



# Likkutei Sichos

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Frogs Here, Frogs There

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## 1.

RASHI'S INTERPRETATION DOESN'T SEEM TO BE *PSHAT*

From the verse,<sup>1</sup> “Aharon stretched out his arm... and the frog emerged and covered the land of Egypt,” Rashi quotes the words, “the frog emerged,” and comments: “It was a single frog; however, they beat it, and it spewed swarms and swarms<sup>2</sup> {of frogs}....”

Seemingly, Rashi's intent is to explain why Scripture uses the singular, “the frog emerged,” although a multitude of frogs emerged. So Rashi explains that at the beginning, only one frog emerged from the river, but by striking it, the frog turned into “streams and stream” {i.e., many swarms}.

In the Gemara<sup>3</sup> (and in *Shemos Rabbah*),<sup>4</sup> the Rabbis also remark on Scripture's use of the singular form, “the frog emerged,” citing two opinions: “Rabbi Akiva states that there was one frog (which spawned a swarm) and filled the land of Egypt. Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah told him... there was one frog {originally}; it croaked to the other frogs, and they came.”

We need to clarify: Rashi's commentary, as known, is based on the **straightforward** interpretation of Scripture. Since the principle that “the Holy One does not fabricate unnecessary miracles”<sup>5</sup> accords with the *pshat* method of interpretation (as explained previously at length),<sup>6</sup> it makes sense that even if the miracle **did** happen, we ought to explain it, as much as possible, as having some natural foundation. There is no need to postulate that the miracle unfolded in a way that was completely contrary to natural law, as anything gratuitous in the realm of the miraculous would be “unnecessary.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Shemos* 8:2.

<sup>2</sup> {In the original mishnaic Hebrew, “*nechilim, nechilim.*”}

<sup>3</sup> *Sanhedrin* 67b.

<sup>4</sup> *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 10, sec. 4.

<sup>5</sup> See *Drashos HaRan*, exposition 8.

<sup>6</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5., p. 124, ff.; vol. 6, p. 49; et al.

If so, why does Rashi cite (from Midrash)<sup>7</sup> the interpretation, “they beat it, and it spewed swarms and swarms”? (Meaning, by the act of beating, new creatures were created, “swarms and swarms.”) This interpretation has no natural basis. Why did Rashi not explain (according to the Gemara and *Shemos Rabbah*) like the opinion of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah that the frog that emerged croaked, summoning the other frogs? (Rashi offers this explanation on the Gemara: “All the frogs in the world heard its call and came.”) Such a phenomenon would not be as miraculous as the creation of new creatures.<sup>8</sup> Or at least Rashi could have cited the interpretation of Rabbi Akiva that the frog “spawned a swarm and filled the land of Egypt.” Although according to this explanation, there were, miraculously, new creations, their creation, nonetheless, involved natural propagation — spawning “a swarm”<sup>9</sup> — as Rashi<sup>10</sup> explains,<sup>11</sup> “offspring emerged from its innards.”

## 2.

A QUESTION ON RASHI’S INTERPRETATION “A SWARMING OF FROGS IS REFERRED TO....”

Rashi<sup>12</sup> continues and says:

The above is its midrashic interpretation. As for its simple interpretation, *pshuto*, it can be said that a swarming of frogs is referred to in the singular. Similarly, {the singular word in the phrase} “the *kinam*<sup>13</sup> was”<sup>14</sup> means: the creeping mass of lice. (And in order to ensure that a novice student of Scripture understands clearly, Rashi translates the

<sup>7</sup> **Similar** to Rashi’s wording, see *Tanchuma* here (v. 14) and *Tanna D’Bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, ch. 7. In these sources, however, it says: (a) that the **Egyptians** beat...; (b) and don’t use the expression, “*nechilim, nechilim* — swarms and swarms” that Rashi uses.

<sup>8</sup> Even though according to Rashi, this explanation also involved another miracle: “**All** the frogs **in the world** heard its call and came.”

<sup>9</sup> In *Tanchuma* and *Tanna D’Bei Eliyahu Rabbah*, *ibid.*, Rabbi Akiva’s opinion is: “They... beat it and many frogs sprayed out.” But in the Gemara, Rabbi Akiva’s view is as stated in the text.

