

עַלֵי דֵשֶׁה

**Alei Deshe - Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on
the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur**

Learning From the Frogs

The Gemara (Pesachim 53b) states: "From where did Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah learn to give up their lives by entering a fiery furnace? From the *tzefarde'im*, the frogs. They reasoned: if frogs, who are not commanded with *kiddush Hashem*, entered hot ovens – extrapolating from (Shemos 7:28) וְעָלוּ וּבָאוּ בְּבֵיתָהּ וגו' וּבְתַנּוּרֶיהָ וּבְמִשְׁאָרוֹתֶיהָ - and they shall ascend and come into your palace... and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls, that they were to enter while the ovens were hot, when there were kneading bowls nearby – then we, who are commanded with *kiddush Hashem*, must certainly do so."

The *Mefarshim* ask, how can it be said that the frogs were not commanded, when Hashem gave a clear directive of וְעָלוּ וּבָאוּ וגו' וּבְתַנּוּרֶיהָ? One might answer that they were merely animals and could not be given a mitzvah. But the truth is to the contrary: animals, who have no *yetzer hara*, must certainly keep the word of Hashem. The *Imrei Emes* explained that the frogs could have met their obligation by entering cold ovens; the pasuk doesn't specify that the ovens must be hot.¹ But the frogs understood that Hashem's inner will was that they enter while the ovens were hot. They chose to go beyond the letter of their obligation and instead fulfill the inner will of Hashem. It was this that inspired Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah. If little frogs could

1 We should add that even if וּבְתַנּוּרֶיהָ must refer to home-heating furnaces, they were cool at the time, since this took place during the summer months.

understand the true will of Hashem, then certainly humans, of whom more is expected, must go the extra mile and give their lives for Hashem.²

The Gemara³ states that in the future (*l'asid lavo*), there will be no longer be Gehinnom; Hashem will simply remove the sun from its encasement, and its strong rays will heal the *tzaddikim* and torment the *resha'im*. The Maharsha⁴ explains that strong heat affects various materials differently: it hardens salt, yet it melts wax. In a similar way, *tzaddikim* will benefit from the heat of the sun, while *resha'im* will suffer from it.

We may explain this on a deeper level. The *mashgiach*, Rav Gad'l Eisner, would describe the following scene as a depiction of *Gan Eden* and Gehinnom:⁵ Everybody is seated in a large *beis midrash* fully stocked with *sefarim*, and told to sit and learn. The *talmidei chachamim* will be ecstatic; with no distractions, no need to eat, drink, or engage in the pursuits of this world, they will be free to delve endlessly into their beloved Torah.⁶ But those who didn't cultivate a love for learning Torah while in this

2 See *Imrei Emes*, 5691 'ד"ה איתא בגמ' ד"ה איתא, 5695 ;*Likutei Yehudah* 6:9 and 7:28

3 Nedarim 8b and Avodah Zarah 3b

4 Avodah Zarah, *ibid*

5 As Chazal say, there is a hairsbreadth of a difference between *Gan Eden* and Gehinnom (see *Koheles Rabbah*, 7:22; *Yalkut Koheles*, 976; *Yalkut Reuveini*, Haazinu and listing 'Gan Eden').

6 See Rambam *Hilchos Melachim* 12:5, and *Yad Hamelech* and *Ohr Sameach* ad loc.

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לְעִלּוֹי נִשְׁמַת
מִדַּת
עֵקָא עֲדֵנָה
צְפוּדָה ע"ה
בֵּת מִשָּׁה מְנַחֵם הַלּוֹי ז"ל

world will suffer acutely and endlessly. Without other activities to keep busy with, how long can such a person sit at his Gemara?⁷

The experience of *Gan Eden* is the intense pleasure of being close to Hashem. But in order to enjoy this pleasure, we must be prepared for it. If, *chas v'shalom*, one did not seek closeness to Hashem while in this world, but to the contrary, channeled his G-d-given yearnings toward physical pursuits, he will not be capable of being healed by the sun when Hashem reveals it; for how can he relate to *deveikus*? Instead, the sun's rays will scorch him. Only one who prepared himself in this world and refined his physical nature will be capable of experiencing closeness to Hashem *l'asid lavo*.

