

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA · 3 SHVAT 5761 · JAN. 27, 2001 · VOL. 8 NO. 14

PARSHA INSIGHTS

INVASION OF THE FROG

“Aharon stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the frog-infestation ascended and covered the land.” (7:2)

One of my indelible childhood memories was the time I saw Walt Disney’s “Fantasia.” I can remember to this day the elephant in the pink tu-tu dancing the “Sugar Plum Fairy.” But the image that remains most vivid in my imagination is Mickey Mouse’s performance as the “Sorcerer’s Apprentice.”

The story of the sorcerer’s apprentice goes like this: The apprentice finds himself alone one day with the sorcerer’s book of spells. The sorcerer has gone out (probably to an interminable sorcerers’ convention). Mickey has been charged, in the sorcerer’s absence, with the cartoon equivalent of *sponge-a* — mopping the floor. Lazy and over-confident, as sorcerers’ apprentices are prone to be, he decides to take the book of spells for a small “test drive round the block.” With the help of the appropriate spell, he succeeds in bringing to life the *sponge-a* stick to do his work for him. Mickey laughs with delight as the newly animated mop goes back and forth to the well, drawing heavy buckets of water and bringing them to the house.

With no work to do, Mickey dozes off. When he awakes, he practically has a heart attack. The house is flooded as the enchanted mop keeps drawing more and more water! All Mickey’s efforts to stop the mop are in vain. Finally, he seizes an ax and tries to chop the mop into oblivion; the mop, however, divides like an amoebae into two. Now there are two magic mops flooding the house with water! Mickey chops these mops as well, and they divide into four. In a frenzy of panic and rage, Mickey slices and hacks, creating a new mop with each whack. When the sorcerer

returns, armies of mops are flooding his house with gallons of water.

If ever there was a case of art borrowing from reality, this must be it. I doubt Walt Disney ever read the Midrash on this week’s Parsha (Disney was known to employ neither Jews nor blacks), but if not, there’s an uncanny “coincidence.”

In this week’s Parsha we learn of the plague of the frogs: “Aharon stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the frog-infestation ascended and covered the land.” This translation is according to Rashi. The literal translation of the verse, however, is: “Aharon stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt and the *frog* ascended and covered the land.” The Torah says that only one frog came out of the river. On this, the Midrash comments that it was a giant frog, and that it only multiplied when the Egyptians started hitting it. Every time the Egyptians hit the frogs they would multiply exponentially.

Now there’s something that doesn’t quite make sense here. If the Egyptians saw that hitting the frogs just made things worse, why didn’t they stop hitting the frogs?

One aspect of having bad character traits is not just that they exert a negative influence on a person, but that they also dominate and distort his view of reality.

What made Pharaoh and the Egyptians refuse to let the Jews leave Egypt? Pride and anger. The Egyptians were so wrapped up in their anger that it never occurred to them to stop beating the frogs. It’s true that at the beginning the frogs were the cause of the anger, but once the Egyptians started beating the frogs, the frogs became merely a means to vent their anger, and the more frogs — the merrier (or the angrier).

Sources:

• The Steipler Gaon as heard from Rabbi B. Rappaport

I DIDN’T KNOW THAT!

“And G-d said to Moshe, ‘Come to Pharaoh...’ ” (9:1)

G-d commanded Moshe to enter Pharaoh’s palace without even asking permission. Despite the armed guards, lions and guard dogs that protected Pharaoh’s palace, Moshe was able to enter unhindered, and this itself was a great miracle.

• Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt; however, the Jewish People do not listen. Hashem commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. Hashem punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these mir-

acles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh's obstinace. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

HAFTARAH

Just as Parshat Vaera describes the downfall of Egypt in the times of Moshe Rabbeinu, so the *haftara* details the demise of a latter-day Egypt in the time of the Prophet Yechezkel.

Like the Pharaoh of Biblical times, the Pharaoh in the *haftara* proclaimed himself a god who created the Nile.

However, Egypt will be conquered by Nevuchadnetzar, the king of Babylon — and when both these

empires will lie in ruins, Israel will emerge unscathed, to re-unite with Hashem.

A SELF-MADE GOD

Pharaoh said, "Mine is the river and I have made myself." (29:3)

You're a farmer. You look at the sky. Will it rain? Will you be able to feed your family? When you depend on the rain to fall and water

YECHEZKEL 28:25 - 29:21

your crops, you realize that you are beholden to Hashem.

Rain rarely falls in Egypt. The Nile rises up and overflows its banks every year at the same time. The Nile waters the fields of Egypt, seemingly automatically.

