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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."

The Vilna Gaon

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 in Mayana shel Torah

**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 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 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



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS  
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE  
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

**YOM ZEH MECHUBAD - scfn vz ouh**  
**"THIS IS THE MOST PRECIOUS OF DAYS..."**

Six days shall you do your work ... ..l`ftkn vag` ohnh`aa Shayshes yamim ta'ase m'lachtecha...

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.

Parshas Vaera

For the week ending 3 Shevat 5757, 10 & 11 January 1997

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# Parshas Vaera

For the week ending 3 Shevat 5757  
10 & 11 January 1997

## Overview

**H**ashem tells Moshe to inform 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.

## 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 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.

*Heard from Rabbi Zev Leff*

### 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.**

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