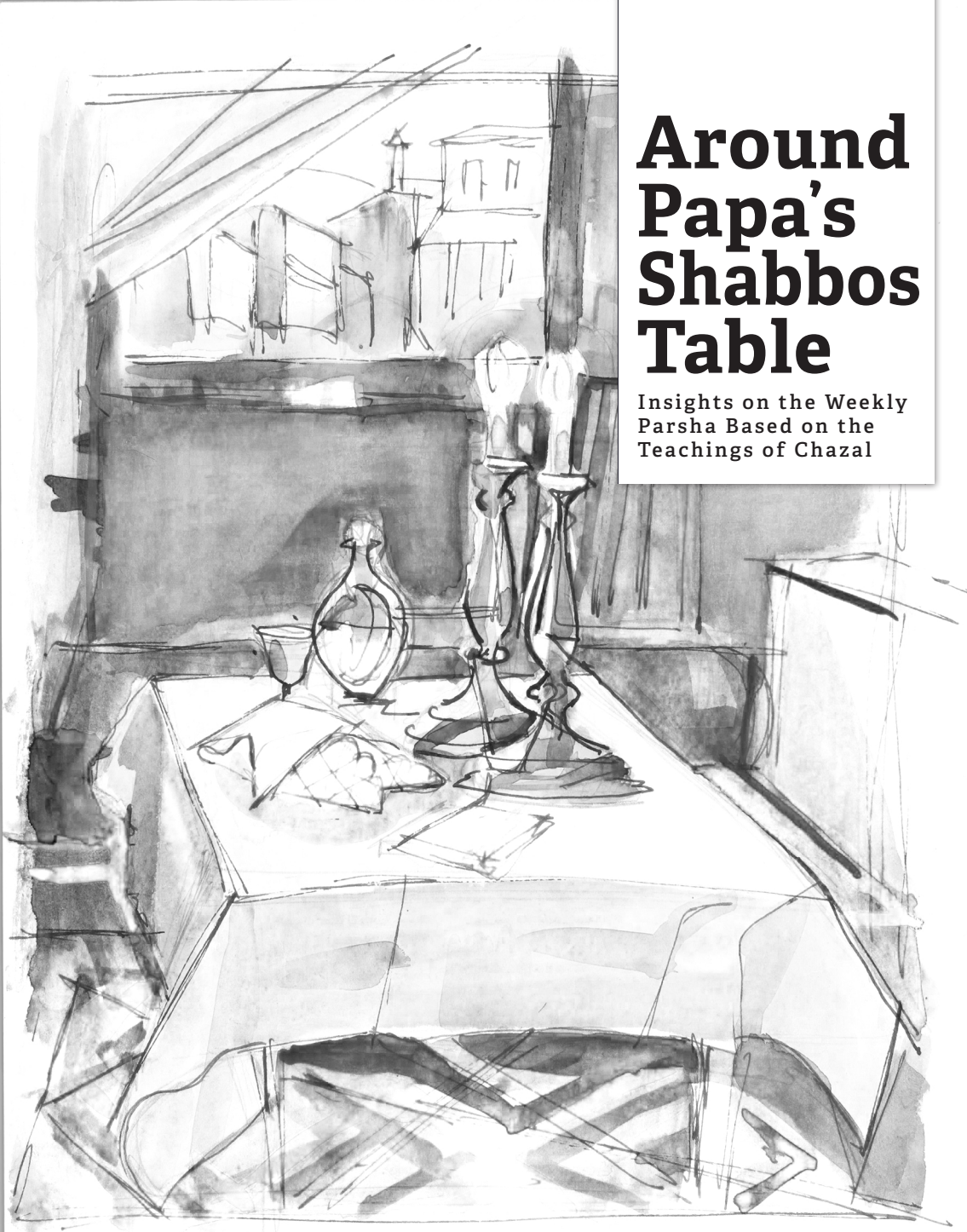




Around Papa's Shabbos Table

Insights on the Weekly
Parsha Based on the
Teachings of Chazal

Uri Eliezer Benjamin

מכתב ברכה

הרב הגאון ר' יחיאל מיכל דרילמן, שליט"א

ר"ח מרחשון, תשפ"ה

לכבוד גיסי היקר והאהוב הרב אורי אליעזר, נר"ו

Knowing you from your early teens, I have witnessed remarkable, constructive qualities and traits in your persona. Your steadfast passion for adhering to the מסורה is legendary. Your burning zeal to be מקבל from the multitude of rebbeim that you are, and were nourished from, is inspiring to anyone who enters your daled amos. You cherish the מסורה you received from your parents.