It is for this reason that the Egyptians denied that there is a Power who supervises all. For the dew of heaven is the symbol and the sign of Hashem's power to run the world. Thus, the Egyptians made the river itself into a god.

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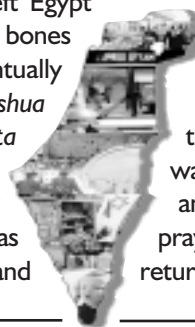
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LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

YOSEF'S TOMB

When the Israelites left Egypt they took along the bones of Yosef and eventually buried them in Shechem (*Yehoshua* 24:32). Our Sages (*Mesechta Sotah* 13b) explain that it was from where Yaakov's family lived in Shechem that he was abducted by his brothers and



sold into slavery, so it was to Shechem that his remains were returned.

One of the earliest casualties of the recent Palestinian uprising was Jewish control of this tomb, and Jews throughout the world pray that this theft too will soon be returned.

RABBI PAYSACH KROHN

On the Power & Potential of the Individual
Motzei Shabbat Parshat Yitro • Feb 17, 2001 • 25th Shevat
Ulamei Panorama • Givat Shaul, Jerusalem at 8:15 PM
For Information call Tel. 02-651-9823
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UNCOVERING THE WORDS OF TORAH

Jews were commanded that, upon crossing the Jordan and entering *Eretz Yisrael*, they were to take large stones, cover them with plaster and write upon them all of the Torah in 70 languages (*Devarim* 27:2-3). Which came first — the plaster or the writing?

Rabbi Shimon says that they first covered the stones with plaster and then wrote upon the plaster. Rabbi Yehuda, however, points out that a few passages later (*Ibid.* 27:8) the Torah explicitly commanded to write upon the stones. He therefore concludes that the writing was upon the stones themselves and these stones were then covered with plaster.

According to your approach, Rabbi Shimon challenged Rabbi Yehuda, how was it possible for the nations of the world at that time to learn the Torah? (How did the ancient nations study the Torah, which was written in 70 languages to make it available for anyone who wished to study it in order that no one should have an excuse that he had no opportunity to learn the Torah? — Rashi)

Hashem instilled a special flash of wisdom in those nations, explained Rabbi Yehuda, and they sent their scribes to scrape off the plaster, copy the Torah and bring back to them its contents. Their failure to take advantage of this opportunity to learn and live by that Torah, he concludes, sealed the fate of their spiritual status.

The obvious question that arises in regard to Rabbi Yehuda's response to Rabbi Shimon's challenge is: Why was it necessary for the words of the Torah to first be concealed with plaster and then revealed through the efforts of the scribes?

It may be that this was intended as a lesson that one can only truly acquire Torah knowledge if he is ready to invest serious effort in studying and understanding the words of the Torah. There are people who may have a curiosity about Torah but want its contents handed to them on a silver platter, like the person who came before the Sages Hillel and Shammai requesting that they convert him to Judaism on the condition that they teach him the entire Torah while he stands on one leg (*Mesechta Shabbat 31a*). To dispel any notion that Torah can be acquired without hard work, our ancestors were commanded to cover the multilingual recording of the Torah with plaster so that the nations who really wished to learn would first have to sweat a little along with their study.

• *Sotah 35b*

THE IRON CURTAIN

When the *kohanim* pronounce their blessing upon the congregation, those who stand behind them are not included as the beneficiaries of their blessing. If, however, there are Jews who are unable to be present in the synagogue during the *kohanim's* blessing (which were then part of the daily service, and continue so even today in many communities in *Eretz Yisrael*) because they are at work in the fields, they too are included in the benefit of the blessings.

When the question was raised as to whether people who do come to the synagogue but are separated from the area of the *kohanim* by a barrier are included in the blessing, this dramatic ruling of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi was cited:

“Even an iron curtain cannot stand between Jews and their Heavenly Father.”

Tosefot explains why those Jews behind the barrier are included in the blessing of the *kohanim*, even though nothing prevents them from being present in the area of the *kohanim* with nothing between them, while the ones who stand behind the *kohanim* are not included. The latter, he points out, demonstrate that they attach no significance to the *kohanim's* blessing which the Torah ordered to be given face to face. This is not the case in regard to those who stand behind the barrier, and the blessing reaches them because “iron curtains” cannot stand in the way of Hashem's blessing reaching them through the *kohanim*.

Tosefot also points out that the “iron curtain” concept also applies to communal prayer. Even though a barrier can interfere with the ability to combine separate groups of individuals into the *minyan* (quorum of ten) needed for communal services, it does not prevent an individual behind a barrier separating him from a *minyan* from answering *amen*, *barchu* and *kedusha* and even fulfilling his obligation of prayer through listening to the *shliach tzibur* (cantor). (See *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 54:20* for more details on this issue.)

