

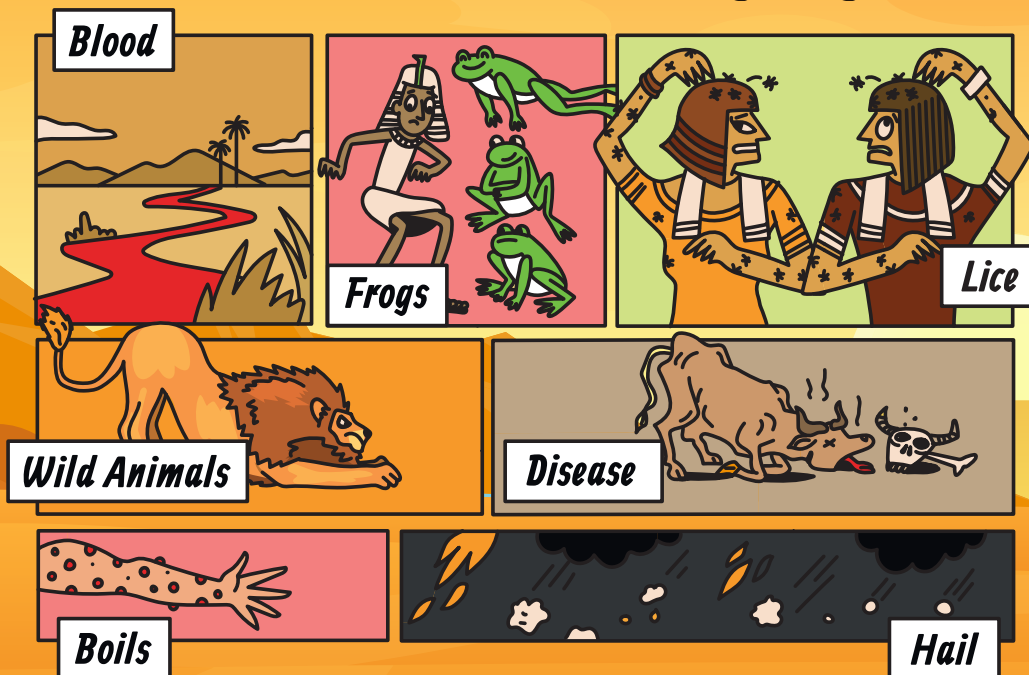


כ"ב - כ"ח טבת תשפ"ב December 26, 2021 - January 1, 2022



קָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- ♦ God tells Moshe to demand from Pharaoh that he free בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Benei Yisrael, the Israelites).
- ♦ Moshe repeats that he is unable, since he has difficulty speaking. God tells Moshe that his brother, Aharon, will speak for him.
- ♦ Moshe and Aharon go to Pharaoh and do what God told them. God turns Aharon's staff into a snake. Pharaoh calls his magicians, and they do the same thing with their staffs. Aharon's staff swallows the magicians' staffs.
- ♦ Pharaoh still refuses to listen to Moshe and Aharon. The plagues begin:



- ♦ During each plague, Pharaoh offers to let Benei Yisrael go. But once the plague stops, Pharaoh changes his mind and refuses to free them.



מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Midrashim are ideas or stories that explain the Torah. They often come from listening very carefully to what the Torah says and how it says it. Here, we will look for what clues this midrash sees in the Torah's words, and try to understand its messages.

Before the plague of hail, God tells Moshe to tell Pharaoh:

Shemot 9:19

"Now, your animals and everything you have out in the open should be brought under shelter. Every man and beast that is found outside, not having been brought indoors, shall die when the hail comes down!"

שמות ט"ט

וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח הָעֵז אֶת־מִקְנֶךָ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה כָּל־הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר־יִמְצָא בַּשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא יֵאָסֵף הַבֵּיתָה וְיָרַד עֲלֵהֶם הַבָּרָד וּמָתוּ:

Moshe hadn't given Pharaoh such a long and detailed warning before any of the other plagues. A midrash comments on this warning:

Tanhuma (Buber) Va'era 20

In none of the plagues did Pharaoh say "God is righteous" except for the plague of hail. Why?

A person who is fighting and trying to beat someone else might surprise them and kill them and take all that they have.

But God said to Pharaoh: "Your animals and everything you have out in the open should be brought under shelter..."

At that moment Pharaoh said, "God is righteous."

