



FEELING FRUSTRATED?

Do you feel ineffective in your personal life?
Frustrated by difficulties in influencing people?
The ten plagues have a lesson for you.

TEACHER'S MANUAL



JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS



PARSHAT VAERA



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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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G-d commands Moses to go tell Pharaoh to “Let my people go.” G-d explains that Pharaoh will at first refuse, but after the supernatural events that G-d will bring upon Egypt he will be forced to free them (Source 1).

For three weeks, Moses warned Pharaoh about the impending plague, and for seven days the plague struck Egypt. At the end of the plague, Moses again warns Pharaoh and threatens another plague, and so on (Source 2).

Why, the Rebbe asks, did the plagues and the warnings take so long? Couldn't a day or two suffice? The warning for the plague of the firstborns was given just once and the plague itself was brief. Why couldn't that suffice for all the plagues?

Moreover, the Rebbe adds, during these months the Jews had to remain in exile!

B. A Learning Experience.....10

Each plague had a certain effect. For example, the plague of blood crushed the strength of the Egyptian gods, deflated the Egyptians' pride and raised the self-confidence of the Jews. The frogs deepened the blow to the Egyptian gods because the frogs sprung out of the river to which they ascribed divine power. The lice forced the Egyptian sorcerers to acknowledge the hand of G-d. During the plague of hail, there were some Egyptians who already feared G-d, so they rushed to protect their animals. The locusts made Pharaoh agree to free the men to serve G-d. The same goes for each plague, see at length in the class (Sources 3-8).

The plagues endured for so long in order for the Egyptians to internalize the effect of each plague. Were the plagues to have been short, and without a break between each plague, the Egyptians wouldn't have been able to internalize the message of the plagues, and their efficacy would be diminished.

C. The Winning Effect of Time.....18

The Rebbe teaches that when trying to influence others, we may feel that despite our efforts, we weren't able to make any impact. The story of Pharaoh teaches us that even if the desired result wasn't apparent—he didn't free the Jews—still, each plague had an impact. So too, each positive action makes a difference. Sometimes, it can take a while until it is visible.

Introduction

Over the course of two Torah portions, we read about the lengthy process of the ten plagues. Is it merely intriguing history or does it have a contemporary message and ramifications for us?

A lesson on the inner meaning of the plagues, and what they can teach us in our daily lives.

השיעור לפרשת וארא

משיחת ש"פ וארא, ר"ח שבט, ה'תשמ"ו,
הנחה בלתי מוגה
תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ו חלק ב' עמודים 391, 398-401

A. The Ten Plagues

Background

G-d reveals himself to Moses in the desert and commands him to return to Egypt and redeem the Jewish people. After some deliberation, Moses accepts the mission and heads to Egypt.

Together with the Elders and his brother Aaron, Moses approaches Pharaoh and informs him of G-d's directive: "So said the L-rd, G-d of Israel, 'Send out My people, and let them sacrifice to Me in the desert.'" They ask him for three days to go and worship G-d.

"Who is the L-rd that I should heed His voice to let Israel out?" Pharaoh says defiantly. "I do not know the L-rd, and I will not let Israel out."

Pharaoh assumes the Jews want to go to the desert because they're lazy, so he decrees that in addition to making bricks with straw, they will also need to collect the straw themselves—no longer will it be provided by their taskmasters.

Moses protests to G-d: "Why have You harmed this nation? Why have You sent me? My mission to Pharaoh hasn't helped, it has only made matters worse!"

G-d answers him: "You will yet see that Pharaoh will drive the Jews out of his land with a strong hand."

G-d tells Moses to go to Pharaoh again and command him to let the Jews out of Egypt. G-d again explains how Pharaoh will refuse to let them out, but after the miraculous plagues the Egyptians will recognize Him and the Jews will leave Egypt.

Source 1 Exodus, 7:1-3

Student's
pg. 3

The L-rd said to Moses, "See! I have made you a lord over Pharaoh, and Aaron, your brother, will be your speaker. You shall speak all that I command you, and Aaron, your brother, shall speak to Pharaoh, that he send the children of Israel out of his land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will increase My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt."

