



## TEN PLAGUES

*The first nine were not punitive. Their intent was to show Egypt the fallacy in their idolatrous ways and repent to the one, true God of the universe, who controls all.*

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5757  
5771  
14  
YEARS

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### Weekly Parsha

## Barad

### A Miracle within a Miracle

**RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG**

The statement, "it's a miracle!" is not one that is used sparingly or with any regard to its literal meaning. A free parking spot in Manhattan is a miracle, as is a well-timed sale, or a sports team pulling off an upset victory. Of course, these examples are not the Torah's concept of a miracle, a "nase". In fact, to truly understand the idea of a miracle is to gain insight into the infinite chachma of God. This week's parsha serves as an introduction into this study.

All of the plagues afflicting the Egyptians, as the Torah describes, were severe, and their destructive power of a supernatural caliber. Their effects, the nature of the punishments and their function in demonstrating the reality of God to Pharaoh are all well-explored. Yet, the plagues, in so far as their construct, lend themselves to a deeper analysis. A prime example of this type of study exists in one of the plagues, that of barad, hail. The

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### Leadership

## THE PLAGUE OF BOILS

### A Lesson in Torah Study and Leadership

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

Many times, although well-intended, individuals present Torah interpretations that are not based on anything more than their subjective views. Listeners are unimpressed. They may cite a verse, but then they suggest a lesson that is not derived from the verse, is obvious, over-simplistic, or infantile. And sometimes their points are often false. This problem is severe. For God carefully selected each and every word in all verses. If we simply offer an explanation without analysis, we fail to uncover God's intended lessons. We are merely using a verse as a springboard for our own thoughts. But this is not Torah study. This will not impress people. And Torah is all about impressing others with a deep appreciation for God's great wisdom. A true Torah lesson should make a person say "wow". An appreciation of God starts with appreciating His written words.

*"And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt." (Exodus 9:11)*

What is problematic with that statement? Think it over for a few moments...

It says the astrologers couldn't stand before Moses. But we wonder: how do boils – a malady of the skin, not bones or muscles – affect posture? Also, of what

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Chicago	4:10	New York	4:19
Cleveland	4:48	Paris	4:43
Detroit	4:51	Philadelphia	4:26
Houston	5:14	Phoenix	5:12
Jerusalem	4:27	Pittsburgh	4:45
Johannesburg	6:45	Seattle	4:09
Los Angeles	4:35	Sydney	7:50
London	3:42	Tokyo	4:19
Miami	5:22	Toronto	4:33
Montreal	4:01	Washington DC	4:37

### Weekly Parsha

## Vaeyrah

**RABBI BERNIE FOX**

### The lineage of Moshe and Aharon and their Appointment as leaders

*These are the heads of their  
extended families. The sons of*

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(Vaeyrah cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

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Reuven, the firstborn of Yisrael were Chanoch, Phalu, Chetzron, and Karmi. These were the families of Reuven. (Shemot 6:14)

In our parasha, the Torah describes the lineage of Moshe and Aharon. This description begins with our pasuk. Why does the Torah provide with this narrative? Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains that Moshe and Aharon were appointed as the leaders of Bnai Yisrael. The Torah provides us with the lineage of these individuals who were charged with the leadership of the Jewish people.[1]

This explanation is difficult to understand. Moshe was appointed as leader of Bnai Yisrael in Parshat Shemot. There, Moshe experienced his first prophecy. Hashem revealed that He would redeem Bnai Yisrael from bondage in Egypt and Moshe would lead the Jewish people out of Egypt and into the Land of Israel. At that time, Aharon was also appointed. He was assigned the task of speaking for Moshe before Bnai Yisrael and Paroh. Why is the Torah now describing the lineage of Moshe and Aharon? Their lineage should be recorded at the juncture of their initial appointment!

In order to answer this question, we must deal with another issue. The end of Parshat Shemot describes Moshe and Aharon's initial conversation with Bnai Yisrael. The

Torah explains that Aharon spoke to the people. He told the nation that Hashem would redeem the Jewish people from Egypt. Then, Moshe and Aharon addressed Paroh. They asked Paroh to allow Bnai Yisrael to enter the wilderness and serve Hashem. Apparently in this conversation, Aharon served as spokesman. Paroh was incensed with this request. In response, he increased the labor required of the Jewish people. The people confronted Moshe and Aharon and strongly criticized them for angering Paroh.

Moshe asked Hashem to explain these events. In the beginning of our parasha, relates the answer Hashem provided. Then, He told Moshe to speak with Bnai Yisrael and offer reassurance. Moshe obeyed. He spoke to the people. In this conversation, Aharon did not act as spokesman. Moshe addressed the nation

directly. The question is obvious. Why did Moshe speak to the people? Aharon had been appointed as spokesman. Moshe was to provide the message Aharon was charged with responsibility for the delivery!

Hashem then instructed Moshe to again speak to Paroh and petition Paroh to release Bnai Yisrael. Moshe responded that he would not be effective. He was not an articulate speaker. He argued that he was unable to communicate with Bnai Yisrael. Certainly, there was little hope that he could motivate Paroh!

Clearly, Moshe's understanding was that he was to address Paroh. Aharon would not be his mouthpiece. Why did Moshe come to this conclusion? Aharon had already been appointed as spokesman!



Sforno offers an explanation for Moshe's actions. Moshe understood that Aharon was appointed to act as his spokesman. However, his understanding was that this appointment was limited. Aharon was appointed to present the initial messages to Bnai Yisrael and Paroh. Aharon did this. Moshe did not assume that an ongoing relationship had been created. Therefore, after the delivery of these first two messages, Moshe took-on the role of speaker. He understood Aharon's role to be over.[2]

Gershonides also explains Moshe's behavior. His explanation is similar to Sforno's. However, there is significant difference. He explains that Moshe was correct. His understanding of Aharon's appointment was completely accurate. Aharon's appointment as spokesperson was limited. He was assigned this role for the purpose of delivering the initial messages to Bnai Yisrael and Paroh. He did not have any ongoing authority. After the communication of these messages, Aharon could no longer speak for Moshe. Therefore, Moshe assumed the responsibility of communicating his prophesies. According to Gershonides, Moshe was completely correct!