A person is like dough which is to be baked in an oven. The Midrash says that Adam HaRishon was the *challah* of the world,⁸ and since Chava spoiled this *challah*, the mitzvah of *challah* was given specifically to women.⁹ The Gemara (Berachos 17a) also says that man's *yetzer hara* is like the sourdough inside a dough. We must take care that our dough does not become charred in the oven of this world and that the *yetzer hara* does not cause our dough to become *chametz*, by misdirecting our deep longing for Hashem's closeness, so that we are pulled toward physical desires instead.

7 See *Toldos Yaakov Yosef, Parshas Bo* no. 5

8 *Bereishis Rabbah* 4:1

9 *Ibid* 17:8

How can we ensure that we don't spoil our dough? We must learn from the frogs.¹⁰ They weren't commanded exactly what to do, but they focused on fulfilling Hashem's will and gave their lives for it. Some things aren't forbidden; some are completely permissible. But we must take a good look in the mirror and ask ourselves honestly: Is this what Hashem wants? We all want to fulfill Hashem's will, and long for His closeness. But we can't get that while indulging our desires for all the nonsense of this world. Instead, we must strive to uphold what Hashem truly wants, exercising *kedushah* even with things which are technically permitted.

The pasuk (8:2) states, וַתַּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּי וַתִּכְסֶּי אֶת אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם - *the frogs ascended and covered the land of Egypt*. The Imrei Emes¹¹ explains that Mitzrayim's *tumah* – which was the overarching attribute of Mitzrayim – was completely covered by the frogs. How? By their demonstrating for us what *mesirus nefesh* means: reading Hashem's desire between the lines and giving up one's life for it. In fact, *mesirus nefesh* is not just about giving up one's life. '*Nefesh*' can mean 'desire.' Each time a person gives up his desire for Hashem, he has been *moser nefesh*. It isn't about the fireworks; these seemingly small acts of *mesirus nefesh* build and compound until one has given up his entirety of desire – his very *nefesh* – for the *Ribbono Shel Olam*.

(וארא תשפ"ב – מאמר ב)

10 As the *Yalkut (182)* says, צפור דעה – can be read as – צפור דעה *a bird of understanding*.

11 סוד"ה איתא בגמרא 5691

Listen To Your Messages

This week's parshah details seven of the ten *makkos*. In Tehillim (78), David Hamelech chastises Klal Yisrael for failing to internalize the message of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* and its accompanying miracles and remaining stubborn in their ways. David lists the various miracles and wonders that we experienced. First, the events of the *midbar*: *krias Yam Suf*, the pillars of cloud and fire, our victories in battle, the spring of Miriam, the *mann*, and so on. With all this, David laments, Bnei Yisrael were lacking in their *emunah* and tested Hashem. Then David lists the *makkos* of Mitzrayim, concluding with further rebuke for Bnei Yisrael's lack of faith. The order

seems odd; the *makkos* occurred before the happenings of the *midbar*, so why are they listed second?

David Hamelech reproves Klal Yisrael for not taking *hisorerus* (inspiration) from the miracles. David begins with events that should have inspired *yiras haromemus*, the awe and fear of beholding the exaltedness of Hashem: *krias Yam Suf*, where even maidservants experienced a high level of *nevuah*; the *mann*, which is food of *malachim* (Yoma 75a); and the other events of the *midbar*, all of them tremendous miracles that should inspire *yiras haromemus*.

But there are some people who can't absorb this type of message. People whose entire lives are hinged on materialism, who follow their desires unquestioningly, do not have the ability to be inspired by *romemus*. For them, David Hamelech continues by listing the fearsome *makkos* of Mitzrayim; even an 'animal soul' – a person with no connection to *yiras haromemus* – can be stirred or shaken by fear for survival. Take a look, David says, see what happens when one hardens one's heart like Pharaoh.

It is well known that the *makkos* were not meant primarily to punish the Egyptians, but mainly to benefit Klal Yisrael. This is clear from a comment

of *Zohar hakadosh*. The pasuk (Yeshayah 19:22) states, וְנִגַּף ה' אֶת מִצְרַיִם נֶגֶף וְרִפּוּא - *Hashem will strike Egypt, striking and healing*. Simply, this is meant to contrast the Egyptians to the Yidden, for whom Hashem prepares the healing *before* the injury (Megillah 13b). The *Zohar*,¹² however, expounds: נֶגֶף לְמִצְרַיִם וְרִפּוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל - *striking Egypt and healing Yisrael*. *Sefarim* explain that not only were Bnei Yisrael not plagued by the *makkos*,¹³ they were in fact healed by them.

