

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XIV: Va'era (Ex. 6:2–9:35)

Essay 10. The plague of frogs

בַּטֶּעַם מַכַּת הַצִּפְרָדִּיעִים מִצִּיּוֹנוֹ מִדְּרָשִׁים חֲלוּקִים, שֶׁהִילְקוּט נִתֵּן הַטֶּעַם לְפִי שְׁהַמְצָרִיִּים בִּקְשׁוּ לֵאבֹד אוֹמָה שֶׁעֲתִידָה לְקַבֵּל הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁנִּמְשָׁלָה לְמֵי־מַיִם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "הוּא כֹל־צֶמֶא לְכֹחַ לְמֵי־מַיִם", יָבֹא דִבְרַר שֶׁגִּידוּלוֹ וּמַחֲיִיתוֹ בְּמֵי־מַיִם וְיִפְרַע מֵהֶם. וּמִדְּרָשׁ רַבָּה נִתֵּן טֶעַם אֲחֵר לְפִי שְׁהַמְצָרִיִּים מִיּוֹנוֹ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְצוּד לָהֶם שְׂקָצִים וְרִמָּשִׁים לְכֹחַ הִבִּיא עֲלֵיהֶם צִפְרָדִּיעִים עַכ"ל.

Regarding the reason for the plague of frogs, we find differing midrashim. The Yalkut Shimoni, Vaeira, remez 182:3 provides a reason, stating that the Egyptians sought to destroy a nation that was destined to receive the Torah, which is compared to water, as it is said, “Ho, all who are thirsty, come for water,”¹ so something whose growth and life are in water will come to exact retribution from them.

Midrash Rabbah (Ex. 10:5) gives another reason, because the Egyptians appointed the Israelites to hunt creeping things and insects for them, and for this reason, frogs were brought upon them.

וְקוֹשֶׁה לָמָּה הוּצָרְכוּ שְׁתֵּי טֶעַמִּים וּמֵאִי בִּינְיָהוּ. וְנִחְזִי אֲנִי מָה הֵיטָה פְּנוּנַת הַמְצָרִיִּים לְשָׁלוֹם עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאַסּוֹף לָהֶם שְׂקָצִים וְרִמָּשִׁים, וְמָה חֲטָאוּ בָּזֶה. וְהֵלֵא כָּבֹד הָיוּ לָהֶם לְעִבְדֵּי־מֶלֶךְ חֹב הַגְּלוּת. וְיֻכַּח בְּמֵאִי דְאֶמְרִינָן בְּפֶרֶק ט' דְּשִׁבְתָּ יִשְׂרָאֵל דְּדִאֲגִי בְּמִצְוֹת, חֲבִיל גּוֹפִיָּהוּ וּמִשּׁוּם הָכִי הִשְׁכַּבְתָּ זָרַע שְׁלֵקָה לְאַחֵר שְׁלוֹשָׁה יָמִים מִסְרִית וְאִינוּ רְאוּי עוֹד לְהִזְרִיעַ וְאַף הָאוֹמוֹת הָאֵיל דְּאֶכְלִי שְׂקָצִים וְרִמָּשִׁים אֵינָהוּ נִמְי חֲבִיל גּוֹפִיָּהוּ עַכ"ל.

It is difficult to understand why two reasons are needed, and what the difference is between them. Let us see the intent of the Egyptians to send the Israelites to gather creeping things and insects, and what their sin was in this. Weren't they already slaves of theirs because of the obligation of the Exile? This can be understood by what is said in chapter 9 of tractate Shabbat (daf 86b): Israel are concerned about mitzvot, [so] their body [temperature] is hot, and because of this, their semen after three days becomes foul and is no longer fit for fertilizing, and even the nations, since they eat creeping things and insects, their body [temperature] is also hot.

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¹ Isaiah 55:1.

ואם כן המצרים שכל פנונתם היתה שישראל לא יפרו וירבו, חשבו בדעתם שהואיל שאינם שומרים מצות לא יהיה חביל גופניהו, דהא נמי לא אכלי שקצים ורמשים, ואף לאחר שלושה ימים שכבת זרע שלהם תהיה ראויה להזריע, ולכן היו שולחים אותם לצוד להם שקצים ורמשים כדי שמתוך כך יתאוו תאונה לאכול מהם ויהיה חביל גופניהו כמו המצרים ולא ירבו יותר מהם, כמו שאמר הכתוב "הנה עם בני ישראל רב ועצום ממנו", ומזה כנגד מזה שלח להם צפרדעים שהיו מסרסין אותם כדכתיב "וצפרדע ותשחיתם".