What about the “iron curtain” which Rabbi Elazar (*Mesechta Berachot 32*) says has stood between us and our Heavenly Father since the destruction of the *Beit Hamikdash*? Tosefot makes the distinction that this statement was a comment on the difference between how acceptable our prayers were during the time of the *Beit Hamikdash* and after its destruction. That barrier does exist but no iron curtain exists before Hashem when it comes to the question of *kohanim* blessings and communal prayers penetrating them.

• *Sotah 38b*

PARSHA Q&A?

1. Did Hashem ever appear to Avraham and say "I am Hashem?"
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question Hashem?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as "Putiel?"
7. After which plague did Hashem begin to "harden Pharaoh's heart?"
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh's house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be "in you and in your nation?"
13. What are "chamarim?"
14. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The *dever* killed "all the cattle of Egypt." Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 - Although Hashem swore to give them the land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pitern*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. 7:17 - a) Because the Nile was an Egyptian god. 8:17 - b) Because an invading army first attacks the enemy's water supply, and Hashem did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 - Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers' magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle *in the fields* died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn't fall to the ground.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

How would you answer this question on the Parsha?

"And Pharaoh's sorcerers did this as well (turning water into blood)...and Pharaoh's heart was hardened." (Exodus 7:22) "And the sorcerers did this as well, and the frogs came upon the land of Egypt." (Exodus 8:3)

Name@Withheld wrote:

I always thought the plagues were supposed to prove that Moshe was sent by G-d, because only G-d had the power to make such plagues. If so, what was the purpose of the first two plagues, blood and frogs, which Pharaoh's sorcerers were able to duplicate? If they could also do it, what did it prove?

Answer:

Although Pharaoh's sorcerers could do the first two plagues, they couldn't *un*-do them. Only Moshe was able to turn the blood *back* into water and to make the frogs go away.

• Midrash Sechel Tov

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.edu with your questions on any Parsha!

TRUE FOR YOU

From: Michael
<Email@Withheld>

Dear Rabbi,
Since there are many religions and faiths around the world with contradictory beliefs, but all believing in one or multiple supreme beings, are they all personifications of one ultimate reality?

Dear Michael,

No. The fact that people believe something doesn't necessarily make it true.

For centuries, western man believed that blood did not circulate, that heavy objects fall faster than light ones and that iron could not float. Many believed the earth was flat. Some still do, such as the members of England's "Flat Earth Society."

Saying that "ultimately, everyone is right" is the logical equivalent of saying that "ultimately, everyone is wrong," because the other religions don't agree that "everyone is right." They all say they're right!

So, for example, by saying "Christians, Moslems, and Buddhists all have a piece of one reality," you are espousing yet another philosophy, one — like the others — which everyone else disagrees with! You're adding to the noise of people shouting "We're right!"

TORAH IS HEAVY, MAN

From: Name@Withheld

Dear Rabbi,
How much does the Torah weigh? My father has to carry it for my cousin's bar mitzvah and he is worried that it may be too heavy.

Dear Name@Withheld,

First of all, *Mazal Tov* on your cousin's Bar Mitzvah! The average Torah Scroll weighs around 20 to 25 pounds. The heaviest is about 50 pounds. There are some "minis" that weigh about five pounds. These small Torahs were usually written for Chassidic Rabbis. Older Torahs are usually larger and heavier.

Your father might try getting to the synagogue early and taking the Torah out for a "test drive." No one ever died from getting to synagogue early!

RABBI YA'AKOV OF MARVEGE

From: Mitch Silk in Hong Kong
<silkm@allenover.com>

Dear Rabbi,

I'm looking for details about Rabbi Ya'akov of Marvege, who authored a halachic work in which he cites insights he received while dreaming. With many thanks in advance.

Dear Mitch Silk,

Rabbi Yaakov of Marvege, a Levi, was a thirteenth century Tosafist born in Marvege, France. His halachic work "*Sha'alot U'teshuvot Min Hashamayim*" is comprised of replies he received from Heaven in dreams in answer to some of his halachic questions. For example, once he wanted to find out whether the halacha followed the view of Rabbi Yitzchak Alfazi or that of the Geonim regarding a certain aspect of the laws of *tefillin*. He inquired of Heaven in a dream and received a reply saying "My covenant will I establish with Yitzchak." This is a verse in Genesis (17:21), but in this context he saw it as an indication that the law follows the view of "Yitzchak," Rabbi Yitzchak Alfazi.

