

The Torah groups various types of afflictions under the general category of leprosy, צרעת. These include שאת ספחת ובהרת. Our Rabbis associated the root cause of these afflictions with sins such as לשון הרע. These sins are extrinsic to the Jew as they clash with the idea of מכבד, that sin is superficial to the Jew. However they are intrinsic to various nations of the world. The Midrash (Midrash Rabbah Tazria 15:9) associates each of these forms of leprosy with a people/nation that exemplified a specific moral defect. שאת refers to Babylonia, ספחת to Persia and בהרת to Yavan (ancient Greece). The general category of נגע צרעת is associated with Edom.

According to Chazal, שאת refers to גאווה, haughtiness, (Shavuot 6b), an inflated ego and sense of self-importance. Ancient Babylonia epitomized שאת, based on the verse שבתה מדהבה ... איך שבת נוגש (Isaiah 14:4). Chazal say that among the 3 afflictions, haughtiness is the root cause of sin. It led Yeravam to become a pariah. Gd divided the Kingdom of Israel between Yeravam and Rechavam. With the Temple in Jerusalem, the people in Yeravam's portion of the Kingdom traveled to the Temple 3 times a year. Each trip to Jerusalem provided Rechavam the opportunity to appeal to Yeravam's subjects to return to the House of David and reject Yeravam. Yeravam placed golden calves in Dan and Beer Sheva to prevent the people from traveling to the Temple in Jerusalem for the three festivals. The Talmud says that Gd, כביכול, grabbed Yeravam by the garment and told him to repent. If Yeravam would repent, then I (Gd), you (Yeravam) and King David will stroll together through the Garden of Eden (Sanhedrin 102a).

Yeravam felt compelled to surrender to his haughtiness for several reasons. He feared the people may have a change of heart and support Rechavam. He was also concerned about his stature and honor. The Gemara says (Sanhedrin 101b) that all who entered the Temple had to stand, except for the kings from the house of David. Yeravam was concerned that if he entered the Temple, he would have to stand while Rechavam sat. He feared being embarrassed in front of the people. Gd told Yeravam to repent, go to Jerusalem and reject his foolish haughtiness. This small personal sacrifice will guarantee his place among the great leaders of Israel. He would be at the forefront of those who walked in the Garden of Eden. He would attain a status greater than Rechavam, Solomon and perhaps even David himself. As Gd told him, the group order would consist of Gd first then Yeravam followed by David.

Yeravam asked ומי בראש, who will lead now? Gd answered Rechavam from the house of Yishai. Gd told him that the price for attaining ultimate greatness is to allow Ben Yishai, Rechavam, to be in the lead in the short term. All he needed to

do was to go to Jerusalem and stand while Rechavem sat. However Yeravam would not see the big picture. He was blinded by his haughtiness and became the ultimate loser.

This is what Chazal meant when they interpreted the term *מדהבה* (mentioned above). According to Rabbi Eliezer, it means *מדוד והבא*, people who "measure and bring", based on immediate, current practicality and indulge in momentary gratification. Such people lack perspective, vision and constantly fail in life. They are the Yeravams of the world who forego eternal glory for the insignificant present. True blessing is not found in quantifiable objects but in that which is hidden from the eye. One must be willing to overlook the short term for the long term gain.

Orthodox parents often push their children into secular endeavors at the expense of Torah studies, in the belief that this will ensure economic success and stability for their children. They do not see the long term goal of raising children imbued with sanctity and an unshakable commitment to Judaism while enhancing the Torah quality of the Jewish community. They are teaching their children to value only what is expedient. They cannot see the importance of studying Chumash, prayer or keeping Shabbos. It has become fashionable for a Jew to look for "Tachlis". There are 2 types of Tachlis, the first, what the Rambam considers the highest calling, to seek out the ways of Gd. The other is a euphemism, to focus only on the moment without long range planning. These same parents don't realize that if everything is predicated on immediate utility, *כבוד אב ואם* will be ignored 20 years later when the child deems his parents obsolete and irrelevant. *מדוד והבא* is the approach of Esau, who willingly surrendered his birthright and the service of Gd for the immediate gratification of a bowl of lentil soup.

The second affliction, *ספחה*, refers to the Persian Empire. The Midrash describes *מדי*, referring to Haman who descended from *מדי*, as a spineless serpent. We might imagine Haman as a confident, arrogant person, but Chazal paint Haman as timid, lacking self-confidence, seeking to ingratiate himself with those in power while seeking it himself. Rabbi Yehuda said when Haman wanted to become prime minister, he attempted to gain favor with Esther, the newly appointed queen. He wondered about her nationality. If she was a Jew, then she would definitely be amenable to assist a relative, a descendant of Esau. His spineless character coupled with his blind ambition led him to overlook the established Halacha that Esau despises Jacob, and if Esther were indeed Jewish they would be natural enemies.

