purpose is not to wash off impure substances (which would be done at the outset of the waiting period) but rather (a) to purge an intangible impure force, and (b) to help restore, replenish, and renew, as the person is reintroduced into society and everyday life.

In sum

P's conception of impurity as a deathly force is rooted in ancient beliefs about impurity as a demonic, underworldly presence. Purification in P consistently expresses the leitmotif of life. The goal in purification is both the expulsion of the deathly force of impurity as well as replenishment and revitalization of the purification candidate. The two acts are simultaneous: As life is reintroduced, so are the forces of death banished. Textual data in support of this hypothesis can be found in the language and components of P's purification procedures, which will be the primary focus of this study. We will begin our analysis with auspicious time intervals, continue to the purgative/refreshing rites of washing, laundering, and shaving, and then examine the use of special life-infusing formulas and substances.

⁹¹ In the case of skin צרעת, where laundering and washing (plus shaving) are carried out twice, before and after the seven-day waiting period, I would argue that each set marks the end of a stage of purification. The first set concludes the period of banishment from the camp and serves as a rite of reentry, while the second set concludes the period outside the tent and signals full readmission.

4. Passage of Time

One element common to nearly every case of purification in P is a prescribed waiting period.⁹² In some cases, there is an empirical or physiological component to allowing time to pass, as in waiting for the healing of צָרַעַת or for the cessation of an abnormal genital discharge, or seven days covering the maximum duration of normal menstrual bleeding.⁹³ In most cases, however, the duration is a typological number, a symbolic time marker that reflects the severity of the impurity. There is also a distinction between time used to attain purification versus time used as a conditional inspection period to determine whether impurity exists, the latter of which applies only in cases of צָרַעַת (e.g., Lev 13:4, 5, 50, 54).

That “time heals” is a part of lived experience. Alongside this natural healing and rehabilitation process is the belief that specific intervals of time have auspicious potency. Each time marker has its own character and associations.

4.1 Until Evening (One Day)

Impurity until evening (indicated primarily by וְיָמָא עַד הָעֶרֶב but also by other phrases, e.g., וּבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְטָהַר) is mentioned dozens of times in priestly texts and once in Deuteronomy (23:12). The onset of evening as a time of purification is explicit in the following cases:

- *Animal carcasses* — One who touches, carries, or eats a non-permitted carcass (Lev 11:24–31, 39–40; 17:15; 22:5–6).
- *House צָרַעַת* — One who enters a quarantined house (Lev 14:46).

⁹² One exception is sanctuary impurity, whose purification does not call for waiting periods. The reason is that sanctuary impurity is cumulative rather than relating to a specific instance of contagion (see Sec. 1.3).

⁹³ Modern estimates put the typical duration of menstrual bleeding between two and eight days, with the average being four to six days; see B. G. Reed and B. R. Carr, “The Normal Menstrual Cycle.” Seven days thus covers the duration of bleeding for most women.

- *Abnormal genital discharges* — One who touches the bedding of a *הַבֵּזֶזֶת*, who sits on, touches, or carries something they sat on (Lev 15:5–6, 9–10, 26–27), who touches or is spat on by a *בֶּזֶזֶת* (vv. 7–8), or who is touched by a *בֶּזֶזֶת* who has not washed his hands (v. 11).
- *Seminal emission* — A man who has a nocturnal emission (Lev 15:16; cf. Deut 23:11–12), cloth or leather onto which semen has fallen (Lev 15:17), or a man and woman who have sexual intercourse (v. 18).
- *Menstruation* — One who touches a woman during menstruation, or who touches her bedding or something she sat on (Lev 15:19–23).
- *Red cow/corpse contamination* — One who prepares the red cow ashes (Num 19:7–9), who sprinkles or touches the *מֵי נֶזֶק* (v. 21), who touches or is touched by a corpse-contaminated person (v. 22), and a corpse-contaminated person on the seventh day of purification (v. 19).

A one-day impurity does not mean completing a twenty-four-hour day. Impurity ends at the onset of evening, whether the person was impure the entire day or only shortly before evening. The “until evening” time frame typically indicates the mildest form of impurity a person can contract.⁹⁴ One exception may be corpse contamination, where the seven days of purification conclude in the evening (Num 19:19). However, this requirement may owe to a separate impurity—having been sprinkled with the *מֵי נֶזֶק* (see Sec. 8.6.2).

4.1.1 Evening as a Delineation Between Days

Why does impurity cease in the evening, as opposed to the next morning? One possibility is that evening is thought to mark the beginning of a new day. Rabbinic Judaism

⁹⁴ See, however, Ch. 1, note 6, regarding the severity of seminal emission versus menstruation.

holds such a view, and some scholars trace this conception back to ancient Israel.⁹⁵ Two festivals are in fact said in priestly literature to begin at sunset: Passover (בֵּינֵי הָעֶרְבָּיִם, Lev 23:5) and the Day of Atonement (בְּעֶרְבֵי מַעֲרֹב עַד עֶרְבֹה, Lev 23:32). Others, however, understand the biblical day as beginning in the morning. Possible indications in priestly writings include the morning עֹלֶה offering mentioned before the evening offering (Lev 6:13; Num 28:4) and the stipulation that sacrificial meat not be left until morning (Exod 12:10, 16:19–20, 29:34; Lev 7:15, 22:30).⁹⁶ References to festivals beginning at night might then be deemed exceptions to the rule⁹⁷ or later additions to the text.⁹⁸ Marking the end of one day and the start of a new one would be one rationale for designating evening as an auspicious time for purification.

Another conception of the biblical day is that overnight hours constitute a period of down-time intervening between one day and the next.⁹⁹ Thus, a day ends in the evening, but the new one begins only the next morning. William Propp suggests that perhaps two demarcations of a day are used simultaneously: Just as there are two new years—a solar new year in the spring and a lunar new year in the autumn, Israel maintains both a solar, dawn-to-dawn day (like Egypt) as well as a lunar, dusk-to-dusk day (like Mesopotamia).¹⁰⁰ According to these views, we are left with the question as to why evening, not morning, is chosen as the purification interval.

⁹⁵ See e.g., J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, “The Concept of Clean and Unclean” (11:1-15:33); J. A. McGuire, “Evening or Morning: When Does the Biblical Day Begin?” pp. 201–214.

⁹⁶ For an alternative interpretation, see J. Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*, pp. 500–508.

⁹⁷ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, p. 1967.

⁹⁸ See e.g., J. Morgenstern, “Calendars of Ancient Israel,” p. 16.

⁹⁹ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 844. Propp understands similarly, see W. H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, pp. 391–392.

¹⁰⁰ See *ibid.*

4.1.2 Primordial and Regenerative Darkness

A different approach is to look at biblical conceptions of nightfall. The dark of night is described as covering and concealing, as in: אַךְ חֹשֶׁךְ יִשְׁוֹפְנֵי וְלַיְלָה אֹר בְּעֶדְנִי, “Surely darkness will conceal me, night will provide me with cover” (Ps 139:11). Covering as a metaphor for forgiving/nullifying sin is also attested in Psalms (Ps 32:1, 5; 85:3). Evening could thus work to cover over and effectively nullify impurity.¹⁰¹ Additionally for P, darkness coupled with water makes up the womb-like, primordial state of the world, prefiguring creation.¹⁰² The onset of evening represents the beginning stage of re-creation, the gestation period leading to rebirth the following day. This picture is reflected in other ancient cultures: Enuma Elish describes the primeval darkness and watery chaos that fill the universe prior to creation.¹⁰³ Indian cosmology in the Rigveda likewise says, “At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness” and everything “was only unilluminated water.”¹⁰⁴ The Egyptian god Atum, who represents completion and is born of darkness and the watery abyss,¹⁰⁵ is thought to represent evening.¹⁰⁶

So, in addition to representing the end of the active day or the beginning of a new day, evening may serve as a time of purification both because it “covers” (and therefore neutralizes) impurity and because it is conceived as a connection to the primordial state of creation, signifying the beginning of regeneration and rebirth—a life motif.

¹⁰¹ The verb כָּפַר can also connote “cover”; see Sec. 9.3.1.

¹⁰² See R. A. Oden, Jr., “Cosmogony, Cosmology”; see also J. D. Levinson, “Genesis,” p. 13.

¹⁰³ See S. Bertman, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 312.

¹⁰⁴ See R. A. Oden, Jr., “Cosmogony, Cosmology.”

¹⁰⁵ See G. Pinch, *Egyptian Mythology*, pp. 63–64.

¹⁰⁶ E.g., “I am Khepri in the morning, Re at noon, and Atum who is in the evening” (*ANET 3*, p. 13). Kaufmann points out that the primordial realm “is conceived of variously—as darkness, water, spirit, earth, sky, and so forth” and suggests that in pagan religion, this realm preexists and gives birth to the gods; see Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, pp. 21–22.

4.2 Third Day

The next longest interval of time for purification is three days. There is one example in P of purification performed on the third day:

- *Corpse contamination* — A corpse-contaminated person is sprinkled with מִי נְדָה on the third day, and once again on the seventh day (Num 19:12, 19; 31:19).

Sprinkling מִי נְדָה on the final day of purification makes intuitive sense, but if there needs to be an initial sprinkling beforehand (the reason for sprinkling twice being a question in itself¹⁰⁷), why does P choose the third day?

4.2.1 Three Days as a Preexisting Purification Period

There is an additional example of a “third day” in a non-P text being significant for purification purposes. Leading up to the Sinai theophany, the people are told to purify themselves for two days to prepare for the third day: וְהָיוּ נְכִימִים לַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, “Let them be ready for the third day” (Exod 19:11). Moses further instructs the people: הָיוּ נְכִימִים לְשִׁלְשֶׁת יָמִים, “Be ready for the third day: do not go near a woman” (v. 15).¹⁰⁸ Propp explains that this may reflect an older, three-day purification period for males.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the Qumran sectarians write of a three-day purification period following seminal emission prior to entering the Temple City, with laundering and bathing done on the first and third

¹⁰⁷ We will not explore the question here, but one suggestion is that a two-stage process recapitulates cosmic destruction and renewal, where the third and seventh days track P’s creation narrative. See J. R. Humann, *Ceremony of the Red Heifer*, pp. 243–245.

¹⁰⁸ NJPS translates both וְהָיוּ נְכִימִים לַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי and הָיוּ נְכִימִים לְשִׁלְשֶׁת יָמִים as “the third day,” but the latter more literally means “three days.” These verses are attributed to J; see R. E. Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 152; W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, p. 143.

¹⁰⁹ See W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, p. 162.

days.¹¹⁰ Sprinkling on the third day in P might then be based on a preexisting, standalone tradition of a three-day purification period.

4.2.2 A Unit of Time Less Than a Week

A three-day span may serve as a standard biblical unit to signify a duration that is more than a day but less than a week.¹¹¹ Apart from purification, a three-day period is attested numerous times in the Pentateuch, used to convey the duration of a sizable journey,¹¹² a fair number of days to put between two parties,¹¹³ and a significant amount of time passing.¹¹⁴ Other durations between one and seven days lack a similar biblical precedent. Two days is used only infrequently¹¹⁵ and is not a duration used for any cultic purposes. A fourth or fifth day occur only within a larger sequence of numbers, as in the days of creation (Gen 1) or the offerings of the tribal chieftains (Num 7, 29). Six days occurs only as the leadup to a seventh day (mainly prior to the Sabbath). Three days is thus the biblical go-to number to convey a significant number of days that is less than a week, and close to the halfway point. It is also the minimum number indicating plurality, as opposed to duality, according to Biblical Hebrew grammar.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁰ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 929.

¹¹¹ See W. H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 206.

¹¹² E.g., Abraham's three-day trek to Mount Moriah (Gen 2:25), Moses' proposed three-day pilgrimage in the desert (Exod 3:18, 5:3, 8:23), and the journey in the wilderness of Etham (Num 33:8).

¹¹³ E.g., Jacob's escape from Laban (Gen 30:26) and the ark scouting out a resting place (Num 10:33).

¹¹⁴ E.g., the number of days Joseph keeps his brothers locked up (Gen 42:17), the duration of the plague of darkness (Exod 10:22), and the time when a חֲבֵט שְׁלֵמִים is considered spoiled and must be burned (Lev 7:17, 19:6).

¹¹⁵ The term שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים is used only regarding Purim (Esth 9:27); יוֹמִים is used regarding the manna (Exod 16:29), injury to a slave (Exod 21:21), and eating quail (Num 11:19).

¹¹⁶ The dual and plural forms have their own endings, such that יוֹמִים means "two days" and יָמִים means "days," i.e., three or more (Raanan Eichler, personal communication).

4.2.3 Magical Completion

The number three also holds typological significance, with sets of three having a magical value representing completion.¹¹⁷ Examples include the triple invocation of קדוש קדוש קדוש (Isa 6:3), the thrice-yearly pilgrimage, שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה (Exod 23:17, 34:23–24, Deut 16:16), the three times (שְׁלֹשׁ פְּעָמִים) Balaam blesses Israel instead of cursing it (Num 24:10),¹¹⁸ and the patriarchal trio of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (including mentions in priestly texts: Exod 2:24; 6:3, 8; Lev 26:42). Three as a number with magical properties may also feature in P's cultic rites, such as the three ingredients cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop used in purification,¹¹⁹ as well as the three-fold priestly blessing (Num 6:24–26).¹²⁰

Day three of the seven-day period is thus likely chosen for several reasons: it has precedents in ancient purification rites, is a frequently used biblical duration, a plurality positioned roughly halfway between the first and seventh days, and is an auspicious number conveying wholeness and completion, a fitting pitstop on the way to full purification.

4.3 Seven Days / Seventh Day

The next significant time interval for purification is seven days, and similarly the seventh day of a seven-day period. A seven-day duration is indicated in the following cases:

- *Childbirth* — A woman has the status of נדה following the birth of a boy (Lev 12:2).
- *Skin צרעת* — A מצרע, after the outbreak heals, remains outside the tent (Lev 14:8), and a suspected מצרע is quarantined (Lev 13:4–5, 21, 26).

¹¹⁷ See W. Smith, *Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 743.

¹¹⁸ Also, the three times (שְׁלֹשׁ רְגָלִים) Balaam strikes his donkey before YHWH opens the donkey's eyes.

¹¹⁹ See Secs. 8.1–3.

¹²⁰ See M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 289.

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- *Abnormal genital discharges* — A בִּזְבֻזָּה, after the discharge has ceased (Lev 15:13, 28).
- *Menstruation* — A menstruating woman (Lev 15:19), or a man who has sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman (v. 24).
- *Corpse contamination* — One who touches a human corpse (Num 19:11, 31:19), all those in the tent where a person has died (19:14), or one who touches a human bone or grave (v. 16).

These are all examples of seven days as the duration of impurity or quarantine. There are also rites performed on the seventh day itself:

- *Skin טַרְעָה* — A מְצַרֵּחַ shaves, launders, and bathes (Lev 14:9), and the priest conducts an inspection during the initial quarantine (Lev 13:5, 6, 27, 32).
- *House טַרְעָה* — The priest inspects the quarantined house (Lev 14:39).
- *Nazirite* — An impure nazirite shaves his/her head (Num 6:9).
- *Corpse contamination* — A corpse-contaminated person is sprinkled with מֵי נְדָה, launders, and bathes (Num 19:12, 19; 31:19, 31:24).

4.3.1 Prevalence of the Number Seven

P texts are replete with the number seven, including the number of days the priests must stay in the Tent of Meeting during consecration (Lev 8:33, 35), the sanctuary lampstand with seven lamps (Exod 37:23; Num 8:2), and sprinkling of various substances done in sets of seven:

- Blood, toward the פְּרֻכָּת (Lev 4:6, 17);
- Blood, toward the כַּפְּרֵת (Lev 16:14);

- Blood, on the altar (Lev 16:19);
- Blood, toward the Tent of Meeting (Num 19:4);
- Anointing oil, on the altar (Lev 8:11);
- Oil, “before YHWH” (Lev 14:16);
- The water-blood mixture, on the *קִצְרֵעַ* (Lev 14:7).

Additionally, Num 28–29 prescribes the sacrifice of seven lambs on the first of each month, the first day of the Unleavened Bread festival, the first-of-the-seventh-month festival (*יום תְּרוּעָה*), and the Day of Atonement. The Pentateuch opens with P describing seven days of creation (Gen 1:1–2:2), which by extension includes the concept of the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week. The pattern pervades H texts as well. There are two seven-day festivals, Unleavened Bread and Ingathering (Lev 23:6, 34), seven weeks of counting toward the Feast of Weeks (23:15, cf. Deut 16:9), seven sets of seven years before the Jubilee (Lev 25:8), and multiple festivals held in the seventh month (23:23, 27, 34).

Also in H, a calf/ewe must be with its mother for seven days (Lev 22:27, cf. Exod 22:29), and if Israel does not listen to YHWH, it will be punished sevenfold for its sins (Lev 26:18, 21). Literary techniques also highlight the number seven in priestly writings, e.g., with Numbers 19 containing seven subjects mentioned seven times,¹²¹ and H using seven instances of a word in a pericope.¹²²

4.3.2 Abundance, Fruitfulness, and Perfection

One typological characteristic of the number seven in the Bible is abundance and fruitfulness. Several instances of seven children, daughters, and wives in the Bible and

¹²¹ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 1039.

¹²² See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, pp. 1323–1324.

apocrypha,¹²³ as well as in Canaanite/Ugaritic literature, point to the number being associated with matrimony and procreation.¹²⁴ Examples are also found in the ancient Near East of the number seven symbolizing innumerability or totality, such as the seven-story ziggurat of Uruk and the Babylonian-Assyrian “seven gods”¹²⁵ representing all known and unknown gods.¹²⁶ Erhard Gerstenberger describes the number seven in priestly texts as a sacred number indicating perfection or completion.¹²⁷ Cycles of seven days, weeks, years, and sets of years comprise a principle of sacred order in P, including the creation narrative.¹²⁸ Milton Terry suggests that, being the sum of four and three—four being the spatial directions representing the world, and three representing the divine aspect of wholeness and completion—the number seven may also symbolize a union between creation and divine creator.¹²⁹

4.3.3 Magical and Foreboding Number Seven

Sprinkling in sets of seven, prescribed by P, may be thought to have magical potency, with sevenfold action cited elsewhere in the Bible for its efficacy. This includes Naaman bathing seven times in the Jordan (2 Kgs 5:10, 14), Elijah ordering his servant to scan the skies seven times for signs of rain (1 Kgs 18:43), and Joshua’s army—together with seven priests carrying seven ram’s horns—encircling Jericho for seven days, and seven times on the seventh day (Josh 6).

The biblical number seven also conveys a sense of foreboding. The sevenfold curses of Lev 26:18 indicate a magical capacity for threat.¹³⁰ A sevenfold punishment awaits anyone who kills Cain (Gen 4:15), with the punishment for killing Lamech being seventy-

¹²³ See 1 Sam 2:5; Jer 15:9; Job 1:2, 42:13; Ruth 4:15; 2 Macc 7.

¹²⁴ See W. H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 121.

¹²⁵ An assembly of seven gods reside in the underworld and “decree the fates”; see S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians*, pp. 115–131.

¹²⁶ See J. Freiberg, “Numbers and Counting.”

¹²⁷ See E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, “Concluding Regulations” (22:26–33).

¹²⁸ See *ibid.*, “The Institution of the Year of Release” (25:8–12).

¹²⁹ See M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 290.

¹³⁰ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 2308.

sevenfold (Gen 4:24). Pharaoh’s dream oracle is interpreted as seven years of abundance followed by seven years of famine (Gen 41:53). The magical significance of the number seven may also be linked linguistically to נִשְׁבַּע, an oath, whereby the word נִשְׁבַּע, “swear an oath,” connotes “be-seven oneself.”¹³¹

4.3.4 Regeneration and Filling

For P, seven days represent a full creative cycle, wherein the world becomes increasingly filled with life on each day. The seven days of priestly consecration can also be understood as a gradual increase in sanctity over the course of the week. According to Propp:

Not only space but also time can possess graduated Holiness. Throughout the week of Filling, the sanctity levels of both priesthood and Altar rise. Each day, the sacrifices, offered by the nonpriest Moses upon an unconsecrated Altar... are more efficacious. Finally on the eighth day, Aaron is sufficiently holy to take over, and the Altar is sufficiently holy to attract and sustain Yahweh’s fire.¹³²

Note that Propp translates the word מִלֵּאִים as “filling” but understands this term (as well as the phrase וּמִלֵּאתָ אֶת יָדָם, Exod 28:41) idiomatically, “connoting a divine commissioning, a transfer of authority from a god to a sacred human.”¹³³ Milgrom points to a parallel idiom in Akkadian, referring to a scepter of authority being placed into Adad-Nirari’s hands.¹³⁴

I would argue, however, that even as an idiom, the term מִלֵּאִים does not lose its basic meaning of “filling.” P uses the verb מִלֵּא in other contexts speaking of investiture of YHWH’s presence, such as endowing people with divine wisdom or spirit, וְאַתָּה תִּדְבֹר אֵל כָּל חֲכָמֵי לֵב, וְאַתָּה תִּדְבֹר אֵל כָּל חֲכָמֵי לֵב (Exod 28:3; see also 31:3; 35:31, 35), and the glory of YHWH filling the Tabernacle, וַיִּכְבֹּד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן (Exod 40:34, 35), and filling is certainly implied in

¹³¹ E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, “Faulty Existence” (26:14-33). This may be connected to the “seven demons” of oaths from Babylonian-Assyrian magical rites; see W. C. Wood, “The Religion of Canaan,” pp. 51–52, 119.

¹³² W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, p. 532.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

¹³⁴ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 539.

these cases. The term מלא used in priestly consecration can thus connote divine commission of the priests as well as their being filled with sanctity over the course of seven days. Seven days of graduated filling in the case of sanctity can also apply to week-long purification. During the seven-day period, the purification candidate becomes increasingly replenished, made whole once again following exposure to the deathly force of impurity.

The number seven used in purification is thus a magical, sacred number conveying abundance, fecundity, wholeness, power, regeneration, and fullness—all signs of life.

4.4 Eighth Day

In three cases, P prescribes eighth-day rites following a seven-day purification period:

- *Skin צרעת* — A מצרע offers two lambs (or one lamb and two birds), as well as flour mixed with oil (Lev 14:10, 23), and is daubed with blood and oil (Lev 14:10–18, 25–29).
- *Abnormal genital discharges* — A בִּזְבָּח/בִּזְבָּח offers two birds (Lev 15:14, 29).
- *Nazirite* — An impure nazirite offers two birds and one lamb (Num 6:10–12).

Apart from purification cases, seven days followed by an eighth day is significant elsewhere in P and H: The seven-day consecration of the priests and tabernacle is capped by eighth-day inaugural proceedings (Lev 9:1; cf. Ezek 43:27). The seven days of the Ingathering feast are followed by an eighth day of assembly (Lev 23:36, 39; Num 29:35). Male circumcision takes place on the eighth day following the first week of life (Lev 12:3; Gen 17:12, 21:4). An ox, sheep, or goat becomes acceptable for sacrifice from the eighth day and onwards, following seven days with its mother (Lev 22:27; see also in E, Exod 22:29).

4.4.1 Eighth Day as a Rite of Dedication and Fulfillment

The significance of the priestly number eight, according to Milgrom, owes to its connection to the number seven, conceived as $7 + 1$, with the number fifty, $7 \times 7 + 1$, serving as an “enhanced number eight.”¹³⁵ He explains that although it is linked to seven, the number eight retains a different character, with seven referring to investiture and מְלֵאִים (rites of preparation and filling) and eight relating to initiation and dedication (rites of first use).¹³⁶ Annemarie Schimmel describes the eighth day as constituting “a second beginning, on a higher level, the fulfillment of what the heptad had prepared and completed.”¹³⁷ For all seven-day purification cycles in P, the eighth day marks a new beginning—even if it is implicit, lacking any specific rites. The cases of skin צָרַעַת, pathological discharge, and impure nazirite, however, prescribe eighth-day sacrificial rites. As will be discussed ahead, these cases (plus childbirth) are distinct in that they involve a debt of gratitude to YHWH. Sacrifice functions to cover that debt and other forms of personal liability (see Ch. 9).

4.5 Two Weeks

There is one instance in P of two weeks as an a priori duration for purification:¹³⁸

- *Childbirth* — A woman has the status of נָדָה following the birth of a girl (Lev 12:5).

The two weeks in this case have the sense of double-seven, twice the duration of initial נָדָה impurity prescribed following the birth of a boy (Lev 12:2). This is also seen in the double period of “purification blood” (דְּמֵי טְהָרָה) days following for a girl—sixty-six days, as

¹³⁵ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, p. 1999. Thus, the 7×7 days of counting, plus a fiftieth day of grain offerings (Lev 23:15–16), may be thought of as an “enhanced” (or expanded) version of the seven days of the Ingathering feast plus an eighth day of assembly.

