

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Noach

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Parshas Noach 5771

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“And he sent out the dove”

The Miracle of Elisha the Winged One Whose Head Tefillin Turned into Dove's Wings

In parshas Noach, which we read this week, we find the following (8,6):

“ויהי מקץ ארבעים יום ויפתח נח את חלון התיבה אשר עשה, וישלח את העורב ויצא ויצא ושוב עד יבשת המים מעל הארץ, וישלח את היונה מאתו לראות הקלו המים מעל פני האדמה, ולא מצאה היונה מנוח לכף רגלה ותשב אליו אל התיבה כי מים על פני כל הארץ, וישלח ידו ויקחה ויבא אותה אליו אל התיבה, ויחל עוד שבעת ימים אחרים ויסף שלח את היונה מן התיבה, ותבא אליו היונה לעת ערב והנה עלה זית טרף בפיה וידע נח כי קלו המים מעל הארץ, ויחל עוד שבעת ימים אחרים וישלח את היונה ולא יספה שוב אליו עוד.”

This narrative describes what Noach did at the end of forty days after the mountaintops became visible. He sends out the raven who goes and returns over and over again until the waters from the earth dry up. Then he sends out the dove to see whether or not the water has dried up. On its first mission the dove returns to the ark unable to find a suitable resting place. After seven days, the dove is sent out a second time and returns with an olive leaf in its mouth. Seven days later, it is sent out again; this time it does not return.

First, let us examine the difference between the behaviors of the raven and the dove in response to their missions. Why does the raven not return to the ark, but rather flies back and forth until the waters on the land dry up? This is in obvious contrast to the dove that returns to the ark twice. Rashi provides an answer to this question based on the teaching of our sages, of blessed memory, in the Gemorah (Sanhedrin 108:): “וּיִצֵא יִצְוֵא וְשׁוֹב, הוֹלֵךְ וּמְקִיף סְבִיבוֹת הַתֵּיבָה וְלֹא הֵלֵךְ בְּשִׁלְחוֹתוֹ, שֶׁהִיא חוֹשְׁדוֹ עַל—”the raven circled the ark, refusing to fulfill its mission; for it was suspicious of Noach with regard to its mate.

We have learned that the raven refused to fulfill its mission, while the dove accepted its mission. The raven circled the ark continuously until the waters dried up; whereas, the dove returned to the ark twice to notify Noach that the waters had not dried up, yet. Our blessed sages praise the dove for its valiant behavior and, for this reason, compare Yisroel to the dove. Elucidating the possuk (Shemos 27,20): “Now you shall command the Children of Yisroel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continually”—we find the following in the Midrash Tanchuma (Tetzaveh 5):

“זֶהוּ שֶׁאִמְרַת הַכְּתוּב (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים א טו) הֵנִיךְ יִפְהָ רַעִיתִי הֵנִיךְ יִפְהָ עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים... אִמְרַת לְהֵם הַקֶּבֶה, דּוֹגְמָא שְׁלֵךְ דּוֹמָה לְיוֹנָה... כִּיִּצְדַּר כְּשֶׁהִיָּה נֹחַ בְּתִיבָה כְּתִיב שֶׁם, וְיִשְׁלַח אֶת הָעוֹרֵב וְיִצְאָ יִצְאָ, וְאַחַר כֵּךְ שִׁלַּח אֶת הַיּוֹנָה, וְתִבֵּא אֵלָיו הַיּוֹנָה וְגו', אִמְרַת הַקֶּבֶה, מֵהַ הַיּוֹנָה הַבִּיָּאָה אֹרֵה לְעוֹלָם, אִף אֶתְם שְׁנִמְשַׁלְתֶּם כִּיּוֹנָה הַבִּיָּאוֹ שְׁמֵן זֵית וְהִדְלִיקוּ לִפְנֵי אֶת הַנֵּר, שְׁנִאִמְרַת וְאַתָּה תִּצְוֶה וְיִקְחוּ אֶלֶיךָ שְׁמֵן.”

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The Midrash cites the possuk (Shir HaShirim 1,15) comparing Yisroel to the dove. HKB"Y tells Yisroel that just as the dove brought light to the world, so, too, you, who are compared to the dove, shall bring olive oil to kindle the lamp before me.