Based on this insight, Gershonides answers our original question. Why is the lineage of

(continued on next page)



Moshe and Aharon discussed in our parasha? He agrees that this lineage is recorded in the context of Moshe and Aharon's appointment as leaders. However, this leaves him with a problem. This appointment took place in Parshat Shemot!

Gershonides responds that the question is based upon a faulty premise. The leadership of Bnai Yisrael was not determined in Parshat Shemot. The relationship established there – that Moshe would receive the message and transmit it to Aharon for communication – was not permanent or even ongoing. That relationship was created on a temporary basis. It would function during the initial communications with Bnai Yisrael and Paroh. It was not authorized beyond that point. In our parasha, an ongoing relationship is created. Moshe and Aharon would permanently assume the role of leaders.

This answers our question. The Torah records the lineage of Moshe and Aharon in our parasha. This is because only at this point is the leadership finalized. With this finalization, it is appropriate to record the lineage of the leaders.[3]

### The transformation of Aharon's staff into a serpent

*And Paroh called to the wise men and to the magicians. And the sorcerers of Egypt also did so with their sorcery. (Shemot 7:11)*

Moshe and Aharon perform their first wonder before Paroh. Moshe instructs Aharon to cast his staff in front of Paroh. The staff miraculously is transformed into a tanin – a serpent. Paroh summons his wise men and magicians. These are the masters of Egyptian sorcery. Paroh instructs his servants to duplicate Moshe and Aharon's miracle. The sorcerers are able to duplicate the transformation to Paroh's satisfaction. However, Moshe and Aharon prove that their miracle is superior. Aharon's serpent swallows the serpent produced by the Egyptians.

How were the Egyptians able to duplicate the miracle performed by Moshe and Aharon? The commentaries explain that the magicians had not really performed a transformation. These sorcerers were masters of illusion. They used their skills to create an illusion of a serpent. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains that the serpent created by the sorcerers was not a living creature. Their illusion of a serpent had no movement. This distinction was demon-



strated when Aharon's serpent swallowed the sham serpent created by the Egyptians.[4]

Malbim offers a different explanation of the magician's illusion. The key to Malbim's explanation lies in the details of the episode. This was not the first time Moshe had performed the miracle of transforming the inanimate into a living creature. Hashem had instructed Moshe to transform his staff for Bnai Yisrael. However, in that incident, the staff had been converted into a snake. The transformation performed in Paroh's presence was much more impressive. The staff became a serpent. A snake has dimensions similar to the staff. A serpent is a large creature.

Malbim explains that the magicians used the serpent's size to their advantage. Their illusion required the coordinated efforts of two parties. One magician threw forth his staff. A second magician was hiding nearby. This accomplice

was disguised as a serpent. As the staff flew through the air, the second magician jumped forth from his hiding place. He grabbed the staff in mid-air, hid it within his disguise and landed on the ground. These magicians were experts in this type of deception. They carefully arranged the lighting and other factors. It appeared that the magician's staff had been transformed.[5]

What was this creature that the Chumash calls a serpent or tanin? How were the Egyptians able to create a convincing disguise to use in their illusion? In 1481 a Jewish traveler, Meshulam ben Rav Manahem, traveled from Italy to Rhodes. From Rhodes Meshulam traveled through much of the Middle East. His travels took him to the Land of Israel and also Egypt. He kept a diary of his travels. As Meshulam traveled along the Nile, he was astonished to encounter very large serpents. Many were larger than humans. He describes these serpents in detail. He also indicates the name given to these serpents in various languages. In English, they are called crocodiles.[6]

This account seems to support the explanation of Malbim. The serpent costume might well have been the complete skin of a crocodile. Unfortunately for the Egyptians, a man in a crocodile suit is no match for the real thing – Aharon's serpent. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 6:14.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 6:12.

[3] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook), pp. 28-29.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 7:12.

[5] Rav Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (Malbim), HaTorah VeHaMitzvah – Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 7:11.

[6] Elkan Nathan Adler ed., Jewish Travelers of the Middle Ages (Dover, 1987), p 164.

Torah offers the following description (Shemos 9:24):

“There was hail and fire [lightning] flashing among the hailstones. It was an extremely heavy [downfall]. There had never been anything like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.”

Rashi offers the following insight (ibid):

“[This was] a miracle within a miracle; the fire and the hail intermingled, yet the hail is water! But in order to do the bidding of their Creator they (fire and water) made peace between themselves.”

The Ibn Ezra (ibid) agrees with Rashi, explaining how this event was a “wonder within a wonder”.

The importance of a *nase b'soch nase*, a miracle within a miracle, is quite difficult to ascertain. Through the plagues, we are witness to countless miracles performed by God. The very break in the natural order is the essential factor in these supernatural events, giving man an opportunity to see God's control over the natural world. If the miracle already represents this discontinuity in the natural order, what does the supplementary “miracle within” add? It must be something more than an additional miracle – that would simply be two miracles. Therefore, one must assume that this “extra” miracle is revealing a deeper concept.

There are other instances where the phenomenon of *nase b'soch nase* emerges. In Parshas Beshalach (ibid 14:22), the Torah explains that, “Bnai Yisrael entered into the midst of the sea on dry land.” A few verses later (ibid 29), the Torah reiterates that, “Bnai Yisrael walked on dry land in the midst of the sea.” Why the need for this repetition? The Ibn Ezra (ibid) explains that this too was a “wonder within a wonder.” How so? Wherever Bnai Yisrael traveled within the sea, a continuous wind blew, keeping the land arid and the walls of water upright. However, God directed a second wind to where the pursuing Egyptians were located; its purpose was to cause the walls of water to collapse. Therefore, the Ibn Ezra writes, there were two winds in the sea in two places of close proximity.

