

**“AND YOU SHALL NOT MAKE YOUR SOULS IMPURE
THROUGH ANY CREEPING THING THAT CREEPS ON THE EARTH”**

**THE EVIL INCLINATION HAS 150 WAYS TO PURIFY THE SHERETZ -
DOVID HAMELECH RESPONDS WITH 150 CHAPTERS OF TEHILLIM**

In our parsha, Parsha Shemini, we find the prohibition against eating the *sheretz*, insect (Vayikra- 11:44): **“ולא תטמאו את נפשותיכם בכל השרץ הרומש על הארץ, כי אני ה' המעלה אתכם מארץ מצרים”** - “And you shall not make your souls impure through any creeping thing that creeps on the earth. For I am Hashem Who brings you up from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you; you shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Our Sages z”l expounded upon this verse (Bava Metzia 61b):

“יציאת מצרים דכתב רחמנא גבי שרצים למה לי, לכדתנא דבי רבי ישמעאל, דתנא דבי רבי ישמעאל, אילמלא העליתי את ישראל ממצרים, אלא בשביל דבר זה שאין מטמאין בשרצים דיי”

“For what purpose does the Merciful One mention the Exodus from Egypt in connection with the prohibition of creeping things? For that which was taught by a Tanna of the academy of R' Yishmael, for a Tanna of the academy of R' Yishmael has taught in a Baraisa: HKB”H said, ‘Had I not brought the Jewish people out of Egypt except to observe this one thing, namely, that they do not contaminate themselves by consuming creeping creatures, I would have been satisfied.’”

This teaching is truly stunning! As we know, the Torah has 365 negative commandments. How do we understand the fact that HKB”H took us out of Egypt specifically in the merit of the observation of the prohibition against eating insects?

**THE DISTINGUISHED STUDENT WHO KNEW
HOW TO PURIFY THE SHERETZ WITH 150 REASONS**

Let us begin to explain this enigmatic teaching by introducing the following Gemara (Eruvin 13b): **“תנא תלמיד ותיק היה ביבנה, שהיה מטהר את השרץ במאה וחמשים טעמים”** “A Baraisa taught: There was a distinguished student in the academy of Yavneh who could purify the insect with 150 reasons.”

It is a pleasure to present the precious explanation of the great Gaon, Rebbe Wolf Boskowitz zt”l (the son of Rebbe Shmuel of Kelin, the author of the *Machatzis HaShekel*), found in his *sefer Shoshan Edus on Mishnayos Eduyos* (3:6, 4), as to why this student had specifically 150 ways to purify the *sheretz*, not more, not less.

He explains the matter based on the Gemara (Rosh HaShanah 21b): **“חמישים שערי בינה נבראו בעולם, וכולן ניתנו למשה חסר אחד, שנאמר: (תהלים ח-ו) ותחסרהו מעט מאלקים”** “Fifty gates of understanding were created in the world, and all but one of them were given to Moshe, as it says (Tehillim- 8:6): ‘But You have made him only slight wanting in [understanding] Divinity.’”

Now when Chazal say that Moshe did not reach the 50th gate, they do not mean that he didn’t understand any of that gate. For it is impossible to consider that the deliverer of the Torah had no comprehension whatsoever in one of the levels of the Torah. Rather it means that, unlike the first 49, Moshe did not comprehend the entire 50th level, only part of it. And the same is true for every Jew who toils in Torah. They merit to understand some fraction of the 50th level, until that future time when we all understand the 50th level in its entirety.

Additionally, there is a well-known principle that the Torah can be explained and understood on 4 levels, known as *pardes*, פּרְדֵּס, stands for פּשֵׁט, Pshat (the plain meaning), רמז, Remez (the hinted meaning), דרש, Drash (the homiletic meaning), סוד, Sod (the esoteric meaning). Based on this, Rebbe Wolf zt”l offers a novel insight: the 3 levels of Remez, Drash and Sod each contain their own 50 gates of understanding. There are 50 levels of Remez, 50 levels of Drash and 50 levels of Sod. All together they total 150 levels. However, the Pshat level only contains one gate, as, when all is said and done, there is only

one way to follow the Torah, as it says (Bamidbar- 15:16): תורה: "אחת ומשפט אחד יהיה לכם ולגר הגר אתכם" "One teaching and one judgment shall be for you and for the proselyte who sojourns among you."

That is why the student specifically came up with 150 ways to purify the sheretz. On the Pshat level there is absolutely no way to purify the sheretz, as the Torah unequivocally states (Vayikra- 11:31): "אלה הטמאים לכם בכל השרץ כל הנוגע בהם במוותם" "These are impure to you among all the creeping animals; anyone who touches them when they are dead shall be impure until the evening!"