The Midrash's statement: "just as the dove brought light to the world" refers to the following teaching found in another Midrash Tanchuma (ibid. 6): "שמן זית זך כתית למאור, למה לא שמן אגוזים, ולא שמן—pure, pressed olive oil was demanded, as opposed to any other type of oil, since the olive symbolizes light for the world. The commentators explain that when the dove brought back an olive leaf in its mouth, Noach knew that the flood and rains had ceased and that he could then leave the darkness of the ark for the light of the world. Nevertheless, to gain a deeper understanding of this matter, we must still explain why our blessed sages used the phrase "הביאה אורה לעולם"—"brought light to the world"—to describe the good news that the dove brought to Noach. Furthermore, to which light are they referring?

Elisha the Winged One

To begin our explanation, let us first introduce a wondrous passage in the Gemorah (Shabbos 49.):

"אמר רבי ינאי, תפילין צריכין גוף נקי כאלישע בעל כנפיים... ואמאי קרי ליה בעל כנפיים, שפעם אחת גזרה מלכות רומי הרשעה גזירה על ישראל, שכל המניח תפילין ינקרו את מוחו, והיה אלישע מניחם ויוצא לשוק, ראהו קסדור אחד רץ מפניו ורץ אחריו, וכיון שהגיעו אצלו נטלן מראשו ואחזן בידו.

אמר לו [הקסדור], מה זה בידך, אמר לו [אלישע], כנפי יונה, פשט את ידו ונמצאו כנפי יונה, לפיכך קורין אותו אלישע בעל כנפיים, ומאי שנא כנפי יונה משאר עופות, משום דאמתיל כנסת ישראל ליונה, שנאמר (תהלים סח יד) כנפי יונה נחפה בכסף וגו', מה יונה כנפיה מגינות עליה אף ישראל מצוות מגינות עליהם."

"R' Yannai said, tefillin require a clean body such as Elisha "the winged one." . . . And why was he called "the winged one"? Because at one time the wicked Roman government passed an edict against Yisroel that anyone donning tefillin would have his brain gouged out. Now, Elisha would don them and go out into the marketplace. An officer saw him; he ran away; the officer pursued him. As the officer caught up with him, Elisha removed the tefillin from his head and held them in his hand.

The officer asked him what he had in his hand. Elisha replied: Dove's wings. He opened his hand and, indeed, dove's wings were found. Therefore, he is called "Elisha the winged one." And why wings of a dove rather than wings of some other bird? Because the congregation of Yisroel is compared to a dove. . . Just as a dove is protected by its wings, so too Yisroel is protected by its mitzvos.

It appears from the fact that the Romans decreed: "שכל המניח תפילין ינקרו את מוחו"—"anyone who dons tefillin will have his brain gouged out"—that the edict only applied to head tefillin. In fact, this is explicit in the Gemorah (Shabbos 130.) where the incident is told a second time: "שפעם אחת גזרה—מלכות הרשעה גזרה על ישראל שכל המניח תפילין על ראשו יקרו את מוחו"—"once, this evil government issued a decree against Yisroel that anyone donning head tefillin shall have his brain gouged out." The Maharsha explains in Chidushei Agadot: "וינקרו את מוחו, שהוא מקום תפילין שבראשו, ועל של

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ראש גזרו שהיא מונחת בגלוי ונאמר בה ויראו ממך. In other words, the decree only applied to head tefillin which (a) are worn in an exposed area and (b) are feared by the goyim—as explained in the Gemorah (Berachos 6.) elucidating the possuk (Devarim 28,10): “וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך, אלו תפילין שבראש” It is clear that the edict applied only to head tefillin, since they instill fear in the nations of the world that see them.

Certainly, all the great commentators have ventured explanations, each in his own unique way, as to why “Elisha the winged one” chose the appellation of “dove’s wings” for the head tefillin—leading to the heavenly miracle producing the dove’s wings in the palm of his hand and his salvation from the Roman officer. As explained, Yisroel is compared to the dove—whose wings protect it; nevertheless, all creatures possess some form of protection. So, additional clarification is necessary as to why Yisroel is compared specifically to the dove.

