

Elijah answered: But you're not Jewish! You think thieves will not come through the Mezuzah? Chinese man: G-d protect store with Mezuzah! Give me mezuzah! I want mezuzah!

Elijah: Well, well, I will bring you one. A week after having provided the Mezuzah, the Chinese returns to see Elijah and asks: So, have you been robbed? Chinese man: Not once! But I am giving you back you Mezuzah anyway!

Elijah: But why? If that protected you from burglars? Chinese man: Perfect burglary protection! But all day too many rabbis come and ask tzedakah!

Calendar

*Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Shevat
Hallel & Special Musaf*

- ◆ Shacharis 8:30 am; Shtibl 8:45 am
- ◆ Brocha in the Seeff Hall.
- ◆ **Smorgasbord of Shiurim.**
- ◆ Mincha: 6:25 pm
- ◆ Shabbos ends: 7:35 pm
- ◆ **Mincha during the week: 6:00 pm**

YoungJewishJoburg

'Spiritshul & Social' Learning Night for guys & girls ages 20's & 30's
with Rabbi Yehuda Stern

New venue. New style. New programme.

Tuesday nights at 8pm

Factory on Grant's "Upstairs Box"
(next to art gallery)

Corner of Grant Ave & Nellie Road Norwood

Term 1: Tues 7 Feb – Tues 28 March

More info: 011 640 5021

Coming to **SydShul on Monday 20 February**

Learning Launch 2017

"MINI DAVOS:

SA & The New World Order"

With an all-star array of presenters.

Watch this space!

Monday Morning Bridge Club

All ages and strengths welcome.

R10 for bridge & tea.

For more information, please contact

Linda Merkel 083 400 0002.

Shiurim @ Sydenham Shul

- Sunday morning 9 am—**Mishna (Pirkei Avos)** *Rabbi Goldman* (boardroom)
- Tuesday 1 pm—**Ladies Shiur** *Rabbi Goldman* (Elk Hall)
- Tuesday 7:45 pm - **Gemorra Sotah** *Rabbi Goldman* (Rabbi's home)
- Tuesday 8:15 pm - **Gemorra Brachos** (for young men) *Rabbi Stern* (Rabbi's home)
- Wednesday 8:00 pm - **Gemorra Sukkah** *Rabbi Stern* (Rabbi's home)
- Shabbos 8:15 am - **Garments of the Soul** *Rabbi Stern* (Shtibl)

Sydenham Barmy Army

Re-launching Sunday 5 February

For Bar Mitzvah boys of 2017 & 2018

Sundays 8:30-9:45am @ Youth Bayit

Instructor: Ari Poyurs

Weekly breakfast, Tefillin & fun learning, exciting outings, cool prizes & gifts
SIGN UP NOW! 011 640 5021

NEW!

Young Mother's Learning Group with Rabbi Yehuda Stern

13 Fundamentals of Jewish Faith

Alternate Thursdays @ 9:15am

Beginning Thursday 9 February

Sydenham Community Centre

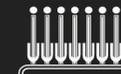
RSVP preferred at Shul office

- ◆ The **Scottish Leader Signature** whiskey at Shul is sponsored by **Distell** & available for purchase at **Norman Goodfellows**.
- ◆ **Nathan Fine** of Ideal Furnishers at Midway Mall, Bramley Gardens wishes all congregants a Good Shabbos. Call 011 887 5456/082 854 5706. **Furniture, Bedding & Appliances.**
- ◆ **Vehicles wanted. Any make, any condition. Best prices. Phone ARNOLD ORKIN 082 823 7826**
- ◆ Acknowledgements: Chabad.org, aish.com
- ◆ Please take Good Shabbos Sydenham home if you will only carry it within the Eiruv.



Good Shabbos SYDENHAM!

Published by the
Sydenham Highlands North
Hebrew Congregation
Johannesburg, South Africa



28 Jan 2017

Parshas Vaaira

1 Shevat 5777

Never Lose the Spirit

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

“What about the workers?!”

Imagine you have been working on the job for years and years. It is hard, manual labor and you are not simply tired but exhausted, demoralised, drained and frustrated. And then, one fine day, some new fellow on the floor stands up and promises a whole new world of equality, rewards, and ultimate freedom. Do you believe him or are you beyond hope? Do you dare hold out for a better tomorrow and risk being disillusioned, devastated and cast into despair yet again or do you simply accept your fate and give up dreaming?

