



Volume 4. Issue 32

The Plagues in Egypt

We once again are able to enjoy an intersection in our learning. In this instance, the *Mishnayot* help us understand this week's *parasha*. Indeed it is incredible that an insight regarding a topic with which many feel familiar, can be so enlightening. This topic is none other than the plagues in Egypt.

Charged with the task of negotiating with *Pharo*, *Moshe* is told by *Hashem*:

...See I have made you an “*elohim*” over *Pharo*, and *Aharon* your brother will be your spokesman. (*Shmot* 7:1)

Rashi explains that *Moshe's* task as an “*elohim*” means that he was placed as a “judge and punisher, to punish [*Pharo*] with the plagues and afflictions.”

The *Griz* provides the following explanation. Unlike that which many may have assumed, the purpose of the plagues was not to free *Am Yisrael*. Instead their role was to judge and punish the Egyptians. This was indeed a vital component of the *Brit bein Ha'Btarim*. Part of the promise to *Avraham* that *Bnei Yisrael* would be redeemed from *Egypt* was “also the nation they will serve, I shall judge” (*Bereshit* 16:14).

One of the *Griz's* proofs is our *Mishnah* (*Eduyot* 2:10) that explains: “The **judgment** of *Egypt* occurred over twelve months”. This twelve month period, referring to the time when the plagues occurred, is specifically referred to as the “judgment of *Egypt*”.

One can therefore understand why in each of the plagues, *Pharo*, his servants and the nation are mentioned separately. Since each of these groups had different accountabilities it is only appropriate that they be judged separately and punished in different manners.

The *Griz* also explains that because each of the plagues acted as punishments, *Moshe*, in engaging

Pharo served another important role – warning *Pharo*. This is because we have a principle that one cannot be punished without receiving prior warning.

The *Griz* continues to explain that the exception to this explanation is *makat bechorot* – the Plague of the First Born. This plague also served the purpose of liberating *Am Yisrael*. This explains why in *Moshe's* first meeting with *Pharo*, before there was any discussion of plagues, *Moshe* is command to warn *Pharo* with this specific plague: “...but if you refuse to send [*Am Yisrael*] out; behold I shall kill your firstborn son.”

The *Griz* uses this explanation to explain a number of difficulties in the text and *tefillot*. When *Moshe* is debating against his nomination as leader and representative he says, “...who am I that I should go up to *Pharo* **and** to take *Bnei Yisrael* out of *Egypt*” (*Shmot* 3:11). Here the “and” appear superfluous. This is, of course, unless you understand that *Moshe* was indeed being charged with two missions: taking *Am Yisrael* out of *Egypt* **and** acting as judge and punisher of the Egyptians.

This also explains a difficulty in *Dayeinu* that we read on *Seder* night. There is reference to the “judgments” having been enough, then later a reference to *makat bechorot*. Ordinarily, one would wonder why the final plague is being singled out. Yet, having understood that the plague served as “judgments” and *makat bechorot* having played the extra role of freeing *Am Yisrael*, we can understand its reference in isolation.

One can also now understand why only *makat bechorot* is mentioned in *Hallel Ha'Gadol* (“*Hodu le'Hashem ki tov...*”). This *Hallel* is focused solely on the actual Exodus. Consequently only the plague that functioned for this purpose is mentioned, to the exclusion of the others that functioned as judgments.

David Bankier

Revision Questions

עדיות א': י"ב – ג': א'

- What is common about the last three *Mishnayot* in the first *perek*? (א': י"ב)
- To what circumstances did *Beit Hillel* restrict the ability for a woman to remarry if she returns from overseas and claims that her husband passed away? (א': י"ב)
- How did *Beit Shammai* convince *Beit Hillel* that when a woman is able to remarry based on her own testimony alone, that she can also collect her *ketubah*? (א': י"ב)
- How does a person become a “half-slave half-free”? (א': י"ג)
- Explain the debate regarding how such a person is treated? (א': י"ג)
- What does it mean that a *kli cheres* is *matzil*? (א': י"ד)
- Explain the debate regarding the scope if this law? (א': י"ד)
- What did *R' Chanina, Segan Ha'Kohanim* testify that *kodshim* that became *tameh* by contact with *ve'lad ha'tumah* could be burnt with? (א': ב')
- Regarding the previous question, what does *R' Akiva* add? (א': ב')
- What did *R' Chanina* testify about, regarding the hides of *korbanot*? (א': ב')
- Can a woman write her own *get*? (א': ב')
- If a *tumah* needle is found inside a slaughter *korban* what is the status of the meat and the knife used for slaughter? (א': ב')
- Can *Shichecha* also apply to standing wheat? (א': ד')
- About what three things did *R' Yishmael* testify? (א': ד')
- When is one exempt for “hunting” a snake on *Shabbat*? (א': ה')
- What three things were debated between *R' Yishmael* and *R' Akiva*? (א': ו')
- Regarding the three things that were said before *R' Akiva*: (א': ז')
 - What can a woman go out into *reshut ha'rabim* wearing?
 - What invalidates a person from acting as a witness?
 - Regarding which *safek tumah* is the ruling that it is *tahor*?
 - Which of the cases were said in the name of *R' Yishmael* and which in the name of *R' Yehoshua*?
- Which of the *halachot* the *R' Akiva* presented were accepted by the *Chachamim* and how many were rejected? (א': ח')
- What attributes does a son usually inherit from his father? (א': ט')
- According to *R' Akiva* which five things took twelve months? (א': י')
- Explain the debate between *R' Dosa ben Harkinas* and the *Chachamim* about whether/how two half *kezaitim* of a *met* can combine to be a source of *tumah*. (א': י"א)
- How does *R' Meir* expand the debate between *R' Dosa ben Harkinas* and the *Chachamim*? (א': י"א)

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Between mincha & ma'ariv
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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
6 th January כ"ח טבת	7 th January כ"ט טבת	8 th January א' שבט ראש חודש	9 th January ב' שבט	10 th January ג' שבט	11 th January ד' שבט	12 th January ה' טבת
Eduyot 3:2-3	Eduyot 3:4-5	Eduyot 3:6-7	Eduyot 3:8-9	Eduyot 3:10-11	Eduyot 3:12-4:1	Eduyot 4:2-3