If so, the Egyptians, whose sole intention was that the Israelites should not be fruitful and multiply, thought to themselves that since [the Israelites] did not observe the commandments, their bodies would not be hot. Also, unlike the Egyptians, they would not eat creeping things and insects, which if eaten made the bodies hot. Thus, after three days, their semen would still be fit for fertilizing, so the Israelites would be more fertile than the Egyptians. Therefore, they sent [the Israelites] to hunt creeping things and insects for them, in order that while doing so, [the Israelites] would develop a desire to eat them and their bodies would become hot like the Egyptians. That way, [the Israelite's] semen would only remain viable for three days, like the Egyptians, and they would not multiply more than [the Egyptians], as it is written, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us."² As measure-for-measure punishment, [G-d] sent them the frogs, which castrated them, as it is written, "He inflicted upon them swarms of insects to devour them, and frogs to destroy them."³

וזהו פונת ר' עקיבא בפרק ז' דסנהדרין שאמר צפרדע אחת היתה והשריצה ומלאה כל ארץ מצרים, לרמוז על פנונתם שישראל לא יפרו וירבו, והאי דכתיב "ושרץ היאר צפרדעים" הנינו צפרדעים מלבד מה שהיו ביבשה.

This is the intention of Rabbi Akiva in chapter 7 of tractate Sanhedrin (67b), who said that there was only one frog, which reproduced and filled all of the Land of Egypt, to hint at their intention that Israel should not be fruitful and multiply. This is the intent of what is written, "and the Nile shall swarm with frogs,"⁴ which is frogs in addition to those on dry land.

אמנם רבי אלעזר בן עזריה לא סבירא ליה הכי, אלא "ושרץ היאר צפרדעים" כפשוטו שבאו כלם מן היאור. וטעם של הצפרדעים הוא כטעם הילקוט בשביל שבקשו לאבד אומה שהיא עתידה לקבל תורה, דאי משום שהיו צדים להם שקצים ורמשים לא היה מקום להלקות אותם על זה, שלא היה להם לישראל לאכול מהם, כדאמרינו בעלמא הוה לה שלא תאכל, ועוד דאין שלים לדבר עבירה.

However, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah does not agree with this. Rather, "and the Nile shall swarm with frogs" should be understood literally, that all the frogs came from the Nile.

² Ex. 1:9.

³ Ps. 78:45; see also Ex. Rabbah 10:3: "Chizkiya son of Rabbi said: The houses of the prominent people were made of marble and tiles . . . a frog would ascend from the depths and say to the marble: 'Make room for me so I can ascend and perform the will of my Creator.' The marble [floor] would split, and [the frog] would [then] ascend and remove their genitals and neuter them, as it is stated: 'And frogs that destroyed them.' "

⁴ Ex. 7:28.

The reason for the frogs is as explained in the Yalkut Shimoni: it was because they sought to destroy a nation that was destined to receive the Torah. If the reason had been that they were hunting creeping things and insects, there would have been no reason to punish them for that, since the Israelites had no reason to eat them. As we say generally in the Talmud, “One should not have eaten it.”⁵ Additionally, “there is no agency for transgression.”⁶

אֵלָא שְׂרָצָה לְרַמּוּז לָהֶם הָפֶדָּה כְּפֻנְתָּם מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה, הוֹאִיל שֶׁבִשְׂבִּיל הַשְּׂקָצִים מִתְקַיֵּמֶת הַתּוֹרָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּדְאֻמְרֵינוּ בְּסוֹף מִכּוֹת רָצָה הַקֹּב"ה לְזַכּוֹת אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְפִיכָף הַרְבֵּה לָהֶם תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת, וּפֶרֶשׁ רַש"י דִּהְיִינוּ אִיסוּר הַשְּׂקָצִים דְּמַאיִסִּי לְמַכְלִינָהּ. וּפִירֵשׁ שֶׁם קוֹל הָרַמ"ז שֶׁפִּינוֹן שְׂרָאִינוּ שֶׁהַקֹּב"ה צָוָה אוֹתָנוּ עַל הַשְּׂקָצִים, הוּא סִמָּן טוֹב לָנוּ שֶׁנִּקְבַּל שְׂכָר עַל הַתּוֹרָה בְּלָה מִכֶּסֶּם קֵל נְחֹמֶר, וּמָה אִם אֵלּוּ שְׂאִין נִפְשׁוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם מִתְאַוֶּה לָהֶם וְאֶדְרָבָא מוֹאֶסֶת בָּהֶם, עִם כָּל זֶה צָוָה אוֹתָנוּ הַקֹּב"ה. וְלָמָּה צָוָה לָנוּ עָלֵיהֶם, אֵלָּא וְדַאי צָרִיךְ לוֹמַר כִּדִּי שֶׁנִּקְבַּל שְׂכָר, קֵל נְחֹמֶר עַל שְׂאָר מִצְוֹת.

Rather, [the Egyptians] wanted to hint to them the opposite of their malicious intention, in measure-for-measure, because the Torah is sustained in Israel through the “creeping things,” as we say at the end of tractate Makkot (23b): “The Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to merit Israel, and therefore He gave them many commandments.” Rashi explains that this refers to the prohibition of creeping things, which are repulsive to eat. The *Kol HaRamaz*⁷ explains that since we see that the Holy One, Blessed be He, commanded us regarding these creeping things, it is a good sign for us that we will receive reward for all the Torah, from the force of an a fortiori argument. That is, regarding these things that the soul of man does not desire, and to the contrary is repulsed by them, nevertheless the Holy One, Blessed be He, commanded us not to eat them. Why did He command us regarding them? Rather, it’s certainly necessary to say it was in order that we receive a reward for not eating them, all the more so with the remaining commandments.

