

A Taste of Torah

Exodus of Mind

By Rabbi Yossi Kaplan

A colossal mass of green covered the Egyptian landscape. Frogs! Frogs on the stovetop, frogs in the bedroom, frogs everywhere. But where did these creatures come from? It started with one giant frog. The Egyptians began beating the frog, hoping to kill it. But lo and behold, as they hit that frog, little frogs spewed out of it. And as quick as they could hit that frog, out came little ones; jumping, croaking, smothering the Egyptians. One wonders about the judgment of the Egyptians; don't you think multitudes of frogs would capture their distaste? So what kept them at bat, incessantly whacking that frog, until the whole land was covered in green?

Pharaoh asked Moshe to rid Egypt of the frogs; he was to set the enslaved Jews free. But a curious thing then happened: Nothing. Pharaoh was back to business as usual; the frogs were gone, but the Jews were there to stay. This scene was repeated plague after plague. Pharaoh promised to set the Jews free, but when each plague ended, he reneged anew on his promise. So here's the question: The country was in turmoil, having suffered through numerous crippling plagues. The economy was all but destroyed. Yet Pharaoh is cool as ice, fiercely, relentlessly, refusing to yield to G-d's command: set My nation free!

There's a common theme in the parsha, starting with the Egyptians and ending with Pharaoh. Rabbi Yaakov Yisroel Kanievsky (1899-1985) gives us insight as to why the Egyptians kept on hitting the frog. They certainly realized the results of their actions, but they were driven. They were driven by anger and revenge. Enraged at the mess unfolding due to this giant frog, they were bent on obliterating it, even as the frog remained alive and well, and the little ones kept

on coming.

The absurdity of the situation borders on insanity, yet here we see to what extent one can delude himself. They were driven, thus, in their minds, their actions were justified, even as they were wrong. Dead wrong! Intellect had given way to the passion of the moment.

Which brings us to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was good and terrified; he knew he was sitting on a time bomb - G-d wouldn't wait forever. But, says Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (1873-1936), he refused to think! How often do we hear of a tragedy, G-d forbid; we realize there's got to be a message from G-d, but we don't want to change. So we don't think, and all is well, even as we pretend not to be frightened.

This approach is apparent in the Egyptians' enslavement of the Jews. The Egyptians worked the Jews so that they wouldn't have time to think. Egyptian culture was at stake in the face of the growing Jewish nation. The Jews are a believing, thinking people; the antithesis of Egyptian culture. Intellect held no sway over the Egyptians, and priority was given to the passion of the moment. So the Egyptians enslaved them, and Pharaoh wouldn't let them go, to ensure the loss of Jewish belief.

The Egyptians thought they were safe, but G-d taught them a lesson. A mass of frogs exited through the mouth of a giant frog, measure for measure. They wouldn't allow a Jewish exodus, so G-d sent them an exodus of another sort. And that exodus was brought about through their own culture of oblivion; they hit the frog without thought of consequence.

The exodus of the Jews, when it finally did come, was thus not limited to physical freedom. It was also an exodus

Stories For The Soul

Scales of Justice

The brief summons hanging on the milkman's door bewildered him. He was an honest man who always behaved appropriately. He had no idea why he had been summoned to court, but the baker knew.

The baker bought butter and cheese from the milkman for his baking. One day he suspected that the lumps of butter that the milkman sold him were under a kilo. The baker decided to check out the matter and for a period of time he consistently weighed every lump of butter that he bought from the milkman. He discovered that they were in fact less than a kilo. Sometimes they were 900 grams, or 950 grams, and once one was even 850 grams.

The milkman arrived at the court shaking with fear. He had never been to a courthouse and had never spoken to the judge. The judge evoked a sense of fear amongst the villagers.

"I assume you have a very accurate scale in your dairy," began the judge.

"No, your honor, I do not have a scale," said the milkman.

"So how do you weigh the butter? Do you just guess that it is one kilo?" asked the judge.

"No, G-d forbid, your honor - I am an honest man. I built myself a scale - the kind that needs a weight on one side to balance the butter on the other."

The judge nodded his head, and the milkman continued: "Every morning when I come to weigh the butter for the baker, I place a kilo loaf of bread on one side of the scale, and this way I know that the butter that I

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Kollel Happenings

FREE CHOICE

Join Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher for a new three-part series for women exploring the Torah outlook on Free Choice. Wednesday January 2, 9 and 16, 7:15 pm at the home of Rabbi Yaakov and Rebbetzin Chaya Meyer. For more info, contact Chaya Major at chaya@manymajors.com



KOLLEL'S 15TH ANNUAL CELEBRATION FEB. 26TH

The Kollel will be celebrating fifteen years of bringing Torah to Denver Jewry on Tuesday, February 26th, at 6:30 pm, at the newly-renovated McNichols Building, 144 W. Colfax Ave. (corner of Colfax & Bannock). Tribute journal in honor of Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, who will be present at the event to receive an award. Ad deadline: Feb. 8th. Ads for Rabbi Amsel, as well as other Kollel personnel, can be emailed to journal@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855. To reserve, visit www.denverkollel.org or contact 303-820-2855.



A DEEPER LOOK

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issues, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights 7:40-8:30 pm at the Kollel, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at Aish Denver 8-9 pm. call 303-820-2855.

Interpersonal Issues

If the Item Isn't Claimed

If one announced a lost item, and nobody claimed it, it must be put away until Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet) will inform the finder whom to return it to. Similarly, if the item had no sign, but was found before the owner despaired of finding it, and, thus, it

can never be returned nor kept by the finder, it must be put away.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

Take a Shot at It

Jeff Levin wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Are we required to immunize our children? Since the scientific knowledge is not 100% accurate and there is ample proof that vaccines in fact damage children permanently and sometimes they can cause death ... are we allowed to vaccinate children? ?

Dear Jeff Levin,

Our Sages teach that in medical matters we should rely on the experts in each generation. Today, there are differences of opinion among doctors concerning which immunizations are helpful, safe or advisable to receive.

Therefore, as with any medical issue, you are required to find a doctor with sufficient expertise in the subject such that his opinion may be relied upon.

There's no blanket answer concerning all vaccines, but certainly many childhood diseases have been practically eliminated or reduced since their introduction. Smallpox, for example, once a great killer of children, is today extremely rare. On the other hand, some vaccinations are of highly questionable value. Find a doctor whom you trust to help select the proper immunizations for your child.

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Stories for the Soul

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will give to the baker will be exactly one kilo."

"Are you telling us that the amount of butter you give the baker is exactly the weight of the loaf of bread he supplies to you?" asked the judge.

"That is it exactly!" said the milkman. The baker's face fell - and he lost

the case.

Moshe Rabbeinu was the quintessential leader. He embodied all the lessons he taught. He didn't practice one thing and preach another. Whatever he demanded of others, he did himself.

Adapted with permission from Shul-Week by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

A Taste of Torah

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of mind. A separation was needed from the destructive Egyptian culture, and that occurred when the Jewish People left Egypt. Today, the prevailing culture is one of allowing desires and emotions to reign supreme. We'd do well to remember that we're a thinking, feeling,

nation, and we can attain greatness through following our intellect. It was us who left Egypt and G-d willing it will be us who will soon be redeemed, through a separation from the prevailing culture. An exodus of mind.

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