

## Parshas Mishpatim ♦ Rabbi Zvi Selevan

In this week's Parsha we find a rather unusual mitzvah. The Torah writes (*Shemos 22:30*) "*V'anshei kodesh tihyun li u'basar basadeh tereifa lo tocheilu lakelev tashlichun oso*"; "You shall be holy people to Me; flesh from a *tereifa* (an animal with ripped organs) you shall not eat, to a dog you shall throw it." Rashi asks what is so special about dogs that we are commanded to throw the meat specifically to a dog? Are other animals not worthy of our mercy? Why can't I sell the meat to a non-Jew and make a profit?

Rashi explains that of course one may sell it or give it to other animals, but the Torah is teaching us that it is preferable to give it to a dog; this shows that Hashem rewards every creature. Since the dogs were silent in Egypt upon our departure and suppressed their natural urge to bark, therefore, as their reward they are given preferential treatment to receive the meat.

We find that not only did the Torah prescribe a physical reward for the dogs, a spiritual reward was assigned as well. We have a midrash known as Perek Shira which relates each animals' praise of Hashem in their own specific manner. Dogs are also included in the Perek Shira. The end of the Midrash relates that R' Yeshaya was extremely bothered by the fact that dogs are allowed to praise Hashem, for after all dogs are known as *azei nefesh*, brazen souls. This bothered him intensely to the point that he fasted 85 times in order to understand this concept.

Finally, an angel came and revealed the answer to him. The angel explained that dogs are allowed to praise Hashem because they were silent during our departure from Egypt. Additionally, dogs merited that their excrement is used in tanning when processing hides with which

to write Sifrei Torah, tefillin, and mezuzos.

What bothered R' Yeshaya so much about dogs more than any other animal? And what exactly was the answer to his query? R' Aharon Leib Shteinman shlit"l explains that R' Yeshaya understood that every animal mentioned in Perek Shira has "good traits" that are an innate part of their being and their praise of Hashem utilizes these specific traits.

Therefore, dogs that are described as *azei nefesh* are inherently brazen and as such should not be allowed to praise Hashem. This was R' Yeshaya's difficulty. The angel answered him that since the Torah goes out of its

the halacha which dictates that we place the Tefillin specifically on our heads and on our arms near our hearts. The reasoning behind this halacha is that we must subjugate both our thoughts and our actions to the Will of Hashem. It is fitting that the dogs, who have it in their essence to suppress their wants for Hashem's will, have a role to play in the production of these two items.

This explanation holds a great lesson for us all. Dogs have no *bechira*, free will, and yet for performing an action which was contrary to their nature, they were privileged that their act be written in the Torah. In addition to that, this

*“We must subjugate our will  
and desires to the will of Hashem”*

way to tell us that the dogs were silent when we left Egypt, this too must be a part of their makeup. As such they are allowed to praise Hashem with this trait that is an innate part of their being.

The dogs praise Hashem by saying "*Bo'u nishtachaveh v'nichreah lifnei Hashem oseinu*" "Come let us bow and kneel in front of Hashem our Creator". This sentence indicates their willingness to subordinate themselves to Hashem's Will, as they did when they were silent during our exit from Egypt, suppressing their natural instinct to bark because of Hashem's Will.

Additionally, the Sefer Torah contains all the mitzvos and is a guidebook to fulfilling Hashem's will, which often requires suppressing our own personal wants. Tefillin too are a sign of one's personal commitment to Hashem's service. This is shown in

action caused them to receive physical and spiritual benefits, and allowed them to be able to pray to Hashem.

Just imagine the reward for those who do not speak during davening. The temptation to talk is great, but those who overcome it will receive immense physical and spiritual benefit, as Rav Yom Tov Lipman Heller (1579-1654) wrote in the special *Mi Shebeirach* which we recite on Shabbos Mevorchim, that all those who do not speak in shul during davening are promised "all the blessings that are recorded in the Torah". As we recite it this week before Mussaf, let us remind ourselves of the amazing power we have to bring blessing into our lives if only we try.

*Good Shabbos!*

