

The Blemish of Exile – Tazria - Metzora

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אָדָם כִּי יְהִיָּה בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ שְׂאֵת אוֹ סַפְחַת אוֹ בְּהָרַת וְהָיָה בְּעוֹר בְּשָׂרוֹ לְנֹגַע צָרְעַת וְהוּבָא אֶל אֱהָרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אוֹ אֶל אֶחָד מִבְּנָיו הַכֹּהֲנִים. (ויקרא יג, ב)

In a previous shiur ([Tazria 2024](#)) we discussed the principle that when we find "four related items" listed together in the Torah, they hint to the four exiles. We have one such instance in our parsha. The Midrash (ויקרא רבה פרשה טו, ט) says that the terms שְׂאֵת, סַפְחַת, בְּהָרַת, נֹגַע צָרְעַת refer to the exiles of בָּבֶל, מִדְיָ, אֲדוּם, יָוֵן respectively.

Each instance of "four related items" in the Torah gives us a different, unique insight into each of the exiles. When all the different instances are combined, they compile a composite picture that fully explains the *root cause* of the exile, the *circumstances* of the exile and the *redemption* from the exile. In this shiur, I would like to discuss what unique insight the "four related items" in our parsha (blemishes on the skin), teach us about the four exiles.

Rabbeinu Bachyei on our passuk above says that all the four blemishes listed in the passuk are different shades of *white*. שְׂאֵת is the shade of white wool. סַפְחַת is the shade of הַיֵּלֶבֶט, the whitewash paint of the Heichal in the Beit HaMikdash. בְּהָרַת is bright white, like the color of snow. The aforementioned three are not yet full-blown צָרְעַת, they are the *precursors* to leprosy. They are all blemishes on *top* of the skin, not recessed into the skin. The final blemish צָרְעַת is all-out leprosy and its color is also bright white, like the color of snow.

The Kli Yakar (ibid.) brings two different opinions regarding the נֹגַעִים. According to one opinion they are a natural illness within the body that sublimates outwards onto the skin. The other opinion is that they are a hidden spiritual ailment, which finds expression outwardly for all to visibly see.

The Kli Yakar doesn't say this, but it may be *both* simultaneously. Very often when someone has a spiritual defect, this leads to physical repercussions and symptoms that are visibly apparent for all to see. The way we behave emotionally and morally affects our anatomy and physiology directly.

Obviously, the origin/essence of the נֹגַעִים is spiritual in nature, which is why when someone observes these blemishes, they consult with a Kohen and not a physician. Similarly, the fact that the נֹגַעִים affect Am Yisrael only and not the other nations, is indicative, not of a genetic defect, but of an elevated spiritual level that "spits out" certain negative behavioral patterns.

When we think of the exiles, we tend to regard them as the aftermath of Am Yisrael sinning against HKB"H. In fact, one of the major ideological foundations of the Christian faith is based on this - that since we Jews sinned against HKB"H, He replaced us as the Chosen People.

We are going to discover a very *surprising* chiddush in this shiur – that the exiles are primarily not resultant from us sinning against HKB"H, but rather *against our fellow Jews*. This is a *major shift* in mindset, because most of us mistakenly believe that if we do teshuva and repent for our sins against HKB"H – this will lead to forgiveness and the end of the exile. What we don't understand is that until we address the root cause of the exile, it will not end, regardless of how much we improve our relationship with HKB"H. We will see that this last exile, that of אָדוּם, has lingered the *longest*, because after 1956 years (and running), we still have not fully internalized this realization and worked to rectify it. Quite the opposite, as this exile continues, our nation is becoming increasingly fragmented and less united.

Let us dive in and begin examining the four blemishes, one by one and reveal what they teach us about the exiles. We are going to be using different methodologies to uncover the hidden secrets of each, such as the methodology of R' Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (examining the first time the word appears in the Torah); such as Torat HaRemez, (using gematriyot, rashei teivot), etc.