וְעַל זֶה אָמַר דּוֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ ע"ה "שֶׁרַץ אֶרֶצָם צִפְרָדְדִּים בְּחֻדְרֵי מַלְכֵיהֶם". וְאִי אֶפְשָׁר לוֹמַר שֶׁהַשָּׂרִים וְהַמְּלָכִים יִשְׁלַחוּ לְאַסּוֹף לָהֶם שְׂקָצִים וּרְמָשִׁים שֶׁבִּנְדָּאִי אֵינָם עוֹלִים עַל שְׁלֶחֶן מַלְכִּים. אֵלָּא הַטַּעַם הוּא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁבִקְשׁוּ לֵאבֹדָם, וְנָהוּ הוּא דְבָר הַתְּלוּי בַּעֲצָה וּבְגִזְרַת הַשָּׂרִים. וּמַעֲמָה אֵלּוּ הַשְּׂנִי מְדַרְשִׁים הוֹצִיָּחוּ חֵד כְּרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְחֵד כְּרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה.

Concerning this, King David, may he rest in peace, said, “their land teemed with frogs, even the rooms of their king.”⁸ It’s impossible to say that the ministers and kings sent to gather creeping things and insects for themselves, as they certainly don’t belong on the tables of kings. Rather, the reason is that they sought to destroy them, and this is something dependent upon the counsel and decree of the ministers. Now, these two Midrashim are both necessary: one according to Rabbi Akiva and the other according to Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah.

⁵ Bava Kamma 47b.

⁶ Kiddushin 42b; Bava Kamma 51a, 79a; Bava Metzia 10b.

⁷ Rabbi Moshe Zacuto (RaMa"Z) (c. 1625–97), *Kol HaRamaz* (Amsterdam 1719).

⁸ Ps. 105:30.

וּבִנְיָה נבא לבאר הפסוקים "הנה אנכי נגף את-כל-גבולך בצפרדעים: וְשָׂרֵץ הַיָּאָר צִפְרָדְעִים". דַּיֵּש לְקַדֵּם אֲמַאי קְתִיב "אֲנֹכִי" וְלֹא "אֲנִי". וְלָמָּה הוּצָרָה לומר שֶׁהַצִּפְרָדְעִים יִשְׂרָצוּ מִן הַיָּאָר. וַיֵּש לומר שֶׁהַקֵּב"ה רָצָה לְרַמֵּז לוֹ שִׁשּׁוּלָם לוֹ הַצִּפְרָדְעִים בְּשִׁבִּיל שְׁתֵּי טַעְמִים אֵלּוּ שֶׁל רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה דְּאֵלּוּ וְאֵלּוּ דְּבַרֵּי אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים.

By this, we will come to clarify the verses, “If you refuse to let them go, then *Anochi* [אֲנֹכִי] [“I”] will plague your whole country with frogs. And the Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall come up and enter your house, and into your bedroom, and onto your bed, and into the houses of your servants and of your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls.”⁹ One must check why it is written with the formal *anochi* [אֲנֹכִי] [“I”] and not the informal *ani* [אֲנִי] [“I”].

Also, why was it necessary to say that the frogs would swarm from the Nile?

It can be said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to hint to him that He was sending him the frogs because of these two reasons of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, that both are the words of the Living G-d.

וּכְנָגַד טַעַם רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא שֶׁהֵיכָּה בְּשִׁבִּיל שְׂקָצִים וְרַמְשֵׁים קְתִיב "אֲנֹכִי", דְּאֲמַרְיָנָן בְּפֶרֶק ה' דְּמַצִּיעָא אָמַר הַקֵּב"ה אֶלְמָלָא לֹא הִעֲלִיתִי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם אֶלָּא בְּשִׁבִּיל שֶׁלֹּא יִטְמָאוּ בְּשִׂקָצִים, דִּי עכ"ל. וְכַתִּיב "אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם" וְכו'. וְזֶהוּ שֶׁכַּתִּב "הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי נֹגֵף אֶת-כָּל-גְּבוּלְךָ", בְּשִׁבִּיל שֶׁגִּרְמוּ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לֶאֱכֹל שְׂקָצִים, וְעוֹד "וְשָׂרֵץ הַיָּאָר צִפְרָדְעִים", לְרַמֵּז לטַעַם הָאֶחָד שֶׁבִקְשׁוּ לֵאמֹר אוּמָה שֶׁעֲתִידָה לְקַבֵּל תּוֹרָה שֶׁנִּמְשָׁלָה לַמִּים.

In accordance with Rabbi Akiva’s reason, which was due to creeping things and insects, it says *anochi*, as it is said in chapter 5 of tractate Bava Metzia (61b), “The Holy One, Blessed be He, said, if I had only brought up Israel from Egypt in order that they not become impure through creeping things, it would have been enough.”

