

So they say that practice makes perfect. Before a boy puts on תפילין, he practices for a little while to be able to do his תפילין properly. How can we practice for the very important and concept of חסידות? חסידות is something that has characterized the Jewish nation since its very beginning. We'll explore a source for this in a moment, but how do we practice for חסידות, which, fortunately for us (at least in our circumstances), is not a physical experience? For so many millions of Jews throughout history - in Europe, Russia, Spain, and elsewhere - it tragically was.

It's my own personal מנהג to have four things in mind when I say קריאת שמע in the morning. Either right before שמע, or while I'm saying שמע - usually right before, at the בוקר בעמו ישראל באהבה - I pause for a moment and think about these four things. This is my own מנהג, which I don't usually share, but for family, I'll make an exception and divulge this part of my daily עבודה.

The first concept is קבלת עול מלכות שמים, which is, of course, the primary כוונה we are instructed to have in mind. The second is קבלת עול מלכות שמים for חסידות נפש - I accept upon myself the willingness to be מוסר נפש. The third is the מצוה of קריאת שמע, both שחרית and ערבית, fulfilling the מצוה of קריאת שמע itself. The last concept, which I learned later in life, is to aspire to the כוונות of the דורות הקדמונים. I don't claim to reach their מדרגה, but I strive to connect to their כוונות in some way, to elevate my חסידות נפש through that aspiration. These thoughts help me focus on the idea of חסידות נפש and remind me of the dedication required for kiddush Hashem.

Now, where do we see an example of חסידות נפש in this week's פרשת וארא? The pasuk says (7:28): וַיִּשְׂרֹץ הָאֵרֶץ צִפְרֹדְעִים וַעֲלּוּ וַבָּאֻּ בְּבֵיתָהּ וּבְחֹדֶר מִשְׁכָּבָהּ וְעַל מִטָּתָהּ וּבְבֵיתָהּ וּבְעַמֻּדָהּ וּבְתִנּוּרֶיהָ וּבְמִשְׁאָרֹתֶיהָ. מוסר נפש על קידוש השם, חנניה, מישאל, ועזריה, who were קל וחומר from the פסוק: If the צפרדעים, who are not commanded in kiddush Hashem, jumped into the ovens as the פסוק describes, then certainly we, who are commanded in kiddush Hashem, must be מוסר נפש for Hashem's honor.

The אריה poses a קשיא on this קל וחומר. He asks, how can we say that the צפרדעים were not מצוה when the פסוק explicitly commands them וַעֲלּוּ וַבָּאֻּ? The גר"א, who was only seven years old at the time, offered a תירוץ to this קשיא: True, the צפרדעים were commanded to enter the houses, but they were not specifically commanded to jump into the ovens. Each frog could have avoided the תנור and chosen a bed or another location. Yet, they chose to demonstrate חסידות נפש by racing to the תנורים. That's the element from where חנניה, מישאל, ועזריה made the קל וחומר - that the צפרדעים went beyond their explicit ציווי out of a desire to sanctify Hashem's name. The אריה was so impressed with this answer that, according to the story, he picked up the young גר"א and kissed him on the forehead.

What is the takeaway? Each of us must strive in our own lives to seize opportunities for kiddush Hashem, whether through positive actions or, if necessary, through חסידות נפש. This is how we demonstrate our dedication to our בורא and bring נחת שמים.

Before concluding, I want to address a famous קשיא related to פרעה. If פרעה - Hashem hardened פרעה's heart - how could he be punished if his בחירה הפשית was taken away? This is a monumental מחלוקת among the מפרשים, but I've always been drawn to the תירוץ of בית הלוי. Hashem didn't remove פרעה's free will; rather, He restored it. When פרעה was ready to release בני ישראל out of fear of the מכות, Hashem strengthened his heart to remove that fear, giving him the ability to choose freely. Without the coercion of fear, פרעה chose to persist in his defiance. So that's a fantastic תירוץ for this very fundamental קשיא of בחירה הפשית. Have a good שבת!

This דבר תורה was said לעלוי נשמת
אמי מורתי תמר רייזל בת מרדכי צבי
אהרן בן יששכר ע"ה
and my brother. אברהם יהודה בו אהרו ע"ה



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