Why does the Ibn Ezra focus so closely on the detail that there were two winds so close to each other?

There is one more explanation offered by the Ramban regarding another miracle, one that serves as the initial point for understanding *nase b'soch nase*. After Bnai Yisrael exited Yam Suf (ibid 15:22-26), they encamped near a water source with undrinkable water. God caused a tree to fall into this river (*vayoreihu*), “sweetening” the water and rendering it drinkable. The Ramban (ibid 25) takes up the term *vayoreihu*, writing that the root of this term is *moreh*, meaning to teach. He explains that God taught Moshe how the tree would have this effect on the water. He then entertains the possibility, based on

Chazal, that the tree in the water was also a miracle within a miracle, since the tree itself was bitter. Based on this, he says one might consider that *vayoreihu* refers to God showing where the tree was hidden, rather than something didactic. He concludes, though, with his original explanation – God taught Moshe His ways, where He sweetens the bitter with bitter.

The Ramban's emphasis on God teaching Moshe the mechanism of the tree and its sweetening effect illustrates an important idea regarding how we should approach miracles. The few instances of revelation by God in the realm of miracles certainly induce a sense of amazement and wonder amongst those reading (and of course experiencing) them. To read about the splitting of the sea, the tree changing the bitter water to drinkable or any of the ten plagues engenders the above emotions. Yet this is not the primary objective of these events. Clearly, they demonstrate God's complete control over nature. Beyond this, they present rare opportunities for mankind to study the ways of God, both in the timing of the revelation (for example, *middah k'neged middah* [measure-for-measure] by *kriyas yam suf*) as well as the actual miracle itself. The Ramban is emphasizing this latter concept in his explanation of *vayoreihu*. There were obviously other methods God could have employed in providing drinking water. However, in choosing this method of the tree, He afforded Moshe the opportunity to scrutinize the mechanism of the miracle itself. Moshe was able to study the Creator, gaining not only scientific insights into the laws of nature, but into God's dominion over this system. This opportunity for analysis serves as an example for all of us. In fact, we see an obligation to participate in this type of study on the night of the Seder. The Rambam (Hilchos Chametz U'Matzah 7:1) writes that it is a positive commandment to recount the miracles and wonders performed by God for our forefathers. This recounting is not simply a review of the events. Instead, it is a time of *limud* – study – where a person must immerse himself in the study of these events.

Therefore, we see that part of the very objective of every miracle is the opportunity to study how God relates to the natural world. Recognizing that miracles themselves have the character of *limud* attached to them, we can now take a further look at their construct. In the *Moreh Nevuchim* (2:29), the Rambam explains that with any miracle it is clear that no natural cause could have brought about the effect. However, he notes that, “these changes [in nature] were not permanent, they have not become a physical property.” One can deduce from the words of the Rambam that a miracle should never be classified as a true change in the laws of nature. Instead, the essence of the miracle is the knowledge that no natural cause exists for it.

With this basic formulation in mind, it can be applied to one of the above miracles. The case of the splitting of the sea is a perfect example of the concept of a miracle, and what *nase b'soch nase* adds to it. The

Torah (ibid 14:21) describes how God directed an eastern wind to blow over the sea all night, resulting in it being split. And of course, this wind was persistent throughout the travel of Bnai Yisrael over the dry land, keeping the walls of water away. This is the essential miracle, and it is clear that there was no natural cause for this event at that moment in time at that exact location. Yet there is more. It seems that God directed another wind, one in the opposite direction of the original (presumably west). The effect of such a wind would be the collapse of the walls of water, killing the pursuing Egyptians. In general, when two winds are blowing, one from the east and one from the west, and they come in close proximity to each other, they tend to negate their directed effects. In other words, the two winds meeting normally would have an adverse effect on its counterpart. It is this property that is the focus of the Ibn Ezra. He emphasizes that the miracle within a miracle involved these two winds being near each other. Normally, such a confluence of winds would discount the effects of the other. In this case, God suspended this property, allowing for the two winds to maintain independent paths without affecting the other.

Therefore, we see that a miracle involves an event where there is no discernible natural cause, and the *nase b'soch nase* emerges through the suspension of a secondary property in nature. God did not change the essence of wind, redefining its nature and giving it a new role. He did, however, temporarily remove one accidental feature, the relationship of two winds in close proximity. This same concept can be applied to the case of *barad*. God alludes to this unique upcoming phenomenon, where (ibid 9:18) “...there was never anything like it in Egypt, from the time it was founded until now.” The primary miracle, then, was the raining down from the sky of this “hail,” with no obvious cause other than God. However, there is another idea being expressed. The Torah, as cited above, describes that, “there was hail and fire flashing among the hailstones.” How is this a *nase b'soch nase*? This “hail” was composed of both fire and ice. Normally, when these two elements are brought together, they negate each other's effects, much like the two winds. In this case, however, God again suspended a secondary property, allowing for the two to co-exist in this form. We see, then, the same expression of the concept of *nase b'soch nase*.