The אָבִי אֲבוֹת הַטְּמָאָה, the root cause for *all four* exiles was the sin of Adam and Chava. It resulted in the first exile in human history – from Gan Eden. Without getting into all the aspects of this sin (which are numerous), let us focus on the "clincher", the one that *resulted in their exile*. The Yalkut Shimoni (בראשית ג, יב) says that if Adam had not complained against Chava, they would not have been exiled from Gan Eden. Meir Panim (פרק טו, עמי קסה) says that when Chava duped Adam into eating from the forbidden tree, it directly resulted in the four גְלוּיּוֹת.

From this we see, that despite directly contravening HKB"H's command to not eat from the עֵץ הַדַּעַת, it was *not* a breakdown in בִּינֵי אָדָם לְמִקּוֹם that caused the exile de facto – it was a sin בִּינֵי אָדָם לְחַבְרֹו, between *Adam and Chava*. We find fragments of Adam and Chava's sin in all of the exiles – they were the "prototype" of all the other sins בִּינֵי אָדָם לְחַבְרֹו and exiles to follow. This was the generic sin, so to speak, which was followed by other more specific sins that typified the specific exiles.

The first blemish is שְׂאֵת, which refers to the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash and גְלוּיַת בְּבֵל.

The first time we find the word שְׂאֵת is in the story of Kayin and Hevel. הָלוֹא אִם תִּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תִיטִיב לִפְתּוֹחַ חֲטָאת רֵיבֶךָ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאֵתָהּ תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ (בראשית ד, ז). There are again many facets involved in the episode of Kayin and

Hevel, but the "clincher" was all about **בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ**. The dispute originated from something **עֲרִיּוֹת** related – who was going to marry Hevel's extra twin sister (Kayin was born with a twin sister and Hevel with two twin sisters – **בְּרֵאשִׁית רְבָה** (כב, ז). Because of this, Kayin killed Hevel (**שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים**). This resulted in Kayin being exiled to wander the earth. R' Bachyei says the color of a **שֵׁאֵת** is white like wool (alluding to the wool from Hevel's sheep).

As with every exile (beginning with Adam HaRishon), there was also an element of **לְמָקוֹם בֵּין אָדָם** involved, but this was not the "clincher" cause of the exile. In the dispute between Kayin and Hevel, Kayin was also **כּוֹפֵר בְּעֵקֶר**. The Midrash (תרגום יונתן, **בְּרֵאשִׁית ג, ח**) says that Kayin denounced G-d and refuted that **אֵלֹהִים** exists. However, when HKB"H came to him with **טְעָנוֹת**, HKB"H didn't rebuke him for **עֲבוּדָה זָרָה**, He rebuked him for **שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים**, a sin of **בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ**, as the passuk says (**שם, י**).

The Tosefta (**יומא ט, ע"ב**) examines in length what caused the first exile, **גְּלוֹת בְּבֵל**, which is related to **שֵׁאֵת**. The Gemara lists three main causes **עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, גְּלוּי עֲרִיּוֹת, שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים**.

First note - the ratio of sins is 2:1 in favor of **בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ**. Although **עֲבוּדָה זָרָה** is listed first, seemingly indicating that it was the "primary" cause, I would like to suggest that that it was not the *root* cause that *resulted in exile*. I believe it was listed first, because that is how it *started*. From there, it was a slippery slope that led to the other two, however, the exile would *not have happened* if the other two were absent. We know from many other sources that HKB"H is **מוֹחֵל עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ**, but He is not **מוֹחֵל** when it comes to **בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ**. For example, Yom Kippur atones for sins against HKB"H, but not for sins **בֵּין אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ**. HKB"H holds us more accountable for sins against our fellow Jew than those against Him.

The Tosefta above goes into detail how Am Yisrael engaged in **גְּלוּי עֲרִיּוֹת**. It basically involved an absence of **צְנִיעוּת** – not necessarily the way the women dressed, but rather the way they walked, their gait, their makeup, the perfume they wore etc. (**צְנִיעוּת** is not only about clothes – you can be fully covered and still not **צְנוּעָה**). It was all provocative with the intention of drawing attention to themselves, and resulted in improper behavior.

