

## **The frogs died from the houses, from the courtyards, and from the field... He removed the swarm of wild beasts from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people – not one remained. (8:9,27)**

The frogs (most of them) died. The *arov*, wild beasts, and *arbeh*, locust, did not. *Kli Yakar* explains that Hashem sought to teach that one who gives himself up for *Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem's Name, will be saved. Thus, those frogs that climbed into the burning hot ovens belonging to the Egyptians – lived. The other frogs, who did not enter the ovens, but rather “chose” to invade the country, the fields, the homes – died. The ones that risked death for the glory of Hashem were spared; the others were not. It was this lesson that Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah called to mind when they made the decision to sacrifice their lives *Al Kiddush Hashem*.

The *Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 13:4)* says, “We derive from here that one who relinquishes his life *Al Kiddush Hashem* – is spared. One who refuses to give up his life (should know) that *Harbei shluchim laMakom*, Hashem has many agents to catalyze one's designated death. In other words; if it is one's time to die – he will die, regardless of his actions. If it is not his time, then giving up his life *Kiddush Hashem* will not harm him. This is why, counterintuitively, the frogs that did not enter the ovens died, while those who gave themselves up for *Kiddush Hashem* were saved.

*Chazal (Talmud Taanis 18b)* set the standard for sanctifying Hashem's Name for the purpose of saving Jewish People. They cite the actions of the *harugei Lod*, the martyrs of Lod, that no creature can stand in their (holy, exalted) presence. The *Talmud* relates the incident for which these two men earned such distinction. The daughter of the king was found dead, and immediately a false rumor went out that the Jews were behind the murder. The natural, but sadly not uncommon, response to such allegations was to first decree the death of all of the Jews and then investigate. When they saw that the only way to annul this decree was to assume responsibility, two Jewish men, Lulianus and Papus, came forward to take the blame. The king executed these two martyrs, and the community was spared.

The dialogue between Turyanus and the martyrs is recorded in the *Talmud*: “If you are descendants of Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah, let your G-d come and save you from death as He saved them from King Nevuchadnezar,” the king said. The martyrs replied, “They were holy and worthy Jews, and Nevuchadnezar was a king worthy of being a catalyst for a miracle. We were destined to die for Hashem. If you will not kill us, then Hashem has many agents. Many bears and lions abound that can carry out the Heavenly decree. Furthermore, you are an evil king (not of the caliber of Nevuchadnezar and, thus, unworthy of being involved in a miracle.) Hashem chose you to be His agent, because He will, in the future, mete out His vengeance against you.” *Chazal* state that, despite their response and the threat of Divine vengeance notwithstanding, Turyanus executed them, just before a pair of officers came from Rome bearing an imperial edict against

Turyanus. The officers split open the head of Turyanus.

In the city of Vyzon (Vyzuonos) an ancient Lithuanian town, an incident occurred which is recorded in the *Sefer Gedolei Hadoros* (cited in *Niflaosecha Asicha*). A Jewish apostate whose animus for the Jewish community was beyond rationale (he was rejected for his heresy and conversion) committed an egregious act of terror against the Jewish community. (Sadly, such self-loathing which manifests itself with acts of vengeance against the Jewish community was not uncommon. We have been dealing with self-loathing for as long as there has been hatred). *Erev Hoshanah Rabbah*, when all was quiet, he hid a crucifix (with the godhead attached) under one of the benches in the *shul*. He then told the local priest, a rabid anti-Semite, that on *Hoshanah Rabbah* the Jews strike the crucifix against the floor, basically defiling their sacred godhead. Soldiers immediately surrounded the *shul* and, following a search (this was after *chibut aravah*, when the *aravah* is struck on the ground five times), they arrested all of the men and brought them to Vilna, the capital city. They were (of course) immediately found guilty and given the death penalty, which meant being hung in the town square.

At that moment, one of the members of the community, whose name was Menachem Mann, came forward and “confessed” his guilt, thereby removing the onus from the community. This unique individual sacrificed his life to save the community. As a result, the community of Vyzon always made a special, “*Keil malei rachachamim* (Prayer for the Dead) four times a year (during the *Yizkor*, memorial, service) in memory of Rabbi Menachem Mann *HaKadosh*, who gave up his life to save their community.

It is not all about willingness to give up one’s life for Hashem. Veritably, there are those who would come forward at the bat of an eyelash to relinquish their lives, but to arise early in the morning to attend *davening* on time is for them a formidable challenge. Giving up their money to help a friend in need is, for them, a no-brainer, but to refrain from speaking during *davening* or to attend a *seder* or *shiur* comes with great difficulty. They want to demonstrate their love for Hashem through great deeds – not “mediocre” ones. *Mesiras nefesh* comes easy to them, because they truly love Hashem, but they want to show their love in “big” way. If they cannot give a *kiddush* in *shul* with all the trimmings – they will not give a *kiddush* – period. It is either all or nothing.

*Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl* (quoted by *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*), explained this is the context of the *shofar* that we blow on *Rosh Hashanah*, as a *zchus*, merit, for *Klal Yisrael*. We blow the *shofar* as a “reminder” to Heaven of the participation of Yitzchak *Avinu* and his father, Avraham *Avinu*, in the *Akeidas Yitzchak*. It was this outstanding, unprecedented act of selfless *mesiras nefesh* which infused this *middah*, character trait, into our collective DNA.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* asked why the *shofar* is singled out more so than the *maacheles*, knife, that Avraham prepared to use to slaughter Yitzchak. He explained that many people are prepared to execute great deeds – even to be slaughtered with a knife – to demonstrate their abiding, all-consuming love for Hashem. As a result, the knife, which indicates a Jew’s readiness to be *moser*

*nefesh* for Hashem, is not all that significant. It is a natural trait endemic to our People. Instead, we take a *shofar*, the ram's horns were caught in the *s'vach*, thistle. *S'vach* also means *sibuchim*, confusions, problems, challenges, issues. The *kunst*, trick, is to serve Hashem even when one is overwhelmed with *sibuchim*. To pass those, relatively speaking, minor tests can be considered greater *mesiras nefesh* than the greater life-altering tests. Challenges are relative. Some of us can relate better to the "exotic" challenges, but fail dismally in the everyday arena of challenge. Some people thrive on crisis, but ignore the mundane challenges that confront us on a regular basis.

The path of life is strewn with difficulty and pain. What hurts one person does not necessarily afflict another. It is all relative. Furthermore, man cannot comprehend the implications of every given situation in life. One thing is for certain: without Hashem, we are totally helpless. We shore up our faith for the greater challenges, but do not realize that getting out of bed in the morning on time to *daven* properly is a difficult challenge for some. As we appeal to Hashem for what appear to be staggering challenges, we should, likewise, turn to Him for all of life's situations with which we grapple regularly, almost on a daily basis.