

BO (EXODUS 10:1-13:16)

The Dog Days of Egypt

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

The Egyptian king had gone too far. G-d's patience had been pushed to the limit. The Pharaoh had defied Him one time too many. Now the ultimate devastation was inevitable:

Moses told the king, *"G-d said, 'At about midnight, I will go out into the midst of Egypt. Every firstborn will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh sitting on his throne, to the firstborn of the (Egyptian) slave girl behind the millstone, and the firstborn animals as well. There will be a great outcry throughout Egypt ... (but the Israelites will be spared from all distress.) A dog will not so much as show its tongue to (i.e., growl at or bite) an Israelite ... so that you will know that G-d has made a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites.'"* (Exodus, 11:4-7)

All of nature does G-d's bidding. Through ten plagues, the natural order was turned upside down. Water turned to blood, frogs inundated people's homes, and day turned into night. G-d wanted to show how He discriminates between His "friends" and His "enemies."

G-d now wanted to demonstrate that He would not even allow a dog to let out a natural bark when an Israelite walked by. Every Egyptian would be subject to the snarls and growls of Egypt's canine population. In the face of the Hebrews, however, the meanest junkyard dog was transformed into a whimpering puppy.

The dogs were rewarded for their "service."

The Torah requires that animals be slaughtered in accordance with specifically prescribed rules. An otherwise kosher animal that dies as a result of disease, injury, or inappropriate means of slaughter may not be consumed.

What do you do if your cow is attacked by a wild animal, and dies as a "*Treif*ah?" (Literally, *Treif* or *Treif*ah means, "torn." Colloquially, it has come to mean "non-Kosher.") What a waste of food/money! How does one recoup his loss?

*... You may not eat flesh that has been torn (**Treif*ah) *in the field*. Cast it to the dogs. (Ibid 23:30)

Unlike meat/dairy mixtures that have been cooked together, which may not be sold or fed to one's animals, *Treif* meat may be sold or used for dog food. This is a special "gift" to the dogs. Their ancestors honored G-d by not growling at Hebrews. G-d repays them by providing them with the remnants of our ravaged livestock.

The *Mechilta* explains that we see from here that G-d never withholds reward from anyone. Dogs act upon instinct. They don't know the difference between right and wrong. (Sorry, Lassie-lovers.) They didn't CHOOSE not to bark; they were miraculously forced to hold their tongues. Yet, G-d rewards their "decision" to obey Him by presenting them with some with fresh beef. Obviously then, humans who choose to do what is right will certainly be rewarded.

He's doing it again... That obnoxious know-it-all at the office who always manages to grate on your nerves. He "knows" who's going to win the primaries and who's going to win the Super Bowl. He's got an opinion about everything, and he's consistently full of baloney.

You really want to put him in his place. You'd love to tell him, just this once, exactly what you think of him and his crazy notions. Still better, you'd just love to punch him in the nose!

Don't do it.

We look at the world and see evil. We see people getting away with being evil. It just doesn't seem fair. Why do the rotten people seem to flourish while nice guys finish last?

Don't give up.

G-d has a very long memory. When we do what is right, we can look forward to G-d's reward. We don't always see it right away. But today, thousands of years later, dogs are still "rewarded" for their ancestors' "Mitzvah" in Egypt. You can be "doggone" sure that He'll do the same for us.

Another thought.

The explanation I wrote above is the "standard" approach that is usually given in reference to this passage. Allow me to share with you a unique interpretation I heard many years ago from a childhood friend, Rabbi Shmuel Geller, currently of Jerusalem.

Our Sages tell us that non-Kosher food somehow has a physical/spiritual effect on those who eat it. The negative influence of *Treif* creates a "tangible" defect on the consumer. You are what you eat.

“‘A dog will not so much as show its tongue to an Israelite ... so that you will know that G-d has made a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites.’ ”

How did the dogs know whom to growl at and whom to ignore? How could they tell the difference between an Egyptian and an Israelite? Simple!

*You may not eat flesh that has been torn (*Treifah) *in the field*. Cast it to the dogs.

A dog is an expert when it comes to *Treif*! *Treif* is its standard food! With its keen sense of smell, a dog can tell the difference between a consumer of *Treif* (i.e., an Egyptian) and a consumer of Kosher! (an Israelite.)

Not only are you what you eat. You are also what you hear, see, and say.

The Torah tells us that there are certain foods that affect us negatively. That applies to other experiences as well. We are all familiar with the proverbial mother who washes her son's mouth out with soap for using improper language.

Do we really need access to all those cable channels? Should we really pollute our homes and our children with the antics of dysfunctional people saying and doing dysfunctional things? Do we use appropriate Internet filters to insure that children of all ages (including ourselves!) are insulated from websites that are *Treif* in every sense of the word?

Every person is the sum total of his life's experiences. It behooves us to be sure that our reading material and other forms of entertainment are *Glatt Kosher*.

Have a great Shabbos.

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