תנחומא (בובר) וארא כ

בְּכָל הַמַּכּוֹת לֹא אָמַר פַּרְעֹה: "ה' הַצַּדִּיק" אֲלָא בַּמַּכּוֹת בְּרַד בַּלְבַּד. לָמָּה?

אָדָם שֶׁהוּא מִבְּקֵשׁ לְהַלְחִים עִם חֲבֵירוֹ וּלְנַצֵּחַ אוֹתוֹ, פְּתָאוֹם הוּא בָּא עָלָיו וְהוֹרְגוֹ וְנוֹטֵל כָּל מָה שֵׁיֵשׁ לוֹ.

אָבֵל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אָמַר לַפַּרְעֹה: "וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח הָעֵז אֶת מִקְנֶךָ..."

בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה אָמַר פַּרְעֹה: "ה' הַצַּדִּיק."



Following the destruction that the hail causes, Pharaoh praises God, saying ה' הַצַּדִּיק! (HaShem ha-tzaddik! God is righteous!; Shemot 9:27). This midrash links the unusual warning before the plague to the unusual response to the plague, explaining that, in this moment, Pharaoh learned that God is fair. God shows more care and compassion for the Egyptians than God is expected to, even when God is sending plagues to hurt them.

- ♦ What is fair and unfair in a fight?
- ♦ Do you think it's important that the warning before the hail was about protecting animals out in the fields?
- ♦ What do you think was the purpose of the plagues? Does this midrash add anything or change the way you understand that purpose?



פְּרָשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

There is a major debate about something that happens a bunch of times in our parashah and the next: God hardening Pharaoh's heart. The most simple understanding is that God made Pharaoh more stubborn during the plagues so that he wouldn't free Benei Yisrael. Was this a fair thing to do?

Here is the Rambam's explanation:

Mishneh Torah, Laws of Teshuvah 6:3

It is possible for a person to sin so greatly, or so many times, that their punishment is that they are unable to do teshuvah, and they lose the ability to return from their wickedness... This is why God hardened Pharaoh's heart.



משנה תורה הלכות תשובה ו:ג

וְאִפְשָׁר שְׂיַחֲטָא אָדָם חֲטָא גָדוֹל אוֹ חֲטָאִים רַבִּים, עַד שְׂיִתֵּן הַדִּין לִפְנֵי דִין הָאֵמֶת שֶׁיֵּהָא הַפְּרָעוֹן... שְׂמוֹנְעִין מִמֶּנּוּ הַתְּשׁוּבָה וְאֵין מְנִיחִין לוֹ רְשׁוֹת לְשׁוּב מִרְשָׁעוֹ... לְפִיכָר חֲזַק הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת לְבוֹ.

According to the Rambam (Spain and Eretz Yisrael, 850 years ago), God's hardening Pharaoh's heart was his **punishment**. Most people have the opportunity to do teshuvah—to repent and then be forgiven—no matter what they do wrong. But Pharaoh had acted so terribly that the right punishment, for him, was to lose his ability to do teshuvah.

Rabbi Yosef Albo (Spain, 600 years ago) understands the hardening differently:



Sefer Ha-Ikkarim 4:25

God hardens his heart... in order to remove from his heart the softening effect which came from the plagues. This made Pharaoh able to choose freely, without being forced.

ספר העקרים ד:כה

הִנֵּה הַשֵּׁם יִתְבַּרַּךְ מְחַזֵּק אֶת לִבּוֹ
...כִּדְי שְׂסִיטוֹר מִלְּבֹו הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׂקָנָה
מְחַמֵּת הַמֶּכָּה
וְיוֹשֵׁאֵר עַל טַבְעוֹ וּבְחִירָתוֹ
מִבְּלִי מְכָרִיחַ.

For Rabbi Albo, hardening was how God made Pharaoh **keep his free will** and keep the ability to do teshuvah correctly. Without the hardening of his heart, Pharaoh would have freed the Israelites immediately after the first plague because he would have been so afraid. But God wanted Pharaoh to do the right thing not because he was forced to do it but because he really wanted to. By hardening Pharaoh's heart, God gave Pharaoh extra courage, and made sure that Pharaoh could really be free to say "yes" or "no" on his own.

- ◆ How do Rambam and Rabbi Albo each understand the meaning of a "hard" or "soft" heart?
- ◆ The hardening of Pharaoh's heart is mentioned 20 times in the story of יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם (yetziat Mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt)! Why do you think the Torah repeats this idea so many times?



