

Va'ai'ra 5779

BS"D Parashat Va'ai'ra 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Frogs in the Oven

The Book of Daniel, chapter 3, relates that King Nevuchadnetzer of Babylon erected a statue in the capital which was to be worshipped by representatives of the many lands and peoples he had conquered.

The King was informed that three of his Jewish administrators, Chananya, Misha'el and Azarya refused to bow to the idol. Nevuchadnetzer gave them the choice of either bowing down or being thrown into a fiery furnace and seeing if their God would save them. The Talmud (Pesachim 53b) records the deliberations which led up to their choice to offer up their lives on kidush HaShem (sanctification of the name of God):

אָס זײַנען געווען דער צוועיטער פֿאַרשטאַנד, און זיי האָבן זיך צו געזאָגט
... 'אָס זײַנען געווען דער צוועיטער פֿאַרשטאַנד [דער צוועיטער פֿאַרשטאַנד] און זיי האָבן זיך צו געזאָגט
אָס זײַנען געווען דער צוועיטער פֿאַרשטאַנד און זיי האָבן זיך צו געזאָגט

“Chananya, Misha’el and Azarya decide on what their mode of action would be from the frogs in the second of the ten plagues. The frogs are not commanded to give their lives in the sanctification of the name of HaShem, however, we as Jews, are so commanded. The frogs went into the burning ovens as it says (Shemot 7) ‘and they will come into the ovens’, then we certainly have to give our lives for the sanctification of the holy name, even in the ovens”.

After reading this, I wondered why they said that the frogs

were not commanded to go into the ovens. Did God not command Moses to tell Pharaoh (Shemot 7,28) "And the river will swarm with frogs, which shall go up and come into your house, and into your bed chamber and upon your bed ...and into your ovens and into your kneading troughs!?"

I submit: HaShem indeed said that the frogs would enter the ovens, but He did not state which particular frog would do so. When the frogs entered a house, one would say, "The verse states that we will come into the house. Therefore, I am hereby fulfilling His wishes by sitting on this easy chair in the living room watching TV". The second frog sees the verse which says, "and into your bed chamber", and he hops onto the thick soft carpet, thereby also fulfilling God's command. A third frog reads the verse which says, "and upon your bed", and jumps between the sheets and dozes off, thereby also fulfilling God's wishes. However, another frog sees that the verse also reads "and into your ovens", and he jumps into the oven to sanctify the Holy Name.

In our times, people who are true to God's Torah have taken upon themselves a multitude of obligations. Some sanctify the Holy Name while living in the galut and writing a yearly check to some institution in the holy land, but have no desire to actually step foot in the "dangerous" Middle East. They are like the frogs on the couch.

Others choose to live in Baltimore or Cleveland or New York, where they study Torah and support the land of Israel by visiting here every several years, but aliya is not on their agenda. They are like the frogs sleeping on the thick bedroom rug.

Others live in Tel Aviv where they tie their existence to the fate of the Jewish state but rarely visit Yerushalayim, because who knows what some insane Arab might do.

Others brave to live in Yerushalayim, even in the Old City,

but never dream of being a soldier in Tzahal.

However, we are blessed with dedicated, sincere and loyal Israeli youth who jump into the fire to defend the Holy Land and its people. They are the thin green line that stands between the redemption of our people and those who seek to destroy HaShem's chosen nation.

Conclusion: How we use the short time that HaShem grants us on this planet is determined by our freedom to choose. To learn Torah, perform mitzvot and take part in the physical defense of this land, is the ultimate sanctification of HaShem's name.

Shabbat Shalom,

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