

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

CUTTING OFF YOUR NOSE

“The necromancers did the same by means of their incantations; so Pharaoh’s heart was strong and he did not heed them...” (7:22)

What would you do if someone came along and turned the rivers into blood? You’d try to turn the river back to normal. What would you do if someone made all the frogs come up out of the river? You’d try to get rid of them.

It’s interesting that Pharaoh didn’t seek to get rid of the plagues, rather he had his magicians duplicate them. This may have been very impressive and certainly boosted his self-confidence, but he was really shooting himself in the foot.

Wouldn’t it have been better to get the magicians to get rid of the blood and the frogs? That would have been just as impressive and much more useful.

This is the way of evil. It doesn’t matter if I lose — just as long as the other person doesn’t win.

HE WHO MAKES PEACE

“This time I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones.” (9:27)

It took seven plagues for Pharaoh to admit that he had sinned. Only after the plague of hail, Pharaoh said “This time I have sinned.” Why didn’t he admit his guilt up till this point?

Pharaoh’s cosmology was that of warring deities. Each god was supposed to control a different aspect of nature. There was a sun god, a moon god, a god of the Nile. Pharaoh’s world was a world where the elements were constantly at war. The Nile god had to be placated so that the river

would swell and overflow its banks, for the fertility of the Nile plain depended on this. The sun god had to be impo-rtuned so that it would not burn the crops. But no god could combine the elements together, for each was a separate power.

In the plague of hail, the hail that rained down on Egypt was no ordinary hail. Inside each freezing hailstone was a small furnace of fire. Fire and Water united. The unification of opposites.

When Pharaoh saw this plague he realized that there was a God in whom all the disparate facets of existence were united. And thus he realized that

“...there is an angel of fire and an angel of ice. Hashem is able to make peace between them. And thus He will make peace for us and all Israel.”

“This time I have sinned.”

When we say “He who makes peace in his exalted realms...” we refer to the upper worlds in which there is an angel of fire and an angel of ice. Hashem is able to make peace between them. And thus “He will make peace for us and all Israel.”

POWER FROM THE PEOPLE

“Moshe spoke before Hashem saying — Behold, the Children of Israel have not listened to me, so how should Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips.” (6:12)

The power of a spiritual leader flows from the people. In every generation Hashem promises us there will be spiritual leaders, the great Torah sages, who will be given the ability to advise and direct the nation.

However, when the Jewish People refuse to listen to these spiritual giants, and instead follow politicians who have no more insight than the rest of us, then our spiritual leaders become powerless to influence or to help the people.

Thus, if the Children of Israel had listened to Moshe, his lips would have been opened and his words would have affected even Pharaoh, but since the Children of Israel did not listen — Moshe’s “lips were sealed.”

THE REAL THING

“...and the staff of Aaron swallowed their staffs...” (7:12)

You can’t fake the Real Thing. When Aaron’s staff swallowed the staffs of the Egyptian sorcerers in front of the king, it became clear who was authentic and who was not.

Jewish history has been plagued by other movements purporting to be the Real Judaism.

Some break away from normative Judaism and change their name, and some try to usurp the authority of the Torah sages and call their beliefs “Judaism.”

During the Ottoman Empire, the Karaites attempted to gain recognition for themselves as the authentic Jews. They approached the Sultan, wanting to be recognized as the legitimate “People of Israel.” They claimed that the other Jewish People should be disenfranchised as being fakes. The Sultan summoned both a rabbi and a representative of the Karaites to appear in front of him at the royal palace. After hearing both their cases, he would decide who was the authentic “People of the

continued on page four

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 then 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 the miracles on a smaller

scale, again encouraging Pharaoh not to grant Moshe's request. However, after the plague of lice, even Pharaoh's magicians concede that only the one true 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 Egypt, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses to let them go.

HAFTORAH: YEchezkel 28:25-26; 29:1-21

Just as the Parsha describes the downfall of Egypt in the times of Moshe, so too the Haftorah 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 Haftorah also proclaimed himself a god who created the Nile.