With this in mind, it is clear how the idea of *nase b'soch nase* adds a fascinating insight into understanding God's revelations to mankind through miracles. To see God's *chachma* (wisdom) emerge through these actions, whether at the sea or in the plagues (or many other examples) is a chance to engage in *yediyas Hashem*, knowledge of God. There is no question that miracles are majestic events, producing awe and wonderment. More importantly, they are vehicles to understanding the Creator in a more meaningful way. ■



# Let My People Go!

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Moshe Rabbenu, also known as Moses, is regarded as one of history's greatest leaders by people of all races and religions. His popularity is based upon his reputation for being the great emancipator who confronted the mighty Pharaoh and proclaimed G-d's command to "Let my people Go!" The popular image of Moshe as a freedom fighter has inspired many downtrodden people throughout history. It has been immortalized in moving Negro spirituals which galvanized and uplifted those who fought to abolish slavery in America. It would seem, however, that mankind's image of Moses is not grounded in fact. A careful study of the opening parshas of Shemot indicate that Moshe never demanded that Pharaoh release the Jews from slavery. Indeed, the request made of him was very modest. He was commanded to "send forth my people that they may celebrate unto me in the wilderness." There was no stipulation that the Jews should be released from bondage. The implication was that after the worship of G-d was completed the Jews would return to their labors in Egypt. It was only because of Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to grant this seemingly small request that Hashem brought upon him the plague of the first born which crippled his resolve and impelled him to drive the Jews out of his land. We obtained our freedom not because Moshe demanded it but because G-d overpowered Pharaoh and forced him to release the slaves against his will.

The question arises: what was the design behind the mission of Moshe? Why was it limited to asking only for permission for the Jews to serve G-d and not to demanding that they be completely released from bondage? There is much that we can learn from the confrontation of Moshe and Pharaoh. The purpose of Moshe's negotiations was not merely to benefit the Jews. Hashem is concerned for all His creatures. Thus

in explaining the objective of the plagues G-d told Moshe "and all Egypt will know that I am Hashem..." G-d wants all of mankind to recognize and serve Him. The foundation of all morality and ethical conduct is the awareness of G-d and the awe that man must sense for his Creator. The source of the wickedness of Pharaoh and Egypt was their immersion in primitive idolatry in which man created deities in his own image and "worshipped" them in order to obtain his lustful desires and assuage his conscience. Paganism is a religious system whose purpose is to provide license for man to pamper himself and oppress others. Moshe was sent by Hashem to redeem the world from its enslavement to blind "religious" instinctualism. The greatest prophet was sent by Hashem to instruct Pharaoh about the G-d of reality, the Creator of Heaven and Earth whom man was created to serve. He taught Pharaoh that man must subordinate his desires and act according to the Divine will. Had Pharaoh accepted this and transformed himself into a servant of Hashem there would have been no need for the fearsome plagues which decimated Egypt. Of his own accord Pharaoh would have realized the evil of enslaving others and would have voluntarily granted the Jews their freedom. Pharaoh's stubbornness brought untold suffering upon his people. All of Hashem's ways are just but human folly is responsible for the evils that befall mankind. The supreme arrogance of Pharaoh, who "hardened his heart and would not listen" to Hashem should shock us out of our own stubbornness and complacency. We can now better understand the supreme importance of the mitzvah of mila and the injunction "and you shall circumsize the foreskin of your hearts and your neck will no longer be stiff." May we merit to obtain a "heart of wisdom and understanding." Shabbat Shalom. ■



PARSHA

# SINS of the Leaders



RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

On the holiday of Shavuot, known as the feast of weeks, based on Exodus 34:22, we read the book of Ruth. The book opens with the story of Elimelech who left the land of Israel due to a famine and subsequently met his demise. The Rabbis tell us that Elimelech was a leader of his people and a wealthy man who abandoned his position in order to avoid the personal conflict that was brought on by the poor people being constantly at his door.

The Rabbis point out that there is an extra word in the very first verse of this book. The verse reads, "And it was in the days the judges judged...." It would have been sufficient to write, "And it was in the days of the judges," a clear reference to the early period of Israel's history after Joshua when Israel was led by a succession

of judges. Interestingly enough, in Hebrew this verse as it is written can be translated, without deviating from the rules of Hebrew grammar, "And it was in the days of the judging of the judges," implying that the judges themselves were deserving of judgment. Thus the extra word is not extra at all but is a hint for the more penetrating reader to focus his attention on the shortcomings of Elimelech.

The Torah contains much information both overtly and covertly on the institution of leadership and the shortcomings of the leaders of Israel. God's book is ruthlessly honest and no one is spared. The greatness of leaders and their weaknesses are revealed side by side. The Torah is not a book of hero-worship but of learning. The only real "hero" is God. As Onkelos translates Exodus 15:1, "I will sing unto God for he has raised himself above the great and greatness is truly His."

The Torah demands of man that he give up one of his most cherished institutions, hero worship. Belief in messiahs is the more common form of this institution, while its most grotesque form is their complete deification. Torah monotheism and hero worship are mutually exclusive.

No wonder Torah leaders were always impressed with the famous statement of Aristotle, "Dear is Plato, but dearer still is the truth." Here Aristotle the Greek intuited an important Torah truth.

When describing the ascension to leadership of the greatest of all leaders, Moses (Exodus 3), the Torah tells of a strange story. It describes Moses' adamant refusal to accept the mission of leading the Israelites out of bondage and into the land of Israel. Even after God explains in detail the importance of Moses' mission, entreats him, and promises to be with him offering him signs and miracles, Moses continues to turn down God's request. Only after God's wrath is kindled does Moses relent and accept his role which has been reduced and transformed into a sharing with Ahron in order to satisfy Moses' demands.

We are mystified at Moses' response to God's request. What leader today would not jump for joy if God would offer him the opportunity to be the greatest leader of all time, the world's most famous lawgiver, the one whose laws, handed down to him by God are still revered, meticulously studied, and kept by hundreds of thousands even now more than three thousand years after his passing? Is there indeed any greater opportunity for any human being? When Albert Einstein was asked whom he would like to meet after his death his reply was not Galileo,

Archimedes, or Newton but Moses. In explaining his decision he said "I would like to ask him if he thought his laws would be kept so many years after his death." Yet the Torah depicts how Moses turns down God's request more than once. Why?

