

B”H

REDEMPTION ZOOLOGY: NICE LIONS OR NO LIONS?

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

An American tourist went to the Biblical Zoo in Yerushalayim and noticed that in the wolf’s cage a lamb was living peacefully. Over the cage was a sign which said, “And the wolf shall live with the lamb.”

The stunned tourist asked the director of the zoo: How did you manage to accomplish this? This is the End of Days!

The director said: Simple, we replace the lamb every day.

WHO NEEDS NICE LIONS?

This week, we read parshas Bechukosai, thus ending the book of Vayikra. The parsha begins with a slew of blessings that the Jewish people will receive if they keep the Torah and mitzvos. Then comes a less benevolent section in which the Torah warns what will happen if they don’t.

Let us focus on one of those blessings. “I will remove wild beasts from the land.” Many will ask, who needs this? Why is this good? Most people are not concerned about wild animals. Nobody is afraid of a lion breaking into his living room or of finding a leopard in his bathtub. We are more concerned about attacks by the Al-Aqsa Brigades or terrorist acts by Islamic Jihad, so what is the great blessing here?

Perhaps we can explain this in light of what the Rambam says at the end of his Hilchos Melachim (12:1). He explains the famous prophecy of Yeshaya (11:6-7), “And the wolf shall live with the lamb ... and the lion, like cattle, shall eat straw,” as a metaphor, not to be understood literally. “Wild animals” represent the wicked of the nations of the world who will make peace with the Jewish people (and the entire world) and will dwell peacefully with them.

Along these lines, we can say that the blessing in the parsha is also to be understood as metaphorical. The wild animals of our parsha are: Hamas, Jihad, Fatah and Hezbollah or, more generally, all the groups and nations among the wicked nations of the world who persecuted or persecute the Jewish people. G-d promises us that in the era of the Geula we will stop suffering from them and the promise of “I will provide peace in the land” will be fulfilled.

However, the Raavad disagrees with Rambam’s explanation of the verse in Yeshaya and wants to understand it literally, i.e. no more predatory animals (not nations). As proof he quotes a verse in our parsha, “I will remove wild beasts from the land.” Wild beasts means wild beasts!

What exactly will happen with those panthers (black and otherwise), lions and wolves?

In Toras Kohanim there is a dispute between Rabi Shimon and Rabi Yehuda HaNasi. Rabi Yehuda says, “He will remove them from the world,” while Rabi Shimon says, “He will make them placid so they won’t do harm,” i.e. they will exist but won’t be predatory. The nature of those animals will change. If you’ve ever wanted to raise a leopard instead of a cat, or a wolf rather than a dog, in the era of the Geula you will have your chance! (Though at that point you may pass on the opportunity...)

On first thought, there is a big question on what Rabi Yehuda says. How can we say that wild animals will cease to exist in the Geula when the verse in Yeshaya says they will exist? If the wolf will live with the lamb, and the lion with the ox, that means there will be a wolf and a lion!

The Rebbe addresses this question (and many others on the subject) and provides an ingenious explanation. We need to say that according to Rabi Yehuda there are two eras in the time of the Geula, the first era when the nature

of predatory animals will change, which Yeshaya prophesied about, and a later era when there will no longer be wild animals. [It's important to mention that these two eras according to Rabi Yehuda are not connected to, and are not parallel to, the two eras according to the Rambam. The simple reason for this is, according to the Rambam during the first era "the world will continue in its normal way," while according to Rabi Yehuda, the change in the nature of wild animals is a huge change in nature.]

So what will actually happen? Do we pasken according to Rabi Yehuda or like Rabi Shimon? Will the animals disappear or exist peacefully?

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS NICE LIONS

The Rebbe links this dispute with another dispute connected with the Geula. In the tractate Rosh Hashana (31a), Abayei and Rav Katina differ regarding "one [millennium] desolation" or "two [millennia] desolation." Rav Katina maintains that in the future there will be only "one desolation" - one millennium, the seventh millennium, when "the world will be destroyed" (We will leave the explanation of this concept and its ramifications for another time.). Abayei maintains that we can expect "two desolations" - 2000 years of "destruction of the world."

Destruction of the world refers either to destruction or, more accurately, to a change in the existence of the world as we know it. The disagreement between Abayei and Rav Katina is, essentially, whether there will be two massive changes in the existence of the world in the Geula or just one fundamental change. The Rebbe says that their disagreement aligns with the disagreement of Rabi Yehuda and Rabi Shimon. Rabi Yehuda, who says that in the future there will be two changes among predatory animals: 1) a change in their nature and 2) their disappearance, agrees with the approach of Abayei - "two desolations," while Rabi Shimon who explains there will be one change, in the nature of the world, holds like Rav Katina - "one desolation."