¹³⁶ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 571.

¹³⁷ A. Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers*, p. 158.

¹³⁸ There are other examples of a two-week duration in the case of צָרַעַת, but it is prescribed only conditionally, as an additional seven days of quarantine (שְׁבַע יָמִים שְׁנִיָּה, Lev 13:5, 33, 54).

opposed to thirty-three for a boy (vv. 4–5). Lev 12:5 contains the only instance of the word שְׁבַעִים, “two weeks,” in the Bible—elsewhere, the duration is expressed as 7 x 2 days or fourteen days. Of the twenty-one instances of “fourteen” in the Pentateuch, all but two are in priestly texts, including the fourteen lambs sacrificed on each day of the Ingathering feast (Num 29), and the Passover sacrifice carried out on the fourteenth day of the month (Exod 12:6, 18; Lev 23:5; Num 9:3, 5, 11; 28:16). The two festivals falling out on the fifteenth day of the month, in addition to coinciding with the full moon, can be conceptualized as following two sets of seven days, the number fifteen having a similar role to the number eight, capping 7 x 2 rather than 7 x 1.

4.5.1 Gender and Childbirth: Double Impurity as Double Loss

Why should the birth of a girl occasion twice the duration of impurity for the mother? One explanation is that it stems from ancient beliefs about human embryology and physiology. Rabbinic sources suggest that male fetuses are formed after forty days and females after eighty days, a belief also held in ancient Greece,¹³⁹ and similar distinctions were held regarding the length of postpartum recovery.¹⁴⁰ Wright and Jones argue that the disparity points to male dominance in ancient Israelite society,¹⁴¹ while Douglas proposes that “reproducing a female is more significant than reproducing a male” and therefore requires a more significant recovery.¹⁴²

I suggest an approach similar to that of Douglas. Recall that for P, only the mother is impure, not the newborn child.¹⁴³ Following a birth, the mother is left vulnerable, weakened,

¹³⁹ See m. *Niddah* 4:7 and Aristotle (*History of Animals* 7.3), both cited by J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 751.

¹⁴⁰ See S. R. Driver, *Book of Leviticus*, p. 76. Milgrom cites Indian and Hittite traditions of a three-month period of impurity following male births versus four months for females; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 750.

¹⁴¹ See D. P. Wright and R. N. Jones, “Discharge.”

¹⁴² See M. Douglas, “Atonement in Leviticus,” p. 114 n. 19.

¹⁴³ Cf. Hittite postpartum impurity rules, which consider both the mother and infant to be impure; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 750.

and deathly forces accrue where there is greater vulnerability.¹⁴⁴ Blood loss, pallor, fatigue, and postpartum depression confirm the belief that her vitality has been sapped by the presence of deathly forces. Furthermore, the mother has experienced the loss/departure of a life that was subsumed within her during pregnancy, a void seized upon by deathly forces. These forces subside over time with the mother's rehabilitation and gradual revitalization.

The double period of impurity after the birth of a girl indicates a greater void, greater vulnerability, and thus requires a longer recovery. Why precisely double? P is concerned with "bearing fruit and multiplying,"¹⁴⁵ and because a female has the unique capacity to multiply, I would suggest that she is viewed by P as possessing twice the life-potential. Therefore, the birth of a girl is reckoned as twice the loss for the mother and requires twice as much time for her to regenerate and become whole.

4.6 Thirty-Three Days / Forty Days

Multiples of thirty-three (and forty) days occur in one case of purification in P:

- *Childbirth* — A new mother has thirty-three "purification blood" בְּדָמֵי טְהָרָה days (after the first seven days, for a total of forty days) following the birth of a boy (Lev 12:2–4), and sixty-six days (after the first two weeks, for a total of eighty days) following the birth of a girl (v. 5).

The phrase בְּדָמֵי טְהָרָה, literally "in the blood of becoming pure,"¹⁴⁶ refers to a stage of less severe impurity than the initial postpartum days. The discharge of blood may be characterized as "purifying" in the sense that it gradually restores the mother's reproductive

¹⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 528.

¹⁴⁵ The language of פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ is a recognized terminological distinction of P, which contains all twelve instances of the phrase; see R. E. Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ See B. J. Schwartz, "Leviticus," p. 233. Cf. the LXX translation "unclean blood" (αἵματι ἀκαθάρτω).

system to normal.¹⁴⁷ At the onset of this phase of purification, the restrictions of נְדָר are lifted, but the mother is barred from contact with sancta until the completion of forty days (v. 4). This has a parallel in ancient Greece, where a woman would undergo purification rites forty days after giving birth and prior to that was not allowed to enter a temple.¹⁴⁸ The number forty is not mentioned explicitly in Lev 12, but P clearly has the number in mind when it prescribes thirty-three days following the initial seven.¹⁴⁹ The significance of sixty-six (and implied eighty) days following the birth of a girl is in the doubling, just as the two weeks of initial impurity for a girl is double that prescribed for a boy (see Sec. 4.5.1 for a discussion of the gender discrepancy).

4.6.1 Surviving an Ordeal

Forty is a number attested abundantly in the Bible, including in P. The number is used to convey the successful completion of a full reign, as with David and Solomon, each of whom is said to have been king for forty years (1 Kgs 2:11, 11:42).¹⁵⁰ It is the period of adulthood, from twenty to sixty years (Lev 27:3), and is therefore the amount of time deemed sufficient for an entire generation of adults to die off (Num 14:33).¹⁵¹ Forty can also represent judgment, punishment, or trial,¹⁵² e.g., the days of flood (Gen 7), the years wandering the wilderness (Num 14:34), the days of Moses' fast (Exod 24:28), and the number of lashes to dole out and not exceed (Deut 25:3).¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ See J. G. Murphy, *Book of Leviticus*, p. 158. Some speculate that the status of נְדָר טְהוֹרָה corresponds to changes in blood flow, either a reduction in quantity (see E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, "Purification" [12:1–8]) or a change in color, from bright red to brown (see G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, "Uncleanness after Childbirth" [12:1–8]).

¹⁴⁸ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 750.

¹⁴⁹ Schwartz notes, "The number thirty-three, which has no significance, when combined with the first seven days yields forty, a 'round' number of purification days" (B. J. Schwartz, "Leviticus," p. 233).

¹⁵⁰ See M. Cogan, *1 Kings*, comment on 11:42. David's reign incidentally contains the only other instance of thirty-three in the Bible, the number of years he reigned in Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:4–5; 1 Chron 3:4)—which, when added to the seven years (and six months) he reigned in Hebron, yields forty.

¹⁵¹ See W. H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 283.

¹⁵² See M. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 293.

¹⁵³ Cf. Middle Assyrian Laws, 18, "they shall flog that seignior forty [times] with staves" (*ANET* 3, p. 181).

In the case of childbirth, the number forty represents the completion of a dangerous, life-threatening ordeal.¹⁵⁴ The number seven, signifying regeneration, coupled with forty, signifying survival and purification by way of trial, are consistent with P's leitmotif of life and replenishment, the victory of life over the forces of death.

4.7 Indeterminate Time

Two cases in P involve indeterminate time, i.e., impurity so long as symptoms continue to manifest:

- *Skin צרעת* — As long as the lesion persists (כָּל יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר הִנָּגַע בּוֹ יִטְמָא, Lev 13:46).
- *Abnormal genital discharges* — As long as the discharge persists, for males (כִּי יִהְיֶה) כָּל יְמֵי זֹב טִמְאָתָהּ כִּי־יִמִּי נִדְתָהּ תִּהְיֶה טִמְאָה (כָּל יְמֵי זֹב טִמְאָה הוּא, Lev 15:2) and females (כָּל יְמֵי זֹב טִמְאָתָהּ כִּי־יִמִּי נִדְתָהּ תִּהְיֶה טִמְאָה, v. 25).

The reason that these are the only two cases with indeterminate times is that every other instance of impurity has either a duration linked to a typological/magical number or an empirical duration with a predictable biological terminus, such as menstruation (the seven days also being typological). Pathological genital discharges are irregular, so P cannot assign fixed times for purification. With skin צרעת, it is conceivable that a person can be a מְצַרֵּעַ in perpetuity. Uzziah, for instance, is said to have been buried as a מְצַרֵּעַ (2 Chr 26:23).

4.7.1 Healing as Part of Purification

Following the empirical healing of צרעת or an abnormal genital discharge, a 7 + 1 purification period is prescribed. Milgrom argues that the healing stage is not a part of purification: “Purification is neither healing nor theurgy. The afflicted person undergoes

¹⁵⁴ See J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, comments on Lev 12:4–5.

purification only after he is cured.”¹⁵⁵ However, there are verses in P that indicate otherwise, where healing is said to render the person pure. Regarding skin צָרַעַת, the text states: נִרְפָּא הַנֶּחֱרָק, “The scall is healed; he is clean. The priest shall pronounce him clean” (Lev 13:37). Regarding genital discharges, it states: וְכִי יִטְהַר הַזָּב מִזִּבּוֹ, “When one with a discharge becomes clean of his discharge” (Lev 15:13), and וְאִם טְהִרָה מִזִּבְיָהּ, “When she becomes clean of her discharge” (v. 28).

Milgrom’s solution is to say that P employs two different uses of the verb ט.ה.ר, one implying ritual purification, and the other physical healing. As such, he translates ט.ה.ר in Lev 15:13, 28 as “healed of his/her discharge,” explaining, “Here the word *tāhar* denotes physical, not ritual, purification.”¹⁵⁶ It seems to me, however, that such a definition of ט.ה.ר betrays the simple reading of the verses, and that healing is understood in P as part of the purification process, albeit natural and preceding P’s purificatory rites.

In sum

P’s time intervals for purification each have their own character and significance: Evening marks the end of the lived day (if not the official day), and darkness may serve to cover/neutralize impurity as well as signal the beginning of primordial regeneration and renewal. The third day constitutes a minor completion, a plurality of days less than a week that provides a milestone of wholeness on the road to full purification. Seven days is a period that predominates in priestly texts, characterized by magical efficacy, a time of graduated filling, a week-long creative cycle signaling regeneration. The eighth day caps the seven-day purification cycle and marks the renewal of life as a pure individual, in some cases involving sacrificial rites. Forty days indicates survival and purification following a period of

¹⁵⁵ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 43.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 921; see also p. 944. Feder also posits a similar dual meaning for the term טְהוֹר; see Y. Feder, “*Tum’ah*: Ritual Impurity or Fear of Contagious Disease?”

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tribulation. Thus, even before discussing rites of purification, we find that the temporal foundation of purification in P is replete with the leitmotif of life and replenishment, a core component in countering the deathly effects of impurity.

5. Washing

In priestly purity legislation, people are explicitly directed to wash with water (י.ח.ר) in the following cases:

- *Animal carcasses* — One who eats carrion (Lev 17:15), or a priest who touches a יָרֵשׁ/creeping animal (22:5–6).
- *Skin צָרַעַת* — A מְצַרֵּעַ, on the first and seventh day of purification (Lev 14:8–9).
- *Abnormal genital discharges* — A בֹּזֵה, after counting seven days following cessation of the discharge (Lev 15:13), one who touches the bedding of a זָבָה/בֹּזֵה, who touches or carries something they sat on (vv. 5–7, 26–27), who is spat on by a בֹּזֵה (v. 8), or who is touched by a בֹּזֵה who hasn't washed his hands (v. 11).
- *Seminal emission* — A man who has a nocturnal emission (Lev 15:16), a man and woman who have sexual intercourse (v. 18), or a priest who ejaculates (22:4–6).
- *Menstruation* — One who touches the bedding of a menstruating woman or an object on which she sat (Lev 15:21–22).
- *Day of Atonement rites* — The person who dispatches the Azazel goat (Lev 16:26), or who burns the חֲטָאתִית bull and goat outside the camp (vv. 27–28).
- *Priests' consecration* — The priests, at the outset of their consecration, before being dressed (Exod 29:4, Lev 8:6).
- *Red cow/corpse contamination* — A corpse-contaminated person on the seventh day (Num 19:19), the priest who throws the ingredients into the red cow fire (v. 7), the one who burns the red cow (v. 8), or a priest who touches a corpse-contaminated person (Lev 22:4–6).
- *Secondary impurity* — A priest who touches anyone who is impure (Lev 22:5–6).

5.1 Implied Washing

There are some conspicuous omissions from the above list. For instance, Leviticus 11, which lists numerous cases of impurity until evening following contact with animal carcasses, makes no mention of a bathing requirement. Also, regarding a woman who gives birth (Lev 12), or who completes seven days of menstrual impurity (Lev 15:19–23), there is no explicit mention of washing. One approach is to take P’s legislation at face value,¹⁵⁷ though others argue that washing is implicit in many cases.¹⁵⁸ For instance, washing is explicitly prescribed for a בַּי but not for a בְּהַ, and it seems doubtful that the two should be different in this regard. There is also the case of Bathsheba who washes following what appears to be menstrual impurity, וְהָיָא מִתְקַדְּשֶׁת מִטְמֵאָתָהּ, “she had just purified herself after her impurity” (2 Sam 11:2–4).¹⁵⁹ Would P not also expect washing following menstruation, and if so, why omit it?

Among the rationales for this omission is that it is a stylistic priestly shorthand technique wherein the reader is expected to fill in the blanks,¹⁶⁰ or that it applies a fortiori reasoning.¹⁶¹ Another way to explain P’s omission of washing following menstruation or childbirth is that the woman is assumed to have already washed herself throughout the time of bleeding for purposes of normal hygiene and cleanliness. Perhaps this suffices for P. This is as opposed to washing after seminal emission or sex, where people may not regard semen as so irksome as to necessitate washing; therefore, P legislates it. As for the בַּי (and implied for the בְּהַ), washing is prescribed even though he likely performed a hygienic wash during

¹⁵⁷ See e.g., Z. Farber, “The Purification of a Niddah: The Torah Requirement.”

¹⁵⁸ Hayah Katz explains, “Since washing is prescribed for lesser, derivative forms of impurity... it is reasonable to suppose that it was part of the purification process in all instances” (H. Katz, “He Shall Bathe,” p. 370). Says Milgrom, if laundering is required for carrying animal carcasses, “it is inconceivable that they are not also obliged to undergo ablutions” (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 667). See also *ibid.*, pp. 746, 924; D. P. Wright, *Disposal of Impurity*, p. 376; D. P. Wright and R. N. Jones, “Leprosy.”

¹⁵⁹ See P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel*, comment on 11:4.

¹⁶⁰ See e.g., D. Ellens, “Leviticus 15: Contrasting Conceptual Associations Regarding Women,” p. 141; Y. Feder, “The Purification of a Niddah: The Legal Responsibility of the Reader.”

¹⁶¹ If even a one-day impurity requires washing (e.g., Lev 15:16–17), certainly washing is indicated following seven days of menstruation; see T. Hieke, “Menstruation and Impurity,” p. 60.

the time of discharge.¹⁶² The reason for subsequent washing, I would argue, is that this is a case of residual impurity, i.e., impurity that continues beyond the flow itself. For a *בְּזָבָה*, purification rites only begin seven days after the cessation of the discharge.

5.2 Immersion vs. Pouring

The manner of washing is not described in P. Immersion in a natural water source is one possibility. Full-body bathing might have been done when such water sources were available (e.g., Naaman immersing in the Jordan river to heal his *צָרַעַת*, 2 Kgs 5:10). However, while Jerusalem and the Judean mountain regions have abundant springs, areas such as the Shephelah and Beersheba region have very few.¹⁶³ A second possibility is immersion in a bath installation constructed for purification. The archaeological record, however, shows almost no sign of such installations before late Second Temple times,¹⁶⁴ even at sites where toilets have been identified.¹⁶⁵ This leads many to the conclusion that washing was typically performed by pouring water from a vessel.¹⁶⁶ Aside from the text of P not precluding it, and the *לַוַיִּן* in front of the Tent of Meeting itself exemplifying non-immersive washing (Exod 30:18–19), purification by pouring water is attested throughout the ancient Near East, such as the Mesopotamian purification ceremony *bit rimki*.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² The verse *וְלֹא יִגְע בּוֹ הַזָּב וְיִדְוֶי לֹא יִטְעַף בְּמַיִם* (Lev 11:15) seems to point to an unstated assumption that a *זָב* would normally be expected to rinse his hands (and other soiled parts of the body) for hygienic purposes.

¹⁶³ See H. Katz, “He Shall Bathe,” p. 375.

¹⁶⁴ See B. Gordon, “Origins of the Miqveh,” pp. 423–424.

¹⁶⁵ See H. Katz, “He Shall Bathe,” p. 377 n. 30.

¹⁶⁶ A reconstruction of the washing procedure is proposed by A. Faust and H. Katz, “Archaeology of Purity and Impurity,” pp. 15–16. See also H. Katz, “He Shall Bathe,” pp. 377–380; B. Gordon, “Origins of the Miqveh,” p. 423.

¹⁶⁷ See H. Katz, “He Shall Bathe,” pp. 377–380; B. Gordon, “Origins of the Miqveh,” p. 424.

5.3 Water Purification in the Ancient Near East

In Hittite ritual, sexual relations must be followed by bathing, and to approach sacrificial items without doing so is a capital crime: “Whoever sleeps with a woman... if he knowingly postpones it and without having bathed approaches the gods’ sacrificial loaves (and) libation bowl in an unclean condition... they are liable to the capital penalty; both of them shall be killed.” Kitchen servants in charge of the gods’ provisions are likewise warned to cleanse themselves: “Spend much reverent care upon the gods’ sacrificial loaves (and) libation bowls... As to yourselves, you shall be bathed and dressed in clean garments...”¹⁶⁸

Mesopotamian examples attest to a dual function of water—purgation and invigoration.¹⁶⁹ Babylonian water purification rites include incantations for ridding people of illness and demonic forces, for instance: “Id, Lady of pure waters, Marduk, son of Eridu, [remove] this sickness,”¹⁷⁰ and “Perform the Incantation of Eridu, bring unto him a censer, a torch. With the purest water wash him, and cleanse and purify the king, the son of his god.”¹⁷¹ And similarly: “Go, my son, (Marduk); pour forth water from an *assamu* vessel, lay a sprig of *mashtakal* on his heart, with the water perform the Incantation of Eridu, sprinkle this man with the water, bring unto him a censer, a torch, that the Plague-demon, which resteth in the body of the man, like the water may trickle away!”¹⁷² The regenerative power of water owes to it being localization of the deity, purification rites invoking the presence of the god Ea (= “the house of water” in Sumerian). One prayer against evil spirits states, “When I sprinkle the water of Ea on the sick man... May a kindly Spirit, a kindly Guardian, be present at my side.”¹⁷³ The vitalizing potency of water is mentioned in the myth of Ishtar’s

¹⁶⁸ ANET 3, p. 209.

¹⁶⁹ According to Thompson, water “had a double meaning, symbolizing as it did the cleansing of the man from the spell and the presence of the great god Ea” (R. C. Thompson, *Devils and Evil Spirits*, p. xlvi).

¹⁷⁰ *Utukki Limnûti*, Tablet III; *ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁷¹ *Utukki Limnûti*, Tablet XVI, *ibid.*, p. 103.

¹⁷² *Utukki Limnûti*, Tablet “A”; *ibid.*, p. 119.

¹⁷³ *Utukki Limnûti*, Tablet III, *ibid.*, pp. 19, 21.

5. Washing

descent into the underworld, wherein the goddess Ereshkigal says, “Sprinkle Ishtar with the water of life and take her from My presence!”¹⁷⁴

In ancient Egypt, the waters of the Nile are viewed as both cleansing and vivifying. Bathing in the morning is part of the daily routine (also attested in the Bible, e.g., Exod 7:15). In pharaonic ceremonies of infancy and coronation, the pharaoh would be sprinkled with water, as depicted in scenes where the droplets formed the shape of an *ankh*, the symbol of life. According to Alan Gardiner, “the rite was intended to transfer to the Pharaoh a goodly portion of the power of the divinities.”¹⁷⁵ Regarding the morning washing performed by Egyptian priests before entering the sacred precincts, Serge Sauneron remarks:

In making their ablutions, not only do they purify their bodies but divine life little by little enters them: the sacred water, like the primordial sea from which the world came in the beginning, is regenerative: whoever is sprinkled with it feels himself invaded by a new power, raised from this life below to the eternal world where the gods reside.¹⁷⁶

The regenerative potency of water in ancient Egypt is attested as well by the multiple ritual washings of the dead in preparation for the afterlife.¹⁷⁷ This conception of water is described by Mircea Eliade: “Contact with water always brings a regeneration—on the one hand because dissolution is followed by a new birth, on the other because immersion fertilizes and multiplies the potential for life.”¹⁷⁸ Indeed, the Akkadian word for water, *mû*, also means “semen.”¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴ ANET 3, pp. 108–109.

¹⁷⁵ A. Gardiner, “The Baptism of Pharaoh,” p. 12.

¹⁷⁶ S. Sauneron, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, p. 79.

¹⁷⁷ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 959, citing A. M. Blackman, “Purification (Egyptian),” pp. 476–479.

¹⁷⁸ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 130.

¹⁷⁹ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 962.

5.4 The Functions of Washing in P

Milgrom acknowledges “the resuscitative powers of water” in ancient Near Eastern ritual but argues that for Israel, water used for washing “is not regenerative, only purificatory,”¹⁸⁰ i.e., purgative. As evidence, he notes that water is not described by P as having special properties (e.g., it is not described as טָהוֹר), and of the thirty-six times washing is prescribed in P, only once (regarding the זָב, Lev 15:13) is מַיִם חַיִּים prescribed. Milgrom concedes, then, that מַיִם חַיִּים has special properties over and above regular water. Elsewhere, he indicates that the use of מַיִם חַיִּים for washing is implied in cases beyond the זָב (see Sec. 8.4.1). Also, there are other cases (זָרַעַת and corpse contamination) where מַיִם חַיִּים is used as the substrate for sprinkling formulas. Thus, there are multiple cases in P where water, even according to Milgrom, is invested with special potency. I would suggest that this potency is regenerative, not merely purgative. If P sees מַיִם חַיִּים (spring water) as possessing special regenerative power, it is hardly a leap to suppose that it views purificatory water in general as an agent of vitalization and replenishment, i.e., beyond purgation.

That water does more than purge impurity is a point later made by Milgrom, who notes that in non-priestly texts the verb הִתְקַדַּשׁ is used to describe ritual washing.¹⁸¹ He defines the term: “literally, ‘sanctify oneself’” and says regarding ritual ablution in the Bible that “there is no difference whatever between Priestly and non-Priestly texts regarding its modus operandi.” That is to say, washing is understood in P not just as an act of purgation but as a rite of elevation and preparation for contact with the sacred. The reason the priestly writers do not use the verb הִתְקַדַּשׁ for ritual bathing, says Milgrom, is that “P and H reserve the root *qdš* for sacred objects or persons.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 963.

¹⁸¹ E.g., Exod 19:10–15; 1 Sam 21:5–6; 2 Sam 11:2–4; and implied in Num 11:18, 31; Josh 3:5, 7:13–14.

¹⁸² J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 965–967.

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That said, I would distinguish between what I call “life-infusing” rites, which include the use of ingredients of magical potency such as מים חיים and blood, and “refreshing and cleansing” rites, which include more common, hygienic practices like washing and laundering (see Sec. 3.2.1). Washing has several functions as part of purification: (1) It cleanses and purges. Besides physical cleansing, even ordinary water has “life” associations and is thus used to banish deathly forces. (2) It refreshes and invigorates, not only symbolically but empirically. Modern studies show that washing either in cold or warm water has positive physiological and psychological effects: Washing with cold water increases blood flow to underlying tissues, elevates the metabolism, improves circulation, and decreases the stress hormone cortisol.¹⁸³ Warm-water bathing stimulates blood flow due to vasodilation, imparts a feeling of relaxation, and decreases anxiety and depression.¹⁸⁴ The pleasant, invigorating somatic experience reinforces the belief that life has overcome the forces of death.¹⁸⁵ (3) Washing serves as a rite of transition and readmission. That P holds this view is evidenced by the fact that washing is performed not at the outset of impurity but at the close (e.g., in cases of corpse contamination, abnormal genital discharge, and צרעת, see Sec. 3.2.2). These three functions complement one another, leaving the purification candidate feeling cleansed, refreshed, renewed, and ready to transition back into regular life.

In sum

Water both purges deathly forces and replenishes in their wake. The latter, vivifying function is attested in the ancient Near East. It is also reflected in P’s language of מים חיים and in the non-priestly use of the verb הִתְקַדַּח to describe washing. Washing offers tangible,

¹⁸³ A. Mooventhan and L. Nivethitha, “Scientific Evidence-Based Effects of Hydrotherapy,” pp. 199–209.