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה רְאֵה נִתְּתִיךָ
אֱלֹקִים לְפָרְעֹה וְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ
יְהִי נְבִיאָךְ. אַתָּה תְּדַבֵּר אֶת כָּל
אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה, וְאַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ יְדַבֵּר
אֶל פָּרְעֹה וְשַׁלַּח אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
מֵאֲרָצוֹ. וְאָנֹכִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת לֵב
פָּרְעֹה וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת אֹתוֹתַי וְאֹת
מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.

Since Pharaoh behaved wickedly and defied Me, and I know that the nations find no spiritual satisfaction by making a wholehearted attempt to repent, it is better for Me that his heart be hardened, so that I can increase My signs and My wonders in him, and you will recognize My mighty deeds.

This is G-d's mode of conduct. He brings retribution on the nations so that Israel should hear and fear, as it is said: "I have cut off nations; their towers have become desolate. I said, 'Surely you will fear Me, you will accept reproof.'"

G-d tells Moses about the impending series of plagues that will strike Egypt. What is the objective if the Egyptians will not repent? Rather, the objective was for the Jewish people to witness it and learn a lesson for the future.

The Chronology

Source 2 Exodus, 7:19-21; 25-27

The L-rd said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, canals, ponds, and all their bodies of water, and they will become blood. There will be blood throughout the entire land of Egypt, even in wood and in stone.'" Moses and Aaron did so, as the L-rd had commanded. He raised the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile before the eyes of Pharaoh and before the eyes of his servants, and all the water in the Nile turned to blood. The fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile became putrid; the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile.

וְאֵיךְ אֶקְשֶׁה. מֵאַחַר שֶׁהִרְשִׁיעַ
וְהִתְרִיס כְּנִגְדִי, וְגִלּוֹי לְפָנַי
שָׂאִין נַחַת רוּחַ בְּאֲמוֹת לְתַת
לֵב שְׁלֵם לְשׁוֹב, טוֹב שִׁיתְקַשֶּׁה
לְבוֹ, לְמַעַן הִרְבוֹת בּוֹ אוֹתוֹתַי,
וְתִכְרִירוּ אֶתְּם אֶת גְּבוּרָתִי.

וְכֵן מִדְּתוֹ שֶׁל הַקֶּב"ה, מִבִּיא
פְּרָעוֹנוֹת עַל הָאֲמוֹת כְּדִי
שִׁישְׁמְעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּירָאוּ,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "הִכְרַתִּי גוֹיִם נִשְׁמוּ
פְּנוֹתָם... אֲמַרְתִּי אֶךְ תִּירָאֵי
אוֹתִי תִקְחֵי מוֹסֵר" (צַפְנִיָה ג).

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֲמַר אֶל אַהֲרֹן:
קַח מִטְּבַח וְנִטְהַר עַל מִימֵי
מִצְרַיִם עַל נְהַרְתָּם עַל יַאֲרֵיהֶם
וְעַל אֲגַמֵּיהֶם וְעַל כָּל מִקְוֵהוּ
מִימֵיהֶם וַיְהִי דָם וַיְהִי דָם בְּכָל
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּבְעֵצִים וּבְאֲבָנִים.
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
ה' וַיִּרַם בַּמַּטֵּה וַיַּךְ אֶת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר
בַּיָּאֵר לְעֵינֵי פְרַעֲה וּלְעֵינֵי עַבְדָּיו,
וַיִּהְיֶה כָּל הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר לְדָם.
וַיִּהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר מֵתָה וַיִּבְאֵשׁ
הַיָּאֵר, וְלֹא יָכְלוּ מִצְרַיִם לְשִׁתּוֹת
מִיָּם מִן הַיָּאֵר וַיְהִי הַדָּם בְּכָל אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם.

Student's There was blood throughout the entire land of
pg. 4 Egypt.

A period of seven days passed after the L-rd had smitten the Nile. The L-rd said to Moses, "Come to Pharaoh and say to him, 'So said the L-rd, "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me. But if you refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite your entire land with frogs.

Rashi

Literally, seven days were filled. [Since the word וַיִּמְלֵא is singular, Rashi explains:] The number of seven days that the Nile did not return to its original state was filled. For the plague would be in effect for a quarter of a month, and for three-quarters of the month Moses would exhort and warn them.

