

## Insights from the Meshech Chochma

### רב מאיר שמחה הכהן מדווינסק זצ"ל פְּרֻשֵׁת בִּי תִשָּׂא תִשְׁפֹּה

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וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם כִּי פָרַע הוּא... (פרק לב' בה)

*Moses saw the people, that it was exposed...*

Rashi explains that Moshe finally “saw” what the people had done. By committing this terrible sin, their “stain and degradation have been exposed. (And forever) this matter will be a disgrace to them in the mouth of those who rise up against them,” for they shamed themselves by being disloyal to Hashem.

Rav Meir Simcha’s focus is on two similar exegesis that are derived from two separate pasukim. The first is from *.../...One man in a thousand I have found, but one woman among them I have not found* and the Midrash explains that the *One man* refers to Moshe Rabbeinu and the “not even one woman” is a reference to the *נְשֵׁי הַמִּדְבָּר*, the women (of the generation) of the *Midbar* and that neither of them were involved in the sin of the *Eigal*. *Vayikra Rabba* adds that R’ Yehuda HaNasi says: “The women of the *נְשֵׁי הַמִּדְבָּר* were righteous. When they heard that they were forbidden to their husbands, they immediately *נִעְלוּ דְלִתוּתֵיהֶן* i.e., refrained from engaging in relations with them.” *Shir HaShirim Rabba* teaches this to us from the phrase in *שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ד' ט* *לִבְבִתִּי אֶחָתִי, שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ד' ט* *נְשֵׁי הַמִּדְבָּר/You captured my heart, My sister, O bride*: “Some say that the verse is referring to the *נְשֵׁי הַמִּדְבָּר*, who were honorable. When they encountered that incident they paused, considered the matter, and did not give any of their nose rings for the *Eigal*. When they heard that they were forbidden to their husbands, they immediately *נִעְלוּ דְלִתוּתֵיהֶן*.” In both cases, the *Mefarshei HaMidrash* struggle to explain why the couples were prohibited from being with each other. Many say that it was because they were just taught, by Moshe, the *halachos* of family purity. The difficulty with this is that both Midrashim appear to be connecting the restriction to the sin of the *Eigal* i.e., the men committed the sin and because of this the women separated themselves from their spouses. The *Matonos Kehuna* (written by Rav Yissachar Berman ben Naphtali Ha-Kohen, circa 1584) answers *מִפְּנֵי שֶׁבִעֲלֵיהֶן הָיוּ עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדַת* *עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדַת* precisely because the men worshipped the *Eigal* made them *assur* to their wives. The *Alshich* says similarly. Other *Mefarshim* question this, as there is no specific prohibition for one who has transgressed *זָרָה* to be with his/her spouse? The *Chida* explains that the *נְשֵׁי הַמִּדְבָּר* may have believed *לְהֵם דִּין מְנוּדָה*—that their husbands were placed in *cheirim* and were therefore off limits.

Rav Meir Simcha’s answer as to why the women separated from their husbands is based on another Midrash. In *Vayikra Rabba* we are told that “for ten matters *tzaraas* comes” and the first listed is *עֲבוֹדַת זָרָה*. Continues the Midrash: “For idol worship—this is derived from the precedent of Klal Yisrael, who bore false witness against Hashem when the people declared,

regarding the calf, *יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹהֶיךָ יְיָ* / *This is your god, O Israel*. From where is it derived that they were afflicted with *tzaraas*? As it is stated (in our pasuk), *וַיֵּרָא מִנְּשָׂה אֶת הָעָם כִּי פָרַע הוּא*, "We still need some clarity-Rav Meir Simcha takes us to Midrash Bamidbar Rabba which is more expansive: "R' Tanchuma bar R' Abba said: 'When the nation departed from *Mitzraim*, most of them were blemished. Why? Because they were toiling in mortar and bricks and would ascend to the top of the structure. One who builds by ascending to the top floor, a stone would fall and sever his hand, or a beam or mortar would enter his eye and he would be blinded. When they arrived at *Har Sinai*, Hashem said: 'Is it appropriate for the honor of the Torah, that I will give it to a generation of blemished people? If I wait until others arise, I will delay the giving of the Torah.' What did He do? He said to the angels that they should descend to the people and heal them. ...and you find in fact they were all healed. However, once they performed that act of the *Eigal*, they were restored to their blemish and became *zavim* and *metzoraim*. Thus, Moshe saw them, as (our pasuk) tells us: *וַיֵּרָא מִנְּשָׂה אֶת הָעָם כִּי פָרַע הוּא* and *וְהַצְרוּעַ אֲשֶׁר בּוֹ הַנֶּגַע... וְהָיָה פְרוּעַ* / *The metzora in whom the affliction is...and the hair of his head shall be unshorn.*" So that we have established that those who sinned with the *Eigal* were punished with *tzaraas*. Rav Meir Simcha still needs one more piece of information to complete his answer and he finds it in *מועד קטן ז*: where we encounter a *machlokes* between R' Yehuda HaNasi and R' Yosi as to how long a *metzora* must separate from his spouse-is it just the *ימי* ספירו, the (seven) days of his counting to see if the *tzaraas* has healed or whether he also needs to be separate during the *ימי חלוטו*, the days of his confirmed *tzaraas*. Regardless, all agree that there is a period during the *tzaraas* illness where a husband and wife cannot be together.

According to Rav Meir Simcha then, the *נְשֵׁי הַמְדָבָר* were *righteous* in not attaching themselves to the *Eigal* and *correct* in assessing that they were *assur* to be with their husbands *because* of the *tzaraas* that the men contracted after stumbling with the sin of the *Eigal*. Rav Meir Simcha concludes this piece with *וּפְשׁוּט* i.e., what I am saying is obvious. It most certainly is when one can so effortlessly cull several *חַז"ל* *מֵאֵמֶרֵי* from all over *פָּה* and weave them into such a beautiful tapestry!

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל  
 לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה  
 לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל  
 ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן ר' אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל  
 מחבר הגהות על ספר משך חכמה