

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXVIII: Metzora (Lev. 14:1–15:33)

Essay 3. Arrogance leads to tzara'at

מְדַרְשׁ רבה דְּבַר אַחַר, "זאת תהיה תורת המצרע", הַדָּא הוּא דְּכַתִּיב "אִם־יִצְעֵלָה לְשָׁמַיִם שִׂיאוֹ וְרָאשׁוֹ לְעֵב יִגִיעַ". שִׂיאוֹ, לְרוּמָא. לְעֵב, לְעֵנְנָא. "פְּגָלְלוֹ לְנִצַּח יֵאבֵד", מַה גְּלָלִים הִלְלוּ מְזוֹהֲמִין אַף הוּא מְזוֹהֵם, "רֵאָיו יֵאמְרוּ אִיו" חֲמוֹן לִיה וְלֹא מְפִירִין בֵּיה, נֶשְׁכֵן פְּתִיב בְּרִיעֵי אִיּוֹב, "וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־עֵינֵיהֶם מֵרְחוֹק וְלֹא הִפְיִרוּהוּ". עכ"ל.

Midrash Rabbah:

Another interpretation: “This shall be the law for a *metzora*,”¹ this is what is written, “Though his arrogance [שִׂאוֹ] [*si’o*] rises to the sky, his head reaching to the clouds [לְעֵב] [*la’av*], as with his dung, he’ll forever be lost. Those who have seen him will ask, ‘Where is he?’ ”²

[The Hebrew word] “*si’o*” [“his arrogance”] [is rendered in Aramaic as] “*le’ruma*.” [The Hebrew word] “*la’av*” [“to the clouds”] [is rendered in Aramaic as] “*la’anana*.”

“As [with] his dung, he’ll forever be lost,” just as this dung stinks, so too, he stinks. “Those who have seen him will ask, ‘Where is he?’ ” They will see him, but not recognize him, since thus it is written of the friends of Job, “They lifted up their eyes from afar and did not recognize him.”³

- Lev. Rabbah 16:3

וְהוּא תְּמוּזָה לְמַה נֶקֶט שְׁתֵּי הַגְּבֻהוֹת, "לְרוּמָא" וְ"לְעֵנְנָא", וּמַה עֵנְנֵי עֵב וְעֵנְנֵי לְכָאן.

It is very strange, why [the author of the Midrash] selected two Aramaic words representing elevations, “*leruma*” [לְרוּמָא] [“to haughtiness”], which has the root רם [*ram*], meaning “high,” and *la’anana* [לְעֵנְנָא] [“to the clouds”]. Also, what is the connection of Job’s language “*av*” [עֵב] [“cloud”] and the Midrash’s interpretation “*anan*” [עֵנָן] [“cloud”]⁴ to this?

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¹ *Metzora* refers to a person suffering from *tzara’at*, often mistranslated as “leprosy,” though it is not a physical disease, but a result of a spiritual defect.

² Job 20:6–7.

³ Job 2:12.

⁴ *Anan* is actually a Hebrew word, but the word given in the Midrash, *la’anana*, is an Aramaic version.

וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמֵר דְּאֶמְרִינֵן בְּפֶרֶק ו' דְּפֶסְחִים אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב כּל הַמְתַּיִיֵּהָר, אִם חָכֵם הוּא, חָכְמָתוֹ מִסְתַּלְקָת מִמֶּנּוּ, וְאִם נְבִיא הוּא, נְבוּאָתוֹ מִסְתַּלְקָת מִמֶּנּוּ, מֵהַלֵּל וּמִדְּבוֹרָה.