Rashi briefly explains the chronology of the events. For three weeks, Moses warned Pharaoh about the impending plague, and for seven days, the plague struck Egypt. At the end of the plague, Moses again warns Pharaoh about the coming plague for three weeks. Afterward, the next plague struck for a week.

>> The Rebbe

Why Were The Plagues Stretched Out?

Student's Considering that the purpose of the
pg. 5 many signs was so that the Jews should recognize G-d's power, a simple question can be asked:

Why did the ten plagues need to be stretched out over such a long period of

וַיִּמְלֵא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אֶחָרֵי הַכּוֹת
ה' אֶת הַיָּאֹר. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה
בֹּא אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה
אָמַר ה' שְׁלַח אֶת עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי.
וְאִם מֵאֵן אֲתָה לְשַׁלַּח הַיָּהּ אֶנְכִּי
נִגַּף אֶת כָּל גְּבוּלְךָ בַּצַּפְרִדָּעִים.

רש"י

וַיִּמְלֵא. מִנִּזְן שִׁבְעַת יָמִים,
שְׁלֵא שָׁב הַיָּאֹר לְקִדְמוֹתוֹ,
שֶׁהֵיטָה הַמַּכָּה מִשְׁמֹשֶׁת רְבִיעַ
חֹדֶשׁ, וּג' חֳלָקִים הָיָה מְעִיד
וּמִתְרָה בָּהֶם (תנחומא):

נשאלת שאלה פשוטה: מכיוון
שהמטרה של ריבוי האותות היא
ש"תכירו את גבורתי", אינו מובן:

מהו הצורך שעשר המכות יהיו במשך
זמן ממושך כל כך, "המכה משמשת
רביע חודש ושלושה חלקים היה מעיד

time? The plague itself would operate for a week, and during the remaining three weeks of the month Moses would warn the Egyptians. There is seemingly no need for the plague to last a full week in order for the Jews to learn to fear G-d - one day should be enough, two or three days at most. The three weeks between each plague seem even more unnecessary.

Indeed, we find regarding the final plague that it didn't last as long as the previous ones. The plague of the firstborns took place in one moment, and only one warning was given beforehand, as Rashi tells us that after giving Pharaoh the warning, Moses never saw him again. This strengthens the question, why did the previous plagues require such a lengthy time span?

Following the plague of darkness, Pharaoh called for Moses and offered to grant permission for the Jews to leave Egypt in order to worship G-d. His condition was that they leave their sheep behind in Egypt, as a guarantee that they would return. Moses refused and said that not only will we go together with our sheep, but you - Pharaoh - will even send some of your own animals with us to offer as sacrifices. Pharaoh became enraged and told Moses to never come to him again.

Before leaving Pharaoh's palace, G-d gave Moses the prophecy regarding the plague of the firstborns and Moses relayed it immediately to Pharaoh, because he had been banned from returning to the palace in the future.

We see that only one warning was given before the plague of the firstborns, rather than a three-week warning period. The plague itself occurred in one single moment. Why couldn't a similar schedule be followed for all of the plagues?

ומתרה בהם" ¹ כדי לפעול "שישמעו ישראל וייראו", אין צורך שתהיה המכה משמשת "רביע חודש", אלא מספיק יום אחד, ולכל היותר - שניים או שלושה ימים, ועל אחת כמה וכמה שאין צורך ב"שלושה חלקים" נוספים, שלושה שבועות, בין כל מכה ומכה!?

כפי שאכן מצינו בנוגע לסיום המכות - שלא לקח משך זמן כל כך כבשאר המכות: בנוגע למכת בכורות - המכה התרחשה ברגע אחד ². כמו כן בנוגע להתראה של מכת בכורות - שהתרה בו פעם אחת בלבד, "בעמדו לפני פרעה נאמרה לו נבואה זו, שהרי משיצא לפניו לא הוסיף עוד ראות פניו" ³. ואם כן, מהו הצורך בשהות זמן ממושכת במכות שלפני זה?

A Six-Month Delay

Student's The most problematic outcome of the
^{pg. 6} lengthy span of each plague was that this forced the Jewish people to stay in exile longer!

