Transgress and Guilt

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From our two previous studies we have looked at Evil, Sin, and Inquity. We have come to see Evil in the Hebrew sense that ra, ra’ah, ro’a, and ra’a all have the common meaning of badness in that one is doing harm or hurt to someone or something. We have seen an over all meaning for Sin as doing wrong or offending by going against what is commanded. When one goes against a mitzvah (commandment), torah (law), mishpat (judgement) or choq/choqah (practice/requirement) then one commits a sin. Because we have offended YHWH, and we have done wrong in keeping the Covenant. We also saw that while evil (harm) and sin (wrong) are not equal. They are related to each other in that when one does harm to another they may also be committing a wrong (sin) by breaking the covenant. Iniquity is the past wrongs or sins we have committed. Thus, they are related and it is whether we have atoned for them or not that makes them iniquity.

This brings us to the Hebrew words for Transgress, and guilt. We will look at their meaning in Hebrew and how they relate to what we have studied so far. We will examine the scripture to find the meaning for these words relying on YHWH’s Tanakh to give us their meaning.

Transgress

The words for what is commonly translated as Transgress are avar (Ayin-Vet-Resh) which can be found in the Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon (BDB) under reference number 5674 on page 716 and 720 and references to all the scripture that use this word can be Found in the New Englishman’s Hebrew Concordance (NEHC) on page 895. It has the general meaning of to pass over, pass through or pass. The other word we will be looking at is ev’rah (Ayin-Vet-Resh) because it is a feminine noun it has a hey also at the end. It can be found in the BDB at reference number 5678 on page 720 and in the NEHC on page 900.

Lets look at some scriptures that give us a sense of this word avar. Avar is passing over or passing beyond the bounds of something.

Shemot (Exodus) 12:12, 23

12 For that night I will go through [pass through] (ve’avar’tiy) the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I YHWH.

YHWH will pass through the borders of Egypt.
23 For when YHWH **goes through [pass through]** (ve’avar) to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and YHWH will pass over (y’pasach – 6452, al – 5921) the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home.

Pasach is similar to the pesach in which Passover is called him Hebrew.

Shemot (Exodus) 33:22

22 and, as My Presence **passes (ba’avor)** by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until **I have passed (‘av’riy)** by.

We see the word here being used as when something is being passed over or crossed.

Bamidbar (Numbers) 13:32

32 Thus they spread calumnies among the Yisraelites about the land they had scouted, saying, “The country that **we traversed (avar’nu)** and scouted is one that devours its settlers. All the people that we saw in it are men of great size;

The passed over the country.

Bamidbar (Numbers) 14:6-8

6 And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, of those who had scouted the land, rent their clothes 7 and exhorted the whole Yisraelite community: “The land that **we traversed (avar’nu)** and scouted is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the YHWH is pleased with us, He will bring us into that land, a land that flows with milk and honey, and give it to us;

Again they passed over the country. We have see that this word avar is used in a sense of Passing over the boundaries or over an area. But how is this word used in relationship to YHWH’s commands and covenant.

Bamidbar (Numbers) 22:18,26

18 Balaam replied to Balak’s officials, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, big or little, **contrary [beyond the boundaries] (la’avor)** to the command of the YHWH ELOHAI.

26 Once more the angel [messenger] of YHWH **moved forward [passed in front]** (‘avor) and stationed himself on a spot so narrow that there was no room to swerve right or left.

Bamidbar (Numbers) 14:40-42
40 Early next morning they set out toward the crest of the hill country, saying, “We are prepared to go up to the place that YHWH has spoken of, for we were wrong.” 41 But Moses said, “Why do you transgress (ov’riym) YHWH’s command? This will not succeed. 42 Do not go up, lest you be routed by your enemies, for YHWH is not in your midst.

Here we see that they were transgressing his command. They were going out side its boundaries to do something he did not command.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 17:2

2 If there is found among you, in one of the settlements that YHWH Eloheka is giving you, a man or woman who has affronted YHWH Eloheka and transgressed (la’avor) His covenant

Again going outside of his covenant.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 26:12-13

12 When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, 13 you shall declare before YHWH Eloheka: “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither [not] transgressed (lo ‘avar’tiy) nor neglected any of Your commandments:

Yehoshua (Joshua)  7:5-15

5 The men of Ai killed about thirty-six of them, pursuing them outside the gate as far as Shebarim, and cutting them down along the descent. And the heart of the troops sank in utter dismay.

