

Pulse OF Emunah

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life

LESSONS

A HELPING HAND

One busy Lakewood morning, Shlomo Greenwald was shopping when he noticed a bareheaded man wandering the store and asked if he could help. The man's name was Michael. He had recently moved from Utah to Toms River with his wife Linda and their children. They were Jewish, but not religious. Shlomo invited them for a meal. It was a turning point for the family. Michael began learning, going to shul, keeping kosher. Linda had converted Reform, but gradually began to follow her husband's progress.

But one Shabbos, a family was hosting them for a meal when Linda briefly forgot herself and began singing along with the *zemiros*. The hosts could not hide their shock. Mortified, Linda decided she had had enough; she was going back to Utah. The family vanished from Lakewood. Shlomo Greenwald was mystified; Michael did not even return his calls.

Eight years later, he got a call from his cousin Yaakov in Baltimore. "Do you know Michael from Utah?"

"Yes!" Shlomo said. "I haven't seen him in years."

"He's sitting right next to me!"

Michael's differences with Linda had led to divorce. He had continued pursuing Judaism and married a *frum* girl from Baltimore. When Yaakov found out how the journey began, he called Shlomo. "The effort you made bore fruit, although it took time to see it."

Thousands of *baalei teshuvah* have similar stories. Interest is often sparked by an offer of help, seeing a *frum* Jew act, and so forth. The inspiration may not come from *kiruv* experts, but seemingly trivial encounter with an ordinary person.

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OF THE WEEK

THE TEN PLAGUES

By Rabbi Moshe Pogrow

Wh Rabbi Yehuda arranged the *makkos* into three groups: *d'tzach*, *adash*, *b'achav*. The grouping is self-evident from the story itself. The first two plagues in each group are preceded by a clear warning, whereas the third in each group—i.e., *kinim*, *sh'chin*, and *choshech*—comes without warning. The implication is that the third plague is a punishment for not responding properly to the first two.

Each of these three groups of plagues was intended to cure the Egyptians of the delusion that they had the right to inflict *gerus*, *avdus*, and *inuy* upon the Israelites. The first group, *d'tzach*, accomplished this purpose by demonstrating Hashem's power over water and land; *adash* by demonstrating His power over the inhabitants who lived on the land; and *b'ach* by demonstrating His power over the atmosphere surrounding the land.

Closer inspection reveals that the three plagues in each group correspond to the three basic aspects of Egyptian *galus* which were eliminated by the

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powerful
PRAYER

HISHAMRU LACHEM:
A FOREIGN DRIVE



In ancient times, the strongest and most tempting *yetzer hara* was the desire to bow to an idol or worship it in some way. To us, nothing could be sillier. Why would someone bow to an idol that he fashioned with his own two hands? Nevertheless, this was the most common *aveirah* throughout the entire era of the Tanach. The reason we cannot understand the temptation is that we no longer have this *yetzer hara*. In the early years of Bayis Sheini, the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah begged Hashem to take it away, because too many people were failing the test. Hashem responded to their *tefillos*, and removed that *yetzer hara*.

Adapted from Emunah in the Classroom

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THE SHABBOS TABLE

By Rabbi Dovid Sapirman, Dean, Ani Maamin Foundation

David Hamelech incorporated into Tehillim numerous psalms authored by others. One, which we say every Shabbos, is Mizmor Shir L'Yom Hashabbos, composed by Adam Harishon on the first Shabbos of Creation. However, besides for that first verse, there is not a single mention of Shabbos anywhere else in the psalm! Radak explains that this *perek* expresses the ideas one should think about over Shabbos. All week long, we are busy with our jobs, schooling, and household responsibilities. We do not have the same ability to focus and meditate as we do on Shabbos. Hence, in a series that discusses our focus on the concepts that will reignite the spark of inspiration and excitement, Shabbos is an excellent place to start.

All week long, we are absorbed in our creative activities: building, sewing, cooking, earning a living. We are distracted from the purpose of life, the reason we were created. If we are materially successful, we may become impressed with ourselves and attribute it to our own talents, creativity, and business acumen. It is easy to forget the reality.

But one day a week, all that stops. We realize that all that we have, all that we do, all of our accomplishments, are from Him. One of the main themes of Shabbos is “a reminder of the works of Creation.” Taking time at the Shabbos table to speak about the wonders of Creation is a *chizuk* for adults and children alike. I wrote extensively on the subject in my first book *Emunah: A Refresher Course*. For example, before a baby is born, its lungs do not function, so a duct transfers blood from one side of the heart to the other. At birth, the lungs inflate, and at that exact moment the duct closes permanently and the baby is able to breathe. How can any thinking person fail to realize that this had to be designed?

The navi Yeshaya tells us, “Don’t you know? Have you not heard? Hashem is the G-d of the world, Who created the expanses of the universe—there is no fathoming His wisdom.”

Why the double expression, “Don’t you know, have you not heard?” There are people who were never taught about the existence of Hashem. But even if they didn’t hear, didn’t they know it on their own? Look around, see the evidence of the Infinite Designer. Be aware of His presence, and be inspired. 

redemption. *Gerus, avdus* and *inuy*—these were the components of the affliction that Egypt had brought upon Israel, and in these lay Egypt’s sin.

These same conditions—*gerus, avdus*, and *inuy*—were now, through the plagues, brought upon the Egyptians, to impress upon them that their lording it over this hapless people was without justification, and to make them feel upon their own flesh the bitterness of the affliction they had brought upon their victims.

Dam, arov, and *barad*—the first in each set—demonstrated to the Egyptians that they themselves were merely *gerim* in their own land, and hence were hardly in a position to treat Israel as *gerim* and deprive them of their rights.

Tzfardeia, dever, and *arbeh*—the second in each set—showed them how illusory were the notions that had made them feel superior to the people whom they had reduced to *avdus*.

Kinim, sh’chin, and *choshech* were *inuyim* that made the Egyptians feel what it means to have to submit to a systematic regime of *inuy*.

Makas bechoros concluded the series and finally brought about Israel’s redemption. 

Based on the commentary of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch zt”l on Chumash, with permission from the publisher.



wonder WORLD

SOCIAL SWARM



How do locusts swarm?

In Parshas Bo, Hashem sends a swarm of *arbeh* so thick it covers the sky and destroys everything that survived *barad*. But what causes locusts to swarm in the first place? When there has been a period of heavy rain, plants grow quickly, and the locust population explodes. When too many grasshoppers crowd together, their bodies actually change: their color darkens, their wings grow longer, and their behavior becomes aggressive. Once in this phase, locusts gather in massive groups, sometimes billions, and fly together for miles, eating everything in their path. One swarm can destroy the food supply for an entire region. The smallest creatures, when multiplied, can be powerful enough to darken the sky and shake an empire. 

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