

In this week's *Parashah*, we read about the last three of the Ten Plagues. In the *Pesach Haggadah*, we find an enigmatic disagreement about the Plagues: "Rabbi Eliezer says, 'How do we know that each plague that *Ha'kadosh Baruch Hu* / the Holy One, Blessed is He, inflicted on the Egyptians was equal to four plagues? It is written (*Tehilim* 78:49), "He sent upon them His *Charon* / fierce anger: wrath, fury, and trouble, a band of emissaries of evil." Wrath is one, fury is two, trouble is three, and a band of emissaries of evil is four'."

The *Haggadah* continues: "Rabbi Akiva says, 'How do we know that each plague that *HKB"H* inflicted on the Egyptians was equal to five plagues? [He quotes the same verse, and explains:] Fierce anger is one, Wrath is two, fury is three, trouble is four, and a band of emissaries of evil is five.'" [Until here from the *Haggadah*]

R' Yechiel Heller *z"l* (1814-1861; prominent *Halachic* authority in Lithuania) writes: The disagreement between these Sages is the same one we find elsewhere in the *Talmud*, *i.e.*, whether the first item in a series should be counted as part of the series or whether it stands alone (see *Sanhedrin* 3b and commentaries there). Thus, Rabbi Akiva counts "*Charon*" as part of the series, for a total of five plagues, and Rabbi Eliezer does not, making only four.

Alternatively, R' Heller writes, there is a disagreement in the *Talmud* (*Zevachim* 102a) whether the type of anger known as "*Charon*" is always followed by consequences. For example, *Hashem* expressed *Charon* toward Moshe Rabbeinu (*Shmot* 4:14), and one Sage says that Moshe Rabbeinu was punished, while another says he was not. Similarly, according to Rabbi Eliezer, *Charon* itself is not a plague; it is merely a precursor to the four plagues listed in the verse ("wrath, fury, etc."). According to Rabbi Akiva, however, inciting G-d to *Charon* always carries consequences, so it also counts as a plague. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Ohr Yesharim*)

Shabbat

"Please speak in the ears of the people: Let each man request of his fellow and each woman from her fellow--silver vessels and gold vessels." (11:2)

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 9a) states: "The word, 'Please,' is meant to encourage them, so that that *Tzaddik* [Avraham] should not say, 'You fulfilled the promise of "they will serve them, and they will oppress them," but you did not fulfill the promise of "afterwards they shall leave with great wealth."' Why did *Hashem* "worry," so-to-speak, that Avraham would say this?

R' Yitzchak Klein *z"l Hy"d* (rabbi of Kosice, Slovakia; killed in the Holocaust) explains: The foundation needed to climb the ladder to perfection is the sincere belief that everything that happens to a person is part of *Hashem's* plan. If a person amasses wealth, he should not say, "My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!" And if the opposite, if his situation is bad, he should not despair of *Hashem's* mercy.

R' Klein continues: The *Mishnah* (*Berachot* 5:5) teaches, "Even if a king greets a person who is in the middle of *Shemoneh Esrei*, the person should not respond to him." R' Klein writes in the name of his father that this may be understood homiletically: Even if one is at the pinnacle of his success such that kings and nobles greet him, he should know, and in his heart he should understand, that he still needs G d's mercy, for in just one moment, his world could turn upside-down. Likewise, if his situation is so bad that he does not see any way out, he should not despair. He should pray and ask for mercy from the Master of Mercy.

- Continued inside -

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– Continued from back page –

R' Klein continues: This is what we saw in Egypt, where the wheel of fortune turned 180 degrees. At first, *Bnei Yisrael* came to Egypt with great honor, but soon after Yosef's death they became slaves who were beaten and oppressed. Then, the same people who yesterday were slaves, whose bodies, souls, and entire beings were controlled by others, suddenly left Egypt with great wealth. From this we can learn about the wonders of *Hashem's Hashgachah* / Providence and how a person should place his trust in Him no matter what his present condition is. This is why Avraham would have insisted that *Bnei Yisrael* leave Egypt with great wealth, as the *Gemara* quoted above suggests: so that the lesson that we are supposed to learn from the entire experience would be complete, so that we can observe the wonders of *Hashem's Hashgachah*, know that everything is from Heaven, and trust in Him.