Also, it is written, “*Anochi* [אֲנֹכִי] [“I”] the L-rd am your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.”¹⁰

This is the meaning of what is written, “If you refuse to let them go, then *Anochi* [אֲנֹכִי] [“I”] will plague your whole country with frogs,”¹¹ because they caused Israel to eat creeping things, and further, “and the Nile shall swarm with frogs,” to hint another reason, that they sought to destroy a nation that was destined to receive the Torah, which is compared to water.

וְאֶחָד כֶּן אָמַר "וְעָלוּ וַיֵּבְאוּ בְּבֵיתָךְ וּבִחְדָּר מִשְׁכַּבְּךָ וְעַל-מִטְתְּךָ וּבְבֵית עֲבָדֶיךָ וּבַעֲמֻדָּה" וְכו', וְזֶה רֹמֵז לטַעַם הַשְּׂקָצִים שֶׁעָשׂוּ כֵּן בְּשִׁבִּיל לְבַטְלֵם מִפְּרִיָּה וּרְבִיָּה, דְּאֵימָא בְּמִדְרַשׁ רַבֵּה רִישׁ פְּרִשְׁת שְׁמוֹת שֶׁפְּרָעָה כְּדִי לְבַטְלֵם מִפְּרִיָּה וּרְבִיָּה גִּזְרָה עַל הַנוֹגְשִׁים שֶׁלֹּא יִגְיחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּלִילָה לִישׁוֹן בְּבִתְיָהֶם וְהַנוֹגְשִׁים אֲצִים לֵאמֹר עַל דְּבַר זֶה נִהְיָו יִשְׂרָאֵל יְשָׁנִים בְּאֶרֶץ.

Afterward, it said, “The Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall come up and enter your house, and into your bedroom, and onto your bed, and into the houses of your servants

⁹ Ex. 7:27–28.

¹⁰ Ex. 20:2.

¹¹ Ex. 7:27.

and of your people, and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls.” This hints at the reason for the creeping things, which happened to keep [the Egyptians] from being fruitful and multiplying, as it is brought in Midrash Rabbah, at the beginning of parashat Shemot (1:15), that Pharaoh, in order to prevent [the Israelites] from being fruitful and multiplying, had decreed that the taskmasters would not allow Israel to sleep in their houses at night, and the taskmasters hurried to say this matter, and Israel slept on the ground outdoors.

ומשום הכי מדה כנגד מדה "ועלו ובאו בביתך", משום שהיה התחיל בעבירה וממנו התחיל הפורענות. "ובחדר משכבך ועל-מטתך" בשביל שגזרת שישראל לא ילכו לישון בבתיהם על מטותם, ואחר כך "ובבית עבדיך" דהיינו הנגשים שגם הם היו מעבדים ישראל, ולא אמר בבית כל עבדיך יעו לא היו כל עבדיך של פרעה ממונים על דבר זה, אלא הנגשים בלבד הממונים על אותו הדבר, ואחר כך "ובעמך" שהיו משלחים ישראל לאסוף להם שקצים ורמשים, שהגדולים והשרים אינם אוכלים השקצים משום דמאיס.

Because of this, as measure for measure punishment: “And they will come up and enter your house”—“He began the wrongdoing, and with him began the punishment.”¹²

“And into your bedroom, and onto your bed”—because of the decree that Israel wouldn’t go to sleep in their homes on their beds.

Afterward, it says, **“and into the houses of your servants”—which is the taskmasters, who were also opposing Israel, but it doesn’t say “into the houses of all your people,” because not all of Pharaoh’s servants were appointed for this matter, only the taskmasters who were appointed for this matter.**

Afterward, **“and into the houses of your servants and of your people”—because they were sending the Israelites to gather creeping things and insects, things that the prominent ones and ministers would not eat because they are repulsive.**

ואחר כך "ובתנוריה", ואיתא בפסחים פרק ד' מה ראו חנניה משאל ועזריה שמסרו עצמן על קדושת השם לתוך כבשן האש. נשאו קל וחמר בעצמם ומה צפרדעים שאין מצווין על קדושת השם, קתיב בהו: "ועלו ובאו" וכו' "ובתנוריה ובמשארותיה", אימתי משארות מצויות אצל התנור. בשעה שהתנור חם, אנו שמצווין על קדושת השם, על אחת כמה וכמה.

Afterward, it says, **“and into your ovens,” and it is brought in chapter 4 of tractate Pesachim (53b), “What did Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah see when they threw themselves into the fiery furnace for the sanctification of G-d’s name? They applied the a fortiori argument to themselves: Regarding frogs, which are not commanded concerning the sanctification of the Name [of G-d], it is written, “and they shall come up and enter . . . into your ovens and into your kneading bowls.” When are kneading bowls found near the oven? You must say that it is when the oven is hot. For us [Jews], who are commanded concerning the sanctification of the name of G-d, all the more so [should we deliver ourselves to be killed in the fiery furnace].”**

¹² Rashi on Ex. 14:4.