However, Egypt will be conquered by Nevuchadnetzar, the king of Babylon, and when both of these empires will lie in ruins, Israel will emerge unscathed, to be reunited with Hashem.

THE BUTLER DID IT!

"Behold I am over you, Pharaoh!"
(29:3)

There once was a butler of a large mansion who decided one day to impersonate his master. A guest was due to arrive who had never met the real master. The butler, bedecked himself in his master's finest clothes and greeted the guest in a fake aristocratic manner, ostentatiously showing-off the enormous mansion, its priceless art collection, and the acres of sumptuous gardens. The butler was having a grand

time lording it up until the real master appeared on the scene, and roundly put the butler in his place. Similarly, Pharaoh did not stint from self-aggrandizement, conducting himself as supreme overlord, answerable to none. He even made himself into a god and proclaimed "I did not know Hashem." Therefore Hashem reminds Pharaoh "Behold I am over you, Pharaoh!" — "Know that I rule over you, and you are in My hands to do with as I see fit. You are no more than a usurping butler!"

• Kochav M'Yaakov

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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

LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

When he once visited Bnei Brak the Talmudic Sage Rami bar Yechezkel saw goats eating beneath a fig tree. Honey oozed from the ripe figs, milk dripped from the goats, and the two combined into one flowing stream.

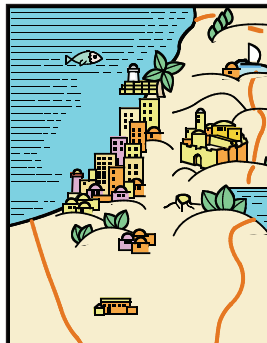
This is the meaning, he exclaimed, of "a land flowing with milk and honey!"

Maharsha points out that the surface understanding of this tribute to Eretz Yisrael (Shmos 3:8; 13:5) is that it is a graphic description of the extraordinary bounty overflowing with wholesome and tasty natural resources. But then the Torah should have written "flowing with milk

and flowing with honey." By using the term "flowing" only once it signaled that these two elements combined into a single flow. This became demonstratively clear to the sage when he saw how they actually blended.

Perhaps the significance of his discovery is that not only is Eretz Yisrael blessed with wholesome and tasty natural resources, but that these two seemingly disparate dimensions of food are naturally and perfectly blended for the health and enjoyment of the inhabitants of the land "flowing with milk and honey."

• Kesuvos 111b



PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Did Hashem ever appear to Avraham and say “I am Hashem?”
2. What does “Orlah” mean?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Hashem told Avraham that his descendants would live as strangers for 400 years (*Bereishis 15:13*). When did this period begin?
6. Who was Aharon’s wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
7. Why are Yisro and Yosef both referred to as “Putiel?”
8. After which plague did Hashem begin to “harden Pharaoh’s heart?”
9. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile river every morning?
10. Give two reasons why the plague of blood was chosen as the first plague.
11. How long did the plague of blood last?
12. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh’s house first?
13. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be “in you and in your nation?”
14. Why was Moshe not the one who struck the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring out lice through their own magic?
16. Why didn’t the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
17. What two miracles took place when Moshe hurled the soot upward to begin the plague of *shechin* — boils?
18. As a result of *dever* — cattle disease — “all the cattle of Egypt died” (9:6). Later, the Torah says that the *shechin* — boils — afflicted the Egyptians’ cattle (9:9). How can this be, if all their cattle had already died?
19. Why did Moshe pray to Hashem only after he left the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way that the hail stopped falling?

BONUS QUESTION?

Rashi never “just” comments; something in the text always impels him to do so. Rashi answers unspoken questions arising from a thoughtful reading of the Torah text. Anyone who wants a true understanding of Rashi’s classic Torah commentary must always ask: “What’s Bothering Rashi?”

“And G-d (Elo-him) spoke to Moshe and said to him, ‘I am the Eternal.’” (6:2) Rashi, on the words “G-d spoke to Moshe” comments: “He spoke words of rebuke.” Why doesn’t Rashi take this opening phrase as a simple statement that G-d spoke to Moshe? **What’s bothering Rashi?**

answer on page six

I DIDN’T KNOW THAT!

