

Removing Impurities – Va'eira

ראוי כל איש חכם לבב לדרוש ולתור בחכמה על מה עשה ה' ככה לקדושים אשר בארץ. יעקב וכל הנפש הבאה מצרימה לתת תחת סבלות מצרים את בניהם ובני בניהם ר"י שנה בחמר ובלבנים ובכל עבדה בשדה מה פשעם ומה חטאתם והלא לא חשוד קב"ה דעביד דינא בלא דינא חלילה. (אלשיך, תורת משה, שמות א, א)

In his introduction to parshat Shmot, the Alsheich asks a pointed question, "Why did Bnei Yisrael have to go down to Egypt for 210 years? Why did they have to endure hard labor? What was their sin? We know that HKB"H operates according to the principle of *מדה כנגד מדה*, so what was this for?"

HKB"H told Avraham in *ברית בין הבתרים* that Bnei Yisrael, his children would have to endure slavery in a foreign country for 400 years. ויאמר לאברהם ידע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם ועבדים וענו אתם, ארבע מאות שנה. וגם את הגוי אשר יעבדו דן אנכי, ואחרי כן יצאו ברכש גדול (בראשית טו, יג-יד)

What do we expect from Avraham immediately after he hears this terrible news? We expect him to *bargain* with HKB"H, like he did with Sdom ... "Perhaps 300 years, perhaps 350 years, *perhaps* 385 years!" With the evil inhabitants of Sdom Avraham was a *noodge*, he kept badgering HKB"H and trying to save *at least a few* from oblivion. These are *his own children* we are talking about, Bnei Yisrael! Does Avraham not care enough about his own children to try "reduce their sentence"? Avraham does not try to negotiate - he accepts it willingly. Why?

The Alsheich follows with a lengthy explanation, bringing reasons from other sources regarding the sequence of events that led to our exile in Egypt and its purpose, but he finally gets to his bottom line. כי מה יצא הדבר להגלותם. מצרימה למען עונותם להתייד חלאת זממת נחש כהתווד כסף בתווד כור.

The purpose of our exile in Egypt was to remove the final impurities in Am Yisrael that resulted from the sin of the *דעת* so that Am Yisrael could be of the required *madreiga* to receive the Torah on Har Sinai –

ואמת אצלי הוא כמדבר במקומו על כי אין צורך הכנות לאדם להשיג נבואה כ"א מצד זממת נחש הדבקה בו שהיא מעפבת אד ישראל שעמדו על הר סיני פסקה זממתו ונמצאו כלם מוכנים לנבואה כי אין שאר בעסה לעב.

Egypt is called *הצרן*, a melting pot for iron, as it says in the passuk (דברים ד, כ). ויוצא אתכם מכור הצרן ממצרים וכו'. The purpose of smelting is to remove impurities. When you heat metal in a furnace, it turns into a liquid. If the metal contains impurities, such as traces of other metals, they too turn to liquid and due to the difference in densities between the different metals, they float to

the top and physically separate from the metal you are trying to isolate. Thus, one can scoop off - either the impurities, or the metal you are trying to isolate.

To remove the impurities of the snake, נֶחָשׁ, you need a purification process and this is what Egypt was. Why davka 400 years (as promised to Avraham)? Because that is how long HKB"H decided was needed to remove the impurities.

You take your suit to be expert dry cleaned and ask how long it will take. "Two days!" the proprietor replies. "Why *two whole days*?" you ask. He explains "First you need pre-treatment with solvent, then gentle tumbling, filtration, distillation, drying, and finishing with pressing. We can do it for only one day and you can come pick up your suit, but it will have white blotches all over it."

HKB"H is the *expert* in how long it takes to purify the impurities caused by the נֶחָשׁ. If He says 400 years, then that is how long it takes! This is why Avraham did not bargain. There is no point in bargaining in such a case. You want Am Yisrael to emerge squeaky clean, with not even the faintest "blotch" remaining.