On the other hand, one who gets involved in the other 150 levels of Remez, Drash and Sod, can be misled by the evil inclination to erroneously conjure up 150 different ways to purify the sheretz, using a different approach at each level of understanding, thus attempting to permit that which is prohibited. These are the sweet words of Rebbe Wolf zt"l.

Parenthetically, we now have a better understanding of that which is says in many seforim, that a Jew is supposed to fulfill the mitzvos of the Torah based on simple belief, without any complicated calculations. As the Ma'or Va'Shemesh (Parshas Nitzavim) quotes from the Rebbe R' Elimelech of Lizhensk zy"l, who explained the Gemara (Rosh HaShanah 16a): "למה" "Why do we blow the shofar? Because Hashem told us to do so!" This means that after all the deep comprehensions and intentions, the main thing is to blow the shofar with the simple and basic understanding that I am doing this because G-d commanded me to do it.

Along these lines, the Yismach Yisrael (Chanukah, pg. 82) brings an incredible statement from the Ba'al Shem Tov zy"l:

"הבעש"ט אמר לתלמידיו, אחרי כל השגותי למעלה בשרשי התורה והמצוות, ואחר כל התענוג מהשגותי, אני מניח את כל השגותי ומחזיק אני באמונה פשוטה, איך בין א נער איך גלייב" [כלומר, אני נער תמים ומאמין]

"The Besh"t used to say to his students: 'After all of my lofty comprehensions regarding the deepest roots of the Torah and its mitzvos, after all that sublime pleasure, I place all of that on the side and I grab onto simple belief. I transform into a simpleton, and I believe.'"

Based on the above, the idea here is that one who fulfills the mitzvos only on the deeper levels of Remez, Drash and Sod is in danger of falling prey to that same evil inclination that tries to purify the sheretz with 150 reasons. However, one who is

anchored in simple emunah, the basic faith which has been transmitted from generation to generation, is ensured that he will succeed in his service of Hashem, without stumbling.

THEY ONLY APPOINTED TO THE SANHEDRIN HE WHO COULD PURIFY THE SHERETZ

Now come and see a fascinating statement in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 17a): "אמר רב יהודה אמר רב, אין מושיבין בסנהדרין אלא מי" "Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: We may appoint to the Sanhedrin only one who knows how to purify a sheretz according to Biblical law."

This means that even a massive talmid chacham, who knew the entire Torah with complete clarity, could not become a member of the Sanhedrin if he could not purify the sheretz through what in essence is a mental exercise in vain, as it is not the truth! The light of the world, Rabbeinu Tam, was already bothered by this question (s.v. she'yodea): "דמה" "Rabbeinu Tam asked, of what value is sharp logic which is absolutely false and meaningless, as the Torah tells us clearly that the sheretz is impure?!"

The Kli Yakar provides a wondrous answer to Rabbeinu Tam's question in his sefer Olelos Ephraim (Vol. 2, 297): The distinguished student in Yavneh was coming to teach us a lesson not to rely too quickly on our intellect. A talmid chacham must be very weary of permitting something for himself, as he might just be convincing himself that this is the case because he has some invested interest in a lenient ruling. It is all too easy to twist the Living Word of G-d and to permit that which is really prohibited. Nothing proves this more than the fact that there are 150 logical ways to purify even the clearly impure sheretz.

Here are his holy words:

"ולוי נראה שתלמיד ותיק זה היה מוכיח את ההמון בזה, המראים פנים של היתר על כל מעשיהם, ואינם רואים חובה לעצמם כלל, כי בכל מעשה או פעולה שיצרו מתאוה לה יעשוה מיד, אך יורו היתר לעצמם פעמיים או שלוש, עד אשר יהיה בעיניהם כהיתר ממש, והוכיחם תלמיד זה לאמר שלא יפה הם עושים, שהרי השרץ הכל מודים בו שטמא טמא יקרא, ואף על פי כן נוכל לטהרו בק"ן פנים.

קל וחומר שיש כח ביד שכלו של אדם לטהר כל מעשה רע, ולהיות מורה היתר לעצמו, ומזה ילמד כל משכיל שלא לסמוך על חכמתו, אף אם נראה לו קצת היתר, מכל מקום לא יסמוך על שיקול דעתו, ולא על רוב חכמתו, ולא יעשה כי אם משפט הכתוב בפירושו. וזהו שאמר רבינא אני אדון ואטהרנו, וממני יראה כל משכיל, שמרוב חורפא יכול האדם לשבש כל כשרון המעשה."