<sup>10</sup> {Rashi on *Sanhedrin* 67b, s.v., “*hishritzah*.”}

<sup>11</sup> See *Zohar* on our *parshah* (29b): “There was one, and it **spawned**....”

<sup>12</sup> {Rashi on *Shemos* 8:2.}

<sup>13</sup> {An atypical inflection of the Hebrew root noun, *kinim*, meaning “lice.” Both words share the same root consonants, but are vowelized differently.}

<sup>14</sup> *Shemos* 8:13.

term).<sup>15</sup> *Pedulier* in the {Old French} vernacular.<sup>16</sup> So, too, the noun in the clause, “the frog emerged” {is a collective noun} — *grenolierre* in the vernacular.

We need to explain: Ordinarily, Rashi first gives the “straightforward interpretation of Scripture” — *pshuto shel mikra*. Only if the *pshat* of a verse is not entirely smooth, does Rashi cite an *aggadah* that “resolves the words of Scripture.”<sup>17</sup> Why does Rashi then **start** with the **midrashic** interpretation, (as he himself notes) **before** presenting the *pshat*?

Likewise, we need to clarify:

The reason that Rashi needs to prove that “the frog” means “a swarming of frogs” (which explains why the singular is used) is readily understood: It is difficult to say that the **noun** “frog” connotes a “**swarming**” (of frogs), something that is **not** mentioned in the verse and can apply to all *sheratzim*,<sup>18</sup> and not just frogs. Therefore, Rashi cites a proof from the biblical phrase, “the *kinam* was,” which was a creeping mass, despite that fact creeping masses are not limited to insects that are lice.

Put differently: If the swarming of frogs were different from other sorts of swarms, then it would be understood that (just as the term refers to **this specific** sort of *sheretz*, which possesses a distinct coloring, behavior, etc.,) the term “frog” here refers to this **specific** sort of swarm.

Still, this solution is also not entirely smooth: If the word {frog} were being used to mean a *swarming* of frogs, then the noun should have been inflected (with a change in its vowelization, or the like), similar to *kinam* {meaning a creeping mass of lice}, as opposed to *kinim* {meaning *just* lice}. (This idea will be elucidated later.)

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<sup>15</sup> In the first and second edition of Rashi (and in manuscript), this conclusion is omitted.

<sup>16</sup> {Where Rashi lived, France, the vernacular was Old French. The related Modern English word, “pedicular,” means “infested with lice.”}

<sup>17</sup> Rashi’s words in his commentary on *Bereishis* 3:8.

<sup>18</sup> {Plural; in the singular, “*sheretz*,” denoting crawling creatures, including many reptiles and amphibians. See fn. 15\* in the original, and sources cited.}

Because, however, this verse uses the similar verb, *sheretz*, connoting “swarm” both regarding frogs<sup>19</sup> and regarding all “swarming living creatures,”<sup>20</sup> it is difficult to say that “frog” means a behavior {viz., swarming} that is exhibited by all swarming creatures. Therefore, {to address this difficulty} Rashi cites “the *kinam*” as proof, as discussed above.

However, we need to explain why Rashi sees it as obvious that the term *kinam* in the biblical phrase, “the lice {*kinam*} was” means “the creeping mass {of lice}.” (Therefore, Rashi, when commenting on this verse,<sup>21</sup> suffices with explaining that *kinam* means a creeping mass {of lice}, without citing a proof-text. Nor does he offer an alternate interpretation.) Yet, concerning the phrase, “the frog emerged,” Rashi says (only as an **alternate** interpretation) that “**it can be said** that a swarming of frogs is referred to in the singular.”

### 3.

“FROG” A SWARMING OF FROGS EVEN THOUGH THE TERM IS NOT UNIQUE

Some commentators<sup>22</sup> explain that what compels Rashi to interpret the phrase, “the *kinam* was” to mean, “the creeping mass {of lice}” is the construct of the word. The word *kinam* (with a *nun-kemutza*)<sup>23</sup> is neither in the plural form (*kinim*) nor in the singular form (*kinah*). Therefore, it is imperative to say that *kinam* does not have the same meaning as the noun *kinim*. Rather, it is a gerund, referring to the “creeping mass” of lice.

In this context, it is understood that this proof-text {concerning *kinam*} does not fully prove that similarly here, the word “frog” means, a “swarming of frogs,” because there is no proof that the term “the frog” here denotes something different than a single frog.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Shemos* 7:28.

