

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

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### Elephants and Monkeys

For those traveling to the zoo for a Chol Hamoed trip, here is an article you can appreciate. The Gemara<sup>1</sup> says that if one sees an elephant or monkey, he recites the bracha of הבריות, משנה הבריות, diversifies creatures.<sup>2</sup> In fact, to be able to say the bracha of הבריות, משנה הבריות, diversifies creatures, some great people went to the zoo<sup>3</sup> in order to recite it on an elephant and monkey.<sup>4</sup>

The Melachas Shlomo<sup>5</sup> explains that we say it on elephants and monkeys since the דור המבול was punished by being turned into elephants and monkeys. That is, the

monkey is similar to man and elephants understand the language of humans.

The Minchas Elazar (1868-1937) recited this during his stay in Berlin. The Steipler (1899-1985) took his children to the zoo in Ramat Gan to one of the gardens that had monkeys, where he recited the bracha of משנה הבריות.<sup>6</sup>

Here are some other accounts of great people visiting animals.

1) The Chida<sup>7</sup> (1724-1806) describes strange and scary animals he saw in London where they also had animals from America. In his sefer Maagal Tov,<sup>8</sup> the Chida tells of his visit to a taxidermy exhibit in Holland featuring a vast array of animals and insects.

2) The Sefer Ohaiv Shalom<sup>9</sup> relates that when R' Shalom Kaminka traveled to Vienna to seek out doctors, he also visited the zoo.

3) The Divrei Chaim (1793-1876) while he was in Vienna visited the zoo of the palace.

4) R' Tzvi Hirsch Shapira (1850-1913), known as the Darkei Teshuva, went with his disciples to see strange animals.<sup>10</sup>

5) The Leket Yosher<sup>11</sup> testifies about his rebbe—the Terumas Hadeshen (1390-1460)—that he once took a walk on Shabbos particularly to see the lions, when a pair of lions were brought to the city, because he had never before seen a lion.

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### Eating On Yom Kippur

During the cholera<sup>12</sup> epidemic<sup>13</sup> in 1848, which killed many thousands in Russia, R' Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883) ruled that the people must eat on Yom Kippur. Not only did he rule this way but he actually made Kidush in shul and ate so that everyone should follow his lead!

R' Shlomo Kluger (1785-1869) in one of his responsa<sup>14</sup> relates that R' Alexander Sender Shor<sup>15</sup> (1673-1737) once needed

<sup>6</sup> Orchos Rabbeinu, 1:94.

<sup>7</sup> מערכת ב, מדבר קדמות, 22.

<sup>8</sup> 13a.

<sup>9</sup> 2, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> See also the Sefer Mevasser Tov, Yeshuos Avraham, p. 226.

<sup>11</sup> 1, p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> In one of the letters that R' Akiva Eiger (See Igeres Sofrim, 29,30) wrote during the deadly cholera epidemic that raged in Poland in the late summer and fall of 1831 guiding Jewish communities how to conduct themselves during that time, he wrote not to feel anxious and to distance themselves from all types of sorrow (עצבות). In a similar vein, In discussing proper conduct during an epidemic, R' Shlomo ben Shimon Duran (1400-1467), known as the Rashbash, writes (שו"ת הרשב"ש, 195, s.v. ואחר) that one should ensure to rest, relax as well as distance aggravation and increase joy (ירחיק האנחה וירבה בשמחה).

<sup>13</sup> In 1892, Yechiel Yeshaya Trunk wrote that the epidemic of cholera spread like fire. Cities were emptied from people due to the great number of dead. In the 1892 epidemic in Lublin, there was no house that didn't have a dead person. Dead rolled in the streets and the tears of orphans and widows broke out. There was an increase in the use of segulos and the recitation of Tehillim. R' Elya Chaim Mizel, the chief rabbi of Lodz, opened the Aron Kodesh, put his head in between Sifrei Torah and told the Malach Hamaves to remove his sword. Tangentially, during the cholera epidemic, R' Tzadok Hakohen as well as other Rebbes especially R' Gershon Henoch Radziner and the Piasezna Rebbe, author of Aish Kodesh would write prescriptions, which were honored by pharmacies.

<sup>14</sup> Eitz Chaim 317.