6 Joshua thereupon rent his clothes. He and the elders of Yisrael lay until evening with their faces to the ground in front of the Ark of YHWH; and they strewed earth on their heads. 7 “Ah, Lord GOD!” cried Joshua. “Why did You lead this people across (ha ‘avar’ta) the Jordan only to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to be destroyed by them? If only we had been content to remain on the other side of the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what can I say after Yisrael has turned tail before its enemies? 9 When the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land hear of this, they will turn upon us and wipe out our very name from the earth. And what will You do about Your great name?”

Again we see the transgress as going over a boundary.

10 But YHWH answered Joshua: “Arise! Why do you lie prostrate? 11 Yisrael has sinned! They have broken [transgressed] (‘av’ru) the covenant by which I bound them.
They have taken of the proscribed [cursed] and put it in their vessels; they have stolen; they have broken faith! 12 Therefore, the Yisraelites will not be able to hold their ground against their enemies; they will have to turn tail before their enemies, for they have become proscribed [cursed]. I will not be with you any more unless you root out from among you what is proscribed [cursed]. 13 Go and purify the people. Order them: Purify yourselves for tomorrow. For thus says YHWH, the God of Yisrael: Something proscribed [cursed] is in your midst, O Yisrael, and you will not be able to stand up to your enemies until you have purged the proscribed [cursed] from among you. 14 Tomorrow morning you shall present yourselves by tribes. Whichever tribe YHWH indicates shall come forward by clans; the clan that YHWH indicates shall come forward by ancestral houses, and the ancestral house that YHWH indicates shall come forward man by man. 15 Then he who is indicated for proscription [taken he cursed thing], and all that is his, shall be put to the fire, because he broke [transgress] (avar) the Covenant of YHWH and because he committed an outrage in Yisrael.”

They transgressed and went beyond the boundaries of the covenant by having a taken an item they were told not to take. This action brought the transgression on all the people.

Yehoshua (Joshua) 23:16

16 If [when] you break [transgress] (ba’av’rachem) the covenant that YHWH Elohekha enjoined upon you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then YHWH’s anger will burn against you, and you shall quickly perish from the good land that He has given you.”

Going and serving other gods transgresses his covenant because we were told not to have other gods.

Shofetim (Judges) 2:20

20 Then YHWH became incensed against Yisrael, and He said, “Since that nation has transgressed (‘av’ru) the covenant that I enjoined upon their fathers and has not obeyed Me,

Shemuel Aleph (I Samuel) 15:24

24 Saul said to Samuel, “I did wrong [sinned] to transgress (biy ‘avar’tiy) YHWH’s command and your instructions; but I was afraid of the troops and I yielded to them [listened to their voice].

Here Saul listen to the voice of the troops and not the voice of YHWH. He was following the will of his troops not the will of YHWH.

Yermiyahu (Jeremiah) 5:28
28 They have become fat and sleek; They pass beyond [transgress] (av’ru) the bounds of wickedness, And they prosper. They will not judge the case of the orphan, Nor give a hearing to the plea of the needy.

The people have gained much and have passed into the bounds of wickedness. How did they do this. They did not judge the case of the orphan or heard the plea of the needy. We are to care for the widow, orphan and needy among us.

Daniyel (Daniel) 9:11

11 All Yisrael has violated [transgressed] (av’ru) Your teaching and gone astray, disobeying You; so the curse and the oath written in the Teaching of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured down upon us, for we have sinned against Him.

The curse and the oath taken on by all entering the covenant being transgressed (going beyond its boundaries) caused us to sin and the punishment to be applied to us.

Hosea 6:4-7

4 What can I do for you, Ephraim, What can I do for you, Judah, When your goodness is like morning clouds, Like dew so early gone?

5 That is why I have hewn down the prophets, Have slain them with the words of My mouth: And the day that dawned [brought on] your punishment. 6 For I desire goodness, not sacrifice; Obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings.

7 But they, to a man, have transgressed (av’ru) the Covenant. This is where they have been false to Me:

Being false or deceitful to YHWH is to transgress his covenant.

Hosea 8:1

1 [Put] a ram’s horn to your mouth—Like an eagle over the House of YHWH; Because they have transgressed (av’ru) My covenant And been faithless to My teaching.