Regarding **שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים**, the Tosefta concentrates on all the untold thousands slaughtered by the evil king Menashe. However, the Sifri (**במדבר לה, י**) adds that the **שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים** was not limited only to Menashe, it was a norm that infected all society. The Sifri illustrates how cheap life was, bringing a case of two Kohanim competing by running up the ramp of the mizbeach to see who would merit doing the avodah. The Kohen who lost the race pulled out a knife and killed his competitor. The father of the slain Kohen was more worried about the shechita knife becoming impure than his dead son.

The decline may have *begun* with עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, but it was not until all norms of *society* had broken down that Am Yisrael were exiled. **Exile is a direct aftermath of a breakdown of societal norms.** Another typical example is the fact that the gematria of שְׂאֵת is בָּא הַלְּזֹה הַלְּזֹה בָּא, referring to the hatred of the brothers against Yosef, trying to kill him, which ultimately resulted in exile.

The second blemish is סַפְחַת, referring to the exile of מְדֵי, the period of Purim. The gematria of סַפְחַת is וּמְרֻדְכִי בָּא לְפָנַי הַמְלֶכֶדּוּ.

Here too we find elements of שְׂפִיכוֹת דָּמִים. The gematria of סַפְחַת is חָרֵב אִישׁ בְּאָחִיו. Not necessarily metal "swords", but swords of the tongue – ridiculing talmidei chachamim. When Mordechai told them not to attend the banquet of Achashveirosh, they ridiculed him. The resulting גְּלוֹי עַרְוִיּוֹת, after they became intoxicated with wine, is well documented.

This series of sins of לְחַבְרוֹ בֵּין אָדָם לְחַבְרוֹ resulted in the second exile and the evil decrees of Haman. Like all other exiles there was also an element of עֲבוּדָה זָרָה - not abiding by the piskei halacha of the gedolei hador, but this again was only the beginning of the sequence of events, it was not not the מְכָה בְּפִטְיֵשׁ. The second exile of מְדֵי ended with the rebuilding of the 2nd Beit HaMikdash, and accordingly the color of סַפְחַת is כְּסִיד הַהֵיכָל.

The third blemish is בְּהֶרֶת, the exile of גֵּן. There are more *direct* connections between the sin of Adam and Chava to the exile of בְּהֶרֶת, than the other three exiles. The gematria of בְּהֶרֶת is אָדָם הָרֵאשׁוֹן. Adam was the purest creation ever to exist, the starkest color white, like snow. Adam later found fault in his wife Chava and separated from her for 130 years. The sofei teivot of וְכָתַב (א, דברים כד, א) is בְּהֶרֶת לָהּ סֵפֶר כְּרִיתָתָהּ (דברים כד, א).

The gematria of בְּהֶרֶת is גֵּן דִּוְחָה חוֹשֶׁד. The Yalkut Shimoni (, טו, בראשית, יב) characterizes the exile of Greece - שְׁהֶחֱשִׁיכָה עֵינֵיהֶן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל - שְׁהֶחֱשִׁיכָה עֵינֵיהֶן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל. During this exile, the oppression was spiritual, not physical, trying to douse the spiritual light of Am Yisrael by causing assimilation. It was the most surreptitious exile, because more Jews were lost to assimilation than those killed in any of the other exiles. When Yehuda HaMaccabi tried to rally the nation to fight the Greeks, he succeeded in only initially recruiting 800 men (ספר מקבים א') from all the millions in Am Yisrael.

The Greeks tried to replace spirituality with physicality, glorifying the physical - nature, the human body, physical pleasure. They had the Torah translated into Greek so that they could understand its power and then they set about *replacing* the Torah morality with Greek philosophy. This was not a brutish exile - it was moral darkness shrouded in a veneer of academia and enlightenment.

The end of this exile was light replacing darkness, the Channukah candles. The gematria of בְּהֶרֶת is וַיִּדְעַת כִּי אֲנִי ה'.

The fourth blemish is נִגְעַת צָרְעַת, the exile of אֲדוֹם. Of the four blemishes it is the only one that has an additional descriptor – נִגְעַת, it is not simply צָרְעַת. What does the addition of the word נִגְעַת signify?

The first time the word נִגְעַת appears in the Torah is כִּי נִגְעַת בְּכַף יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד יַעֲקֹב, in reference to Yaakov battling with the angel of Eisav (Edom).