Perhaps, writes R' Klein, this is why we are required to mention the Exodus in *Kiddush* on *Shabbat*--so that a person will remember that everything that belongs to him was given to him by *Hashem*, who gives wealth and might. When a person remembers that, he will not worry that he is losing out by observing *Shabbat*.

R' Klein adds: The *Yetzer Hara's* attempts at seduction are many. The *Yetzer Hara* would like to blind a person so that he believes that observing the Torah and *Mitzvot* will hold him back from succeeding financially. However, if a person believes with complete faith in *Hashgachah Peratit--i.e.*, that every step a person takes is planned by *Hashem*--then that person will desire the way of the Torah. This is why the Exodus is the foundation on which everything else depends, for at the time of the Exodus we saw the deeds of *Hashem* and the wonders of His Providence. This also is why the Torah says, "I am *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery," and not, "I am *Hashem* who created you." We did not witness the wonders of Creation, but we did witness the Exodus. And, this is what *Chazal* mean when they say (*Mechilta: Beshalach* 17), "The Torah was only given to those who eat *Mahn*." That generation saw with its own eyes, not through the eyes of a stranger, that *Hashem* prepares food for all of His creations. Without this faith, it is impossible to observe the Torah.

Based on this, concludes R' Klein, it appears one can explain the verse (*Devarim* 11:26): "See, I (*Anochi*) present before you today a blessing and a curse"--using the pronoun "*Anochi*" and not "*Ani*." The meaning is: If you look at what I wrote in the commandment beginning "*Anochi*"--*i.e.*, that "I have taken you out of the land of Egypt"--then you will know that I am the source of blessings and curses. (*Birkat Avraham: Parashat Shmot*)

"Moshe said, 'So said *Hashem*, "At about midnight I shall go out in the midst of Egypt".'" (11:4)

"It was at midnight that *Hashem* struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt." (12:29)

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 4a) teaches that Moshe Rabbeinu told Pharaoh that the Plague of the Firstborn would occur at "about" midnight to avoid a *Chillul Hashem* / desecration of G-d's Name if one of Pharaoh's advisors miscalculated the time and claimed the plague was a minute early or late. In reality, however, the plague occurred at precisely midnight. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Chaim Kanievski z"l (1928-2022; Bnei Brak, Israel) asks: However noble the motive, a prophet may not "edit" his prophecy. By what right, then, did Moshe Rabbeinu alter the prophecy that he had been given?

R' Kanievski answers: It stands to reason that Moshe was never commanded to tell Pharaoh at what time the plague would occur. [Indeed, we do not find any verse in which *Hashem* commands Moshe to share that information with Pharaoh.] Rather, Moshe was told when the plague would be for his own information, and he chose to tell Pharaoh approximately when it would occur. (*Si'ach Ha'Pesach* p.105)



"*Va'avarti* / I shall go through Egypt on this night, and I shall strike every firstborn in the land of Egypt . . . I am *Hashem*." (12:12)

In the *Pesach Haggadah*, we quote this verse and emphasize that *Hashem* alone carried out the Plague of the Firstborn, not an angel or emissary of *Hashem*.

R' Moshe Elyakim Bri'ah Hofstein z"l (1757-1828; the second *Koehnitzer Rebbe*; known as the "*Be'er Moshe*") explains: The spiritual impurity of the land of Egypt was so great that no angel could have withstood being exposed to it. Therefore, *Hashem* Himself had to "enter" the land to take *Bnei Yisrael* out.

Alternatively, writes the *Koehnitzer Rebbe*, an angel could not have performed this task for the following reason: We are taught that an angel can only perform one task. Here, however, the mission was two-fold: to punish the Egyptians and redeem *Bnei Yisrael*. That, an angel could not accomplish. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mateh Moshe*)

R' Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg z"l (1785-1865; rabbi of Koenigsberg, Germany) writes: "*Va'avarti*" means "I will spread out" (see *Melachim I* 22:36), *i.e.*, that the light of *Hashem's* Honor, which usually is hidden, will spread throughout Egypt. Alternatively, it alludes to *Hashem's* "*Evrah*" / anger that will flare up against the Egyptians. (*Ha'ketav Ve'ha'kabbalah*)