Rashi mentions an interesting statement of the Rabbis pertaining to Exodus 3 verse 18. The Rabbis state that God told Moses that the elders of Israel will listen to him if he uses the expression *Pakod Pakodti*, which means God will remember them, since this was given to them as a sign from Jacob and Joseph that with these words they will be redeemed. They will then know that Moses is their true redeemer appointed by God. At first sight this idea seems difficult. How could these words act as a proof that Moses is the true savior? If the elders knew this tradition could not Moses also have known of it? Would he not then be able to fool the people by using this phrase?

Upon closer examination we find the words of the Rabbis contain a deep idea. The Patriarch Jacob knew by way of prophecy that his children would be redeemed. He knew that being enslaved many false prophets would arise claiming to be their savior. He taught his children how to distinguish between the false savior and the true one. He gave them insight which would help them differentiate between the real and counterfeit. The false savior is driven by a desire to be a leader which stems from man's most abhorrent trait, his egomania. Jacob taught his children to scrutinize the personality of anyone who presents themselves as a savior for telltale signs of this trait. The true savior will never have traces of self-aggrandizement in his message. He will only proclaim God as the true redeemer. His message will be, "God will remember you." The false prophet, driven by a desire for personal recognition will inevitably somewhere in his message place himself in a role of glory. They will then know that he is a counterfeit. His message will not be exclusively of God but of himself as well. Jacob taught his children not to be influenced by fancy rhetoric but to search carefully, to scrutinize each person who presents himself as a savior for signs of egoistic motivation. The true savior will never lapse into the slightest expression of self-glorification. The message of the false savior will always betray his personal ambition. This message in its most crude form is always, "I am the way." This is the ultimate statement of the megalomaniac who seeks to present himself as a savior and conceal from others his sick delusional mind. In spite of all the rhetoric of such individuals, their true intent always comes through.

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## Leadership

God told Moses that the elders of Israel were not fools. They had good teachers, the Patriarch Jacob and his son Joseph. They taught them how to scrutinize the personality of those who claim to be leaders. They would not be fooled by attractive speech. They could distinguish between the true and the counterfeit. They would find in Moses no traces of a desire for self-glorification. They would then be willing to listen to his words. They would recognize in Moses, who was not a man of words, the true leader.

How valid and important are the words of Torah! How real and intelligent! Leadership is a strange phenomenon. People need leaders to teach them how to make good decisions. But the most important decision of all, that is, who is a good leader, must be made by the people. It is a logical circle. Just as a good leader is the most valuable thing for mankind, a bad leader is the most horrible thing for mankind. We need not look far in history to confirm this. People are easily deceived by false leaders. Leaders are usually more intelligent and talented than their followers. That is why people look up to them. But this very intelligence and talent permit them to deceive their followers, to use them as a means of their own self-aggrandizement. Again and again people are duped by talented individuals who are adept at concealing their insatiable personal ambition and presenting themselves as selfless saviors of humanity. Only when it is too late is the truth revealed. The old and wise Patriarch Jacob knew this dilemma well. He knew that it required a wise people to choose a true leader. He taught them the one lesson they needed to know in order to make a correct decision. He taught them how to avert the greatest catastrophe that can befall a people, the wrong choice of a leader. He gave them insight into the human personality so that they would be able to detect the tell tale signs of the impostor. The "I am the way" type leader would never fool them. The elders of Israel were well equipped to proceed properly and cautiously in their most important decision. If only modern man had such knowledge, he could say farewell to most of his woes.

In our society today, where the image has replaced the reality, those who rise to the top are those who are most adept at projecting images. This means by definition that they are best capable of deceit and lying. Today's politician is characterized by his ability to look someone in the face and lie without batting an eyelash. He is believed because most people, not having such talents, cannot imagine someone doing such a thing. They therefore conclude that the person

must be speaking the truth. Corrupt political figures eventually bring misfortune to their followers in the form of the destruction of their life and property. The tangible results of their insatiable greed and aggression eventually become realized.

The religious sphere is far more subtle. People are less able to discern the harm done to their souls than to their property and bodies. The harm can go on for centuries. The religion of the false leader disintegrates quickly into a system where belief in the person of the leader becomes its most distinctive mark. Objective systems are subordinated to fanatical belief in a certain leader or person. Salvation becomes not a matter of human growth and perfection but of belief in the mystical power of some individual to be a savior. Such a system is not necessarily put to rest with the demise of the false leader as in the political sphere. Innocent and ignorant followers can go on for centuries in the belief that they are benefiting their souls. Death in this case serves to further the deceit of the leader giving him a surreal existence and making him even less subject to scrutiny than he was during his lifetime. This creates the strange phenomenon the were that person here today he would be less successful than he is having died.

How does Torah characterize the true leader? It begins with the description of Moses' strong reluctance to accept leadership. The Torah gives us the strange formula that a great leader is he who wishes to lead least. A desire to lead ipso facto renders the person unqualified to be a leader. He who wishes to see his name in print and over the media is by definition a false leader. Such people may pose as altruistic leaders, they may say they are doing it all for the sake of God, but in reality they are using God to gain human recognition. They suffer from the greatest of human weaknesses, the need for approval by man. God's approval is not enough.

But can there not be one whose motives are pure, who is totally imbued with sincere religious fervor for the sake of God and Humanity and therefore desires leadership? The Torah's answer is decidedly no. Moses was the greatest leader and the Torah tells us he did not wish to lead. Those who desire to lead are always fraudulent.

The Torah's formula sounds strange. No doubt people have been fooled throughout the ages precisely because they believed in the ideal of the sincere religious leader who desires to lead for God's sake. When they see someone whom they think satisfies this image they become so

overjoyed they fail to investigate further. But Torah states emphatically that no such leader exists. It is an illusion, a mirage of the human spirit based on ignorance. Here is why.