We can see that there is a boundary about which the covenant encompasses. To keep the covenant is to stay within its boundary. When we break the covenant we transgress or pass beyond its boundary. In that point we have sinned. If we do not repent (turn) from it then we bear our iniquity and the breaking of the covenant are also bring harm (evil) upon those around us. Just like we saw in Yehoshua. Transgressing the covenant is a very serious thing and we open ourselves for punishment.

Lets look at some scriptures that give us a sense of this word ev’rah. Ev’rah is an anger passed beyond the bounds. We will see that like the verb form this word denotes a boundary but in the case of wrath or great anger.
Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 9:18

18 By the fury (baev’rat) of YHWH of Hosts, The earth was shaken. Next, the people became like devouring fire: No man spared his countryman.

Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 10:6

6 I send him against an ungodly nation, I charge him against a people that provokes [my wrath] (ev’ratiy) Me, To take its spoil and to seize its booty And to make it a thing trampled Like the mire of the streets.

Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 13:9, 13

9 Lo! The day of YHWH is coming With pitiless fury and wrath (ve’ev’rah), To make the earth a desolation, To wipe out the sinners upon it.

13 Therefore shall heaven be shaken, And earth leap out of its place, At [in] the fury (be’ev’rat) of YHWH of Hosts On the day of His burning wrath.

Guilty

The words translated as guilty is most of the Tanakh is used with transgress.

The first word is asham or ashem (Aleph-Shin-Mem-sofit) which is a verb. It is reference number 816 and found in the BDB on page 79 and in the NEHC on page 178.

Vayiqra 4:13, 22, 27

13 If it is the whole community of Yisrael that has erred [sinned] and the matter escapes the notice of the congregation, so that they do any of the things which by YHWH’s commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt (ve’ashemnu)

22 In case it is a chieftain who incurs guilt [sins] by doing unwittingly any of the things which by the commandment of YHWH his God ought not to be done, and he realizes his guilt (ve’ashem)

27 If any person from among the populace unwittingly incurs guilt [sinned] by doing any of the things which by YHWH’s commandments ought not to be done, and he realizes his guilt (ve’ashem)

In these cases we see that guilt occurs once one realizes they have broken a commandment.

Vayiqra 5:2-4, 17, 19, 23
2 Or when a person touches any unclean thing—be it the carcass of an unclean beast or the carcass of unclean cattle or the carcass of an unclean creeping thing—and the fact has escaped him, and then, being unclean, he realizes his **guilt (ve’ashem)**

3 Or when he touches human uncleanness—any such uncleanness whereby one becomes unclean—and, though he has known it, the fact has escaped him, but later he realizes his **guilt (ve’ashem)**

4 Or when a person utters an oath to bad or good purpose—whatever a man may utter in an oath—and, though he has known it, the fact has escaped him, but later he realizes his **guilt (ve’ashem)** in any of these matters

17 And when a person, without knowing it, sins in regard to any of YHWH’s commandments about things not to be done, and then realizes his **guilt (ve’ashem)**, he shall be subject to punishment [bear iniquity]

19 It is a **guilt (asham)** offering; **he has incurred guilt [truly he is guilty – ashem ashem]** before YHWH

23 when one has thus sinned and, realizing his **guilt (ve’ashem)**, would restore that which he got through robbery or fraud, or the deposit that was entrusted to him, or the lost thing that he found,

Guilt is also applied to when someone is unclean and did not realize it and had touched on of the set apart offerings to YHWH. Thus they incurred guilt. Also, making an oath and breaking it and when realizing it they are now guilty of it. Even if we are found guilty we must pay the penalty for that guilt.

Bamidbar 5:6-7

6 Speak to the Yisraelites: When a man or woman commits any wrong toward a fellow man, thus breaking faith with YHWH, and that person realizes his **guilt (ve’ash’mah)**, 7 he shall confess the wrong that he has done. He shall **make restitution [restore his guilt –vehashiyv et-ashamu]** in the principal amount and add one-fifth to it, giving it to him whom he has wronged.

Here we see the process by which we make restitution or restore that which caused us guilt.

Habakkuk 1:11

11 Then they pass on like the wind, They **transgress (vaya’vor) and incur guilt (ve’ashem)**, For they ascribe their might to elohu.”

The get their power from another god.
Yehezkel (Ezekiel) 25:12

12 Thus said YHWH GOD: Because Edom acted vengefully against the House of Judah and incurred guilt (vayeshemua) by wreaking revenge upon it.

