

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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## Chapter XXVII: Tazria (Lev. 12:1–13:59)

### Essay 9. Does white represent pure or impure?

**מדרש** רבה "אדם פייִהִיָה בעור־בשרו", אָמר ר' אָבין מִשָּׁל לְגִיטָה יֵרָק שֶׁהִמְעֵין לְתוֹכָהּ, כֹּל זֶמֶן שֶׁהִמְעֵין לְתוֹכָהּ יֵרָקָה מִשְׁחִיר. פֶּסֶק הִמְעֵין הִלְבִּין יֵרָקָה. כִּד זָכָה אָדָם: "וְשַׁעַר שְׁחָר צִמְחֵבּוֹ נִרְפָּא הַנֶּתֶק טְהוֹר הוּא", וְאִם לֹא, "וְשַׁעַר בִּנְגַע הַפֶּדָּ לָבֹן", הֵדָּא הוּא דְכְּתִיב: אָדָם, אוֹ דָם עכ"ל.

### **Midrash Rabbah:**

**“When a man [אָדָם] [*adam*] has on the skin of the body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly disease on the skin of the body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests.”<sup>1</sup>**

**Rabbi Avin said: This is analogous to a vegetable garden into which a spring flows. As long as the spring flows into it, its vegetables are dark. If the spring stops, its vegetables will grow pale. So too, if a person merits, “the scaly disease has remained unchanged in color, and black hair has grown in it, the scaly disease is healed; the person is pure.”<sup>2</sup> If not, “hair in the affected patch has turned white.”<sup>3</sup> That is [the meaning of] what is written: “A man [אָדָם] [*adam*],” [could instead be interpreted as] “or blood [דָם] [אֶ] [*o dam*].” [I.e., just as vegetables grow pale due to a shortage of water, if someone’s blood chemistry has too much blood and not enough water, the hair of the affected patch can be white.]**

- Lev. Rabbah, Tazria 15:3

יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק מַה בָּא לְלַמְּדֵנוּ עִם מִשָּׁל זֶה. וַיֵּשׁ לוֹמַר שֶׁתַּרְגוּם מְצוּרָה סְגִירוֹ, שֶׁנִּסְגְּרוּ כָּל הָאוֹרוֹת מֵעָלָיו, כְּנוֹדָע אֲצִלְנוּ שֶׁעָקָר הַנֶּגְעִים הָיִינוּ שֶׁנִּסְתַּלְקוּ מֵעָלָיו אוֹרוֹת הַחֲכָמָה, דְּכְתִיב בָּהּ "הַחֲכָמָה תִּחְיֶה בְּעָלֶיהָ", וְלִפְיִכָּךְ מְצוּרָה חֲשׁוּבָה כְּמַת, שֶׁגַּם הַמִּיתָה הִיא שֶׁנֶּעְדְּרָה מֵאוֹתָהּ הַנֶּפֶשׁ הָאוֹר הַגָּדוֹל.

**It is necessary to check what this parable comes to teach us. It may be said that the Targum Onkelos translates מְצוּרָה [*metzora*] [“leper”] as “closed off,” that all the Heavenly lights have been closed off from him,<sup>4</sup> as is known to us that the essence of the afflictions is that the**

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<sup>1</sup> Lev. 13:2.

<sup>2</sup> Lev. 13:37.

<sup>3</sup> Lev. 13:3.

<sup>4</sup> Zohar III:49b.

lights of wisdom have been removed from him.<sup>5</sup> This is as it is written, “Wisdom gives life to those who possess it.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the *metzora* is considered as dead,<sup>7</sup> for death too is when that great light has been removed from the soul.

ובזה יבין מסרה קטנה "נראה לי" ב', "פנגע נראה לי", "מרחוק ה' נראה לי", פלומר למה "פנגע נראה לי" לפי ש"מרחוק ה' נראה לי" שנסגרו ממנו האורות, שהצרעת בא על לשון הרע, ונדוד אמר "רומה על-השמים אלהים", סלק שכינתו מביניהון, כששמע שיש באותו הדור דלטורין "בני-אדם שניהם חנית וחצים" וכו'.

With this, we can understand the minor Masoretic note “‘it appears to me’ twice”. The term is found twice in the Bible: “The owner of the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, ‘There appears to me as a plague in the house.’”<sup>8</sup> “The L-rd appeared to me from afar.”<sup>9</sup> This is as though the Masoretic note means to say: Why is it that “it appears to me as a plague”? Because “the L-rd appeared to me from afar,” that the Heavenly lights have been closed off from him.