¹⁸⁴ Y. Goto, et al., “Physical and Mental Effects of Bathing: A Randomized Study.”

¹⁸⁵ In the same way that fatigue, disease, or other outward physical signs reinforce the belief in the presence of deathly forces (see Sec. 3.1), so too do tangible, outward signs of health and vitality demonstrate the absence of these forces.

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empirical effects of invigoration and wellbeing, which both refresh and provide confirmation that the deathly presence has been expelled. The fact that washing takes place at the end of the period of impurity points to it also serving as a rite of renewal and readmission.

6. Laundering

Several cases in priestly texts require laundering clothes (ס.ב.כ) as part of purification:

- *Animal carcasses* — One who carries the carcass of an animal forbidden for consumption (Lev 11:25, 28), who eats or carries the נבלה of a permitted animal (11:40, 17:15), or who eats טרפה (17:15).
- *Skin צרעת* — A מצרע, on the first and seventh day of purification (Lev 14:8–9), or one under investigation for צרעת whose outbreak faded or did not spread (13:6, 34).
- *Cloth/leather צרעת* — An item with an outbreak that did not spread, both before and after an additional seven days of quarantine (Lev 13:54, 58).
- *Abnormal genital discharges* — A בן, after counting seven days following cessation of the discharge (Lev 15:13), one who touches the bedding of a זב/זבה, who touches or carries something they sat on (vv. 5–7, 26–27); who is spat on by a בן (v. 8), or who is touched by a בן who hasn't washed his hands (v. 11).
- *Seminal emission* — Cloth or leather onto which semen has fallen (Lev 15:17).
- *Menstruation* — One who touches the bedding of a menstruating woman or an object on which she sat (Lev 15:21–22).
- *Atonement Day rites* — The person who dispatches the Azazel goat (Lev 16:26), or who burns the חטאת bull and goat outside the camp (vv. 27–28).
- *Levites* — The Levites, as part of their dedication rite (Num 8:7, 21).
- *Red cow/corpse contamination* — A corpse-contaminated person on the seventh day (Num 19:19, 31:24), or the priest who throws the ingredients into the red cow fire (19:7), burns the red cow (v. 8), gathers the ashes (v. 10), or sprinkles the מי נדה (v. 21).

Two related cases warrant mention. One is laundering a garment containing the blood of the חֲטָאת (Lev 6:20), done in a sacred precinct (תְּכַבֵּס בְּמִקּוֹם קֹדֶשׁ). Some consider this to be a case of impurity,¹⁸⁶ though others view it as laundering not for purification but rather as proper disposal of the sacred.¹⁸⁷ The second case, not in P, involves the Israelites laundering their clothes as part of the three-day preparation prior to the Sinai theophany (Exod 19:10, 14).

6.1 Biblical Laundering Methods

P does not explain what laundering garments entails and assumes the reader knows how to perform it. Verses elsewhere in the Bible speak about laundering with the aid of נָתַר (Jer 2:22, natron) and בְּרִית (Mal 3:2, lye or potash), made from the ash of certain plants. Both serve as detergents, producing an alkaline solution in water capable of removing dirt and grease.¹⁸⁸ The verb כִּבֵּס is defined as laundering or fulling and is thought to perhaps be cognate with the Akkadian *kabāsu*, meaning “trample” or “crush” (as well as ש.כ.ב, meaning “subjugate”), implying laundering by means of beating or pounding.¹⁸⁹ The fulling process involves placing cloth into a basin with water and detergent and treading on it with the feet.

Two cases in P explicitly specify laundering using water: One is cloth or leather with semen on it, וְכִבֵּס בַּמַּיִם, “and it will be laundered with water” (Lev 15:17); the other is in reference to the person who burns the red cow, וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו בַּמַּיִם וְרַחַץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם, “he shall

¹⁸⁶ See e.g., J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 404.

¹⁸⁷ Wenham explains that the blood used to purify the altar must be removed in accordance with the principle of “not confusing the holy and the common” (G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, “The Purification Offering [6:17–23]”). Grossman takes this approach as well, emphasizing that holiness—like impurity—is contagious, and that holiness is not allowed to spread and is therefore washed out before the clothing can be reused; see J. Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*, pp. 434–435. It seems to me that requiring the clothing to be washed שְׁקִיפוֹת קֹדֶשׁ is itself compelling evidence that the concern here is holiness and not impurity.

¹⁸⁸ See J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, “Excursus: The Ancient Craft of Washing Clothes” (7:3–9); A. Neufeld, “Hygiene Conditions in Ancient Israel,” p. 54.

¹⁸⁹ See B. A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, pp. 458–459; HALOT, s.v. כִּבֵּס.

launder his garments in water, and he shall wash his body in water” (Num 19:8). It stands to reason that the more common formulation, וְכִבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרִחַץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם (and similar) is a shortened formulation where the term בַּמַּיִם is implied for laundering. Whether this means water only or with a detergent is difficult to know. However, if (a) laundering for purification does not entail the removal of a physical substance (unlike laundering to remove the blood of the חֲטָאת), and (b) the term בַּמַּיִם means the same thing for laundering as it does for washing (which does not involve the use of detergents), then perhaps we can conclude that water alone suffices for the purification rite.

6.2 Occasions for Laundering

In rabbinic literature, the laundering requirement is thought to indicate a more severe case of impurity.¹⁹⁰ However, many one-day—and presumably minor—impurities are said to require laundering, such as secondary impurity (e.g., touching the bedding of a נָזֵף, Lev 15:5) or red cow/מֵי נִדָּה impurity (Num 19). Alternatively, laundering might simply indicate the presumption of contact between an impure substance and the clothing—for instance, when carrying a carcass (Lev 11:25, 28) or gathering the ashes of the red cow (Num 19:10).¹⁹¹ However, in cases of corpse contamination, abnormal genital discharges, and skin צָרַעַת, laundering takes place seven days after cessation of contact with the source of impurity, during which time the person may have already changed clothes,¹⁹² in the same way that they would have already washed soiled areas of the body (see Sec. 5.1).

¹⁹⁰ See e.g., Rashi on Lev 11:25, כל מקום שנאמרה טומאת משה חמורה מטומאת המגע שהיא טעונה כיבוס בגדים; Ibn Ezra on Num 19:10, ואחר שאמר שיכבס את בגדיו אין צורך להזכיר שירחץ במים.

¹⁹¹ Milgrom cites Nahmanides that laundering is required when there is direct contact between an impure item and the clothes but then argues this is the case only in cases of “intense” contact, as defined by the manner or duration of contact; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 668.

¹⁹² Changing clothes would have been possible for those with enough means to possess more than one set of garments, which may have included everyone but the truly destitute. For instance, Eckhart Otto understands the law in Exod 22:8 to assume that people generally have at least one extra set of clothing, since “they can go to court and the sanctuary even if one piece of their clothing is lost.” This is as opposed to the law in vv. 25–26, directed to those in such financial straits that they must use their only set of clothing as collateral; see E. Otto,

In such cases, I would argue that the clothing becomes impure not from contact with an offending substance but rather from the inside-out, meaning that the person's residual impurity is thought to transfer from body to clothing.¹⁹³ Thus, in some cases, laundering is required to expunge impure substances (or invisible traces thereof) from clothing following direct contact, while in other cases, it is required due to impurity on the body infecting the clothes.

6.3 The Functions of Laundering in P

I would suggest that laundering, like washing, serves several functions in P: (1) It cleanses and purges, both in the physical sense of ridding fabric or leather of impure substances and in the sense of banishing the forces of death by use of water, a "life" substance. (2) Laundering implies putting on a clean set of clothing, imparting feelings of refreshment and renewal. (3) Donning fresh, pure clothing is a rite of transition/readmission into normal life, as well as preparation for approaching the sacred.

Only the first function involves purgation; the second two functions are not focused on the act of laundering but rather on wearing freshly laundered clothes. The emphasis on changing one's clothes is attested as part of purification, for instance when Jacob tells his family: *הִסְרוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנֹּכַר אֲשֶׁר בְּתִכְכֶּם וְהַטְהֵרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמַלְתֵיכֶם*, "remove the foreign gods in your midst, and purify yourselves, and change your clothes" (Gen 35:2). Changing clothes is associated in other biblical texts with rites of transition, such as coming out of mourning (Gen 38:14, 2 Sam 12:20), leaving captivity (Gen 41:14, Deut 21:13), and

"Clothing in Biblical Law," p. 324. Cf. Propp, who does not view 22:25–26 as describing a case of one set of clothes; rather, since the ancient Israelites use clothing as bedding, the idea of withholding a garment is a symbolic way of expressing that collateral should not be held overnight; see W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, pp. 261–262.

¹⁹³ For corpse contamination, however, laundering is required for an additional reason: the person has just been sprinkled with *מֵי נִדָּה*.

6. Laundering

undergoing an elevation in social status (Ruth 3:3). The priests must don special garments to serve in the sanctuary, a dictate whose infringement comes at penalty of death (Exod 29:43). Laundering prior to the Sinai theophany (Exod 19:10) is a purificatory act but is clearly geared toward preparation for a divine encounter. For the *מְצַרֵּעַ* and the *בֵּן* (and possibly implied for the postpartum mother), washing and laundering precedes coming before YHWH to offer sacrifices.

Ancient Near Eastern texts likewise pair bathing and wearing fresh clothes as part of a ritual complex for transition and preparation for an elevated state/encounter. For instance, Hittite temple officiants are instructed: “When a servant is to stand before his master, he is bathed and clothed in clean (garments).”¹⁹⁴ Gilgamesh, in the Babylonian epic, is told to cease wandering and rejoice, which includes bathing and laundering: “Let thy garments be sparkling fresh, thy head be washed; bathe thou in water”¹⁹⁵ (cf. Eccl 9:8). The preparation of Ishtar’s lover Tammuz includes washing, anointing, and changing clothes: “Wash him with pure water, anoint him with sweet oil; clothe him with a red garment, let him play on a flute of lapis.”¹⁹⁶

In sum

Laundering of clothes in the purification process accomplishes several things: In some cases, it cleanses the material of an impure substance. In other cases, it purges forces of death imparted to clothes via contact with the body. Laundering also involves donning fresh garments, which functions, along with washing, to refresh and prepare the person for readmission to society and normal life.

¹⁹⁴ Hittite Instructions for Temple Officials, col. 2; *ANET* 3, p. 207.

¹⁹⁵ Epic of Gilgamesh, Old Babylonian Version, iii:10–11; *ibid.*, p. 90.

¹⁹⁶ Descent of Ishtar to the Nether World, Reverse, 48–49; *ibid.*, p. 109.

7. Shaving

Several cases in P call for shaving the body or head:

- *Skin* צָרַעַת — A מְצַרֵּעַ, on the first and seventh day of purification (Lev 14:8–9), or during investigation, shaving the area around the outbreak (Lev 13:33).
- *Levite purification* — The Levites, during their dedication rite (Num 8:7, 21).
- *Nazirite* — A nazirite who inadvertently becomes corpse-contaminated (Num 6:9), or upon completion of the vow (Num 6:18).

7.1 Hair and Shaving in the Bible and Ancient Near East

In the Bible and ancient world, hair—especially in abundance—represents beauty, virility, strength, heroism, and even wildness.¹⁹⁷ For example, Absalom is noted for his beauty, the key description being his long head of hair which he cuts once a year when it becomes too heavy for him (2 Sam 14:25–26). Esau the hunter is dubbed אִישׁ שְׂעָר, a “hairy man” (Gen 27:11). Elijah is called a בַּעַל שְׂעָר, “a person of (much) hair,” whom Martin Buber describes as a “zealous and inflexible nomad, long-haired, wrapped in a hairy garment with a leather girdle, reminiscent of the Babylonian hero Enkidu of the Gilgamesh epic.”¹⁹⁸ Samson is the nazirite, judge, and hero whose hair endows him with superhuman strength, enabling him to tear a lion apart with his bare hands (Judg 14:6), rip through rope used to bind him (15:14), and kill a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey (v. 15). When Delilah finally succeeds in cutting off the locks of his hair, the text says of Samson, וַיִּסָּר כְּחֹוּ מַעֲלָיו, “his strength left him” (16:19). Also, the prophets depict Israel and Jerusalem’s destruction using the metaphor of shorn hair, i.e., as a loss of beauty and vigor (e.g., Isa 7:20, Ezek 5:1).

¹⁹⁷ G. Mobley, *Samson and the Liminal Hero*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁸ M. Buber, *Prophetic Faith*, p. 76.

7. Shaving

In Ancient Near Eastern literature, hair likewise represents strength, heroism, and wildness. An Akkadian myth describes a man standing before Namtar, vizier of the underworld: “the hair of his head he held in his left, while in his right [he held] a sword.”¹⁹⁹ The deity Nanna is described: “its head of hair [rea]ches to the pedestal, [. . . in fr]ont of it are (placed) the Storm (*abûbu*) Dragon and the Wild Bull.”²⁰⁰ Gilgamesh lets his hair grow and roams as a nomad: “He will his body with uncut hair invest, will don a lion skin and roam over the steppe.”²⁰¹

Being viewed as the seat of vitality and life force, hair is also used in cultic offerings.²⁰² A ninth century B.C.E. Phoenician dedication bowl to the goddess Astarte, found in Kition, has an inscription that is understood to read, “an offering here of a plait of hair.”²⁰³ Milgrom speculates regarding Absalom that he presented his cut hair yearly at the sanctuary as an offering, and points to the cultic offering of a nazirite’s hair as an explicit Israelite example of such a rite.²⁰⁴

Apart from the *קצירת*, Levites, and nazirite, other mentions of shaving in priestly texts are proscriptive. These include prohibitions against shaving bald patches into parts of the beard or head (Lev 19:27, 21:5; cf. Deut 14:1, Ezek 44:20), mourning customs that appear to have been common in ancient Israel²⁰⁵ and are thought to be associated with the cult of the dead.²⁰⁶ In the Deuteronomic Code, the law concerning the female captive of war requires the woman to shave her head upon entry into the Israelite’s home (Deut 21:12). This is

¹⁹⁹ Vision of the Nether World, Reverse; *ANET* 3, p. 109.

²⁰⁰ Nabonidus and the Clergy of Babylon; *ibid.*, p. 313.

²⁰¹ The Epic of Gilgamesh; *ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁰² See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1802.

²⁰³ See M. J. Lundberg, “Four Cypriot Inscriptions,” p. 123.

²⁰⁴ See J. Milgrom, “Nazirite,” pp. 45–46.

²⁰⁵ See e.g., Isa 22:12, Jer 41:5, Amos 8:10, Mic 1:16; cf. pulling out the hair in Ezra 9:3.

²⁰⁶ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, pp. 1690–1691.

commonly interpreted either as part of the woman's mourning process²⁰⁷ or as an act of cutting her off from her past so as to be absorbed into Israelite society.²⁰⁸

Elsewhere in the ancient world, shaving the head was common for cult officiants, including Sumerian²⁰⁹ and Egyptian priests,²¹⁰ the latter of whom would shave their entire body as part of ongoing service.²¹¹ Ezekiel 44:20, which states that priests must not shave their heads (or wear untrimmed hair, cf. Lev 10:6), seems to be a response to these practices. There is also evidence of Babylonian and Akkadian priests shaving during their initiation,²¹² and the Akkadian word for "shave," *gullubu(m)* (also attested in Biblical Hebrew, תִּעַר הַגְּלָבִים, Ezek 5:1), is used in connection with cultic dedication.²¹³ Hittite officiants of the temple are instructed to shave before preparing the daily loaves: "Let them be bathed (and) groomed, let their (body) hair and nails be removed."²¹⁴ While no doubt cleanliness and hygiene play a role in cultic shaving, Edmund Leach argues that long hair is associated with unrestrained sexuality, whereas a shaven head is the mark of celibacy, akin to a rite of castration or circumcision.²¹⁵ Shaving the head can thus indicate sublimating libido and dedicating one's energies to the cult/deity.

²⁰⁷ See D. L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy*, comment on 21:12–13.

²⁰⁸ See S. M. Olyan, "What Do Shaving Rites Accomplish?", p. 619.

²⁰⁹ See W. G. Lambert, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology*, p. 189.

²¹⁰ See R. Wallenfels and J. M. Sasson, *The Ancient Near East*, p. 14.

²¹¹ See W. G. Lambert, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology*, p. 189.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ See J. A. Black, et al, *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, p. 96. Shaving the face and body was also the normative practice in ancient Egypt, exemplified in the Bible in Joseph's shaving as part of his preparation to meet Pharaoh (Gen 41:14).

²¹⁴ *ANET* 3, p. 209.

²¹⁵ See E. R. Leach, "Magical Hair," pp. 154–157. Egyptian priests were circumcised as well; see W. G. Lambert, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion and Mythology*, p. 189.

7.2 Shaving in P: Renewal, Purification, and Disposal

P's impurity legislation prescribes full-body shaving for the *מְצַרֵּעַ* and for the Levites during their dedication, and head-shaving for the impure nazirite.²¹⁶ The *מְצַרֵּעַ*, once healed, is instructed to shave their entire body twice: once following the two-bird rite and again seven days after reentering the camp (both times accompanied by laundering and bathing, Lev 14:8–9). What is the purpose of this shaving? Wenham cites an anthropological view that shaving, along with washing and sacrifices, represent “rites of aggregation,” wherein a person in an abnormal social state is reintegrated into the community.²¹⁷ The fact that both instances of shaving precede phases of reentry—the first into the camp and the second into one's own tent—perhaps bolsters such a view. Olyan understands all instances of ritual shaving in the Bible as marking a transition.²¹⁸ Full-body shaving is seen by some as an act of renewal, with the person's bare, hairless skin rendering them similar to a newborn.²¹⁹ Additionally, shaving can be understood as part of purification, no less so than washing and laundering. According to Wenham, “shaving and washing obviously portray cleansing from the pollution caused by the skin disease.”²²⁰ Similarly, Hartley suggests that “shaving removes all surface impurity,” that doing so twice only underscores priestly meticulousness regarding purity standards, and that shaving along with washing would remove any remaining scales lodged in the hair.²²¹

I would say further that the stipulation of shaving “all his hair” makes it less plausible that reabsorption or renewal are primary motives for the rite. A person without hair on the head, beard or eyebrows makes for an abnormal and even shocking visage, if anything

²¹⁶ In addition, for scalp or beard *מְצַרֵּעַ*, shaving is prescribed on the seventh day of quarantine, when the person shaves around the scall (Lev 13:33). This is part of examination and diagnosis, to test whether the scall spreads in the days to follow. The Mishna instructs to shave around the scall, leaving a two-hair buffer around it to determine if it spread (m. *Nega'im* 10:5).

²¹⁷ See G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, “Rituals outside the camp” (14:2–9).

²¹⁸ See S. M. Olyan, “What Do Shaving Rites Accomplish?”, p. 621.

²¹⁹ See R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus*, pp. 150–151; cited by J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, comment on 14:9.

²²⁰ See G. J. Wenham, *Leviticus*, “Rituals outside the camp” (14:2–9).

²²¹ J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, comment on 14:8–9.

singling them out rather than integrating them into the rest of society. Hartley points out that ancient Israelites were generally prohibited from shaving their sideburns or the corners of their beards (Lev 19:27).²²² Neither is such extreme shaving an invigorating act, like washing. Rather, it reflects a high level of concern that the זָרָע be completely expunged before reintroducing the person into normal human contact. Moreover, the word נָטְהַר both times follows the triad of shaving, washing and laundering, and so the plain meaning would seem to be that these three acts are first and foremost intended to purify.

The same is the case regarding the Levites, where shaving is explicitly mentioned as a rite of purification: וְהִטְהָרוּ ... וְהִטְהָרוּ ... וְהִטְהָרוּ, “let them go over their whole body with a razor... thus they shall be purified” (Num 8:7). Levine understands this shaving, accompanied by laundering and sprinkling with מִי הַטָּהַר, as the priestly directive to meet “purificatory requirements,” comparable to מְצַרֵּעַ purification.²²³ That is to say, themes of transition, change in social status, renewal, and—in this case—cultic dedication and submission may indeed serve as layers of meaning for shaving as part of the Levite dedication, but purification is arguably the chief objective.

The nazirite, on successful completion of the vow, shaves their head and places the sanctified hair on the altar, beneath the זֶבַח הַשְּׂלָמִים (Num 6:18). A nazirite who inadvertently becomes impure through contact with a human corpse must shave their head on the seventh day of purification (v. 9). Is this shaving a purificatory act, as with the מְצַרֵּעַ and the Levites? Unlike the cases of the מְצַרֵּעַ and Levites, which call for shaving the entire body, the nazirite shaves only the hair on their head. Moreover, shaving is not a rite indicated in the basic purification instruction for corpse contamination (Num 19). As such, it is thought that

²²² Ibid.

²²³ See B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 273.

shaving functions here as a means of disposing of a desecrated sanctum prior to restarting the vow.²²⁴

In addition, there may be reasons to view the hair as being impure. Plainly, it is impurity that causes the hair to become desacralized. Also, the nazirite does not shave at the sanctuary on the eighth day as part of rededication but rather on the seventh day, בְּיוֹם טְהוֹרָתוֹ, “on the day of his cleansing” (Num 6:9). Furthermore, the fact that this hair must be removed prior to approaching the sanctuary may testify to the impurity of the hair. Additionally, holiness is thought to be particularly susceptible to impurity. According to Milgrom, impure forces have a “magnetic attraction for the realm of the sacred,”²²⁵ and sanctified hair exposed to corpse impurity is thus especially liable to attract deathly forces. Shaving the impure nazirite’s head, then, could perhaps constitute an act of purification in addition to sanctum disposal.

7.3 The Limited Scope of Shaving

If hair is particularly predisposed to attract impurity, why is shaving not a more common rite of purification in P? I would speculate that if only for aesthetic reasons, shaving the head, beard, or body is viewed as an extreme measure and therefore used only sparingly. As to why a מְצַרֵּעַ requires shaving, this may be due to the severity of the case, as an extra precaution against possible contagion, as well as the fact that hair grows out of the skin and is included in the diagnostic process.²²⁶ Regarding the Levites, the reason may be the one-time nature of the rite, as well as the association of ritual baldness with submission and cultic

²²⁴ Wright interprets the nazirite’s shaving in this way: “The shaving of the head does not seem to be purificatory, but rather to remove a desecrated sanctum”; see D. P. Wright, “Unclean and Clean (OT),” *A Corpse-Contaminated Nazirite*.

²²⁵ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 257.

²²⁶ See Lev 13:3–4, 10, 20–21, 25–26, 30–32, 36–37.

dedication. In addition, the Levites are about to serve in the sanctuary, an undertaking fraught with danger of death,²²⁷ and so shaving may be a precautionary measure for extra purity.

Why, then, do Aaron and his sons not undergo shaving upon induction to the cult? It would also be a one-time rite, the danger to the priests (being in closest contact with sancta) is equal if not greater,²²⁸ and if anyone is subject to more rigorous purity measures, it is the priests (e.g., Lev 21). Baruch Levine points out a distinction between levitical and priestly induction: Whereas the Levites are presented as a quasi-offering to YHWH (Num 8:15–16), indicating a servile role, the priests become YHWH's anointed, the officiants of the cult.²²⁹ Perhaps a fully shaven body, though it offers additional purity, does not befit the gravitas and splendor (כבוד and תפארת, Exod 28:2, 40) of the priestly office.

In sum

Hair in the ancient world is thought to be a locus of vitality, with the potential to be cultivated as a sanctum. As such, it is especially vulnerable to infection by deathly forces. The shaving rites of the מצרע and the Levites are the rare cases where body hair is shaved off, as a means of purging impurity. For the Levites, it may also function as an act of sublimation and cultic dedication, as well as extra protection against the dangers of the sacred realm. Shaving the nazirite's head is done to dispose of a desecrated sanctum and is perhaps also a means of removing impurity.

²²⁷ Lethal danger for the Levites is indicated in handling sacred items (Num 4:15, 19–20; 18:3) and profaning sacred donations (Num 18:32).

²²⁸ For instance, death awaits the high priest who fails to wear bells on his robe (Exod 28:35), or other priests who do not wash their hands and feet (Exod 30:20–21), who drink alcohol while serving (Lev 10:9), or who enter the Holy of Holies without sanction or protection (Lev 16:2).

²²⁹ See B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 273.

7. Shaving

We now move from rites of cleansing and refreshing to the life-imbuing class of rites, ingredients and formulas of magical potency used in more severe cases to banish the deathly forces of impurity and convey life and replenishment to the recipient.

