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An Important Lesson We Learn from Fish Who Were Not Corrupted by the Sin of "Eitz Hadas" or "Dor Hamabul"

Among the many reasons we have discussed for the sacred custom of eating fish on shabbos, we wish to explore in depth the following explanation found in the holy seforim: the fish were not involved in the corrupt behavior that pervaded the rest of creation during the “**dor homabul**,” - the generation of the flood.

We will open our discussion with a story from a collection of the holy Rabbi Yisroel of Tchortkov, zy”a, in his sefer *Ginzei Yisroel*, described to him by Rabbi Yosef of Rodvill, zy”a, concerning his grandfather the holy Rabbi Yisroel of Rozhin, zy”a.

One shabbos night, while standing behind the Rabbi of Rozhin's chair, he witnessed his custom of eating the fish's eyes. It dawned on him that a praiseworthy reason for this custom was due to the lack of involvement of the fish in the corruption that consumed all other living creatures during the generation of the flood. This is why fish do not require the process of shechitah, slaughter, as a means of tikun, rectification, like other animals do; instead, they are permitted for consumption after mere collection or trapping; their tikun is simpler and less painful than shechitah.

It is well known that the initial step in all transgressions involves the sense of sight. Rashi comments (Bamidbar 15,39): **"העין רואה והלב חומד והגוף עושה את העבירות"**. “The eye sees, and the heart craves and the body performs the transgressions.” It appears that the fish's eyes remained pure and untainted, accounting for their avoidance of corruption.

He deduced that this was the reason that the holy Rabbi of Rozhin customarily ate the eye of the fish. The holy Rabbi immediately sensed his thought process, turned to him and said, **“Young man, you have hit upon the truth.”**

We learn from this story that the custom to eat fish on shabbos stems from the fact that the fish refrained from sin; furthermore, tzaddikim followed the custom of eating a fish eye, since the fish's eyes were untainted. (G-d willing, we will discuss at length another reason for this custom in upcoming articles.)

The Ben Ish Chai in his sefer Benayahu ben Yehoyadah (Sanhedrin 108.) explains that fish were chosen as a shabbos delicacy to teach that the fire of gehinom is not in force on shabbos, just as the boiling waters of the flood did not affect the fish.

“All That Were On Dry Land, Excluding Fish”

Let us examine how we know that the fish remained uncorrupted, and what allowed for that possibility. The verse describing the generation of the flood states explicitly (Bereishis 7,22): **"כל אשר נשמת רוח חיים באפיו מכל אשר בחרבה מתו"**. Rashi elucidates based on the gemorah (Sanhedrin 108.): **"אשר בחרבה, ולא דגים שבים"** – "that were on dry land, excluding fish." A similar teaching is found elsewhere in the gemorah (Kiddushin 13., Zevachim 113.): **"בדור המבול לא נגזרה גזרה על דגים שבים, שנאמר מכל אשר בחרבה מתו ולא דגים שבים"**. "In the generation of the flood, the decree was not applied to fish in the sea, as it is written 'of everything that was on dry land, died'-- but not the fish in the sea."

An additional inference can be found in the verse (Bereishis 6,12): **"כי השחית כל בשר את דרכו על הארץ"**. "For all flesh had corrupted its way on earth" - "on earth," specifically, excludes fish who live in the seas. Rabeinu Eliyahu Mizrachi in his commentary on Rashi notes that Rashi comments on this verse (ibid.) that even domestic animals, beasts and birds had relations with those that are not of their own species - Rashi omits mention of fish.

The Maharal of Prague in his sefer Gur Aryeh cites the words of the Mizrachi and explains why the fish did not sin along with all of the other creatures. It is due to their good fortune that they do not dwell among the corrupt human beings on dry land, who contaminate all of creation.

"Like Those Fish that Proliferate and Become Numerous"

This provides us insight into the blessing Yaakov bestows upon Ephraim and Menashe (Bereishis 48,16): **"וידגו לרוב בקרב הארץ"**. Rashi comments: **"כדגים הללו שפרים ורבים ואין עין הרע שולטת בהם"**. - "May they reproduce like these fish that proliferate and become numerous, and the evil eye has no effect on them." We can suggest that his intention was to bless them that they not mingle or get involved with wicked people who inevitably corrupt others. Rather, they should be "like these fish that proliferate and become numerous" – in a permissible fashion with their own species; "and the evil eye" – of the generation of the flood; "has no effect on them" – to corrupt them, since they live in the seas separate from mankind.

