



CHAYAT HASHAVUA: FLY

CAN ANYONE TEACH US THE NAME FOR THE FLY?

- It's *z'vuv*, from the root *זבב*.
- It refers to something that goes back and forth or dangles, suspended in the air—like a fly!

THE DESIRE TO GET RID OF FLIES IS NOTHING NEW.

- Our tradition (midrash) teaches that one of the reasons Pharaoh's chief butler was sentenced to death was that he had given his ruler a drink in which a fly had been discovered. (As it turned out, however, it was not the butler's fault and he was allowed to live.)
- The tradition (midrash) also tells us that at the time of his death, Moses' soul spoke to God, saying his thanks for being placed in the body of a man so righteous that "never a fly rested upon it."
- And one of the "miracles" of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem was that, despite the numbers of animals that were sacrificed there, no flies were ever seen in the slaughterhouse
- Can you imagine any reason, not including miracles, why the Temple slaughterhouse may have been free of flies? (The great rabbi-philosopher Maimonides suggested that the phenomenon was nothing more the effect of incense-smoke in the area.)

THE VIEW OF FLIES IN THE ANCIENT WORLD BY OTHER PEOPLES, HOWEVER, WAS OFTEN VERY DIFFERENT.

- The Philistine people worshipped a god who they believed controlled the movement of flies.
- So they prayed to the "Lord of the Fly" and they built a great temple to honor their god of the flies.
- What do you think of the idea of people actually worshipping the fly itself as a god?
- That's why our people, beginning with Abraham, rejected idolatry and began to believe in the One God of all creation.

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT FLIES?

- The Talmud (Ketuvim 77b) advised that all food be protected from flies because they may have had contact with persons suffering from skin diseases.
- The rabbis knew almost two thousand years ago that flies carry disease.
- Given how we feel about flies, do you think they're kosher? (No—only four types of locust out of all flying insects are permitted.)

IT'S TIME FOR THE FLY QUIZ!

- How many species of flies exist in the world—30,000, 60,000, or 120,000? (120,000)
- The eye of an ordinary house fly has how many lenses—40, 400, or 4,000? (4,000)
- How many pairs of wings do flies have? (One.)
- Most flies are harmless to humans, but what kinds of injuries and damage can some species cause? (Destroy crops, live as parasites under the skin of other animals, and carry diseases [e.g., typhoid, cholera, anthrax, and dysentery].)
- What are some of the good things that flies do? Carry pollen to plants, speed up decomposition of animal remains, manure, and vegetable matter, consume other insects that cause injury or damage, and serve as food for frogs, toads, lizards, and birds.)

IN THE BIBLE THERE IS A VERSE THAT SAYS, “DEAD FLIES MAKE THE PERFUMER’S OIL PUTRID; [AND] A LITTLE FOOLISHNESS OUTWEIGHS WISDOM AND HONOR.”(Eccl. 10:1)

- Can anyone teach us what it means that dead flies make the perfumer’s oil putrid?
- The idea is that an insignificant thing, a fly, can spoil an important thing, a whole batch of valuable perfume.
- In the same way, a little bit of foolishness can outweigh much wisdom and honor.
- As children we learn that even one small theft can cause us to lose our place with our friends; one small bit of gossip by someone about us can cause many people to think badly of us.
- As we get older, we learn that one small lie can ruin a marriage and one small deceit can cause the loss of our job.
- This verse is teaching us that our inclination to do a bad thing is like a dying fly, with the power to spoil something of much greater value.



Gather the People

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