Well then, you may say, how did we get out in only 210 years and not the full 400? Chazal answer - קִשְׁי הַשְּׁעָבוּד הַשְּׁלִים. It would have been 400 years - without hard labor, but the hard labor speeded things up. That is more intensive/aggressive (it almost wiped Bnei Yisrael out in the process), but it does the job. You can add extra chemicals to the drycleaning machine, but you run the risk of ruining the suit.

If the entire purpose of our exile in Egypt was atonement for the sin of Adam and Chava with the חֲדָעָה, we need to understand exactly what the sin entailed and its components. We get a hint from the Alsheich above - כִּי אֵין שְׂאֵר - בְּעֶסֶה לְעֵבֶב. In this shiur we will explain how the Ten Plagues fit in with this process.

Our parsha, Vaeira, begins describing the עֶשֶׂר מַכּוֹת, the first seven (blood - hail) and in next week's parsha Bo, the final three (locusts – firstborns).

The question is why davka those specific Ten Plagues? Blood, Frogs, Lice, Wild Animals, Pestilence, Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness and Slaying of the Firstborns.

Why did HKB"H not choose other kinds of plagues in Egypt, for example – earthquake, flood, drought, tornado, hurricane, volcanic eruption, etc.? If you say "Those could be mistaken for natural phenomena!", then how about this selection: Bringing the "Black Plague" a few thousand years early, or "Spanish Flu", or "COVID"? Or, raining down boiling hot spaghetti and meatballs instead of

hail, or having rats invade Egypt instead of frogs, or cockroaches instead of lice, or mad cow disease instead of pestilence? There are endless other possibilities.

HKB"H specifically chose those ten and no other.

In a previous shiur ([Vaeira 2021](#)) we brought the Torat HaMinchah who explains how the Ten Plagues were in fact a reenactment of the 6 days of Creation. In this shiur we are going to follow the shita of the Alsheich (above) and explain how the Ten Plagues fit in with the sin of the עץ הדעת. The source is Meir Panim (פרק טו, עמי קעה).

I have already devoted two shiurim to detailing the sequence of events that comprised the sin of the עץ הדעת ([Breishit 2021](#) and [Breishit 2022](#)) so I will not repeat them at length here. Just a brief, four-line summary -

According to the shita of R' Yehuda (Brachot 40a) the עץ הדעת was a wheat tree. Sefer Meir Panim analyses it further, down to the minutest detail. Chava took the wheat from the tree, ground it into flour, made it into a bread that was left to become chametz. Chava and Adam ate from this bread.

The Ten Plagues were not an atonement for the sin of Adam and Chava, they were a *punishment* for the נחש and his part in causing the sin, which involved injecting chametz into the bread, שֶׁאֵר בָּעֶסֶה. The gematria of שֶׁאֵר is "דצך עדש באחב".

This punishment was unleashed on Pharaoh, who was a gilgul of the נחש as it says in the passuk דָּבַר וְאָמַרְתָּ כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֶל-לִקְיָם הַנָּגִי עָלֶיךָ פֶּרֶעַה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם הַתַּנִּים הַגְּדוֹל הַרְבֵּי בְּתוֹךְ יִאֲרִיו, אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לִי יִאֲרִי וְאֲנִי עֲשִׂיתִנִּי (יחזקאל כט, ג). Another name for Pharaoh is הַתַּנִּים הַגְּדוֹל, the large serpent.

Let us go down the list and we see exactly how each of the plagues was *exact* מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה punishment for Pharaoh/the נחש.

דם Blood. The Gemara (Eruvin 100b) says that as a result of Chava eating from the עץ הדעת, she was punished with two types of blood אַחַת דָּם נִדָּה and אַחַת דָּם בְּתוּלִים. The plague of blood was מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה for the נחש afflicting Chava with blood. If the sin of the עץ הדעת would not have taken place, the birth process would have been "blood free", a kind of a "Polaroid" birth. Click and - out pops the baby.