8. Sprinkling with Water Mixtures

Several cases in P require sprinkling a water and blood/ash-based formula on the purification candidate:

- *Skin* *צִרְעָת* — A *מְצֹרֵעַ* is sprinkled in the two-bird rite, on the first day of purification rites after healing (Lev 14:7).
- *House* *צִרְעָת* — An infected house whose walls have been replastered and where the discoloration has not spread is sprinkled in the two-bird rite (Lev 14:51).
- *Corpse contamination* — A corpse-contaminated person is sprinkled with *מֵי נְדָה* on the third and seventh days of purification (Num 19:18–19; 31:19), as are the tent and vessels in the room where the corpse lay (Num 19:18), as well as spoils of war (31:20, 22–23).
- *Levite purification* — The Levites are sprinkled with *מֵי חֲטָאת* during their dedication rite (Num 8:7, 21).

In the case of the *מְצֹרֵעַ* (Lev 14), the sprinkling rite comes after the priest determines that the person's *צִרְעָת* has healed. The priest takes two ritually pure, wild birds and slaughters one of them over an earthen vessel containing *מַיִם חַיִּים*, i.e., spring water from a flowing source. He then takes the second (live) bird, along with cedar wood, red yarn, and hyssop, dips them into the water in the vessel (now also containing the blood of the first bird) and sprinkles the mixture seven times on the *מְצֹרֵעַ*. The live bird is then set free in the open country. After this procedure comes other rites of purification: two sets of bathing, laundering, and shaving (separated by seven days), followed by sacrifices and daubing with blood and oil on the eighth day. For house *צִרְעָת*, apart from removal of the infected stones and plaster, purification consists solely of the two-bird sprinkling/casting-off rite.

For corpse contamination (Num 19), a fully red, unworked cow is slaughtered outside the camp and its blood sprinkled seven times toward the Tent of Meeting. The cow is then burned in full, with its blood, along with cedar wood, red yarn, and hyssop, producing an ash mixture that is stored for later use. When needed for purification, the ash is added to a vessel containing מֵי חַיִּים and sprinkled on all corpse-contaminated persons on the third and seventh day of the purification period, as well as on the tent which housed the corpse and any vessels in the tent at the time. This water is referred to as מַי נְדָה, likely the same mixture as the מַי חֲטָאת used for Levite purification (see Sec. 8.6.3).

We will now look at the ingredients used in the two-bird and red cow rites, beginning with those shared by both—cedar wood, red yarn, hyssop, and מֵי חַיִּים, and followed by those specific to each rite—the two birds and red cow.

8.1 Cedar Wood – עֵץ אֲרֵז

The אֲרֵז is widely held to be the Lebanon cedar (*Cedrus libani*).²³⁰ The word עֵץ in עֵץ אֲרֵז does not mean “tree” (the Lebanon cedar being 12–21 m. tall) but rather a piece of wood, branch, or stick, a size compact enough to be held in the hand along with other ingredients in the two-bird rite. Cedar wood (*erēnu*, Akk.) is used in Mesopotamian ritual to make magical figures and as an ingredient in incense and folk medicine, for instance, “you drive (into the ground) around him (the sick man) three splinters of cedar wood.”²³¹ Its balsam and oil are used as well, e.g., “I daubed its foundation wall with sesame oil, perfumed oil, cedar balsam, honey and ghee,” and “you mix (various drugs) in cypress oil (and) cedar balsam, you rub him several times and he will get well.”²³² Both cedar and tamarisk are added to water to make magical substances, e.g., “at night you set up a holy water container... you put into it

²³⁰ See I. Jacob and W. Jacob, “Flora.”

²³¹ *CADe*, pp. 276–277.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 278.

tamarisk and let it stay in the open overnight,”²³³ and “white cedar (resin), cedar oil, sesame oil, virgin oil, oil of *nikiptu*, white honey, that are imported into this country (to be put into the holy water basin).”²³⁴

Cedar is also employed in ancient Near Eastern cults for its pleasant, cleansing odor.²³⁵ Its oil is used in Egypt for embalming fluid,²³⁶ noted in the works of Herotodus²³⁷ and more recently discovered through a chemical analysis of unused embalming material.²³⁸ Cedar wood resists fungus,²³⁹ which may make it particularly useful in treating house צרעת (Lev 14:51), thought to possibly be fungus or mold.²⁴⁰ Milgrom suggests that “of all woods with magical powers, cedar might have been selected because of its color, red,” which is associated with blood and, hence, life.²⁴¹ Cedar is known for its strength and is associated with the gods. For instance, cedar wood is the weapon of the storm-god Baal.²⁴² The cedar forest in Lebanon is held to be the abode of the gods, e.g., “[Gilgamesh and Enkidu] were gazing at the Cedar Land, the dwelling of the gods, the throne of the goddesses.”²⁴³ Biblical texts (Ezek 31; 2 Kgs 19) also regard the cedar forest in Lebanon as a divine dwelling place.²⁴⁴ Cedar wood is used in the construction of the palaces of David (2 Sam 5:11) and Solomon (1 Kg 7:2, referred to as the עֵר הַלְבָנוֹן), as well as in Solomon’s temple (e.g., 1 Kgs 5:20, 6:9; called the בַּיִת אֶרְזִים in 2 Sam 7:7) and in the second temple (Ezra 3:7).

²³³ *CADb*, p. 240.

²³⁴ *CADe*, pp. 277–278; see also J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 835.

²³⁵ See R. S. Heiss, “Leviticus,” p. 702.

²³⁶ See I. Jacob and W. Jacob, “Flora.”

²³⁷ See *The Histories*, Book II, pp. 160–161.

²³⁸ See J. Koller, et al., “Analysis of a pharaonic embalming tar,” p. 784.

²³⁹ See I. Jacob and W. Jacob, “Flora.”

²⁴⁰ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 870–871.

²⁴¹ See *ibid.*, p. 835.

²⁴² See N. Ayali-Darshan, “Cedar Forest Tradition,” pp. 186–187.

²⁴³ See *ibid.*, pp. 187–188.

²⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 188–189.

Its godly associations, strength and durability, pervasive use in healing rituals and as a preservative, and its red (bloodlike) hue make cedar a potent, magical ingredient for banishing impurity and helping to convey strength and life to the person undergoing purification.

8.2 Red Yarn – תולעת אֶשֶׁן

The תולעת אֶשֶׁן²⁴⁵ refers to a crimson-dyed material, typically wool,²⁴⁶ either a fabric or a cord. The red dye is extracted from the shell of a cochineal (scale insect), specifically the kermes insect (*Kermes ilicis*) that infests oak trees.²⁴⁷ The origin of the word אֶשֶׁן is unclear; it is thought to be connected with the Akkadian *šinītu(m)*, meaning rinsing, soaking, dyeing, or dyed textile, though it may be an Egyptian loanword.²⁴⁸ The term is sometimes used to imply a string or cord, e.g., used to mark Zerah's wrist at birth (Gen 38:28) or hung as a sign from Rahab's house (Josh 2:18). In P, apart from being a sprinkling ingredient, אֶשֶׁן is one of the precious materials used in the construction of the Tabernacle and priestly vestments (Exod 25:4) as well as in the transport covering for the Tabernacle (Num 4:8). Elsewhere in the Bible, אֶשֶׁן is mentioned as a color of women's fine clothing (2 Sam 1:24; Jer 4:30; also Prov 31:21), a red hue corresponding to sin (Isa 1:18), and a description of beauty, referring to the color of a woman's lips (Song 4:3).

The biblical text does not discuss the amount of אֶשֶׁן used in the rites. Rabbinic tradition specifies an amount weighing 10 *zuz* (= 5 *shekels*) in the red cow rite,²⁴⁹ and 2 *zuz* (= 1 *shekel*) in the two-bird rite, wherein the surplus length of the red cord is used to bind the cedar, wool, and hyssop together.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ Also called תולעת אֶשֶׁן (Exod 25:4, Num 4:8), תולעת הַשָּׁנִי (Exod 25:5), אֶשֶׁן (Gen 38:28, Jer 4:30), אֶשֶׁן (Josh 2:21), אֶשֶׁן (Prov 31:21, Song 4:3), and תולע (Isa 1:18).

²⁴⁶ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 835.

²⁴⁷ See E. Firmage, "Zoology."

²⁴⁸ See HALOT, s.v. אֶשֶׁן.

²⁴⁹ See b. *Yoma* 42a.

²⁵⁰ See m. *Nega'im* 14:1.

8.2.1 Red Signifying Blood

Of the various dyes used in P (including תְּכֵלֶת, blue, and אַרְגָּמָן, purple), it is אֶשָּׁף, crimson, that is chosen for sprinkling rites. Milgrom suggests that the color red represents blood, being an association that is “widely attested in primitive cultures.”²⁵¹ He argues that in the red cow rite, the red hide of the cow, along with the crimson yarn and red cedar, “symbolically adds to the quantity of blood in the ash mixture” and “enhances its potency.” Milgrom cites a similar rite by the African Ndembu tribe, where a person reddens the river with the blood of a fowl and also adds powdered red clay and gum.²⁵² Use of red ochre in burial rites to symbolize blood is attested as far back as the Neolithic period.²⁵³

Ancient Near Eastern texts also describe the use of red ingredients to simulate blood. One example is found in the tomb of Seti I: “Then the majesty of this god (Re) said: ‘Go ye to Elephantine and bring me red ochre very abundantly.’ Then this red ochre was brought to him... When further maidservants crushed barley to (make) beer, then this red ochre was added to this mash. Then (it) was like human blood.”²⁵⁴ The Ugaritic tale of Aqhat describes red dye being used to symbolize violence and blood: “She’ll slay the slayer [of her brother], destroy the destroyer of [her] sibling... in the sea she bat[hes], and stains herself red with murex... She emerges, dons a youth’s raiment, puts a k[nife] in her sheath, a sword she puts in her scabbard...”²⁵⁵ The annals of King Shalmaneser III explicitly link red-dyed wool with blood: “I piled them up, I covered the wide plain with the corpses of their fighting men, I dyed the mountains with their blood like red wool.”²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 272.

²⁵² See *ibid.*

²⁵³ Giulia Sortini describes red ochre as representing “a return to the earth or possibly as a form of ritual rebirth, in which the colour symbolises blood and the Great Goddess” (G. B. Surlini, “The Megalithic Temples of Malta,” p. 145).

²⁵⁴ *ANET* 3, p. 11.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

In Isaiah, *שְׁנֵי* is likened to sin—and, by association, blood: *אִם יִהְיוּ חַטָּאֵיכֶם כַּשָּׁנִים*: *כַּשָּׁלֶג יִלְבִּינוּ*, “Be your sins like crimson, they can turn snow-white” (1:18). Joseph Blenkinsopp suggests that the transformation of crimson to white creates a “catchword link with the washing of bloodstained hands in the previous stanza.”²⁵⁷ Milgrom explains that red ingredients are used in the two-bird rite “in order to counter and reverse the death process vividly and visually represented by the deterioration of the body stricken with scale disease.”²⁵⁸ In P’s purification rites, the red hue of the *שְׁנֵי תוֹלַעַת* reinforces the blood, the “life,” contributing to the potency of the formula to counteract and replenish from deathly forces.

8.3 Hyssop – *אֶזוֹב*

The *אֶזוֹב* is generally identified as Syrian hyssop (*Origanum syriacum*), a wild herb.²⁵⁹ In the two-bird rite, hyssop is one of many elements dipped into the water and used for sprinkling, whereas in the red cow rite, the hyssop serves both as an ingredient in the ash mixture as well as the instrument for sprinkling. The use of hyssop as a ritual dispenser is attested elsewhere in the Bible, such as brushing blood on the doorposts during the plague of the firstborn (Exod 12:22). Psalms states, *תְּחַטְּאֵנִי בְּאֶזוֹב וְאֶטְהַר תְּכַבְּסֵנִי וּמִשָּׁלֶג אֶלְבִּין*, “Purge me with hyssop till I am pure; wash me till I am whiter than snow” (Ps 51:9). In the New Testament, Moses is depicted as using hyssop to sprinkle blood on the people in the covenant ceremony of Exodus 24 (Heb 9:19).

Hyssop is chosen likely for several reasons: (1) It is readily available, growing out of the cracks of rocks (or walls, 1 Kgs 4:33). (2) As a ritual dispenser, its leaves have hairs,

²⁵⁷ J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, comment on 1:18.

²⁵⁸ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 835. Cf. Noga Ayali-Darshan, who argues that the *שְׁנֵי תוֹלַעַת* in the two-bird rite serves as an impurity transfer agent; see N. Ayali-Darshan, “Scapegoat: The Origins of the Crimson Thread.”

²⁵⁹ See I. Jacob and W. Jacob, “Flora”; W. H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, p. 407.

giving it the capacity to hold onto liquid.²⁶⁰ Flowering buds add to the liquid-holding surface area and aid in sprinkling, and the Mishna specifies that the hyssop must contain buds.²⁶¹ (3) As an ingredient to be burned in the red cow rite, hyssop is attested in the rabbinic tradition as adding bulk and quality to the ashes.²⁶² (4) Hyssop was used medicinally in the ancient world as a tonic.²⁶³ (5) The word *אֶזְוֵב* may be a play on *זֹב*, flow, as in gushing water.²⁶⁴ For speakers of Biblical Hebrew, this would bring to mind *מַיִם חַיִּים* and add to the leitmotif of life. (6) Cedar and hyssop may also form a contrasting pair, as indicated in 1 Kgs 5:13, with cedar being mighty and enduring, whereas hyssop is humble and ephemeral.²⁶⁵

The triad of cedar, red yarn, and hyssop forms a complex to combat the dark forces of impurity and aid revitalization. Carl Keil and Franz Delitzsch, commenting on the red cow rite, describe the three ingredients:

cedar-wood... as the symbol of the incorruptible continuance of life; and hyssop, as the symbol of purification from the corruption of death; and scarlet wool, the deep red of which shadowed for the strongest vital energy.²⁶⁶

8.4 Spring Water – *מַיִם חַיִּים*

The Bible contains nine instances of the term *מַיִם חַיִּים*,²⁶⁷ and four of these are found in P's legal texts. Only in one case, the *זָב*, is washing with *מַיִם חַיִּים* prescribed (Lev 15:13). In the other three instances, P calls for *מַיִם חַיִּים* to be used as the substrate for a formula for sprinkling on a *מְצַרֵּעַ* (Lev 14:5), a *צָרְעָת* house (14:50), and a corpse-contaminated person

²⁶⁰ See I. Jacob and W. Jacob, "Flora"; also J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 836.

²⁶¹ See m. *Parah* 11:11.

²⁶² See t. *Parah* 4:6.

²⁶³ See I. Jacob and W. Jacob, "Flora."

²⁶⁴ See M. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100*, comment on 51:9.

²⁶⁵ J. Grossman, personal communication.

²⁶⁶ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol.2, p. 124.

²⁶⁷ Gen 26:19; Lev 14:5, 50, 15:13; Num 19:17; Jer 2:13, 17:13; Zech 14:8; and Song 4:15.

(Num 19:17). HALOT defines מַיִם חַיִּים as “running water.”²⁶⁸ NJPS translates the term variously as “spring water” (Gen 26:19), “fresh water” (e.g., Lev 15:13, Zech 14:8 and Song 4:15), and “living waters” (Jer 2:13, 17:13; prefaced by the word מְקוֹר). Milgrom suggests that the term מַיִם חַיִּים refers to flowing spring water, either above the ground or in an artesian well below the ground, but excludes water stored in a cistern.²⁶⁹

The amount of water is not specified in P for either the two-bird or red cow rite, but rabbinic tradition prescribes one quarter *log*, the equivalent of one *revi'it*, which contemporary halakhic measurements place between 86–150 ml, or 0.36–0.63 cups.²⁷⁰ The Talmud cites a tannaitic teaching stipulating that the ashes of the red cow must be visible in the water, and that the blood of the bird in the two-bird rite must also be visible, the quarter-*log* amount being small enough to ensure that the bird’s blood is recognizable in the water. For both rites, the water is collected in the vessel first, and the blood or ashes—the facilitating item (מְקַשֵּׁי) —is placed on top, where it is more visible.²⁷¹ Thus, according to these traditions, it is the appearance of the red blood or ashes, coloring the water, which is key.

8.4.1 Scope of Use

Milgrom points out the relative scarcity of the מַיִם חַיִּים descriptive for purificatory water and suggests that when it is prescribed as the substrate for a purification formula, this functions as “an ancient theurgic recipe, a vestige of and a link to pre-Israelite rituals, shown to be originally exorcistic rites.”²⁷² He also notes that all one-day, “minor” cases of impurity

²⁶⁸ HALOT, s.v. חַי.

²⁶⁹ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 923.

²⁷⁰ See b. *Sotah* 16b and m. *Nega'im* 14:1.

²⁷¹ See b. *Sotah* 16b. Note, however, that in the red cow rite, the verse states וְנָתַן עָלָיו מַיִם חַיִּים אֶל כְּלֵי (Num 19:17), meaning that the water is placed on top of the ashes.

²⁷² J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 963.

“do not require spring water; any water—drawn or collected—will do.”²⁷³ According to Milgrom, the use of מֵיִם חַיִּים is an exception and not characteristic of P.

However, Milgrom also argues that purificatory bathing for a נְדָה and a זָבָה (neither being explicit in the text) “are derivable from the *zāb*.”²⁷⁴ If the זָבָה requires bathing, presumably it is with מֵיִם חַיִּים, like the זָב. Likewise for the נְדָה—if her washing is derivable from the זָב, then according to Milgrom, should she not require מֵיִם חַיִּים as well? The Qumran sectarians may in fact have required the use of מֵיִם חַיִּים in the case of menstruation. Martha Himmelfarb points out in the rules of menstruation found in 4Q272 that the word [מֵיִם חַיִּים] (line 16) is visible, likely referring to מֵיִם חַיִּים, and suggests that the sectarians “understood the condition of the menstruant as analogous to that of the זָב.”²⁷⁵ If that is the case for a menstruating woman, then the postpartum mother, who also has the status of a נְדָה (Lev 12:2, 5), should similarly require מֵיִם חַיִּים.

If מֵיִם חַיִּים is explicitly mandated for a מְצַרֵּעַ, a corpse-contaminated person, and for a זָב, and is implied for a זָבָה, a נְדָה, and for a postpartum mother, this would mean that *all* cases of impurity lasting beyond one day utilize מֵיִם חַיִּים, whether for washing or sprinkling. This hardly makes it an exception in P!²⁷⁶

8.4.2 Spring Water, Blood, and Life

The word חַיִּים in the phrase מֵיִם חַיִּים, according to John Hartley, “represents its life-giving power.”²⁷⁷ Similarly, Milgrom says that “it can hardly be an accident” that term מֵיִם חַיִּים is employed: “Since impurity is symbolic of death, its antidote, appropriately, is that

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 924.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 924.

²⁷⁵ M. Himmelfarb, “Impurity and Sin,” p. 21.

²⁷⁶ The question as to why P would omit explicit mention of מֵיִם חַיִּים from many cases is valid and worthy of a separate inquiry.

²⁷⁷ J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, comment on 14:5–7.

which gives life.”²⁷⁸ I would suggest that מַיִם חַיִּים, being running water, makes it reminiscent of blood, creating an analogy: As blood courses through flesh and gives life to it, so too water courses through the earth and imparts it with life. Like blood, spring water is a manifestation of חַיִּים, flowing and moving. It is the dynamic, animating element bestowing life and nourishment, relative to the static, hardened earth through which it courses by way of its many arteries. Both blood and water possess “life,” and both are applied in sprinkling rites, as life-substances capable of ridding death-forces and restoring vitality.

8.5 Two Wild Birds – שְׁתֵּי צִפְרִים חַיִּוֹת

The מְצַרֵּעַ purification rite calls for two birds, which have two descriptors: they must be טְהוֹרוֹת, i.e., pure, permitted for consumption, and חַיִּוֹת (Lev 14:4). NJPS translates the latter as “live” and HALOT similarly as “living, alive.”²⁷⁹ Milgrom contests the translation “alive” on the grounds that it is superfluous and instead suggests that חַיִּוֹת means “wild,” undomesticated, which would rule out doves or pigeons.²⁸⁰ He cites the rabbinic tradition describing them as צִפְרִים דְּרוֹר, “free birds,”²⁸¹ ones which do not vary greatly in size and will create the proper ratio of blood to water.²⁸² Milgrom argues that a wild bird is specifically prescribed, as opposed to a pigeon or a dove, “else there would remain the ever-present fear that the live bird dispatched to the open country would return to the settlement and bring back the very impurity it was supposed to eliminate.”²⁸³ In addition to this interpretation, Milgrom acknowledges the “life” motif carried by the word חַיִּוֹת:

²⁷⁸ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 924.

²⁷⁹ S.v. חַי; see also Hartley (WBC) and Wenham (NICOT) translations.

²⁸⁰ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 833. “Wild” may also be implied in כִּי חַיִּוֹת הֵנָּה (Exod 1:19), the midwives’ explanation as to the disposition of Hebrew women who manage to give birth before their arrival.

²⁸¹ See m. *Nega’im* 14:1. Elsewhere, the Talmud describes a free bird as not allowing itself to be subjugated and that it seeks to evade capture inside a house just as it does in the field (b. *Shabbat* 106b).

²⁸² See b. *Sotah* 16b.

²⁸³ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 833.

Nonetheless, the notion of “live” must also be denoted here, on thematic grounds. It is also the preferable rendering in the occurrences that follow, vv 6, 7, 51, 53. Life is the theme, the Leitwort, of the ritual: “live” waters (v 5) are employed; blood, the symbol of life, is added to the waters; so too the red yarn and the (red) cedar, which, again symbolically, supplement the blood or life-giving qualities of this potion. In fact, this emphasis on blood and red substances concerns the basic intent of this ritual; because the scale-diseased person is akin to the dead, this rite effects his restoration to life.²⁸⁴

8.5.1 Parallels to the Two-Bird Rite

One Akkadian text offers a striking parallel to the two-bird rite, involving the treatment of the skin disease *saḥaršubbû*. After the patient is healed, a ritual is performed where a partridge and crab are burned, and a second partridge is wiped on the patient’s body and released.²⁸⁵ In other Akkadian purgative rituals, a male bird is released along with the incantation, “May the evil of this bird cross over [the mountain],” or “May a bird take my sin up to the sky, may a fish take my sin down to the abyss.”²⁸⁶

In P itself, there is a manifest similarity between the two-bird rite and the two goats of Leviticus 16: The blood of the slaughtered bird, mixed with water, is sprinkled on the מצרע seven times to effect purification (וְהִזָּה עַל הַמִּטְהָר מִן הַצִּרְעָתָה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וְטָהְרוּ) (Lev 14:7), and so too the blood of the slaughtered goat is sprinkled seven times on and in front of the ark cover (וְהִזָּה שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים מִן הַדָּם) (Lev 16:14)²⁸⁷ and on the horns of the outer altar (וְהִזָּה עָלָיו מִן הַדָּם בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים וְטָהְרוּ וְקִדְּשׁוּ מִטְמְאֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) (v. 19). The linguistic parallels are evident:

²⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 832.

²⁸⁵ From an Akkadian medical text published in 1999 by Akio Tsukimoto, according to the interpretation of Yitzhaq Feder; see Y. Feder, “Behind the Scenes of a Priestly Polemic,” p. 6.

²⁸⁶ Cited by J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 834.

²⁸⁷ This verse is speaking about the blood of the bull, but the same procedure is used for the goat: וְעָשָׂה אֶת דָּמוֹ וְעָשָׂה לְדָם הַפָּר (16:15).

8. Sprinkling with Water Mixtures

Table 5. Linguistic parallels: Two-bird and two-goat rites

Two-bird rite (Lev 14:7)	Two-goat rite (Lev 16:19)
וְהִזָּה עַל הַמִּטָּהָר <i>From the water-mixture, with the cedar, hyssop, and red yarn (implied)</i> מִן הַצְרָעַת שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים וְטָהַרְוּ	וְהִזָּה עָלָיו מִן הַדָּם בְּאֶזְבֵּעוֹ מִטְמְאֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים וְטָהַרוּ וְקִדְּשׁוּ

Further, just as the bird left alive is dispatched away from the settlement, over the open field (וְשִׁלַּח אֶת הַחֲיָה עַל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה),²⁸⁸ so too is the living goat dispatched away from the settlement, into the wilderness (וְשִׁלַּח אֶת הַשְּׂעִיר בַּמִּדְבָּר).²⁸⁹ In the Leviticus 16 rite, the rationale for the dispatched goat is stated explicitly: Aaron lays his hands on the goat, confessing the sins of the Israelites and “putting them on the head of the goat” (וְנָתַן אֹתָם עָלָיו), after which “the goat shall carry upon it all their iniquities to an inaccessible region” (וְנָשָׂא הַשְּׂעִיר עָלָיו אֶת כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵם אֶל אֶרֶץ גְּזֵרָה), 16:21), after which “the goat shall carry upon it all their iniquities to an inaccessible region” (וְנָשָׂא הַשְּׂעִיר עָלָיו אֶת כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתֵם אֶל אֶרֶץ גְּזֵרָה), 16:22). The goat acts as a vehicle to transfer away sin. As such, many view the live bird set free over the field likewise as a vehicle for carrying away impurity.²⁹⁰

Keil and Delitzsch, however, argue that the bird represents freedom and vitality, “a symbolical representation of the fact that the former leper was now imbued with new vital energy and released from the fetters of his disease.”²⁹¹ Notwithstanding the possibility of multiple layers of symbolism, it seems to me—based on Akkadian parallels and the clear

²⁸⁸ 14:53 adds: אֶל מְחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה, “outside the city, over the open field.”

