

The river shall swarm with frogs, and they shall ascend and come into your palace ... and of your people and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. (7:28)

The frogs were a hardy bunch who swarmed all over Egypt. No place was considered off limits to them. Even the burning hot ovens did not prevent them from fulfilling Hashem's command. When the Almighty said, "Go," they went. It took enormous *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, for those frogs to enter the burning oven. For all intents and purposes, it spelled certain death. In the end, they were the only frogs who did not die. Whoever carries out Hashem's *mitzvah* comes to no harm. *Chazal* (Yoma 85:b) teach that years later Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah entered the fiery cauldron, motivated by a *kal v'chomer*, a *priori* argument, derived from the Egyptian frogs. They conjectured, "Frogs do not have a *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem's Name; yet, the frogs entered the Egyptian ovens, knowing that they probably would not emerge. Certainly Jews, who have this *mitzvah*, are obligated to enter the fiery cauldron to demonstrate their inextricable, uncompromising devotion to Hashem."

The *Maharsha* presents a counter question to this *kal v'chomer*. Since frogs do not have the *mitzvah* of *V'chai bahem*, "And you shall live by them," which compels every Jew to live and not relinquish his life in the performance of a *mitzvah*, the frogs had nothing to cause them to refrain from expressing their devotion to Hashem – not even their lives. Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah had a very powerful reason for seeking life. Furthermore, the *tzelem*, image, that Nevuchadnezer placed before them was not really an idol. It did not represent a pagan deity, which is another reason why these holy men did not have to give up their lives. Thus, we return to our original question: What was the *kal v'chomer*?

Horav Avraham Kalmanowitz, zl (quoted by *Horav Elyahu Svei, zl*), explains that indeed they had no underlying obligation to sanctify their lives, because they had not been asked to bow down to an idol. Nonetheless, just because there is no *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem* does not detract from the fact that what they were being asked to do was a denigration of the *kavod*, glory, of *Shomayim*, Heaven. To bow down to this image at the behest of an evil gentile king, one who had earned his stripes murdering Jews, was a gross *chillul Hashem*, profanation of Hashem's Name. Thus, the general community was obligated to take action to preserve the glory of Heaven.

Someone had to take a stand in defiance of Nevuchadnezer. Now, the question began: Agreed that someone has to give up his life, who says that it should be "me"? Let it be someone else. I would like to avail myself of the *mitzvah* of *V'chai ba'hem*; and live by them.

Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah ruminated over this question and ruled for themselves, based upon the *kal v'chomer* from the frogs. The frogs were given a general command: "Go all over Egypt." They, too, had a question: "Why should I be the one to enter the ovens? Let it be the next frog. I would rather lay on Pharaoh's soft pillow. This, too, is a *mitzvah*." Regrettably, there will

always be the other fellow. "Let him be the one, not me." Certain frogs did not take this attitude. They understood that when action must be taken, we do not defer to someone else – we act! This was the lesson which Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah derived from the frogs. Thus, they entered the fire to demonstrate to Nevuchadnezer that the glory of Hashem is sacrosanct and supersedes everything.