True, the Talmud states that from the Rosh Hashanah before the Exodus the Jewish people were no longer enslaved. But they were still imprisoned in exile for another six months, an entire winter.

והעיקר - שבמשך כל אותו זמן
(חודש לכל מכה ומכה) היו בני
ישראל צריכים להתעכב בגלות
מצרים!

אמנם, "בראש השנה בטלה עבודה
מאבותינו",⁴ חצי שנה לפני צאתם
ממצרים - אבל, גם לאחר כן היו
בגלות מצרים, במעמד ומצב ש"לא
היה עבד יכול לברוח ממצרים",⁵
במשך חצי שנה, חורף שלם!

B. A Learning Experience

>> The Rebbe

Student's To explain the matter:
pg. 7

The five-year-old beginner student understands that each of the plagues must have had a specific impact on Pharaoh. While Pharaoh refused to release the Jewish people even after being stricken with a number of plagues, it is nevertheless clear that each one of the plagues had some form of impact on him.

והביאור בזה:

הבן חמש למקרא מבין בפשטות שכל מכה ומכה פעלה דבר מסוים אצל פרעה ואצל מצרים. אמנם, גם לאחרי כמה וכמה מכות לא הסכים פרעה לשלוח את בני ישראל ממצרים (התכלית של כל המכות) אבל אף על פי כן, בוודאי נפעלה פעולה מסוימת על ידי כל מכה ומכה.

(As an introduction, it's worth devoting a few minutes to explain the appropriate way to view the plagues.)

Several years ago, we heard about the horror and tragedy of the tsunami that hit Southeast Asia. Imagine if in 30 years your grandchildren or great-grandchildren's teacher asks them to prepare a project on tsunamis. The children will open an encyclopedia and read the following:

"A tsunami is a series of waves in a water body caused by the displacement of a large volume of water. The waves of a tsunami reach heights of dozens of feet, and swiftly crash over the shoreline. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was among the deadliest natural disasters in human history, with at least 230,000 people killed or missing in 14 countries bordering the Indian Ocean. Thousands more died from hunger and disease following the tsunami. Millions were left homeless. The waves carried away vehicles and transportation, homes and wrought utter destruction. Today early warning sensors dot the ocean."

The curious child will come and ask us what we remember from that time. We'll look at what they copied from the encyclopedia and recall the images and reports of the horrors. We'll tell them of the hotels destroyed, the hospital dragged into the ocean, the millions of homes destroyed, the young girl who saved swimmers on the beach, the children ripped out of their mothers' arms and those who were found. We'll tell them about the Swedish child who was rescued and those who weren't, the mass graves, the lost people. Everything we remember. The child will summarize the stories in their notebook and the satisfied teacher will give them a high grade.

If we read the encyclopedia again, we'll see that everything is written there—very briefly. For example, the short sentence “The waves carried away vehicles” includes the trains full of bodies, ships in the tops of the trees, dinghies floating about, yachts devoid of tourists, cars whose passengers drowned on camera.

Without the oral tradition accompanying this text, filling in the details, we'd be left with a dry, bare-bones story.

The same holds true for the ten plagues, more or less. The Torah describes them in the manner of a short, encyclopedia-like entry. All ten plagues are detailed in two portions, Va'era and Bo, and in these words lie countless stories: the story of a dying empire and the birth of a nation, stories of faith and stubborn disbelief.

When we read the short words of the Torah, we need to use our imagination to picture the scene, and, of course, study the midrashic texts which record the oral traditions of what transpired.

Now, we'll continue to study the talk where the Rebbe focuses on several plagues and explains the effect they had on Pharaoh and Egypt.)

The Plagues' Impact

Blood

Description: The waters of the river turn to blood, the fish die and the smell is overpowering. The Egyptians are forced to buy water from the Jews to drink.

Source 3 Exodus, 7:17

Student's With the staff I am holding I will smite the water
pg. 7 of the Nile, and it will turn to blood.

הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מִכָּה בַמֶּטֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדִי
עַל הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר וְנִהְפְּכוּ
לְדָם.

Rashi

There is no rainfall in Egypt, and the Nile ascends and waters the land. The Egyptians therefore worship the Nile as a deity. G-d therefore smote their deity, and afterwards He smote them.