This also sheds light on Yaakov's blessing to Zevulun (Bereishis 49,13): **"זבולון לחוף ימים יושכן והוא לחוף אניות וירכתו על צידון"**. "Zevulun shall dwell by seashores; he shall be at the ship's harbor, and his end is at Sidon." Rashi comments:

"והוא יהיה מצוי תדיר על חוף אניות במקום הנמל שאניות מביאות שם פרקמטיא, שהיה זבולון עוסק בפרקמטיא וממציא מזון לשבט יששכר והם עוסקים בתורה, הוא שאמר משה שמח זבולון בצאתך ויששכר באהליך, זבולון יוצא בפרקמטיא ויששכר עוסק בתורה באהלים".

It is important for us to understand why Yaakov insisted that Zevulun's business transactions take place near the seashore.

We can suggest that Yissochar, the pillar of Torah scholarship, who sits and learns in the Beis Midrash, is in a protected environment, away from evil influences; however, Zevulun, who is involved in commerce, is more likely to associate with people who constitute dangerous and damaging influences. Therefore, Yaakov blessed him: "זבולון ילחוף ימים ישכון", so that he would learn a lesson from the fish living in the seas (who were not corrupted by the evil influences in the generation of the flood). Just like the fish avoided corruption due to their separation from the creatures on dry land, he should have the good sense to distance himself from harmful, evil people while transacting his business affairs.

This explains the rationale behind our custom of eating fish on shabbos and also why the Almighty prohibited work on shabbos. All week long, while a man is busy earning a living, he is likely to come in contact with indecent, disreputable people and could fall prey to their negative influence. Come shabbos, however, we are commanded to completely separate ourselves from those potential influences and immerse ourselves in Torah study and service of Hashem. By eating fish on shabbos, we are reminded of how the fish avoided corruption in the generation of the flood due to their separation from the corruption of mankind.

The Yismach Moshe's Insight

The Yismach Moshe supplies a wonderful solution to the Maharal's question. In addition, he examines the perplexing subject of how it is even possible for animals to become corrupt – are freedom of choice and avoidance of sin relevant to them?

He explains that the reason why the animals behaved corruptly in that generation, was because they were reincarnations of wicked people who had already corrupted their ways while still alive. Fish, however, that can only be reincarnations of tzaddikim – who need to rectify minor flaws – did not, therefore, sin at all during the time of the flood. Here are his holy words:

"יש להבין בדור המבול דנגזר כליה על כל הברואים, אם אדם חטא בהמה מה חטאה, וכי דעת יש להם שקבלו גמול ועונש. ויש לתרץ זה בכמה אנפין, ואחד מהן דהלא מבואר במסכת אבות (פ"ה מ"ב) שכל הדורות היו מכעיסין ובאין, עד שהביא עליהן את מי המבול, אלמא דכמה דורות היו חוטאין, ולפי זה התגלגלו בודאי בדומם צומח חי כנודע מפי חכמי האמת, וגם כן היו משוקעין

ברשעתן, עד שאפילו בגלגוליהם החזיקו ברשעתן ודבקו באינם מינם, לכך על הכל נגזר שאף הם היו באותו החטא.

והנה נודע מפי חכמי האמת דרוב צדיקים מגולגלים בדגים, ולפי זה אז שלא היו צדיקים בהדורות רק המסויימים כמו משתלח וחנוך וחבריהם, והם היו צדיקים גדולים שאינם צריכין להתגלגל כלל, והשאר היו רשעים, ואם כן לא היו שום גלגול כלל בדגים, מהיכי תיתי יתענשו, אבל עכשיו יש גלגולים בצדיקים בדגים למרק עבירות קלות שבהן".

The Yismach Moshe also answers a question posed by his Rabbi the holy Chozeh of Lublin, zy"a:

"ויקח חמאה וחלב וכן הבקר וגו' (בראשית יח ח). שאלני מורי הצדיק וקדוש מוה"ר יעקב יצחק מלובלין זלה"ה, מאי טעמא לא נזכר בתורה הקדושה בסעודת המלאכים דגים, וכן (בראשית לא נד) ויזבח יעקב בהר, ובדברי רז"ל נזכר בשר ודגים. והשבתי לפי שעיקר הסעודה להעלות ניצוצות ולתקן גלגולים.

והנה איתא בכתבי האר"י דרוב צדיקים מגולגלים בדגים, והיינו ודאי צדיקים קטנים, אבל הצדיקים הגדולים אין צריכין לשום תיקון, ואז בימי אברהם לא היו רק הצדיקים הגדולים הנזכרים בתורה, וקלסיה מאד, ואמר שמשום זה לא נזכר גם כן בסעודת שלמה דגים, לפי שאז היתה סיהרא במילואה ואיש תחת גפנו, היינו שהיו הכל נשמות חדשות".

Why aren't fish mentioned when Avraham Ovinu serves the malachim a meal? On the other hand, with regard to a meal served by Yaakov (Bereishis 31, 54), the Rabbis do mention the inclusion of fish.