²⁸⁹ 16:22 adds: אֶל אֶרֶץ גְּזֵרָה, which NJPS and Milgrom render “to an inaccessible region.” 16:10 specifies: לְשַׁלַּח אֶת הַחֲיָה לְעֵזְאֵל הַמִּדְבָּר, “to send it to Azazel in the wilderness.”

²⁹⁰ See e.g., J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 840; E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, “The Rites” (14:1–32); D. J. Davies, “Sacrifice in Leviticus,” p. 397.

²⁹¹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 2, p. 385.

analogies to the scapegoat rite, especially sending the bird away to an uninhabited region—that removal of impurity is the primary motivation for the dispatched bird.

8.6 Red Cow – פָּרָה אֲדָמָה

The red cow is given several descriptors in Numbers 19:2: It is a פָּרָה, a female, which is unusual in that female cattle are not otherwise prescribed in P’s legislation. It must be תְּמִימָה, whole/complete, and without מוֹם, blemish. Milgrom argues that תְּמִימָה and אֵין בָּהּ מוֹם are synonyms, a “redundancy for the purposes of emphasis.”²⁹² A yoke, עֵל, must never have been placed on it, which could indicate that the animal is fit only if has never been used for profane purposes.²⁹³ Albert Baumgarten suggests that not being yoked means that the red cow’s “strength is unattenuated” and that its ashes are therefore a “potent agent.”²⁹⁴

Of course, the cow must also be אֲדָמָה, red. Milgrom argues that red is meant “to increase, if symbolically, the amount of blood in the ashes.”²⁹⁵ Levine similarly states, “It seems inescapable that the ruddy color of the cow symbolized blood,” pointing out the etymological connection between the words דָּם and אֲדָם.²⁹⁶ In his doctoral thesis on the red cow, Joel Humann suggests that the cluster of words אֲדָמָה, אֲדָמָה, אֲדָם, and דָּם are “so similar phonetically that they absolutely demand paranomasia and speculative etymologization.”²⁹⁷ The word אֲדָמָה, he says, is linked symbolically with אֲדָם and דָּם, the rite representing a reversal of the creation of human beings, “a return to the dust of the

²⁹² See J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 158. Cf. the rabbinic tradition, which understands תְּמִימָה as referring to the factor of redness, separate from the requirement of being unblemished (see *Sifrei Numbers* 123:1).

²⁹³ See B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 461.

²⁹⁴ A. I. Baumgarten, “The Paradox of the Red Heifer,” p. 445.

²⁹⁵ J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, p. 158. Cf. Julius Greenstone, who suggests per the rabbinic tradition that the red cow serves as an atonement for the Golden Calf and “must be red, which is symbolic of sin (Isa 1.18)”; see J. H. Greenstone, *Numbers*, p. 201.

²⁹⁶ B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 460.

²⁹⁷ J. R. Humann, *Ceremony of the Red Heifer*, p. 109. Humann here cites A. Brenner-Idan, *Colour Terms*, p. 161.

earth.”²⁹⁸ The reddish-brown hue of the cow also resembles earth.²⁹⁹ In addition, the fact that other red ingredients—red yarn, cedar wood, and the cow’s blood³⁰⁰—are employed in the rite suggests that redness, signifying blood and therefore life, is a key element of the rite.

8.6.1 Paradox of the Red Cow

If the ashes of the red cow serve to purify, why should those preparing, handling, and dispensing them be rendered impure? This long-discussed “paradox” of the red cow is evidenced several times in the pericope, where its handlers are made impure during the following procedures: throwing the three ingredients into the fire (vv. 6–7), burning the red cow (v. 8), gathering the ashes (v. 10), and sprinkling or touching the מֵי נֶדָה (v. 21). Each of these cases necessitates a wait until evening, with some instances requiring washing and/or laundering.³⁰¹

Milgrom’s proposed solution to the paradox is that it is a חֲטָאת. A standard feature of the חֲטָאת, he says, is that it renders its handlers impure.³⁰² As an example, he cites the goat and bull חֲטָאת sacrifices of Leviticus 16, where the person who burns them must wash and launder before reentering the camp.³⁰³ Why does the חֲטָאת impart impurity? Says Milgrom, “it absorbs the impurity it has purged,” which is why the חֲטָאת carcass is burned outside the camp. As comparative evidence, he cites the Babylonian Akitu festival in which the body of the ram used for cleansing the temple is thrown into the river. Albert Baumgarten points out a problem in Milgrom’s reasoning: The bull and goat חֲטָאת of Leviticus 16 are burned after having already absorbed impurity, but the red cow is burned *prior* to absorbing any

²⁹⁸ J. R. Humann, p. 109.

²⁹⁹ HALOT s.v. אֶדְמָה, “orig. the red tilled soil.”

³⁰⁰ The cow must be burned along with its blood (Num 19:5), which is unlike normal חֲטָאת sacrifices, where the blood is poured out and not burned, e.g., כָּל דַּם הַפָּר יִשְׁפָּךְ אֶל יְסוּד מִזִּבְחַת הָעֹלָה, (Lev 4:7).

³⁰¹ A detailed table of cases and purification rites can be found in the Appendix.

³⁰² J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 271–272.

³⁰³ The language is indeed similar. Compare וְהִשְׂרַף אֹתָם יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו וְרַחַץ אֶת בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְאַחֲרָיִךְ כֹּן יָבוֹא אֶל הַמִּחְנֶה (Lev 16:28) with וְהִשְׂרַף אֹתָהּ יְכַבֵּס בְּגָדָיו בַּמַּיִם וְרַחַץ בְּשָׂרוֹ בַּמַּיִם וְטָמְאָ עַד הָעֶרֶב (Num 19:8).

impurity.³⁰⁴ David P. Wright, also recognizing this difficulty, suggests that the red cow absorbs impurity “prospectively, before actual use in purification,”³⁰⁵ a theory that Baumgarten rejects as well. I would add another difficulty, which is the absence of any mention of *ṭāṭā* impurity in P’s basic legislation (Lev 4–5). Furthermore, P specifically stipulates that the burning of the *ṭāṭā* is to take place in a “pure place” outside the camp, at the site of the altar ash heap (Lev 4:12; see also 6:4), which if anything indicates *sanctum* disposal rather than impurity disposal.

Baumgarten’s own solution to the paradox is that the requirement of washing and laundering from contact with the red cow ashes, as well as contact with the Day of Atonement *ṭāṭā*, is due to contacting too high a level of sanctity: “since [the handlers] begin at the middle, at the level of ‘normalcy,’ they are raised further above the line than they ought to be; hence they are rendered impure.”³⁰⁶ According to Baumgarten, some cases employ language of sanctification, as in contact with the blood of a *ṭāṭā* (*יָגַע בְּבִשְׂרָה יִקְדָּשׁ*) (Lev 6:20), while others use language of defilement, as in the red cow, but these in fact represent the same phenomenon. However, there is no precedent in P for the term *ṭāṭā* being used to describe impurity by way of sanctity. Indeed, P is scrupulous about distinguishing between these terms: *וְלֹא תִבְדִּיל בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַחֵל וּבֵין הַטְּמֵא וּבֵין הַטָּהוֹר*, “for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the unclean and the clean” (Lev 10:10).³⁰⁷ Furthermore, the exact language of washing, laundering, and reentering the camp is used in the Leviticus 16 for burning *ṭāṭā* sacrifices and dispatching the scapegoat. According to Baumgarten, their impurity stems from two opposite rationales, but nowhere is this indicated in the text.

³⁰⁴ A. I. Baumgarten, “The Paradox of the Red Heifer,” p. 443.

³⁰⁵ D. P. Wright, “Heifer, Red.”

³⁰⁶ A. I. Baumgarten, “The Paradox of the Red Heifer,” p. 445.

³⁰⁷ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 615, who identifies this as a P verse, not H.

Another solution is offered by Dominic Rudman, who proposes that the מֵי נֶדֶה constitutes a “weak solution of death” and does not have a cleansing function. Rather, its role is to “cause a more serious contamination of a like nature to become responsive to the usual treatments for impurities,” i.e., bathing and laundering.³⁰⁸ In other words, the greater impurity is diluted by introducing a lesser impurity. As such, Rudman translates מֵי נֶדֶה as “water of impurity.” One difficulty with this thesis is the phrase הוּא תְהַטֵּף אֵשׁ בּוֹ (Num 19:12, and similar instances of the verb אֵטַף in vv. 13, 19, 20), referring to the action of the ashes, implying that they themselves purify, not merely make a person receptive to purification.³⁰⁹ Humann as well points out that there is no indication in the text that dilution is the function of the מֵי נֶדֶה.³¹⁰

Baruch Levine argues that the ashes generate impurity due to the incinerated cow representing death, and that they are effective in clearing corpse contamination based on sympathetic magic:

The operative magical principle in the rites of Numbers 19 is sympathetic: death rids the community of death! Ashes represent annihilation and are, therefore, effective when applied to persons and objects defiled through contact with the dead.³¹¹

8.6.2 A Life-Death Mixture

I would suggest an amended version of Levine’s position: The red cow rite employs an element of sympathetic magic within a life-imbuing rite. The red cow ashes possess some “deathly force,” but it is harnessed, by use of the life-ingredients, to repel the forces of death incurred by corpse contamination. Nonetheless, by virtue of the deathly component, contact with the ashes produces a minor impurity. Thus, a pure person who comes into contact with

³⁰⁸ D. Rudman, “Water for Impurity or Water of Impurity?”, p. 75.

³⁰⁹ See e.g., Levine’s translation, “He must purify himself with [the ashes] on the third day...” (B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 459).

³¹⁰ See J. R. Humann, *Ceremony of the Red Heifer*, p. 169.

³¹¹ B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 471.

the ashes does not get the benefit but does incur the impurity. An apt analogy might be a medicine that has a healing action but also produces a side-effect. Only the person for whom it is intended will get both the benefit and the side-effect, whereas a person who takes it when it is not indicated will merely experience the side-effect.

Where do we see that the corpse-contaminated person also gets the “side effect,” i.e., the minor impurity? I would argue that it is in the wait until evening on the seventh day of purification. In all other cases of impurity lasting more than one day (childbirth, menstruation, abnormal genital discharge, and *צָרַעַת*), there is not a single instance where P describes the impurity as terminating in the evening. This requirement for a corpse-contaminated person, I suggest, is not for purposes of concluding the seven days of purification, but due to their being sprinkled with the *מֵי נִדָּה*—just as handlers of the ashes/ *מֵי הַנִּדָּה* throughout the chapter must wait until evening. In some cases, the handlers are instructed to launder and wash as well, which the corpse-contaminated person also does on the seventh day, though for the latter it owes to a combination of seventh-day refreshment/transition rites (similar to the *מְצַרְעֵה* and *בֵּן*) and contact with *מֵי נִדָּה*.

8.6.3 *מֵי חֲטָאֵת* and *מֵי נִדָּה*

The term *מֵי (ה)נִדָּה* (Num 19:9, 13, 20, 21 [x2]; 31:23) is variously interpreted as referring to the act of sprinkling,³¹² to “water of expulsion [of impurity],”³¹³ and to “water of impurity.”³¹⁴ Only in the Levite dedication is the water mixture called *מֵי חֲטָאֵת* (Num 8:7). Levine believes that *מֵי נִדָּה* and *מֵי חֲטָאֵת* refer to two different substances.³¹⁵ However, the mention of *מֵי חֲטָאֵת* in Numbers 8:7 assumes that the reader understands which purificatory

³¹² See B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 464; also see Rashi, Shadal on Num 19:9.

³¹³ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 745.

³¹⁴ See D. Rudman, “Water for Impurity or Water of Impurity?”

³¹⁵ See B. A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, p. 274.

8. Sprinkling with Water Mixtures

waters are being referred to, and the only candidate is the formula whose detailed instructions appear in Numbers 19.

Also, the Levites are about to undertake the work of the sanctuary, and it is fitting that among their purifications they would cover corpse contamination, especially if they had become contaminated without realizing it, or they knew but subsequently forgot—a scenario explicitly mentioned in P (Lev 5:3). One difference, however, is that whereas Numbers 19 requires sprinkling *מִי נִדָּח* on the third and seventh days (vv. 12, 19), the case of the Levites mentions only a single application on the day of their purification.

In sum

The shared ingredients in the two-bird and red cow sprinkling rites (*מִיִּם חַיִּים*, blood, cedar, red yarn, and hyssop) convey motion, life-force, strength, and vitality—a life motif. Life both banishes the forces of impurity and serves to revitalize from their deathly effects. The dispatched bird helps to carry off the impurity of the *מִצְרָע*, and the ashes of the red cow add a sympathetic (death driving out death) element to the *מִי נִדָּח*.

9. Sacrifices

Private individuals undergoing purification are required by P to offer sacrifices in the following cases:

- *Childbirth* — The postpartum mother, after forty/eighty days of purification (Lev 12:6–8).
- *Skin* *צָרַעַת* — The *מְצֹרַע*, on the eighth day of purification (Lev 14:10–13, 21–24).
- *Abnormal genital discharges* — The *בִּזְבֻזָּה*, on the eighth day of purification (Lev 15:14–15, 29–30).
- *Impure nazirite* — The nazirite, on the eighth day of purification following inadvertent corpse contamination (Num 6:10–12).

The offerings brought are as follows:

Table 6. Private sacrifices for impurity

Case	Offering	Hardship substitution
Childbirth	1 male lamb (חֲטָאת) 1 bird (עֵלָה)	2 birds (עֵלָה + חֲטָאת)
Skin <i>צָרַעַת</i>	2 male lambs (עֵלָה + אֵשֶׁת) 1 ewe (חֲטָאת) 3/10 flour with oil (מִנְחָה) 1 log oil	1 male lamb (אֵשֶׁת) 2 birds (עֵלָה + חֲטָאת) 1/10 flour with oil (מִנְחָה) 1 log oil
Genital discharges	2 birds (עֵלָה + חֲטָאת)	(none)
Impure nazirite	2 birds (עֵלָה + חֲטָאת) 1 male lamb (אֵשֶׁת)	(none)

9.1 Why Only Some Impurity Cases Require Sacrifice

Absent from the above list are all forms of one-day impurity, menstrual impurity, and corpse contamination, none of which call for sacrifice.³¹⁶ To explain the omission of sacrifice in Numbers 19, Levine remarks on the uniqueness of the red cow rite, being “entirely separate from the Sanctuary and its sacrificial altar,” designed specifically so because P wished to distance itself from the cult of the dead.³¹⁷ Milgrom argues that corpse contamination and menstrual impurity, having a duration of seven days, are less severe than the cases of *זָרַעַת* and abnormal genital discharge, which are eight-day impurities.³¹⁸ But in the latter cases, as well as the case of the impure nazirite, the eighth day rite *is* the sacrifice,³¹⁹ so Milgrom’s reasoning strikes me as circular.

Elsewhere, Milgrom offers a pragmatic rationale as to why there is no sacrifice following menstruation, saying it would be too great a burden to require women to bring sacrifices every month.³²⁰ A practical reason may also underlie the absence of sacrifice for corpse contamination: A sacrifice entails an outlay of money, and such a demand might dissuade people from tending properly to the dead. Furthermore, it is a secondary contamination. The corpse-contaminated person is not the source of the impurity, and so it is not incumbent upon him or her to bring a sacrifice.

However, an overarching factor determining which cases require sacrifice, I would argue, is indebtedness to YHWH. In most cases, this pertains to survival and recovery: Childbirth, even in the modern, Western world is an ordeal, but the risk of maternal

³¹⁶ Ezekiel, however, indicates that a priest must offer a *חַטָּאת* following purification from corpse contamination (Ezek 44:27), which Milgrom views as an older, more “conservative” tradition; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 277.

³¹⁷ See B. Levine, *Numbers 1–19*, pp. 470–472.

³¹⁸ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 277.

³¹⁹ See Lev 14:10 (*מִצְרֵעַת*); 15:14, 29 (abnormal discharge); and Num 16:10 (nazirite). Eighth-day rites for the *מִצְרֵעַת* also include daubing rites using sacrificial blood and oil.

³²⁰ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 935.

mortality from exhaustion and hemorrhage in the ancient world was exceedingly high,³²¹ and emerging intact owed to an act of divine beneficence. Being a מִצְרָע held the potential of a life sentence of disease, disfigurement, and isolation,³²² and being declared pure meant having one's life back. Pathological genital discharge posed a danger to the נֶזֶב/נֶזֶבָה, and contagion was a real fear, so recovery must have come as a relief to all. Surviving such ordeals incurs a debt to YHWH, one which is offset via sacrifice. The impure nazirite's sacrifice, by contrast, is not occasioned by survival. It does, however, represent a debt owed for inadvertently breaking a vow to YHWH and being granted a chance to restart it. Unlike corpse contamination, menstruation, and other cases of impurity, the above cases are ones where the person owes something to YHWH for being the recipient of a good, and sacrifice functions to cover that liability. The עֲלָה, חֲטָאת, and אֲשָׁם each touch on a different aspect of indebtedness, as we will see ahead.³²³

9.2 Sacrifices Follow Purification

Sacrifice enters at the final stage of purification, after the text already declares the person pure. Prior to offering the sacrifices, the מִצְרָע is dubbed “pure” twice, once before readmission to the camp (Lev 14:8) and again before reentering the tent (v. 9). The term נִטְהַר, “and he is made pure,” is mentioned a third time after sacrificial rites (v. 20), but this additional pronouncement may relate to daubing rites performed with sacrificial blood (vv. 14, 25) rather than to the sacrifices per se. Milgrom notes that the hardship-substitution sacrifice in the case of the מִצְרָע is not followed by the term נִטְהַר and argues

³²¹ See L. K. McClure, *Women in Classical Antiquity*, p. 92. The Bible attests to this as well: Rachel dies following a difficult labor (Gen 35:16–19), and Eli's daughter-in-law is overcome by labor pains and dies (1 Sam 4:19–21).

³²² Uzziah, for instance, lives out his life as a מִצְרָע (2 Chr 26:23).

³²³ See Sec. 9.3.3. For a more in-depth analysis of sacrifice in P, see e.g., J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*; J. Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*.

that the mention of וְטָהַר in v. 20 “is not essential, for it only refers to the effect of the sacrifices,”³²⁴ meaning that the מְצַרֵּעַ is already pure by the end of the seventh day.³²⁵

Further evidence of this is the fact that the מְצַרֵּעַ, when presenting the sacrifices, comes before YHWH at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (לִפְנֵי יְהוָה פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, v. 11), i.e., inside the holy precinct, the Tabernacle courtyard itself.³²⁶ If the person has any impurity left to resolve, it is evidently not a danger to themselves or the sancta.

As for the other cases, the healed בֶּן and נֶזֶבֶת count seven days and wash (the latter rite explicit only for the בֶּן), after which they are called “pure” (Lev 15:13, 28). The following day, they arrive at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to offer sacrifices, and the text does not restate following the sacrifices that they are “pure” (vv. 15, 30), so every indication is that full purification is achieved prior to eighth-day rites. The impure nazirite’s hair is shaved off on the seventh day, which is “the day he becomes pure” (בְּיוֹם טְהוֹרָתוֹ, Num 6:9). A day later, the nazirite brings sacrifices to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and again the text says nothing about their becoming “pure” as a result (vv. 11–12). The case of the postpartum mother would seem present an exception, since she is not declared “pure” until after offering her sacrifices (Lev 12:7–8). However, apart from waiting the requisite number of days, sacrifice is the only explicit rite prescribed, and she, too, brings her sacrifice to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. I would argue, therefore, that this case is no different than the others. She is pure for all practical purposes at the end of forty/eighty days.

³²⁴ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 859.

³²⁵ According to Milgrom, prior to the sacrifices, the מְצַרֵּעַ is pure for all purposes apart from being permitted to eat from the sacred offerings; see *ibid.*, p. 849.

³²⁶ See J. Milgrom, *ibid.* Cf. Rashi, *ad loc.*, m. *Nega'im* 14:8, *Sotah* 8a, which say that in the Herodian Temple, the מְצַרֵּעַ would go only up to—and not through—the Eastern/Nicanor gate, leading into the space containing the altar. In the Tabernacle, this would be the equivalent of standing at the opening to the courtyard.

9.3 Meaning of the Term כָּפַר

Rather than “pure,” the term accompanied by sacrifices is כָּפַר, which is employed in all purification cases under discussion:

Childbirth

- ...וְהִקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְכִפֹּר עָלֶיהָ וְטָהְרָה מִמִּקּוֹר דָּמֶיהָ... (Lev 12:7)
- ...שְׁתֵּי תַרְיָם אוֹ שְׁנֵי בָנִי יוֹנָה אֶחָד לְעֵלָה וְאֶחָד לְחֹטְאֵת וְכִפֹּר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן וְטָהְרָה (12:8)

Skin צִרְעַת

- ...וְהִנּוּתָר בְּשֶׁמֶן אֲשֶׁר עַל כֹּף הַכֹּהֵן יִתֵּן עַל רֹאשׁ הַמִּטְהָר וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה (Lev 14:18)
 - ...וַעֲשֵׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַחֹטְאֵת וְכִפֹּר עַל הַמִּטְהָר מִטְּמֵאָתוֹ וְאַחֵר יִשְׁחַט אֶת הָעֵלָה (14:19)
 - ...וְהֵעֵלָה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הָעֵלָה וְאֶת הַמִּנְחָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן וְטָהְרָה (14:20)
- (Also in vv. 21, 29, 31 regarding substitution sacrifices)

House צִרְעַת

- ...וְשָׁלַח אֶת הַצֹּפֵר הַחַיָּה אֶל מַחוּץ לְעִיר אֶל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה וְכִפֹּר עַל הַבַּיִת וְטָהְרָה (Lev 14:53)

Abnormal Genital Discharges

- ...וַעֲשֵׂה אֹתָם הַכֹּהֵן אֶחָד חֹטְאֵת וְהָאֶחָד עֵלָה וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה מִזֹּבֹו (Lev 15:15)
- ...הָאֶחָד חֹטְאֵת וְאֶת הָאֶחָד עֵלָה וְכִפֹּר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה מִזֹּבֹו טְמֵאָתָה (15:30)

Impure nazirite

- ...וַעֲשֵׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶחָד לְחֹטְאֵת וְאֶחָד לְעֵלָה וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו מֵאֲשֶׁר חָטָא עַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ... (Num 6:11)

The term כָּפַר is notably absent in the cases of menstrual impurity, corpse contamination, and one-day impurities—i.e., those that do not involve sacrifices. The one exception above where the term כָּפַר appears in a case without sacrifices is house צִרְעַת.

Milgrom suggests that the reason כָּפַר is used here is so that “the bird ritual for houses should

close the same way as its counterpart for persons,” such that וְכָפַר עַל הַבַּיִת וְטָהַר (v. 20) parallels וְכָפַר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן וְטָהַר (v. 53).³²⁷

9.3.1 Interpretations of כָּפַר

What does כָּפַר mean, and how does it function in the above cases of impurity? HALOT defines כָּפַר (*pi'el*) as appease, make amends, or atone.³²⁸ Milgrom, however, argues that in most cases of כָּפַר, expiation and atonement do not fit. Instead, he renders כָּפַר as “purge,” noting that in biblical poetry, כָּפַר parallels הִסִיר, “remove” (Isa 27:9), and מָחָה, “wipe clean” (Jer 18:23), and that in Leviticus 14, כָּפַר accompanies the cleansing terms וְחָטָא and וְטָהַר.³²⁹ Milgrom points to potential cognates *kafara* (cover) in Arabic and *kuppuru* (wipe) in Akkadian, both of which connote “rub,” either rubbing something on (covering) or rubbing it off (removing/purging). Because the meaning “rub off” predominates in ancient Near Eastern ritual texts, he concludes that כָּפַר in the context of impurity means rub off or purge.³³⁰

Yitzhaq Feder rejects the interpretation of wiping based on the Akkadian *kuppuru*, viewing כָּפַר instead as carrying the more abstract meaning “expiate.” He explains that there is no trace of the concrete sense of wiping in Palestinian Aramaic, that only Mesopotamian dialects employ the dual sense (concrete and abstract), and therefore there is no reason to think the biblical authors meant “wipe” or “rub.” As such, כָּפַר should be understood based on inner-biblical evidence, which according to Feder points to expiation.³³¹

³²⁷ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 882.