A great leader must be a great person according to Torah. Contrary to popular opinion, a person that can not get his own life in order cannot help others gain perfection. Only a perfected individual can. But what is a perfected individual? An individual who has partaken fully of the good God has given man. But what is that good? That good is Torah. Torah places one immediately in the divine presence. No wonder so many verses in Psalms depict the perfect man as he who is constantly involved in the study of Torah; he who is overjoyed by Torah and is brought by it to states of sublime bliss. The ultimate good God gave man is a most overpowering experience. It Brings man to rapture thrilling his every fiber. It is the ultimate state of mind for which man was created. Those who have experienced it cannot tear themselves away from it. The prophets compare the state to the strongest experience of lovesickness. Is it any wonder that one who has experienced this ultimate existence would never wish to leave it and return to the mundane world of human affairs. Such perfected souls look with disdain at the joys of the ego and human recognition. Being in God's presence and experiencing the reality of His existence they frown upon man and his shallow values. They know full well what prompts human approval and look upon it with contempt. As described in Exodus 18:21, they are haters of what humans consider to be gain. For them human affairs offer no thrills, no excitements, and no benefit. It means being torn away from the most enjoyable and most perfect state of human existence. It means being thrown into the responsibilities of leadership and the constant involvement with the pettiness and nonsense of human emotions. It is no wonder that Moses complained so often to God about his plight as a leader. For the truly perfected person leadership is a nightmarish descent from the beatitude and blessedness of God's world to the bleak and ugly world of human affairs. Such a journey is indeed almost humanly impossible. Why does such a person do so? Only one thing can force him to do so - he has no choice. There is no one else that can do it and God demands that it be done. Even to the very end Moses pleaded with God, "Send, I beg you by the hand of whom thou will send (Exodus 4:13)." Moses was hoping against hope that there was someone else who could do the job. When God's anger was kindled at this request he realized he had no

(continued on next page)



(Leaders continued from previous page)

## Leadership

way out. There was none other. With all the strength in his character he committed himself to the almost inhuman task of leaving the land of the blessed for a joyless and painful existence because God left him no choice.

All true Torah scholars since Moses have followed in his footsteps. As Maimonides states in the Laws of Sanhedrin, Ch. 3 L. 10, "Such was the manner of the wise men of old. They would run away from appointment [to the Sanhedrin]. They would struggle to their utmost to avoid being judges and only conceded when they knew that there was no one equal to the task and that judgment would be corrupted if they did not participate." The great scholars reacted just as Moses did when God requested of him that he be a leader.

According to Torah, how one views leadership is the very touchstone by which one's perfection may be measured. For the perfected person who constantly lives in the world of Torah and who is not moved by the approval of the masses it is a most distasteful enterprise. The more perfected the person the more distasteful and the more difficult it is for him to engage in leadership. On the other hand, for the distorted personality, the one who has never experienced the true good for man, the one who is riddled with inner turmoil, whose life is in disarray, who is plagued by vacillating emotions of greatness and worthlessness, leadership seems like a haven. He is attracted to it like a magnet. Being rooted in the value system of man he seeks to turn away from the source of his own imperfection and soothe himself with the thrills of ego satisfaction. Leadership appears as his salvation; his ultimate escape from his unhappy existence. Under the guise of saintliness and in the seeming service of God he can satisfy his base desires for human approval and assuage his guilt with the pretense of righteousness. Such a person would jump at the opportunity to lead and react in the exact opposite manner of the great Moses. Such a person does not know God nor even the good God has given to man. He is a willful deceiver of others and himself.

The Rabbis and true Torah leaders were never impressed by people who desired to save the world. They recognized immediately the true source of this desire, man's egomania. Being astute Torah scholars they knew well the lesson of Jacob and understood the greatness of the true leader, Moses. They were never impressed by rhetoric and claims of individuals who in their shallow world of ideas think they are helping God. Torah scholars have a deep understanding

of perfection and human nature. They are not naive purists. They are deep thinkers, trenchant and calculated. The virtue of puristic naiveté is not a Torah concept but a man made religious notion.

The Torah scholar leads only when necessary and even then he never leaves the world of Torah. He is preoccupied with it in his every spare moment tearing himself away only momentarily to engage in the necessary task of leadership. He shuns honors and accolades and despises publicity and renown. He is not plagued by a desire to increase the number of his followers. He loves to be alone or with a few friends studying Torah. He is totally satisfied being in God's presence.

Such is the Torah tradition of leadership. It has produced a succession of true and great leaders the likes of which the world has never known. They were not perfect nor did they try to convey the image of being perfect. Man cannot be perfect. They were able to recognize their shortcomings, repent, and reinstate their relationship with God. Elimelech, on the other hand, was a weak leader. He could not overcome his shortcomings. In failure, he abandoned his position. However, he was not a corrupt leader. He never made use of his subjects for his own self interest. Thus the Torah distinguishes three types of leaders: the great leader, the good leader overcome by weakness, and the corrupt leader. May God send us true leaders and grant us the knowledge to recognize them. ■



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relevance are the boils on "all of Egypt"? Why mention that "all Egyptians" had boils, if the verse's message concerns only the astrologers' inability to stand? Furthermore, of what significance is the astrologers' inability to stand before Moses, as opposed to standing before Pharaoh or others? And if they truly could not stand, let them sit. But "stand before" has another meaning...

We are being taught many lessons here. The primary lesson is that we use the verse as the starting point, and let it teach us. We must not start with our own unchecked thoughts and then look for some supporting verse.

The posture of lying mystics adds no great wisdom to God's Torah. The real lesson must address the basic theme of the Ten Plagues, as the plague of boils was delivered together with the other nine.