He answers that the main purpose of the meal is to elevate the "sparks" and to rectify the reincarnated souls. The Arizal teaches that most tzaddikim reincarnate into fish – the lesser tzaddikim, that is; for the greater tzaddikim do not require tikun. In Avraham's times there were only great tzaddikim; so, serving fish was not necessary; all the neshomes were originals and not reincarnations.

Rabbi Tzaddok Hokohen, zy"a:

The Fish Did Not Sin by the Tree of Knowledge

Now let us see an amazing, novel interpretation found in the Pri Tzaddik of Rabbi Tzaddok Hokohen of Lublin, zy"a (Vayakhel 3). The reason for eating fish is because they didn't participate in the sin of the tree of knowledge, as did all the other living creatures. He cites the Midrash (B.R. 19,5) on the verse (Bereishis 3,6):

"ותקח מפריו ותאכל ותתן גם לאישה עמה ויאכל, וגם ריבוי, האכילה את הבהמה ואת החיה ואת העופות, הכל שמעו לה".

According to the Midrash, Chava offered the forbidden fruit to all of the animals and birds and they partook. Rav Tzaddok infers that she did not feed the fruit to the sea

creatures and this is why they remained uncorrupt during the times of the flood. Here are his holy words:

"ואיתא בגמרא (שבת קיח:) במה מענגו בתבשיל של תרדין ודגים גדולים וראשי שומין, וכידוע דענג שבת בא לתקן הקלקול הראשון מהנחש, ומין דגים לא היו בקלקול אכילת עץ הדעת, כי היו נכסים במים וגם לא מתו במבול, ואין בהם שום בירור מאיסור חלב דם וטריפות, מפני שהם הבעל חי הראשון שנזכר בהם נפש חיה ולא היה בו שום שבירה."

Elsewhere, he adds (Emor 6) that fish do not have the prohibitions of "cheilev" and "gid honasheh," and do not contain the admixture of good and evil. Adam and Chava were in Gan Eden on dry land; the fish living in the waters and not on dry land, were , technically, not in Gan Eden.

י"ג מ'כילין ד'רחמי Is An Abbreviation for דגי"ם

We can add a bit of spice for shabbos to further clarify this phenomenon. In Yod'ei Binah (end of Noach), written by Rabbi Elazar of Lantzout, a son of the Bnei Yissoschar, zy"a, he wishes to explain why the sea creatures were saved from the flood based on a teaching in the gemorah (Sanhedrin 108.):

"תנא דבי ר' ישמעאל אף על נח נחתך גזר דין אלא שמצא חן בעיני ה', שנאמר נחמתי כי עשיתם ונח מצא חן בעיני ה'."

Noach himself did not merit being saved from the flood, because he did not rebuke others in his generation; nevertheless, he found favor, "חן", in the eyes of the Almighty and was saved. We might suggest that he found favor in the merit of the "thirteen attributes of mercy" which are described in the verse (Shemos 33,19): **" וחנותי את אשר "** "And I shall show favor when I shall show favor." Now, **דגי"ם** is an abbreviation for **י"ג מ'כילין ד'רחמי** which are the thirteen attributes of mercy. Thus, they were saved in the same merit as Noach was saved.

Upon first glance, this requires much more explanation. How is it plausible that the fish were saved because their name constitutes the abbreviation **י"ג מ'כילין ד'רחמי**? We need only look to the verses describing the creation to understand the matter more clearly. Only the fish merited the Almighty's blessing (Bereishis 1,22):

"ויברך אותם אלקים לאמר פרו ורבו ומלאו את המים בימים" "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters of the seas." Why did only the fish merit this blessing? Also, why is this blessing nearly identical to the blessing bestowed upon man (ibid. 27):

"ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים ברא אותו זכר ונקבה ברא אותם, ויברך אותם אלקים ויאמר להם אלקים פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ וכבשוה."

The Fish Were Created to Serve as Examples for Yisroel

We have learned in the gemorah (Avodah Zarah 3):

"אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל, מאי דכתיב (חבקוק א יד) ותעשה אדם כדגי הים כרמש לא מושל בו, למה נמשלו בני אדם כדגי הים, לומר לך מה דגים שבים כיון שעולין ליבשה מיד מתים, אף בני אדם כיון שפורשין מדברי תורה ומן המצוות מיד מתים."

Men are compared to fish to teach us that just as fish cannot survive out of the water, on dry land, so, too, mankind cannot survive outside a world of Torah and mitzvos.

The Mishnah states (Avos 6,12): **"כל מה שברא הקב"ה בעולמו לא בראו אלא לכבודו"**. Hashem created fish that can live only in water, to serve as an example and model for all of Yisroel who are compared to fish. Yisroel can only survive and exist while occupied with Torah which is compared to water. The moment they leave the Torah, they die a spiritual death.

