

“And these shall be impure to you among the creeping things that creep upon the earth: the weasel and the mouse, and the tortoise according to its variety.” (11:29)

There is an intriguing *Midrash* that comments on the word “v’zeh,” “and these,” with which our *pasuk* begins. *Chazal* tell us Hashem showed Moshe *Rabbeinu* four things with His finger because Moshe was puzzled by them. He showed him how the *shemen ha’mishchah*, oil of anointing, was made. Second, He showed Moshe the work of the *Menorah*. Third, He showed him the creeping things that are ritually impure. Also, He showed him the moon, so that Moshe would know when the new month was to be sanctified. In each case the word “zeh,” this, was used to indicate a special emphasis made by Hashem in showing Moshe the intended subject. The *Midrash* ends with the following statement: “He stirred up the fire and showed him the salamander, for it says in *Sefer Tehillim* 29:7, “*Kol Hashem chotzeiv la’havos eish*,” “The voice of Hashem hews out flames of fire.” When did He do this? When He said, “And these shall be ritually impure to you.”

What is the *Midrash* teaching us with the last statement concerning the salamander? *Horav Mordechai Rogov, z.l.*, in his *Ateres Mordechai* has a compelling explanation of this *Midrash*. Hashem was intimating to Moshe that *Klal Yisrael* would be subject to trial by fire. There would be difficult and trying times in Jewish history when we would encounter persecution and tribulation of the worst kind. The “stirring of the fire” which the *Midrash* mentions, is a reference to the periods of affliction when our enemies would burn our bodies and destroy our lives. Yet, it was at this very time that Hashem showed Moshe the “salamander,” a creature which *Chazal* in the *Talmud Chagiga* 27a say is created and formed from fire. Consequently, this creature is immune to the effects of fire.

Fire destroys everything but fire. *Klal Yisrael* is likened to the salamander for they will **not** be consumed by the flames of persecution. Those who attempt to annihilate us will not succeed. We have been in *galus*, exile, for over two thousand years. How many fires have been set to destroy us? Torquemada did not succeed and neither did Hitler. Nations have come and gone, but *Klal Yisrael* will live forever. A nation forged in fire will not be destroyed by fire. The *Navi Yirmiyahu* says, “So says Hashem; is not My word like fire” (23:29). We have the power of the salamander within us as we cling to the Torah, Hashem’s word.

Rav Rogov offers a powerful insight. When was the message regarding the salamander revealed to Moshe? In what context was it related to him? It was in connection to the laws of kosher foods that Hashem stressed our relationship to the salamander. If, in fact, the Torah is still adhered to even after our long and agonizing exile, it is on account of our care and concern specifically to the laws of prohibited foods. These spiritually defiled foods contaminate one’s heart, thereby breaking down one’s resistance to the effects of the fires of exile.

What a powerful statement! Our bodies are not simple bodies. They are the repository of the holy *neshamah*, soul, given to us by Hashem. This container must be cared for by following the “directions” given by its “Maker.” A vital factor that is necessary if our bodies are to retain their holy spirit, be strong, and able to resist the harmful spiritual and physical challenges of the exile, is by scrupulously adhering to the laws of *Kashrus*.