All of this is exemplified at your Shabbos table. The way you "hareve" to design a Shabbos table for your family is nothing less than spectacular.

In this compilation of divrei Torah, you collect, design, organize, and meticulously explain fundamental concepts in Torah and yirah. It is an inspiration to us all. You have the talent of a מפיץ מרגליות and a סופר בהיר. The love you have for your family and the dedication to their yedias haTorah is evident in your chibbur.

Your mentors have encouraged you to share the wealth of these divrei Torah with others. It's about time. The yedios and inspiration of these words deserve a much greater exposure. It is a זיכוי הרבים on the highest level.

באהבה רבה,
יחיאל מיכל

מכתב ברכה

הרב הגאון ר' ירוחם הכהן פיטטער, שליט"א

משגיח רוחני דמתיבתא ד'לאנג ביטש

ה' מרחשון תשפ"ה

נב' תלמידי ידידי אהובי ר' אורי, נ"י

My Dear Beloved Uri,

"NACHAS!!"

The word gushes from my heart in a wave of unbridled emotion as I read the pages of *Around Papa's Shabbos Table*. It is a monumental accomplishment! The fruits of labor of a true *ehrllicher* Yid committed to a life of *Toras Emes*.

This past Simchas Torah, a *bachur* came over to me during *Hakafos*. The dancing was intense, the emotions running high. The "עולם הבא איז א גוטע זאך, לערנען תורה איז א בעסער זאך, ניגון" "ווארף אוועק א יעדן יאך, לערנען תורה נאך און נאך."

The *bachur*, owing to his intense focus on the words of the "ניגון", was struck by a *kushya*: The Mesillas Yesharim says in the first *perek* that "The sole purpose of a man's creation is to find pleasure with Hashem and the splendor of His *Shechinah*." So, how can I enthusiastically sing, "לערנען תורה איז", "עולם הבא is better?!" when "א בעסער זאך"

True, "עולם הבא" is the ultimate purpose of Creation. However, in one aspect, this world is greater: *SHTEIGING*.

"לערנען תורה" is the key to *shteiging*. The רמח"ל writes in דרך ד' that when a person learns Torah, he infuses himself with Hashem Himself, as he thinks the thoughts and preferences of Hashem. He ascends to new heights of *kedushah*. He *shteigs*!

In עולם הבא, he receives his great reward for the *shteiging*.

"עולם הבא איז א גוטע זאך"

BUT

" לערנען תורה איז א בעסער זאך "

Uri, as I read your *vertlach* and *shticklach Torah*, waves of emotion abound. Memories of almost five decades warm my heart. I see a young *bachur* in eleventh grade aspiring to follow his *madrachim*. His face — it's called פנים because it shows one's פנים — cries out, "I want to learn Torah," "I want to be a שמים," "I want to daven with כוונה and learn מוסר, to be a בן תורה."

Witnessing these yearnings come to fruition over these many years continues to bring me unbounded *nachas*. For, just as the Torah is unlimited because it comes from Hashem, so is its נחת unlimited.

Around Papa's Shabbos Table evidences a *talmid chacham*, *ba'al yiras Shamayim*, and *ben Torah*, dedicated to self-growth, and committed to the *chinuch* of his family.

You have created, together with your *Eishes Chayil*, a home that is a bastion of *SHTEIGING* obvious to all!

באהבה וידידות מעומקא דלכא
ידוּחם הכהן פייטער

קאן הייב ו'ד'זא א מלמדא דאטא יחזקיהו בעלזער

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ספר בראשית



פרשת בראשית

Rav Shach, *zt"l*, cites¹⁶ the Vilna Gaon in his explanation of the *sefer Safra D'Tzniusa* on the Mishnah:¹⁷ “הפוך בה והפוך בה דכולה בה” — *Delve into it and delve into it, because everything is in it.* Everything that happened, is happening, and will happen to every person is included in the Torah in every detail. And not just to people, but to all animals as well.