הלכה • Halakhah

Drinking four cups of wine (or grape juice) at the Pesah Seder is found in the Mishnah (Pesahim 10:1). But the Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesahim 10:1) traces it even earlier, to the beginning of our parashah. Here, God describes to Moshe how the Israelites will be freed:



Shemot 6:6-7

Therefore, say to Benei Yisrael: I am God, and

I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt.

I will save you from slavery.

I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through great miracles.

I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt.

שמות ו:ו-ז

לְכֵן אֶמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי ה'
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלַת
מִצָּרִים

וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבָדָתָם

וְנָאֵלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה
וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים:

וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהִיִּיתִי לָכֶם
לֵאלֹהִים וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצָּרִים:



What's the purpose of the four cups?

Rambam writes that the four cups help us feel that we were personally freed from Egypt. It is not enough to remember the event. We are aiming to truly experience it ourselves. Rambam explains that this is also the reason we should recline while eating and drinking at the Seder (Mishneh Torah, Hametz u-Matzah 7:6-7).

Details of the four cups:

- ◆ At the Seder, each cup should hold at least a רביעית (revi'it, about 3 to 3.3 ounces). When it's time to drink, we are supposed to drink at least half of the cup's contents.
- ◆ It's usually better to use red wine/grape juice, but if you have white wine/grape juice that is fancier or that you like better, then that can be preferable.
- ◆ This mitzvah is so important that a person who is having money troubles is supposed to even take out a loan in order to be able to buy wine for the Seder. However, the Jewish community has to do everything possible to avoid this situation. We are all responsible to make sure that every person can drink four cups on Seder night.





קֹה זֶה • What's Going On Here?

In last week's parashah and again this week, when God instructs Moshe to appear before Pharaoh, Moshe tries to get God to choose someone else. Moshe gives a bunch of different reasons, and one that comes up a few times is that he is unable to speak well (Shemot 4:10; 6:12; 6:30).

What exactly was Moshe's speech difficulty?

- ◆ **Abarbanel and Rabbeinu Hannanel** say that Moshe had a hard time pronouncing certain letters.



- ◆ **Shadal** says that Moshe was an old man who was used to hanging out with sheep; he didn't have a fancy vocabulary or strong powers of persuasion.

- ◆ **Rashbam** says that Moshe was not fluent in the Egyptian language because he had run away from Pharaoh's palace at a young age.



רִגַע שָׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Shemot 7:27

If you refuse to let them go, then I will **plague** your whole country with frogs.

שמות ז:כז

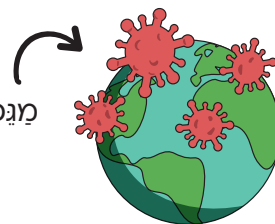
וְאִם-מָאֵן אֶתָּה לְשַׁלַּח הַנֶּה
אֲנֹכִי נִגַּף אֶת-כָּל-גְּבוּלְךָ
בַּצִּפְרֵדָּיִם:



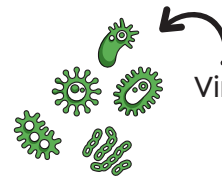
לָנֹחַ (שׁוֹרֵשׁ נ.ג.פ.)

To bring a disease upon, to defeat

Plague or epidemic = מִגֶּפֶה



Virus = נְיִי



A stumbling block = אָבֹן נִפְּקָה

Find the Word!

Can you find this שׁוֹרֵשׁ (shoresh, root) in another place in the parashah? (Hint: look in chapter 9, when Moshe introduces the plague of hail.)



One-Minute Debate • דְּבָרָה שֶׁל דִּיּוּן

How to play:

Here is a topic for debate along with some suggested arguments, but feel free to come up with your own.

- ◆ Assign people to the "true" or "false" sides.
- ◆ Each side gets 30 seconds to make their case.
- ◆ At the end, the group votes on a winner.

Debate: Blood was a worse plague than frogs.



True!

- ◆ What are you supposed to drink for an entire week?!
- ◆ Can you imagine the smell of all those dead fish?
- ◆ Water turning to blood is straight out of a horror movie.



False!

- ◆ How would you feel about frogs in your bed, your food, and your hair?!
- ◆ Sure, frogs are cute for a minute, but all that slimy jumping gets very old, very fast.

Torah Reading • קריאת התורה

Accents!