Sha'alot U'teshuvot Min Hashamayim is cited by halachists, such as Shibbolei Haleket and Radvaz, as being authoritative.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

- 6:2 Subtle and Sensational Miracles
- 6:6 Four Dimensions of Redemption
- 6:9 Why Moshe was Ignored
- 6:10 The Meaning of "Leimor"
- 7:3 The Free Will of Pharaoh
(also see *Siftei Chachamim* on Rashi)
- 8:6 Why Pharaoh said "Tomorrow"
- 8:18,25 Uniqueness of Fourth Plague
- 9:3 The Cattle in the Field

SFORNO

- 7:3 Pharaoh's Hard Heart
- 8:12 Structure of the Plagues.
- 9:14 Effects of the Plagues

KLI YAKAR

- 6:26-27 Aharon and Moshe
- 7:17 Three Sets of Plagues
- 8:27 "Mesirat Nefesh" of the Frogs

Re: Torah in Uniform:

I am the Rabbi of an Israeli Air Force base in the Negev and have started a weekly Torah sheet at our base. It is comprised of a story, a Torah idea or saying, an interesting halachic question & answer and a riddle. The audience is a very broad spectrum [officers, enlisted soldiers, religious, traditional and completely secular].

I've been reading your Ohrnet Mag for years, and I would like permission to take stuff from "Ask the Rabbi" and Yiddle Riddle. Naturally I have to translate it into Hebrew. May I have your permission?

- DL, Kiryat Sefer <idl@barak-online.net>

Ohrnet Responds: You have our permission! We love to have our stuff reprinted. We do ask please that you credit us as follows:

From: www.ohr.edu

Ohr Somayach Interactive

email: ohr@ohr.edu

Thank you for helping us bring the light of Torah to others!

Re: Rare Occasions:

You wrote: "For the Torah portion Miketz to fall *after* Chanukah, three events must coincide: Rosh Hashana must fall on a Shabbat, and both the months of Cheshvan and Kislev must have only 29 days instead of 30."

Actually the length of Kislev doesn't matter. Even if Kislev had been 30 days this year, it would not have changed the fact that the 8th day of Chanukah fell on Friday, and that *Parshat* Miketz followed.

- Julie Stampnitzky, Rehovot, Israel <jules@yucs.org>

Yarmulke Riddle (Ohrnet Vayigash):

In response to our recent "Yarmulke" riddle, Boris Schein, a math professor in Fayetteville, Arkansas wrote us with a related riddle. Those interested in his riddle are invited to write him at <bschein@uark.edu>.

Visiting Israel (Ohrnet Vayigash):

You recently wrote about the safety of visiting Israel. I might add: The annual murder rate in any major U.S. city hovers at 500-800. What's the murder rate in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Haifa? Even collectively? I don't fully understand why some Jews stay away from Israel when any sign of conflict arises, or why parents of some children attending Yeshivot and seminaries yank their children out at the first sign of conflict. Perhaps a lack of *emunah* (faith)? I don't believe the children choose to leave. I had two children studying in Israel during various conflicts and they opted to stay. We left the decision to them, and *baruch Hashem*, they made the right choice.

- Arnold Woods <ahnoldw@juno.com>

An Appreciative Reader:

Dear Ohr Somayach,

Please accept our donation towards support of your weekly "Ask the Rabbi" e-mail column. The rabbis involved with this are clearly very erudite, and their sensitivity and dedication to *Klal Yisrael* rivals legends of the Chafetz Chaim. May it continue to serve as a shining example of how an observant Jew should behave and help bring about our redemption soon. As usual, our only condition of this donation is that it be maintained as anonymous as possible. Many thanks!

- Name@Withheld

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving People the Benefit of the Doubt

When our unfavorable impressions of others begin to brew, we should remember the following story entitled:

A TALE OF ALE

It was Erev Pesach after the time of selling *chametz* (leavened products), and my wife asked me to do some last minute shopping at the new local supermarket. As I was lining up to pay, I noticed the man in front of me had three beer bottles amongst his purchases! "Oy vey!" I thought. How can this man be so ignorant? Doesn't he know that

beer is *chametz* and therefore forbidden to buy for Pesach? Secondly, I was concerned that the supermarket was not taking seriously its sale of *chametz*. If they had really sold their *chametz*, how could they now sell it to this man? Once it was my turn to pay, I mentioned to the check-out clerk that beer is *chametz* and shouldn't be sold now.

Then she told me "the other side of the story." The man had not bought the beer, rather he was returning three empty beer bottles to get the deposit back on them. In case I was skeptical, she pulled out the three empty bottles from under her counter!

- An Ohrnet reader