And They Shall Fear You Refers to Head Tefillin

We can begin to decipher the sages riddles based on what we have learned in the Gemorah (Berachos 6.) elucidating the possuk (Devarim 28,10): “וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך, אלו תפילין שבראש”—“And all the nations of the world will see that the name of Hashem is upon you, and they will fear you—this is a reference to head tefillin.” The Chasan Sofer in his introduction to B’nuyah BaRamah explains the meaning of this enigmatic teaching by first focusing on the possuk (Shemos 13,9): “והיה לך לאות על ירך ולזכרון בין עיניך למען תהיה תורת ה' בפיך”—“And it shall be for you a sign on your arm and a reminder between your eyes—so that Hashem’s Torah may be in your mouth.” The connection between the mitzvah of tefillin and Hashem’s Torah being in your mouth remains to be explained.

The Torah She’b’chsav, the written Torah, repeatedly mentions that the head tefillin are to be worn between one’s eyes. We find this in the passage of “kadesh” (Shemos 13,9): “והיה לך לאות על ירך” and “ולזכרון בין עיניך”, in the passage of “v’haya ki yiviacha” (ibid. 16): “והיה לאות על ירכה ולטטפות בין עיניך”, in the first paragraph of krias shema (Devarim 6,8): “וקשרתם לאות על ירך והיו לטטפות בין עיניך”, and in the second paragraph of krias shema (ibid. 11,18): “וקשרתם אותם לאות על ירכם והיו לטטפות בין עיניכם”.

In the Torah She’b’al Peh, the oral Torah, however, our sages reveal that the true intention is not that the tefillin be worn on the forehead between the eyes, but rather opposite the brain. The Gemorah explains (Menachos 37.): “בין עיניך זו קדקד, היכא, אמרי דבי רבי ינאי מקום שמוחו של תינוק רופס”—between the eyes means over the fontanel, the soft spot of an infant’s skull. The reason for this is explained in the Gemorah (ibid.) as follows:

“תנו רבנן בין עיניך זו גובה שבראש, אתה אומר זו גובה שבראש או אינו אלא בין עיניך ממש, נאמר כאן בין עיניך ונאמר להלן (דברים יד א) לא תשימו קרחה בין עיניכם למת, מה להלן בגובה שבראש מקום שעושה קרחה, אף כאן בגובה של ראש מקום שעושה קרחה”.

The common expression “between your eyes” is used both regarding head tefillin and regarding a mourner. By a mourner, the Torah speaks about a place where one can make a bald spot. From this the

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Rabbis deduce that with regards to head tefillin, the Torah is also referring to a place where one can make a bald spot.

Similarly, the Mishnah (Megillah 24:) teaches that one who wears his tefillin on his forehead is practicing heresy. Rashi comments: "...כמשמעו בין עיניך ממש..."—those who practice in this manner are following the literal translation and exhibiting contempt for the teaching of the sages. This is implicit in the possuk itself: "והיה לך לאות על ירך ולזכרון בין עיניך"—"it will serve as a sign on your arm and as a reminder between your eyes"; then the possuk adds the following warning: "למען תהיה תורת ה' בפיך"—"so that Hashem's Torah should be in your mouth." In other words, do not interpret the phrase "between your eyes" literally; rather we should practice in accordance with the teaching of the sages of the oral law and place the head tefillin on the skull opposite the brain.

It is well-known that the world was created by means of the Torah—as stated in the Midrash (B.R. 1,1): "היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה ובורא את העולם, והתורה אמרה (בראשית א א) בראשית ברא אלקים, ואין ראשית אלא תורה". Since HKB"H gave the Torah to Yisroel—to be interpreted by the sages to the best of their understanding—and the Torah was used to create the world, it turns out that Yisroel controls the forces of nature that were created by means of the Torah.

Let us preface one more idea learned in the Gemorah (Berachos 21.): "מניין לברכת התורה לפניך מן התורה"—the Gemorah wants to know from where in the Torah do we derive that it is necessary to recite a blessing before reading from the Torah; we derive this requirement from the possuk: "When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our G-d." The Maharsha comments in Chidushei Agados: "מצאתי כתוב דהכי משמע ליה ברכת התורה, כי שם ה' אקרא, דהיינו כשאני קורא בתורה שהיא כולה שמות של הקב"ה, שכל התורה באותיותיה היא שמותיו של הקב"ה כדאיתא במדרש"—this possuk is a reference to the blessings of the Torah. It states that when I read from the Torah which consists entirely of names of HKB"H, I must bless Him first.

