

Shock and AWE

Who doesn't know the Ten Plagues? Hashem, who is All Powerful, could have done anything to the Egyptians that He wanted, so why did He choose those ten afflictions? The Midrash teaches that Hashem brought the plagues *middah keneged middah* (measure for measure). In other words, each one of the plagues was to punish the Egyptians for something they had done to persecute the Children of Israel | BY ROBERT SUSSMAN



1 DAM (BLOOD) – WHY?

The Egyptians saw that the Children of Israel would immerse in a mikvah when they became impure or because of *taharas hamishpacha* (family purity). So, the Egyptians withheld water from them so that they could not immerse in it in an attempt to stop them from the mitzvah of procreation – so Hashem turned all of the Egyptians' water to blood. (Yalkut Shimoni)

Another reason: The Egyptians forced the Children of Israel to draw water for them. (Midrash Tanchuma)

DAM – DID YOU KNOW?

*The Nile was only made into blood for a very brief period, during which the fish immediately died because of the blood, and, afterwards, the Nile returned to its prior state. When the Torah says that the Egyptians were not able to drink from the water of the Nile, it was not because of the blood, as we don't find that they asked for the plague to be removed, but because of

the fish that died in the Nile and the stench that was in the air. And a proof of this is that we see that Pharaoh's magicians were able to turn the Nile to blood – if it hadn't returned to its prior state of being water, how would they have been able to do so?! (Chizkuni)

*Even when an Egyptian spit – it turned to blood! (Yalkut Shimoni)

2 TZIFARDEA (FROGS) – WHY?

The Egyptians told the Children of Israel to go out and bring them insects and other disgusting creatures, so they could play with them. So, Hashem brought frogs on the Egyptians until the sounds of the frogs could be heard in the stomachs of the Egyptians. (Yalkut Shimoni)

TZIFARDEA – DID YOU KNOW?

The frogs would enter into the Egyptians' ovens, but they didn't die! They would enter into the bread baking in the oven and when the Egyptians would eat the bread, the frogs would go out into their stomachs and they would jump there and cry out in a loud voice, until the Egyptians would die. (Tamtzis HaZohar)



3 KINIM (LICE) – WHY?

The Egyptians would make the Children of Israel sweep their houses, their streets, and their markets, therefore Hashem changed all of the dust in Egypt into lice until there was no more dust to sweep. (Yalkut Shimoni)

Another reason: The Egyptians prevented the Children of Israel from taking baths and washing their clothes. (Midrash Sechel Tov)

KINIM – DID YOU KNOW?

*The plague of lice began on the first of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, ie. the date of Rosh Hashanah. This was the day on which Pharaoh's magicians declared regarding the plague of lice, which they were unable to duplicate, "It is the finger of G-d!", admitting that it had come from Hashem. From that day and after, although still not redeemed, the Jews no longer had to work like slaves during the six months that they would remain in Egypt (See Rosh Hashana 11a). (Shichas Leket)

*There were 14 types of lice brought on the Egyptians. (Yalkut Shimoni)

4 AROV (WILD BEASTS) – WHY?

The Egyptians told the Children of Israel go and bring bears and lions and make games and contests with the animals, therefore Hashem brought all the wild animals against the Egyptians. (Yalkut Shimoni)

AROV – DID YOU KNOW?

The plague of wild animals brought lions, wolves, bears, leopards, etc., and they entered



into the homes of the Egyptians. The Egyptians locked their doors and Hashem sent a wild animal from the sea and its name was Siloni. The Siloni would enter through the windows of the Egyptians' homes and it would open the door so that the wild animals could enter and eat the Egyptians. (Otzar Midrashim)

5 DEVER (SICKNESS) - WHY?

The Egyptians made the Children of Israel shepherds of horses, camels, donkeys, cows, and sheep. Therefore, sickness came and killed all of the animals that the Children of Israel shepherded, until there were no animals left for the Jews to shepherd. (Yalkut Shimoni)

DEVER - DID YOU KNOW?

If an animal was in the hands of an Egyptian, and there was a Jew with a grievance regarding that animal (eg. a claim that a portion of that animal belonged to the Jew) – such an animal would be saved, thus making it known that the grievance should be decided in the Jew's favour. (Midrash Rabbah)

6 SHECHIN (BOILS) - WHY?

The Egyptians made the Children of Israel servants to warm the cold and to cool the hot. Therefore, boils came on them in order that they would not be able to wash

in either hot or cold. (Yalkut Shimoni)

Another reason: The slavery was so intense that the Children of Israel did not even have a moment to scratch themselves from the hard work. (Midrash Aggadah)

SHECHIN - DID YOU KNOW?

*Since Pharaoh had not done teshuva (repented) following the first five plagues, from the sixth plague and after, even if Pharaoh had changed his mind and wanted to return, Hashem strengthened his heart in order that Hashem could collect the entire judgment against Pharaoh for his transgressions. (Midrash Rabbah)

*According to some, there were three types of boils: (1) dry on the inside and on the outside; (2) wet on the inside and on the outside; and (3) dry on the inside and wet on the outside. (Maseches Bechoros) According to others, there were 24 types of boils. (Midrash Sh'loscha v'Arba'ah)

7 BARAD (HAIL) - WHY?

The Egyptians made the Jews plant gardens, vineyards, trees, and orchards. Therefore, hail was brought upon them and broke everything that the Jews planted. (Shemos Rabbah)

BARAD - DID YOU KNOW?