<sup>20</sup> *Bereishis* 1:20 (and Rashi, ad loc.).

<sup>21</sup> {Rashi on *Shemos* 8:13.}

<sup>22</sup> *Sefer HaZikaron* {a commentary on Rashi}, (by Rabbi Avraham Bacart HaLevi) on *Shemos* 8:13.

<sup>23</sup> {The Hebrew consonant *nun* is vowelized with a *kamatz*, whereas in the word *kinim*, the *nun* is vowelized with a *chirik*.}

<sup>24</sup> See *Maskil Le'David*, ad loc.

The above also explains Rashi’s nuanced wording: “Similarly, the *kinam* was’.... **So, too**, the noun in the clause, ‘the frog emerged,’” and therefore, {why} Rashi adds, “*grenolierre* in the vernacular.” Since Rashi doesn’t ever note the {Old French} translation to explain the plural form, “frogs,” which was mentioned frequently beforehand, it is understood that its meaning is well-known. So once Rashi informs us that here that the word “frog” mean “a swarm, *sheirutz*, of frogs” — and we already know the meaning of the word *sheirutz* (from the earlier verse,<sup>25</sup> “the river will swarm with frogs”) — what additional insight do we obtain from Rashi’s notation here of the {Old French} translation of the phrase, “a swarming of frogs”?

However, the reason for this {noting of the translation by Rashi} is follows:

The {Old French} vernacular for “frog” is *grenouile*. This definition is already known to a young, novice student of Scripture {to whom Rashi addresses his commentary}, since this is the student’s mother tongue (French, and this is the case nowadays) {i.e., the same word is used in modern-day French}.

In contrast, in the translation into the vernacular of the words, “a swarming of frogs,” a change in construct of the noun “frogs” takes place — *grenolierre*. This change of construct resembles the change in construct of *kinim* into *kinam* (and similarly, in their respective translations into the vernacular). Nonetheless, Rashi asserts: “**So, too**, the noun in the clause, ‘**the frog** emerged’ {is a collective noun} —*grenolierre* in the vernacular.” Even though the word frog has not undergone any inflection, still, the meaning is “*grenolierre* in the vernacular” (not *grenouile*).

Nonetheless, Scripture still refers to a swarm of lice, *kinim*, with the term *kinam*, regardless of the fact a “creeping mass” is not a phenomenon associated specifically with the insect of lice. [**This** is the main difficulty in explaining the terms *kinam* (and “frog”) as connoting a “creeping mass” {specifically of lice} (and “a swarm” {specifically of frogs})]. Therefore {because of this precedent,

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<sup>25</sup> {*Shemos* 7:28.}

Rashi says, notwithstanding that "swarm" is not unique to frogs}: **"it can be said"** that in our verse,<sup>26</sup> the word "frog" also connotes "a swarming of frogs."

In light of the above, it would seem plausible to explain<sup>27</sup> that Rashi presents the midrashic interpretation **before** the straightforward one, because the straightforward one in our case, is not so smooth and well-founded, as explained above.

#### 4.

*PSHUTO*, "ITS SIMPLE EXPLANATION," MEANS THE SIMPLE, SEMANTIC DEFINITION OF THE WORD

In truth, however, it's not possible to say that (only) because of this reason Rashi first offers the midrashic interpretation and then the interpretation that "frog" means a "swarming of frogs." In order to understand this, a prefatory explanation is called for:

To emphasize that a particular interpretation accords with *pshat* and not *drush*, Rashi uses the following terms: (a) as in our case — "its simple interpretation, *upshuto*"; (b) "the straightforward interpretation **of Scripture**, *upshuto shel mikra*."<sup>28</sup> The difference between them is readily understood: The meaning of the expression, "*upshuto shel mikra*" is that a given interpretation aligns with the straightforward meaning of the text — with the overall content of the verses. In contrast, the expression, "**its** simple interpretation, *upshuto*," means what follows is the straightforward meaning of the word, or of the matter, that is drawing Rashi's attention. This holds true even though the offered interpretation may not dovetail with the straightforward understanding of the overall content.

Accordingly, in our context, it should turn out as follows: If we were to say that Rashi prioritizes the midrashic interpretation to the *pshuto* one because the

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<sup>26</sup> {*Shemos* 8:2.}

<sup>27</sup> See *Maskil Le'David*, ad loc.

