YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Naso**

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

**Those Who Are Sent Out of the Camp**

Translated by David Strauss

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that has a discharge (*zav*), and whoever is impure by the dead; both male and female shall you put out, outside the camp shall you put them; that they defile not their camp, in the midst of which I dwell. And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord spoke to Moshe, so did the children of Israel. (*Bamidbar* 5:1-4)

This section was said on the day the *Mishkan* was erected (see *Gittin* 60a), but was written here, out of chronological order, so it would be adjacent to the sections dealing with the arrangement of the camps: the camp of Israel, the camp of the Levites, and the camp of the *Shekhina* (the *Mishkan* itself). The three impure people mentioned in these verses are sent out of the camp, but according to the Midrash Halakha, this statement is applied differently to each of the three.

The leper is sent out of all three camps, that is to say, outside the camp of Israel:

And the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and the hair of his head shall go loose, and he shall cover his upper lip, and shall cry: Impure, impure. All the days wherein the plague is in him he shall be impure; he is impure; he shall dwell alone; outside the camp shall his dwelling be. (*Vayikra* 13:45-46)

It should be kept in mind that outside the camp of Israel lived the "*erev rav*," i.e., the "mixed multitude" – converts and others who had joined the people of Israel at the time of the exodus from Egypt.

In future generations, a leper was required to be sent out from Jerusalem and from other walled cities, whose sanctity is greater than the rest of *Eretz Israel*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Cities that are walled are holier, for lepers must be sent out of them. (Mishna *Keilim* 1:7)

The uniqueness of the impurity of a leper probably stems from the fact that it is impurity that also involves a sin, as is evident from the cases of leprosy known to us from Scripture (e.g., *Bamidbar* 12, II *Melakhim* 5, and II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 26).

A *zav*, "one who has a [gonorrhea-like] discharge" is sent out of the camp of the Levites but is permitted to remain in the camp of Israel. This is not explicitly stated in Scripture, but *Chazal* derive it from details in the verses.[[2]](#footnote-2) In future generations, a *zav* would be sent outside the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

The Temple Mount is holier, for *zavs*, menstruants, and women after childbirth may not enter it. (*Keilim* 1:8)

Within the plain sense of Scripture, it may be possible to learn the law of a *zav* from the law of a *ba'al keri*, one who had a seminal emission. There is some similarity between them in real life, and the Gemara (*Pesachim* 67b) compares them as well. This is what the Torah says about a *ba'al keri*:

When you go forth in camp against your enemies, then you shall keep you from every evil thing. If there be among you any man, that is not pure by reason of that which chances him by night, then shall he go outside of the camp, he shall not come within the camp…For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you, and to give up your enemies before you; therefore shall your camp be holy; that He see no unseemly thing in you, and turn away from you. (*Devarim* 23:10-15)

Halakha treats a war camp like the camp of the Levites (see *Pesachim* 68a), and a *ba'al keri* is forbidden to remain there. What this means is that, in a war camp as in the Levites’ camp, God “walks” in the midst of the camp. This is not like in the camp of the *Shekhina*, where the *Shekhina* rests permanently, even in times of peace, but its sanctity is greater than that of the camp of Israel, regarding which there is no mention of God's walking and which does not contain the ark of the Lord.

Due to the many hardships and enemies that Israel encountered in the wilderness, it is possible that the entire camp, while it was in transit, was treated like a camp going out to war and *zavs* were sent out of it entirely, but I have not found any proof for this.

The impurity of a *zav* does not necessarily stem from sin, but it is an impurity whose source issues from one’s own body.

One who is impure because of contact with the dead is sent out only from the camp of the *Shekhina*, outside the *Mishkan* (or the Temple), as explicitly stated in *Bamidbar* 19. This law is the most lenient of the three, because the impurity comes from an external source.

In the Midrash Aggada, the passage took on a different meaning: The impure, the *zavs*, and the lepers are not people whose bodies were afflicted with an external ailment (impurity) or an internal ailment (gonorrhea or leprosy), but rather sinners – and not individual sinners, but the entire people of Israel:

Another explanation: "Command the children of Israel." Our Rabbis expounded the verse in reference to the exile: "Command the children of Israel" – because Israel transgressed the commandments, they became liable to being sent out, this being exile. This is what is written: "That they put out of the camp."

"Put out" denotes exile, as it is stated: "Put them out of my sight, and let them go forth" (*Yirmiyahu* 15:1).

"Out of the camp" – this is *Eretz Israel*, where the *Shekhina* camps.

"Every leper, and every one that has a discharge, and whoever is impure by the dead" – He alluded to them that if Israel transgresses these three transgressions – idolatry, incest, and bloodshed – they will be liable for exile.

"Leper" – just as a leper conveys impurity by entering into a house, so idolatry conveys impurity by entering into a house.

"And every one that has a discharge – this is incest, both of them conveying impurity by way of semen.

"And whoever is impure by the dead" – this refers to murderers, who defile themselves and defile the land with bloodshed.

And we have thus learned: Exile comes into the world for idolatry, for incest, for bloodshed, and for [disregard of] releasing the land (*shemitta*). (*Bamidbar Rabba* 7)

"That they put out of the camp" – From where did leprosy come upon them? Rabbi Yehuda bar Simon said: From the episode involving the [golden] calf. And our Rabbis said: From the "murmurers." (Ibid., as well as many other *midrashim*)

Why did *Chazal* add the sins of Israel across generations to the plain meaning of Scripture?

It is possible that they were moved to this exposition by the juxtaposition of the section dealing with the sending out of the impure and the section that immediately follows it:

Any man or woman, when they commit any of the sins… and that soul be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have done; and he shall make restitution for his guilt in full. (*Bamidbar* 5:6-7)

According to its plain sense, this passage makes no mention of a particular sin, but instead conveys a general rebuke. The Midrash comes to say that perhaps the connection between these sections teaches that avoiding being sent out of the camp – that is, going into exile – requires confession, atonement, and repair.

1. From the Rambam (*Hilkhot Bi'at Mikdash* 3:2, 8), it would seem that the mitzvaof sending the leper out, and the prohibition falling upon the leper against defiling the camp, apply only to Jerusalem. The obligation to send him out from any walled city stems only from the mitzvaof "he shall dwell alone" (*Vayikra* 13:46). The commentators have discussed his position at length. A detailed summary of the various views can be found in Rabbi Y. M. Tucazinski, *Ir ha-Kodesh ve-ha-Mikdash*, part III, chap. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See mainly *Pesachim* 67 and *Sifre*, *Parashat Naso*, section 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)