

Toras Avigdor

Junior

Illustration by Rav Avigdor Miller and his wife, Leora, z"l



Adapted from
the teachings of
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פרק חותם

Don't Get Bitten by the Snake!

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Don't Get Bitten by the Snake!

I'm sure you know all about the Ten Makkos that Hashem sent upon the Mitzrim. But did you know that there was once a different makkah that came upon the Yidden in the Midbar? Did you ever hear about the makkah of snakes?

In our parshah, we learn that some of the Yidden complained about living in the Midbar. Camping in a tent might be fun for a little while, but can you imagine living your entire life in a tiny tent? And when they passed by other nations and saw people who were living in real houses, and eating normal food, so some of them became jealous. And some of the people were so unhappy that they even wished they could go back to Mitzrayim!

But they didn't realize they were living at the best time in our entire history! They were able to see Moshe Rabbeinu whenever they wanted, and they knew that Hashem was traveling with them and guiding them. They saw Hashem protecting them with the ananei hakavod, the clouds of glory, and they were able to eat food that came down directly from Hashem! So how could such a lucky people even think of complaining?!

It was only the yetzer hara that made them feel like Mitzrayim was better. And because they listened to their yetzer hara, so Hashem punished these people by sending a makkah: Snakes suddenly appeared in the desert and began biting people. Many people were getting bitten by snakes and they didn't know what to do!

So Moshe Rabbeinu davened to Hashem, and Hashem told him that he should make a statue of a snake and put it on top of a pole. And then the people who were bitten should look at that snake and they would be healed.

And the Torah tells us that this is what happened — Moshe made a snake out of a metal called copper and put it on top of a pole for everyone to see. All those who were bitten by a snake looked up at the snake statue and were healed.

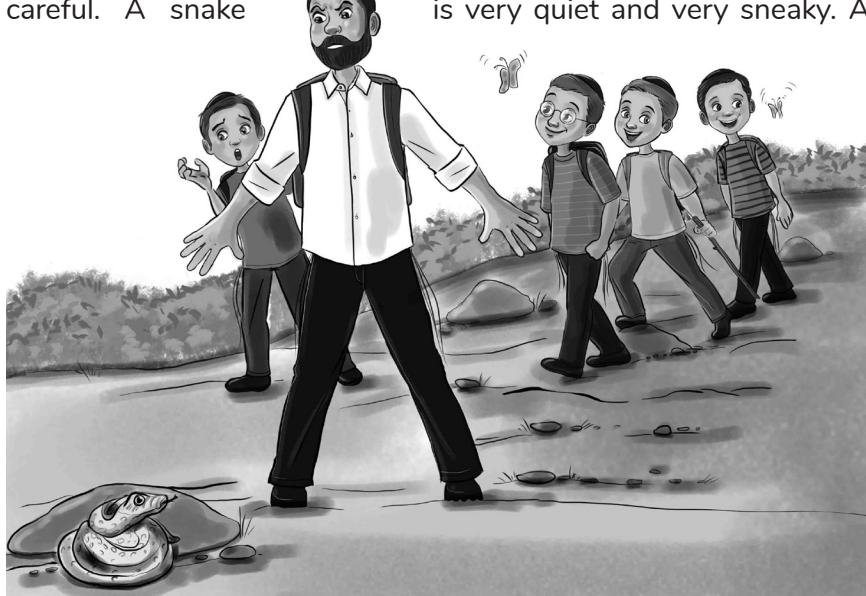
Now, if you all you did was learn this story, that's already very good. It's a story from the Torah and just learning the story is a great mitzvah. But we will try to go a step further and learn a lesson from this story that we can apply to our daily lives. We want to understand what this snake story is trying to teach us.

In the very first parshah of the Torah we learn what a snake is. Right away in Parshas Bereishis, the Torah introduces us to a very important malach — the yetzer hara. And in that story, the yetzer hara appears like a snake. Why a snake? Why not a bear, or a maybe a big tiger?

The answer is that the yetzer hara is very similar to a snake.

If you ever go hiking
are poisonous
careful. A snake

in the woods, in a place where there
snakes, you have to be very, very
is very quiet and very sneaky. A



snake also has something called “camouflage” — Hashem designed him so that he blends in with the ground he crawls on.

And that’s what makes a snake so dangerous — he can sneak up on you, chas v’shalom, and by the time you notice it, it’s too late.

Just like a snake, the yetzer hara is very sneaky. He hides himself and always tries to catch us where we expect him least.

Now, when the Yidden were complaining in the Midbar, they didn’t dream they were complaining because of the yetzer hara. We never realize that the yetzer hara is attacking us because he does such a good job hiding!

So what did Moshe Rabbeinu do? He made a snake out of copper. Copper blends in very well with the sands of the desert. If you’re in the desert, a copper-colored snake can come right up to you without you noticing. But if you pick it up and put it on a pole, all of a sudden it’s easy to see.

And that’s the important lesson that this story is supposed to teach us. The yetzer hara is very sneaky, and without us realizing, it puts ideas into our heads to make us unhappy with what we have.

The only way to fight this yetzer hara is to pick it up from the ground, hold it up high, and say, "Now I see you! All you are is a sneaky little snake. And I'm not going to let you make me unhappy anymore!"

So this parshah is teaching us the best trick for fighting the yetzer hara: Realize that he’s the yetzer hara, and you’re already fighting and winning!

Have a Wonderful Shabbos!