For *tzara’at*<sup>10</sup> comes due to slanderous speech,<sup>11</sup> and David said, “Exalt Yourself over the Heavens, O G-d,”<sup>12</sup> remove Your Presence from among them, when [David] heard that there were informers in that generation, “men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongue is a sharp sword.”<sup>13,14</sup>

ועוד יש לתת טעם למה מראה הלכן כאן הוא סימן טומאה, סימן לעונותיו של אדם וביום הכפורים הוא להפך כי מראה הלכן הוא סימן מחילה וסליחה וכפרה, והשחור דקיימא לו אדום הוא, אלא שלקה, הוא סימן טהרה והתם סימן טומאה.

Also, we need to give a reason why the white appearance here for the *metzora* is a sign of impurity, a sign of a person’s sins, whereas on Yom Kippur it is the opposite, for then the white appearance is a sign of forgiveness, pardon, and atonement. This refers to the High Priest tying a strip of crimson wool upon the head of the scapegoat, and if the wool turned white, it would indicate forgiveness of the sins of the Jewish people.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Chayim Vital, *Sefer Etz Chayim* 38:7: “Since the state of a *metzora* also involves the departure of the intellectual Sefirah of *Chochmah* [חכמה] [“wisdom”], as we said above, therefore he is considered as dead.” The section also notes that מצורע [spelled fully with a vav], has a Gematria of 406 [and thus has a *mispar kolel*, when one adds one for the word itself, of 407], which hints at [the term] החסרון החכמה [“the absence of *Chochma*”] [which itself has a Gematria of 407].

<sup>6</sup> Eccl. 7:12.

<sup>7</sup> Nedarim 64b.

<sup>8</sup> Lev. 14:35.

<sup>9</sup> Jer. 31:3 (31:2 in some editions).

<sup>10</sup> *Tzara’at* is a skin disease. Many English translations refer to it as leprosy and to the person afflicted as a leper. However, this skin disease was not related to leprosy. Rather, it was considered a physical manifestation of a spiritual ailment.

<sup>11</sup> Arachin 15b; Rambam, *Mishneh Torah*, Defilement by *Tzara’at* 16:10.

<sup>12</sup> Ps. 57:6.

<sup>13</sup> Ps. 57:5.

<sup>14</sup> Lev. Rabbah 26:2.

<sup>15</sup> Mishnah Yoma 6:8; Yoma 67a.

We **also** need to explain why **black—which** for the laws of menstruation **we hold to actually be red blood that has faded**<sup>16</sup>—**is a sign of purity** here in the case of the *metzora*, **but there** for the laws of menstruation **it is a sign of impurity**.

דאיתא בפרק ג' דפסחים על פסוק "והיה ביום ההוא לא־יהיה אור יקרות (יקפאון) [וקפאון]", דמי שיקר בעולם הזה, קפוי לעולם הבא, ומי שקפוי בעולם הזה, יקר לעולם הבא, והיינו עליונים למטה, ותחתונים למעלה, הלכן שחור, והשחור לבן.

For it is stated in the third chapter of tractate *Pesachim* on the verse, “And it shall come to pass on that day that light will not be significant, but insignificant.”<sup>17</sup> That is, one who is significant in this world, will be insignificant in the World-to-Come, and one who is insignificant in this world, will be significant in the World-to-Come.<sup>18</sup> This means that the upper ones will be below, and the lower ones will be above,<sup>19</sup> the white will be black, and the black will be white.

ועוד אמרינן בהוריות אשרי צדיקים שמגיע אליהם בעולם הזה כמעשה הרשעים בעולם הבא. וכן נמי בפרק קמא דקידושין כל שזכייתו מרובין מצונותיו, מריעין לו ודומה כמי ששרף כל התורה בלה. ואם כן מראה השחור הוא סימן שהוא קפוי, ואם הוא קפוי בעולם הזה יהיה יקר בעולם הבא והיינו סימן טהרה, אבל כשהוא יקר בעולם הזה שיש לו מראה לבן שהוא יקר וחשוב אז יהיה קפוי ושחור לעולם הבא ולכן הוא סימן טומאה.

Also, it is said in *Horayot* (10b): “Happy are the righteous, to whom it happens in this world according to the experiences of the wicked in the World-to-Come. Woe unto the wicked, to whom it happens in this world according to the experiences of the righteous in the World-to-Come.”