<sup>15</sup> R' Alexander Sender Shor, who was orphaned as an infant, was the son of R' Efraim Zalman Shor, Magid of Lvov. In 1704, R' Alexander Sender resigned from his position in Hovenov, feeling himself both unwilling and unable to continue to bear the responsibility of the

<sup>1</sup> Brachos 58b.

<sup>2</sup> Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 225:8. The bracha is אלהינו מְלֵךְ הַקֶּדֶשׁ.

<sup>3</sup> See שו"ת יביע אומר, 4:20.

<sup>4</sup> Minhag Yisrael Torah 1, 225:5.

<sup>5</sup> To Kilayim 8:6.

to eat on Yom Kippur. He requested that the food be brought to him in the yard outside the Beis Midrash so that everyone would see him eat, and learn that protecting one's health overrides the Yom Kippur fast.

Every Yom Kippur R' Shlomo Zalman Aurbach would go from one sick person to another that halachically was supposed to eat and would tell them to eat.<sup>16</sup>

In regard to one who is supposed to eat on Yom Kippur due to his circumstances, the שו"ת בנין ציון<sup>17</sup> החדשות says that not only is he exempt for eating on Yom Kippur but also fulfills גמולם מאד לנפשתיכם<sup>18</sup>.

When R' Chaim Soleveitchik became the rabbi of the city of Brisk, ill patients in the community consulted with him prior to Yom Kippur to determine if and how much they would need to eat on Yom Kippur. He required that they eat as much as they felt they needed. Because he didn't instruct them to limit their food or water intake, R' Chaim faced criticism as they felt it was too lenient of a position. His response was, "I'm not being lenient concerning the fast; to the contrary, I am being stringent regarding *pikuach nefesh*.<sup>19</sup>

Doctors once told a person that he must eat on Yom Kippur. He responded with a happy countenance as he explained, until now I served Hashem by fasting on Yom Kippur and now I am going to serve Hashem by eating on Yom Kippur.

The Gemara<sup>20</sup> says that whoever eats and drinks on Erev Yom Kippur is considered to have fasted for two days. The Chazon Ish explains that since halacha requires festive eating on Erev Yom Kippur just as it requires fasting on Yom Kippur, there's no difference between feasting on Erev Yom Kippur and fasting on Yom Kippur; both are fulfillments of Hashem's will. The Chazon Ish related this idea with a patient who was upset over having to eat on Yom Kippur, assuring him that he would be fulfilling Hashem's will by eating to care for his health on Yom Kippur, just as he would be fulfilling Hashem's will by fasting if he were healthy. He said, "We are just simple soldiers who follow the orders issued to us. If it's too fast, we fast and if it's to eat, we eat." The Chazon Ish told this patient that he

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rabbinat. He went to live in Zolkiew where he remained for the rest of his life, devoting himself to study and writing and earning his living working in a distillery. R' Alexander Sender Shor, who authored a definitive work on shechita and kashrus called *Tevuos Shor*, was considered one of the foremost scholars of his age.

<sup>16</sup> The Ohr Hachaim (Shemos 31:13, s.v. ירמו) writes that when we must desecrate Shabbos for a sick person, that is not called desecration rather that is called observing Shabbos—*Shemiras Shabbos*. This is just as it says ושמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם שבתות ה'רבה, violate one Shabbos on his account by saving his life so that he may live to observe many Shabbosim (Yoma 85b). In a situation where one is supposed to desecrate Shabbos and doesn't, he is being מולול (belittling) in Hashem's command.

<sup>17</sup> Siman 25. A חולה שיש בו סכנה who eats on Yom Kippur is as if he fasted since Hashem commanded both. See also pp. 23-4 in the book response from the Holocaust.

