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THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

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.

The most successful of these is undoubtedly Christianity, but there have been many others who have tried to authenticate themselves as 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,' and that the 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 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

"The Ten Plagues affected the whole world. With these inexplicable and vast abnormalities in nature, the existence of a Being who directed and supervised the most minute detail of reality became inescapable."

from on 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 onto 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 what the Karaite had said to sink in and then quietly added: "Your Majesty, I don't believe there is a need for more to be said..."

You can't fake the Real Thing.

FIRE, WIND AND WATER

"For this time, I am sending all My plagues...." (9:14)

The Torah is speaking here about the plague of hail. But how can a plague of hail be considered "*all My plagues*"?

Hashem has three kinds of emissaries who extract payment from those who violate His will: **Fire**, **Wind**, and **Water**.

Sodom was punished by **Fire**. In the time of *Noach*, the world was deluged by **Water**. And the generation which built the *Tower of Babel* was spread by the **Winds** to the four corners of the earth.

The Egyptians were punished by all three kinds of emissaries: Blood and Frogs in **Water**; Locusts in the **Wind**, as it says "And Hashem caused a strong East *Wind* to blow." The plague of boils was under the tutelage of the emissaries of **Fire**, as it says "Take for yourselves handfuls of furnace soot..."

However, there was one plague that combined all three elements together — the plague of Hail.

The hail itself was **Water**. Each hail-stone contained **Fire**. And the hail was accompanied by thunder: "And Hashem sent *thunder* and Hail..." Thunder represents the domain of the **Wind**.

Now we can understand why the plague of hail was equivalent to "*all My plagues*."

• Heard from Rabbi Zev Leff

• The Vilna Gaon

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 Aaron 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.

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SING MY SOUL
INSIGHTS INTO THE SHABBOS ZEMIRO

YOM ZEH MECHUBAD

"THIS IS THE MOST PRECIOUS OF DAYS..."

*"Six days shall you do
your work ..."*

When Jews were obligated to refrain from agricultural efforts in the Sabbatical year, there inevitably arose the question "What shall we eat?" The Torah therefore allays this fear with Hashem's promise that there will be a bumper crop in the sixth year which will cover the needs of the seventh year as well.

The Sabbath observer who

lives from day to day might also be tempted to ask how he will have what to eat on the seventh day if he is not permitted to work. Hashem, therefore, included in the command to work six days and rest on the seventh a guarantee that in six days of work "all of your work" will be completed – enough to cover the needs of the seventh as well.

We therefore sing these words, taken from that command, as a reminder of this Divine guarantee that enough will be achieved in the six days to carry us through the seventh.

לע"נ
מרת אדל בת ר' שבתאי ז"ל
ת.ג.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Name the seven plagues, in order, and in Hebrew, listed in this week's parsha.
2. Did Hashem ever appear to Avraham and say "I am Hashem?"
3. What does "Orlah" mean?
4. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
5. How long did Levi live?
6. Hashem told Avraham that his descendants would live as strangers for 400 years (*Bereishis* 15:13). When did this period begin?
7. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
8. Why are Yisro and Yosef both referred to as 'Putiel'?
9. After which plague did Hashem begin to 'harden Pharaoh's heart'?
10. Give two reasons why the plague of blood was chosen to be 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. How many frogs were there in the beginning of the plague of *tzefardea*?
15. Why was Moshe not the one who struck the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
16. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
17. 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?
18. Why did Moshe pray to Hashem only after he left the city?
19. Why did the wheat and spelt survive the hail?
20. What was miraculous about the way that the hail stopped falling?

BONUS QUESTION?

Moshe said: "**When shall I pray for you, your servants and your people, to rid you of the frogs?**" Pharaoh answered: "**Tomorrow.**" (8:5,6) Why did Pharaoh subject his nation to an extra day of plague by saying "Tomorrow?" Didn't he want the frogs to go away immediately?