This then is the meaning of the statement: "וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך, אלו תפילין שבראש"—"And all the nations of the world will see that the name of Hashem is upon you, and they will fear you—this is a reference to head tefillin." It is specifically the head tefillin that will instill fear in the nations of the world. When they see that Yisroel don the head tefillin on top of their heads, even though the possuk states explicitly "between your eyes," they will realize that the Almighty gave the Torah to Yisroel to interpret as they see fit. This will inspire fear and reverence in the nations of the world; for they will understand that the Torah and the forces of nature are controlled by Yisroel to use as they please. This is the gist of his lovely explanation.

With Noach's Mission the Dove Risky Its Life to Fulfill a Rabbinical Decree

Let us continue along this path in an effort to comprehend the great miracle involving "Elisha the winged one"—the transformation of his head tefillin into dove's wings. A wonderful and novel idea is found in

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the incomparable teachings of our great master the Chasam Sofer concerning the missions of the raven and the dove. Pertaining to the raven's mission, it is written (Bereishis 8,6):

“ויהי מקץ ארבעים יום ויפתח נח את חלון התיבה אשר עשה, וישלח את העורב ויצא ויצא ושוב עד”
“—And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noach opened the window of the ark which he had made. He sent out the raven, and it kept going and returning until the drying of the waters from upon the earth.” Rashi comments: “יצוא ושוב, הולך ומקיף סביבות התיבה—going and returning; going and circling the ark; but it did not go on its mission.”

The Gemorah (Sanhedrin 108:) explains the reason for the raven's refusal to accept Noach's mission: “תשובה ניצחת השיבו עורב לנח... אם פוגע בי שר חמה או שר צינה, לא נמצא עולם חסר בריה”
“—the raven presented Noach with a compelling argument. . . Should I be struck down by the master of heat or the master of cold, will the world then not be lacking one species? Let us analyze this argument. (a) Why, indeed, did Noach not consider the validity of the raven's argument? (b) Why did the dove not share the same concern? Here are the holy words of the Chasam Sofer (Bereishis 29:) to clarify the matter:

“הנה הקב”ה צוה לכל בעלי חיים שיכנסו בתיבה, ולא היה להם רשות לצאת כי אם ברשות השם יתברך, כדכתיב אחר אשר כבר חרבו פני האדמה, (בראשית ח טו) וידבר אלקים אל נח [לאמר] צא [מן התיבה] וגו', ואם כן לכאורה הדין עם העורב. אך נח ידע שיש כח ביד חכמים לעקור דבר תורה היכי שהשעה צריכה לכך, ותגזר אומר ויקם, ולא יזיקהו שרב ושמש ולא קור וצינה, אך העורב לא האמין זה.”

HKB”H commanded all living creatures to enter the ark; they were not allowed to leave the ark without the Almighty's permission. It would seem, then, that the raven's argument was justified. Noach, however, was aware that the sages were given the power to amend a Torah decree if necessary. He was confident, therefore, that neither heat nor cold nor any other harm would befall the raven. The raven, however, did not share this same belief.

Then the Chasam Sofer reiterates this concept and adds (ibid.):

“כבר כתבתי במקום אחר, כי לא היו רשאים לצאת מן התיבה, עד שאמר הקב”ה צא מן התיבה. אך קיימא לן יש כח ביד חכמים לעקור דבר לצורך שעה ולמיגדר, ומצוה לשמוע להם, על כן יונה שהיא בחינת (ברכות נג:) כנסת ישראל ליונה אימתלא, שמעה לקול נח ויצאתה כששלחה.”

מה שאין כן העורב האפיקורס לא שמע לקול נח, נגד דברי ה' שאמר בא אל התיבה, ואין לו רשות לצאת עד שיאמר ה' צא, על כן כששלחו בעד החלון לא יצא להלן מן התיבה כי ה' לא אמר צא, ולא נכנס לתוך התיבה כי נח דחפו לחוץ, ונשאר מפרח סמוך לאסקופת התיבה, והיינו ויצא ויצא הלוך ושוב.”

Indeed, if circumstances dictate, the sages possess the power to modify a Torah decree. So, although the creatures living in the ark were not supposed to leave the ark until HKB”H gave them permission to do so, the dove—to whom the Congregation of Yisroel are compared—obeyed Noach's request and went out on the mission.

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In contrast, the raven was a heretic and did not heed Noach's words. When sent out through the window, he did not venture far from the ark; he did not reenter the ark, because Noach pushed him away and did not allow him to do so. He flew near the threshold of the ark, circling back and forth.