So it was with our ancestors in Egypt. They were slaving away all those years when a new face appeared and began making promises. Moses brings a message from G-d that they are about to be redeemed. There is a Promised Land ahead. All is not lost. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

The Jews' response? *And they did not listen to Moses out of shortness of breath and from the hard labor.*

One commentary explains that “shortness of breath” shouldn't be understood only literally. The Hebrew for breath is *nach*, which can also mean “spirit.” In other words, they could not heed Moses' call not only from physical breathlessness, but because they lacked the spirit. Having suffered in bondage for so long, they no longer had the faith or hope to believe that freedom was still in the realm of the possible. It was simply beyond them.

They had lost the spirit.

In the history of Egypt not a single slave had ever escaped. How could an entire nation ever walk free? Moses was a dreamer, they must have thought. It is just not realistic to hold out such high hopes only to have them dashed yet again. And so, the people were utterly despondent and spiritless and, therefore, they could not hear, i.e. absorb, Moses' message.

It happens all too often. People become so set in their mediocrity that they give up hope of ever achieving the breakthrough. Marriages get stuck in the rut of routine and the tedious treadmill keeps rolling along until we lose even the desire to dream. Today in Israel, many people - even some once-brave leaders - are so despondent from years of war, attrition and terror that they sometimes clutch at imaginary straws that promise a delusory peace because, basically, if we are honest with ourselves, they have simply lost the resolve. It takes an extraordinary degree of faith and courage not to.

I have often quoted a wise proverb heard in the name of the legendary Chasid, Reb Mendel Futerfas. “If you lose your money, you've lost nothing. Money comes and money goes. If you lose your health, you've lost half. You are not the person you were before. But if you lose your resolve, you've lost it all.”

Moses brought new hope to a depressed, dreamless nation. He gave them back the spirit they had lost and eventually, through the miracles of G-d, the promise was fulfilled and the dream became destiny.

To be out of breath is normal. To be out of spirit is something the Jewish People can never afford. May we never lose the spirit.

Parsha Pointers

*Vaeira: Artscroll Chumash pg 318;
Living Torah pg 281*

G-d reveals Himself to Moses. Employing the “four expressions of redemption,” He promises to take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them, and acquire them as His own chosen people at Mount Sinai; He will then bring them to the land He promised to the Patriarchs as their eternal heritage.

Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of G-d, “Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness.” Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. Aaron’s staff turns into a snake and swallows the magic sticks of the Egyptian sorcerers. G-d then sends a series of plagues upon the Egyptians.

The waters of the Nile turn to blood; swarms of frogs overrun the land; lice infest all men and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities; a pestilence kills the domestic animals; painful boils afflict the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail. Still, “the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he would not let the children of Israel go, as G-d had said to Moses.”

The Greatest Miracle of All

By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

Miracles, miracles, and more miracles. That is the story of this week’s Torah portion. Sticks transforming into serpents; water turning into blood; hail pellets with a core of fire; dreadful plagues of frogs, lice, wild beasts, pestilence and boils.

“Fairy tales,” declares the sceptic. “Isn’t it so convenient that all these miracles happened more than three thousand years ago? I’ll believe it when I see it with my own eyes! Why didn’t G-d send ten plagues upon the Nazis? What’s with all the terrorists who blow up men, women and children? Did G-d perhaps forget how to make miracles?!”

The believing Jew, too, asks the same questions—albeit in a more respectful tone. Yes, he understands that G-d controls nature as well as the supernatural; but why did G-d choose to flip the switch, deciding to abandon the course of miracles and to run the world entirely through the laws of nature?

The book of Exodus introduces us to the era of openly nature-defying miracles, an era which lasted roughly a millennium. The Scriptures are filled with stories of prophets and miracles; in fact, it seems that the laws of nature were temporarily defunct. This era ended with the destruction of the first Holy Temple. Afterward, there were a few brief glimpses of the supernatural—such as the miracle of Chanukah—but after a few centuries these too vanished. For the past two thousand years we live in a double exile: physically, we were banished from our homeland; spiritually, we cannot perceive the G-dly hand which creates and directs all of creation.

