

YOU AND THE MOSQUITO

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

Last week's Torah reading discussed what we ordinarily refer to as "kosher" and "non-kosher" animals, birds and insects - many of these, the Torah describes as pure and impure. This week, the Torah goes on to describe states of impurity that befall *people*. Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, quotes a Talmudic sage (Rav Simlai) who says that this fits very well - after all, the Creation of man also followed the Creation of the animals!

The Medrash says something which might appear self-contradictory: "if a person merits it, they say to him, 'you preceded all the works of Creation;' but if not, they say to him, 'the mosquito came before you!'" In Jewish thought, there is no contradiction: we are given the tools to analyze both sides of this coin.

It is true that in the physical order of Creation, humans come last. But why do they come last? Because everything was building up to the final purpose of Creation. Jewish sources make it clear that the world, indeed the universe, was created for human beings, who alone are able to choose good and avoid evil. The universe was created in order that we be given this opportunity to come closer to G-d of our own volition. We have free choice - now, what choices do we make?

A person who chooses good attaches him or herself to G-d and Torah, adopting Divine attributes such as a giving nature, and care and concern for other people. The world was created in order to provide that soul with the opportunity to do just what he or she is doing! So, indeed, what came first? Even before Creation, there was the idea of creating an environment where souls could fulfill this mission. "You preceded all the works of Creation."

But on the other hand, if a person runs after every base instinct and desire, then this person is denying "G-dliness" in favor of the animal kingdom. What is he or she? A sophisticated animal! Merely the latest in a chain of animals stretching back to Creation... and indeed, "the mosquito came before you."

So indeed, we have complete freedom to choose whatever we would like to be. Anything we want! But who would *want* to be an animal, when he or she can be like G-d?

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