It can be said that it's said in the sixth chapter of tractate Pesachim:

Hillel said to them: I [once] heard this *halacha* but I have forgotten it. . . . [Regarding this,] Rav Yehuda **said that Rav said: Anyone who acts haughtily, if he is a [Torah] scholar, his wisdom departs from him; [and] if he is a prophet, his prophecy departs from him.** “If he is a Torah scholar, his wisdom departs from him” [is learned] **from Hillel**, for the Master said [in this *Baraita*]: Hillel began to rebuke them with words. . . . **And** “If he is a prophet his prophecy departs from him” [is learned] **from Deborah**, as it is written: “The villagers ceased, they ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, I arose a mother in Israel.”⁵ [She lost her prophetic spirit], as it is written, “Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song.”⁶

-Pesachim 66b

וְלִרְמוֹז עַל אֵלּוּ הַשְּׁנַיִם אָמַר שְׁתֵּי הַגְּבוּהוֹת, ד' "אִם-יַעֲלֶה לְשָׁמַיִם שִׂיאוֹ" שִׂיאוֹ הוּא לְשׁוֹן נְשִׂיאוֹת וְרוּמָמוֹת, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפִּירֵשׁ רד"ק (בְּשֵׁרֵשׁ נְשִׂא). וְזֶה הַנְּשִׂיאוֹת בָּא לֹא מִחֻמַּת הַחֻקָּה, וּבְפֶרֶק ה' (שָׁם) אֶמְרִינֵן "לֹא בְשָׁמַיִם הוּא" לֹא תִמְצָא בְּגִסֵּי הַרוּחַ. "וְרֹאשׁוֹ לְעֵב יִגִּיעַ", לְעַנְנָא, זֶה הַנְּבוּאָה שֶׁבָּאָה לְאָדָם עַל יְדֵי עָנָן, כְּדַכְתִּיב "הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי בָא אֵלֶיךָ בְּעֵב הָעָנָן", מִשֶּׁהָ עָלָה בְּעָנָן וְכוּ'. "כִּגְלָלוֹ לְנִצְח" וְכוּ', אִם יִהְיֶה לְהֵם גְּאֻנָּה יִהְיוּ מְזוּהָמִים כְּמוֹ הַגְּלָל, שִׁיְהִיֶּה נִלְקָה בְּצַרְעַת בְּמוֹמִים גְּלוּיִים לְכָל. חֲמוֹן בִּיה וְלֹא מִכִּירִין יִתִּיה עוֹד לֹא בְשֵׁם חָכֵם וְלֹא בְשֵׁם נְבִיא, לְפִי שֶׁנִּתְגַּלָּה קְלוֹנוֹ וּמוֹמוֹ, שֶׁאִם הִיָּה יִרָא שְׁמַיִם הִיָּה הַקַּב"ה מְבִיא לוֹ יִיסוּרִין בְּצַנְעָא וּבְכַבּוּד.

To hint about these two, the arrogance of a Torah scholar and prophet, [the author of the midrash] said two Aramaic words representing elevations.

“**Though his arrogance [שִׂיאוֹ] [*si'o*] rises to the sky,**” with the word *si'o* being a term of princely dignity [נְשִׂיאוֹת] [*nesi'ut*] and exultation, as the Radak⁷ explained on the root *na'sa* [נשא]. **This princely dignity came because of wisdom, and there in the fifth chapter of Eruvin (55a), it says, “Rabbi Yochanan said: ‘It is not in heaven,’⁸ [means that Torah] is not to be found in the haughty.”** Thus, “rises to the sky” refers to a Torah scholar.

“**His head reaching to the clouds**”—**to the clouds, this is referring to the prophecy that comes to a man via a cloud, as it is written, “And the L-rd said to Moses, ‘I will come to you in a thick cloud,’⁹ and a *Baraita* taught that Moses ascended in the cloud.¹⁰** Thus, “his head reaching to the clouds” refers to a prophet.

⁵ Judges 5:7.

⁶ Judges 5:12.

⁷ Rabbi David Kimchi (1160–1235) (“RaDaK”), medieval rabbi, Biblical commentator, philosopher, and grammarian.

⁸ Deut. 30:12.

⁹ Ex. 19:19.

¹⁰ Yoma 4a.

“As [with] his dung, he’ll forever be lost.” This means, if they have haughtiness, they will be as filthy as the dung, as he’ll be afflicted with *tzara’at*, with blemishes revealed to everyone.

“Those who have seen him will ask, ‘Where is he?’ This means, they saw him but didn’t recognize him anymore, not by the name “Torah scholar,” and not by the name “prophet,” because his shame and blemish were revealed, for if he had feared Heaven, then the Holy One, Blessed be He, would have brought him sufferings privately and with honor.

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