We see that the dove, who represents the people of Yisroel, was willing to sacrifice her life in order to fulfill the Rabbi's decrees and to heed Noach's instructions; she did not fear, as the raven did, that she might be harmed by the heat or the cold. After all, the righteous dictate and the Holy One fulfills. Certainly, no harm would befall her.

Dove's Wings Allude to Noach's Mission

It is now understandable why our blessed sages compared the mitzvos which protect Yisroel to a dove's wings. The dove's wings symbolize the fact that the dove used her wings to leave the ark and fulfill a Rabbinical decree in the form of Noach's mission. For this reason, the mitzvos which protect Yisroel are compared to a dove's wings. They teach us and remind us that the mitzvos only protect us when they resemble the dove's wings—i.e. when the commandments of the written Torah are performed in the manner prescribed by the sages of the oral law, the Torah She'b'al Peh.

Now, the Roman government was aware that the survival of the Jewish people was dependent on their faith and trust in the sages of the oral law. This motivated them to decree that "anyone who donned tefillin would have his brain gouged out." The Romans wished to uproot the principle underlying the head tefillin. By wearing these tefillin on top of the head instead of between the eyes, Yisroel's unwavering adherence to the sages of the Torah She'b'al Peh was evident.

Consequently, when Elisha removed the tefillin from his head and the officer asked him: "מה זה בידך"—"what is that in your hand?" Elisha replied: "כנפי יונה"—"dove's wings." He was alluding to the fact that his placement of the tefillin on top of his head rather than on his forehead—"between his eyes"—was in keeping with the concept represented by "dove's wings." He was willing to put his life at risk just as the dove demonstrated her willingness to use her wings, despite the inherent danger, in order to fulfill a Rabbinical decree. This, too, is the Gemorah's point when it asks: "ומאי שנא כנפי יונה משאר עופות"—"And how are a dove's wings different than any other bird's?" And it answers that they are unique, because the Congregation of Yisroel are compared to a dove: "מה יונה כנפיה מגינות עליה אף ישראל"—"מציאות מגינות עליהם"—"just as a dove's wings protect it, so do Yisroel's mitzvos protect them."

Let us add one more tidbit. The Roman officer suspected Elisha of donning head tefillin; therefore, he asked him: "מה זה בידך"—"What is that in your hand?" His intention was really twofold: (1) simply put, show me what you have in your hand, and (2) why are you risking your life to wear the head tefillin? Doesn't the concern of saving one's life absolve one from all of the mitzvos of the Torah?

To which Elisha replied that he was adhering to the doctrine of the "dove's wings." In other words, I am acting as the dove did. She used her wings and put her life in danger to go out on Noach's mission—a version of a Rabbinical decree—without fear of harm from the heat or cold; for she knew that the Rabbis were given the power to modify the laws of nature. So, too, do we observe the Rabbinical institution to place the head tefillin on top of our heads rather than between our eyes—knowing that

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our enemies will be unable to harm us. This is why his head tefillin miraculously transformed into dove's wings.

At this point, we have gained a better understanding of the Midrash: **“מה היונה הביאה אורה לעולם, אף אתם שנמשלתם כיונה הביאו שמן זית והדליקו לפני את הנר, שנאמר ואתה תצוה ויקחו אליך שמן”**—“just as the dove brought light to the world, you, too, that are compared to the dove, shall bring olive oil to kindle the lamp before me, . . .” This can be understood based on an explanation in the Midrash Tanchuma on this week's parsha (3) elucidating the possuk (Yeshayah 9,1): **“העם ההולכים בחשך ראו אור גדול, אור גדול אור שנברא ביום ראשון, שגנזו הקב”ה לעמלי תורה שבעל פה ביום ובלילה”**—“the people walking in the darkness saw a bright light; a bright light refers to the light that was created on the first day of creation and was stored away by HKB”H for those who toil day and night in the study of the Torah She’b’al Peh.”

We see clearly that Torah She’b’al Peh is considered a bright light that illuminates for Yisroel the darkness of this world. So, when the dove fulfilled Noach's mission—thereby observing a Rabbinical decree from the oral law—she was introducing the tremendous light of Torah She’b’al Peh into the world. This is precisely the message of the Midrash: **“מה היונה הביאה אורה לעולם, אף אתם שנמשלתם כיונה הביאו שמן זית והדליקו לפני את הנר”** . . .—“just as the dove brought light to the world, you, too, that are compared to the dove, shall bring olive oil to kindle the lamp before me, . . .”