והקשה הרי"ף דמאי קל וחמר הוא זה, שהרי כך גזר הקב"ה על הצפרדעים "ויעלו ויכאו בביתך . . . ובתנוריה", מה שלא גזר על חנניה וחדביריו, דהא כתיב "וְחִי בָהֶם" ולא שימות בהם, ועוד מה קדושת השם היה בעלות הצפרדעים בתנורים יותר ממה שנתקדש בעלותם מתוך השיש ובקרב איש שהיו מקרקרים שם עכ"ל.

The Rif¹³ questioned: What kind of an a fortiori argument is this? For thus the Holy One, Blessed be He, decreed concerning the frogs: “and they shall come up and enter your house . . . and into your ovens,” which He did not decree on Hananiah and his friends. For thus it is written, “You shall keep My laws and My rules, which human beings do, and shall live by them,”¹⁴ [from which the rabbis derived], “and one should not die by them.”¹⁵

Also, what sanctification of the Name [of G-d] was there in the frogs entering the ovens, more than what was sanctified when they arose out of the marble floors, (as it is said in the Midrash, Shemot Rabbah 10:4)¹⁶ and into man’s innards, where they were croaking.¹⁷

ולדידו נראה שיש לדקדק למה כתב הפסוק "ובתנוריה" קודם "ובמשארותיה". היה לו לומר "ובמשארותיה ובתנוריה". אלא נדאי מדיקדק הסדר צריך לומר שפונת הקב"ה לא היתה לצוות על הצפרדעים שילכו לתנורים, דמה תועלת בזה, דאי משום שיתקדש שם שמים בהם הלא כבר נתקדש פשיקעו השיש וכשכאו וינעקו בקרב המצרים, ואי משום שביאישו את לחמם הלא כבר נבאש ונפסד פשילכו למשארותם, ואם כדי שיצטננו התנורים כמו שקכת המדרש, ומה צורך לזה הלא כבר פתם נפסד.

To us, it appears that there is a need to check why the verse is written, “and into your ovens” before “and into your kneading bowls.” It should have said, “and into your kneading bowls and into your ovens.” Rather, certainly from the opposite order, it is necessary to say that the intent of the Holy One, Blessed be He, was not to command the frogs to go into the ovens, for what is the benefit of this? For if it were for the sake to sanctify the Name of Heaven by them, wasn’t it already sanctified when the marble floor was split and [the frogs] came and cried out inside the Egyptians? If it were in order to make their bread stink, didn’t it already become stinky and worthless when they went into their kneading bowls? If it were in order to cool the ovens so that the bread wouldn’t bake, as the Midrash writes,¹⁸ what need was there for this, for wasn’t their bread already spoiled?

¹³ Rabbi Yoshiyahu Pinto (d. 1648), *Meor Einayim*, a commentary on *Ein Yaakov*.

¹⁴ Lev. 18:5.

¹⁵ Yoma 85b; Sanhedrin 74a; Avodah Zarah 27b, 54a.

¹⁶ See footnote 3, above.

¹⁷ Rashi to Ex. 7:29: “They made their way right into their bodies and croaked.”

¹⁸ Ex. Rabbah 10:2: “When an Egyptian woman would knead dough and ignite the oven, the frogs would come, descend into the dough, eat the dough, descend into the oven, cool it, and adhere to the bread.”

אֵלֶּא נִדְאִי צָרִיד לֹאמֵר שֶׁהִקְבִּ"ה לֹא צִוָּה עֲלֵיהֶם שֶׁיֵּלְכוּ לַתַּנּוּרִים וְאֵף לֹא צִוָּה עֲלֵיהֶם שֶׁיֵּלְכוּ לַמִּשְׁאָרוֹתָם, שֶׁהֵרִי בָּלְאוּ הֵכִי יֵלְכוּ שָׁם כִּי כֵן דָּרְכָם לְטוֹשׁ עַל פְּנֵי אוֹכֵל. וְכֵן דָּרְךְ הַשְׂקָצִים לְרִמּוֹשׁ עַל כָּל דָּבָר אֲכִילָה. אֵלֶּא כֹּךְ הִיָּתָה כְּוֹנֶנֶת הַקֵּב"ה לֹאמֵר, שֶׁיִּהְיֶה כֹּךְ הַצִּפְרָדְעִים מְרוֹבִּים שֶׁבִּהְיוֹתָם הוֹלְכִים לְאֹכֹל הָעֶסָה בַּמִּשְׁאָרוֹתָם לִפִּי טִבְעָם, מְרֹב רַבּוּיִים וְחִפְצָם לְרוֹץ אֲצֹל הָעֶסָה יֵלְכוּ אֵף לַתּוֹךְ הַתַּנּוּר אֵינָה מֵהֶם, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁמִּקּוֹם הַמִּשְׁאָרָת יִהְיֶה צָר וְ"קֶטַן מִהֵכִיל" כֹּךְ רַב הַצִּפְרָדְעִים, וְאֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לָהֶם לְבָרוֹת מִן הָאֵשׁ, וּמִכָּל שֶׁכֵּן שֶׁיִּהְיֶה לְפָרְעָה לְחֹשׁוֹב שֶׁאֵף יִשְׂרָאֵל עִם רַב בִּהְיוֹתָם מְאֻסְפִּים שְׂקָצִים אִי אֶפְשָׁר לָהֶם שְׁלֹא יֵאָכְלוּ מֵהֶם, אֵף שֶׁבִּאֲכִילָתָם יֵשׁ בָּהֶם סִכָּנַת הַנֶּפֶשׁ.

