



Chukas / חֻקַּת

The Snake in our Minds

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Yosef and Daniel Spolter laughed as they watched a baby chimp grab a banana from an adult chimp and run off with it. Totty had brought them to the zoo as a reward for memorizing the first perek of Mishnayos Brachos, and they were having a great time watching all the animals playing and eating.

A few minutes later, they passed a concession stand selling yummy frozen treats. It was a hot day and Totty offered to buy ices for the two sweaty boys. After checking the hechsherim, Yosef picked a cherry freeze-pop and Daniel got a lemon popsicle. The boys thanked Totty, made beautiful brachos, and happily licked their frozen treats as they walked.

Just then they heard the ding-a-ling of a bell and looked up to see yet another man selling refreshments, this time from a little cart, and it advertised Cholv Yisroel ice cream! Another frum family approached and their parents bought the kids each a large waffle cone with strawberry-vanilla ice cream topped with cookie crumbles.

"Let's go, boys," Totty urged, "you already got ices."

"But Totty," complained Yosef, "we wouldn't have picked these yuchy ices if we knew that we could get a **real** treat like ice cream cones!"

"Yeah," added Daniel. "And these lemon ices always make my tongue prickle."

"No," said Totty firmly. "You've already gotten a treat and I'm not buying you another one."

The boys lowered their voices as they entered the cool, dark reptile house, filled with cages containing different types of lizards, turtles, and snakes. They saw an iguana munching on leaves and were amazed to see a foot-long chameleon catching flies with his tongue.



Then another cage near them caught their attention. The sign read “**King Cobra:** *(Ophiophagus hannah)*, also called hamadryad, The world’s longest venomous snake, it can deliver enough venom in a single bite to kill a large elephant.”

“Wow!” said Daniel, “but where is it? I can’t see anything but rocks and branches.”

“I see it,” said Totty. “Look carefully.”

The boys peered through the glass and suddenly jumped back. What they thought was just a branch had slithered towards them and raised its hooded head, flicking its forked tongue in and out.

“Wow, Totty, that snake scared me!” Yosef said, as they walked back out into the bright sunlight a few minutes later.

“Maybe that’s the Nachash from Gan Eden!” Daniel began to say, but just then they passed the ice cream cart again. “Oh, please Totty, please? Please can we get one? It’s not fair that they are selling cholov Yisroel ice cream here and all we got were these lousy ices! Please? Please?”

Totty stopped walking. “Yosef, Daniel, five minutes ago you were happily enjoying these ices. Suddenly you saw ice cream and now you don’t like the ices? Do you understand what just happened to you?”

“Yeah, we saw ice cream.” Yosef said, a confused look on his face.

Totty smiled. “Daniel, you mentioned something interesting about the snake just now. We know that the Nachash of parshas Bereishis was the Yetzer Hora, whom Hashem had made look like a snake. After the cheit of the Eitz Hada’as, he was given the curse to ‘crawl on his belly’.

“And the Yetzer Hora acts like a snake. You couldn’t even see the cobra until he moved, right? You thought he was a piece of wood. That’s how the Yetzer Hora works! He slithers in our mind and hides himself so we can’t see him even though he’s right there, causing us to think and act in ways that are wrong.

“Now what just happened with the ices and the ice cream is similar to what happened to the Am Yisroel in this week’s Parsha.”

“They had ice cream in the midbar?” Yosef asked.

“No,” Daniel said. “But the mann tasted like whatever they wanted, so it tasted like ice cream!”

Totty chuckled and continued. “Before the Am Yisroel came to Eretz Yisroel they passed by other nations who lived nearby. And those nations were eating real food! Sure, the Yidden had the mann, but you couldn’t chew mann like you chewed a nice geshmake steak. So they complained about the mann to Moshe Rabbeinu, and Hashem sent venomous snakes to punish them. Why snakes? Because the snake of the Yetzer Hora was crawling in their minds, causing them to be unhappy with the mann.

“We should always be happy with what we have. There is no need to complain about the good things Hashem gives us! Bnei Yisroel complained about the mann and, lehavdil, you boys are complaining about these delicious ices! That was the Yetzer Hora who jumped out at you, telling you not to enjoy what you **do** have now - and you didn’t even realize he was there!”

The boys thought about this as they slurped the last of their ices. Yosef looked up. “My freeze pop **does** taste good, Totty.” he said. “Thank you for buying it and thanks for teaching us such an important lesson.”

Have A Wonderful Shabbos!

Let’s Review:

- Why were the boys unhappy with their ices?
- How is the Yetzer Hora similar to a snake?



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