In general, everything is written in *Parshas Bereishis* itself, and in even more general terms, from the first word until לעשות, ברא אלקים, and in even more general terms in the first seven words — the very first *pasuk* — and in even more general terms in the word בראשית itself! (It is worthwhile to see the full *lashon* of the Gra as brought down by Rav Shach, and the lessons he learns from this Gra.)

I was once told that when someone heard this from the Vilna Gaon, they wanted to see if it was really true, so they tried to stump the Gaon by asking about some rare mitzvah. Where in the word בראשית can we find the mitzvah of *Pidyon Haben*, the mitzvah of redeeming a firstborn son from a kohen? Without blinking an eye, the Gaon answered, “בן ראשון אחר שלושים יום תפדה” — *After thirty days, a firstborn son must be redeemed.* The *roshei teivos*, the first letters make up the word בראשית.

We mere humans, so very distant in our *mesorah* from Har Sinai, cannot begin to fathom or grasp the enormity, complexity, and secrets that are in our Torah. There are many such *pshatim* written on all parts of the Torah, and they constantly amaze me, and often leave me shaking my head in awe at some eye-opening revelation like the one just mentioned. I will try to intersperse some of these truly enjoyable

16. אבי עזרי הקדמה להוצאה שניה קטע הראשון

17. פרקי אבות ה:כו

Torah secrets throughout this *sefer*, in between the *vertlach* I've used to teach my family the lessons I gleaned from the various *divrei Torah* that I pen henceforth.

And so, *be'ezras Hashem*, we begin...

Who is Man?

The *pasuk* says in *Tehillim*,¹⁸ “מה אנוש כי תזכרנו, ובן אדם כי תפקדנו” — *What is man that You should remember him, and what is man that You should be watchful over him.*” If any *pasuk* seems to be asking “Why are we here? What is our mission?” This is it. Who are we? What is our worth? What is our mission? Let us find out...

There are conflicting yet similar statements in Gemara that cite this *pasuk*, and we will quote both.

The Gemara states:¹⁹ “ואריב”ל בשעה שעלה משה למרום אמרו מלאכי השרת” לפני הקב”ה רבש”ע מה לילוד אשה בנינו? אמר להן לקבל תורה בא... מה אנוש כי תפקדנו... — *Reb Yehoshua ben Levi said, at the time that Moshe went up to heaven to receive the Torah, the heavenly angels said to Hashem, Hashem, what is this mortal being doing amongst us? Hashem said to them, he came to accept the Torah... they responded, what is man that You should remember him, and what is man that You should be watchful over him?*”

The Gemara continues with a back and forth. Hashem tells Moshe to respond, and after receiving Divine protection from the *malachim*, Moshe asks the *malachim* what their connection to Shabbos, *Kibbud Av V'Eim*, and other *mitzvos* would be, since they have no Shabbos, no parents, etc. In the end the *malachim* acquiesce, and Moshe is given the Torah to deliver to Klal Yisrael.

The second Gemara...

18. תהלים ח:ה

19. שבת פח:

The Gemara states:²⁰ “א”ר יהודה אמר רב בשעה שביקש הקב”ה לבראות את האדם... אמרו לפניו רבוש”ע מה מעשיו... מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ומה כי תזכרנו? — *Reb Yehuda said in the name of Rav, at the time that Hashem sought to create man... they said to Hashem, what is man’s deeds... what is man that You should remember him, and what is man that You should be watchful over him?*”

In this Gemara, Hashem actually created the *malachei hashareis*, and when they began to argue and said their piece, Hashem wiped them out. New *malachim* were created, and they said, “What worth is it for us to argue? The entire world is Yours...” In the end, obviously, Hashem created Adam, and — as the saying goes — the rest is history.