The Holy Gaon, Rebbe Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin zy”a takes the same approach in his sefer Or Zarua LaTzaddik- Mamar on Mahus Lashon HaKodesh:

”ולדעתי זהו הענין שזכרו ז”ל בפרק קמא דעירובין מאותו תלמיד שהיה מטהר השרץ בק”ן טעמים, שהקשו רבים וכי מה תועלת בחריפות של הבל, שהרי התורה טומאתו ועיין שם בתוספות. אבל היה המכוון להראות כי לא על ראיות שכליות יסמוך האדם, שהרי יש לנו לדון ק”ג טעמים על השרץ שהוא טהור, אם באנו לסמוך על טעמים שכליים, אבל ראוי לדעת האמת במה שהוא אמת, ואחר כך להסמיך כל טעמים וכל ראיות השכל אל האמת.”

Perhaps we can add a nice touch to this by carefully examining the words of Rabbeinu HaKadosh (Pirkei Avos- 4:2): “רבי אומר אל תסתכל בקנקן אלא במה שיש בו” - “Rebbi said: ‘Do not look at the container, but rather what is within it.’”

We can suggest that Rebbi is hinting to the 150 ways of purifying the sheretz. Being that the Torah prohibited the sheretz, there must be 150 corresponding reasons why the sheretz is impure, cancelling out the 150 reasons to purify. This teaches us that the intellect can be very misleading and that the only way to reach the truth is through Divine assistance.

This is what Rebbi is alluding to: “Do not look at the ק”ק ק”ק (the numerical value of 150, 150). Don’t get caught up in the 150 reasons to purify vs. the 150 reason to declare impure. Rather, “look at what is within it”, extract the lesson that it comes to teach us. Remember the message of the student from Yavneh, that we cannot rely on human intellect alone. Rather, we must pray to Hashem that He should enlighten our eyes and assist us in reaching truthful conclusions and interpretations in Torah.

Now we understand why it is so critical for the talmid chacham to have internalized this lesson before being appointed to the Sanhedrin, where he will be confronted by so many serious halachic questions. This is why understanding how easily the sheretz could be declared pure was a prerequisite for being appointed to the Sanhedrin.

THE ORIGINAL SNAKE CAUSED ADAM TO STUMBLE USING 150 REASONS

When we delve deeper we will realize that the *Nachash HaKadmoni*, Original Snake, caused Adam and Chava to fall into his trap and eat from the *Eitz HaDaas*, Tree of Knowledge, by using the same 150 reasons used to permit the sheretz. Through this act he was successful in bringing death into the world. The

Megale Amukos (Behar, s.v.- mah inyan shemitah) explains that the letter נ of נח”ש, snake, represents the 50 levels of impurity through which the Nachash caused Adam and Chava to stumble, thus injecting its own impurity into them and all of mankind. This impurity remained within us until we stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah, at which point it ceased, as the Gemara teaches (Shabbos 146a): “ישראל שעמדו על הר סיני בסקה זוהמתן” - “The impurity was removed from the Jewish people that stood at Har Sinai.”

This is why it is written regarding the exodus from Egypt (Shemos- 3:12): “בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלקים על ההר” - “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship G-d on this mountain.” The word תעבדון, you will worship, is comprised of נ, תעבדו, you will work on 50 (נ), meaning you will work during the 50 days of the Sefiras HaOmer, between the exodus from Egypt and the receiving of the Torah, to cleanse and purify yourself from the impurity of the 50 levels of impurity, represented by the נ of the נח”ש.

Additionally, as the Gemara teaches us (Bava Basra 16a): “הוא שטן, הוא יצר הרע, הוא מלאך המות” - “The Satan, Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination) and the Angel of Death or all one in the same.” Thus the נח”ש which represents the Evil Inclination, is the Satan as well. This matter can be found in the very name of the Satan, as נ, ש’ערי ט’ומאה stands for the 50 levels of impurity. These are the wondrous words of the Megale Amukos.

We now see clearly how the Nachash caused Adam and Chava to sin using the 150 reasons to purify the sheretz. The Nachash, representing the 50 levels of impurity, was able to combat the 50 levels of understanding contained within each layer of Torah: Remez, Drash and Sod. He thus was able to create 150 reasons to permit the impure, thus nullifying the 150 real reasons to declare it impure.

