



24th January 2009 – שבת פרשת וארא – כ"ח טבת תשס"ט

Ohr Yerushalayim News

T NEWS ... LATEST NEWS ... LATEST

Mazel Tov!

Mazel Tov to Shmuel Boroch & Channi Salomon on the birth of a baby boy. The **שלום זכור** will be at 38 Stanley Road.

Kiddush This Week

The Kiddush this week is sponsored by David & Rochel Leah Jacobs on the occasion of the birth of their daughter Shayna Basya

Thanks!

The shul was like to thank the anonymous donor of the **ספר** **המשולש** left in shul on Sunday morning.

Rabbi Lewis Shiur Continues This Week

The second in a series of four shiurim by Rabbi Lewis continues this Thursday at 8.00pm in the Shul, on the **דנין** of **טהרת המשפחה** and **יחוד**. This shiur is for men only.

T NEWS ... LATEST NEWS ... LATEST

Raise the Baton!

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (Torah.org)

In this week's portion, once again, Hashem sent Moshe and Ahron to Pharaoh in a second effort to sway his heart and have him change his mind to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. Unlike the unembellished appeal in last week's portion, this time they were equipped with more than pleas - this time they came with miracles. Standing in front of the ruler, Ahron threw his stick down and it turned into a snake. Pharaoh was not impressed. He countered with a little magic of his own. His sorcerers matched the miraculous stick-to-snake act by having his spooks throw down their sticks and by transforming them into snakes.

Ahron one-upped the Egyptian magicians as his stick swallowed all of their sticks. But that obviously was not enough. Pharaoh's heart was once again hardened and he refused to let the Jews leave Egypt. And so, Hashem decided that the benign miracles would not be effective with the stubborn king. It was time for the heavy artillery -- the ten plagues.

Hashem commands Moshe: "Go to Pharaoh in the morning -- behold! He goes out to the water -- and you shall stand opposite him at the river's bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand" (Exodus 7:15). A simple question bothers me. Moshe had only one special stick. There are various Midrashic explanations as to its origin, but everyone agrees it was a unique one. It was a special one with special powers. Moshe may have been a leader of many hats, but he only carried one stick. Why did Hashem need to define the stick as the one that turned into a snake? He could have simply asked Moshe to come with his stick. Moshe would surely have known exactly which stick Hashem wanted him to take.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson is better known to us as Lewis Carroll, author of the 1865 children's fantasy story, Alice in Wonderland. What most of us do not know about him was that he was also a brilliant mathematician spending more than twenty-five years teaching at Oxford University.

An apocryphal story relates that Queen Victoria was so delighted after reading his fantasy-laced novel, Alice in Wonderland that she asked him to send her any other works penned by the same quill. Dodgson responded immediately, but the Queen was somewhat taken aback when she received two of his other works, Syllabus of Plane Algebraical Geometry and An Elementary Treatise on Determinants.

We tend to look at the world and forget that routine natural events are also replete with awe-inspiring miracles and supernatural properties. We become acclimated to the mundane miracles of life so that we also shrug when Hashem turns proverbial sticks into proverbial snakes. We feel we can do that too!

Therefore, before orchestrating the largest insubordination of natural law in world history, by turning the flowing Nile into a virtual blood bath, Moshe is told to bring with him the stick that Pharaoh only considered to be capable of performing minor miracles. Moshe is told that the same stick that was not able to impress Pharaoh has the ability to shatter the Egyptian economy and with it the haughty attitude that kept the Hebrew nation enslaved.

Sometimes our marvel of G-d's wonders is dulled by the scoffing of the naysayers. They lead us to forget that the same power behind the minor miracles of life are the generators of great miracles that we can hardly fathom and surely not anticipate! Even the incomprehensible miracle of life itself is blunted by its ongoing regularity. Our emotions become bored and our intellect spoiled with the majestic events that are considered trite by their regular reoccurrence. And when we fail to see the greatness of genius in the wonderland in which we live, we expect G-d to send us a more prominent message. But we must never forget that even the

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת וארא

שבת מברכין שבט	שבת מברכין שבט
Candle Lighting	No later than 4.20pm
Mincha	4.25pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	10.13am
Mincha 1 st / 2 nd Minyan	1.30pm / 4.26pm
Rov's Mishnayos Shiur	4.56pm
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	5.31pm
Ovos Uvonim	6.31pm
Sunday 1 st / 2 nd Minyan	7.20am / 8.20am
Sunday Mincha & Maariv	4.30pm
Monday ראש חודש	7.00am
Thursday	7.10am
Tuesday/Wednesday/Friday	7.20am
Maariv Monday - Thursday	7.45pm
Shabbos Next Week	4.33pm

most awe-inspiring message comes from the same Hand and Stick that bring us the simplest benign worms!

To Fix Our Attention

Rabbi Label Lam (Torah.org)

So says HASHEM, "Through this shall you know that I am HASHEM; behold with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the waters that are in the River and they will change to blood. The fish-life that is in the water will die and the River will become foul. Egypt will become weary of trying to drink water from the River. (Shemos 7:17-18)

Pharaoh is getting his first introduction to HASHEM. It's hard not to notice that the method is a little rugged. Maybe, because Pharaoh is extra hardnosed and living in deep denial and therefore he needs an extra dose of reality. It makes sense to shock him with a plague or ten. However, we understand that the plagues were not meant to convince Pharaoh alone, but the entire Jewish Nation as well. How and why does this method of muddying the waters of Egypt work so well?