<sup>28</sup> For example, see: *Bereishis* 1:27, 3:8, 4:8. 7:16, 12:5, 12:11.

**translation** of the **word** “frog” does **not connote** “a swarming of frogs” (while according to the Midrash, the word “frog” does mean a single frog), then Rashi needn’t have said: “As for its simple interpretation, *pshuto* (implying, the simple definition of the word “frog” is) ...a swarming of frogs.” Instead, Rashi ought to have said, “As for its straightforward interpretation according to Scripture, *pshuto shel mikra*...” Meaning, since the continuation of the verse gives no hint that the miracle came about because they struck the frog — it broke into “swarms and swarms” — therefore, this explanation, (the first one) is according to its “midrashic interpretation.” We know about this miracle through the Torah’s midrashic method of exegesis, whereas according to *pshuto shel mikra*, Scripture’s straightforward method of interpretation {which considers a broader scope in Scripture}, the straightforward meaning of the term “frog,” in the phrase, “the frog emerged,” should be “a swarming of frogs.”

## 5.

### THE MIDRASHIC INTERPRETATION FITS BETTER WITH THE OVERALL CONTENT OF THE PASSAGES

Another puzzling point in Rashi’s commentary: Rashi himself explains at the beginning of *parshas Vayishlach*<sup>29</sup> that “many ‘oxen, שׁוורים’ are commonly referred to as an ‘אס, שׁור’ {in the singular}.” Meaning, it is possible to refer to many animals of the same species by the name of the species. So why didn’t Rashi offer this interpretation to explain **straightforwardly** the phrase “the frog emerged”? He could have said that “frog” means many frogs, which are referred to here in the singular by the name of its species.<sup>30</sup>

Concerning this question, commentaries<sup>31</sup> explain that Rashi was troubled by an irregularity in the Torah’s wording: In the balance of the *parshah*, this plague is referred to **ten** times in the plural, “frogs.” As such, why, specifically, in this verse, does the Torah **deviate**, and, using the singular, say: “the frog emerged”? From this variance, we understand that when the Torah says “the

<sup>29</sup> {*Bereishis* 32:6.}

<sup>30</sup> As interpreted in *Pesikta Zutrasa (Midrash Lekach Tov)*, ad loc. {by R. Toviah ben Eliezer, c.1105 - c.1115 CE.}

<sup>31</sup> *Yefei Toar on Shemos Rabbah*, loc. cit.; *Maskil L'Dovid*, ad loc.; *Torah Temimah*, ad loc.



frog,” it is not using the name of the species to denote a multitude of such animals. Rather, the Torah refers to the plague this way, drawing attention to the singular form, in order to allude to a **unique** phenomenon. For this reason, Rashi clarifies: “It was a single frog....”

In light of the above, understandably, the midrashic interpretation, although derived by *drush*,<sup>32</sup> has an advantage over the interpretation that the word “frog” means “a swarming of frogs”: The midrashic interpretation aligns better with the overall content of the verses (the straightforward interpretation according to **Scripture**). Specifically according to the Midrash, we can understand why Scripture says, “the frog emerged,” in the singular form. True, the interpretation that “frog” refers to “a swarming of frogs” also answers why the singular form is not used **throughout** the *parshah* (since it is only fitting to use the singular when speaking about the “**swarming** of frogs”).<sup>33</sup> However, the difficulty is the converse: **Throughout** the *parshah* (here, as well), Scripture should use the plural form, frogs, as the use of the singular is not smooth,<sup>34</sup> because immediately afterwards, it says: “The necromancers did the same... and they made the **frogs** come up.”

Consequently, Rashi cites this interpretation only as his second; and the midrashic interpretation is cited as his first and main interpretation according to *pshuto shel mikra*.

A question, however, still remains unanswered: How is the second interpretation {“a swarming of frogs”} more *pshuto*, straightforward, in terms of the semantic **definition** of the **words**, “the frog emerged,” than the midrashic interpretation?

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<sup>32</sup> {A methodology of homiletic exegesis employed, foremost, in the teachings of Midrash.}

<sup>33</sup> In other words, “swarming” is used as a participle {not as a gerund} (similar to {the participle, “creeping,” used in describing the plague of} “lice”).

<sup>34</sup> However, this is not a thorny difficulty (as is the interpretation that the singular is used after the name of the species), since this instance {of use of the singular} is the only exception.