צפרדע Frogs. The word צַפְרִידֵּעַ are the letters צִדְעִי. By making Adam and Chava eat from the עץ הדעת, they gained knowledge, דַּעַת. Part of the description of the plague of frogs is that the frogs jumped into the ovens and into the bread (כח, ז, שמות ז), וּבִתְנִינִיךָ וּבִמְשָׁאֲרוֹתֶיךָ (שמות ז, כח). What about jumping into the bathrooms and the pantry and the lounge cabinets? The passuk specifically

singles out ovens and bread, because that was part of the sin of Chava, baking bread in an oven. See shiur ([Va'eira 2025](#)) for more details.

כל עפר הארץ היה כנים Lice. The passuk says (שמות 8:17) **כל עפר הארץ היה כנים** (that all the dust of the earth in Egypt became lice. The Or HaChaim (ibid.) brings Tosfot on the Gemara (Shabat 12a) that tries to define what kind of lice afflicted Egypt. Lice do not come from the ground - they are parasites that are passed from one creature to another. So why does the passuk say **כל עפר הארץ היה כנים**? The Tosfot brings R' Yosef of Orléans (also known as the Bechor Shor) who says that there are two types of "lice", one that jumps from the ground, (which is actually called a פֶּרַעוֹשׁ, a flea) and the other which does not come from the ground, but is transferred from one creature to another. The Or HaChaim says the Plague of Lice involved *both* types.

As a result of Adam eating from the עֵץ הַדַּעַת, HKB"H cursed the earth (בראשית 3:17) **אֶרֶץ חֲבֹלָה**. Therefore, Pharaoh was punished **מִדֶּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה** by **עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ**. Lice affect the hair. Before Chava sinned, her hair was braided (Brachot 61a) to endear her to Adam HaRishon, as braided hair is a symbol of **זִנְיָנוּת**. After she sinned, her hair became unruly and Adam no longer found her beautiful and separated from her for 130 years. Thus HKB"H punished Pharaoh in his hair.

עָרֹב Wild Animals. After Adam and Chava sinned they were lowered in stature to that of the animals (קהלת 3:10) **וּמוֹתֵר הָאָדָם מִן הַבְּהֵמָה**. Pharaoh was punished **מִדֶּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה** by being attacked by wild animals.

דָּבָר Pestilence. By sinning, Adam and Chava introduced death to the world. Before the sin with the עֵץ הַדַּעַת they were immortal. By all rights, HKB"H should have immediately punished Pharaoh/the נָחֵשׁ with death, but in His mercy, he first smote the beasts as a warning.

שָׁחִין Boils. Before their sin, Adam and Chava were covered by a Divine layer of skin – **כְּתָנֹת אֹרֶז** (see shiur on [Ki Teitzei 2023](#)). After their sin, this Heavenly skin was mostly removed (except at the extremities of the fingers and toes) and instead HKB"H downgraded them to earthly skin (בראשית 3:21) **כְּתָנֹת עוֹר** (with the letter ayin). Therefore, HKB"H punished Pharaoh **מִדֶּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה** by afflicting his skin.

בָּרָד Hail. After HKB"H banished Adam and Chava from Gan Eden as a result of their sin, He placed at the entrance to Gan Eden the **לֶהֱטֵה הַחֶרֶב** (בראשית 3:24) **הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת**. What is this "alternating sword"? The Da'at HaZekeinim (מבעלי התוספות) says (ibid.) **שֶׁמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת מִחֹמֶם לְצוּלָה וּמִצוּלָה לְחֹמֶם**, that it alternates between extreme heat and extreme cold (like גֶּהֱנוֹם – hell is not only hot, it alternates between extreme hot and cold). To punish Pharaoh/the נָחֵשׁ for causing this, HKB"H rained down **בָּרָד**, which was fire inside ice.

