



A Taste of Torah

A Leave of Faith

by Rabbi Nesanel Kipper

After hearing of the terrible travails of slavery the Jewish People suffered in last week's parsha, the Ten *Makkos* (Plagues) finally begin, with the first seven occurring in this week's parsha and the final three in next week's Parshas Bo. There is a great deal of discussion among the commentators as to the purpose of the *Makkos*.

An examination of the verses seems to indicate that the purpose of the *Makkos* was to force Pharaoh to set the Jews free. Prior to the plague of frogs, Pharaoh is told (*Shemos* 7:27), "If you refuse to send out the Bnai Yisrael, behold, I will smite the entire boundaries [of your land] with frogs." Similar wording is used before a number of the other plagues, as well. This would seem to imply that the threat of the *Makkos* was meant to persuade Pharaoh to release the Jewish People.

However, this approach leaves a number of questions. Why were ten plagues necessary - wouldn't a single, mighty plague have done the trick? In addition, Hashem says (*ibid.* 7:3), "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart and I will increase my signs and wonders in Egypt." This only strengthens the question, for why did Hashem have to go out of His way, so to speak, to harden Pharaoh's heart and prolong the process of redemption?

An alternative approach that solves these issues is that Hashem's intention with the Ten Plagues was, as expressed in the aforementioned verse, to increase His signs and wonders, so that, as Rashi comments on that verse, Bnai Yisrael would see and recognize Hashem's might. The Ramban similarly discusses how the Ten Plagues serve to affirm that Hashem presides over every

detail in our world and to debunk any misconception regarding G-d's existence. In addition, these plagues serve as a cornerstone of our belief that can be related to future generations.

There is thus evidence of two reasons for the *Makkos*. 1) To force Pharaoh to free the Jews from slavery. 2) To display that Hashem is the all-powerful, omnipresent and omniscient G-d. These two reasons seem to be independent of each other, but perhaps it can be explained that these two reasons are really one and the same.

Our Sages tell us that Hashem took out Bnai Yisrael due to the merit of their *emunah* (faith). This seems to indicate that *emunah* was necessary to merit redemption. Indeed, the Vilna Gaon (Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna; 1720-1797) makes such a comment in his work on prayer, *Avnei Eliyahu*. Commenting on the words in *Shemone Esrei* that G-d is a "support and assurance for the righteous," the Vilna Gaon explains that Hashem helps the righteous keep their faith while they are still awaiting their salvation. To illustrate, he notes that Hashem instilled *emunah* in the Bnai Yisrael by bringing the *Makkos* in order to enable them to attain the merit needed to be redeemed. From the teachings of our Sages and the Vilna Gaon, it is clear that the role the *Makkos* played in instilling the Jewish People with *emunah* was actually pivotal in their meriting redemption.

With this context, it can be explained that the two reasons discussed are linked together. Indeed, Hashem brought the *Makkos* as a means to free Bnai Yisrael from their Egyptian slavery, but in order to merit redemption, they needed to have *emunah* in Hashem.

continued on back

Stories for the Soul

Dress Code

Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz served in the Israeli Knesset as a representative of the Charedi community for decades from the 1950s until his retirement in the 1980s. His work brought him into close contact with many of the greatest Torah leaders of the era, including Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach (1899-2001), who led the Charedi Torah world for many years. Rabbi Lorincz related that whenever he would visit Rav Shach in the latter's home, Rav Shach would insist on donning his *kapote* (long jacket) as a sign of respect. Though Rabbi Lorincz protested, noting that this was an unnecessary burden and made the great Torah leader uncomfortable, especially during the summer heat, Rav Shach insisted that it was proper *derech eretz* (etiquette and respect) that he do so.

Finally, Rabbi Lorincz asked Rav Shach if he'd agree to leave off his *kapote* if Rabbi Lorincz himself would remove his jacket while visiting. Rav Shach replied that if Rabbi Lorincz himself was not wearing his jacket, then there was no need for him to wear his jacket either. And so it was - Rabbi Lorincz would remove his jacket when visiting Rav Shach, and Rav Shach did not don his *kapote*.

In this week's parsha, Hashem commands Moshe and Aharon to treat Pharaoh with the proper respect befitting a king. Despite his wickedness, Pharaoh, as a king, was still deserving of proper respect. By the same token, all people are deserving of a basic level of respect, even if it is difficult to do so or if one feels it is unnecessary.

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Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: How can adding liquid prevent hand-washing?

Answer: If a bread-type item is broken into pieces less than the size of a *kezayis* (olive's-volume) and combined with liquid in such a way that the pieces lose their form, the blessing changes from *hamotzi* to *mezonos* (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 168:10). For example,

matzah meal combined with liquid ingredients to make a cake or cookie dough would be *mezonos*, even before baking.

This week's question: When can the blessing on a food go from *hamotzi* to none at all based upon one's personal food preferences?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Saadia Gaon - Part XII

Initially, the Exilarch, Dovid ben Zakkai, offered the position of *gaon* to one of the senior Torah scholars in Babylonia at the time, a man by the name of Rabbi Nissim Nehora'i. Rav Nissim was a *reish kalla*, the highest rank of the biannual

kalla gathering. Rav Nissim declined the offer. Some say that Rav Nissim was blind, and felt that this made him unfit for the position. Dovid ben Zakkai asked Rav Nissim his opinion about appointing Rav Saadia to the position.

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continued from front

Hashem therefore arranged matters so that Ten Plagues would occur and achieve the goal of teaching *emunah* to the Jewish People

One may wonder why *emunah* is so vital that it was a prerequisite to redemption. There are many mitzvos in the Torah, so why is this one area of faith in Hashem required, more than anything else, to achieve redemption.

The Torah (Devarim 10:20) gives a mitzvah of *uvo sidbak*, attaching oneself to Hashem. What exactly is included in this mitzvah? The Meshech Chochma (Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk; 1843-1926) explains that this means to have *emunah* and *bitachon* (trust) in Hashem. Trust in Hashem, teaches the Chovos Halevaavos, is built upon *emunah*; the stronger one's intellectual faith, the more he can build an actual trust that will express itself in one's day-to-day life as he encounters challenges. It is through faith and trust in Hashem that we are able to connect with Him.

When Bnai Yisrael are commanded to build a *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), the verse says (Shemos 29:46), "And they shall know that I am Hashem, their G-d, Who

took them out of Egypt to dwell among them [through the *Mishkan*]." Rashi explains that Bnai Yisrael's redemption from Egypt was on the condition that Hashem would dwell among them.

In light of the above, we can now explain what was so important about *emunah*. Since the purpose of leaving Egypt was to have Hashem's presence in their midst, and *emunah* and the *bitachon* it builds are, per the Meshech Chochma, the path by which one connects to Hashem, *emunah* was a prerequisite for the Exodus to occur. Having Hashem dwell among the Jewish People is the ultimate connection, and this would only be possible with complete faith in Hashem.

The Rambam in his work *Moreh Nevuchim* explains that to whatever extent one places his trust in Hashem, he will merit Divine assistance in the same measure. May we all merit a level of *emunah* in Hashem that will enable us to cast our burden onto Hashem and put our trust in Him. In doing so, we will see that Hashem's assistance will mirror our devotion, and, most importantly, it will bring Him into our lives.

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