The exile of Edom is typified by the same struggle between Eisav and Yaakov over succession, who is the "chosen son"? Eisav used his mouth, his tongue, to dupe his father Yitzchak into thinking that he was a worthy son, the rightful firstborn. However, Eisav was בְּפִהוֹ וְאֶחָד בְּלִבּוֹ, his speech (outward behavior) lacked parity with what was in his heart. He gave the outward impression that he respected his father, when in his heart he could not wait for Yitzchak to die, so that he could kill his brother Yaakov. Eisav had no qualms to feed Yitzchak dog meat when he returned from hunting, despite Yitzchak's explicit instructions on how to shecht a kosher animal. Despite knowing his father's aversion to idol worship, he married idol worshipping Canaanite wives whose burning incense caused Yitzchak to go blind. When he was rebuked for marrying them, Eisav went to take the daughter of Yishmael as an additional wife. The gematria of נִגְעַת צָרְעַת is אֲחֻזַּת נְבִיאוֹת (בראשית כח, ט).

נִגְעַת צָרְעַת is punishment for inappropriate use of the mouth, the tongue – speaking lashon hara. The same Tosefta in Yoma (above) discusses the difference between the destruction of the 1st Beit HaMikdash and the 2nd, saying that in the time of the 2nd Mikdash there was more Torah study, more observance of mitzvot and more chessed than during in the 1st Mikdash. However, during the 2nd Mikdash there was שִׁנְאָת חֲנֻמִּים amongst the masses, which did not occur during the 1st Mikdash. It was not overt, it was hidden. Therefore, the time of rebuilding the 1st Mikdash is public knowledge, a short time after its destruction, while the time of the rebuilding of the 3rd Mikdash is hidden from us.

The period of the 2nd Mikdash excelled in בְּיַיִן אָדָם לְמִקְוֹם, but they failed spectacularly in בְּיַיִן אָדָם לְחֻבְרוֹ and it was this failure, the breakdown of societal norms due to senseless hatred for one another that led to exile.

This exile is the longest. Throughout its duration there has not been once where Am Yisrael were united as one. It is a series of fragmentations, ever increasing in intensity. Even the greatest tragedies in this lengthy period have not served to unify us and, Rachmana litzlan, there have been no shortage of tragedies in the last 1956 years. The result of these tragedies, which HKB"H intended to wake us up, instead resulted in greater polarization within our nation, Ashkenazim, Sefardim, Chassidim, Mitnagdim, Reform, Conservative,

Traditional, Orthodox, Ultra-Orthodox, Neturei Karta, National Religious, Chardal, Dati Light, Modern Orthodox, Secular, Left, Right, etc. etc.

What typified the pre-exile period was this fragmentation into כְּתוּת כְּתוּת. Has anything changed in 1956 years? Is it any wonder that this exile never ends? It is because we haven't changed an iota in all this time, if anything we have become worse.

Undoubtedly the world of Torah has improved exponentially during this time. Right now, there is more Torah study worldwide than ever in the last 1956 years. However, a similar phenomenon occurred during the 2nd Mikdash period, compared to the 1st Mikdash period and that didn't prevent its destruction and exile. As I have tried to prove above, exile is not about בֵּין אָדָם לַמָּקוֹם, it is all about בֵּין אָדָם לְחִבְרוֹ.

As we speak, we are seeing historical, biblical changes taking place, the opportunity is great. We are reaching a nexus at which it is possible to bring the Geulah 214 years earlier (אֶחָיִשְׁנָה) rather than in the planned 6,000th year (בְּעֵתָהּ). The only way it will happen is if we all intensely focus our efforts to solving the *root cause* and that is improving the בֵּין אָדָם לְחִבְרוֹ in Am Yisrael. Learning Torah an extra hour a day will not really help that now. That hour would better be used doing chessed, being mekarev and opening dialogues with other people, trying to restore unity to our nation.

What causes white colored blemishes is הַלְבֵּנֵת פְּנֵי חִבְרוֹ, speaking lashon hara and the like. We need to immediately cease and desist from doing this, regardless of circumstances and work to bridge gaps rather than exacerbate them.

If we do our maximum hishtadlut in this area, HKB"H will have mercy on us and redeem us.

Shabbat Shalom

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