Locusts אֲרֶבֶה. After sinning, Chava was punished with suffering during the birth process (טו, בראשית ג, טז). As punishment מִדָּה הֶרְבֵּה אֲרֶבֶה עֲצֻבוֹנָה וְהִרְגָה (בראשית ג, טז). HKB"H punished Adam for sinning by unleashing אֲרֶבֶה on Egypt. HKB"H punished Adam for sinning by destroying his Heavenly source of food וְקוֹץ וְדֹרְדֹר תִּצְמִיחַ לָךְ, וְאֶכְלָתָ אֶת עֵשֶׂב וְאֶכְלָתָ אֶת עֵשֶׂב (בראשית ג, יח). Similarly, He unleashed a plague of locusts to destroy the source of food in Egypt.

Darkness חֹשֶׁךְ. After being expelled from Gan Eden, Adam was banished to a place called "אֶרֶץ" (זוהר חדש, סתרי אותיות, בראשית ריו), which is a place of darkness. HKB"H punished Pharaoh with a Plague of Darkness.

Slaying of the Firstborn בְּכוֹרוֹת. The Zohar HaKadosh (בראשית כח, ע"ב) says that Kayin was born from the union between the נָחֶשׁ and Chava. Later, Adam "knew" his wife and from this union Hevel was born. Therefore, Kayin was the firstborn of the נָחֶשׁ and Hevel was the firstborn of Adam, born from the same mother, Chava, but from different fathers. Kayin, the firstborn of the נָחֶשׁ slayed Hevel, the firstborn of Adam. Therefore, מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה, HKB"H slew the firstborn of Pharaoh/the נָחֶשׁ (and all other firstborns in Egypt). To describe the "range" of firstborns slain, the Torah gives the highest level and the lowest level מִבְּכוֹר פְּרִעָה הַיֵּשֶׁב עַל כֶּסֶּאֱדָם עַד בְּכוֹר הַשִּׁפְחָה אֲשֶׁר אַחֲרֵי הָרִחִים (שמות יא, ה), from the firstborn of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the maidservant next to the millstone. Interesting choice – "maidservant next to the millstone". The Torah could equally have said the "maidservant in the laundry", or the "maidservant in the kitchen". This phraseology is not incidental, it is an allusion to Chava, who became the maidservant of the נָחֶשׁ and ground the fruit of the הָדֵעַת עֵץ הַדֵּעַת, wheat, into flour (with a millstone) to make chametz bread.

As we see, all the Ten Plagues were punishment for Pharaoh, who was the gilgul of the נָחֶשׁ.

In HKB"H's בְּרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים, HKB"H doesn't say that Avraham's descendants will go down to Egypt, He leaves it unspecified לֹא לָהֶם לָאָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. In theory, Am Yisrael could have been exiled to Switzerland instead of Egypt?? But no! It had to be *specifically Egypt*.

It had to be the land ruled by הַתְּנִינִים הַגְּדוֹל, Pharaoh, to punish his predecessor הַנָּחֶשׁ הַקְּדָמוֹן. It had to be Egypt, because Egypt was the land of chametz. Egypt was the first country in the history of the world that used chametz to make their bread. They prided themselves on their chametz baking prowess, using it as a status symbol of their superiority over other nations. To do tikkun for creating a chametz bread in Gan Eden (שָׂאֵר בְּעֶסֶה according to the Alsheich), you need to do it in the land of the chametz.

When you have done tikkun for the sin of Adam and Chava and are redeemed from Egypt, you leave the chametz behind and you begin eating

chametz free bread – matza. Following that, HKB"H raises you one level higher and gives you the same food he gave to Adam and Chava in Gan Eden before they sinned – Mann, food of angels.

In this way, Bnei Yisrael ultimately arrived at Har Sinai after completely eliminating all the impurities of the sin of the עֲוֹן הַדֵּעַת caused by the שָׁטָן.

This, according to the Alsheich is the purpose of our slavery in Egypt.