## 6.

### HOW DID AHARON FULFILL HASHEM'S COMMANDMENT?

The explanation is as follows: Rashi needs to explain not only the difficulty of the irregular wording in the clause, “the frog emerged” (“frog” is singular), but also the **contradiction** this phrase poses to Hashem’s command to Aharon in the previous verse:<sup>35</sup> “Raise your arm with your staff... and make the **frogs come up....**” Scripture emphasizes it was Aharon who was to “**make** the frogs come up.... (In contrast, concerning the plague of locusts, it says,<sup>36</sup> “Raise your hand over Egypt for the (plague of) locusts, so that **they will ascend....**,” and similarly concerning the other plagues.)<sup>37</sup> Understandably, the command to Aharon was not limited to the preparatory and initiating act of raising his arm with his staff, etc. Rather, the command meant also that he had to carry out the plague, actually bringing out the frogs, and in droves — “**make the frogs come up.**” In that case, how did Aharon fulfill this Divine command, when, in fact, what transpired was that “the **frog** emerged” (one solitary frog)?

Therefore, Rashi explains, “they **beat** it, and it **spewed** swarms and swarms<sup>38</sup> {of frogs}”: Although to start with, Aharon (by raising his arm, etc.) extracted only a single frog, this frog was special. It **spewed** swarms and swarms {of other frogs}. This resembles what happened with the “the waters of Egypt.”<sup>39</sup> When they were beaten, they spurted water. (More water was not **created** out of nothing.) The same thing happened with the frog that emerged from “the waters of Egypt.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it didn’t matter who hit the frog. For this reason, Rashi {in his commentary here} **omits**<sup>41</sup> the word “**Egyptians.**” {That is, Rashi doesn’t identify who beat the frog}.

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<sup>35</sup> {*Shemos* 8:1.}

<sup>36</sup> *Shemos* 10:12, and Rashi, ad loc.

<sup>37</sup> {With all the other plagues, an action was taken by Moshe or Aharon, but Hashem's command to them implied no causal relationship between their action and the ensuing plague.}

<sup>38</sup> {In the original mishnaic Hebrew, “*nechilim, nechilim.*”}

<sup>39</sup> {*Shemos* 7:19.}

<sup>40</sup> {*Shemos* 8:2.}

<sup>41</sup> Unlike *Tanchuma* and *Tanna DeBei Eliyahu Rabbah*; see fn. 7 in the original.

On this basis, we understand why Rashi can't give the explanations found in the Gemara and in *Shemos Rabbah*, viz., that “it croaked to the other frogs and they came,” or that “it spawned a swarm and filled the land of Egypt,” because according to both explanations, it turns out that **Aharon** only actually brought forth **one** frog. The vast number of frogs came about, however, either through the one frog croaking or spawning the swarm. Consequently, Aharon did not fulfill the command to “**make the frogs come up.**” Accordingly, Rashi must offer the interpretation that the frog spewed swarms and swarms.

## 7.

THE WORD וַתֵּעַל HAS TWO CONNOTATIONS

The Torah tells us explicitly, using the plural form, that Aharon was commanded to “make the **frogs** come up.” Therefore, Scripture must also include (at least a hint as to) how this command was fulfilled.

The explanation: The clause, “the frog emerged, וַתֵּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּי,” can be explained {grammatically, in Hebrew} in two ways: (a) the frog *emerged* {i.e., וַתֵּעַל is an intransitive verb}; (b) the frog is the subject of the clause — the frog *caused* other frogs *to come forth* {i.e., וַתֵּעַל is a transitive verb, so the verse would be translated: “the frog *called up* (other frogs)”}.<sup>42</sup>

In the interpretation of the Midrash, these two details — (a) that Aharon brought forth one frog; (b) that this frog called up other frogs — are alluded to by its two expositions: (a) “וַתֵּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּי”: “it was a single frog”; (b) “וַתֵּעַל (וַתֵּעַל) הַצְּפַרְדֵּי”: the frog “spewed swarms and swarms.”

On this basis, we can also appreciate why Rashi cites the “midrashic interpretation” — “it spewed swarms and swarms” — to explain the clause, “וַתֵּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּי,” and not the clause, “it covered the land of Egypt.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See *Malbim*, ad loc.

