

Introduction

To study in *chevruta*, with a partner, is a mainstay of Jewish life. Over the years, both of us have enjoyed the fruits of *chevruta* study, but never with the intensity and creativity that led to this book. Five years ago, our mutual curiosity about Jewish teachings that might inform contemporary pastoral caregiving led us to embark on an exploration of biblical texts about sickness and healing. Each study session gave rise to an ever-expanding number of questions and associations, triggering extended forays into fields with which we were already familiar, and new arenas altogether.

We began by looking at the *metzora*, often translated as “leper,” the biblical figure with a skin condition who spent time *michutz lamachaneh*, meaning outside the camp. Intrigued by Leviticus’s description of a place set aside for the management of an illness, we entered into a world far more expansive than we had first imagined. The *metzora* raised questions for us that dovetailed with contemporary discussions in fields ranging from anthropology to neuroscience to literary and ritual theory. It soon became clear to us that we and other professional caregivers would benefit greatly from a deeper understanding of these questions and issues.

We dove into a rich hermeneutical process in which we placed diverse voices in dialogue with each other. These voices included biblical and rabbinic stories, contemporary scholarly material from a range of disciplines, clinical material from our own work as rabbis and chaplains, and our own experiences of being both patients and family members. Later in the process, we interviewed a number of colleagues who work as military chaplains, bringing their voices into our conversation too. Woven into all of this was God's presence, a reassuring reminder that text study is an ancient and reliable means of connecting with holiness and divinity.

Ultimately, this book is about how human beings maintain our sense of rootedness to, and interconnectedness with, all of life. Our shared love of learning was the crucible that kept the two of us connected to these very things. This book is a product of the synergy and synthesis to which the Jewish community's cherished practice of *chevruta* study gives rise.

In this book, we begin by exploring how humans maintain their sense of orientation during times of both stability and transition. In the opening chapter, we use the medical terminology of "alert and oriented" to present a model of orientation and attunement. We also summarize how contemporary neuroscientists understand the brain's propensity to "map" the world around us, and we describe studies that show what happens to the brain when it is "de-centered" through participation in meditation or ritual. We suggest that the experience of losing our usual axes of orientation might, paradoxically, allow for growth and change. In chapter 2, we present Leviticus's "maps," describing the levitical geographical and spiritual terrain. We pay particular attention to the place known as *michutz lamachaneh* and to the categories of people who spent time there. We propose that hospitals, nursing homes, and military bases are just a few of the contemporary corollaries of the Bible's *michutz lamachaneh*.

In chapter 3, we turn our attention to the *metzora*, exploring the biblical and contemporary significance of his skin condition and describing his journey to *michutz lamachaneh*, his sojourn there, and his return home again. We also describe the priest's relationship with the *metzora*, proposing that he served as "priest, prophet, and pastor," a widely used framework for understanding modern-day clergy's work. These three roles combined to make the priest the *metzora's Moreh Derekh*, or Guide for the Way. Chapter 4 continues this focus on the priest with an exploration of how ancient and contemporary caregivers were and are affected by our journeys between the camp and *michutz lamachaneh*. Drawing on a ritual of return described in the Torah for the priest who had come into contact with the powerful substance used to disperse death's pollution, we propose that all professional caregivers, not only clergy, have much to learn from how the Bible approached these kinds of transitions.

Chapter 5 compares the experiences of today's patients to the *metzora*. Drawing on biblical descriptions of a Tent of Meeting that lay outside the boundaries of the camp, we describe the creation of sacred space in institutional settings such as hospitals and nursing homes, and we look at various rituals marking the numerous transitions through time and space that today's care-receivers offer. In chapter 6, we turn our attention to the Bible's war camp that was *michutz lamachaneh*, drawing parallels to the experiences of contemporary military personnel. We explore war's effects on soldiers and on those who stay behind in the camp, and we examine ancient and contemporary means of leaving for war and returning home again. Finally, in chapter 7, we discuss the social marginalization that often accompanies physical marginalization. Looking at the priest and those of the *metzora* through a fresh set of biblical stories, we propose that the margins and the center are

inextricably interconnected and, when allowed to interact fully and freely, offer new avenues that lead to *shalom* (peace) and *shleimut* (wholeness).

As we worked on this book, many people provided assistance along the way. While the two of us are responsible for any errors or shortcomings, we are grateful for the role that each of these people played in imbuing the finished product with a sense of completion that we call *shleimut*.

Heather Borshof, Bob Feinberg, Bonnie Koppell, Harold Robinson, and Emily Rosenzweig, all of whom serve as both rabbis and military chaplains, graciously allowed us to interview them. They vastly expanded our understanding of this critical arena for pastoral caregiving, and their experiences, insights, and torah fill chapter 6. Additionally, Ron Lemmert added a great deal to our understanding of prison as a *michutz lamachaneh* setting, and Shlomo Fox deepened our understanding of pastoral accompaniment. Daniel Coleman, Curtis Hart, David Kraemer, Adriane Leveen, Judy Roth, Claudia Setzer, S. David Sperling, and Robert Tabak all read draft chapters along the way and offered invaluable feedback. Margaret Groarke connected us to Claudia Setzer, facilitating a rich and fruitful partnership, and Dianne Hess helped us create the index for this book. We also thank Benjamin Wiener for providing us with a copy of an Israeli Supreme Court decision.

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