

A Taste of Torah

Stuck on a Stick

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Does snake on a stick sound Jewish to you? At first blush, it would sound like a delicacy limited to those who do not maintain a kosher diet and live outside most large Jewish communities. Nothing very Jewish about that, right? On to the next booth.

I have news for you. Snake on a stick has a longer Jewish history than matzah balls and gefilte fish. Indeed, in this week's parsha, the Jewish People complain about the manna, and Hashem sends poisonous snakes to bite them as punishment for their ingratitude. The Jews realize their error and ask Moshe to intercede on their behalf. Moshe obliges, and is instructed by Hashem to create a snake and place it upon a pole; Moshe fashions a copper snake and puts it up. Those who have been attacked by one of the venomous reptiles, says Hashem, will gaze upon this elevated serpent and be healed.

Our Sages (Rosh Hashana 3:8) famously asks, "Now, does the snake cause death or life?! Rather, whenever the Israelites would gaze upward and subjugate their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they would be healed..."

The above mishnah seems to indicate that the snake itself did not have any healing powers; it was merely a means to get the people to look toward Heaven and remember and return to Hashem.

Yet oddly and ironically, we are told that over time, this copper snake evolved into an idol in its own right. The verse in Kings 2 (18:4) states that King Chizkiyah, during his campaign to destroy idols, crushed the serpent, for the Jews had taken to offering incense before it. If the snake never

had any real power, but was a mere ploy to draw the eye skyward, why would anyone mistake it for an idol?

The Rambam (Laws of Idolatry 1:1) tells us that idolatry began when people had the bright idea of bringing gifts to the servants who work for Hashem. "Isn't it proper," they reasoned, "for us to show our appreciation to Hashem for His Creation by bringing offerings to His servants, such as the sun, moon and stars?" Over time, people brought more and more gifts to the agents, and forgot about their original Master, Hashem Himself.

Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner (1749-1821), in his magnum opus *Nefesh Hachaim* (3:12), states that the purpose of the copper snake was not merely to draw attention to the heavens. The snake is the epitome of evil - think Adam, Eve, Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Jewish People needed to look at the snake and recognize Who is ultimately behind everything in this world, be it good or evil. When they looked at the snake, they were looking at evil incarnate - and past it. They had to focus their gaze on their Father in Heaven and recognize that the snake itself has no power to harm or heal; all that comes from Hashem Himself. When they internalized this lofty recognition, the snake and its venom held no power over them, and they recovered from its ill effects.

Based on these two sources, perhaps we can explain how the copper snake devolved into idolatry. At the time King Chizkiyah ascended the throne, the Jewish People had slipped and begun to worship idols. They were unable to directly connect to the ultimate Source, and felt a need to connect to spiritual

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Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Stories for the Soul

Red Carpet Treatment

based on a story on achim.org

A man phoned the Manchester Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Yehuda Zev Segal (1910-1993), for advice regarding a job offer. The opportunity seemed promising, but his pursuit of it was likely to lead to squabbling among a number of parties. Rabbi Segal advised against pursuing the offer. The fellow was very disappointed, bemoaning his lack of income. Rabbi Segal encouraged the man to place his trust in Hashem and conferred his blessings.

Soon after, the business in which the man had been offered a position collapsed, while he became a partner in a successful carpet business. One day, the man was escorting Rabbi Segal somewhere when they passed a hotel. The sidewalk was piled high with worn carpets which had obviously just been replaced. "Oy!" the man exclaimed. "New carpets for a hotel! Another order that didn't come my way!"

Rabbi Segal was not pleased with the remark. "Where is your *bitachon* (trust in Hashem)?" he demanded. "Whatever earnings Heaven has decreed for you will surely come your way. And what right do you have to complain? You have much success and goodness in life!"

A stranger nearby overheard this conversation. He approached them and introduced himself as a real estate investor whose enterprises sometimes required the purchase and installation of carpets. Rabbi Segal's companion gave the man his business card. Eight months later, the investor called to say that he had purchased a huge tract of land near a train station and would be

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Kollel Happenings

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention bachurim in Denver over the summer! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday. Night seder begins at 8 pm, with ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the sedorim. For further details, info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

SFAS EMES: A PIERCING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

It is one of the most widely-studied works of our time. Sfas Emes gives us a glimpse into the infinite depths of Torah and Jewish thought. Kollel Scholar Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky is an expert in this great work, and a master in bringing its timeless lessons into daily life. Join Rabbi Karnowsky on Thursdays, 8:15-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

THE LETTERS OF THE LAW: THE MELACHOS OF SHABBOS

Rabbi Shmuel Halpern received *semicha* (ordination) from Beth Medrash Govoha in 2016 and has spent the past four years receiving *shimush* (training in practical halacha) from Rabbi Micha Cohn of Lakewood. Rabbi Halpern now shares his halachic expertise in this weekly class that will help familiarize you with the laws of Shabbos. Monday evenings 8-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What food may not be consumed by non-Jews and Jews alike?

A: *Aiver min hachai*, consuming a part of a living animal, is one of the seven mitzvos non-Jews are commanded to observe (Sanhedrin 56a).

This week's question: There is a Torah prohibition of *aiver min hachai*, consuming a part of a living animal. What common food items are exceptions to this prohibition?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Noda BiYehuda Part XII

Following his father's passing, Rabbi Shmuel Landau succeeded him as head of the *Bais Din* (Jewish court) of Prague.

He carried on his father's legacy of battling the various Jewish movements that threatened traditional Judaism.

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powers that Hashem had created. The copper snake's entire existence was predicated upon this challenge - see the snake and realize where its power really comes from, or get stuck with the snake itself! While the Israelites in the desert may have succeeded in making the jump from snake to Hashem, their descendants failed to do so - they focused on the snake.

Idolatry, strictly speaking, is worship of an entity other than G-d Himself. In a deeper sense, it is placing one's faith in anything besides G-d Himself. Trust in the Almighty Dollar smacks of idolatry - many pettily think that cash will improve their lives, forgetting that a good life is dependent upon Hashem alone. Some believe that science can and will conquer all diseases, sooner or later, neglecting a reality that G-d is the true Healer of all flesh. Others think that having the right politician in

office will create peace and prosperity at home and abroad, ignoring the fact that "the heart of a king is in the hand of Hashem." (Proverbs 21:1)

Adam and Eve themselves faced this challenge in the Garden of Eden - to see that the Snake they faced was a mere agent of Hashem, and listening to it over its Creator was sheer lunacy. Their spiritual greatness, and the magnitude of the test they faced, defies our imagination and is beyond our conceptual grasp. But they failed. And it is up to us, in our small yet great way, to rectify their tragic error, to do our utmost to recognize that when all is said and done, nothing else will save us. Embassy relocations and nuclear missiles, vaccines and superbugs, presidents and prime ministers - they are useless, harmless, hopeless. Unless the one Source of them all wills them to have an effect.

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needing carpeting for the many stores and offices which he planned to build there.

In this week's parsha, Hashem assures Moshe that he needn't worry about

battling the mighty kings Sichon and Og - Hashem would deal with them. Hashem can do what He pleases, no matter how hopeless things seem - it is left for us to trust in Him.