Standing also means to "present" one's self...to appear before others. The astrologers attempted to reproduce the plagues, only to expose their inability. This is significant, since God records their feeble attempts. So significant is this point, that it appears from the very few words concerning the plague of boils, that the objective of this plague was precisely to disarm their claims to superiority through astrology and magic. Torah verses are selective in their messages, not merely recounting every single historical occurrence. Our verse means to teach that boils purposefully targeted the astrologers.

"And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt." This refers not to posture, but to their ability to sustain their dignity...they could not "appear" before Moses who outperformed them. They were ashamed. But why were they any more ashamed during the plague of boils? The answer is the second part of the verse: "...for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt". Here, God hints to us...

### How God Teaches Us

As a wise Rabbi said, as I have quoted numerous times, the Torah's words are carefully selected. Our verse is just one example of hundreds of thousands. With His meticulously crafted texts, God provides us with just enough information to discern a problem, and that hint being the very opening to the answer. "Its answer is by its side" is a Rabbinic statement describing this very phenomenon.

Knowledge is endless, but written words are limited. How then can God direct all generations to continuously uncover new truths? If knowledge was limited to the written word, when we concluded any text, we would have nothing more to gain. This is only true of human works. But Divinely inspired works are different. The Torah's and Rabbis' "apparent" inconsistencies, exaggerations and contradictions force the mind into the world of induction and deduction, and other forms of reasoning. Wisdom has a design. It has layers and curtains...where truths are only unveiled with the method of questioning.

We must appreciate the "Chocmas haKasuv", the "wisdom of the written words", and search for God's intended teaching by listening to the words with a great deal of sensitivity and awe. "For God gives wisdom, from His lips [come] knowledge and understanding". (Proverbs 2:6) This verse teaches two matters: 1) to be cognizant that God is the "source" of all wisdom, and 2) that His "lips" offer an additional benefit. "Lips" refer to the written word - that which has been articulated. These articulations or Pasukim can reveal great insights if we spend the necessary time considering the problems in each verse.

God's messages embedded in the Ten Plagues are numerous. Clearly, the act of unveiling the astrologers' lies through boils was precise. For only with a plague that attacks the "body" would all others derive the lesson that one person is equal to another. This explains our previous question why boils caused the astrologers' shame, as opposed to any other plague. For it was boils alone that made a comparison between all Egyptians, exposing the astrologers as equals, and not the superiors they claimed to be. The very fact that God chose to include this comparison as the exclusive effect of this plague, indicates the very purpose of this plague.

But why was the demotion of astrologers so essential that a separate plague was required to address it?

### Leaders: For Study, not Deification

From their inability to reproduce the Plague of Lice and from their silence regarding all subsequent plagues, we realize God's primary lesson is, as He said, "There is none like Me in all the land". God wished to educate the Egyptians away from idolatry, magic and astrology. They are all false. And He did so by showing His exclusive reign over the universe and all of its laws.

We must then ask what more was achieved when demoting the astrologers' status via boils. We already know that astrology is false, since from the Plague of Lice and onwards, the astrologers could not reproduce any miracle brought by Moses. What more was added in boils? The verse says the astrologers could not stand before Moses. Again, we see a comparison: the astrologers are contrasted against Moses. I believe this lesson is to force us to consider what we must value, and what we must disregard.

Although in a much higher social status than Moses, the astrologers realized their lowly state. It matters none that they were in positions of power, and that Moses and his people were slaves. Roles must play no role.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians - as well as all other human beings - attribute more credence to a person in a higher status, simply because he or she possesses that status. A times, even the higher-ranked person dupes himself into believing he is superior. In his dream, Pharaoh saw himself standing literally "on" the Nile, the source of Egypt's fertility. He too was bitten by the fantasy of greatness. The lesson here is to ignore reputations, and view one's actions or ideas alone. The Torah says "do not fear man", and "do not respect the rich or the poor". In all cases, human emotions of favoritism will lead to corruption, not God's truths, and justice.

Moses was unaffected by the boils that reached the astrologers. This directed the Egyptians to the realization that although in high office, a person can be a fake. It is clear from the institution of leadership, that man enjoys subjugation to a director - people want a leader. But we must be so careful and accept as a leader, only he who is guided by reason and Torah truths. We must be sensitive to this human frailty of insecurity and the desire for a father figure. We are to abandon that need, and mature into intelligent people. In no way should we respect leaders' words or actions alone: they must pass the litmus test of reason and Torah. The leader too must not fall prey to seeking popularity. That must not be his objective. He must lead only with the desire to educate others towards a life of reason, Torah, and ultimately a love of God...not a love of himself. Rabbi Reuven Mann once mentioned the Talmudic portion that says "Any leader whose subjects like him, is doing a poor job". This means, that a true leader admonishes his followers towards truth, although he risks losing his post.

### Summary

We conclude that the Torah teaches in a very subtle and deep manner. It takes time to master this style, but it can afford us great insights. We must study the verses, allowing the words to lead us, and not use them to support our whims. We learn that every plague offered deeper lessons than meets the eye. And we learn that we are not to follow the leader, but we must use reason to determine truths. Moses, although of a slave population, spoke truth, while the astrologers attested to their lies by their inability to stand before him.

Don't follow the leader. Follow the truth. ■

### Let the Words Talk

What might we derive from this latter half of the verse? These words appear to make a comparison. Both, the astrologers and the Egyptians possessed boils. We must now ask this: what about this comparison prevented the astrologers from appearing before Moses? Why was their "equal" status with all other Egyptians an embarrassment to them? We see the answer quite readily! It was the very equality of their condition to that of all other Egyptians that disarmed their claims to greatness. They were no better! They could not defend themselves from boils. What type of powerful astrologer allows painful blisters to afflict them over days? It is the liar who allows this to happen, since in fact, he has no more defense from boils than any other Egyptian. It was this diminution of status that was their embarrassment, and why they could not "appear" before Moses.

