

Reb Pinchas
Imrie Pinchas
Parshas Va'eira

Siman #86

Regarding the lice of Egypt, the poskim (Jewish legal authorities) debated (Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 321:10) whether they are a species of white lice or black lice referred to as "flea." It is said in the name of the Rav, of blessed memory, that it is therefore called "flea" (*par'osh*) because of Pharaoh (*Par'oh*).

[NOTE: It would seem that this aligns with the opinion of R' Yitzchak of Orléans in Tosafot on Shabbat (12a), in the passage beginning "lest he kill." However, it appears that even Rabbeinu Tam agrees that the lice mentioned in the Torah refer to the jumping flea (*par'osh*), as per the words of R' Yitzchak of Orléans. Rabbeinu Tam maintains that the language of the Torah is distinct from the language of the Sages. In the language of the Sages, "lice" (*kinim*) refer to the creeping type.

Thus, the words of Rabbeinu Tam align according to all opinions. (Annotation by the holy Rabbi Shalom of Koidanov, of blessed memory, in *Midrash Pinchas HaChadash*, p. 80).

1. The Duality of Language and Meaning

Rabbeinu Tam's distinction between the "language of the Torah" and the "language of the Sages" teaches us that words and concepts in Torah may shift meaning depending on context and perspective. This highlights a broader principle in Torah study: the same term can carry different nuances, reflecting the multifaceted nature of divine wisdom.

The jumping flea (*par'osh*) and the creeping lice (*kinim*) are both part of the same discussion yet serve different linguistic and conceptual roles.

- **Personal Application:** In life, understanding context is key to interpreting words and actions. What may seem contradictory or inconsistent at first glance can be reconciled by recognizing the nuance of perspective.

2. Symbolism of Pharaoh and the Lice

The connection between the word *par'osh* (flea) and Pharaoh (*Par'oh*) offers a symbolic layer. Pharaoh represents arrogance, control, and oppression, while fleas are small, pervasive, and parasitic—seemingly insignificant yet profoundly irritating. This might suggest that Pharaoh's tyranny mirrors the way small, harmful behaviors can accumulate into a larger oppressive force.

- **Personal Application:** This comparison reminds us to be vigilant about small "fleas" in our own character—seemingly minor flaws or habits that can grow into significant problems if left unchecked.

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3. The Nature of Miracles

The plague of lice in Egypt was not merely an infestation; it was a divine sign, part of the larger narrative of liberation. The debate over what type of lice the Torah refers to—the jumping flea or creeping kind—reminds us that even the seemingly mundane aspects of miracles carry layers of meaning. The plague's impact transcended its physical manifestation, symbolizing the breakdown of Pharaoh's control.

- **Personal Application:** Miracles often occur through the ordinary, teaching us to find meaning in the small and seemingly insignificant moments of life.

Conclusion

This passage illustrates the richness of Torah interpretation and its relevance to personal growth. It invites us to explore context, symbolism, unity, and the deeper meanings embedded within divine wisdom. By internalizing these lessons, we can approach Torah study—and life—with greater humility, curiosity, and depth. **END NOTE]**