<sup>43</sup> {I.e., the question could have been raised on this clause: How did this one frog cover the land of Egypt?}

## 8.

### ONLY THE MIDRASHIC INTERPRETATION EXPLAINS THE TWO CONNOTATIONS

Although the midrashic interpretation has support from the diction of the verse, as explained, Rashi still refers to it as “midrashic.” After all, according to this interpretation, we have to say that both of the two events connoted by these two **different** ways of parsing the clause, “וַתַּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּי” — they both happened. Such a supposition is not tenable according to the *pshat* method of learning Scripture, but only according to the “midrashic” method. According to *pshuto*, the word must be explained just one way: The subject of וַתַּעַל must be the same as the subject of וַתִּכַּס, “(it) covered.” We must explain that the meaning of the word “frog,” stated in the singular form, is a “**swarming** of frogs.”

Nonetheless, Rashi offers this interpretation second. (His principal interpretation is the “midrashic” one.) He prioritizes the interpretations this way for two reasons:

- (a) From the content of the passages, the interpretation of the Midrash is more fitting as *pshuto shel mikra* (as discussed in Section 5).
- (b) Also, the semantic meaning of the word as “frog” is smoother according to the midrashic interpretation than the interpretation that “frog” means a “swarming of frogs”<sup>44</sup> (as discussed in Section 3).

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<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, only Rashi’s second interpretation is called “*pshuto*,” because the difficulty with the interpretation, “a swarming of frogs,” is only that there is no compelling proof for it. The midrashic interpretation, however, is **antithetical** to the *pshuto* explanation (since the midrashic interpretation necessitates parsing the phrase, וַתַּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּי, in two different ways [transitive and intransitive] **simultaneously**.)

## 9.

EVEN IF ONE CANNOT FINISH, ONE STILL NEEDS TO START

From the “wine of Torah”<sup>45</sup> found in Rashi’s commentary:

There is a principle that “one who begins to perform a mitzvah is told to complete it.”<sup>46</sup> Our Sages, too, warn<sup>47</sup> that grave punishments ensue when it is possible to complete a mitzvah, yet one does not do so.

Moreover, and especially, this is true about teaching someone Torah. When teaching Torah, the material has to be presented to a student “like a set table, prepared to be eaten from, that is placed before a person,” as derived from the scriptural words, “place before them.”<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, if a Jew knows that due to unpreventable reasons he would not be able to complete a mitzvah, nevertheless, he is prohibited to refrain from beginning the mitzvah and fulfilling the part that he can. As we find with Moshe, he designated three cities of refuge in trans-Jordan,<sup>49</sup> even though they would not provide refuge until those in Canaan were designated.<sup>50</sup> Moshe had said to himself,<sup>51</sup> “A mitzvah that I can perform, I will perform.”

When a doubt arises about what constitutes a mitzvah’s complete observance, then when it concerns mitzvos such as *tzedakah*, obviously, being generous is praiseworthy. In contrast, when a doubt arises concerning mitzvos such as {dispensing corporal punishment by} flogging, we are cautioned not to exceed what is mandatory, as it says,<sup>52</sup> “he shall not add, lest he strike him an additional blow.” In fact, according to several *Amoraim* {talmudic sages}, “the

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<sup>45</sup> {The deeper ideas in Torah.}

<sup>46</sup> Rashi on *Devarim* 8:1, based on *Tanchuma*, ad. loc. (and *Sotah* 13b); *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Pesachim*, ch. 10, halachah 5; *Rosh Hashanah*, end of ch. 1; *Megillah*, end of ch. 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Sotah* and *Tanchuma*, *ibid*,

<sup>48</sup> *Shemos* 21:1, and Rashi, ad loc; see Alter Rebbe’s *Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 4, par. 18.

<sup>49</sup> *Devarim* 4:41.

<sup>50</sup> Rashi on v. 41; *Bamidbar* 35:13, and Rashi there (based on *Sifri*, ad loc.).

<sup>51</sup> Rashi on *Bamidbar*, *ibid*. (based on *Makkos* 10a).

<sup>52</sup> *Devarim* 25:3.