רש"י
וְנִהְפְּכוּ לְדָם. לְפִי שֶׁאֵין גְּשָׁמִים
יֹרְדִים בְּמִצְרַיִם וְנִילֹס עוֹלָה
וּמִשְׁקָה אֶת הָאָרֶץ וּמִצְרַיִם
עוֹבְדִים לְנִילֹס, לְפִיכֵן הִלְקָה
אֶת יְרֵאתָם וְאַחַר כֵּן הִלְקָה
אוֹתָם.

>> The Rebbe

Student's For example: Rashi writes regarding the
pg. 8 plague of blood that with this plague G-d struck the idolatrous belief of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. In order for this effect to be fully felt, the plague had to endure for a period of time. In this way the Egyptians would have the time to contemplate the matter and internalize it.

The plague of blood had another form of impact on the Egyptians and the Jews that should be noted.

ולדוגמה: במכת דם - מפרש רש"י
"לפיכך הלקה את יראתם". היינו
שמכת דם הכתה את העבודה זרה של
פרעה ומצרים. וכדי שהפעולה תהיה
בכל התוקף, המכה הייתה צריכה
להימשך משך זמן, כדי שהיה זמן
להתבונן בנעשה ולהפנים את זה.

ויש להוסיף בזה - על פי דברי המדרש
- עוד פעולה שפעלה מכת דם על
המצרים והיהודים.

Source 4 Shemot Rabbah, 9:9

Student's Rabbi Avin the Levite, son of Rebbi, said: "The
pg. 8 Israelites got rich from the plague of blood. How so? When an Israelite and an Egyptian were living in one house and a barrel was full of water; the Egyptian would go to fill the jug from it and it would be filled with blood. The Israelite would drink water from the barrel, and the Egyptian would say, 'Give me a little water' and he would give him, but it turned into blood. He would say, 'You and I both drink from the same barrel!' The Israelite would drink water and the Egyptian would drink blood. But when the Egyptian would purchase the water from an Israelite with money, he would be able to drink water. From here, the Israelites became rich."

אמר רבי אבין הלוי ברבי, ממפת
דם העשירו ישראל. כיצד?
המצרי וישראל בבית אחד
והגיגית מלאה מים, ומצרי הלך
למלאות הקיתון מתוכה מוציא
מלאה דם, וישראל שותה מים
מתוך הגיגית, והמצרי אומר תן
לי בידך מעט מים ונותן לו ונעשו
דם, ואומר לו נשתה אני ואתה
מן קערה אחת, וישראל שותה
מים והמצרי דם, וכשהיה לוקח
מישראל בנדמים, היה שותה מים,
מכאן העשירו ישראל.

>> The Rebbe

Student's The deep effect this had on the Egyptians is clear. The Jews were the Egyptians' slaves, and were forced to do backbreaking labor. Now, the Egyptian needs to take his own money and give it to a Jew in order to quench his thirst. This had an effect on the Egyptian magicians as well, because they too were thirsty.

pg. 9

Conversely, this showed the Jews their own greatness. Even when an Egyptian wanted to drink out of the same vessel as a Jew, the Egyptian's water would turn into blood while the Jew drank good water. Only when the Egyptian paid for the water was he able to drink it. The effect was so great that the Jewish people became wealthy as a result.

וּמוֹבֵן גּוֹדֵל הַפְּעוּלָה שֶׁבִּדְבַר עַל
הַמִּצְרִים, שֶׁאֶפִּילוֹ שֶׁהִיהוּדִי הוּא עֶבֶדוֹ
שֶׁל הַמִּצְרִי שֶׁהֶעֱבִיד אוֹתוֹ עֲבוּדַת פֶּרֶךְ,
הֵנָּה בִּשְׁעָה שֶׁהִיא צְמָא, הוֹכֵרַח לְקַחַת
אֶת כֶּסֶפוֹ - שֶׁבּוֹ הֵיָה יְכוּל לְקַנּוֹת חַיִּי
נַפְשׁוֹ - וּלְתַתּוֹ לִיהוּדִי כְּדֵי לְרוּוֹת אֶת
צִמְאוֹנוֹ. דְּבַר זֶה פֶּעַל גַּם עַל חֶרְטוּמֵי
מִצְרַיִם, כִּי אִף הֵם הָיוּ צְמָאִים...