³²⁸ S.v. כָּפַר.

³²⁹ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 1079.

³³⁰ Milgrom grants that “rubbing on” may sometimes be the meaning in cases possessing an apotropaic element, such as the doorpost blood rite during the plague of the firstborn (Exod 12:7–23; though notably there is no verb כָּפַר in this case), or the blood-oil daubing rite of the מִצְרַעַת. Regarding the latter rite, he concludes that since the blood is from the אֶשֶׁת, it carries the meaning “expiate”; see J. Milgrom, *ibid.*, p. 1079–1081.

³³¹ Y. Feder, “On *kuppuru*, *kippēr* and Etymological Sins,” pp. 538–541.

Mary Douglas suggests that “cover,” rather than wipe, better matches the meaning of *כָּפַר* found in purification cases, which are “exemplified by bodily leakages and disease, so clearly not cases in which dirt has to be removed or surfaces polished.”³³² Douglas describes the function of *כָּפַר* as “cover, recover, cover again, to repair a hole, cure a sickness, mend a rift, make good a torn or broken covering.”³³³

William Propp argues similarly that “cover” is the literal meaning of *כָּפַר*. He notes that “we normally look to the Qal conjugation for a root’s basic meaning” and cites the single biblical instance of a *qal* form, *וְכִפַּרְתָּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּמַחֹץ בַּכֶּפֶר* (Gen 6:14), describing smearing or covering with pitch.³³⁴ Propp also points to the word *כַּפֶּרֶת* as a “richly ambivalent term,” denoting cover as well as purification and atonement.³³⁵ Regarding the *pi’el* *כִּפֶּר*, he cites a verse from Jeremiah that is later rephrased by Nehemiah, wherein the word *תִּכַּפֵּר* (Jer 18:23) is replaced by *תִּכַּס*, “cover” (Neh 3:27), a substitution that suggests the terms are viewed by the latter as synonyms. He also notes that the imagery of “covering” sin is attested in Psalms (Ps 32:1, 5; 85:3). Nonetheless, Propp translates the term *כָּפַר* in P as “clear” or “effect clearing,” which he explains expresses “cleansing, nullification, reconciliation and the removal of an obstruction.”³³⁶

Baruch Schwartz rejects the proposed connection between *כָּפַר* and the Arabic *kafara* (cover), opting instead for the Akkadian *kuppuru* (wipe), used in P either to convey the technical meaning “purge” (when it refers to an object) or the metaphorical meaning “cleans” (regarding human sin or impurity; e.g., cases of the *אָשָׁם*).³³⁷ In addition, he suggests that in some cases the verb *כָּפַר* means *כִּפֶּר*, “ransom,” and that these two types of

³³² M. Douglas, “Atonement in Leviticus,” p. 116.

³³³ Ibid., pp. 117–118.

³³⁴ W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, p. 466.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 385.

³³⁶ Ibid., pp. 466–467.

³³⁷ See B. J. Schwartz, “Concerning the ‘Eating’ of Blood,” pp. 52–54. However, as observed by the medieval exegetes David Kimhi and Abraham Maimonides, there is a plausible etymological link between the *qal* verb *כָּפַר*, meaning “cover,” and *כַּפֶּרֶת*, a “cover” or “lid”; see R. Eichler, *The Ark and the Cherubim*, p. 166.

כִּפֹּר are merely homographs, not etymologically connected. The “ransom” connotation, Schwartz argues, extends to the phrase לְכַפֵּר עַל נַפְשֵׁתֵיכֶם (Lev 17:11), regarding blood applied to the altar.³³⁸

9.3.2 Clearing/Covering Liability

Putting aside for the moment whether the verb כִּפֹּר connotes wiping, covering, expiating, clearing, or cleansing, I would argue that when applied to impure persons, it does not refer to the elimination of impurity itself. As discussed above, individuals are effectively pure even before offering sacrifices. Nonetheless, sacrifices can be viewed as part of purification by distinguishing between two phases: (1) the personal impurity-elimination process, achieved via procedures of washing, waiting, sprinkling, etc., and (2) purity with respect to YHWH, achieved via sacrifice. The term כִּפֹּר pertains only to the latter and connotes, as I proposed earlier, being cleared of liability for a debt.³³⁹ In this sense, “cover,” “wipe,” or most any proposed etymology for כִּפֹּר would be an apt metaphor for the cancellation of liability.

In P’s worldview, to be in proximity to YHWH with a liability is dangerous, and it is the job of the priests to effect כִּפְרָה for the people and protect them from harm. This is illustrated in numerous cases where the term כִּפֹּר refers to stopping a plague in progress, such as YHWH’s wrath in the wake of the Korah rebellion (Num 17:11) or YHWH’s plague following the incident at Peor (Num 25:8, 13). Clearing of liability, כִּפְרָה, is also done as a prophylactic, for example to prevent YHWH’s plague during a census (Exod 30:12, 15). The phrase כִּפֹּר נַפְשׁוֹ in this case is frequently understood as a person’s “ransom,”³⁴⁰ but I would

³³⁸ See B. J. Schwartz, “Concerning the ‘Eating’ of Blood,” pp. 54–55.

³³⁹ Frank Gorman understands כִּפֹּר as repairing “disruptions” in the relationship between a person and YHWH; see F. H. Gorman, *Divine Presence and Community*, p. 16. Sidney Hills explains that כִּפֹּר is an act which overcomes “a break in a relationship between two persons”; see S. O. Hills, *KPR in the Hebrew Old Testament*, p. 287.

³⁴⁰ See e.g., translations of NJPS, Propp, as well as Schwartz (“Concerning the ‘Eating’ of Blood”).

argue that the payment made here can just as well be framed as a preemptive means of covering individual liabilities that could, collectively, result in danger.

Other times, כַּפָּרָה is performed as a petitionary measure to release people from liability and avoid YHWH's imminent wrath, as in Moses' intercession following the people's golden calf worship (Exod 32:30). Another example from a non-P source concerns Jacob, who is aware of his debt to Esau—as well as his brother's wrath against him—and wishes to clear himself. Jacob says to himself: אֶכַּפְּרֶה פָּנָיו בְּמִנְחָה הַהֲלֹכֶת לְפָנָי וְאַחֲרָי כִּן אֲרֹאֶה פָּנָיו אוֹלֵי יִשְׂאָהּ פָּנָי, “If I propitiate him with presents in advance, and then face him, perhaps he will show me favor” (Gen 32:21). The term אֶכַּפְּרֶה פָּנָיו is the equivalent of לְפָנָי יְהוָה ... וְכַפֵּר, wherein the פָּנָיו is the target of the כַּפָּרָה, such that כַּפֵּר concerns not repairing oneself but clearing oneself with respect to another, that other signified by their face.

For כַּפָּרָה in cases of purification, the phrase לְפָנָי יְהוָה is part of P's formula, which when written in full takes the following form:

1. כַּפֵּר עַל
2. person/object needing clearing
3. person doing the clearing
4. לְפָנָי יְהוָה
5. from (מִן) the specific liability (impurity or sin³⁴¹).

An example of the complete formula is וְכַפֵּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לְפָנָי יְהוָה מִזֹּבוּ (Lev 15:15),³⁴² which I would render as, “And the priest shall clear him of liability before YHWH resulting from his flow.” The element לְפָנָי יְהוָה appears in many instances of this כַּפֵּר formula³⁴³ but is omitted

³⁴¹ The term כַּפֵּר is employed for both sin and impurity using nearly identical language, e.g., וְכַפֵּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן מִחַטָּאתוֹ (Lev 5:6, 10) and וְכַפֵּר עַל הַמַּטְהָר מִטְּמֵאתוֹ (Lev 14:19).

³⁴² For a separate discussion of this formula, see R. Gane, *Cult and Character*, p. 116.

³⁴³ See Lev 5:26; 10:17; 14:18, 29, 31; 15:15, 30; 19:22; 23:28; and Num 31:50.

at other times likely because it is assumed. Likewise, the elements “from + liability” are mostly left implicit since the context spells out the cause of the liability.

Regarding sancta in need of purification, impurity presents a liability in the sense that it jeopardizes the continuity of YHWH’s presence in the sanctuary and thus among the camp. However, unlike individual purification, where impurity is neutralized prior to כַּפֶּרֶה, in the case of cult objects, impurity is neutralized during the act of כַּפֶּרֶה itself—the blood rite (see Ch. 10).

9.3.3 Liabilities Covered by the עֹלָה, חֲטָאת, and אֲשָׁם

The purificatory עֹלָה, חֲטָאת, and אֲשָׁם sacrifices are each described in P as agents of כַּפֶּרֶה.³⁴⁴

- עֹלָה — וְסָמַךְ יָדוֹ עַל רֹאשׁ הָעֹלָה וְנִרְצָח לוֹ לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו (Lev 1:4).
- חֲטָאת — וְכִפֶּר עֲלֵהֶם הַכֹּהֵן וְנִסְלַח לָהֶם (Lev 4:20; also 4:26, 31, 35).
- אֲשָׁם — וְהִכְהֵן יִכַּפֵּר עָלָיו בְּאֵיל הָאֲשָׁם וְנִסְלַח לוֹ (Lev 5:16; also 5:6, 10, 13, 18, 26)

Milgrom suggests that the עֹלָה was the original sacrifice for propitiation and expiation, predating the חֲטָאת and אֲשָׁם and initially known as the כְּלִיל.³⁴⁵ In cases of impurity, he explains, the עֹלָה functions in part as a thanksgiving offering (as in Lev 22:18, Num 15:3) and in part as an expiatory offering (as attested by the use of the term וְכִפֶּר, Lev 12:7, 8). Its expiation, he says, “addresses other matters than pollution.”³⁴⁶ Jonathan Grossman proposes that the עֹלָה is required for a person to be able to stand once again before

³⁴⁴ This is as opposed to the זֶבַח שְׂלָמִים sacrifice, brought in festive or commemorative contexts, which is not said to effect כַּפֶּרֶה.

³⁴⁵ As in וְכָל מִנְחַת כֹּהֵן כְּלִיל תִּהְיֶה לָא תֵאָכַל (Lev 6:16; also 6:15; Deut 33:10; 1 Sam 7:9); see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 172–173. Cf. views in rabbinic literature explaining the עֹלָה as expiating sins not covered by the חֲטָאת, such as neglecting to perform a positive command (see t. *Menahot* 10:3) or sins of thought rather than action (*Leviticus Rabbah* 7:3).

³⁴⁶ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 757–758.

YHWH, compensating for the “distance” between the person and the sacred domain caused by the impurity.³⁴⁷ I would suggest that perhaps the *עֹלָה* in cases of impurity serves a dual gratitude-expiation role. Specifically, the *עֹלָה* offsets the debt owed for being the undeserving recipient of a good. To survive an ordeal such as childbirth or disease, or to be given a second chance to complete one’s term as a nazirite, is an act of divine grace—and one which may leave the recipient feeling that the accounting with YHWH is no longer in their favor. Offering an *עֹלָה* covers the debt of gratitude and gives the offerer peace of mind that they are in good standing with YHWH to receive his continued blessing.

The predominant traditional rendering of the *חֲטָאת* is as a “sin-offering,” brought for an inadvertent transgression.³⁴⁸ The case of the nazirite is understandable in this light, since the verse states *וְכִפֶּר עָלָיו מֵאֲשֶׁר חָטָא עַל הַנִּפְּשׁ* (Num 6:11), that the sacrifice covers him for inadvertently becoming corpse-contaminated. But what is the “sin” that would require a *חֲטָאת* following skin *צָרַעַת*, childbirth, or an abnormal genital discharge? Biblical narratives cast skin *צָרַעַת* as a punishment—against Miriam for speaking against Moses’ Cushite wife (Num 12), against Gehazi for his act of greed and deception (2 Kgs 5), and against Uzziah for asserting priestly prerogatives (2 Chron 26). Yet, priestly legal traditions say nothing of any sin imputed to the *מִצְרַע*.³⁴⁹ Regarding childbirth and genital discharges, the Bible does not attribute these to transgression, but opinions in rabbinic literature do,³⁵⁰ presumably on the assumption that a sin-offering must address a sin. Milgrom’s proposed rendering of the *חֲטָאת* as a “purification-offering,” however, provides a rationale other than sin: The purpose of the

³⁴⁷ See J. Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*, pp. 98–99.

³⁴⁸ In his 1971 article, Milgrom states, “To my knowledge, all versions and translations, old and new, render the *ḥattā’t* sacrifice as ‘sin offering’”; see J. Milgrom, “Sin-Offering or Purification Offering,” p. 237.

³⁴⁹ On this point, see J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, p. 25.

³⁵⁰ The postpartum mother is said to be guilty of violating the rash oath said during childbirth that she would never again have sex with her husband (see b. *Niddah* 31b). Ibn Ezra on Lev 15:14 says regarding the *בֶּזַע* that the discharge occurred as punishment for a sin: *והקרבת עולה וחטאת בעבור כי הזיב מוסר על עון*.

חטאת is to cleanse the sancta of impurity transmitted to it from afar.³⁵¹ I concur with Milgrom that sanctuary purification is one aspect of the חטאת, but I would suggest that perhaps inadvertently contaminating the sanctuary also creates a personal liability, and offering the חטאת clears that liability. (This proposal of a dual-function חטאת will be discussed in Sec 10.4.2.)

The עֹשֶׂה, often termed the guilt-offering or reparation-offering, is normally prescribed in cases of sancta trespass (Lev 5:15). Of the impurity cases, only the impure nazirite and the מְצַרֵּעַ are instructed to offer an עֹשֶׂה. The nazirite inadvertently defiles a sanctum—their own hair, so the עֹשֶׂה clearly fits the case. The question is why the מְצַרֵּעַ needs to bring an עֹשֶׂה. Milgrom argues that the reason is that the individual “may have desecrated sancta” (emphasis his) in the past, and contracting צָרַעַת served as a punishment for doing so. As evidence for this, he cites the depiction in Chronicles of Uzziah contracting צָרַעַת after trespassing the sanctuary.³⁵²

That the מְצַרֵּעַ “may” have trespassed sancta, however, seems insufficient to explain the centrality of the עֹשֶׂה in the מְצַרֵּעַ case, since its blood is used in the elaborate daubing rite (Lev 14:14). Grossman suggests that the עֹשֶׂה of the מְצַרֵּעַ enables the person to reabsorbed into Israelite society and provides כְּפָרָה for the time he or she was cut off from the sancta and unable to participate in divine service.³⁵³ Hartley points out ways that the עֹשֶׂה procedure in Leviticus 14 is unusual and indicates a unique usage of this sacrifice.³⁵⁴ As such, perhaps the עֹשֶׂה of the מְצַרֵּעַ should not be expected to fit the typical mold of sancta trespass. I would suggest that while no doubt (given the term עֹשֶׂה, “guilt”) there is an aspect of personal liability that the sacrifice is presumed to clear, the purpose of this particular עֹשֶׂה may be

³⁵¹ See J. Milgrom: “Sin-Offering or Purification-Offering?”, pp. 237–239; *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 253–254. See also J. Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*, p. 255.

³⁵² See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 856–857.

³⁵³ See J. Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*, pp. 360–361.

³⁵⁴ See J. E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, comments on 14:12.

closer to the מְלֹאִים ram, whose blood is used in a similar daubing rite during priestly consecration (Exod 29:21). Both serve to raise the recipient from a lower to higher status (impure to pure, or pure to holy) by applying life-infusing/replenishing substances—blood and, in the case of the מִצְרֵעַ, oil. (On these substances, see Ch. 10.)

9.4 Communal Purification Sacrifices

Thus far, we have discussed sacrifices prescribed as part of an individual’s purification process. Sacrifices also accompany several public purification rites:

- *Day of Atonement* — Once a year, on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev 16).
- *Priest and Tabernacle consecration and inauguration*³⁵⁵ — A one-time, eight-day event (Exod 29; Lev 8–9).
- *Levite dedication* — A one-time event (Num 8).

The sacrifices offered are as follows:

Table 7. Public sacrifices for impurity

Case	Offering	
Day of Atonement (Lev 16)	Priests’ offerings: 1 bull (חֲטָאת) 1 ram (עֹלָה)	People’s offerings: 2 male goats (חֲטָאת + Azazel) 1 ram (עֹלָה)
Priests/Tabernacle consecration and inauguration (Exod 29, Lev 8–9)	<u>First day</u> 1 bull (חֲטָאת) 2 rams (מְלֹאִים + עֹלָה) Basket of grain products	<u>All seven days</u> 1 bull (חֲטָאת)

³⁵⁵ I distinguish here between “consecration” of the Tabernacle and priests, which involves their preparation and official induction (Exod 29, Lev 8), and their “inauguration,” which is the ceremonial opening service, the celebratory rite of first use (Lev 9).

Priests/Tabernacle consecration and inauguration (cont.)	<u>Eighth day</u> Priests' offerings: 1 calf (חֲטָאת) People's offerings: 1 ram (עֹלָה) 1 male goat (חֲטָאת) 1 calf + 1 male lamb (עֹלָה) 1 ox + 1 ram (זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים) Flour with oil (מִנְחָה)
Levite dedication (Num 8)	2 bulls (חֲטָאת + עֹלָה)

9.4.1 Rites of Leviticus 16

The verb כָּפַר appears sixteen times in Leviticus 16, applying to the high priest and his family (vv. 6, 11, 17, 24, 33), to the people at large (vv. 17, 24, 30, 33, 34), and to the sancta (vv. 16, 20, 33). Does כָּפַר here refer to sin or impurity? Where it comes to people, no mention is made of resolving impurity, only sin (e.g., vv. 21, 30, 34). Moreover, as we have discussed, individual impurity is remedied not by sacrifice but by other purificatory rites. The Azazel goat is said to address the people's sins (v. 21), and the edict of self-denial, mentioned twice (vv. 29 and 31), addresses sins, as clarified by the intervening verse: כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֵר כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֵר, “For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before YHWH” (v. 30). Self-denial practices, be they fasting or other acts, purge life-force, a strategy that is relevant to sin. For impurity, the opposite strategy is required: replenishment of life-force. (For more on this distinction, see Sec. 10.4.3.)

Regarding sancta, one verse appears to indicate that the rites of Leviticus 16 clear both impurity and sin: וְכִפֶּר עַל הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִטְּמֵאת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִפְּשָׁעֵיהֶם לְכֹל חַטָּאתָם, “Thus he shall purge the shrine of the uncleanness and transgression of the Israelites, whatever their sins” (v. 16). According to Milgrom, sins are capable of defiling the sanctuary at a distance, like

impurity.³⁵⁶ Yet, he points out that the focus in this verse is on impurity, not sin, as evidenced by the term “impurities” repeated at the end of the verse: וְכֹה יַעֲשֶׂה לְאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד הַשֹּׁכֵן אִתְּכֶם בְּתוֹךְ טִמְאַתְכֶם, “and he shall do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which abides with them in the midst of their uncleanness.”³⁵⁷ Impurity is also the sole concern mentioned just a few verses later, again relating to blood applications on the altar: וְנִטְהַרוּ וְקִדְּשׁוּ מִטִּמְאַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, “Thus he shall cleanse it of the uncleanness of the Israelites and consecrate it” (v. 19).

Elsewhere in priestly texts, negligence regarding individual purification is said to contaminate the sancta (Lev 15:31; Num 19:13, 20), and H points to Molech worship, a brazen act of impurity, as another cause of sancta pollution (Lev 20:3). The חֲטָאת brought by purification candidates, as we suggested earlier, clears the person of liability for inadvertently polluting the sancta. Negligence, brazen impurity, and inadvertent impurity all contribute to sancta pollution. Possibly, then, the phrase וּמִפְּשָׁעֵיהֶם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִטִּמְאַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל in v. 16 could refer to two categories of impurity: (1) everyday inadvertent impurities (טִמְאַת) and (2) impurity via sin (פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם), due to either negligence or wanton acts. In this framing, the phrase לְכֹל חֲטָאתֶם in the same verse could simply mean any human act or state that pollutes the sancta and requires purification. The כַּפָּרָה of Leviticus 16 thus pertains to clearing two forms of liability: human sin and sancta impurity.

9.4.2 Priest and Tabernacle Consecration

The consecration and inauguration of the priests and Tabernacle likewise employ a three-part כַּפָּרָה, applying to the priests (Lev 8:33, 9:7), to the people (Lev 9:7), and to the sancta (Exod 29:36, 37; Lev 8:15). As with Leviticus 16, these sacrifices clear people of sin and the sancta of impurity. Why would new sancta, just manufactured, require ritual

³⁵⁶ According to Milgrom, this includes inadvertent sins as well as brazen ones; see J. Milgrom, “The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray,” pp. 393–394; *idem*, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 257–258. See also B. A. Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, pp. 377–379. An in-depth discussion of this position, while worthwhile, is outside the scope of this study.

³⁵⁷ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 1033.

purification? Milgrom cites a rabbinic opinion that they are rendered impure by the builders.³⁵⁸ However, the text seems to imply that כִּפָּרָה here relates not (only) to resolution of impurity but to sanctification: שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תִּכַּפֵּר עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְקִדְשֶׁתָּ אֹתוֹ וְהָיָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ קֹדֶשׁ קְדָשִׁים, “Seven days you shall perform כִּפָּרָה upon the altar to consecrate it, and the altar shall become most holy” (Exod 29:37).

Purification from contact with the builders could be done on a one-off basis, whereas this procedure is repeated for seven days. Additionally, the language here expresses not merely purification but also sanctification. Similar language is used in the Leviticus 16 rite: וְהִזָּה עָלָיו מִן הַדָּם בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ שִׁבְעַת פְּעָמִים וְטָהַרוּ וְקִדְשׁוּ מִטְּמֵאת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, “and the rest of the blood he shall sprinkle on it with his finger seven times. Thus he shall cleanse it of the uncleanness of the Israelites and consecrate it” (Lev 16:19). That the same blood application not only purifies but also sanctifies suggests that purification is not merely purgative—it also fills and replenishes, invests with energy. Purification and sanctification, I would suggest, are two moves along the same continuum of increasing life-force, purification being a move from minus (impure) to neutral (pure), and sanctification being a move from neutral (pure) to plus (holy). (See Sec. 10.3 for further discussion of this proposal.)

9.4.3 Levite Dedication

The dedication of the Levites, though it is a communal event, more closely resembles individual rites of purification. It begins with sprinkling with מִי חֹטְאת, shaving the entire body, and laundering clothes (Num 8:7), procedures for impure persons. The verse is explicitly framed in terms of purity, beginning with וְכֹה תַעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם לְטָהָרָם, “This is what you shall do to them to cleanse them” and concluding with the word וְהִטָּהְרוּ, “thus they shall be cleansed.” Only once the Levites are pure does the rite turn to the sacrifices, whose purpose is

³⁵⁸ J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 521.

לְכַפֵּר עַל הַלְוִיִּים (v. 12), to clear the Levites of any liabilities before YHWH, enabling them to serve safely in the sanctuary. The *עֹלָה* and *חֲטָאת* can be understood here to serve the same function as those offered for individual purification (see Sec. 9.3.3).

In sum

For impure individuals who bring sacrifices as part of purification, the sacrifices are offered after personal purification has been achieved, and the person is fit not only to reside in the camp but to enter the sacred precincts. The sacrifices therefore do not purge impurity, nor are they intended to replenish the individual. Instead, the *כִּפָּרָה* function releases a person from liabilities accrued from being the recipient of divine beneficence and from unwittingly polluting the sancta. The blood of these sacrifices applied to sancta, however, does involve an act of replenishment, as we will see ahead.

10. Blood and Oil Applications

P prescribes applications of blood and/or oil to persons and sancta in several cases of purification and sanctification. These applications employ a variety of methods: pouring (נָצַק); sprinkling (הִזָּה, root ה.ז.ה), usually with the finger;³⁵⁹ dashing or hurling (זָרַק), typically a larger amount, using a מִזְרָק/silver dashing vessel;³⁶⁰ daubing (נָתַן), i.e., direct placing with the finger;³⁶¹ anointing (מָשַׁח), lit. smearing;³⁶² spilling/pouring out (שָׁפַךְ); and draining (נִמְצָה).³⁶³ Two rites involve bodily applications of blood and/or oil:

- *Priests' consecration* — The priests are sprinkled with blood and oil (Exod 29:21, Lev 8:30), daubed with blood (Exod 29:20; Lev 8:23–24), and anointed with oil (Exod 28:41; 29:7; 30:30; 40:13, 15; Lev 8:12).
- *Skin מְצַרֵּעַ* — The מְצַרֵּעַ is daubed blood and oil (Lev 14:14, 17–18, 25, 28–29).