We have two Gemaras, in two different places, quoting from two different sets of Amoraim. The first is when Hashem was about to give the Torah to Klal Yisrael, the angels objected and used the *pasuk* of *מה אנוש* as their primary argument. The second is when Hashem was looking to create man, the angels objected and used the *pasuk* of *מה אנוש* as their primary argument. Which is the real place for this argument using this *pasuk*? Is it by the giving of the Torah, or at the time of man’s creation?²¹

— *In the beginning, Hashem created the heavens and the earth.*²² The second Rashi in the Torah²³ brings the Midrash Rabbah, which says, “אין המקרא הזה אומר אלא דרשני” — *This pasuk says nothing except expound upon me.*” Rashi continues with the very famous line, “ובשביל ישראל... ושביל התורה שנקראת ראשית...” — *For the Torah which is called the beginning...and for Yisrael which is called the beginning.*” Rashi seems to be changing the typical meaning of the letter “*beis*” at the start of a word.

20. סנהדרין לח:

21. ע' מהרש"א חידושי אגדות שבת פח: שהק' כן. וע"ש בתרוצו

22. בראשית א:א

23. רש"י שם ד"ה בראשית ברא

Normally we would translate בראשית as “*In the beginning.*” After all, that’s how we were taught to translate the word in first grade! But according to the Midrash that Rashi is quoting, the letter *beis* actually means “for” instead of “in.” The way to translate this most famous *pasuk* is now, “*For the Torah and Yisrael, Hashem created the heavens and the earth.*”

There are many interpretations of this Midrash. The one I’d like to share comes from an Alshich Hakadosh on *Parshas Emor*. Once we see the thought process of the Alshich, perhaps we can apply it to our original conundrum — trying to explain the dual use of the *pasuk* of מה אנוש in the argument of the *malachei hashareis* against both the giving of the Torah, and the creation of Adam Harishon.

The Torah tells us²⁴ that on the fifteenth day of Tishrei, we are to celebrate the Yom Tov of Sukkos. The Alshich poses twenty questions on the *pasuk* that introduces this Yom Tov. After the twenty questions, he begins his answer by asking one more question. What are we celebrating on Sukkos? If it is to celebrate the *ananei hakavod*, to celebrate the protective cloud that followed and protected the Yidden during their sojourn through the *Midbar* —which is the assumed reason — then, asks the Alshich, why don’t we also have a Yom Tov celebrating the *mon* and the *be’er*? Why don’t we celebrate the *mon* that Hashem sent to us to eat in the *Midbar*, and why don’t we celebrate the well of Miriam that gave us water in the *Midbar*? Both are at least as important and valuable to the Bnei Yisrael as were the *ananei hakavod*? Without any of these three, the Bnei Yisrael would not have survived the *Midbar*. If one is deserving of a Yom Tov of its own, why aren’t the other two?

To answer this question, the Alshich brings down what he refers to as מרגלא בפמיהו דרבותינו — *A frequent saying of our Chazal.*” The Midrash Tanchuma²⁵ says, “כי מאז ברא הוא יתברך את העולם כי נתאוה להיות”

24. ויקרא כג:לג/לד

25. ויקרא, בחקתי ג'

לו דירה בתחתונים — *Because from the time that He the Blessed One created the world, because He had a desire that there should be a place for Him to live amongst the lower realms.*” The Alshich HaKadosh is *medayek* as follows. Our *parshah* says that Hashem created the heavens and the earth. If Hashem had a desire to live in the lower realms, the Midrash should have said, “נתאוה להיות דירה בארץ — *Hashem had a desire to live on the earth.*” Why does the Midrash use the word תחתונים instead of ארץ? Why does the Midrash use an unusual term that refers to “the lowers” instead of simply saying “earth”?

The Alshich answers with a remarkable insight into who we are as Yidden — all learned from this very first *pasuk* in our Torah. Says the Alshich: Hashem has no desire whatsoever to live on or in this world. Hashem is *kulo ruchani*, completely spiritual. Hashem really has no place in our world. So, where does Hashem belong, if not in the heavens? He belongs in *us*! בתחתונים refers to Yidden. Hashem has a desire to live within each and every Yid! When a Yid observes the Torah and *mitzvos* they become a vessel into which the holiness of the *Shechinah* wishes to reside. This, says the Alshich, is the meaning of the famous *pasuk*,²⁶ “ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם” — *Make for me a Mikdash and I will dwell within them.*” As the *pasuk* in *Yirmiyah* says,²⁷ “היכל ד’ — *the Bnei Yisrael themselves are the dwelling place of the Shechinah.*” Because of our *neshamah tehorah*, we have a unique and singular connection to Hashem.