Rather, certainly it's necessary to say that the Holy One, Blessed be He, did not command [the frogs] to go into the ovens, nor did He command them to go into their kneading bowls, because they would have gone there as they are accustomed to crawling over anything edible. Similarly, it is the way of insects to creep over any food.

Rather, this was the intent of the Holy One, Blessed be He, to say: That the frogs should be so numerous that, by their existence they go to eat the dough in the kneading bowl according to their nature. By their vast numbers and their desire to run to the dough, some of them would even go into the oven, because the space of the kneading bowl would be too narrow and "too small to hold"¹⁹ so many of the frogs. Even though they would flee from the fire, and even more so, Pharaoh thought that even Israel, being many, would while gathering creeping things, could not help but eat from them, even though doing so would endanger their lives.

וְאֵתִי שֶׁפִּיר שֶׁמִּתְחַלֶּה כְּתִב "וְעָלוּ וּבָאוּ בְּבֵיתְךָ" וְכֵן וְאַחֵר כֹּךְ "וּבִכָּה וּבְעַמְּךָ" וְכֵן "יַעֲלוּ הַצִּפְרָדְעִים". וְמֵה צוּרְךָ הִנֵּה שֶׁיִּחְזוֹר לֹאמֵר "יַעֲלוּ הַצִּפְרָדְעִים" וְהֵלֵא קָבֵר אָמַר מִתְחַלֶּה "וְעָלוּ וּבָאוּ". אֵלֶּא נִדְאִי לִפִּי שֶׁהִפְסִיק בַּתַּנּוּרִיָּה וּבַמִּשְׁאָרוֹתֶיהָ דְּבָנָה לֹא קָאִי "וְעָלוּ וּבָאוּ", מִשּׁוּם הֵכִי חֲזַר לֹאמֵר "יַעֲלוּ" וְכֵן מִשּׁוּם שֶׁהוּא צִוּי חֲדָשׁ. וְעוֹד מִכָּאן מוֹכַח נִמִּי שֶׁהִשְׁגִּי פְסוּקִים הֵם שְׁמֵי טַעֲמִים וּמִשּׁוּם הֵכִי חֲזַר לֹאמֵר "יַעֲלוּ", שֶׁבְּטַעַם בִּיטוּל פְּרִיָּה וּרְבִיָּה לֹא הָיוּ אֵלֶּא גֵרְמָא לְכוּ הִנֵּה לָהֶם הַצִּפְרָדְעִים בְּבֵיתִים וְלֹא גִּוּפָם מִמֶּשׁ, וְאַחֵר כֹּךְ "וּבִכָּה וּבְעַמְּךָ וּבְכָל-עַבְדֶּיךָ" לְרִמּוֹז עַל הַטַּעַם שֶׁל רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה שֶׁבִּקְשׁוּ לְאַבֵּד אוֹמָה וְכו'.

It's fine that initially it is written, "and they shall come up and enter your house," and afterward it is written, "The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants."²⁰ But what was the need to repeat to say, "the frogs shall come up," for didn't it initially say, "and they shall come up"?

Rather, certainly it's because [the verse] interrupted the initial command "and they shall come up" with "into your ovens and into your kneading bowls," for in this "and they shall come up and enter" did not apply, because as we have said, G-d did not need to command them to enter the kneading bowls, as that was the frogs' nature. Because of this, [Scripture] returned in the next verse to say "the frogs shall come up," because this was a new command, that the frogs would climb "on you and on your people." Whereas it is the nature of frogs to climb on food,

¹⁹ I Kings 8:64: "the bronze altar that was before the L-rd was too small to hold the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat parts of the offerings of well-being."

²⁰ Ex. 7:29.

and thus the kneading bowls, it is not their nature to climb on people, and thus a command was necessary.

Further, from here it is also proven that the two verses are two reasons, and because of this, it returned to say “the frogs shall come up,” for in the first verse, the reason of preventing being fruitful and multiplying, [the frogs] were only acting in an indirect way, and therefore the frogs were in the houses and not specifically on their bodies. Afterward, in the second verse, “The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants,” it was to hint on the reason of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah that [the Egyptians] sought to destroy a nation that was destined to receive the Torah.