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"Aharon married Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, and she bore him Nadav and Avihu" (6:23) Traditionally, the woman gets to choose the first child's name. Here, Elisheva named her first child 'Nadav' in honor of her father, 'Aminadav.' Aharon named the next child in honor of his father: *Avi-hu* 'He is my father.'

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

Just as the Parsha describes the downfall of Egypt in the times of Moshe Rabbeinu, so too the Haftorah details with 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 these empires will lie in ruins, Yisrael will emerge unscathed, to be re-united with Hashem.

A SELF-MADE GOD

"Which he 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 your crops, you realize that you are beholden to Hashem.

Rain rarely falls in Egypt. The Nile rises up and over-

flows 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 everything. For the dew of heaven is the symbol and the sign of Hashem's power to run the world.

Not only this, but they made the river itself into a god, as Pharaoh said "*Mine is the river and I have made myself.*"

• Bnei Yissaschar

WEEKLY DAF

CHULLIN 138 - BECHOROS 3

THE THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

Both Acheir (the Sage Rabbi Elisha ben Avuya, teacher of Rabbi Meir) and his grandson, Rabbi Yaakov, saw — each in his time — a similar incident which challenged their faith.

A father asked his son to climb up to a high place and bring him some fledgling birds after dispatching their mother. The son duly fulfilled these two mitzvos — honoring parents and dispatching the mother bird — for which the Torah promises the reward of long life, and upon his return he fell and died.

Acheir lost his faith. His grandson, however, reached the conclusion that the reward promised was to be enjoyed upon the resurrection of the dead in “a world which was altogether long and good” and not in the transient existence of our world.

The Talmud questions both of their conclusions by suggesting that there may indeed be a reward of long life in this world, but that the youngster who fell to his death may have been guilty of entertaining thoughts of idol worship, for which one is punished even if the thought does not culminate in action.

One of the commentaries raises a challenge from this question to the explanation offered by Rabbeinu Asher (Rosh) in Rosh Hashana 17b as to why the name Hashem appears twice in the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy to reveal that Hashem is merciful both before the sin is committed and afterwards. There is a need for Divine mercy before the sin, he explains, in the case of one who is thinking of worshipping idols. Hashem’s mercy withholds the punishment due him for such a thought until he actually carries out his intention, and only then pun-

ishes him for both thought and deed. If even in regard to thoughts of idol worship there is no punishment before the deed, how can the Talmud suggest that the son met his untimely death because of his idolatrous thought alone?

The Korban Nesanel, in his commentary on the Rosh, distinguishes between an idolatrous thought which did not come to fruition because of his repentance as opposed to that which did not come to fruition because circumstances did not enable him to carry out his plan. In the first case there is no punishment at all, and it is to such a situation which the Rosh refers. Our Talmud’s suggestion is that the son may have thought of worshipping idols and was prevented by circumstances in which case he would be culpable for the thought alone.

• Chullin 142a

THE PROBLEM OF THE FIRST-BORN

A *bechor*, the male first born of a kosher animal owned by a Jew, is considered holy and must be given to a *kohen* who offers it as a sacrifice and eats its flesh, or slaughters it for consumption if it has developed a blemish disqualifying it as a sacrifice. The *bechor*’s holiness prevents anyone from shearing its wool or using it for work.

This created a serious problem in post-*Beis Hamikdash* times when sacrifices were no longer possible. There was a danger that the *bechor*, lingering in the *kohen*’s possession until it developed a blemish, would be shorn or used for work. What some Jews did to avoid the problem was to sell a share of the pregnant mother or her unborn *bechor* to a non-Jew, whose partnership

exempted the animal from the status of *bechor* when it was born.