Acting in vengeance is also another way to incur guilt.

The next word is asham as a masculine noun (Aleph-Shin-Mem Sofit) reference number 817 which is found on page 79 in the BDB and on page 179 in the NEHC.

Bereshit 26:10

10 Abimelech said, “What have you done to us! One of the people might have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt (asham) upon us.”

Guilt is the result of breaking of YHWH’s commands.

Tehillim (Psalms) 68:21

21 Yea, Elohim will crush his enemies head the hairy crown of him who walks on in his guilt (ba’ashamayv)

You can also see this word used in Vayiqra 5:6,7,15,16,18,19,25, 6:10, and 7:1,2,5,7,37

The next word is ashem as an adjective (Aleph-Shin-Mem Sofit) reference number 818 which is found on page 79 in the BDB and on page 179 in the NEHC.

Bereshit 42:21

21 They said to one another , “Alas, we are being punished on account of our brother [We are truly guilty because of our brother] (ashemim), because we looked on at his anguish, yet paid no heed as he pleaded with us. That is why this distress has come upon us.”

They expressed their guilt to their brother.

Ezra 10:19

19 They gave their word to expel their wives and, acknowledging their guilt (va’ashemiyam), offered a ram from the flock to expiate it [for their guilt – al-ashimatam 819].

The guilt offering was given to purge the guilt.

The next word is ash’mah as a feminine noun (Aleph-Shin-Mem Sofit) reference number 819 which is found on page 80 in the BDB and on page 179 in the NEHC.
Vayiqra (Leviticus) 4:3

3 If it is the anointed priest who has incurred guilt (le’ash’mat), so that blame falls upon the people, he shall offer for the sin of which he is guilty [has sinned] a bull of the herd without blemish as a sin offering to YHWH.

When the high priest incurred guilt he caused it to also be on the people.

Vayiqra (Leviticus) 5:24, 26

24 or anything else about which he swore falsely, he shall repay the principal amount and add a fifth part to it. He shall pay it to its owner when he realizes his guilt (ash’matu) [He shall give it on the day of his guilt offering].

26 The priest shall make expiation on his behalf before YHWH, and he shall be forgiven for whatever he may have done to draw blame [being by guilt] (le’ash’mah) thereby.

The Offering was to purge the guilt after he made restitution.

Vayiqra (Leviticus) 22:15-16

15 But [the priests] must not allow the Yisraelites to profane the sacred donations that they set aside for YHWH, 16 or to incur guilt requiring a penalty payment [guilt offering] (ash’mah), by eating such sacred donations: for it is I YHWH who make them sacred

The Priests were to ensure that the people did not incur guilt by eating the set aside offerings of YHWH.

Ezra 9:6-7, 13, 15

6 and said, “O Elohay, I am too ashamed and mortified to lift my face to You, O Elohay, for our iniquities are overwhelming and our guilt (ve’ash’matenu) has grown high as heaven. 7 From the time of our fathers to this very day we have been deep in guilt (be’ash’mah). Because of our iniquities, we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to foreign kings, to the sword, to captivity, to pillage, and to humiliation, as is now the case

13 After all that has happened to us because of our evil deeds and our deep guilt (vabe’ash’matenu)—though You, Eloheynu, have been forbearing, [punishing us] less than our iniquity [deserves] in that You have granted us such a remnant as this

15 O YHWH, Elohey of Yisrael, You are benevolent, for we have survived as a remnant, as is now the case. We stand before You in all our guilt (be’ash’mateynu), for we cannot face You on this account.”
Clearly today we are in the same state.

Ezra 10:10

10 Then Ezra the priest got up and said to them, “You have trespassed by bringing home foreign women, thus aggravating the guilt (ash’mah) of Yisrael.

Trespass is a different Hebrew word than transgress. One we will look into later.

We have seen that guilt is the result of sin or transgressing the boundaries of the law and covenant. Iniquity is the sin that is not yet turned from and therefore we are still deserving of its full penalty. We also saw that when we sin or transgress we can cause harm (evil) to come upon others. Our actions are what cause these things to happen. How we act or obey YHWH is important to him. We must be knowledgeable of what things he wants us to do and act upon that knowledge. Wisdom comes from living this way of life and keeping his laws and commands. Over time we see the good (tov) in doing these things.