

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Rayza Bayla *bas* Yitzchok Leib *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Insect Repellent – of the Spiritual Sort PARSHAS NO’ACH 5777

As stationary as it may seem to us, the truth of the matter is that nature changes. There were certain periods in history that witnessed an alteration of specific physical characteristics of the environment.

One example is recorded in the Mishnah in Sotah (9:12), which outlines some aspects of the earth’s decline in the post-Temple era. The Mishnah states:

רָבִן שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן גַּמְלִיאֵל אוֹמֵר מִשּׁוֹם רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, מִיּוֹם שֶׁחָרַב בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ, אֵין יוֹם שֶׁאֵין בוֹ קִלְקָלָה, וְלֹא גֵרֵד הַטֵּל לְבִרְכָה, וְנִטְלָ טַעַם הַפְּרוֹת. רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר, אֵף נִטְלָ שְׁמֶן הַפְּרוֹת.

“Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says in the name of R’ Yehoshua: From the day that the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed – there is no day that contains no curse; the dew no longer descends for a blessing; and taste has been removed from the fruits. R’ Yose says: Even nutritional value has been removed from the fruits.”

New World Order

The Flood, as well, had a marked effect on the planet in a number of respects. The Vilna Ga’on (*Aderes Eliyahu, parshas Bereishis*) points to one of the irksome new realities of the post-Flood world. The Torah speaks of man’s dominion over the animal kingdom on more than one occasion; and the Ga’on notes a variation in this issue as related to Adam and then later to No’ach. Adam was informed of his total mastery over all creatures regardless of their venue of habitation. After the Flood, No’ach was also given a similar reassurance of his dominance over the various living creatures.

But here there is a shift regarding one particular item. No’ach was told **וּמִוֹרְאֵיכֶם וְחַתְּכֶם יְהִיָּה עֲלֵיכֶם** – “And your awe and fear shall be upon all the animals of the earth, and all the birds of the sky, all with which the earth creeps, and all the fish of the sea – they are given into your hands” (*Bereishis 9:2*). The Vilna Ga’on notes that there is something missing from this list: namely, *sheretz ha’of* (winged insects). Apparently, the innate fear of man imbued within all creatures would henceforth be absent from this one significant segment –the flying bugs. And, in fact, we suffer to this day from the wantonness of the likes of flies and mosquitoes. These creatures will brazenly and literally walk all over our faces without a trace of compunction. It is no small kindness, the Ga’on concludes, that Hashem preserved the inherent fear of at least the more formidable beasts of the field. Had their inhibition been similarly canceled – well, that is a scenario too terrible to contemplate.

This, in any event, is one of the more discernable aspects of the post-Flood era with which we must contend on an ongoing basis: the fearlessness of the flying bugs. However, as we shall see, there may be ways to avoid this nuisance – even without resorting to pesticides or mosquito netting.

Exploits of the Saintly Sage

This is perhaps best illustrated by a well-known anecdote involving R' Elyah Lopian, saintly Mashgiach of the yeshivah in Kfar Chassidim. The area at that time was suffering greatly from a horrible epidemic of mosquitoes. The yeshivah students also were not spared from this plague and had to contend with the hordes of bugs that swarmed around the premises.

So it happened that R' Elyah was delivering a discourse during this time, when he noticed something quite unusual. In contrast to the regular practice, this time the students did not seem to be listening; rather, they were occupied and distracted. When he remarked as such to the audience, they attributed the problem to the current plague. “What can we do,” they claimed, “with all these mosquitoes swarming about?”

R' Elyah answered, with all sincerity: “What mosquitoes?” Apparently, he was the lone figure in the whole environ that the mosquitoes left alone.

There actually is precedent for this type of phenomenon in the teachings of Chazal. They include the following item in the list of miracles that took place in the vicinity of the Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple): לא נראָה זבוב בְּבֵית הַמִּטְבָּחִים - “No fly ever appeared in the Temple slaughter-house” (*Avos 5:5*). Despite the substantial volume of blood and organs involved in the preparation of the sacrificial offerings, the proceedings did not attract any flies.

Why not? It appears to be a function of the contrasting natures of these entities. That is, creatures associated with grime and filth are repelled by an environment of sanctity. Thus we find, as well, that the prophet Elisha was similarly spared such annoyances. When visiting the city of Shunem, Elisha would be hosted by a certain couple. The *passuk* quotes the wife as telling her husband: הִנֵּהנָּא יְדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹקִים קָדוֹשׁ הוּא – “Behold, I have known that this man of G-d is holy” (*Melachim II 4:9*). How indeed did she know? The Gemara (*Berachos 10b*) attributes it to the fact that she never saw a fly hovering around him by the table (R' Yechiel Michel Stern, *Otzar Yedi'os*, vol. I, pp. 482, 495).

As a postscript, another interpretation may be offered to account for R' Elyah's apparent “immunity” to mosquitoes. The great Torah scholars were able to attain high levels of concentration when engaged in Torah study; it was known that R' Elyah would likewise become quite engrossed when delivering a Torah discourse. R' Shlomoh Brevda related another “discourse” episode in which R' Elyah was lecturing to his disciples while a fierce storm was raging right outside. The speech was punctuated throughout by flashes of lightning and huge claps of thunder. After this had been going on for a substantial length of time, R' Elyah suddenly became aware of his audience's reaction to the deafening noises. He thus expressed his dismay about the lack of concentration. “How could it be,” he proclaimed, “that a storm has just now begun and already we are distracted!”

This, then, could be an alternate explanation for R' Elyah's fortitude in the mosquito affair. Just as thunder and lightning could not shake his immersion in learning and teaching, neither could the sting and bother of a swarm of mosquitoes.

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