What was the worst part of all the *makkos*? It was the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. If not for that, Pharaoh would have been humbled enough after the first or second *makkah* to let Bnei Yisrael go, thus avoiding all the additional *makkos*. We see clearly, the darkest situation that can befall a person is when he is too submerged in the noise of this world to hear Hashem calling out to him.

The pasuk (15:26) says, כָּל הַמַּחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַתִּי בְּכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא אָשִׁים עֲלֵיכֶם כִּי אֲנִי ה' רִפְּאֵה - *any of the diseases that I brought upon Egypt, I will not bring upon you, for I am Hashem, your Healer*. Rashi comments, "And even if I will bring it upon you, it will be as if I hadn't." *Chasam Sofer* explains

12 Vol. 2, 36b

13 See Avos 5:5 עשרה נסים וכו' and *Rishonim* ad loc.

this pasuk as a promise that Hashem will remove our stubborn, stony heart and replace it with a heart of flesh. Since our hearts will not be stubborn, even one who is *chas v'shalom* deserving of illness will be as if he were not, because he will rectify his ways – *for I am Hashem, your Healer*.

In fact, every person can replace his stony heart with one of flesh, regardless of his situation. In

not place [the diseases of Egypt]. And if you do not hearken – I will place. In either event – *I am Hashem, your Healer*." It is clear that even one who has sinned can do *teshuvah* and Hashem will heal him of his heart of stone.

At the very least, we must prevent our hearts from turning to stone. As the pasuk (Shir

Although we have sinned and are 'asleep' from mitzvos, in our hearts we still yearn to come close to Hashem.

Sanhedrin (101a), R. Yochanan comments on the beginning of this same pasuk (15:26): אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ וְהִיָּשֶׁר בְּעֵינֶיךָ תַעֲשֶׂה וְהֶאֱזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתָיו וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל הַקְּוִי - *If you hearken carefully to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, and do what is just in His eyes, listen to His commandments and observe all His decrees* – "If you hearken – I will

Hashirim 5:2) states, אֲנִי יִשְׁנָה וְלִבִּי עֹר - *I am asleep, but my heart is awake*. Although we have sinned and are 'asleep' from mitzvos, in our hearts we still yearn to come close to Hashem. It is in our hands to remove the stubbornness and long for closeness to Hashem.

(בנאות דשא – וארא תשפ"ב)

Learning From The Frogs II

The Gemara (Pesachim 53b) states: From where did Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah learn to give up their lives for *kiddush Hashem* by entering a fiery furnace? They drew an inference from the frogs and applied it to themselves. The frogs, who were not commanded with *kiddush Hashem*, figured out that they must enter fiery ovens from the pasuk (Shemos 7:28), וְעָלוּ וּבָאוּ בְּבֵיתְךָ וְגו' וּבְתַנּוּרֶיךָ וּבְמִשְׁאֲרוֹתֶיךָ - *and they shall ascend and come into your palace... and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls*; when are kneading bowls near ovens? when the ovens are hot. *Kal v'chomer*, we, who are commanded with *kiddush Hashem* – Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah inferred – must certainly do so.

The Maharsha notes an apparent flaw in this *kal v'chomer*. True, the frogs gave their lives, but frogs are not commanded (Vayikra 18:5) וְחַי בְּרָהֶם - *and*

by which he shall live, which exempts us from most mitzvos when there is danger to life. Because Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah were not forced to worship *avodah zarah* publicly,¹⁴ the principle of וְחַי בְּרָהֶם exempted them from giving their lives. So how could they derive from the frogs that they were to give their lives? The Maharsha answers that such a *kal v'chomer* is not unprecedented; the *kal v'chomer* includes the stringency that one scenario has over the other (כל זה אכניס בק"ו).

This answer seems problematic. Firstly, the *Rishonim*¹⁵ write that a stringency written plainly in the Torah cannot be included in a *kal v'chomer*

14 See Maharsha for explanation

15 See *Tosafos, Kiddushin 5a; Tosafos HaRosh, ibid 4b; Tosafos, Bava Kamma 25a; Shittah Mekubetzes, ibid*

and therefore refutes a *kal v'chomer*.¹⁶ Secondly, the aspect of **וְיִחַי** is not simply a stringency that people have and frogs do not, in which case it could theoretically be included in the *kal v'chomer*; rather, frogs *have no reason not to* give their lives, while people do, because of **וְיִחַי**. If so, there is no place for comparison between them.