*How did the hail fall? First there were brilliant flashes of lightning and then

there were booming sounds of thunder, then the earth shook, and then the stones of hail fell – only there was no rain! (Midrash HaGadol) [And this explains why Moshe was able to scratch a mark on the wall and tell Pharaoh that when the sun reaches there, then the hail will fall. (See Rashi on Shemos 9:18) Normally, when it hails, there are clouds in the sky blocking the sunlight.]

*One half of the hail was ice and the other half was fire. When the Egyptians were struck, they would be burned by the ice and then burned by the fire. (Midrash HaGadol)

*Come and see how great the mercy of Hashem is! Even at a time of His anger, He still has mercy on the wicked and on their animals because the plague of hail wasn't sent against them, only against their crops and produce, so as to avoid harm to those who took care and guarded themselves and their animals in order that they would not be struck by the hail. (Midrash Rabbah)

8 ARBEH (LOCUSTS) - WHY?

The Egyptians made the Jews sow wheat and barley, and beans and lentils, and all types of *kitniyos* (legumes). Therefore, locusts came upon them and ate all that the Jews had sown. (Yalkut Shimoni)

ARBEH - DID YOU KNOW?

*The Egyptians were happy when the locusts came! They filled barrels with them and pickled them. But Hashem wasn't about to let them gain from a plague intended to punish them, so he brought a westerly wind, which didn't leave behind a single one – even the ones that they had pickled in their pots and in their barrels flew away! (Shemos Rabah)

*Some say there were 7 types of locusts and some say that there were 4 types of locusts. (Midrash HaGadol)





9 CHOSHECH (DARKNESS) - WHY?

When an Egyptian would eat a meal at night, he would bring a Jew and sit the Jew opposite him. He would light a lamp and place it on the head of the Jew and he would say to the Jew, "See that you don't bend your head from side to side, otherwise I'll cut your head off." (Midrash HaGadol)

Another reason: The Egyptians conspired to imprison the Children of Israel. (Midrash Tanchuma)

CHOSHECH - DID YOU KNOW?

*During the first three days of darkness, if an Egyptian was sitting and wanted to stand, he could stand, or if he was standing and wanted to sit, he could sit. But, during the second three days, if an Egyptian was sitting, he was not able to stand, and if he was standing, he was not able to sit, and a person who was lying down was not able to sit up. (Midrash Rabbah)

*Six days of darkness took place in Egypt, and the seventh day of darkness took place at the sea, where, just as it had been in Egypt, it was light for the Jews and dark for the Egyptians. (Midrash Rabbah)

*This darkness was not the absence of the light of the sun, like at night. It was a very thick mist that descended from Heaven which one could perceive as having substance to it. Had this not been the case, they would have been able to use lamps. (Ramban)

10 MAKOS BECHOROS (DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN) - WHY?

The Egyptians wanted to kill the Children of Israel. (Midrash Tanchuma)

Another reason: The entire time that the

Children of Israel are in exile, *Rochel Imeinu*, our mother Rachel, cries over her children – and not only once, but the entire time that they are in exile. And because the Egyptians caused Rachel to cry out loud, therefore Hashem punished them with crying out loud – as it says by the death of the firstborn – "And there was a great cry in all of the land of Egypt." (Tamtzis HaZochar)

MAKOS BECHOROS - DID YOU KNOW?

*The firstborn to every man died (even if the mother had previously had children). The first born to every woman died (even if the father had previously had children). The firstborn of every animal died. Firstborn boys died. Firstborn girls died. (Midrash Tehillim and Piskta d'Rav Kahana.) Where there was no firstborn at home, the oldest in the house would die. (Ramban)

*When the Egyptians were informed that the last plague was going to take place, the firstborn children went to their fathers and said, "Everything that Moshe has said has been brought upon us. Don't you want us to live? Take these Hebrews out from among us, and, if not, we will die!" They answered to them saying, "Even if every Egyptian dies, [the Hebrews] are not going out from here!" What did the firstborn children do? They went to Pharaoh and screamed, saying,



"Please, take out this nation! Because of them, evil comes upon us and upon you." He said to his servants, "Go and violently beat them." What did the firstborns do? Immediately they went out and each one took a sword and killed his father," as we say in Hallel, "[Hashem] struck the Egyptians with their firstborn," and sixty myriad were killed as a result. (Midrash Tehillim)

*After the last plague, Pharaoh went running through the streets, calling out, "Where do Moshe and Aharon live?" Young Jewish children played with him and said, "Where are you going and who are you looking for?" Pharaoh told them that he was looking for Moshe and Aharon. Some of the children told him that Moshe and Aharon lived here, and others told him that Moshe and Aharon lived somewhere else, and still others told him a different place. Finally, Pharaoh found Moshe's house and said to him, "Rise, go out from my nation!" Moshe said to him, "Are we thieves that we should leave in the night? Hashem commanded us, 'No man will go out from his home until morning.'" (Shemos 12:22) (Midrash Tehillim and Midrash Vayosha)

*Bisya, the daughter of Pharaoh, who rescued Moshe from the Nile, gave him his name, and raised him, was a firstborn. Moshe davened that Bisya be spared from dying in the plague. (Midrash Tehillim)

Based upon Midrash Leil Shimurim

Three of the plagues were done through Aharon, three through Moshe, three by Hashem, and one by all of them. Blood, frogs, and lice, which affected the land, were done through Aharon. Hail, locusts, and darkness, which affected the air, were done through Moshe. Wild animals, sickness, and death of the firstborn were done by Hashem. The plague of boils was done by all of them. (Midrash Rabbah, Da'as Zekeinim)

The Egyptians wanted to drown Jewish babies in the Nile, so Hashem drowned the Egyptians in the sea. (Midrash Tanchuma) III