מִכֵּה זֶה פֶּעַלָּה גַּם עַל הַיְהוּדִים שֶׁנֹּכַחוּ
לְרֵאוֹת אֶת מַעֲלָתָם. אֶפִּילוֹ כִּשְׁהַמִּצְרִי
אָמַר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל "נִשְׁתָּה אֲנִי וְאֵתָּה
מִן קַעֲרָה אַחַת - יִשְׂרָאֵל שׁוֹתָה מֵיִם
וּמִצְרִי דָם". רַק כֹּאשֶׁר הוּא שִׁילֵם עַל
כֵּךְ הוּא יְכוּל הֵיָה לְשִׁתּוֹת מֵיִם. עַד כְּדֵי
כֵּךְ, שֶׁעַל יְדֵי זֶה הֶעֱשִׂירוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם אֶת
יִשְׂרָאֵל!

The impact: destroying belief in the Egyptian god, breaking the pride of the Egyptians who now had to pay the Jews for water, and raising the prestige of the Jews.

Frogs

Description: Countless frogs arise from the river and spread across the entire land and enter the homes. Finally, the frogs die and the stench fills the land.

Source 5 Exodus, 8:2

Student's Aaron stretched forth his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frog[s] came up and covered the land of Egypt.

pg. 9

וַיִּט אֶהָרֹן אֶת יָדוֹ עַל מֵיִמי מִצְרַיִם
וַתֵּעַל הַצְּפָרְדֵּעַ וַתִּכַּס אֶת אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם.

>> The Rebbe

Student's The plague of frogs went even further than the plague of blood. Here, the plague arose from their false god—the Nile— itself! Because this is so obvious, Rashi didn't need to spell it out in his commentary.
pg. 9

במכת צפרדעים, היה ענין עמוק יותר ממה שהיה במכת דם - משום שהמכה באה מהעבודה זרה שלהם עצמה! - ולרוב הפשיטות לא הוצרך רש"י לפרשו.

The impact: an even deeper destruction of the belief in the Egyptian god, the Nile river, from which the plague emerged.

Lice

Description: Lice, crawling everywhere, descend upon the Egyptians. The Egyptians suffer greatly and no amount of scratching can alleviate it.

Source 6 Exodus, 8:13-15

Student's Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and the lice were upon man and beast; all the dust of the earth became lice throughout the entire land of Egypt. And the magicians did likewise with their secret rites in an attempt to bring out the lice, but they could not. . . . So the magicians said to Pharaoh, "It is the finger of God."
pg. 10

וַיִּט אֶהָרֹן אֶת יָדוֹ בְּמִטְהוֹ וַיַּךְ אֶת עֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ וַתְּהִי הַכֹּנִם בְּאֲדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה, כֹּל עֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ הָיָה כֹּנִים בְּכֹל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֹן הַחֲרָטְמִים בְּלִטְיָהֶם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת הַכֹּנִים וְלֹא יָכְלוּ... וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֲרָטְמִים אֶל פַּרְעֹה אֲצַבֵּעַ אֱלֹקִים הוּא.

>> The Rebbe

Student's Until the plague of lice, Pharaoh claimed that he himself was a god. But this plague forced him and his magicians to concede that the "finger of G-d" was at work.
pg. 10

עד אז פרעה טען שהוא עצמו אלוקים... אך דווקא מכה זו פעלה עליו ועל חרטומיו להודות בכך שזו אצבע אלוקים.

The impact: Pharaoh and his magicians acknowledge G-d's power.

Hail

Description: A heavy hail engulfs Egypt, tearing down trees, destroying agriculture and killing people and animals outside. The hail stones were filled with fire and they were accompanied by terrifying sounds.

Source 7 Exodus, 9:18-20

Student's [G-d said:] At this time tomorrow I am going to
pg. 10 rain down a very heavy hail, the likes of which has never been in Egypt, from the day of its founding until now. Go now and gather in your livestock and all that you have in the field, because any man or beast that is found in the field and not brought into the house will be struck by the hail, and they will die. He of Pharaoh's servants who feared the word of the L-rd drove his servants and his livestock into the houses.