This is the very same, wonderful analogy Rabbi Akiva presented to Papus (Berachos 61:): the fox tried to trick the fish into leaving the water, under the ruse that he would protect them from the fishermen's nets. Just as the fish would not have survived out of the water, so, too, we will survive without Torah study. This is why only the fish were blessed with a special blessing, so similar to man's blessing-- their purpose is to provide an example for Yisroel to live in a world immersed in Torah.

This also explains the formula **"פרו ורבו ומלאו את המים בימים"**: we should proliferate in our Torah studies and be zocheh to intuit numerous novel interpretations, chiddushim. This concept is described in Derech Pikudechah (Mitzvah 1, 25 and 26):

"והנה גם בנידון דידן ישנו מצות פריה ורביה גם ברמז, לפרות ולרבות בתורה להוליד בכל פעם שכליות חדשים בתורה. ומדי דברי בזה אדבר בפרט הלזה, כאשר דעתי אי"ה בכל מצוה רמזי מצוה התלויים בה, אשר אפשר לקיימה בכל עת אפילו בהעדר המצוה הגשמיית הגופניית, כי התורה נצחיית הוא בכל עת ובכל זמן, והנה בזאת המצוה אפשר לקיים בכל עת ובכל זמן מצות פריה ורביה בתורה, להוליד בכל פעם שכל חדש בתורה כמו שכתבו המקובלים."

This enhances our understanding of the praise sung by the fish (Perek Shirah, chapt. 4): **"דגים אומרים (תהלים כט, ג) קול ה' על המים אל הכבוד הרעים ה' על מים רבים"**. "The voice of Hashem is on the waters, the G-d of Glory thunders; Hashem is on the vast waters." Since their purpose is to teach Yisroel the lesson and secret of their survival and existence, they sing out: **"קול ה' על המים"** - "the voice of Hashem is upon the waters." This is the voice of Hashem which was heard when the Torah was given (Devarim 5,19): **"קול גדול ולא יסף"** – a voice which continues without cease, a perpetual voice (as described by Rashi based on the Targum). This voice rises above the waters, the abode

of the fish, who were created as living examples to teach that the Torah is the essence of our existence. Therefore, the G-d of Glory thunders upon the vast waters.

The Fish Were Spared from the Sin in the Merit of the Torah

We have now been enlightened and can understand how the fish did not fall prey to sin by the tree of knowledge or in the generation of the flood – as opposed to all other living creatures. They were created as a model for Yisroel that there is no life without Torah. Torah is the antidote against the yetzer horah. Torah is also compared to water. Fish that live in water are protected from the yetzer horah.

Following this lead, we can now explain the holy words of Rabbi Elazar of Lantzout: the fish were saved because their name דג"ם is an abbreviation for **י"ג מ'כילין ד'רחמי** – the thirteen attributes of mercy. The holy Maggid, Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritsch, zy"a, explains that the thirteen hermeneutical principles by which the Torah is expounded parallel the thirteen attributes of mercy. Utilizing one of the hermeneutical principles, invokes the corresponding attribute of mercy. Utilizing the first principle, kal va'chomer, invokes the first attribute, **א"ל**; utilizing the second principle, gezeirah shovah, invokes the second attribute, **רחום**; and so on.

We have seen that the fish were spared from sin in the merit of Torah which is compared to water. We know that Torah is expounded by means of the thirteen hermeneutical principles which correspond to the thirteen attributes of mercy. The very name דג"ם, an allusion to these attributes, teaches us that the purpose of their creation was to serve as a reminder to occupy our lives with Torah.

This takes us back to the custom of eating fish at our shabbos tables. The Tur (Orach Chaim 290) writes in the name of the Midrash:

"אמרה תורה לפני הקב"ה, רבנו של עולם כשיכנסו ישראל לארץ זה רץ לכרמו וזה רץ לשדהו ואני מה תהא עלי, אמר לה יש לי זוג שאני מזווג לך ושבת שמו שהם בטלים ממלאכתם ויכולין לעסוק בך".

Shabbos is a day dedicated to Torah; it equips us and empowers us to fend off the yetzer horah the rest of the week.

We, therefore, follow the custom of eating fish at all of our shabbos meals; fish, the only living creatures that did not participate in the sins of the tree of knowledge and the generation of the flood. As we contemplate, how they found the strength to avoid the sins all other creatures fell prey to, we realize that they symbolize life in a Torah environment. We should then realize, that if we, human beings, actually occupy ourselves with the study of Torah - which is compared to water - how much more likely that we will merit salvation from the yetzer horah.