

Pulse OF Emunah

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life

LESSONS

KEEPING THE PROMISE

In Eretz Yisrael, there lived an elderly man, who *bentched* with extraordinary *kavanah* every time. His neighbors expressed curiosity, and the man shared his story. As a young boy, Rav Meir Shapiro of Lublin tested him in learning. Afterward, he told him that there is no letter *fei sofis* in *bentching*. Many words related to anger and destruction end with this letter. If someone *bentches* with *kavanah*, they have no power over him (Ba'er Heiteiv: Orach Chaim, Hilchos Bircas Hamazon 185:1). From then on, the boy did his best to say every single word slowly and carefully.

As a *bachur*, he was deported to Auschwitz. He told the guards that he was a cook by profession and was assigned to the kitchen. He never lacked food, and continued to *bentch* properly. One Nazi saw a healthy Jewish boy and became angry. He took him outside, gave him a hammer, and ordered him to dig a bunker six feet by six feet if he wanted to continue working in the kitchen. The young man could only pray. A few minutes later, a group of Nazis drove by in a truck, pelting him with vegetables and curses.

Then another truck filled with foreign workers arrived. They asked him to share the vegetables. He agreed, on condition that they dig a bunker six feet by six feet. Together they managed to do it, and he paid them with vegetables. He then called the German officer, who had no choice but to allow him to return to the kitchen. The man promised Hashem that if he got out of here, he would continue to thank the One Who sustained him in the valley of death.

The elderly man concluded, "As you can see, I kept my promise. And Hashem has kept His."

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gem

OF THE WEEK

THE TEN PLAGUES

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

Rabbi Yehuda arranged the *makkos* into three groups: *d'tzach*, *adash*, *b'achav*. The grouping is self-evident from the story itself. The first two plagues in each group are preceded by a clear warning, whereas the third in each group—i.e., *kinim*, *sh'chin*, and *choshech*—comes without warning. The implication is that the third plague is a punishment for not responding properly to the first two.

Each of these three groups of plagues was intended to cure the Egyptians of the delusion that they had the right to inflict *gerus*, *avdus*, and *inuy* upon the Israelites. The first group, *d'tzach*, accomplished this purpose by demonstrating Hashem's power over water and land; *adash* by demonstrating His power over the inhabitants who lived on the land; and *b'ach* by demonstrating His power over the atmosphere surrounding the land.

Closer inspection reveals that the three plagues in each group correspond to the three basic aspects of Egyptian *galus* which were eliminated by the

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PRAYER

TACHANUN: THE CRY
OF A BROKEN HEART



The text of Tachanun, according to our *minhag*, consists chiefly of Tehillim 6, which David uttered after his sin with Batsheva. It is a cry to G-d by a man worn down by profound guilt and utter loneliness.

Yet it shows us that there is a way to find mercy and help from on High even from the depths of distress. "The L-rd has heard the sound of my weeping." Everyone who recites this may be certain that G-d will answer his prayer, if it issues from a broken heart—which G-d never rejects.

Adapted from World of Prayer by Rabbi Elie Munk

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SERVICE OF THE HEART


By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

In the Shema, we undertake to fulfill all Hashem's *mitzvos*, "to serve him *b'chol levavcha*," in all your heart. The Gemara asks "What service is done *in* the heart? This refers to *tefilah*." *Tefilah*, although performed with the lips, is actually an obligation on the heart. Were we to daven only in our minds, it would be easy for our thoughts to wander. (*Kavanah* is difficult even when we do say the words!) Therefore we say all the *tefilos* verbally, but our actual service to Hashem is what transpires in our hearts as we say them.

But the Gemara's statement raises an obvious question. This *parsha* of Shema is known as "*kabbalas ol mitzvos*," accepting the yoke of Hashem's commandments. It speaks of no *mitzvah* in particular. Nevertheless, our *chachamim* are telling us that it singles out the *mitzvah* of *tefilah*. Not Shabbos, not *tefillin*, nor any other commandment.

There is a message here for us to internalize. The essence of any *mitzvah* is the heart. Of course, we perform the *mitzvos* with our bodies: *tefillin* on our arms, Kiddush with our mouths. But the intention behind all of Hashem's *mitzvos* is for us to grow closer to Him, to become better and holier people, to refine our character and care for others. All this is a service of the heart.

The Malbim tells us that every *mitzvah* has a *guf* and a *neshama*: the external actions that we do to fulfill the *mitzvah*, and the feelings that accompany it. How much fear and awe of Hashem? How much love? How deeply did the *mitzvah* penetrate our emotions? These are the factors that turn a physical act into a deeply spiritual *mitzvah*.

Some years before the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash, the *navi* Daniel was abducted by Nevuchadnetzar's soldiers and brought to Bavel to be trained for service in Nevuchadnetzar's staff. Also part of this group were Chananya, Mishael and Azarya. Although they were merely teenagers, the boys were already great *tzaddikim* and *chachamim*. The pasuk tells us that Daniel "placed upon his heart that he would not be defiled by the food of the king," as the food in the palace was all *treif*. Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon explains that he "placed it upon his heart" when he was reciting Shema as he arrived in the palace. The Shema says that the words shall be "on your heart." 

redemption. *Gerus*, *avdus* and *inuy*—these were the components of the affliction that Egypt had brought upon Israel, and in these lay Egypt's sin.

These same conditions—*gerus*, *avdus*, and *inuy*—were now, through the plagues, brought upon the Egyptians, to impress upon them that their lording it over this hapless people was without justification, and to make them feel upon their own flesh the bitterness of the affliction they had brought upon their victims.

Dam, *arov*, and *barad*—the first in each set—demonstrated to the Egyptians that they themselves were merely *gerim* in their own land, and hence were hardly in a position to treat Israel as *gerim* and deprive them of their rights.

Tzfardeia, *dever*, and *arbeh*—the second in each set—showed them how illusory were the notions that had made them feel superior to the people whom they had reduced to *avdus*.

Kinim, *sh'chin*, and *choshech* were *inuyim* that made the Egyptians feel what it means to have to submit to a systematic regime of *inuy*.

Makas bechoros concluded the series and finally brought about Israel's redemption. 

Based on excerpts from the commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt"l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.




wonder WORLD

DRAGON HUNTING



What defenses can a tiny animal have?

Blue dragons (*Glaucus atlanticus*) are a type of sea slug found in the ocean. They have boneless, soft bodies, but no outer shell, unlike snails or oysters. On average one inch long, they have a special air bag in their bodies that allows them to float on the water. They have teeth and are predators, but also have incredible camouflage: their blue bodies blend in with the water, and their stomachs are silver, invisible to predatory birds above. Blue dragons also carry a powerful poison. After consuming the Portuguese man o' war, a marine animal similar to a jellyfish, the blue dragon stores the man o' war's stingers around its body and can unleash them at will. 

Adapted from the Niflaos HaBoreh Explorer series by Rabbi Yaakov Lubin

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