

The Snake in our Minds

Toras Avigdor

Adapted from the teachings
of Rav Avigdor Miller z"l

Junior

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Yosef Spolter giggled as he watched one monkey tap another monkey on the shoulder, grab his banana away from the other side and climb up a tree to hide. "I could stay here and watch the monkeys all day," said Yosef. "They're my favorite!"

"They're probably your favorite because they give you ideas about how to bother me," laughed Yosef's older brother Daniel.

Totty Spolter had taken Yosef and Daniel to the zoo as a reward for their learning the first perek of Mishnayos Brachos by heart, and they were enjoying their day together.

After about an hour of walking around they passed a stand where a man was selling refreshments and Totty offered to buy ices for the two sweaty boys. "It's pretty hot today and these Jumbo Rainbow Ices Deluxe will cool you off before we go into the next part of the zoo."

"I love rainbow ices," said Daniel. "Yeah," said Yosef. "There's nothing better than colorful ices! It's like having every taste in one food! Thank you so much, Totty!"

As the boys licked their ices and got ready to go into the next building, they heard the ding-a-ling of a bell and looked up to see a man selling refreshments from a different cart - and it had a big advertisement on it for Cholorov Yisroel ice cream! Yummy! Ice-cream! Yosef and Daniel watched with a little bit of jealousy as a family approached and each child chose a large cone with all the flavors and toppings they wanted.

"Come on boys; we've already cooled off enough with our ices," said Totty as he grabbed Daniel and Yosef by the hand. "Let's go into 'Reptile World,' and check out the snakes and lizards."

"But Totty," complained Yosef, "those ice cream cones look so good! Did you see that hot fudge with the colorful sprinkles?! Maybe we could also –"

"Not happening!" said Totty firmly. "You've already gotten a treat and you're not even halfway done!"

"I told you not to ask," said Daniel to Yosef as he nudged him. "You should have waited at least till we finished the ices."

The boys lowered their voices as they entered the cool, dark reptile house, filled with cages containing different types of lizards, turtles, and snakes. They stopped at the first cage and watched wide-eyed as a big chameleon sat on a branch catching flies with his tongue.

Then another cage caught their attention. The sign read "**King Cobra: (Ophiophagus hannah), also called hamadryad.** The world's longest venomous snake, it can deliver enough venom in a single bite to kill a large elephant."

“Wow!” said Daniel, “My science teacher Mr. Markowitz told us that an elephant usually weighs about 10,000 pounds. That must take a lot of poison!”

“But where is it?” asked Yosef. “I don’t see anything except for rocks and branches.”

“I see it,” said Totty. “Look carefully.”

The boys peered through the glass and suddenly jumped back. The dead branch right near the glass had suddenly picked up its head, looked directly at the boys, and flicked its poisonous tongue in and out.

“Wow Totty! I think my heart stopped beating for a few seconds. That was scary!” Yosef said, as they walked back out into the bright sunlight a few minutes later.

“Maybe that’s what the Nachash from Gan Eden looked like and – ” Daniel began to say, before getting distracted as they passed the Ice Cream cart again.

“Oh, please Totty, please? Please can we get one? It’s not fair that they are selling kosher ice cream here and all we got were these lousy ices! Please? Please?”

Totty stopped walking. “Yosef, Daniel; twenty minutes ago you were happily enjoying these ices. Suddenly you saw ice cream and now you don’t like the ices? Do you understand what just happened to you?”

“Yeah, we saw ice cream,” Yosef said, wondering what his father didn’t understand. It made perfect sense to Yosef – he was hungry for ice-cream now.

Totty smiled at the boys. “You know that what just happened to us with the ices and the ice cream is similar to what happened to the Am Yisroel in this week’s Parsha.”

“Before the Am Yisroel came to Eretz Yisroel they passed by other nations who lived nearby. And those nations were eating real food! Sure, the Yidden had the mann, but you couldn’t lick the mann like you lick a yummy ice cream.

“So when they passed by Midian or Amon and they saw children eating real ice cream, the Yetzer Harah began to crawl around their head and give them ideas. “Maybe it’s better over there,” they thought, and because they let the Yetzer Harah think for them they complained to Moshe Rabbeinu. And what did Hashem do? He sent poisonous snakes to punish them.

“The question is,” said Totty, “why snakes? Why not lions or elephants? Maybe wild gorillas? Everything Hashem does is for a reason – even when he punishes a person, every detail of the punishment is to teach a lesson.

“Daniel, you said a minute ago that the cobra reminded of the Nachash in Gan Eden. And we know that snake was really the malach called the Yetzer Hora only that Hashem chose to make it look like a snake. And really we should be bothered by the same question: Why did Hashem choose a snake. Maybe the Yetzer Harah should have come dressed up like a gorilla or a lion.

“Rav Avigdor Miller that Hashem made the Yetzer Hora look like a snake so that we should realize that the Yetzer Hora **acts** like a snake. You remember when that cobra jumped out at us and surprised us? It was hiding in plain sight; you thought it was nothing; just a harmless dead branch – you couldn’t even see it until it raised his head to bite. An elephant or a gorilla can’t do that – you’d notice it from far away. A snake camouflages itself among the brown earth and the leaves; that way it can creep up on someone and bite him without even being noticed. That’s the trick that a snake uses to fool you. It hides from you and makes you think it’s nothing until it bites and then it’s too late – unless you weigh more than a ten thousand pound elephant.

And that’s exactly how the Yetzer Hora works! He hides himself, putting ideas in our heads and making us want things, and we don’t even realize that it’s the Yetzer Harah crawling around in our heads trying to poison us.

And that’s why Hashem chose to send snakes to punish the complainers. If He had wanted He could have sent thousands of gorillas to punish the complainers, just like he punished the Mitzrim. But Hashem wanted davka a snake because He wanted to teach the Am Yisroel the secret tricks of the Yetzer Hora; about how a person can be happy and satisfied with what he has, but then the tricky snake begins to hide itself among your thoughts and make you unhappy.

“And the Bnei Yisroel learned that lesson forever! When they were surprised by the snakes that were hiding behind the branches and rocks they reminded themselves about the even more dangerous snake, the Yetzer Harah, who is also always hiding in your mind, trying to make you unhappy.

“And Boruch Hashem just now we were lucky enough to learn the same lesson the Bnei Yisroel did in the midbar – only that we were lucky enough to learn the lesson from a snake **behind** a glass while licking our delicious ices.”

Have a Wonderful Shabbos !



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