וכלפי מה שהקשו שהצפרדעים אינם מצוים על "נחי בהם", יובן במה שכתב הזוהר שכלם הלכו לתנורים ומקצתם מתו ומקצתם ניצולו ועיי"ש. והרי נצטוו בכמה צווים אחרים "ובאו בביתך ובחדר משכבך" וכו', ועכשו שכלם הלכו לתנורים אם היו נשרפים היו מבטלים הצווים שעשה להם הקב"ה, ואפלו הכי נעשה להם גם כמו שכתוב בספר הזוהר, והרי זה דומה לציווי של "נחי בהם" שנצטוו חנניה משאל וצוריה, וגדול כחם שחרי הם מצוים בעלמא על קדושת השם.

As for the question that the frogs were not commanded “and you shall live by them,” this can be understood by what the Zohar (II:29b) writes, that all of them went into the ovens, and some of them died, and some of them were saved, and see there.

They were commanded by a few other commands, “and they shall come up and enter your house and your bedroom,” etc., and now that all went into the ovens, if they were all burned, that would have cancelled the other commands that the Holy One, Blessed be He, made for them. I.e., there wouldn’t have been any left to enter Pharaoh’s palace and bedroom. Even so, a miracle happened, and many survived, as mentioned in the book of the Zohar.

This fact that G-d gave them other commands that necessitated their survival is similar to the command of “and you shall live by them” that was commanded to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and great is their power, for [these men] were generally commanded to sanctify the Name of G-d, unlike the frogs.

ולפי דעת הזוהר הקדוש שם שכתב: ואינון דמיתו מאי קא עבדי. נהמא הנה בתנורא ועאלין בגו נהמא ומתבקעין ונפקי מיניהו אחרנין ואישתאריין בנהמא. אתו למיכל מינה ההוא פיתא אהדר עורדענייא במיעייהו ורקדן ורמאן קליו עד דהוו מתים עכ"ל.

According to the opinion of the holy Zohar there that writes:

Rather, all of them went up into the fire and went into the ovens and [some] did not die. **But what did the ones which died do? There was bread in the oven, and they went into the bread and exploded, but others came out from them and remained in the bread. When [the Egyptians] came to eat from it, that bread turned back into frogs in their innards. So [the frogs] danced and raised their voices until [those Egyptians] died.**

- Zohar II:29b

יובן בדרך אחרת הטעם שחזר לומר "ובקה ובעמך . . . יעלו הצפרדעים" אחר שקבר כתב "ועלו ובאו", לפי שכלם הלכו לתנורים לקדש את השם נעשה להם הנס שחזרו לחיות והיו נכנסים לתוך מיעיהם ממש, וזהו "ובקה ובעמך" דוקא תוך גופה יעלו הצפרדעים שקבר מתו, וזהו תוספת חידוש שאנו למדים מזה הפסוק השני.

We can understand in a different way the reason that it returned to say, "The frogs shall come up on you and on your people," after it was already written, "and they shall come up and enter your home." Since they all went to the furnaces to sanctify the Name of G-d, a miracle happened, and they returned to life, and they literally entered into [the Egyptians'] stomachs. This is the meaning of "ובקה ובעמך", not as we have been translated the *bet* as meaning "on," i.e., "come up on you and on your people," but as meaning "in," i.e., "into you and into your people," the frogs that have already died will specifically "come up into your body." This is a new addition that we learn from this second verse.

נחזר לענייננו, שמתחלה כתב "ובקה" שהוא התחיל בעבירה ואחר כך "ובעמך", דאמרנו במדרש על פסוק "ולא יכלה עוד הצפנינו" שהיו המצריים חושבים בכל בית שאפשר שיהיה שם תינוק והיו מביאים קטניהם ומבכנים אותם ואף תינוק ישראל היה בוכה עמו. וזהו "אחזו לנו שעלים שעלים קטנים". ואלו הקטנים אפשר שהיו אותם שהיו גדולים בימי משה ולכן לקו תחלה. ואחר כך "ובכל-עבדיו" דהיינו כל יועציו שהסכימו בעצתו של "כל-הבן הילוד" וכו', ובזה הפסוק אמר "ובכל-עבדיו" לפי שבפסוק זה מירי בטעם רבי אלעזר בן עזריה שבקשו לאבד את ישראל וכל יועציו ובעדיו הסכימו עמו, מה שאין כן בפסוק הראשון כנ"ל. ועוד אפשר שאמר "ובכל-עבדיו" להרבות את איוב שאף הוא היה באותה עצה אלא ששמת ונידון בייסורין.

We will return to our subject, that initially it was written, "on you," for he was the beginning of the sin, and afterward it was written "and on your people," as it is said in the Midrash Ex. Rabbah 1:24 on the verse, "When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile."²¹ The Egyptians had thought that every house might have a baby, and they would bring their little ones, and have them cry, and even the babies of Israel would cry with them. This is the meaning of "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards—for our vineyard is in blossom."²² These little ones could be those who were adults in the days of Moses, and therefore they were afflicted first.

Afterward, it says, "and on your servants," which is all the advisers that had agreed with his suggestion regarding, "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile."²³ By this, the verse says "and on your servants," because this verse is speaking of the reason of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah that [the Egyptians] sought to destroy Israel, and all of his advisors and servants agreed with him, which was not the case with the first verse, as above.