Continues the Alshich: The *malachim* presented an argument to Hashem not to allow the Torah to be given to Moshe Rabbeinu. They wondered what a human was doing up in heaven. What right did Moshe have to be there? The Gemara says²⁸ that the *malachim* argued by quoting the *pasuk*, “מה אנוש כי תזכרנו...” — *Who is man that he should be remembered?*” But Hashem rejected the *malachim’s* argument, and so

26. שמות כה:ח

27. ירמיהו ז:ד

28. שבת פח:

says the Alshich, “קיום העולם ומצותיה מקיימים העולם” — *It is therefore proven that Yidden, by their adherence to the Torah and its mitzvos, keep the world going.*”

Therefore, says the Alshich, “בעזרת ישראל שבהם עולם מתקיים בקיימם” — *Torah ד'. וע"כ הטיבו אשר דברו רבותינו ז"ל באומרם בראשית ברא אלקים וכו', בשביל ישראל שנקראו ראשית נברא העולם, בשביל התורה שנקראת ראשית נברא העולם* “כי זה זה גורם קיומו...”

*“Hashem chose His nation Klal Yisrael because in them is the foundation of the world when they keep Hashem’s Torah. And therefore — well-said by Chazal — when they said, Bereishis, because of Klal Yisrael who are called Reishis the world was created, because of the Torah that is called Reishis the world was created, **because both factors are the source of upholding the world...**”*²⁹

Perhaps now, we can understand our original question. The two seemingly disparate Gemaras, each quoting the *malachim* who argued using this *pasuk* of מה אנוש. Perhaps we can say that the two are really one! בשביל ישראל... בשביל התורה are not two different reasons for בראשית ברא אלקים, but rather they are **one** reason! It was a must for these two things to come together as one in order for Hashem to agree to create the world. Hashem needed mankind, and Hashem needed the Torah to give to mankind to create a Yid — and now that there was a Yid, the world could have sustenance, and the world would be a place where Hashem could find a home.

“נתאוהו להיות דירה בתחתונים,” Hashem desired to have a place for Himself *in us*! This is the reason for the creation of the world, and nothing else mattered. How does Hashem have a place in us? Firstly, by creating us — as in the second Gemara we quoted. But that would not have been enough. Just creating mankind without giving them the Torah would not have accomplished Hashem’s plan of creating a place for Him to dwell. Hence, the first Gemara we brought — that

29. See how the Alshich uses this to answer his question as to why we have a Yom Tov celebrating Sukkos, and not for the *mon* or well.

Hashem gave us the Torah. Ahhhh! With this combination we can all do the math — mankind plus Torah, equals Yid. And Yid equals a place for Hashem to dwell! These are not two separate things; Yisrael and Torah are not two different things, they are, when joined together, the very meaning and purpose of creation. Thus, they are both called “first”!

And so, our question on the two Gemaras is answered, and we have gained a deep new understanding of why Hashem created the world, and we have gained an awesome insight into why Hashem made us Yidden. This insight creates for us a breathtaking responsibility. It answers the very first question we asked. What is our purpose in this world? Why did Hashem create the world and put us in it? What is our mission? What should our goals be?

Our mission and our goals, my friends, is to become proper vessels so that Hashem will feel comfortable dwelling within us. We do this by keeping His Torah and doing His *mitzvos*, by being good servants to Him. The more we learn, daven, and do *mitzvos* with the proper enthusiasm, the better a vessel we become and the more *Shechinah* we will be able to host.

This is the message of the Alshich Hakadosh, and this is the message of the very first word of our holy Torah. בראשית, for Klal Yisrael, Yidden, who are called ראשית, and for the Torah which is called ראשית. Not because they are two different things — to the contrary — because we are one with the Torah. As one of the most famous Jewish idioms goes,³⁰ “ישראל ואורייתא וקב”ה חד הוא” — *Yidden, the Torah, and Hashem are one.*” A Yid who keeps the Torah and *mitzvos* earns the reward of hosting the *Shechinah* within himself — and all are one inside us!