What do you need to know to read Torah? You might think it is enough to know all the vowels and all the notes to make sure you are pronouncing and singing everything right. But other things matter too, like accents, or the part of the word you say a little bit stronger than the rest. Did you know that accents can totally change the meaning of a word? Think about the word, "address" (the way Americans and Canadians pronounce it). If you say ADD-ress (accent on the first part of the word), it means a place where you send a letter or where someone lives. But if you say add-RESS (accent on the end of the word), it means to speak to someone or to call them something. **Can you think of other examples?**

In Hebrew, accents sometimes tell us about the timing of a word—like, whether it is about the past or about the future. Look at this verse from the first aliyah of our parashah:

שמות ו:ח

וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת־
יָדִי לָתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלִיעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי
אֹתָהּ לָכֶם מִוְרֶשֶׁה אֲנִי ה'.

The orange letters show the accented parts of the words, and you can see they have notes on them to show you that the accent belongs there. When the accent goes at the end of verbs (action words), it usually means that the word is about something that will happen in the future. When the accent moves back in the word, it usually means that something happened in the past. (Makes sense, right? Future = forward; past = back). So, in this case:

I **will** bring you to the land = וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ

Which I promis**ed** = אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת־יָדִי

I **will** give it to you = וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לָכֶם

Don't **refuse** to pay attention to those accents, they can **affect** the meaning! (See what we did there?)



בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

In the הלכה/Halakhah section (p. 4), we saw the four verbs (action words) about redemption that correspond to the four cups on Seder night. The קריאת התורה/Torah Reading section (p. 8, to your left) highlights a fifth verb that appears in the very next verse!

Shemot 6:8

I will bring you to the land...

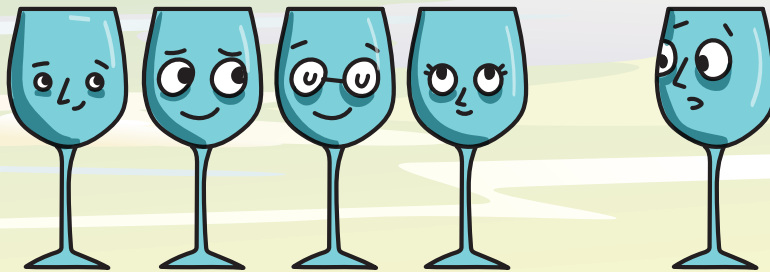
שמות ו:ח

וְהֵבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל־הָאָרֶץ...

So why aren't there five cups of wine at the Seder?

Interestingly, there used to be! But it's not because of these verses. Possibly because of an ancient superstition, that drinking an even number of drinks was unlucky (see Pesachim 110a), a מנהג (minhag, custom) began in Babylonia to pour a fifth cup. Later, this extra cup was associated with the "missing" fifth verb of redemption in Shemot. It might have become the כוס אליהו (kos Eliyahu, Eliyahu's cup) at our Seders today, which we pour but don't drink.

- What do you think? Should there be a fifth cup of wine at our Seder to remember God bringing Benei Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael? Why or why not?



**WATCH
OUT**

for this in the Shema:

וְאַהֲבָתָּ (ve-ahavta) has the emphasis at the end (on "ta") meaning "you **will** love," not in the middle (on "hav"), which would mean, "you loved!"



שאלות השבוע • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. The answers to the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.

aliyot:

- 1) Shemot 6:2 to 6:13
- 2) 6:14 to 6:28
- 3) 6:29 to 7:7
- 4) 7:8 to 8:6
- 5) 8:7 to 8:18
- 6) 8:19 to 9:16
- 7) 9:17 to 9:35

Good luck!

1 What name of God was familiar to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov?

2 How old was Amram when he died, and who in this aliyah also lived to the exact same age?

3 How many years older than Moshe was Aharon?

4 What did the frogs have in common with dough?

5 What did the magicians call the plague of קִנִּים (kinnim, lice)?

6 What body part is used to describe דֵּבַר (dever, pestilence)?

7 Two crops survived the בָּרָד (barad, hail)—what were they?



8 Which plagues in our parashah did Aharon help bring about?

9 What was the name of Moshe's sister-in-law?

10 For which plagues in our parashah does the Torah specify that the land of Goshen, where Benei Yisrael lived, was unaffected?

*
Look for the answers on page 12!



