

One of the central insights conveyed by our *Parashah*, writes R' Shmuel Rabinovitch *shlita* ("Rabbi of the Western Wall and the Holy Sites"), is that there is no power in the world except G-d. This is what the Ten Plagues--the first seven of which occur in our *Parashah*--were meant to teach, as *Hashem* said to Moshe (*Shmot* 7:5), "And Egypt shall know that I am *Hashem*, when I stretch out My hand over Egypt." Likewise, Moshe said to Pharaoh (8:6), "So you will know that there is none like *Hashem*, our *Elokim*."

It is noteworthy, R' Rabinovitch continues, that one of the signs that Moshe was told to perform in Egypt was to turn his staff into a snake and, then, back into a staff. Egyptians revered snakes, as is evident from the fact that the crowns of their kings and queens featured the head of a cobra. Through this sign, Moshe demonstrated that there is a Being more powerful than a snake.

Indeed, it was not only Pharaoh at whom the above message was directed, R' Rabinovitch writes. We read in next week's *Parashah* (10:2), "So that you [*Bnei Yisrael*] may relate in the ears of your son and your son's son that I made a mockery of Egypt, and My signs that I placed among them--that you may know that I am *Hashem*." *Bnei Yisrael* were already believers (see *Shmot* 4:31), but *Emunah* / faith is not something that one attains once in his lifetime, and then he retains it. Rather, holding on to *Emunah* requires constant work. This is as true today as it was in Egypt, R' Rabinovitch adds. We are accustomed to think that idolatry no longer exists, but that is a mistake. True, few people in the Western world bow down to man-made idols. However, as in Egypt, the belief that there is a power other than G-d is rampant. R' Rabinovitch concludes: "idolatry" is what we must constantly strengthen our *Emunah* against. (*Avnei Derech*)

## Shabbat

Our Sages derive from the verse (*Vayikra* 12:3), "On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised," that a timely *Milah*--as opposed to one that has been delayed for whatever reason--may be performed even if the eighth day of the boy's life is *Shabbat*. If not for this verse, circumcision would be prohibited on *Shabbat* because it involves *Melachah* / prohibited labor. (However, a *Milah* that has been delayed beyond the eighth day may not be performed on *Shabbat*.)

Why does the *Mitzvah* of *Milah* on the eighth day take precedence over *Shabbat*? R' Yissochor Weisberg z"l (Lakewood, N.J.; died 2022) writes:

There are times when two *Mitzvot* conflict, and one takes precedence over the other. That is not the case here. We read (*Shmot* 31:16), "*Bnei Yisrael* shall observe the *Shabbat*, to make [literally, 'to do'] the *Shabbat*," and *Midrash Mechilta* comments: "To do the *Shabbat*"--This refers to *Brit Milah*. The *Midrash* is teaching, R' Weisberg explains, that *Shabbat* and *Milah* are not competing *Mitzvot*; rather, they complement each other. Among other parallels: (1) both are signs of the covenant between *Hashem* and the Jewish People--*Milah* is expressly called a "*Brit*," and about *Shabbat* we read (*Shmot* 31:17), "Between Me and *Bnei Yisrael* it is a sign forever"; (2) circumcision is the pinnacle of the sanctification of the human body, while *Shabbat* is the pinnacle of the sanctification of time; (3) both involve subjugating oneself completely to *Hashem*'s Will; and (4) both are connected with the spiritual level of Adam Ha'rishon before his sin.

- Continued in box inside -

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**“The sorcerers did the same with their incantations to draw forth the lice, but they could not. . . The sorcerers said to Pharaoh, ‘It is a finger of Elokim!’” (8:14-15)**

*Midrash Rabbah* elaborates: When the sorcerers saw that they could not replicate the plague of lice, they acknowledged that the lice were an act of G-d, not an act of sorcery.

Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven Gerondi z”l (Spain; 1320-1376) writes: The redemption from Egypt was, without a doubt, the prelude to the Giving of the Torah. Therefore, *Hashem* wanted to impress upon *Bnei Yisrael* that that which is impossible for others or impossible according to the laws of nature is not impossible for Him. This is the most important cornerstone of our faith, and one who denies it effectively denies everything, including the principle of reward and punishment, Rabbeinu Nissim writes.