Pharaoh “hardening his heart” was not Hashem’s decree. Rather, it was the natural consequence of his continued sinning. Our Sages say, “Someone who wants to corrupt himself is given the opportunity to do so.” Man is free to choose his own direction in life. However, as he progresses in his chosen direction, it becomes increasingly difficult for him to retreat.

• Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler

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. 6:12 - Sealed.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:18 - With the birth of Yitzchak.
6. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
7. 6:25 - Yisro fattened (*pittem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
8. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 7:25 - Seven days.
12. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
13. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
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. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
17. 9:8 - 1) Moshe was able to hold four handfuls of soot (two of his own and two of Aharon’s) in one hand. 2) This small amount of soot spread over the entire land of Egypt.
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.

WEEKLY DAF

SHABBOS 51 -57

PROOF OF THE REPROOF

When Rabbi Simon told Rabbi Zeira that he hesitated to reprove some sinners because he assumed that they would pay no heed to his warning, the latter told him that he was still obligated to try. To prove his point he quoted an interpretation of Rabbi Acha ben Chanina about the heavenly punishment visited upon the righteous Jews in Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* because they failed to reprove their sinful neighbors.

Hashem had initially spared these individuals from the general destruction and defended their failure to offer reproof on the grounds that He knew that their warning would not be heeded. "Even if it was clear to Hashem," challenged the Attribute of Justice, "how was it so clear to them?" The initial pardon was then withdrawn — the only time in history that a prophecy for good was rescinded — and the death decree was issued, because one who fails to offer reproof is considered an accomplice to sin.

The clear implication of this *gemara* is that where there is *absolute certainty* that the sinful party will not heed the warning there is no obligation to offer reproof. Some leading commentaries,

however, point out in *Mesechta Beitzah* (30a) that if the sin is one which is explicitly written in the Torah, and we can therefore assume that the sinner is aware of it, there is an obligation to offer reproof even if we are certain that it will be ignored. This opinion is codified as law by the Rema in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 608:2.

How do we reconcile this ruling with our *gemara*? Our *gemara* discusses sins which were explicitly written in the Torah, yet stresses that the guilt of not reproofing was based only on their not being certain that it would be accepted?

The Magen Avraham (ibid.) solves the problem: When one is certain that a sinner who is aware of the sin will ignore his reproof he is no longer considered guilty as an accomplice. But he still is obligated by the Torah to reprove a fellow Jew.

• *Shabbos 54a*

TWO MIRRORS OF A MIRACLE

How does one view this sort of miracle? A woman died, leaving her husband with an infant who required nursing. The poor fellow could not afford to hire someone

to nurse the child. A miracle happened and the father was able to nurse his child!

"How great a man is this," exclaimed Rabbi Yosef, "that such a miracle happened for him!"

"On the contrary," countered the Sage Abaye, "how inferior is such a man that the natural order of things had to be upset for him (and he was not granted heavenly help in acquiring the required funds in natural fashion — Rashi)."

These two perspectives are explained by Iyun Yaakov in this manner:

Rabbi Yosef sees the miracle as a heavenly tribute to this man's greatness because the course of nature was changed in his merit. Had he simply been granted the wealth to hire a nurse, this would have been much less recognized as something extraordinary testifying to his status.

The Sage Abaye, on the other hand, sees this miracle as a put-down of its beneficiary. Had he been granted wealth he would have been able to afford everything he wanted. The miracle which occurred supplied him with only the narrow fulfillment of one need and was therefore a heavenly sign of how lacking in merit he was.

• *Shabbos 53b*

continued from page one

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Book."

Of course, as was the custom of the East, both the Karaite and the rabbi were required to remove their shoes before appearing in front of the Sultan. The Karaite removed his shoes and left them by the entrance to the throne room. The rabbi also removed his shoes, but then he picked them up and carried them with him into the audience with the Sultan.