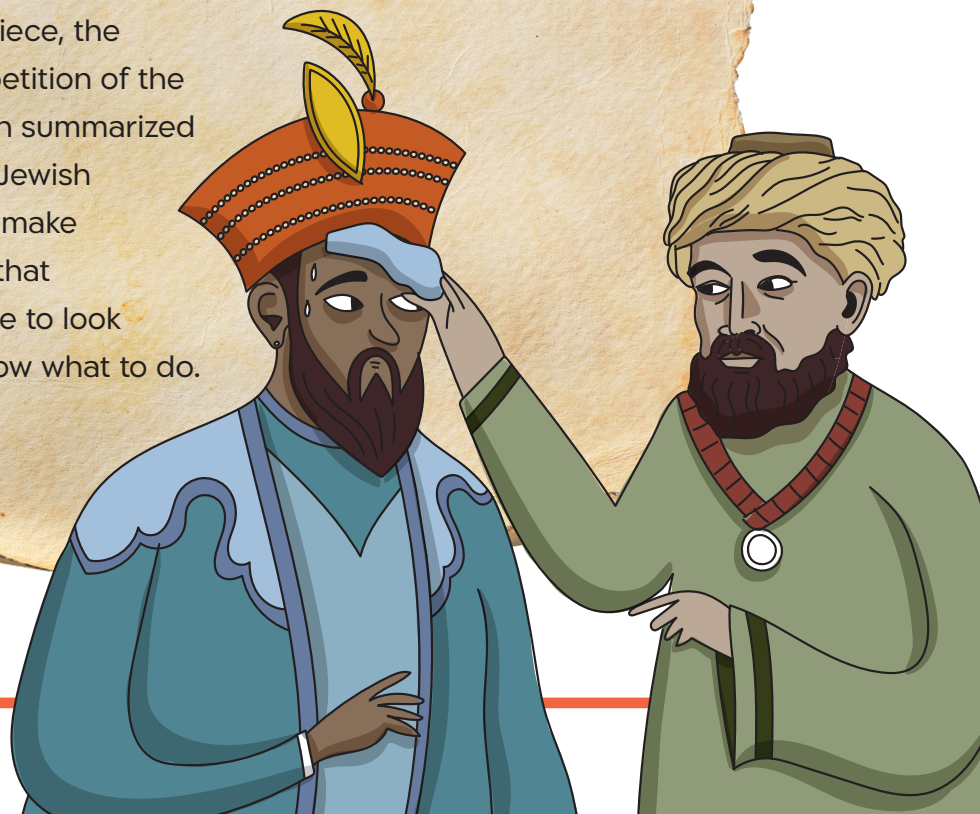


מי היו חכמינו • Who Were Our Sages?

It is no exaggeration to call **Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon** one of the most important Jewish sages who ever lived. He is commonly known by his acronym, **Rambam** (ר' מֹשֶׁה בֶּן מִימּוֹן), or his Greek name **Maimonides**. The Rambam was born in Spain about 900 years ago, but ended up in Eretz Yisrael and Egypt, working as the personal doctor of the Abassid Emperor, Saladin.

The Rambam was an important philosopher, not just for Jewish people, but in world history. One of his goals was to use the best wisdom available, from Greek philosophy and (what was then) modern science, to understand and interpret traditional Judaism. This is clearest in his Guide of the Perplexed, which he wrote in Arabic. There, he dealt with questions like: what could the Torah mean when it talks about God's body, if we know that God does not have a body?

As a young man, the Rambam wrote his halakhic masterpiece, the Mishneh Torah ("Repetition of the Torah"), a book which summarized and organized all of Jewish law. The idea was to make a practical guide so that you would never have to look anywhere else to know what to do.



Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. אֱלֹהִים / El Shaddai (6:3)
2. 137 (6:20); Levi (6:16)
3. Three (7:7)
4. They were both in kneading bowls (7:28)
5. אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים (etzba Elohim, the finger of God) (8:15)
6. A hand - יָד ה' (yad Hashem, the hand of God) (9:3)
7. חִטָּה and כִּסְמֶט (hittah and kussemet, wheat and spelt) (9:32)
8. דָּם (dam, blood; 7:19-20), צִפְרֵדִיעַ (tzfardei'a, frogs; 8:1-2), כִּנִּים (kinnim, lice; 8:12-13), שְׁחִין (sh'hin, boils; 9:8-9)
9. Elisheva (6:23)
10. עָרֹב (arov, wild animals; 8:18); דֵּבֶר (dever, pestilence; 9:4-7); בָּרָד (barad, hail; 9:26)



Shabbat Shalom!

~ שבת שלום ~



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