Similarly, we also read in the first chapter of tractate *Kiddushin* (39b):

Anyone whose merits are greater than his sins is punished with suffering [in this world in order to be rewarded in the World-to-Come], and he appears [to others] like one who burned the entire Torah without leaving even one letter remaining of it. Anyone whose sins are greater than his merits has goodness bestowed upon him [in this world, and he will be punished in the World-to-Come], and he appears [to others] like one who has fulfilled the entire Torah without lacking [the fulfillment of] even one letter of it.

- Kiddushin 39b

If so, the appearance of black is a sign that he is insignificant, and if he is insignificant in this world, he will be significant in the World-to-Come, and that is a sign of purity. But if he is

<sup>16</sup> Niddah 19a, 19b; Sukkah 33b.

<sup>17</sup> Zech. 14:6.

<sup>18</sup> Pesachim 50a.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

**significant in this world, with a white appearance that is precious and important, then he will be insignificant and black in the World-to-Come, and therefore it is a sign of impurity.**

אָמנ'ם פֿיום הפּפורים וָהוא מעין דוגמת העולם הבא וָאָנוּ פֿאותוֹ הַיּוֹם דּוֹמִים לַמִּלְאָכִי הַשָּׂרָת, אַז הַלּוֹכֵן הוּא הַיָּקָר וְהַשָּׁחוּר וְהָאָדוּם הוּא הַקְּפוּי וְסִימָן טוֹמְאָה.

**However, on Yom Kippur, which is like a reflection of the World-to-Come, on that day we are like ministering angels, then whiteness is the precious state, and black and red are insignificant and a sign of impurity.**

וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ זֶה אִם יֵשׁ שֵׁעַר לֶבָן טָמֵא, וְאִם כָּלּוּ הַפֶּה לֶבָן טָהוֹר, וְשָׂאזְ אֵין לוֹ נְשָׁרוֹת מִבִּפְנִים רַק כָּלּוּ לֶבָן בְּעֵצָם, וְשָׂאף אִם הִיָּה לוֹ אֵיזֶה חֲטָא עֲתָה נִתְכַּפֵּר לְגַמְרִי, דְּנִגְעִים "מִזְבַּח כְּפָרָה" הוּא. וְאִם שֵׁעַר לֶבָן קוֹדֵם לַבְּהֵרֶת, טָהוֹר, וְשִׁנָּה גִידוֹן כְּתוּלִיד חֲכָם וְשֵׁעַר עֲבִירָה בְּלִילָה דְּאַמְרִינוּ אֵל תִּהְיֶה אַחֲרָיו פֿיום, וְשָׂמָא עֲשֵׂה תְּשׁוּבָה, דְּשֵׁעַר לֶבָן הֵינּוּ חֲכָמָתוֹ וְאַחֲרָ פֶּה בָּאָה הַבְּהֵרֶת. אָמנ'ם אִם בְּהֵרֶת קִדְמָה לְשֵׁעַר לֶבָן, וְשֵׁלָא הִיָּה לְבוֹ שְׁלָם וְהִיָּה לוֹ שֵׁעַר לֶבָן לְהוֹדִיעַ לְבְרִיּוֹת וָהוּא לֶבָן וְטָהוֹר, אַז הוּא נִקְרָא לֶבָן וְשָׁחוּר "וְטָמֵא טָמֵא יִקְרָא".

**In this way: If there is a white hair, he is impure; but if all has turned white, he is pure. For then he has no blackness within, rather he is entirely white in essence. Even if he had some sin, now it has been completely atoned for. For afflictions are “an altar of atonement.”<sup>20</sup>**

**If the white hair precedes the *baheret*, a snow-white sore, he is pure,<sup>21</sup> as this is considered like a Torah scholar who sinned at night, of whom we say, “Do not suspect him during the day, for perhaps he has repented,”<sup>22</sup> for the white hair represents his wisdom, and afterward came the *baheret*. But if the *baheret* came before the white hair, his heart was not whole, and he had white hair to show people that he is white and pure, then he is called white that is black, and “he shall call out, ‘impure, impure.’”<sup>23</sup>**

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<sup>20</sup> Berachot 5b.

<sup>21</sup> Bava Metzia 86a.

<sup>22</sup> Berachot 19a.

<sup>23</sup> Lev. 13:45.