

"Make for you a poisonous serpent and set it on a high pole. And it shall come to pass that everyone that is bitten when he looks upon it shall live." (21:8)

The purpose of the serpent's bite was to alert the people to the dangers which lurk in the wilderness. This awareness would make *Bnei Yisrael* cognizant of Hashem's miraculous power which had kept these dangerous creatures far away from them in the past. Indeed, the people had not even known of their existence.

When an individual was bitten, he had only to transfix the serpent's image upon his mind. This image would remind him that even when he is protected from these serpents, through Hashem's graciousness, the danger is a real one. This thought reinforces the concept that every breath we take is a unique gift from Hashem. We all experience disappointments which render us impatient, even angry. Nothing is so thoroughly calculated to help us cope with daily frustrations than the conviction that there is an abyss on the narrow edge of the path of life. We tread confidently on this path, unaware of Hashem's guiding and protecting hand which veils the dangers from our sight.

Thus, the punishment meted out to these people was the removal of the protective custody which had until then kept the serpent hidden and innocuous in the desert. Consequently, the appropriate antidote for one who had been bitten was to gaze at the serpent on the staff. This created a permanent imprimatur of the serpent, so that the individual perpetually remembers Hashem's beneficence in protecting him from danger.