There is a difference of opinion among the *Rishonim*¹⁷ whether it is permitted to give one's life for mitzvos other than the three cardinal sins. *Nemukey Yosef*¹⁸ writes that one who is an *adam gadol*, *chassid* and *yerei Shamayim* may do so. The *mefarshim* wonder about this: how can one's level of piety change the *halachah*? Surely, the obligatory mitzvah of **וְיִחַי** applies to everybody.

We may suggest that since a *chassid* and *yerei shamayim* recognizes that the purpose of life is to achieve closeness to Hashem, he sees no point in living if he is compelled to transgress Hashem's command. Because of this, he is permitted to give his life to avoid transgressing any *aveirah*.

The *Sfas Emes*¹⁹ wonders whether the above exception of *Nemukey Yosef* applies also to an *adam gadol* neglecting his health to the point of danger in avoidance of an *aveirah*. If an *adam gadol* is ill, may he refuse to eat non-kosher foods or to eat on Yom Kippur? Or is it only when somebody tries to coerce him to sin on pain of death?²⁰ According to our above explanation, it is clear that he may endanger his health to avoid transgressing, since he sees no possibility at all of eating forbidden foods or at a forbidden time.

Indeed, it is reported that the Riva fasted on Yom Kippur against his doctors' instructions.²¹ It seems that he simply saw no purpose in living

while transgressing Hashem's mitzvos. This conduct was repeated by *tzaddikim* throughout the generations; they refused to be healed by forbidden means, and insisted on fasting even when it posed a danger. During *Churban Europa* as well, there were pious Yidden who – notwithstanding extreme danger – could not bring themselves to put *treif* into their mouths.²²

This, then, was the lesson that Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah took from the frogs. Frogs are commanded in neither *kiddush Hashem* nor **וְיִחַי**.

But they understood that the purpose of Creation itself – and the obligation of every being – is to reveal and proclaim Hashem's kingship. If frogs, who have no commandments at all, understood this concept²³ to the point of giving their lives for it – certainly we, Hashem's most cherished creations, must rise above all rationalizing and recognize that the only thing that's important is bringing *kiddush Hashem* and glory to His Name. It is simply impossible to transgress Hashem's word.²⁴

The Gemara's expression for the inference Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah drew is – **נִשְׂאוּ קוֹי בְּעַצְמָן** *they derived* (literally: lifted) *a kal v'chomer about themselves*. Shouldn't it say **לְעַצְמָן**, to themselves, i.e., to their predicament?

Anyone could be amazed at the frogs' *mesirus nefesh*. But Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah derived a *kal v'chomer* from the frogs – **בְּעַצְמָן**, *about themselves*. They absorbed into themselves the inspiration and lesson of the frogs, in a manner of **נִשְׂאוּ**, lifting themselves above nature in understanding a Yid's purpose in life. Indeed, this is a *kal v'chomer* that cannot be refuted.

(בנאות דשא – וארא תשפ"א)

We, Hashem's most cherished creations, must recognize that the only thing that's important is bringing kiddush Hashem and glory to His Name.

16 *Chasam Sofer* (Pesachim ibid, s.v. *kal v'chomer*) asks this question, see there about the Maharsha

17 See *Beis Yosef*, *Yoreh Deah* beginning of 157

18 See *Beis Yosef*, ibid; *Shach*, ibid 2

19 *Likutim*, Ki Sisa ושמרו ד"ה

20 See also ibid, *Hashmatos to Pinchas*

21 The *Acharonim* discuss this: see my grandfather R. Yaakov Meir Biderman's notes to *Sfas Emes* (printed at the end of the sefer); *Yabia Omer*, vol. 4 *Choshen*

Mishpat 6 and vol. 6 *Yoreh Deah* 13 (where the various opinions are cited); *Avnei Nezer*, *Choshen Mishpat* 193; *Kovetz Nezer Hatorah*, issue 23 (Tammuz 5771); notes of R. Y.E. Weintraub to *Avnei Nezer*; *Otzros Hashe'elos U'Teshuvos* 618

22 See *M'pi Sefarim V'sofrim*, chap. 2, *Peninei Chassidus* 12

23 See *Chasam Sofer* to our parshah, p. 38 והנה ד"ה; *Chasam Sofer* to Pesachim, ibid

24 See *Degel Yehudah* to our parshah who explains the *Maharsha* this way; *Yismach Moshe*, Ki Sisa; *Tzidkas Hatzaddik* 224; *Ibra D'dasha*, vol. 1 p. 4 footnote 2