A city council hired an artist to make a statue for the central park. The artist was offered a handsome sum of money for his work. He labored to create a marvelously lifelike image of a horse. It was such a perfect replica that passersby would hardly notice that it was statue. This became a point of contention for the city council that had commissioned the artist and promised him generous recompense for his craft. After all, as politicians, they wanted to gain some reflected glory for their efforts to beautify the park and all was going completely unnoticed. The artist, they complained, had done too good of a job. The horse was too real in appearance and casual observers were incapable telling the difference between it and the real thing. They complained to the artist threatening to halt his payment unless he made some correction. What was he to do? His statue was perfect. What improvement could he possibly make? After a short period of time he arrived at a solution. He went to the park with a hammer and chisel in hand and surgically he stuck at and knocked off the nose of his beautiful statue rendering it seriously and obviously flawed.

Soon small crowds gathered in the park and were seen taking serious notice of the statue. One was heard saying to another, "What a beautiful statue of a horse!" The other one answered, "Too bad the nose is broken!"

The Chovos Halevavos in his introduction to Shaar HaBechina, the Gate of Investigation, lists three reasons one may naturally fail to recognize the great goodness woven into every detail of creation. The summary of the second reason is that HASHEM makes the world run in a predictable and orderly fashion. It is precisely because the goodness is so reliable and consistent that we are rocked to sleep by the steady rhythm of its delivery. A baby is formed from a single cell and after nine months is a marvelous composite of three trillion cells. The first year of life the weight doubles. By the time the child has achieves full stature there are approximately 60 trillion cells running to perform their individual tasks below the radar of our conscious mind. We might tend to call it nature. Nature really means repeating miracles. When something occurs once in history, like the splitting of the sea, then we call it miraculous. If it happens every day and twice on Sunday as a matinee then few would ever take notice.

That's the problem. The good is too darn good. How is The Creator to grab the attention of man? Well, it seems that the sometimes the only way interrupt the habit of living habitual and shallow is a subtle shock treatment that arrests the attention of individual or the entire world. When one small group of cells fails to cooperate, G-d forbid, the person finds themselves praying for mercy, while seeking treatments at Sloan Kettering. When a plane fails to reach its destination in one piece then everyone is amazed that anyone emerges whole. When the Nile River, the main economic artery in Egypt clots with blood, even for a week, then we and even Pharaoh have a better chance of knowing that there is a G-d. Too bad it has to be broken first to fix our attention.

Don't Flog the Frog

Rabbi Naftali Reich (Torah.org)

Frogs. Everywhere the Egyptians looked there were frogs. In the streets, in their homes, on their beds, even in their ovens. Billions of slimy frogs with bulging eyes, biting everything in sight and letting loose a

cacophony of raucous croaks at an ear-shattering, mind-numbing decibel level. Egypt was prostrate and helpless.

Where did all these frogs come from? Did they descend on Egypt in swarms, like the predators and the locusts of later plagues? Our Sages tell us that they did not.

It all began with a single frog emerging from the river. The Egyptians struck the repulsive creature in an attempt to kill it, but to their shock, the frog split into two exact replicas of the first, like an ameba undergoing binary fission. The Egyptians then struck these two frogs, and they, too, executed an immediate two-for-one split. The Egyptians flogged the frogs again and again, but all they accomplished was a rapid geometric proliferation of slimy creatures that metastasized into an all-encompassing plague that gripped Egypt in a reptilian stranglehold.

Let us try and visualize this surreal scenario, Egyptians desperately striking at the frogs again and again only to see them multiply before their very eyes. We cannot help but marvel at the utterly bizarre behavior of the Egyptians. Why in the world would they continue to flog the frogs when each blow just exacerbated the situation? Couldn't they see that striking the frogs was counterproductive, to say the least? There can be only one explanation. They were not thinking rationally. With the painful memory of the blood plague still fresh in their minds, the Egyptians reacted to the onset of the promised second plague with anger and frustration bordering on panic. For all practical purposes, the stress caused them to take leave of their senses and lash out in a totally irrational manner. As the frogs multiplied, the demented frenzy of the Egyptians drove them to ever more violent reactions, which caused even more frogs to appear. They were caught in a downward spiral headed for disaster.

But the question still remains: Why indeed did Hashem choose to send the plague in this fashion? Why didn't he simply unleash a massive flood of frogs on Egypt as he would eventually do with the predators and the locusts?

The commentators explain that Hashem knew the Egyptians would react irrationally. In fact, this itself was one of the crucial messages of this early plague. The message was simple and straightforward. Just as it was futile and indeed irrational to flog the frogs, so would it be futile and irrational to defy the will of Hashem. Just as fear and revulsion could cause them to take leave of their senses and flog the frogs, so could their inflated egos cause them to scorn the divine retribution of the plagues and insist on keeping the Jewish people enslaved. It would be the height of madness to disobey the commands of Hashem. Hashem had give the Egyptians a warning within a warning, but they chose to disregard it.

A merchant came to seek the advice of a great sage.

"My business is failing," he said. "I have tried everything, but the customers have stopped coming to my store. I don't know what to do." "Tell me what you have done thus far," said the sage.

"Well, I've spent a fortune on advertising. I've run numerous sales. I've renovated my store. The worse the situation became, the more money I spent on advertising and renovations. But nothing helps."

"I think I see the problem, my friend," said the sage. "You've been looking in the wrong direction. Drawing all the customers in the world to your store won't help if your product is inferior. Look inward. Improve your product, and your customers will return."

In our own lives, things sometimes do not go our way, no matter how much or how often we try. Clearly, this is a message from Heaven. Sometimes, however, we refuse to acknowledge it and stubbornly continue to bang our heads against brick walls, inflicting grievous damage on ourselves and our loved ones in the process. Only when wisdom prevails and our minds take control of our impulses can we recognize Hashem's hand and look inward for the causes of our misfortune. And when that happens, no matter how our problems are resolved, we will be forever enriched by our newfound closeness to Hashem.