



mishnath chayim

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

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While discussing the plague of *arov*, the mixed multitude of wild animals, the Torah presents a *possuk* which at first glance almost defies comprehension. When informing Moshe of the upcoming plague, Hashem says:

וּמְלָאוּ בָתִים מִצְרַיִם אֶת הָעָרֹב וְגַם הַאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר
הִסְעֵלָה : (שמות ח:יז)

“.... and the houses of Egypt shall be filled with the *arov*, **and also the ground that they are on...**” (*Shmos* 8:17)

The ground that they are on? What does that mean? Of course the animals will fill up the ground that they are on, because, well, because they’re on it!

The Torah doesn’t make mistakes. If we can’t understand the *possuk*, it must be that we are the ones missing the boat about something. Perhaps we can piece together what’s going on over here by turning to the Mishnah in *Kilayim*, which deals with one particular aspect of *tumah*.

There are various sources of *tumah*, such as a dead lizard, a person or article afflicted with *tzaraas*. There are also various ways to impart *tumah* to someone or something else, such as through physical contact. A corpse, the quintessential source of *tumah*, possesses a unique method of transferring its impurity even without actual contact. This method, referred to as *tumas ohel*, occurs when the pure and impure are found together under the same roof. While animal carcasses transfer *tumah* via direct contact, only a human body can cause defilement through *tumas ohel*.

The Mishnah discusses the status of the *adnei hasadeh*, a species of man like creatures, as it relates to *tumas ohel*. The Mishnah states:

ואֲדָנֵי הַשְׁדָּה, חַיָּה. רַبִּי יוֹסֵי אָזֶר, מִטְפָּאֹת
בְּאַחֲלָל כְּאָדָם. (ח:ה).

“*Adnei Hasadeh* have the (halachic) status of an animal (as opposed to having “human” status). R’ Yosi says, they cause ‘tent defilement’ like a person.” (*Kilayim* 8:5)

The *Tanna Kamma* considers the *adnei hasadeh* to be members of the animal kingdom; thus, they would be incapable of employing this vehicle of *tumah*. R’ Yosi disagrees and considers them to similar enough to humans to be able to defile through *tumas ohel*.

So, what exactly are these *adnei hasadeh* things? The Bartenura explains that they are creatures of the field who possess human like faces, as well as arms and legs. These creatures are rooted to the ground by a cord which projects from their navels, which renders them stationary. Nevertheless, *adnei hasadeh* are considered extremely dangerous, as they attack anything that comes within striking distance. The only way to subdue an *adnei hasadeh* is by peppering its cord with arrows. Once the cord is severed, the animal expires. (See the *Tiferes Yisroel* for a full and fascinating discussion regarding the reason we do not find such creatures in existence today.)

Getting back to our discussion of *arov*, Rashi explains that every type of wild creature was brought into Egypt during this plague. In light of Rashi’s statement, the Vilna Gaon (*Kol*

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a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his Neshamah.



Eliyahu, se'if 51) queries: How could our friends the *adnei hasadeh* be transported to Egypt? They were, after all, rooted to the ground; should their terrestrial umbilical chord be severed, they would not survive. Therefore, concludes the Gaon, it must be that Hashem transported *the very earth to which they were connected!* In other words, with the *adnei hasadeh*, it was a package deal—not only did they themselves enter Egypt, but their “ground” came with them!

The Haflo’oh (*Panim Yafos*) takes this idea one step further. In reality, animals only function at full strength in their native environment. A polar bear in Egypt, for instance, will lack the drive to operate at regular capacity due to its unfamiliar surroundings. In order for the animals to feel sufficiently comfortable in Egypt to perform their duties of attacking and eating people, they needed to be surrounded by their native conditions.

For Hashem, obviously, this was no problem; He simply brought the animals’ environments along with them. The polar bears came rolling into Egypt on their ice floes, the tigers with their jungles, and so on and so forth. Needless to say, the sudden influx into Egypt of not only hordes of vicious beasts but foreign habitats as well, had a devastating effect on the Egyptian terrain. (A glacier or tropical rain forest suddenly appearing in a city park or some choice farmland could be rather disruptive.)

With these insights, the meaning of our seemingly cryptic verse should now be clear. “And the houses of Egypt shall be filled with the *arov*, and also the ground that they are on.” The intent of the *possuk* is not to say that the *arov* filled the houses and the ground; rather, the **ground** itself, which had traveled along with the *adnei hasadeh*—or according to the

opinion of the Haflo’oh, the ground which traveled with every animal—filled the Egyptian’s houses. Our *possuk* teaches that *arov* and their accompanying terrain shall **both** fill up the Egyptians’ houses, wreaking further well deserved havoc on the householders.

This geologic pandemonium which accompanied the arrival of the ferocious fauna into Egypt was but a tip of the iceberg of the miraculous events which Hashem orchestrated at that time. May we merit to witness the Final Redemption whose events will dwarf even those of *Mitzrayim*, as the *navi* tells us (*Yirmiyahu* 23: ,8): “In those days, no longer will people refer to ‘the G d Who took the Jews out of the land of Egypt,’ but rather to ‘the G d Who returned the ... House of Israel ... from all of the lands to which I had scattered them.’”

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