

Whoever feared the word of Hashem... chased his servants and his livestock into the houses. (9:20)

Chazal derive an important principle from the Torah's depiction of the "G-d-fearing" Egyptian: The best of snakes should have its head smashed. In other words, a snake is a snake, regardless of how "good" it may be. It cannot be trusted. The Torah distinguishes between the Egyptians who listened to the warning of Moshe *Rabbeinu* concerning the upcoming plague which would overrun the country and those that did not listen. Those who listened brought their livestock indoors, while those who ignored the warning left their animals outside. To their chagrin, these recalcitrant Egyptians lost their animals. Later on, when Pharaoh was about to pursue the Jews who had left Egypt, he was able to obtain animals from the G-d-fearing Egyptians. We derive from here that an Egyptian remains evil, regardless of his supposed fear of G-d. Evil remains evil, no matter how it is coated.

Let us attempt to digest this statement. Once the Egyptian becomes G-d-fearing, his serpentine character should disappear. The two simply do not mesh together. *Yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, and evil are antithetical to one another. How is one considered G-d-fearing, yet act like an Egyptian, with hatred and malice towards the helpless Jewish slaves? **Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita**, explains that *Chazal* are teaching us that unless one's entire *mahus*, essence, is altered, unless he undergoes an extreme makeover, his *yiraas Shomayim* will not have any impact on him. If he remains a *nachash*, his *yiraas Shomayim* is worthless.

True fear of G-d is internal. It is not something one "puts on" to make an impression. The entire person is changed. A *yarei Shomayim* is no longer the same person he once was. One who continues with his *nachash*, snakelike behavior, is not really G-d-fearing.

Furthermore, let us analyze the superhuman effect of the G-d-fearing Egyptian in response to the dilemma which confronted him. The entire country ignored Moshe: some because they gave no credence to his warning; others because they were afraid of what their neighbor might say. They would rather lose their animals than be viewed as sympathizers, fools, and spineless people. To listen to Moshe meant standing up for one's beliefs, challenging Pharaoh, going against popular opinion. It took incredible strength to go against the country's political and pagan current, to defy Pharaoh and his cohorts in order to listen instead to Moshe.

The *yarei Shomayim* did just that. He acted in a bold manner that was filled with courage and fortitude, regardless of public backlash. This is in what he believed, and he would act on his beliefs, regardless of the consequences. This sounds good! It sounds like a truly wonderful, morally upright man of incredibly strong character! Yet, since the *yiraas Shomayim* remained outside of his essence, it had not changed him; therefore, he still retained his base Egyptian character. His fear of G-d was a one-time deal; it was not reflective of his essence. Therefore, later, when Pharaoh needed animals to pursue the Jews, he turned to the G-d-fearing Egyptians to supply the war

effort. An Egyptian remains an Egyptian – much like a snake remains a snake.