



The Greater Washington Community Kollel

SHABBOS DELIGHTS

TORAH MINUTE

IN MEMORY OF RABBI KALMAN WINTER ZT"l

Faith Still Needs Gratitude

Presented by Rabbi Hillel Shaps, Kollel Scholar and Director of Special Projects

For the first of the ten plagues, Blood and Frogs, G-d commands that Aharon be the one who sets them in motion by striking the river with his staff (7:19-20). Similarly, for the third plague, Lice, it was Aharon who was commanded to strike the sand to initiate it. Rashi explains that it had to be Aharon, not Moshe, who performed these acts because both the water and the sand helped save Moshe – the water when he was placed in a basket in the river as a baby, and the sand when he had to bury the Egyptian he had killed for striking a Jewish slave.

Rashi's explanation for why Aharon was chosen to bring these plagues, though, begs the following question: If it would have been more fitting for Moshe to usher in each of these plagues, why didn't G-d use a different means of initiating them? The answer appears to be that G-d specifically engineered things this way to teach the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the good that others do for us. If G-d expected Moshe to have appreciation for the inanimate river and sand, how much more so must a person be careful to appreciate the good that other people do for him or her.

But this answer requires further examination. There would be many opportunities to teach the lesson of gratitude. Why did G-d go out of His way at this moment – the beginning of the ten plagues – to teach this lesson?

The Chovos Halevavos details a person's obligation to investigate G-d's existence and the many kindnesses He provides through contemplation of the physical world around us. After this, he begins a new section – Shaar Avodas Elokim (Gate of Service of G-d) – with the following: "Since we have clarified the obligation of belief in G-d and ways of investigating His kindnesses, we are now obligated to mention a person's obligation once this is clear to him. That is service of G-d – the logical response of a person who has received goodness towards his benefactor." In other words, belief in G-d does not necessarily translate into serving G-d. For that, a person also needs to appreciate the kindnesses of G-d, which then translates into a desire to serve Him. This, explains Rav Mattisyahu Solomon, is the reason that G-d chose to teach the lesson of gratitude specifically at the onset of the ten plagues. While the plagues would certainly bring the Jewish people to a clear recognition of G-d's existence and omnipotence, in order for them to become G-d's servants – the ultimate purpose of the Exodus – they had to be able to appreciate the many kindnesses that G-d would bestow upon them.

In one way or another, each of us receives a bounty of blessing from G-d. May we merit to appreciate those blessings and strive to respond in kind by improving our service of G-d.

Wishing you a Good Shabbos!

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TABLE TALK

Point to Ponder

The sorcerers did so with their incantations to draw forth lice, but they could not... The sorcerers said to Pharaoh, "It is the finger of Hashem!" (8, 14 – 15)

They could not create lice since magicians need to have their feet on the ground in order to perform magic, and the lice separated the ground from under their feet. (Da'as Zekanim)

How was their inability to make lice a sign that this was the finger of Hashem? One may maintain that Moshe was also performing magic, but his feet were not separated from the ground because the lice were not present when he brought the plague?

Parsha Riddle

...And the staff of Aaron swallowed their staff. (7, 12)

Where else in the Torah did such a thing occur?

Please see next week's issue for the answer.

Last week's riddle:

Why did Hashem specifically give Moshe the sign of a snake, and Tzoraas?

Answer: Since he had spoken Lashon Hora about Bnei Yisrael, which is the craft of a snake, and Tzoraas is the punishment for speaking lashon hora. (Rashi Shemos 2, 4 & 6).

HATORAH V'HAMITZVAH

HALACHA INSIGHTS FROM THE PARSHA

Parashas Va'eira relates the performance of apparently magical feats by the Egyptian sorcerers and necromancers. While some explain these to have been mere illusion or the cunning taking of credit for aspects of the miracles actually performed by Moses (Abarbanel; Malbim), the traditional approach takes the Biblical text at face value, as a description of genuinely supernatural activity.

This debate has important practical ramifications: Ibn Ezra (Vayikra 19:31) and Rambam (Avodas Kochavim 11:16) utterly reject the idea of magic, calling it lies, nonsense, and deception and its believers empty-headed and intellectually deficient, and they consequently maintain that the Torah's various prohibitions of sorcery do not include any actually effective practice, since "the [Biblical] text does not prohibit the true, only the false". (According to Radak [Shmuel 1 end of ch. 28] this is also the opinion of "all the Geonim", at least with regard to the necromantic practice of Ov, although he himself sides with the traditional view.) Rashba (Shut. 1:413), on the other hand, although unwilling to definitively reject Rambam's stance due to his great humility, nevertheless inclines to the opposing view that magic is real and nevertheless prohibited by the Torah.

As we have previously discussed, halachic authorities struggle to articulate the distinction between practices rooted in superstition and idolatry, which are prohibited, and those rooted in the natural order, which are permitted even insofar as we may not understand the science behind them. One classic treatment of this question is by R. Yaakov Ettlinger, who was asked about the permissibility of the eighteenth and nineteenth century practice of therapeutic mesmerism (animal magnetism). R. Ettlinger relates that he consulted "the sages of the nations of the world" about the practice, and that some dismissed it as nonsense and lies, whereas others believed in it even while acknowledging that its theoretical underpinnings were barely understood. He consequently permits the practice, arguing that the Talmud allows even clearly occult practices that definitely have no scientific basis whatsoever, such as incantations, and we must assume that the explanations for their effectiveness lie in the vast areas of natural science of which we remain ignorant. A fortiori is mesmerism permitted, since its adherents claim that it is a natural discipline, although one not well understood (Shut. Binyan Tzion #67).

PRESENTED BY
RABBI YITZHAK GROSSMAN, ROSH CHABURAH

KIDS KORNER

Who Am I?

#1 WHO AM I?

1. I was for some.
2. I was the first.
3. I am not unintelligent.
4. I am not value.

#2 WHO AM I?

1. I was one.
2. I was many.
3. We were baked.
4. We were piled up.

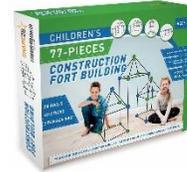
Last Week's Answers

#1 Nile river (I saved the savior, I was an Egyptian god, Moshe wouldn't strike me, Sons were thrown to me.)

#2 A snake (I was the Yetzer Hara, I was a stick, Tasteless, Two tongued.)

All children 13 and under who answer a "Who Am I?" correctly will be entered into a raffle to

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Fort
Building
Kit



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Answer as many as you can.
Each correct answer will entitle you to another raffle ticket and increase your chances of winning!

THE NEXT
RAFFLE WILL BE
Feb 11.

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Shabbos Parshas Beshalach – Feb 7-8



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