Rabbis had one lash deducted”<sup>53</sup> {from the total number of lashes administered} “as a precaution not to transgress ‘lest he strike him an additional blow.’”<sup>54</sup>

The difference between Rashi’s two interpretations are analogous to the above:

According to Rashi’s first interpretation, it turns out that Aharon fulfilled the Divine directive to “raise up the frogs.” However, only later, as a result of others beating the frog that had emerged, did the frogs “**cover** Egypt.”

According to the second interpretation, however, it turns out that Aharon brought about the entire swarm of frogs, which covered the land of Egypt.

The reason is because the frogs were: (a) on a simple level, a plague and scourge to the Egyptians, so according to *pshto*, Aharon caused it all; (b) a phenomenon from which Pharaoh would “expound,” learning that **later on**, he would have to liberate the Jewish people. Therefore, according to the midrashic interpretation, Aharon also accomplished this by bringing the plague in a way that later on, the frog would be beaten.

Put differently: Explaining Scripture in the manner of *drush* also colors how the command to “raise the frogs” is perceived. It doesn’t necessarily mean like its *pshto*, “many frogs.” Rather, it is possible to explain that the intent was **one** frog. And since bringing a plague resembles administering lashes, Aharon adopted a minimalist approach, and he reasoned that the command to raise frogs meant only a single frog. This way, there would be no apprehension about administering a punishment that exceeded what was mandatory.

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<sup>53</sup> *Makkos* 22b.

<sup>54</sup> *Targum Yonasan ben Uziel* on *Devarim* 25:3; Rambam’s *Commentary on Mishnah*, on *Makkos*, ch. 3, mishnah 10; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Sanhedrin*,” beg. of ch. 17 (and see commentaries there); *Chinuch*, “*mitzvah 595*”; and see *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 18, par. 21. Later rabbinic scholars {*acharonim*} note that this serves as a biblical basis for making a fence around the Torah. (See *Lekach Tov*, principle 8.)

## 10.

### THE TAKEAWAY

The lesson that can be gleaned from both interpretations:

From the first interpretation (that Aharon raised only one frog), we learn that if for tribulations (a plague over Egypt), we ought not dispense more punishment than absolutely called for, then even more so,<sup>55</sup> when it comes to dispensing reward, the positive attribute, we should be cautious not to violate the prohibition of “not detracting.”<sup>56</sup>

From the second interpretation (that Aharon fulfilled the complete mitzvah), we learn that we need to try to perform a mitzvah completely, from beginning to end. When speaking about, for example, the mitzvah of drawing a Jew closer to the observance of Torah and mitzvos — and “learning Torah is equivalent to them all” — we shouldn’t satisfy ourselves by just beginning to draw him closer. We must complete the process. We must engage with the person until he resembles a *Shulchan Aruch*,<sup>57</sup> reaching the epitome of excellency.<sup>58</sup>

Still, if a person is in a situation that enables him only to start the mitzvah, and he can only begin to set another Jew on his journey to getting closer to Torah and mitzvos, then the person might wonder: Of what value is to start getting involved in drawing another Jew close when the outcome is uncertain? Who knows how the matter will end?

Therefore, the aforementioned lesson comes into play: “A mitzvah that I can perform, I will perform.”

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<sup>55</sup> See Rashi on *Shemos* 20:6, *Bamidbar* 31:7.

<sup>56</sup> {*Devarim* 31:1.}

<sup>57</sup> {Lit., “a set table,” meaning, the table is perfectly prepared and equipped. Likewise, the affected Jew needs to be influenced until he is perfectly prepared and equipped to live his life as a Jew.}

<sup>58</sup> {In the original, “*tachlis ha’ilui*.”}

In general, a person should not be involved in making calculations. “Why do you involve yourself with the secrets of the Holy One?”<sup>59</sup> This is not the person’s worry. The person must do whatever he can to positively influence another Jew.

Moreover, when the person does everything dependent upon him, then “the Holy One **links** a good thought to deed.”<sup>60</sup> Meaning, Hashem links and brings the good thought into action.<sup>61</sup>

And when it is **Hashem** who completes the mitzvah, it is fulfilled without constraints, so that is the apex of perfection.

— from a talk delivered on *parshas Vaera*, 5727 (1967)

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<sup>59</sup> *Brachos* 10a, near the end of the page.

<sup>60</sup> *Kiddushin* 40a.

<sup>61</sup> *Sefer Hamaamarum* 5702, p. 87; and see the Alter Rebbe’s explanation of this process in *Tanya*, ch. 16.