Because this lesson is the foundation of the Torah, Rabbeinu Nissim continues, *Hashem* wanted it to be publicized in Egypt, a land of wise men and sorcerers. If Egypt’s sorcerers could not create lice out of nowhere, “nature” could not do it either; therefore, the plague of lice could only be an act of G-d. Had *Hashem* performed His wonders in a less developed country than Egypt, people would always wonder if the wise men of Egypt could have done the same thing. (*Derashot Ha’ran* #3)

**– Continued from back page –**

R’ Weisberg elaborates on the last of the above similarities: Before Adam ate from the *Etz Ha’da’at*, there was no shame in the human body (see *Bereishit* 2:25), because Adam existed on a higher spiritual plane. In fact, R’ Yitzchak Ze’ev Soloveitchik z”l (1886-1959; rabbi of Brisk, Poland; later in Yerushalayim; known as the “*Brisker Rav*”) is quoted as saying that, at that time, one could even have recited *Kriat Shema* in front of an unclothed body--something that is prohibited today. *Brit Milah* represents the removal of a physical reminder of the shame that came into the world with Adam’s sin, though the process of eradicating that shame will not be completed until *Olam Ha’ba*. *Shabbat*, too, is reminiscent of the holiness that existed before Adam’s sin. That is why a *Midrash* says that Adam sang (*Tehilim* 92:1), “A psalm, a song for the *Shabbat* day,” upon learning that repentance was possible.

What, then, is special about the eighth day after birth that *Milah* is permitted on *Shabbat* only when it is performed on that day? R’ Weisberg explains that the number eight also alludes to a spiritual plane that is above our physical world--the latter having been created in seven days. As such, circumcision on the eighth day has greater power to repair the damage done by Adam’s sin.

(*Kuntres Mili D’brit* chs. 15 & 18)

**“Moshe spoke before *Hashem*, saying, ‘Behold, *Bnei Yisrael* have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips!’” (6:20)**

R’ Yehonatan Eybeschütz z”l (Central Europe; 1690-1764) writes: A prophet’s ability to prophesy is proportional to the merit of his generation. When the generation is more righteous, the prophet speaks more clearly, and likewise the opposite. Thus, for example, the prophet Yeshayahu’s language is clearer than the prophet Yirmiyahu’s language. (The latter lived in and prophesied to the generation in which the *Bet Hamikdash* was destroyed.) Therefore, when *Bnei Yisrael* saw that Moshe had a speech impediment, they assumed that they were not worthy of redemption. (*Tiferet Yehonatan*)

**“*Hashem* said to Moshe, ‘Say to Aharon, “Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt.”’” (7:19)**

*Rashi* z”l writes: Because the river had protected Moshe when he was cast into it, it was not smitten by him, neither at the plague of blood nor at that of frogs; rather, it was smitten by Aharon.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

The *Gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 92b) teaches: “If you drink from a well, do not throw a stone into it.” R’ Bezalel Ashkenazi z”l (1520-1594; Chief Rabbi of Egypt) quotes R’ Menachem Ha’meiri z”l (“the *Meiri*”; Provence; 1249-1306), who writes: This *Gemara* is meant to be a clever metaphor. It is teaching that, though one should take care not to treat any person in a degrading way, one should not even think of denigrating someone who acted kindly towards him. One who does so demonstrates extremely lowly *Middot* / character traits, the *Meiri* writes.

R’ Ashkenazi adds, in the name of R’ Yosef ibn Migash z”l (Spain; 1077-1141), that the *Gemara*’s lesson is demonstrated by the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu was not the one to strike the water, which had protected him as an infant.

(*Shittah Mekubetzet*)

R’ Nosson Zvi Finkel z”l (1849-1927; the *Alter* of Slabodka) elaborates: The *Gemara* is teaching the degree to which a person must feel and practice the *Middah* / trait of gratitude. Not only does a person deserve gratitude when he provides assistance to another, even inanimate objects from which we once benefitted deserve our gratitude. The purpose of the plagues was to reveal *Hashem*’s greatness and power, and, ultimately, to teach the Egyptians to believe in Him. Even for such an important purpose, Moshe Rabbeinu could not ignore the gratitude he owed to the inanimate waters of the Nile.

(*Ohr Ha’tzafun* I p.190)

Of course, inanimate objects do not need, and are not aware of, our gratitude. Rather, explains R’ Daniel Haymann *shlita* (Tel Zion, Israel), the reason for the obligation to express gratitude even to inanimate objects is to imbue good character traits in us. If we do not feel gratitude to everything that provides us with some benefit, we soon will not be grateful to the people who do good for us.

(*Hakarat Ha’tov Ke’halachah* p.18)