

Zera Shimshon

Profound Divrei Torah culled from the writings of the Gaon and Mekubal Rav Shimshon Chaim ben Rav Nachman Michael Nachmeni zy"l, author of Sefer Zera Shimshon on Chumash and Toldos Shimshon on Pirkei Avos, who promised that all who study his words will be blessed with an abundance of good, wealth and honor, and will merit to see children and grandchildren thriving around their table.



תשפ"א Va'eira

• Zera Shimshon - the Limud that brings Yeshuos •

גלייך 120

אמרות שמשון

Why the Torah Refers to Yisro's Idolatrous Past Even After He Repented

ואלעזר בן אהרן לקח לו מבנות פוטיאל לו לאשה ותלד לו את פינחס וכו': (שמות ו כה)

Elazar the son of Aharon took for himself from the daughters of Putiel as a wife, and she bore Pinchas...

Rashi describes what the name 'Putiel' alludes to. מזרע יתרו שפטם עגלים לעבודת - אלילים - Putiel alludes to her ancestor, Yisro, who is called 'Putiel' because he fattened calves for idol worship before he learned about Hashem. [i.e. פוטיאל is interpreted as a contraction of two words, פטם - he fattened, and לאל - to the idol gods.]

The allusion of this name seems hard to comprehend in light of what the Gemara in Bava Metzia (נח ע"ב) teaches us. לא תונו איש את עמיתו. באונאת דברים הכתוב מדבר. אתה אומר באונאת דברים וכו'. הא כיצד. אם היה בעל - תשובה אל יאמר לו זכור מעשיך הראשונים וכו'. The Torah states, 'And a man shall not wrong his fellow'. The Passuk is discussing verbal wrongdoing... How so? If someone repented from his wrong ways, one should not say to him, "Remember your past deeds". If someone descended from converts, one should not say to him, "Remember the deeds of your forefathers". In view of this, we need to understand why the Torah would refer to the righteous convert, Yisro, as 'Putiel' in reference to the cows that he used to fatten for idol worship, as this would seem to be a direct transgression of that which the Torah commands us, לא תונו איש את עמיתו - A man shall not wrong his fellow.

The Torah recounts (במדבר כה ו-יא) the following incident. The Nasi of the tribe of Shimshon came and brought a Midyanite woman before Moshe and before the eyes of the entire assembly, and said to Moshe,

"Moshe is this Midyanite woman permitted or forbidden? If you will say she is forbidden, who permitted the daughter of Yisro to you?" Pinchas, son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen, saw and stood up from amid the assembly and took a spear in his hand. He followed the Nasi into the tent and pierced him and the Midyanite woman. Hashem then told Moshe, "Pinchas, son of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen, turned back My wrath from upon the Children of Israel, when he zealously avenged My vengeance among them'.

Rashi explains that the reason why Hashem recounted Pinchas's ancestry up to Aharon, 'is because the tribes mocked Pinchas by saying, "Did you see the son of Puti [i.e. this is a shortened form of Putiel] whose mother's father fattened calves for idolatry yet he killed the Nasi of a tribe of Israel!" Therefore, the Passuk comes and traces Pinchas's ancestry to Aharon' [i.e. to teach us that it was in keeping with the values of his saintly grandfather, Aharon, that Pinchas killed the adulterer].

Seemingly, the mockers believed that because Pinchas married the granddaughter of a priest who had at one time been involved with fattening cows for idol worship, he therefore was not worthy of killing a Jewish Nasi. Their

reasoning was according to that which the Gemara in Avodah Zara (ז" ע"א) says that one who is fanatically devoted to idol worship will never be able to fully repent. The mockers thus maintained, albeit wrongly, that because Yisro had at least at one time been so fanatically dedicated to pagan worship, so much as to fatten cows on their behalf, it was impossible to say that Yisro had truly repented, and thus a grandchild of his should not be the one to kill a Nasi of an entire Jewish tribe.



In view of this, we can understand that although the name 'Putiel' does indeed infer to the fattening of calves for idolatrous worship, nevertheless it does not imply negatively about Yisro, but rather connotes very favorably on his behalf. This is because the name 'Putiel'

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conveys the idea that although Yisro was so radically obsessed with his idols - even fattening cows for their worship - and thus clearly had a very hard time repenting and leaving go of his idolatrous ways, nonetheless he did subsequently repent and abandon his sinful idol worship.