Also, it's possible that it said "and on your servants" is to include Job, who was part of the counsel, though he remained silent and was punished with suffering.²⁴

²¹ Ex. 2:3.

²² Song of Songs 2:15.

²³ Ex. 1:22.

²⁴ Sotah 11a.

ואחר כך פרעה קרא למשה ולאהרן ואמר להם "העתירו אליה' ונסר הצפרדעים ממני ומעמי", שהיה נראה לו הפך שורת הדין להלקות אותם על שבקשו לאבד בגזירת "כל־הבן הילוד", שהרי כבר ניצולו כלם כדאמרינו בפרק קמא דסוטה "שש־מאות אלף רגלי העם" וכו'. ומשום הכי לא קרא תגר אלא על אותם שהיו בגוף, דהיינו "ממני ומעמי" ולא ממני ומביתי ומעמי, לפי שאותם שבבתיים באו בשביל שגמרמו לישאאל לאכול השקצים כנ"ל.

Afterward, Pharaoh called to Moses and Aaron and said to them, “Plead with the L-rd to remove the frogs from me and from my people,”²⁵ that it appeared to him contrary to justice to justice to punish those who sought to destroy Israel through the decree “every boy that is born,” since all were saved, as it says in the 1st chapter of tractate Sotah (12b):

“But Moses said, those in whose midst I am are **six hundred thousand foot soldiers** [רגלי] [*ragli*]²⁶—Moses said to the Jewish people: On account of me [an alternative meaning of the word *ragli*], **all of you were saved** [as the decree to throw all males into the river was canceled on my account].

- Sotah 12b

Because of this, [Pharaoh] did not call out about those living in the houses, but about those that were in the body, that is “from me and from my people,” and not “from me and from my house and from my people,” because those that were in the houses came because [the Egyptians] caused Israel to eat repulsive things, as discussed earlier.

אמנם טעה בסברתו לפי שאף שניצולו כלם מכל מקום גרמו צער לאביהם ולאמם של התינוקות בעת שהשליכו לניאור, שלא היו יודעים שסופם להיות ניצולים. ואמר לו משה "התפאר עלי", לא שהיה נוטל שררה לעצמו חס ושלום, אלא כלומר יש לך להחזיק טובה לי שבשבילי ניצולו, שאם היו חס ושלום אבונים אז לא הייתה לה תקומה, ולפי האמת אהיה חשבת לחטוא ובאומות הקב"ה חושב מחשבה כמעשה, ועם כל זה אני אתפלל שיסיר "הצפרדעים ממני ומביתי" כנגד השתי הטעמים הנ"ל.

However, he erred in his reasoning, because even though all were saved, in any case they caused pain to the fathers and mothers of the infants at the time they were thrown into the Nile, as they did not know they would ultimately be saved. And Moses said to him, “You may have this triumph over me: at what time shall I plead on your behalf and your servants and your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses, to remain only in the Nile?”²⁷ He said that not that he was taking credit for himself, G-d forbid, rather as if to say, “you should strengthen your appreciation of me, that because of me, [the infants] were saved. For if, G-d forbid, [the infants] had been lost, then there would be no hope for you. In truth, you thought to sin, and for the nations, the Holy One, Blessed be He, considers a thought as an action,²⁸ but nevertheless, I will pray that the frogs be removed ‘from you and from your houses,’ ” according to the two reasons mentioned above.

²⁵ Ex. 8:4.

²⁶ Num. 11:21.

²⁷ Ex. 8:5.

²⁸ Tosafot to Kiddushin 39b.

וזהו דאמרינן בפרק ה' דמציעא ומי נפיש אגרייהו טפי מריבית וממשקלות. אף על גב דלא נפיש אגרייהו טפי, מאיסי למכלינהו. וקשה והא פתיב "ארח חיים פן תפלוס", ויש לומר דאין הכי נמי דכל מצנה שטרחה מרובה לפום צערא אגרא, והשקצים דמאיסי אין טורח לשמור המצנה כמו ריבית ומשקלות שאדם מתאנה להן, אמנם אם לא ישמרו אותם יהיה להם עונש כפול משום דמאיסי.

This is what is taught in chapter 5 of Bava Metzia (61b):

Rav Chanina said to him: And is the reward for [abstaining from consuming creeping animals] **greater than** [the reward for observing the *halakhot* with regard to] **interest and ritual fringes and weights?** [Ravina] **said to him: Even though their reward is not greater, [it is more] repulsive [for Jews] to eat [creeping animals].**

- Bava Metzia 61b

A difficulty is that it is written, “Do not weigh the path of life.”²⁹ It can be said that it is indeed so that for every commandment that is a lot of trouble, “according to the labor is the reward.”³⁰ For creeping things, which are repulsive, there’s no trouble to observe the commandment as opposed to the commandments concerning interest and weights, to which man is drawn. In truth, if people wouldn’t observe [these commandments against creeping things], there would be a double punishment because they are repulsive.

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²⁹ Prov. 5:6.

³⁰ Pirkei Avot 5:23.