The specific applications to people are as follows:

Table 8. Bodily applications of blood and/or oil

Rite	Substance	Subject	Method	Verse
Priests' Consecration	Anointing oil	Aaron's head	נָצַק	Exod 29:7, Lev 8:12
		Aaron and his sons	מָשַׁח	Exod 28:41, 30:30, 40:13–15
	Blood of מִלְאִים ram	Priests' right ear, right thumb, right big toe	נָתַן	Exod 29:20, Lev 8:23–24

³⁵⁹ E.g., וְהִזָּה עָלָיו מִן הַדָּם בְּאֶצְבָּעוֹ שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים (Lev 16:19). The exception is sprinkling of water formulas, which is done using a hyssop branch (red cow rite) or a bundle of hand-held items (two-bird rite).

³⁶⁰ See Exod 27:3, 38:3; Num 4:14, and the offerings of the tribes (Num 7); see also HALOT, s.v. מִזְרָק.

³⁶¹ The word אֶצְבָּע is explicit only in altar daubing but is implied in ear-thumb-big-toe daubing of the priests and מְצַרֵּעַ.

³⁶² The term מָשַׁח can also refer to pouring, e.g., וְנָתַתָּה עָלָיו וְנָתַתָּה עַל רֹאשׁוֹ וְנָתַתָּה עַל זְרֹעֹתָיו וְנָתַתָּה עַל יָדָיו (Exod 29:7).

³⁶³ Cf. HALOT, s.v. מִצָּה, which defines it as “pressing out.” The term נִמְצָה occurs in only two places in P (Lev 1:15, 5:9), both in cases of applying bird blood to the altar, where there is too little blood to place in a vessel for dashing; see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 169.

10. Blood and Oil Applications

Rite	Substance	Subject	Method	Verse
Priests' Consecration (cont.)	Anointing oil, blood from the altar	Priests, vestments	הִזָּה	Exod 29:21, Lev 8:30
מִצְרָע	Blood of אֲשָׁם	Right ear, right thumb, right big toe of מִצְרָע	נָתַן	Lev 14:14, 25
	Oil in right hand	Right ear, right thumb, right big toe of מִצְרָע	נָתַן	Lev 14:17, 28
		Head of מִצְרָע	נָתַן	Lev 14:18, 29

Outside of P, an additional case of blood application to persons is found in the covenant ceremony (Exod 24), where Moses dashes blood from the עֹלָה and זָבַח שְׁלָמִים at the people, referring to it as דַּם הַבְּרִית, “blood of the covenant” (v. 8).

More frequently in P, we find instructions for blood applications to various sancta, most commonly the outer altar, but on certain occasions items in the sanctuary interior:

Table 9. Blood applications to sancta

Sanctum	Application	Method	Sacrifice/Rite	Verse
Outer altar	Dash on sides	זָרַק	עֹלָה זָבַח שְׁלָמִים אֲשָׁם מִלְאִים	Lev 1:5, 11 Lev 3:2, 8, 13 Lev 7:2 Exod 29:16, 20; Lev 8:15, 19, 24
	Drain on wall	נִמְצָה	עֹלָה (bird)	Lev 1:15
	Daub on horns	נָתַן	חֲטָאת	Lev 4:25, 30, 34
	Pour out at base	נָצַק, שָׁפַךְ	חֲטָאת	Lev 4:7, 25, 30, 34
	Sprinkle on wall	הִזָּה	אֲשָׁם (bird)	Lev 5:9
	Drain at base	נִמְצָה	אֲשָׁם (bird)	Lev 5:9
Incense altar	Daub on horns	נָתַן	חֲטָאת of the priest, community	Lev 4:7, 15
	Sprinkle 7x	הִזָּה	חֲטָאת of Lev 16	Lev 16:19
Before the curtain	Sprinkle 7x	הִזָּה	חֲטָאת of the priest, community	Lev 4:6, 17
Ark cover	Sprinkle 7x	הִזָּה	חֲטָאת of Lev 16	Lev 16:14–15

10. Blood and Oil Applications

Sanctum	Application	Method	Sacrifice/Rite	Verse
Toward Tent of Meeting	Sprinkle 7x	הִזָּה	Red cow תֹּאֲחֶזֶק	Num 19:4

In two cases, oil is applied to sancta:

Table 10. Oil applications to sancta

Sanctum	Application	Method	Rite	Verse
Tabernacle and vessels	Anoint	חָשַׁח	Consecration	Lev 1:5, 11
Toward YHWH	Sprinkle 7x	הִזָּה	מִצְרָע purification	Lev 3:2, 8, 13

How are blood and oil viewed in the Bible, and what is their role in P's purification and sanctification rites?

10.1 Blood: The Life-Force

The Pentateuch links blood to שָׁנֵה, a word that has a range of meanings in the Bible: throat (cf. Akk. *napištu*), neck, breath, living being, person, personality, life, and the locus of feelings and perceptions.³⁶⁴ It is thought that “throat/appetite” may have been the original meaning of שָׁנֵה, which then extended to breath, a sign of life, and to blood, another life substance.³⁶⁵ The extension of שָׁנֵה from breath to blood may have also been pragmatically motivated, since blood is more tangible than breath and thus easier to manipulate in cultic rituals, including purification.³⁶⁶ The lexical pair “blood” and “life” is attested in Hebrew,

³⁶⁴ See HALOT, s.v. שָׁנֵה.

³⁶⁵ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1472.

³⁶⁶ See E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, comment: “Atonement” (Lev 4–5). Says Milgrom, “it became inevitable that a similar equation would develop between *nepeš* and blood, the other life-containing organ” (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, p. 1472).

Ugaritic, and Akkadian poetry,³⁶⁷ a linkage that stems from an ancient belief that pulsating blood is the locus of life.³⁶⁸ More than just symbolizing life, blood is thought to *be* life,³⁶⁹ and even after an animal is slaughtered, blood is considered potent and full of latent life.³⁷⁰

The biblical connection between blood and נֶפֶשׁ is made most explicitly in several instances of the prohibition against consuming blood. The first is a P text³⁷¹ in Genesis: אָדָם בְּשָׂר׃ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ, “But flesh with its life, its blood, you must never eat”³⁷² (Gen 9:4), where בְּשָׂר׃ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ expresses an equivalence between נֶפֶשׁ and blood.³⁷³ The next two verses are found in Leviticus 17, an H text. One states: כִּי נֶפֶשׁ הַבֶּשֶׂר בַּדָּם הוּא, that the life-force is “in the blood” (v. 11). The other contains two separate clauses: כִּי נֶפֶשׁ כָּל בֶּשֶׂר דָּמוֹ בְּנִפְשׁוֹ הוּא, and כִּי הוּא נֶפֶשׁ כָּל בֶּשֶׂר דָּמוֹ הוּא (v. 14), both of which state that blood is the life-force of the flesh. Finally, there is one instance in Deuteronomy: כִּי הַדָּם הוּא הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְלֹא תֹאכְלוּ הַנֶּפֶשׁ עִם הַבֶּשֶׂר (12:23), stating that “blood is the life-force” and that meat is not to be eaten with the life-force still within it.

Regarding sancta purification, Milgrom suggests that blood acts as a ritual detergent³⁷⁴ and that its cleansing properties derive from blood being “life.”³⁷⁵ Hartley says similarly that “blood has cleansing power because it carries an animal’s life-force.”³⁷⁶ I would add that the application of blood/life-force both drives out impure forces and (to

³⁶⁷ See Y. Avishur, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs*, pp. 559, 577. Avishur is cited in E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, comment on 9:4.

³⁶⁸ See J. Scullion, “The Genesis Narrative.” Wenham says that blood is identified with life, since “a beating heart and a strong pulse are the clearest evidence of life” (G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, comment on 9:4).

³⁶⁹ William Gilders argues, “Blood, therefore, is not a symbol of life, if by symbol one means something that merely stands for its referent. Blood really *is* life” (W. K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 18).

³⁷⁰ See M. Vervenne, “The Blood Is the Life,” pp. 451–470.

³⁷¹ See R. E. Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 46.

³⁷² Wenham’s translation; see G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*. Others who translate “its blood, its life” include R. E. Friedman, *Bible with Sources Revealed*, p. 46; W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, p. 233; E. Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, p. 42. Cf. NJPS and Speiser (*Genesis*), who render בְּשָׂר׃ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ as “life-blood.”

³⁷³ Wenham paraphrases “flesh with its life, i.e., its blood” and explains that the word דָּמוֹ is in “apposition to and explaining” נֶפֶשׁ; see G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, comment on 9:4.

³⁷⁴ See e.g., J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 254.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 711–712.

³⁷⁶ J. Hartley, *Leviticus*, comment on 17:11.

borrow Douglas' language) "repairs the hole" or "mends the rift" left by the deathly presence. That blood rites do not merely purge but also convey life-force to the recipient is reinforced by P's parallel applications of oil, which as we will see is a substance used not to purge but to invigorate and elevate.

10.2 Oil: Vitalizing and Renewing

Ceremonial anointing with oil in the Bible typically accompanies an elevation in status, as in the appointment of kings (e.g., 1 Sam 10:1, 16:13; 1 Kgs 1:39; 2 Kgs 9:3), the induction of priests (e.g., Exod 29:7, Lev 8:12), and the consecration of cultic or ceremonial objects (e.g., Gen 28:18, 35:14; Exod 40:9; Lev 8:10). A rise in status accompanied by oil anointment is attested in Mesopotamia as well, not only in conferring priesthood and kingship but also in releasing individuals from a bond, such as merchants relieved of royal obligations or prostitutes released from their duties.³⁷⁷

The priestly anointing oil, made from crushed olives, is infused with several spices, detailed in Exod 30:23–24—by proportion: myrrh (2 units), aromatic cinnamon (1 unit), aromatic cane (1 unit), and cassia (2 units). The psalmist pictures a lavish amount of oil used in Aaron's anointment, running down onto his beard and collar (Ps 133:2). The anointing oil is also called *שֶׁמֶן קֹדֶשׁ*, "holy."³⁷⁸ P states the purpose of Moses pouring oil on Aaron's head: *וַיִּמָּשַׁח אֹתוֹ לְקֹדֶשׁוֹ*, "and he anointed him, to consecrate him" (Lev 8:12). The anointing oil is subsequently combined with blood from the altar (from the *מִלְאִים* ram) and sprinkled on Aaron and his sons' bodies and clothing, where the text states: *וְקֹדֶשׁ הָיָא וּבְגָדָיו וּבְגָדֵי בָנָיו*, "Thus shall he and his vestments be holy, as well as his sons and his sons' vestments" (Exod 29:21). Blood and oil combine to render the priests *שֶׁמֶן קֹדֶשׁ*. As mentioned earlier,

³⁷⁷ See D. Fleming, "The Biblical Tradition of Anointing Priests," p. 406.

³⁷⁸ See Exod 30:25, 31; 30:29; Num 35:25; also Ps 85:21.

Wenham and Milgrom both link holiness to “life” (see Sec. 2.3). We previously discussed blood, which is the life force. Perhaps oil, too, is a substance thought to convey vitality and thus be an apt pair along with blood to confer holiness.

Gerstenberger explains that ceremonial anointing developed from everyday customs and that oil in the Bible “symbolizes life, well-being, health,” and is used as part of hygienic practices.³⁷⁹ When David finishes mourning over his son, he bathes, anoints himself with oil, and puts on fresh clothes (2 Sam 12:20; see also 2 Sam 14:2, Ezek 16:9, Ruth 3:3). Anointing is thus used as part of the same refreshing/revitalizing complex as bathing and laundering. It is also associated with eating and satiety (Deut 31:20, Ps 23:5, 2 Chron 28:15). On the properties of oil, Cornelis Houtman states:

application of anointing oil refreshes a person, restores vitality, and produces a feeling of well-being and self-confidence... In case of sickness, it can reinvigorate him or her and numb pain... Therefore one forgoes anointing oneself with oil in time of mourning... “Applying ointment” has an energizing and cleansing effect... and it can revive and renew a person, remake him or her as it were into another, a new human being.³⁸⁰

In everyday contexts, oil is part of wellness and refreshment. In ceremonial contexts, it is a substance used in elevations of status. But these are not two entirely separate functions—ceremonial use is thought to derive from everyday practices. As such, I would suggest that perhaps it is the vitalizing, renewing properties of oil that make it a particularly suitable substance for the status-elevation rites of ceremonial induction and consecration.

10.3 Parallel Ear, Thumb, and Big Toe Daubing Rites

The induction of priests includes a daubing ritual where blood from the **מִלְאִים** ram is placed on the right ears, thumbs, and big toes of Aaron and his sons (Exod 29:21). A similar

³⁷⁹ See E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, comment: “The Rites” (14:1–32).

³⁸⁰ C. Houtman, *Exodus: Volume 3*, p. 523, quoted in W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, p. 451.

rite is performed in the purification of the מִצְרֵעַ, where blood from the אֵשֶׁת־לַמִּזְבֵּחַ lamb is applied to the right ear, thumb, and big toe of the מִצְרֵעַ (Lev 14:14, 25), followed by oil placed in the same locations on top of the blood (vv. 17, 28). The remainder of the oil in the priest's hand is placed on the head of the מִצְרֵעַ (vv. 18, 29), another element with a parallel in the high priest's consecration rite (Exod 29:7).³⁸¹

Milgrom likens the ear, thumb, and big toe daubing rite to applying blood to the horns of the altar. He suggests that these extremities represent the “vulnerable” parts, i.e., the parts most at risk of contracting impurity, and that the common denominator between the daubing rites of the priests and the מִצְרֵעַ is that they are “purgative and apotropaic.”³⁸² However, there is no language of purification in Exod 29. Grossman suggests that the two rites represent a move from outside to inside, closer to YHWH's presence—the מִצְרֵעַ being allowed to fully reenter the camp, and the priests being allowed to serve in the sanctuary.³⁸³ The fact that the מִצְרֵעַ is the only purification case to involve oil, and that it is also the case most explicitly framed in terms of exclusion and readmission, gives strength to Grossman's position. I would add that the inward movement in both cases represents an elevation in status, and the nature of that elevation, I suggest, can be better understood when we account for the tonifying properties of blood and oil. Namely, the two daubing rites are thought to confer added vitality upon the subject.³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ A thorough discussion of the מִלְאָיִם rites is beyond the scope of this study. Pertinent questions that arise include: What do anointing with oil and the מִלְאָיִם ram accomplish, and how are the goals of these two elements distinct? For a recent analysis and bibliography, see J. Grossman and E. Hadad, “The Ram of Ordination and Qualifying the Priests to Eat Sacrifices,” *JSOT* 45 (2021), pp. 476–492.

³⁸² See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 528–529.

³⁸³ See J. Grossman, *The Sacrificial Service*, pp. 360–361.

³⁸⁴ According to S. David Sperling, “The similarities in the two rites stem from their common purpose, which is to change the status of the affected persons and thus confer on them new life” (S. D. Sperling, “Blood”).

Propp avers that the rite “raises one’s state of purity, making the impure pure and the already pure super-pure.”³⁸⁵ I would adjust this by saying that it makes the impure pure and the pure *holy*. Both involve an upward move along the same continuum:



Figure 2. Purity-holiness continuum

In this schema, impurity represents a deficit of life-force, a “minus.” Purity is a neutral state, but relative to impurity it is fullness of life-force, whole and complete. Holiness is a high-life-force state, above normal, more intense and concentrated. Transformation from impure to pure and from pure to holy both involve adding life-force, “plus.” Purification is an act of replenishment, of making whole, whereas sanctification is an act that intensifies, imbues with added vitality commensurate with nearness to YHWH’s presence. Thus, the parallel daubing rites of the *מִצְרֵעַ* and priests can perhaps be understood as catalyzing a move along the life-force continuum: for the *מִצְרֵעַ*, a move from impure to pure, and for the priests, a move from pure to holy. As such, blood and oil can be agents of purification as well as sanctification.

10.4 Meaning of the Term *חִטָּא*

In the consecration of the Tabernacle, the verb *חִטָּא* (*pi’el*) is used to describe the blood-daubing rite on the horns of the altar (*וְחִטָּאתָ עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ*, Exod 29:36; *וַיְחִטֵּא אֶת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ*, Lev 8:15). What does this term convey? HALOT renders it “cleanse from sin, purify” (with the *hitpa’el* form *חִטָּתָא* meaning “purify oneself”). Propp translates *חִטָּא* as “un-sin,”

³⁸⁵ W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, p. 530.

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meaning to remove sin.³⁸⁶ Milgrom suggests “cleanse, expurgate, decontaminate,” as distinct from the *qal* form meaning “sin.”³⁸⁷

The term **אֶחָטָה/הִתְחַטַּאת** occurs fourteen times in P, in the following cases:

Table 11. Instances of **אֶחָטָה/הִתְחַטַּאת** in P

Case	Substance	Subject	Verse
Tabernacle Consecration	Blood	Altar	Exod 29:36; Lev 8:15
House צִרְעַת	Water-blood mixture	House	Lev 14:49, 52
Levite dedication	מִי חֲטָאת	Levites	Num 8:21
Corpse contamination	מִי נֶדֶה	People, tent, vessels	Num 19:12 [x2], 13, 19, 20; 31:19, 20, 23

Regarding Tabernacle consecration (Exod 29 and Lev 8), nowhere is there any mention of either sin or impurity, so there is no explicit reference as to what the verb **אֶחָטָה** is targeting. However, given that ten instances of **אֶחָטָה/הִתְחַטַּאת** involve the sprinkling of **מִי חֲטָאת** to purify from corpse contamination,³⁸⁸ and two others relate to house **צִרְעַת**, another form of impurity, it stands to reason that the verb **אֶחָטָה** in the consecration rite targets impurity rather than sin. Furthermore, all these cases make use of life-force-imbuing ingredients, whether blood itself in the altar-daubing rite, or **מִי חַיִּים** and blood-based formulas in the cases of the red cow and two-bird sprinkling rites. While life purges the forces of death, and **אֶחָטָה/הִתְחַטַּאת** could refer to the act of purgation, life also “adds life.” I suggest that **אֶחָטָה** connotes adding, strengthening, and reinforcing—conveying “plus” to transform the subject from impure to pure, or from pure to holy.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁶ See W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, p. 469; see also J. Barr, “Sacrifice and Offering,” p. 874.

³⁸⁷ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 253; see also D. P. Wright, “Day of Atonement.”

³⁸⁸ On the equation of **מִי חֲטָאת** with **מִי נֶדֶה**, see Sec. 8.6.3.

³⁸⁹ The verb **אֶחָטָה** implying “adding” may be also understood in the phrase **אָנָּכִי אֶחָטָה** (Gen 31:39), conveying restoration or compensation (Raanan Eichler, personal communication).

10.4.1 Common Thread Between אָטֵחַ and אֶחָח

The terms אָטֵחַ and אֶחָח are typically characterized as disconnected concepts, “sin” and “purify,” or even as opposites, “sin” and “un-sin.” But if אֶחָח is understood as adding plus, this in fact converges with the biblical idea of אָטֵחַ, sin. The original meaning of אָטֵחַ/אֶחָח may imply “miss a mark” (e.g., Judg 20:16, Prov 8:36), but the predominant biblical characterization of אָטֵחַ is of a burden borne by the sinner. The Bible uses various metaphors for describing sin, the most common of which is “weight,”³⁹⁰ imagery that is thought to stem from ancient Near Eastern iconography depicting worshippers, vassals, and prisoners bearing heavy loads.³⁹¹ The weight metaphor is seen in terminology accompanying sin, such as sin being described as כָּבֵד, “heavy” (Gen 41:31), הַדָּלָה, “large” (e.g., Gen 20:9; Exod 32:21; 2 Kgs 17:21), use of the preposition עַל, sin being “upon” a person,³⁹² and frequent use of the verb נָשָׂא, describing sin as something “carried” or “borne” by the person (e.g., נָשָׂא עֲוֹנוֹ מִנְשָׂא, Gen 4:13). The language of carrying sin is particularly prominent in priestly texts,³⁹³ appearing in both P and H, and applying to the term חַטָּאת as well as אָטֵחַ.³⁹⁴ The weight of sin sits on a person as an unwanted “plus.” When the sin is pardoned, the weight is lifted, the plus off-loaded.

In this sense, the terms אָטֵחַ and אֶחָח in P both convey the concept of “plus,” something extra, additional, supplemental. What differentiates them is that a אָטֵחַ refers to an unwanted plus in need of purging, while אֶחָח is to imbue with a needed plus, either restoring life-force to that which is impure, or supplementing vitality to persons and objects in the sacred realm. Related terminology can be understood similarly: The מִי חַטָּאת supplies a plus,

³⁹⁰ Gary Anderson notes that weight predominates six to one over other metaphors for sin; see G. A. Anderson, *Sin: A History*, p. 17.

³⁹¹ See J. Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 16.

³⁹² As in, כִּי הִבְאֵת עָלַי וְעַל מְמַלְכְתִּי חַטָּאתָה (Gen 20:9).

³⁹³ See J. Lam, *Patterns of Sin*, p. 43.

³⁹⁴ See. B. J. Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” pp. 3–21.

i.e., life-force replenishment and strengthening, to people and objects contaminated from corpses, and the חטאת offering can be understood as a “plus” sacrifice.

10.4.2 Sin-Offering and Purification-Offering

Milgrom explains that the term חטאת is derived from the *pi'el* form and not the *qal*, justifying his translation “purification-offering” rather than “sin-offering,” and argues that it purifies the sanctuary but does not resolve the offerer’s sin.³⁹⁵ However, this argument has its difficulties. The word חטאת itself in many instances means “sin,”³⁹⁶ and the etymology of the word חטאת points to “sin.”³⁹⁷ Also, the basic instruction of the חטאת sacrifice is built around cases of sin.³⁹⁸ Milgrom explains that it is the “effect” of sin on the sanctuary that the חטאת helps to resolve, not the sin itself residing within the offerer. Sin, he says, is absolved through feelings of remorse,³⁹⁹ indicated by the term אָשָׁם (Lev 4:13, 22, 27).⁴⁰⁰ But if that were the case, we would expect mention of אָשָׁם in the basic חטאת instruction (Lev 4:1–12 or 15:22–31).⁴⁰¹

Further, verses such as וְכָפַר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן מִחַטָּאתוֹ, “Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for his sin” (Lev 4:26), point to the offerer as the locus of action for the verb כָּפַר.⁴⁰² Thus, as much as Milgrom’s theory helps to explain some otherwise difficult-to-understand cases where a חטאת is prescribed (e.g., childbirth, genital discharge, and צָרַעַת), to

³⁹⁵ See J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 253–254; *idem*, “Sin-Offering or Purification-Offering?”, pp. 237–239.

³⁹⁶ E.g., Gen 4:7, 18:20; Exod 10:17, 30:10.

³⁹⁷ See J. Lam, “On the Etymology of Biblical Hebrew חטאת,” pp. 325–346.

³⁹⁸ See Lev 4, e.g., וְהִקְרִיב עַל חַטָּאתוֹ אֶשֶׁר חָטָא פָּר כֶּן בָּקָר תָּמִים לִיְהוָה לְחַטָּאת (v. 3); also see Num 15:22–30.

³⁹⁹ Says Milgrom, “The inadvertent offender needs forgiveness not because of his act per se—as indicated above, his act is forgiven because of the offender’s inadvertence and remorse—but because of the consequence of his act” (J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, p. 256).

⁴⁰⁰ Milgrom explains, “The fact that his sin is inadvertent (*bisegāgāh*) and that he feels guilty (*weāšēm*) means that he has undergone inner purification” (J. Milgrom, “Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray,” p. 390).

⁴⁰¹ Gary Anderson points out this objection; see G. A. Anderson, “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings (OT).” Also, the pairing of חטאת and אָשָׁם further points to חטאת having a “sin” connotation; see J. W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus*, pp. 88, 92; see also J. Lam, “Etymology,” p. 341.