# Year-end Contributions



As we draw to a close of 2010 we look back on all we have accomplished these past 12 months. With much toil, endurance and a passion to share new Torah insights with you, we're about to reach a milestone issue #400, enjoyed mostly by you, our regular readers. Here's a few more stats from this past year:

- 641,003 articles were read
- 49,603 audio classes were listened to
- 264,548 JewishTimes issues downloaded
- 99,179 unique visitors
- 33,611 monthly visits
- 200,000 signatures to date for world Jewry
- \$65,000 raised to date for those in need

At this time, we ask your show of thanks with your year-end, tax deductible contribution. We are gratified by the Torah light we have shared, aiding your Jewish learning and activism. We look forward to new achievements this coming year.

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*A Rabbi conducts a memorial service at Fort IX ten months after the liberation*

# Survivors

*These questions were shared online this week. I thought it relevant to share my answers with you...*

**Questions:** At the time and moment of liberation of a Holocaust survivor from a concentration camp, which Torah portion, parsha, line, and/or verse would have been most likely discussed, referenced, read or considered by a survivor as he or she was walking out of the camp (historically or fictitiously) - in order to find meaning in their horrific experience and/or to seek redemption?

By the same question, what parsha or text of the Torah would one have held on to in his or her mind or maybe spoken among a group (at the camp during liberation) in order to embrace a remembrance and sacred understanding of Torah and help to walk out of a concentration camp as a survivor, as a Jew and not as a victim?

**Rabbi:** In order to find meaning in their horrific experience and seek redemption, Exodus

12:13 teaches that due to Torah adherence, God spared the Jews in Egypt while simultaneously all Egyptian firstborns and disobedient Jews were killed. Only those Jews who followed God's commands that ancient Passover eve, were saved, so they might continue on this path and accept the Torah seven weeks later. The lesson derived is that Egyptian and Jew alike, who were drawn after idolatrous and sinful lives had no place in existence, in God's eyes. The survivors learned that the idolatrous sins of their Jewish brothers and sisters was the cause of their bondage, and ultimately, their deaths.

Redemption will be sought only by he and she who understand that which redeems.

In order to embrace a remembrance and sacred understanding of Torah and help to walk out of a concentration camp as a survivor, as a Jew and not as a victim, one might consider that great event of Revelation at Sinai, the objective of the Egyptian exodus. For it was not the removal of bondage alone, but God's objective was to "benefit" the Jews, to offer them the best life

here, and in the next world.

What causes a sense of victimization, is a focus on the tragedy alone. But what removes this sense, is:

1) viewing God as "benefactor". Thereby, one realizes the amazing care - not victimization - which God expressed in giving us this greatest gift. Torah is replete with instances where God's providence is recorded.

If this concept is internalized, that God does assist man as a rule, one may still remain with questions regarding subjective experiences, many we cannot answer. However, he/she will attain a sense of deep thanks and esteem, due to God's many acts of great kindness. We must appreciate God's unchanging, kind nature, although we cannot explain our specific circumstances.

2) We must also not attempt to evaluate what we view are calamities, relying on myopic assessments. For Joseph too realized the great good in his sale and imprisonment, but only decades later. ■

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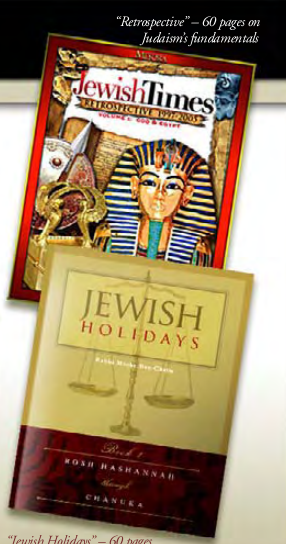
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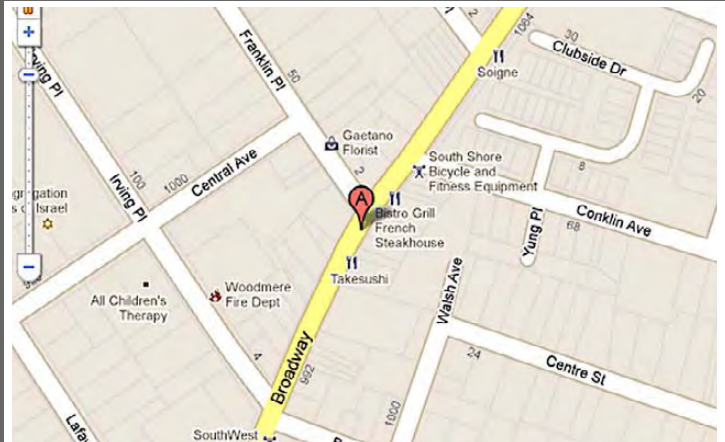
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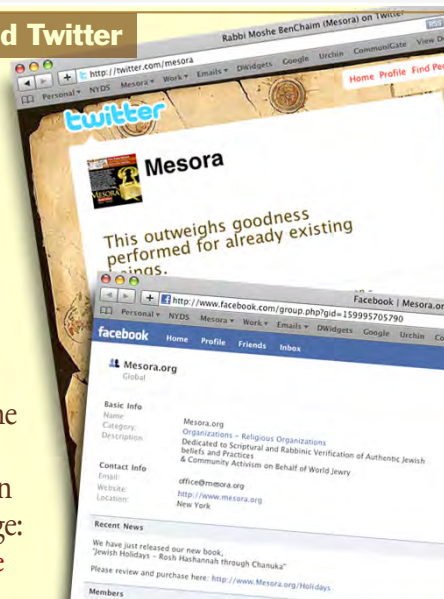
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