If Egypt was the cure for the sin of Adam HaRishon, then why did HKB"H have to wait until the generation of Moshe? When Avraham went down to Egypt because of the famine, HKB"H could have made Avraham's sojourn in Egypt, when Sarah was kidnapped by Pharaoh, the tikkun. Just as we read that Bnei Yisrael left Egypt בְּרֶכֶשׁ גָּדוֹל, so too did Avraham leave Egypt laden וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד, בְּמִקְנֵה בְּכֶסֶף וּבְזָהָב (בראשית יג, ב). The Exodus could have taken place when Avraham left Egypt and returned to Eretz Yisrael and we could have saved a lot of suffering and anguish. Why do you need to wait until the generation of the grandsons of Yaakov?

Chazal tell us that part of the process of doing tikkun for the sin of Adam HaRishon and eliminating the impurities resulting from this sin was Avraham giving birth to Yishmael and Yitzchak giving birth to Eisav. Only when Yaakov gave birth to twelve "clean" sons, with no impurities was the ancestry of Am Yisrael finally pure. This is why we are called Am Yisrael and not Am Yitzchak or Am Avraham. However, the sons of Yaakov, by the sin of selling Yosef, forfeited meriting the full tikkun in their generation. Only the children of the Twelve Tribes who went down to Egypt were truly lacking impurity. This was a unique, special generation who were sin free. This is what the Alsheich is asking מָה פְּשָׁעָם וּמָה חֲטָאתָם?

To bring about the Geulah requires a unique, special generation. We have had unique generations like this scattered throughout our history. The generation of the exile in Egypt and Moshe, who did the final tikkun for Adam HaRishon. The generation of R' Akiva who did tikkun for the brothers selling Yosef כִּי מִיָּמֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לֹא נִמְצָא כָכֶם (מדרש משלי א, יד). No other generation could have achieved the tikkun they did.

There is one more generation that will achieve a similar purpose, the pre-Mashiach generation. This next unique, special generation will bring about the final tikkun. The tikkun for Adam HaRishon was already done by the generation of Moshe. The tikkun for the sin of selling Yosef was already done by the generation of R' Akiva. All that is left is to do tikkun for the sin of the egel hazav. This will be the task of generation at the end of הָעָלְף הַשְּׁשִׁי.

What makes this generation unique? Will the entire generation be of the stature of a Moshe Rabbeinu or a R' Akiva? Obviously not. The generation of the

Exodus indeed did have a Moshe Rabbeinu, but the rest of Bnei Yisrael had reached the 49th level of טמאה. The generation of Asara Harugei Malchut indeed did have a R' Akiva, who learned things from the crowns on the letters of the Torah that even Moshe Rabbeinu himself could not understand. However, the remainder of R' Akiva's generation was rife with שגאת חנם and caused the destruction of Bayit Sheini.

It is a good guess then, following this pattern, that the generation of the Mashiach will have a figure of the status of Moshe Rabbeinu and R' Akiva combined – the Mashiach, but the rest of the generation will be of a very low level in comparison. This is the secret formula - a combination between an extremely elevated individual and a very low generation. The elevated individual though, has the power to raise the generation from the lowest depths to the highest heights - in the blink of an eye בְּהֶרֶף עֵין.

It took a generation who was at the lowest 49th level of the זיהמת נחש to do *tikkun* for the זיהמת נחש. It took a generation that was at the lowest level of שגאת חנם to do *tikkun* for the sin of שגאת חנם, selling Yosef. It will therefore be a generation who is at the lowest level of the egel hazav, the most materialistic generation, to do *tikkun* for this last outstanding sin.

I believe באמונה שלמה that we are already experiencing the series of events that immediately precede the Geulah. There has never before in history been a "generation of the egel hazav", that has turned *materialism into a deity*, like this generation.

I do not know for sure if we are this generation, or whether it will be our children or our grandchildren. Either way it cannot be further than our great grandchildren, because that is already after the אֶלֶף הַשְּׁשִׁי.

This special generation will experience miracles that will make the Ten Plagues in Egypt look like a B-rated movie in comparison. I believe we already have begun experiencing some of these, but they are only the prequel. בב"א.

Shabbat Shalom

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