

FROM BUGS TO BLASPHEMY: HOW TO NOT BE LIKE THE EGYPTIANS

The פסוק¹, when talking about the איסור of eating שרצים, uses the לשון of “המעלה אתכם מארץ” - “we were elevated from Egypt”. This is in contrast to the עשרת הדברות², where the תורה chooses to use the לשון of “הוצאתיך”, taken out. Why does the פסוק here switch the terminology? רש"י brings down the גמרא³ that says that had we been taken out of מצרים only so we don't eat שרצים, it would have been enough. The גמרא says that abstaining from שרצים is a מעלה, which is why the פסוק specifically uses that word. What exactly is so unique about insects that abstaining from them is so special?

The משנה⁴ tells us of the זכות that we have מצוות 613. Some explain that this means the הקב"ה gave us “freebies”. There are some things that we would probably be doing anyway had they not been מצוות, and now we're getting שכר for them! One of these “freebies” is the איסור to eat שרצים. When it comes to most עבירות, they usually stem from an innate desire to commit the sin. We're all human, and sometimes we fall prey to the trap the הרע יצר is setting. However, insects are disgusting. Most normal people do not have any desire whatsoever to touch them, let alone eat them. Anyone who eats insects is doing it purely to rebel against the הקב"ה, which is why the גמרא uses it as the paradigm of acting like the other nations.

In הלכה, there is a difference between a מומר לתיאבון and a מומר להכעיס. A מומר לתיאבון is one who sins from a standpoint of desire, and a מומר להכעיס sins just to spite G-d. One נפק"מ between a מומר לתיאבון and a מומר להכעיס is a story brought down in the גמרא⁵. The משנה says that one who sells himself into slavery to עבודה זרה is not to be redeemed, nor are his children, as long as the father is alive. There was a story where a man sold himself to cannibals, and asked רבי אמי to redeem him. Based on the משנה, we redeem the children because of the threat of assimilation. קל וחומר we should redeem the father, who is in danger of losing his life! The רבנן stopped the redemption, as they claimed he was a מומר להכעיס, and was seen eating וטריפות when kosher food was available. רבי אמי, trying to help the man out, said maybe he was only trying to fulfill his תאוות and is only a מומר לתיאבון, therefore we can redeem him. Only once they brought witnesses to confirm that there was similar kosher food available did רבי אמי send him away.

We can clearly see from this גמרא why eating insects would've been so repulsive, and why abstaining from such would've been enough to be redeemed. When we left מצרים, we became G-d's nation. We separated ourselves from the crowd, and became an elevated people. The exact antithesis of יציאת מצרים is doing things just for the sake of rebelling against G-d. We find a similar idea by how some explain the mysterious גמרא⁶ of כפה עליהם הר כנגית. Even if הר סיני wasn't literally dangling over their heads, the miraculous nature was enough that the תורה was “being forced” upon them, that there was no way they can say no after what they saw. After witnessing the מכות, walking through the ים סוף, and receiving the תורה, how can one possibly go against the רבש"ע without any physical temptations?

1 ויקרא יא.מה

2 שמות כב, דברים ה.ו

3 בבא מציעא סא:

4 מכות כג:

5 גיטין מו:-מז.

6 שבת פח.

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Although this relates to the מומר להכעיס, we can apply this lesson to our lives. When we slip up, we usually follow our desires. However, we see that there is a מומר of this type as well, the מומר לתיאבון. If we internalize the amazing miracles of יציאת מצרים that we've experienced, how can we deny הקב"ה at all? When we sin, we are saying that הקב"ה isn't in front of us. If we felt He was, we would never do something like that! If we live a life of לנגדי תמיד, we won't be able to slip up, as we would be too awe-stricken to even fathom the thought. The extraordinary miracles are done to recognize the ordinary miracles, such as G-d's omnipresence. If we properly experience יציאת מצרים, we will come to experience our individual יציאת מצרים as well, and only want to serve הקב"ה always.