The Gemara goes on to bring a beraisa that supports Rav Katina's view, from which we can learn that the halacha is as he says. Therefore, in the dispute between Rabi Yehuda and Rabi Shimon the halacha is like Rabi Shimon, i.e. these animals will still be around but they won't be predatory.

What does this do for us? How do we benefit from all this?

Ramban (in his explanation on this verse in our parsha) explains that the nature of all animals when they were first created was peaceful and there were no predatory animals. The rehabilitation and restoration of this nature of animals is an indication of the world in general reverting to the original and optimal state of peace. The real goal is to restore the world to the way it was in the Six Days of Creation. The change in the nature of animals is an inseparable part of this, part of the panoply of changes that G-d will do in the Geula to restore the world to what it was supposed to be.

As for us, the message is clear. The time has come to stop behaving like wild animals in our pursuit of nonsense. We need to slow down and see to it that we are acting like true human beings, being considerate of the other, helping others and living according to proper values and not like wild animals!

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will end with a story that speaks for itself.

In his youth, Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa lived in Bendin. He had a friend who was in charge of fixing sefarim in the beis medrash.

A poor man came to the city and collected money to be able to marry off his daughter. The two friends gave him a donation out of their pockets and then R' Bunim told his friend to also lend the man money from the tzedaka fund that he had. R' Bunim promised that he would repay the money that was taken.

The people who davened in that beis medrash were opponents of Chassidus and when they heard that the gabbai had taken tzedaka money meant to repair sefarim and had given it to some passing wanderer, a fellow Chassid, they raised a hue and cry. A meeting was held in the beis medrash between mincha and maariv to decide what fine the gabbai deserved.

R' Bunim heard about the meeting and went to the beis medrash where he found people sitting around the table. R' Bunim stood and addressed them: "Allow me to defend the accused. First, I will ask you to explain to me the meaning of the verse in Tehillim (119-176), '*Ta'isi k'seh oveid b'kash*' [I strayed like a lost sheep in straw]. What did Dovid mean to say? Can a sheep stray and get lost because of a bit of straw?"

The people did not know that R' Bunim had changed the vowels of the verse that says "I strayed like a lost sheep – *bakeish avdecha* [seek out Your servant] and thought that the verse he was quoting was correct. They were unable to answer his question about the sheep and the straw and so R' Bunim said he would explain it with a parable.

There was once an epidemic among the animals of the forest. The animals went to the lion, king of the beasts, to find out who was responsible for this. First the leopard confessed his sins. "Something bad happened to me. I was hungry and I looked for something to eat and a person happened by and, I admit, I attacked and ate him."

The lion and his ministers discussed this and judged the leopard favorably since it had been hungry and found nothing else to eat and that's what leopards do.

Then came the wolf. "I am a sinner. I was hungry and saw a cow grazing in the field with a calf beside her. I couldn't restrain myself and ate both in the same day."

The lion and his advisors conferred and decided that's what wolves do and it was not at fault.

Many other wild animals passed before them and all were exonerated until a sheep came by.

"It was very cold and my master had pity on me and brought me into his house. At night, I was very hungry and I didn't see anything to eat until I found a bit of straw that my master had put inside one of his boots to pad it. I ate that bit of straw and revived myself and now, I confess, when my master woke up in the morning, he did not find straw in his boot."

Hearing this confession of the sheep, all the animals angrily cried out, "Villain! It was because of your terrible crime that we are suffering!" And they fell upon the sheep and ripped it apart.

"Now, you know," said R' Bunim, "what Dovid meant when he said – I am like a lamb who lost his life because of a bit of straw. And you, dear friends, each of you sinned greatly like the animals in the parable. You don't see your own flaws but you convene to judge and fine someone for something insignificant, for daring to help a poor man. For a bit of straw – that he lent money from the fund to repair sefarim – you are ready for him to be lost from the world."

"Nu, Reb Aryeh Leib, R' ZevWolf, R' Dov Ber," said R' Bunim to three of the men gathered there, "you yourselves know you have sinned with various sins" - and he pointed at them and listed their sins. "And now, what? Will we go to the 'Aryeh?' The 'Dov' did such-and-such! Should we all fall upon the Dov? But the 'Zev' also did such-and-such! So what should we do – let's all set upon the little lamb."

Saying this, he pointed at the frightened man who stood in a corner of the room.

The people were ashamed and the meeting dispersed.

Good Shabbos!