Rabbi Mori, the son of Rachel (the daughter of the Sage Shmuel, who was impregnated by her non-Jewish captor who subsequently converted; but, since he was not Jewish at the time of conception, his biological son was always referred to by his mother’s name) was in the practice of selling the ear of the unborn animal to a non-Jew, and then giving the *bechor* to a *kohen* when it was born. He did not wish to personally benefit from this transaction, so he gave away the *bechor*, but he took the precaution of eliminating the status of *bechor* by making this sale so that the *kohen* would not be placed in danger of transgressing the ban on shearing or working with the *bechor* while waiting for it to develop a physical blemish which would allow him to slaughter it for food.

Despite his noble intentions Rabbi Mori suffered a loss of all his animals. Why?

One of the explanations offered in the Talmud is that Rabbi Mori inadvertently misled other Jews who followed his lead and completely avoided the responsibility of the laws of *bechor* by selling a share of the unborn *bechor* to a non-Jew. They failed, however, to make the transaction in the proper legal fashion which was followed by a scholar like Rabbi Mori himself and thus ended up with an animal which was in reality a *bechor* but which they mistakenly assumed to be free of that status.

The custom of Jews throughout the centuries has been to sell a non-Jew a share in the pregnant mother in order to eliminate the problems arising from a *bechor* in post-Temple times. Tosefos, among others, explain why this is done, despite the fact that Rabbi Mori was punished for doing so.

• Bechoros 3b

continued from page one

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THREE TIMES TEN

“And I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments. And I will take you to Myself for a people and I will be to you for a G-d.” (6:6-7)

The World was created with **Ten** Utterances. (“Let there be light” etc.) There were **Ten** Plagues in Egypt, and there were **Ten** Statements (Commandments) given at Sinai. What is the connection between these three ‘Tens’?

It was, in fact, the Ten Plagues that turned the Ten Utterances into the Ten Commandments.

Before the advent of the Ten Plagues, the world of nature, which was created with the Ten Utterances, concealed the presence of the Creator. It was possible to miss the Hand of a Divine Creator, to think that nature had no guide.

The Ten Plagues affected the whole world. With these inexplicable and vast abnormalities in nature, the existence of a Being who directed and supervised the most minute detail of reality became inescapable.

It was this revelation, that Hashem changes nature at will, that opened the way to the possibility of the revelation of Hashem Himself at Sinai — and the giving of the Ten Statements.

In other words, through the “great judgments” — the Ten Plagues that altered the ‘laws of nature’ — the possibility of “And I will take you to Myself for a people” — the giving of the Ten Statements at Sinai — became a reality.

• Chidushei HaRim in Mayana shel Torah

MAKING LIGHT

And I will take you to Myself for a people and I will be to you for a G-d.” (6:7)

Nobody can know G-d. No concept can define Him whatsoever. No flight of the imagination can reach anywhere near Him.

The Jewish People only reach a recognition of the Divine through the light of the Torah and Mitzvos. For “Hashem and the Torah are One.” The word for Torah in Aramaic is ‘*Ohr*aisa.’ The word for light is ‘*ohr*.’ The Torah, so to speak, is the light which ‘illuminates G-d.’

Therefore, it is only through “I will take you to Myself for a people” — the giving of the Torah at Sinai — that there existed the possibility of “I will be to you for a G-d” — that the Jewish People would be able to have its ‘close encounter’ with the Divine.

• Adapted from Kedushas Levi

I HAD A DREAM!

Behrooz Zinati
<bzinati@ix.netcom.com>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

When one has a bad dream,
does one have to do something
about it?

Dear Behrooz Zinati,

It depends.

During the day, your body makes a lot of noise. Mundane occurrences and stimuli fill all your senses. Although you have an 'inner voice,' you can't always hear it.

When you sleep, your body quiets and your mind relaxes. Your soul then 'rises above' daytime entanglements. In such a state you can sometimes receive actual inklings of the future. "In a dream — in a vision of the night ... G-d opens the ears of man" (Job 33:15).

But a bad dream can result just as easily from an extra piece of pizza or some leftover chicken too close to bedtime or a monster movie from ten years ago. It's difficult, therefore, to know what is an actual premonition, what is a reverie re-run, and what is chicken.