זרע שמשון פרשתנו אות ה

Why the fish died during the plague of blood

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' וַיִּרְם בַּמַּטֵּה וַיִּד אֶת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר לְעֵינֵי פְרֻעָה וּלְעֵינֵי עַבְדָּיו וַיִּהְיֶה כֹּל הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר לְדָם וַהֲרִגָה אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר מֵתָה ... (זכ - כא)

Moshe and Aharon did so, as Hashem had commanded, and he held the staff aloft and struck the water that was in the river in the presence of Pharaoh and in the presence of his servants, and all the water that was in the river changed to blood. And the fish that were in the river died...

It would seem that the reason the fish died during the plague of Blood, was simply due to the lack of oxygen in the river's waters when they turned into blood. What we need to understand is; if the fish died naturally when the water turned to blood, why did the Torah see it important to tell us about it, being that it was nothing more than a natural outcome?

We need to understand why indeed the fish died, as the Gemara in Megillah (יב ע"ב) says, במדה שאדם מודד בה מודדין לו - With the measure that a man measures, the Heavenly tribunal measures out to him, i.e. in the manner that one deals with others, Hashem will deal with him. Accordingly, because the Egyptians bestowed goodness upon the Jews by freely providing them with fish, as the Jews clearly acknowledged when they said, נאכל את הדגה אשר נאכל - במצרים חנם - We remember the fish that we would eat in Egypt for free, therefore, this merit in itself should have sufficed to prevent the fish from dying, so that the Egyptians should not bear a loss in that distinct entity with which they had bestowed goodness upon the Jews.

The answer seems to be that when the Jews said נאכל את הדגה אשר נאכל - We remember the fish that we would eat in Egypt for free, it doesn't mean 'free of charge' as the Gemara in Yuma explains, rather is referring to something else entirely, as the Midrash, quoted in Rashi, explains. If you would say that this means that the Egyptians would give them fish free of charge, this cannot be so, for has it not already said, 'Straw will not be given to

you'; if the Egyptians would not give them straw free of charge, would they give them fish free of charge? What, then, did they mean when they said 'free'? They meant, 'free from any obligations to perform the commandments of the Torah'.

Nonetheless, it is still hard to understand why the fish died, for although the Jews might have not eaten the fish entirely free of charge, nevertheless, they definitely were nourished from those fish, as the Jews themselves proclaimed, 'We remember the fish that we would eat in Egypt'; therefore that in itself should have sufficed to keep the fish alive, so that the Jews should continue to have from where to eat and be nourished.

We can explain this phenomenon according to the Midrash (שמו"ר ט"ו ט"ו) which expounds on it as follows. **And the fish that were in the river died.** The great scholar, R' Avin the Levite, said: The Jews became wealthy from the plague of Blood. How so? Picture an Egyptian and a Jew living together in one house, and the barrel there is full of water. When the Egyptian would go fill his ladle from inside the barrel, he would take it out full of blood, while the Jew is drinking water from inside the barrel. The Egyptian says to him, "Give me a little water from your own hand", but when the Jew gives it to him it becomes blood. The Egyptian then says to the Jew, "Let you and I drink from one bowl", and even so the Jew drinks water while the Egyptian drinks blood. However, when the Egyptian would purchase the water from the Jew with money, he would drink water. From these transactions the Jews became wealthy.

We need to grasp how Rav Avin was able to discern, from the fact that the fish died, that the Jews had become wealthy. We can explain that Rav Avin was bothered by this very question that we just posed; he found it hard to understand why the fish would die when that was the source of the Jew's livelihood. Consequently, he surmised that the Jews must have become rich from this very plague, and thus no longer had any need for the fish to sustain them.

We can now understand why the Torah felt it to be significant to tell us that the fish died. For we can say that, in truth, the water never actually turned into actual blood, rather it only appeared that way as a way to punish the Egyptians by making them be repulsed from drinking the water. Therefore, naturally speaking, the fish did not have to die. But nevertheless, they did die as punishment to the Egyptians. And as for the livelihood of the Jews? No need to worry, for the Jews all became wealthy during this plague, and no longer had any need for the fish.

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