When the Sultan looked down from his throne, he was struck by the somewhat strange sight of the rabbi holding a pair of shoes, and he demanded an

explanation.

"Your Majesty," began the rabbi, "as you know, when the Holy One, may His Name be blessed, appeared to our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, at the site of the burning bush, G-d told Moses "Take off your shoes from your feet!"

"We have a tradition," said the rabbi, "that while Moses was speaking to the Holy One, a Karaite came and stole his shoes! So, now, whenever we are in the company of Karaites, we make sure to hold on to our shoes!"

The Karaite turned to the rabbi and

blustered:

"That's nonsense! Everyone knows that at the time of Moses, there were no Karaites!"

The rabbi allowed time for the Karaite's words to sink in and then quietly added: "Your Majesty, need more be said?"

You can't fake the Real Thing.

Sources:

He Who Makes Peace - Rabbi Slesinger as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer

Power From The People - Sfias Emes
The Real Thing - heard from Rabbi Zev Leff

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OVER A BILLION BYTES OF TORAH LITERATURE AND INFORMATION

ARE THERE FLYING RABBIS OR ARE THERE FLYING NONE?

c.e.k. from Los Angeles, CA
<kill@worldnet.att.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi:

Thanks again for your very informative and enjoyable service. I promise you I'm serious about this question, I'm not joking or trying to make fun. I have recently been exposed, through a student film, to a reference about "flying rabbis." Apparently, throughout history this is a well-documented phenomenon. Apparently, the last one died within the past 100 years or so. Could you recommend some easily available (in the US) books on the subject? If this film was merely generating a fictional hoax, I apologize. If not, I eagerly await your scholarship on the matter. Shalom.

Dear c.e.k.,

Jewish tradition does relate incidents of people, both righteous and wicked, who were able to fly. The righteous people did so using holy methods, while the wicked ones resorted to the occult to do so.

There are stories of a particular Rabbi who lived in Egypt early this century who they claim was able to fly. His name was Rabbi Abuchatzaira. His descendants live in Israel and are a famous family of Kabbalists. There is also a story about the Baal Shem Tov and one of his disciples flying across a river. As with many of these kinds of stories, if you believe all of them you are too gullible, but if you don't

believe any you are too cynical.

We are cautioned against telling too many "miracle stories." A person is considered righteous or wicked based on his deeds alone, and so the ability to do miracles doesn't really prove anything.

Regarding Judaism and the occult, I suggest the book *Faith and Folly* by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel.

Sources:

- *Yalkut Shimoni Shemos 14:235*
- *Targum Yonasan Bamidbar 31:8*

HERE'S SNEEZIN' ATCHOO!

Alan Mangurten, Morton Grove, IL
<manguala@concentric.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi:

Are there Jewish roots to the custom of saying "G-d bless you" when someone sneezes, or does this really have other origins? Todah Rabbah!

Dear Alan Mangurten,

There is an ancient Jewish custom that when someone sneezes we say "asuta" which is Aramaic for "may you be healed." The sneezer then says "blessed are you" and then says "for your salvation, G-d, I wait."

This custom was written down during the Mishnaic period (c.100 CE), but it dates back to the time of Jacob. Before Jacob's time, it was extremely common for perfectly healthy people to die suddenly, with no forewarning. Rather, a person would walk down the street, suddenly sneeze and die. Jacob prayed that Hashem should give people some warning of their impending death, so they would have time to consider their

ways and repent of any bad deeds.

Source:

- *Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chaim, 230*
- *Mishnah Berurah 7 (ad loc.)*

HONG KONG HANUKAH

Ido from Hong Kong, China
<idok@asiaonline.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My name is Ido and I have a question. Before that I would like to speak about myself: I am nine years old, I live in Hong Kong (China) speak Hebrew, I go to a Jewish school called Carmel School and I am sure you heard of my Jewish studies teacher, Rabbi Avtzon (one of the most popular guys in Asia). Here's the question: What does Maimonides tell us about the importance of Chanukah?

