

Make for yourself a fiery serpent and set it upon a pole; and it shall be that everyone that is bitten when he sees it, shall live. (21:8)

The narrative stimulates a number of questions: Why did Moshe *Rabbeinu* fashion the serpent of copper? Why not of another substance, such as clay or wood? Is there a relationship between the word *nachash*, serpent, and the word *nechoshes*, copper? Why was this serpent placed upon a pole? How is one who is bitten by a serpent cured simply by gazing at the serpent? **Horav Avigdor Miller, Shlita**, addresses these questions in his commentary on this *parsha*. The serpent is a symbol of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. The *yetzer hora's* strength lies in its ability to be elusive, to conceal itself from its victims. Thus, the first serpent, the *nachash* that played a leading role in the sin of Adam *Ha'rishon*, presented itself as a friendly advisor. Hashem chose the *nachash* as the symbol for all forms of persuasion, using its guile to manipulate man into succumbing to temptation. Every serpent should serve as a reminder of this concealed force. The ability to ensnare defines the essentially character of the *nachash*.

The serpent travels on its stomach, hiding in the grass, so that it can strike without warning, when it is least expected. Because of its unique nature, the serpent is copper-colored, a color that easily blends in with most environments. This allows the snake a greater opportunity to remain concealed, especially upon the earth or in the grass.

Moshe understood the hidden peril of the serpent. He, therefore, chose to fashion a serpent of copper. Even the name *nachash* alluded to the serpent's resemblance to *nechoshes*, copper, pointing to the difficulty man has in recognizing the danger of the *nachash*. Thus, Hashem commanded Moshe to place this copper serpent upon a pole, so that everyone would see it and be reminded of its existence. This way, people would be warned to avoid the fatal temptation of its misleading advice.

The complainers were punished in order to provide a lesson to be cognizant of the effects of the subtle persuasion of the serpent. When the people looked at the copper serpent, they were reminded of the existence of the evil inclination. They would avoid the tragic consequences that its bite could catalyze. The way to be healed of the snake bite/*yetzer hora*, is to be aware of its existence at all times. The serpent seeks to remain incognito, to hide from its victims. It enters the minds and hearts of men, poisoning their concepts and philosophies. They think they are thinking straight, but, alas, they are only succumbing to the effects of the serpent's guile. The healing is through awareness. Whoever notices the serpent survives. It is as true today as it was then. When we open our eyes to the efforts of the serpents, we will realize that it subtly leads us astray: to follow the trends of the times; to defer to every challenge to the *Torah* way of life; to view modernity as a savior and reject the past. When we recognize the tempting nature of the snake, we are able to avoid the entrapping, deception of the *yetzer hora*.