



February 10, 2024



Parshas Mishpatim

1st of Adar 1 5784

## The Unrewarded Frogs

I was once at a sheva berachos and heard the following great question. The Torah states that a slave who likes his master and chooses to remain with him rather than walk free must have a hole drilled through his ear. Rashi explains that we are telling the slave that his ear that heard the words at Har Sinai beckoning him to be a slave of Hashem, and only Hashem, should not be willfully accepting a human master upon himself; hence, it deserves a hole drilled through it.

The question is glaring. What did the ear do wrong? The ear was the only organ in his body that actually did the job it was supposed to do. It obediently listened to whatever was being said at Har Sinai. Why don't we drill a hole through the slave's hands, which stole and got him into slavery in the first place? Or why don't we drill a hole through his forehead for not internalizing the lessons he learned at Har Sinai? Why are we picking on the ear, which did precisely the job it was supposed to do?

The Imrei Emes (one of the previous Gerrer rebbes) gives the following answer. True, the slave's hands are at fault, and true, his brain is at fault, but had this slave been careful with what went into his ear, he would have had no trouble internalizing what he heard. Had this slave been careful to stay clear of lashon hara, gossip, his ears would have remained pure and would have enabled the slave to hear the powerful words uttered at Har Sinai. Steering clear of speaking and hearing lashon hara is what keeps our ears holy and in turn enables us to properly absorb the lessons the Torah teaches us.

When we were running for our lives getting out of Mitzrayim, the thousands of dogs that inhabited Egypt did something remarkable. They didn't let out a single bark. As sort of a salute when we left, they sat in silence instead of barking. We know that the Torah rewards the dogs for their respect by stating that any food that we cannot halachically consume should be thrown specifically to dogs. The question is why the frogs in Egypt didn't receive a similar sort of reward. During the second plague, the frogs terrorized the Egyptians and even went so far as jumping into Egyptian ovens. Why isn't there some form of reward for them, much like there is for the dogs?

### Jump Into The Furnace

The Kotzker Rebbe explained that in life it is sometimes easier to jump into a fiery furnace than to keep one's mouth shut. Avraham jumped into a furnace to avoid bowing to idols and the Torah makes no mention of it, and yet when

Avraham served three Arab wanderers a meal the Torah recounts the entire story. Why? Explains the Kotzker, the Torah wants us to go out of our comfort zone. Avraham was a man of pride. He was a man that exuded confidence in his convictions. He was firm as a rock. To a certain degree, jumping into the furnace is what one would expect of him. In contrast, on day three of his *milah* recovery, Avraham was in extraordinary pain. It was excruciatingly hot, and yet he ran to serve the three Arabs with zeal and glee, completely disregarding his tremendously uncomfortable state.

The ability to keep one's mouth shut from speaking lashon hara goes against one's comfort zone. Plugging one's ears when a friend is saying lashon hara requires going against one's personal desires. But it is also what separates the men from the boys. The ability to act correctly even when it is contrary to what the peanut gallery has determined as "normal" is the ultimate praise a man can get.

When we drill that hole into the slave's ear, we are telling the slave that far too many unholy things entered that ear and should have been filtered out. We are telling the slave that had he been courageous enough to stop the slander and gossip around him, he would have ears that could properly listen to the ethics of the Torah. Allowing our ears to remain submerged in the mud of the gossipers and the coffee room prevents our ears from rising to hear the sweet sounds of the pure Torah. A man courageous enough to stand up for what is right even at the expense of awkwardly shutting down gossip-mongering conversations is a man with special holy ears.

### **The Horrific Hagbah**

Once, in the Ponovezh Yeshiva, a *bochur* got up to do *hagbah* and the unthinkable happened. He dropped the Sefer Torah! Being that this happened in a room with one thousand people in it, it immediately became the talk of the town. "What happened?" "Who was it?" "Is he a weakling?" "He'll probably never get *hagbah* again." After a few days of this, Rav Shach, the Rosh Yeshiva, walked to the middle of the room, in the middle of *seder*, banged on the *bimah* and proclaimed with a thunderous cry, "Better to drop a Sefer Torah by accident ten times than to listen to one word of *lashon hara* even once!"

Our ears are a roadway to our souls. If we filter them well, our souls soar. If we don't, we end up a slave to the gossip-mongers of society, and if history has taught us a thing or two, those people make terrible masters. Better to plug the ear and live the high life with one Master and one Master only: the One Above.