שאת and ספחת are the opposite extremes of the same affliction. Often people in positions of power lack self-confidence. They portray themselves as haughty, as שאת, but in reality they are closer to ספחת, groveling, spineless. The United Nations outwardly exudes שאת, while attempting to ingratiate themselves with others for their selfish indulgence.

The Jew should strive for the middle ground and emulate the ways of Gd. The words גאווה and גאות share a common root. The former is reprehensible while the latter is an attribute of Gd, גאות לבש. גאות implies a self-confidence and self-respect without need for ego stroking by others. Haman pursued כבוד. כבוד in general is not an evil notion, for Gd is described as מלך הכבוד. כבוד is granted one who lives a life of Torah and kindness, raises children to follow in our tradition and has yearnings for sanctity. When one pursues כבוד for the sake of self-aggrandizement, true כבוד flees from him. גאות means adopting and adhering to a philosophy of life no matter what the world says. כבוד is never attained by a בעל גאווה, who is insecure and lacking self-respect. When Haman ordered all to bow to him, Mordechai adhered to his principles and refused. Haman expressed his own twisted notions of כבוד. Someone who epitomizes ספחת seeks material things like a royal horse, to be clothed in royal garments by royal servants, basking in an announcement of his approval by the king. Haman's ideas of כבוד were anathema to Mordechai. He immediately returned to his sack cloth and prayer after returning from Haman's concept of כבוד. Haman could not tolerate the thought that Mordechai might be gloating over his humiliation in receiving the כבוד that he, Haman, pursued all his life.

Unfortunately, many Jews today pursue Haman's כבוד. They long to be feted as guests of honor at a banquet and celebrated by the royal servants, toastmasters who cry out their virtues and proclaim ביקרו המלך חפץ ביקרו. As Reb Bunim M'Peshischa said, The Jew should walk around with his hands simultaneously in 2 pockets. On the one hand he should view himself as great and reaching heavenly heights. On the other hand he should recognize that he is dust and ash.

There was a disagreement in the heavenly academy concerning pronouncing defilement, טומאה, by a diagnosis of leprosy (Bava Metzia 86a). Rabbah Bar Nachmani was selected to arbitrate. Man on the one hand can reach such heights that he is asked to resolve heavenly disputes, while on the other hand he is mere dust. Moses was the greatest of men yet he suffered the fate of all men. The recognition of this duality is what Chazal meant by true כבוד expressing מכם. Leading a life with a long term perspective leads a person to reject the false honor of שאת and ספחת.

The third affliction, בהרת, symbolizes the ancient Greeks, whose decrees blinded (as bright light blinds) the Jewish People. The Midrash says that in the second Temple an ox would lead the First Fruits procession, בכורים. The ox symbolized agricultural might, רב תבואות בכה שור. The horns of the ox were covered with gold. The Jewish Hellenizers inscribed on the horns that the people rejected any share in the God of Israel. To the Hellenizers, only the superficial had meaning. Importance is ascribed to physical appearance and oratory skills. Internal strength of character was ignored. They wanted to replace the internal faith of the Jew with their external pursuit of beauty.

The Gemara (Erchin 10b) relates that an ancient mortar and pestle made from copper dated back to Moses was used in the Temple. It was used to finely grind the incense ingredients, and it was symbolic of the need for the Jew to grind away his vulgar habits and return to Gd. The Hellenizers from Alexandria adjusted the mortar and pestle, after which it no longer was capable of grinding the incense. Eventually the adjustment was removed and it once again was effective. Modern day Hellenizers attempt to adjust and subvert Judaism. They say that there is no reason to keep Shabbos. It is more practical to ride to Shul. Fires were prohibited in ancient times because it took too much effort, but it is so easy to turn on a light. This is the attitude of בהרת, similar to the Hellenizers who attempted to blind the people with their false, bright light. בהרת is at best a skin deep association with Judaism.

Leaders who are great orators personify בהרת. Bilam wove blessings from beautiful phrases. Yet with all his 'blessings', this wicked malingerer did not express as much love towards Bnay Yisrael as Moses did when he referred to them as ממרים, rebels.

When it comes to expressing true emotions and feeling, the spoken word is often inadequate. Truly strong feelings require no words, they are self-evident. Moses' true speech impediment, כבד פה, was due to the trepidation he felt in attempting to express his true love of Bnay Yisrael, for he feared being unable to fully capture his emotions in words. The great leaders of the Jewish People, גדולי ישראל, were beloved because they spoke sparingly but their sparse words were imbued with great love and authority.

The Midrash characterizes the Kingdom of Edom as נגע צרעת, the combination of the defilements associated with ובהרת and שאת ספחת. The common denominator of all these forms of defilement is they are not מכם, they are not intrinsic to the Jew.

These afflictions and associated defilement are thrust upon the Jew by the nations of the world. However in the time of Mashiach, Gd will wipe away all these defilements easily and gently, וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם מכל טומאותיכם. Gd will sprinkle water on the Jewish people and they will be purified from all their defilements, as easily as one washes dirt from his hand.

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