The reason for the emergence and subsequent disappearance of miracles is linked to the purpose of our very existence. Life in the Garden of Eden was idyllic, because evil was not yet part of the human character. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge imbued Adam and Eve with an intimate knowledge of physical and material desire. The moment they were expelled from the Garden is the moment when the story of the perpetual human struggle began: the struggle of choosing between the G-dly (good) or the opposite (egotism, hedonism, etc.). And actually, this is what G-d really wanted from the moment He considered the idea of creation: a free-choosing human being who would struggle with the evil and self-centeredness which are natural parts of his personality, and would triumph.

Miracles are comparable to training wheels. In the early years of our nationhood, G-d assisted us in

our struggle by frequently and very openly interfering in the happenings of this world. A miracle opens the eyes to a higher truth, and motivates a person to want to connect to this higher reality through Torah and Mitzvot. Ultimately, however, we need to mature. We need to be able to ride the bike with our own two wheels; we need to face life’s struggle with our own strengths. The messianic era is the consummation of our relationship with G-d, and to earn this privilege we have to prove that the relationship is real to us, so real that we maintain this relationship even in the absence of any revealed reciprocity from G-d.

We are the greatest miracle of all: our ability to steadfastly remain loyal to G-d throughout two thousand years of temptation, despite the spiritual blackness which surrounds us.

What Was the Point of the Plagues?

By Rabbi Aron Moss

Question:

When it comes to the Passover Seder, I always get stuck on the ten plagues. The Nile River turns to blood, the land is covered in frogs, the people riddled with lice. It all sounds a bit weird. Why would the Almighty G-d afflict a people with these particular plagues? He could have just zapped them, and yet He sends them....frogs?!

Answer:

I too have been baffled by the plagues, especially the frogs. It is a bit incongruous, like calling a football team "The Roosters." It just doesn't sound menacing.

You can only understand the plagues if you listen to the way G-d Himself described them. He told Moses, "I will smite the Egyptians and bring justice to their gods." G-d was not only punishing the Egyptian people for enslaving the Israelites, He was also smashing the Egyptian value system.

Each plague was an attack on the core beliefs of Egypt, the beliefs that led them to become the most immoral society of that time. Let's look at the three examples you mentioned: the river turning to blood, the frogs and the lice.

The Egyptians worshipped the Nile as a god. It

was their source of irrigation, and thus their source of wealth. The Nile represents materialism in the extreme. That's why it was afflicted first. When money is god, blood will flow.

The frog was another Egyptian deity, the god of fertility. Having children is a noble pursuit, but for the Egyptians, children were no more than a power base. Being fruitful like a frog meant expanding your clan and extending your influence. When children are seen as frogs, humans have lost their humanity.

But it was the third plague, the plague of lice, that forced the Egyptians to recognize that the finger of G-d was at play. The Egyptian sorcerers were able to replicate the first two plagues through black magic, and so they weren't convinced that they were being divinely punished. But when lice swarmed over every Egyptian, they lifted their hands up in defeat. As powerful as Egyptian sorcery was, it could not manipulate something as small as a louse. Egyptian spirituality dealt with big things, major issues, not minute details. They didn't give importance to the small things.

We left Egypt and its ugly beliefs behind to embrace a value system that was its polar opposite. Money is not a god, merely a means to do good. Our children are not trophies, but precious souls entrusted to us by G-d. And little things do matter. Most of our lives are made up, not of dramatic choices and big events, but of small details and subtle choices, and they all make a difference.

At the Seder we enumerate the ten plagues and reflect on the values that made the Egyptians into oppressors--the values we left behind, and the values that have kept us coming to the Seder for three thousand years.

Live & Laugh

A Chinese trader in Paris goes to see his neighbor Elijah to complain that he has been burgled for the 37th time this quarter, while hardly all other Jewish merchants had been burgled at all.

Elijah consoled him as best he could and said: But what can I do for you? How may I help you? The Chinese replied: You sell me Mezuzah! Mezuzah must store for me!

Sydenham Shul 24 Main Street, Rouxville, 2192.

Telephone: 640-5021, Fax: 485-2810

E-mail: sydshul@sydshul.co.za

Website: www.sydshul.co.za

www.facebook.com/sydenhamshul