So, what is our mission? Is it easy? No, it is not. It takes work, lots of work. And the *yetzer hara* will fight us at every step, but the

30. מאמר מפורסם זה לא ברור מהו מקורו. י”א שזה מדברי הזוהר, ואחרים מביאים את זה מהרמח”ל. מצאתי בספר אדיר במרום לרמח”ל דף ק’ בזה”ל “כי הקב”ה והתורה וישראל אחד הוא.”

rewards for success are oh, so wonderful. The light of the *Shechinah* in our homes, in our families, lighting up our lives with goodness and success.

Let us strive to live up to our mission, let us strive to become holy vessels, let us strive to live up to the lesson of בראשית.



פרשת חקת

A Copper Cure

Once again, we face a *parshah* that is full of topics to discuss. But since we are currently knee-deep in the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, the following piece from the Sfas Emes seems entirely appropriate to share.

Aharon Hakohen had died. Following his death, the Bnei Yisrael face the Canaanites, and they pray to Hashem to give them success in their fight against this enemy. Hashem hears their *tefillos* and the Bnei Yisrael are victorious. They travel from this war to the land of Edom. The way is long. They were but a short distance from entering the Promised Land, but because of the *Meraglim*, they are going to wander the Desert for forty years. This combination of constant wondering, together with the knowledge that they were “oh, so close,” causes some of them to once again rebel against Hashem.

They complain against Moshe and Hashem with a similar refrain:³⁸⁶ “למה העליטנו ממצרים למות במדבר” — *Why did You take us out of Egypt to die in this Desert?!*”

Hashem punishes them with a plague of poisonous snakes, which bite and kill “a large multitude” of the Bnei Yisrael. They daven to Moshe, and Hashem instructs Moshe:³⁸⁷ “וַיֹּאמֶר ד' אֶל מֹשֶׁה עֲשֵׂה לְךָ שֵׂרֶף” — *And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Make for yourself a snake and put it on a pole, and anyone who gets bitten should look at it and they will live.’* Moshe goes ahead and creates a copper snake and puts it on a pole, and those who were bitten gaze upon it and are cured.

386. במדבר כא:ה

387. במדבר כא:ח

Questions abound. Why the need for an elaborate cure? Couldn't Hashem have done as He did with the plagues of Mitzrayim — bring a wind, and the poisonous snakes would disappear? Hashem didn't tell Moshe to make a copper snake, just a snake. Where did Moshe come up with the idea to make it out of copper?³⁸⁸ And there are many more questions discussed in the *Meforshim*.

Rashi addresses the first question by bringing the famous Gemara that states:³⁸⁹ “וכי נחש ממית או מחיה? אלא בזמן שהיו ישראל מסתכלין כלפי” — *And does a snake kill or give life? Rather when the Bnei Yisrael gaze upward and indenture their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they are healed.*”

The Sfas Emes brings this Rashi and Gemara, but states that Rashi does not seem to fully answer the question — why the elaborate ruse? If the answer was to have the Bnei Yisrael daven to Hashem, tell them to look toward Heaven and daven. “Raise your eyes heavenward and pray for healing.” Why the need for the intermediary of a snake on a pole, which they must gaze upon, and then the cure becomes active? It seems superfluous, if the ultimate goal is to have them daven to Hashem.

The Sfas Emes explains that the Ramban says that Hashem typically forms a cure out of the disease itself. We see this in snake bites, that antivenom is made out of the poison of that particular snake. The antivenom for a rattlesnake bite is made from rattlesnake poison, and the antivenom for a cobra bite is made from cobra venom, etc. The words of the Ramban are “למתוק מר במר” — *To sweeten the bitter with the bitter itself.*”

In our times, virus vaccines are usually created out of the virus itself — the same way antivenom is the cure for a snake bite.

And so, the cure for this plague of the poisonous snakes was to create a snake, but put it high upon a pole. Why? Says the Sfas

388. ע' רש"י ורמב"ן על הפסוק - "לשון נופל על לשון"

389. ר"ה כט.