We can add that this matter is hinted to in the Torah’s description of the Nachash (Bereishis- 3:1): “והנחש היה ערום” - “The snake was wiser than any beast of the field that Hashem G-d had made.” Targum Onkelos translates this pasuk as follows: “והוא חכם מכל חיות הבראיה אשר עשה ה’ אלקים” - “The snake was wiser than any beast of the field that Hashem G-d had made.” The Nachash indeed was wise, but he used his wisdom for the side of evil, as the pasuk describes (Yirmiyahu- 4:22): “חכמים הם להרע ולהיטיב לא ידעו” - “They are wise at doing evil, but know not how to do good.” This idea, as well, is hinted to in the name of the snake. The word נח”ש stands for נח”ש, the 50 level of wisdom used for the side of evil, through which he proposed 150 reason to permit the prohibited.

DOVID HAMELECH, THE REINCARNATION OF ADAM HA'RISHON, WROTE 150 CHAPTERS OF TEHILLIM

Now our heart stirs as we propose the reason that Dovid HaMelech a"h composed specifically 150 chapters of *Tehillim*, Psalms. Our teacher, the Arizal, has taught us (Sefer HaLikutim-Haazinu) that Dovid was the *gilgul*, reincarnation, of Adam HaRishon, sent down to repair that which Adam had caused. This is the explanation of the Medrash (Bamidbar Rabbah-14:12): "Adam took 70 years of his life and gave them to Dovid the son of Yishai."

This is what Dovid referred to when he began his book of *Tehillim* with: "אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים לא ישב, כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה יוםם ולילה" "Praiseworthy is the man who walked not in the counsel of the wicked, and stood not in the path of the sinful, and sat not in the session of scorners. But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in His Torah he meditates day and night."

The Medrash Shocher Tov expounds: "מדבר באדם הראשון, אמר אדם הראשון, אשרני אם לא עמדתי בדרכיו של נחש, ואשרי אם לא ישבתי במושב" "This is Adam HaRishon speaking. Adam HaRishon said: "I would have been praiseworthy had I not walked in the paths of the snake. And I would have been praiseworthy had I not sat in the session of scorners."

Based on the above we can explain that being that Dovid HaMelech was the reincarnation of Adam, he saw fit to compose specifically 150 chapters of *Tehillim*. Adam fell prey to the 150 reasons of the Nachash to permit the impure, thereby allowing the Nachash to inject him with its impurity. It was to repair this damage that Dovid composed his *Tehillim*. The Jewish people could now forever use these 150 chapter of *Tehillim* to pray to Hashem to save them from the evil inclination and its 150 methods of tricking us.

THE JEWISH SOULS IN EGYPT SINNED WITH THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

Continuing along this path we can now explain the Gemara that we started with, which stated that the merit of observing the prohibition against eating *sheratzim* alone was enough of a reason to be taken out of Egypt. Let us begin by introducing the following verse (Shemos- 2:23):

"ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וימת מלך מצרים ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה" - "And it happened during those many days, that the king of Egypt died, and the Children of Israel groaned because of the work."

The Medrash (Shemos Rabbah- 1:34) explains: "וימת מלך מצרים שנצטרע והמצורע חשוב כמת... אמרו חרטומי מצרים, אין לך רפואה אם - לא נשחוט מקטני ישראל ק"נ בערב וק"נ בבוקר ורחץ בדמיהם שתי פעמים ביום" "The king of Egypt died: this means that he contracted leprosy, and a leper is tantamount to a dead person. The sorcerers of Egypt told Pharaoh that the only cure would be to slaughter 150 Jewish babies every evening and 150 Jewish babies every morning and to bathe in their blood in the evening and in the morning."

Now this must be understood, for the Egyptians were wise people, as it says (Melachim 1- 5:10): "ותרב חכמת שלמה מחכמת כל בני" "Shlomo's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt." Why then did the wisest men of Egypt think that the blood of 150 babies in the morning and evening would heal Pharaoh? What is the significance of this?

We can answer this based on that which our teacher, the Arizal, has revealed to us (Shaar HaPesukim- beginning of Parshas Shemos): that the reason the Jewish people suffered so terribly in Egypt is because when Adam HaRishon sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, all the souls that were contained within him were damaged. These souls needed to undergo an enormous repair, and thus they went through many reincarnations until they were purified and refined to the necessary degree.

Their first reincarnation was in the generation of the flood. Since the evil was still deeply rooted in them they stumbled and corrupted their ways. After this they were reincarnated again in the form of the generation that built the Tower of Babel, who were subsequently dispersed across the earth. Once again they had failed. They were sent down a 3rd time as the people of the city of Sedom. They also became corrupt and were destroyed, without accomplishing their mission. Finally, they were sent down as the souls of the Jewish people that found themselves enslaved in Egypt. It was through the terrible hardships of the slavery in Egypt that these souls were finally expunged and cleansed.