Many dreams are also influenced by what one thinks about during the day and indeed, if you are able to see a connection to your thoughts during the day, then you can certainly ignore the dream.

And even true dreams contain at least one false element. This we see from Joseph's dream of the sun,

moon and eleven stars bowing to him. Although this dream was a true portent of Joseph's future greatness, nonetheless it did contain one untrue element — the moon. Jacob said to Joseph, "Will I, your mother and all your brothers come and bow down to you?" As the commentators point out, Joseph's mother — represented by the moon — had already died, so it was impossible for this element of the dream to ever materialize.

If despite this you are still worried about a bad dream, one option is to fast the next day (*ta'anit chalom*). This particular option is not common today, since most people become depressed and weak when they fast, and therefore the negative effects may be greater than the good.

The most prevalent practice is to do what is known as 'making the dream better' — *hatavat chalom*. The Talmud states that Rabbi Pedat said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "One who saw a dream and is depressed about it should 'make it better' in front of three people — providing they love him." That is, that one should tell a close friend that he is distraught by a bad dream and ask him together with two other friends to state (with conviction) "You have seen a **good** dream" — three times. Some authorities record the custom of telling the dream to the local rabbi, and ask him for a positive interpretation of the dream.

Which reminds me of a story: One night, Yankel, the tailor of Pletstk, dreamed he saw a bridge.

By the bridge stood a sentry. Under the bridge lay buried a treasure.

When he awoke, Yankel took some food and a pick-ax and set off. After many days, he came to a bridge, and — Lo and behold! — the very sentry he'd dreamed of stood by it. Yankel took his pick-ax and began to dig. "What in blazes!?" cried the soldier. Yankel told the soldier of his dream, whereupon the soldier broke out laughing.

"You fool," the soldier said. "What if I believed in dreams? Why, right now I'd be off a-runnin' to a little Jewish town called Pletstk; I'd break down the door of a little tailor named Yankel. I'd push over his cast-iron stove, and — if dreams be true — there I'd find a buried treasure. Why, that's exactly what I dreamed last night. Ha! Ha! Ha!"

Yankel gasped. He snatched up his tools, ran home, pushed aside his cast-iron stove. There he saw it — the buried treasure.

Sources:

- Tractate Berachot 55a
- Aruch Hashulchan 220:4-8
- Code of Jewish Law, Orach Chaim 288
- Derech Hashem 3:1

YIDDLE RIDDLE

What is the relationship between the button on a man's trousers' back-pocket being on the **left** side, according to American standards, and one of the 613 commandments of the Torah?

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PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

1. *Dam, tzefardea, kinim, arov, dever, shechin, barad.*
2. 6:9 - Yes.
3. 6:12 - Sealed.
4. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
5. 6:16 - 137 years.
6. 6:18 - With the birth of Yitzchak.
7. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
8. 6:25 - Yisro fattened (*pitem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
9. 7:3 - After the sixth plague, *shechin*.
10. 7:17 - a) Because the Nile was an Egyptian god and 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. 8:2 - One.
15. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
16. 8:27 - So that the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
17. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle *in the fields* died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
18. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
19. 9:32 - They matured later and their stalks were still soft. Therefore, they were able to resist the bombardment of hailstones.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn't fall to the ground.

BONUS ANSWER!

Pharaoh didn't believe that the frogs were a plague from Hashem. He preferred to believe that the frogs were a natural phenomenon about which Moshe had special knowledge. When Moshe asked "When shall I pray...?" Pharaoh thought Moshe was simply timing his question to coincide with the plague's natural end, expecting Pharaoh to say "Right now!" By saying "Tomorrow" Pharaoh tried to trick Moshe and make him look foolish.

• *Ibn Ezra in the name of Rav Shmuel ben Chofni*

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

LET MY PEOPLE KNOW

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