Dear Ido,

Maimonides (Rambam — Rabbi Moses ben Maimon) relates that the Greeks tried to destroy Judaism. They didn't let us study the Torah or observe the commandments. Finally, Hashem had mercy on us and we defeated them.

Then Maimonides writes about the miracle of one day's oil which burned for eight days. Because of this, our Sages established Chanukah as a time of joy and praise to Hashem. We light candles to remind ourselves of the miracle of the oil. This teaches us that although the military victory was a miracle, the spiritual victory was the essence of Chanukah.

Sources:

- *Rambam, Hilchot Chanukah 3*

continued on page six

New Feature!

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ask-the-Rabbi" features

Re: Kashrut certification of restaurants open on Shabbat (Ohrnet Parshat Vayishlach):

At least three kashrut boards in the US will give certification to businesses open on Shabbos if those businesses are owned and operated by non-Jews. The Chicago Rabbinical Council certifies a particular Dunkin Donuts store, and I believe there is also a certified Dunkin Donuts in the Five Towns area of Long Island. (This is a wonderful thing the night after Pesach....) Also, I am acquainted with a (non-Jewish owned) wholesale bagel factory (under the Kof-K) that has a retail window open on Shabbos.

• Joel Ehrlich, Albert Einstein College of Medicine <ehrllich@aecom.yu.edu>

Re: How did fish survive the scalding Flood waters? (Ohrnet Parshat Vayishlach):

Another explanation is the waters in the Eretz Yisrael were not destructive, not hot. As for the fish, either the waters

below land level were cooler or the fish congregated in Eretz Yisrael. (Rabbi Levi in Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:66 and 4:2, Rabbeinu Bachai Bereishis 8:11)

• Rabbi Yitzchok D. Frankel, Cedarhurst, NY <Ydfrankel@aol.com>

Re: Saying the silent prayer out loud for visually impaired congregants (Ohrnet Parshat Vayeitzei):

Your answer did not take into account evening services or a place where there is no minyan, which are the interesting cases, in my humble opinion.

• Ben Michelson <ben@valor.com>

The Rabbi responds:

In those cases, one would be allowed to recite the prayers out loud for the sake of the visually impaired people.

Re: Haftorah (Torah Weekly Parshat Vayera):

It's a terrific thing you're doing! There's a slight error in the Haftorah of Parshat Vayera. The child revived by Elisha wasn't Yonah, but rather Chabakkuk (as hinted in the verse "You will hug [chovekes] a son." (4:16 Kings II) The child revived by Eliyahu was Yonah, Elisha's contemporary. Pobody's nerfect!

• Shmuel Silinsky <ssilinsky@aish.edu>

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked:

"Who was the first person to die after the Great Flood (mabul)?"

Answer: Haran. On the verse "Haran died in the presence of his father," the Zohar states that Haran was the first person to die in his father's lifetime. The Vilna Gaon explains that this refers to those who died *after* the Flood, because before the flood we do find those who died in their fathers' lifetimes — Hevel and Chanoch, for example. Now here's the rub: A simple calculation shows that Noach outlived Haran! So if Noach was still alive when Haran died and no person had yet died in their father's lifetime, then no one could have died period! For if Noach was alive, his children must have been alive. And their children must have been alive. Continue the logic through the generations and you'll realize nobody died!

• Eli & Zahava Gross <ezgross@netvision.net.il>

Sources:

• Zohar Lech Lecha 1:77b • Kol Eliyahu

continued from page three

BONUS ANSWER!

The obvious problem here is that the statement appears to be redundant, because immediately afterwards it repeats "and said to him...." We also know that the Hebrew word "Elo-him" means judges (as well as G-d) and that the Hebrew word *dabeir* ("speak" as opposed to "say") refers to harsh speech. Both of these together thus indicate rebuke.

• Based on Dr. Avigdor Bonchek's new book "What's Bothering Rashi?" Feldheim Publishers

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 "Le'mor"
 7:3 The Free Will of Pharaoh (also see *Sifsei 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 Aaron and Moshe
 7:17 Three Sets of Plagues
 8:27 "Mesiras Nefesh" of the Frogs