<sup>18</sup> Devarim 4:15. See Brachos 32b. When the Sanzer Rav would lift the Marror on Pesach during the years he wasn't well, he would say אשר כדשנו...ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם since Marror wasn't good for him then. This follows the words of...הדרשה שבר על הדרשה, just like one receives reward on the פרישה, he also receives reward on the פרישה—the withdrawal from it (Pesachim 22b). In a similar vein, In 1944, the rabbis in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp composed a special prayer for the inmates to say on seder night before eating bread, proclaiming that they were eating bread on Pesach in fulfillment of the mitzva to preserve their lives. There was an episode where doctors warned one not to eat Matza and Marror on Pesach night since it would be dangerous for him. Yet, he ate it. One ruling in that case was there is no greater מצוה הבאה בעבירה than that (See מהרי"א אסאד, Orach Chaim 160). The Maharam Shik (Orach Chaim 260) said it was only a sin and no Mitzva.

<sup>19</sup> R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin in his *Moadaim Be'halacha*, p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> Rosh Hashana 9a.

himself went through periods when he couldn't wear tzitzis or tefillin because of a severe digestive illness. During those times, he would daven to Hashem to cure him and would say, "Master of the World, You commanded me to wear tzitzis and to don tefillin, and I did so. But now you have commanded me not to..."<sup>21</sup>

R' Menachem Mendel of Viznitz, author of the *Tzemach Tzadik*, was once dangerously sick prior to Yom Kippur to the extent that the doctors forbade him to fast. Since the Chassidim were afraid the Rebbe wouldn't listen to the orders of the doctors, they approached R' Yehoshua Belzer to influence him not to fast. As a result, R' Yehoshua Belzer wrote the following letter in the year 1884: "...I remember when my father, the Sar Shalom of Belz, was dangerously ill and we were concerned as maybe he would refrain from eating on Yom Kippur. However, he was quick to the matter and immediately after Kol Nidrei he asked for food to eat according to what he needed. He then said מוכן ומזומן לקיים מצות בוראי כפי שאמרתי, behold, I am prepared and ready to fulfill the commandment of my Creator according to Chazal. He then ate<sup>22</sup> with such simcha which we never saw except when he ate Matza and performed the mitzva of the four species.<sup>23</sup> You should also be quick in this mitzva and follow the doctor's orders. Especially a great person must be more careful with this because others may learn from you..."

When R' Chaim Soleveitchik advised a patient to eat on Yom Kippur and he saw the patient was disturbed, he would say have you ever been to a bris on Shabbos? Was the mohel upset that he committed an act of Shabbos desecration? Surely not. He rejoices over the opportunity to fulfill the will of Hashem. The one who forbade performing *melacha* on Shabbos required performing a bris on Shabbos for an eight-day-old boy. The same applies to eating on Yom Kippur in order to maintain one's health.<sup>24</sup>

The Shem Mishmuel<sup>25</sup> wrote in a letter to his son-in-law who wasn't well that he should follow the orders of the doctor regarding eating on Yom Kippur. He writes the one who commanded you to fast on Yom Kippur also commanded you to listen to the doctor (and not fast if that is necessary). The same applies to davening as the Sheliach Tzibur (the one who leads the congregation in prayers) is motzi those who are unable to daven. So, if the doctor says you shouldn't daven, the Sheliach Tzibur will be motzi you. The letter ends with the Pasuk אכל מעשיך בשמחה לחמך, go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart for Hashem has already approved your deeds,<sup>26</sup> which was said in the time of Shlomo when they ate on Yom Kippur at the completion of the בנין הבית.<sup>27</sup>

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years. He received semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the books, *Fascinating Insights* and *Incredible Insights* in addition to being the host of *The Fascinating Insights Podcast*. His writings, some of which have been translated into Hebrew, German and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

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<sup>21</sup> See Pe'er Hador 3, p. 215.

<sup>22</sup> Parenthetically, the Pasuk (Shemos 18:12) states that Aharon and the elders of Israel ate bread with the father-in-law of Moshe. This took place on Yom Kippur as Rashi (18:13, s.v. וידי) tells us the following day was the day after Yom Kippur. So, on the first Yom Kippur the Jewish people didn't fast (See the Chassam Sofer Al Hatorah, Yisro, s.v. לאכל).

<sup>23</sup> Sefer Likutai Yesharim, Elul Yomim Noraim, 15.

<sup>24</sup> See also Maaseh Ish, 4,163.

<sup>25</sup> Devarim and Moadim, p. 262.

<sup>26</sup> Koheles 9:7.

<sup>27</sup> See end of Bamidbar Rabba 17:2.