⁴⁰² See R. Gane, *Cult and Character*, pp. 106–122. As further proof, Gane notes similar prepositional use regarding impurity, e.g., וְכָפַר עַל הַמִּטְהָר מִטְמֵאתוֹ (Lev 14:19); see *ibid.*, pp. 112–116.

interpret the *תאִטָּה* as referring exclusively to purification of the sanctuary and not helping to resolve a person's sin is problematic on multiple grounds. Interpreting the *תאִטָּה* as a “plus” sacrifice, however, incorporates “sin” as well as “purification” and can be understood to address both the offerer and the sanctuary, in two stages of the rite.⁴⁰³

In the first stage of the *תאִטָּה* sacrifice, the offerer purges *אֲטָה*, offloads sin or unwanted “plus.” One way this is accomplished is through the hand-leaning rite. The function of the rite is much-debated; among the views are hand-leaning signifying ownership of the animal,⁴⁰⁴ indicating substitution of the animal for the person,⁴⁰⁵ and being a rite of transference from the offerer to the animal.⁴⁰⁶ Propp contends that transference is “the most obvious interpretation.”⁴⁰⁷ I would suggest that transference constitutes the first part of the *תאִטָּה*, the individual's offloading of sin/plus.

The second stage of the *תאִטָּה* involves the *אֲטָה* component.⁴⁰⁸ When the animal is slaughtered, its blood (life-force) is drained out and applied to the sancta. Albert Baumgarten compares the *תאִטָּה* to the purification rites of bathing or laundering, describing it as a rite of “empowerment,” done “to restore force to the altar.”⁴⁰⁹ I consider this an apt description of

⁴⁰³ Gane likewise posits a two-stage *תאִטָּה* rite, but (1) he characterizes the second stage as removing *sin* from the sanctuary rather than removing impurity (*ibid.*, p. xx), and (2) he says that the second stage occurs just once a year on the Day of Atonement (*ibid.*, pp. 274–276). Blood applications throughout the year, according to Gane, “result in contamination of the entire outer altar and outer sanctum,” which blood applications on the Day of Atonement come to purify (*ibid.*, pp. 180–181; cf. Propp's metaphor of the sanctuary as an “antacid” for absorption of transgressions; see W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, pp. 449–450). I would argue that not only is *תאִטָּה* blood not contaminating—otherwise it would be drained outside the camp and not allowed near the sanctuary, let alone be placed on the altar—but it is the quintessential life-substance, and as such it serves to replenish the sancta.

⁴⁰⁴ See e.g., D. P. Wright, “The Gesture of Hand Placement,” pp. 433–446; J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, pp. 150–153.

⁴⁰⁵ See e.g., N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature*, pp. 116–119. This interpretation strikes me as unlikely, since hand-leaning is also used for the *עֹלָה* sacrifice, which is called *אֲשֶׁה רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה* (Lev 1:9, 13, 17), and to have a human being symbolized as a “food gift” and a “pleasing aroma to YHWH” seems counterintuitive, if not perverse.

⁴⁰⁶ Gerstenberger explains it as “transfer of sin through hand leaning”; see E. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, comment on 1:3–9.

⁴⁰⁷ At the same time, Propp does not view the different explanations as being mutually exclusive; see W. H. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, pp. 457–458.

⁴⁰⁸ The *תאִטָּה* is in fact the only sacrifice where the verb *אֲטָה* is employed (Exod 29:36, Lev 8:15).

⁴⁰⁹ A. I. Baumgarten, “*Ḥaṭṭa't* Sacrifices,” pp. 339–340.

the second stage of the *תאֲזַח*, where blood endows the altar with added life-force, countering the effects of deathly forces that have accrued on it. Thus, in these two stages, the *תאֲזַח* sacrifice functions both to purge unwanted plus (*אֲזַח*) from the offerer and to impart needed plus (*אֲזַח*) to the sancta by means of the blood rite.

What happens to the sin in the transfer process? According to Roy Gane, the sin is transferred to the animal and its blood, which proceeds to defile the sanctuary and is rectified only on the Day of Atonement.⁴¹⁰ However, it seems to me that deliberate defilement of sancta would be inconceivable to P, whose concern is constant vigilance for maintaining the sanctuary's purity and sanctity. Blood applications to the sancta should therefore be expected to purify the sanctuary, not defile it. I would suggest that there are two possibilities for what happens to the sin: One is that it is transferred to the animal, whose death cancels out the sin, such that the blood applied to the sancta is pure. The second possibility is that sin is considered by P to simply be excess/misplaced life-force. Thus, once it leaves the offerer, it ceases at that point to be sin and instead is life-force that can be used for other purposes—in this case, infusing the *תאֲזַח* blood and making it all the more potent and capable of replenishing the sancta. This latter view casts the *תאֲזַח* as a rite of recycling, taking energy that is burdensome and destructive, and converting it into useful, life-giving energy, put to the service of the community.

10.4.3 Impurity and Sin: Minus and Plus

There are two types of liability in P, both of which need clearing (*כִּפְּרוּת*)—the “minus” variety, impurity, and “plus” variety, sin. To cancel out a minus and restore purity requires a counteracting plus. This is achieved by rites designed to replenish, refresh, and restore life-force—rites on which we have focused throughout this study. To cancel out a plus requires

⁴¹⁰ See R. Gane, *Cult and Character*, pp. 180–181.

precisely the opposite strategy—acts that function as a minus, which purge,⁴¹¹ pay out, offload, or burn off life-force. This includes sacrifices, self-denial,⁴¹² monetary restitution,⁴¹³ donations,⁴¹⁴ and even suffering.⁴¹⁵

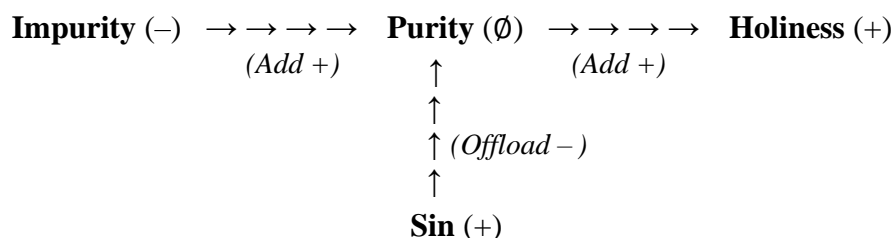


Figure 3. Purification and sanctification

The goal for most individuals is to reach purity, the neutral state, either cancelling out the minus of impurity by adding/replenishing, or cancelling out the plus of sin by offloading/purging. Once pure, priests (and other sancta) can become sanctified by further adding/infusing. In this schema, sin and holiness both constitute a “plus,” additional life-force, but they are two very different states. Sin is an unhealthy excess, extra energy weighing on the person, experienced as something כָּבֵד (heavy, burdensome), where offloading comes as a relief. Holiness, however, is bounty, concentration of life-force, a

⁴¹¹ Purification from impurity also involves purgation, but in the case of impurity it is expelling a foreign entity. In the wake of sin, however, purgation involves drawing from one’s own life-force.

⁴¹² As in, תַּעַנּוּ אֶת נַפְשֵׁיכֶם (Lev 16:29; see also 16:31; 23:27, 29, 32). HALOT renders ע.ג.ה as “oppress” (with ע.ג.ה + ש.נ.פ. meaning “castigate oneself”; s.v. II ענה); JPS and Milgrom render as “self-denial.” Self-denial, physical impoverishment, is a way of draining one’s life force, inducing a state of minus.

⁴¹³ Material possessions, too, form a part of a person’s vitality, their life-force stores. Withdrawing from one’s assets is thus a way of resolving the “plus” of sin—not only as a purge but as a just transfer to one who has been wronged.

⁴¹⁴ The rabbinic tradition points to charity as a means of atonement of sin, e.g., תְּשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וְצִדְקָה (Tanhuma Noah 8:2). Though the Bible does not have such a concept, it does mention donating to the public sphere in order to gain YHWH’s favor, e.g., וְכִי תִזְבְּחוּ זֶבַח תּוֹדָה לַיהוָה לְרִצְוֹנְכֶם תִּזְבְּחוּ (Lev 22:29).

⁴¹⁵ Punishment and suffering are ways of exacting “payment” for wrongs. The greater the sin, the more life-force must be burnt off by means of suffering. For instance, the curses of Lev 26 conclude: אֲזַי יִקְנַע לְבַבְכֶם הָעָרָל אֲזַי יִרְצוּ אֶת עֹנֵיכֶם (v. 41). Joseph Lam argues that ר.צ.ה in the context of punishment means “pay back,” in this case repaying sin by being exiled and punished by YHWH; see J. Lam, “Sin Is a Debt that Must Be Repaid.”

high-intensity state that manifests as קְבוֹד (splendor, gravitas),⁴¹⁶ wherein energy is properly channeled and focused. Impurity and holiness cannot coexist—the former erodes the latter. Impurity and sin, however, can reside simultaneously within the same person, where the deathly force must be countered with an infusion of life, and at the same time a sin requires offloading.

In sum

Whether applied to individuals or sancta, blood and oil are vivifying substances intended to boost the life-level of the subject, transforming them from impure to pure, or from pure to holy. Thus, they function to add, replenish, and make whole. Blood is the quintessential “life” substance, and oil is a vitalizer and tonifier used in elevations of status. The concept of adding or imbuing with “plus” is implied by the verb חָטַח, and this idea extends to the terms חָטַח and חֲטָאת. Consequently, חָטַח is a state of plus that is negated by offloading, whereas טִמְאַח is a state of minus that is negated by replenishing.

⁴¹⁶ As in, וְנַעַדְתִּי שְׁמָה לְבָנִי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִקְדַּשׁ בְּכָבוֹדִי (Exod 29:43), wherein the Tabernacle is made קְדוֹשׁ with YHWH’s קְבוֹד; and קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל הָאָרֶץ קְבוֹדוֹ (Isa 6:3), where due to YHWH being intensely קְדוֹשׁ, the land is filled with his קְבוֹד.

11. Conclusions

The authors of P understand impurity to be a deathly, underworldly force. This association of impurity with death owes not to the nature of P's cases but to the widespread belief in the ancient world that impurity stems from demonic forces. P omits any demonic attribution but nonetheless acknowledges impurity's dark potency, afflicting both people and sancta. Thus, impurity must either be avoided or—when it is an inescapable or necessary part of life—scrupulously tended to in accordance with P's purification rites. The leitmotif of life abundantly attested in these rites reveals P's strategy for purification: Life is used as a remedy for deathly forces.

Is purification purgative or regenerative? I contend that it is both. As reinvigoration and replenishment are introduced, the deathly force of impurity is purged. This is accomplished through natural processes of healing as well as through purificatory procedures: Auspicious time markers and typological numbers help to dissipate impurity's potency and replenish life-force. Rites of washing and laundering purge as well as invigorate and refresh, helping a person emerge feeling renewed as they are readmitted into their lives and communities. Shaving and haircutting are primarily purgative rites but can also convey cultic dedication. The use of blood, מִיִּם תְּיִיִם, oil, and other vitalizing ingredients repel and drive out impure forces as well as replenish the life-force of those who are severely impure. Purificatory sacrifices clear people of different forms of liability, with the תִּטְהַר having a dual function of purging the offerer and restoring the vitality of the sacred precincts, ensuring the continuity of the divine presence.

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Appendix: Purification Cases and Rites

The table below summarizes methods of purification by category and case (explicit references only), including Levite dedication and priestly consecration.⁴¹⁷ Cases of secondary transmission are indicated by brackets, and tertiary transmission by curly brackets.

Table 12. Purification cases and rites

Main Category	Case	Wash	Launder	Shave	Sprinkle	Daub	Sacrifice	Duration (days)	Verses
Impure animal carcasses	[Touch]	x*						1 (eve)	Lev 11:24, 27, 31, 39; *22:6
	[Carry]		x					1 (eve)	Lev 11:25, 28, 40
	[Eat]	x*	x					1 (eve)	Lev 11:40, *17:15
	[יָרַשׁ on utensil]	x						1 (eve)	Lev 11:32
Childbirth	Birth of a boy						x	7 + 33	Lev 12:2–4, 6–7
	Birth of a girl						x	14 + 66	Lev 12:5–7
Skin צָרַעַת	Purification	x2	x2	x2	x	x	x	Heal + 7 + 1	Lev 14:3–31
	Marks: faded, didn't spread ⁴¹⁸		x					7 (quarantine)	Lev 13:6
	Scalp/beard: didn't spread, not deep		x					7 (quarantine)	Lev 13:34
Cloth/leather צָרַעַת	Outbreak disappears	x2						7 + 7 (quarantine)	Lev 13:58
House צָרַעַת	Didn't spread after replastering				x			7 (quarantine)	Lev 14:49–53

⁴¹⁷ I include consecration of the priests here, even though it is uncertain whether this is a case of purification. As explained in Sec. 10.3, it shares a daubing rite with the מְצַרֵּעַ, and both purification and consecration work along the same vector, adding life-force.

⁴¹⁸ There are seven cases of skin צָרַעַת presented in Lev 13. I include only the cases of marks and scalp/beard outbreaks in this table because they alone call for laundering if the person passes the priest's inspection.

Appendix

Main Category	Case	Wash	Launder	Shave	Sprinkle	Daub	Sacrifice	Duration (days)	Verses
Abnormal Genital Discharge	Man/בִּזְ	x ⁴¹⁹	x				x	Cease + 7 + 1	Lev 15:13–14
	[Touch bedding]	x	x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:5
	[Sits on seat]	x	x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:6
	[Touch בִּזְ]	x	x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:7
	[Spat on by בִּזְ]	x	x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:8
	[Touch seat]							1 (eve)	Lev 15:10
	[Carry seat]	x	x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:11
	[Wood touched]	x							Lev 15:12
	Woman/הִבִּזְ							x	Cease + 7 + 1
	[Touch bed, seat]	x	x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:27
Seminal emission	Ejaculation	x						1 (eve)	Lev 15:16
	[Cloth with semen]		x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:17
	Sexual intercourse	x						1 (eve)	Lev 15:18
Menstruation	Menstrual flow							7	
	[Touch bedding]	x	x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:21
	[Touch seat]	x	x					1 (eve)	Lev 15:22
	[Man has sex with]							7	Lev 15:24
Corpse contamination	[Person contaminated by corpse]	x	x		x			7 (to eve*)	Num 19:11, 14, *19; 31:19, 24
	{Touch corpse-contam. person}							1 (eve)	Num 19:22
	[Vessels and tent]				x				Num 19:18
	[War spoils]	x ⁴²⁰			x				Num 31:23
Red cow	[Throw into fire]	x	x					1 (eve)	Num 19:7
	[Burn]	x	x					1 (eve)	Num 19:8
	[Gather ashes]		x					1 (eve)	Num 19:10
	[Sprinkle מִי נְדָה]		x					1 (eve)	Num 19:21
	[Touch מִי נְדָה]							1 (eve)	Num 19:21
Nazirite	Became impure			head			x	7 + 1	Num 6:9–11

⁴¹⁹ Here מִי נְדָה is specified (Lev 15:13).

⁴²⁰ Only items that cannot withstand passing through fire (Num 31:23).

Appendix

Main Category	Case	Wash	Launder	Shave	Sprinkle	Daub	Sacrifice	Duration (days)	Verses
Levite dedication	-		x	x	x		x	1	Num 8:7–21
Priests' consecration	-	x			x ⁴²¹	x	x	7	Exod 29, Lev 8

⁴²¹ Blood and anointing oil (Exod 29:21), as distinct from מִיִּם תַּיִם + blood/ash mixtures in other cases.

תקציר

מטרתנו של מחקר זה היא להבין את משמעותו של מושג הטומאה הכוהני באמצעות בחינת טקסי טהרה. ניסיונותיהם של חוקרים מודרניים לזהות את הרציונל העומד מאחורי מושג הטומאה במקרא נעשו בדרך כלל מתוך חיפוש אחר מכנה משותף בין **מקורות** הטומאה על פי המקור הכוהני (P): פגרים של בעלי חיים, הפרשות מאיברי המין (הקשורות ללידה, נידה וזיבה פתולוגית), צרעת, גופת אדם ופריטי פולחן ספציפיים המשמשים לטיהור (אפר פרה אדומה, לדוגמה). רבים ממקרים אלה נראים כקשורים להתפשטותן של מחלות, ועל כן הגישה הרווחת במחקר מזה שנים היא שחוקי הטומאה של המקור הכוהני מתרכזים בעיקר סביב תחום ההיגיינה. קו מחשבה נוסף המבוסס על השוואה עם מקורות חוץ־מקראיים קושר את המקרים הללו לפלישתם של שדים.

הצעה מסוג אחר היא שתגובות ספונטניות של גועל ופחד הן המגדירות תופעה כלשהי כ"טמאה". חוקרים אחרים נוקטים בגישה סמלית יותר ורואים בחוקי הטומאה דרך סוציולוגית לתקשר נורמות ואידיאלים הנוגעים למוסר או לגבולות חברתיים. אחת מתתי הגישות בתוך הגישה הזו תופסת את הטומאה כסמל למוות. תומך בולט בתת הגישה הזו הוא יעקב מילגרומ, המתאר את המונחים "טומאה" ו"קדושה" כמונחים הופכיים המסמלים בהתאמה מוות וחיים. ברוח זו, הוא מפרש את כל מקרי הטומאה כקשורים בדרך כלשהי למוות. הספקנים לגבי טיעון זה מציינים כי לא כל מקרי הטומאה של המקור הכוהני מתאימים כל כך בקלות למודל של "חיים-מוות", והם טוענים כי אין סיבה אחת ויחידה שבכוחה להסביר את כל המקרים כולם. חוקרים אחרים מרחיקים לכת וטוענים כי המקרים המובאים במקור הכוהני מלוקטים בעצם ממסורות שונות ומשונות, ועל כן גם אם ננסה לתת כמה סיבות שונות לטומאה, לא נצליח להסביר את הדברים לאשורם.

הנקודה הראשונה שיש לשים לב אליה היא שתיאוריות אלו אינן בהכרח מתחרות זו בזו, אלא מתארות רבדים שונים בתפיסה הכוללת של הטומאה: בבסיס עומדות התופעות עצמן בהן נתקלים בני אדם בחייהם. על גביהן מצויות התגובות המוחשיות (ומעוגנות חברתית) – גועל, פחד או דחייה, והתגובות הללו מניעות נורמות חברתיות, טאבו, אמצעי הפרדה וטקסי טהרה, והרובד האחרון הוא שכבת ההסברים למכלול החוויות הללו.

ההסבר הנפוץ ביותר בעולם העתיק לטומאה הוא שמקורה בעולם השדים. שדים הם תושבי העולם התחתון הנטפלים אל האדם, בעיקר כאשר הוא פגיע, וגורמים למוות ולמחלות. עם זאת, המקור הכוהני דוגל במסגרת תיאולוגית שבה ה' הוא הישות העל־טבעית היחידה, וחוקרים רבים רואים בחוקי הטומאה

של המקור הכוהני כדחייה של דמונולוגיה. מהו אם כן (ואם בכלל) ההסבר החלופי של המקור הכוהני לטומאה?

בניגוד למילגרום, הסובר כי ההתעלמות של המקור הכוהני מנושא השדים נועדה לשלול את האמונה כי בטומאה יש פוטנציאל לפגוע בבני אדם, אני מציע שהחידוש העיקרי של המקור הכוהני הוא **הסרת ההאנשה** מן הטומאה, דהיינו היפטרות מכל ישות על־טבעית מלבד ה'. עם זאת, עדיין קיים בטומאה מימד של מוות, ותפיסת העולם העתיק הייתה שיש "כוחות של מוות" הקשורים לתופעות כגון לידה, פתולוגיות מסוימות וכמובן למיתה עצמה. על כן לפי המקור הכוהני הטומאה איננה פלישה של שדים אלא "כוח מוות" חסר אישיות. אני מסכים שהמוות הוא רכיב של הטומאה. עם זאת, בניגוד למילגרום, אבקש לטעון כי המוות אינו המרכיב המאפיין של מקרי הטומאה במקור הכוהני. אלא, נושא המוות עולה רק דרך קישורה של הטומאה לעולם התחתון.

הראיות הטקסטואליות שהמקור הכוהני תופס את הטומאה ככוח מוות נמצאות לא במקרי הטומאה עצמם אלא **בטקסי הטיהור** הבאים לבטל את הטומאה. חוקרים אחדים הצביעו על מוטיב ה"חיים" המופיע לאורך טקסי הטיהור של המקור הכוהני, מוטיב המתאפיין בדרך כלל כ"חיים המסירים את המוות" ולפיו טיהור הוא למעשה טקס של **מירוק**. אני מסכים עם היבט זה של הטיהור, אך אני מציע כי בנוסף להשפעותיו הממרקות, ברוב המקרים נועד הטיהור **למלא ולחדש**. כוחות המוות, מלבד היותם דבר שיש להסירו, מרוקנים את כוח החיים מן האדם כאשר הם משתלטים עליו. טקסטים מהמזרח הקדום מעידים על הנזק, המחלות וההשפעות מפחיתות החיים שגורמת פלישתם של שדים. הטיהור לעומת זאת מחדש וממלא את חלל החיים שהותירה נוכחות המוות, והוא משרה חיים וחיוניות מחודשים על האדם העובר הטהרות.

חלקו הגדול של מחקר זה הוא סקירת טקסי הטיהור ותהליכיהם על פי סדר הופעתם במקור הכוהני. הוא מתחיל בבחינת המרכיב הנפוץ ביותר בטיהורים של המקור הכוהני – מרווחי זמן מוגדרים: ערב, שלושה ימים, כפולות של שבעה ימים, היום השמיני וארבעים יום. כל אלו הם מספרים טיפולוגיים הידועים במקרא ובעולם העתיק כבעלי יכולת מאגית להעניק שלמות והתחדשות. לאחר מכן אדון בטקסי הטהרה הנערכים במרחב הביתי, הרחיצה והכביסה. יסוד המים הוא יסוד מרכזי בטקסים אלה, ואעיינ באופן שבו מושג המים נתפס במזרח הקדום, הן כאמצעי ניקוי והן כחומר שבכוחו להעניק חיים והתחדשות. באותה קטגוריה של טקס טהרה אישי שכזה נמצא גם הגילוח; נראה כי במקור הכוהני תפקידו הוא בעיקר למרק, והוא מתבצע רק במקרים נדירים.

לאחר מכן אדון בטקס פרה אדומה – טקס הטהרה מטומאת המת – ובטקס שתי הציפורים שנערך במקרה של צרעת (של העור או של הבית), וכן במרכיבים המשותפים לשניהם: ארז, חוט שֶׁנִי, אזוב ומִים חִיִּים (מי מעיין). אדום/דם, חיים, תנועה וכוח הם מוטיבים המצויים במרכיבים אלה, והם משתלבים יחד ויוצרים נוסחאות עוצמתיות להוקעת כוחות המוות והוספת חיים על המועמד לטיהור. בתוך העיון בטקס פרה אדומה אחקור את המאפיין החריג והפרדוקסלי שלו, האפר המקנה טומאה לנוגעים בו ובה בעת מטהר אדם אשר נחשף לגופת המת.

לאחר מכן, אבקש לבחון את תפקידם של הקורבנות בתהליך הטיהור. אני טוען כי שלב הקורבנות מתרחש רק לאחר שנפתרה בעיית הטומאה, וכי מטרתו (כפי שמצביע הפועל הנלווה "כִּפֵּר") היא לנקות את האדם מחובותיו האישיות כלפי ה'. לבסוף, אבחן את מריחת הדם והשמן, פעולה המבוצעת רק במקרה של צרעת עור ובהקדשת הכוהנים. הדם נחשב לכוח הנושא חיים, ושמן לחומר מחייה וכזה שבכוחו להביא את האדם למעמד חדש. אני טוען כי הטרנספורמציות מטמא לטהור ומטהור לקדוש, מתרחשות שתיהן על אותו ציר של הגברת החיים. שתיהן כוללות הוספת חיוניות, מה שאני מכנה "פלוס". במקרה של טומאה, פלוס מבטל מינוס – החיוניות מונעת את ההשפעות מפחיתות החיים של כוחות המוות.

נראה כי סקירה זו של טקסי הטהרה במקור הכוהני קובעת ברכה לעצמה, שכן כפי הידוע לי טרם נעשתה סקירה דומה במחקר המודרני. נוסף על כך אך אני מקווה שאצליח להציג כראוי כיצד המרכיבים, הטקסים והשפה המשמשים לטיהור בטקסטים של המקור הכוהני מצביעים על מוטיב "חיים" רחב שבו טקסים חדורי חיים מתגברים על כוחות המוות. לטיהור בוודאי יש תפקיד ממרק, אך אני טוען – על בסיס מקורות מהמקרא ומהמזרח הקדום – שטקסים אלה נועדו אף להחיות ולחדש.

עבודה זו נעשתה בהדרכתו של ד"ר רענן אייכלר
מן המחלקה לתנ"ך של אוניברסיטת בר-אילן.

אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

טקסי התחדשות :
הערות על הטיהור במקור הכוהני

דוד בר-כהן

עבודה זו מוגשת כחלק מהדרישות לשם קבלת תואר מוסמך
במחלקה לתנ"ך על שם זלמן שמיר של אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

תשפ"ב

רמת גן