הַנְּנִי מִמָּטִיר כְּעֵת מָחָר בְּרֹד
כִּבְד מָאֵד אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָיָה כָמוֹהוּ
בְּמִצְרַיִם לְמֹן הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
וְעַד עֵתָהּ. וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח הָעֹז אֶת
מִקְנֶךָ וְאֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה
כֹּל הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר יִמָּצֵא
בַּשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא יֵאָסֵף הַבַּיִתָּה וְיָרֹד
עֲלֵהֶם הַבְּרֹד וּמָתוּ. הִירָא אֶת
דְּבַר ה' מֵעַבְדֵי פְרַעְהָ הַנִּיִּס אֶת
עַבְדֵי וְאֵת מִקְנֵהוּ אֶל הַבָּתִּים.

>> The Rebbe

Student's Even before the plague of hail there were
pg. 11 some Egyptians who were G-d-fearing, but this didn't have any practical expression. The plague of hail motivated the G-d-fearing Egyptians to express their belief in a practical action - rushing to shelter their livestock.

גם קודם לכן, חלק מהמצרים היו יראים מה', אך זה לא התבטא בפעולה ממשית. במכת ברד, יראת עבדי פרעה מה' השפיעה עליהם ברמה המעשית - "הירא את דבר ה', הניס את עבדיו ואת מקנהו".

The impact: some Egyptians fear G-d, and act accordingly.

Locusts

Description: A heavy plague of locusts covers the land and consumes all surviving vegetation spared from the hail.

Source 8 Exodus, 10:3-11

Student's Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said to
pg. 11 him: . . . If you refuse to let the Israelites go, tomorrow I am going to bring locusts into your land. They will obscure the view of the earth, and no one will be able to see the earth. They will eat the surviving remnant left over by the hail, and they will consume all your trees that grow out of the field... He turned and left Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long will this one be a stumbling block to us? Let the people go and they will worship their G-d. Don't you understand yet that Egypt is lost?"

Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to them, "Go, worship the L-rd your G-d. Who will be going?" Moses said, "We will go with our youth and our elders, our sons and our daughters, our flocks and our cattle, because it is a festival of the L-rd for us." Pharaoh told them . . . not so; let the men go now and worship the L-rd.

>> The Rebbe

Student's The warning about the impending plague
pg. 12 of locusts didn't cause Pharaoh to repent completely and free the Jewish people from Egypt. But it did have a partial effect on him - he agreed to allow at least the men to leave, something he had refused until then.

The impact: Partial agreement of Pharaoh to release the Jews from Egypt.

Similarly, every plague had its unique effect, adding on to that which was achieved earlier.

וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל פְּרֹעֹה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו... כִּי אִם מֵאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלַּח אֶת עַמִּי הַנִּנְי מִבְּיַמְּךָ מִחַר אֲרֶבֶה בְּגִבְלֶךָ. וְכִסָּה אֶת עֵינֵי הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא יוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְאָכַל אֶת יֵתֵר הַפְּלִטָּה הַנּוֹשְׁאֶרֶת לָכֶם מִן הַבֶּרֶד, וְאָכַל אֶת כָּל הָעֵץ הַצֹּמַח לָכֶם מִן הַשָּׂדֶה... וַיִּפֹּן וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פְּרֹעֹה.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ עֲבָדֵי פְּרֹעֹה אֵלָיו עַד מַתִּי יִהְיֶה זֶה לָנוּ לְמוֹקֵשׁ שְׁלַח אֶת הָאֱנָשִׁים וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הַטָּרִם תִּדְעֵ כִּי אֲבָדָה מִצְרַיִם.

וַיּוֹשֵׁב אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת אַהֲרֹן אֶל פְּרֹעֹה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם לָכוּ עֲבֹדוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. מִי וּמִי הַהִלְכִים? וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּנַעַרְיָנוּ וּבְזַקְנֵינוּ וְגַלְךָ בְּבָנֵינוּ וּבְבָנוֹתֵנוּ בְּצֹאֵנֵנוּ וּבְבָקְרֵנוּ וְגַלְךָ כִּי חָג ה' לָנוּ. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם.. לֹא כֵן, לָכוּ נָא הַגְּבִרִים וַעֲבֹדוּ אֶת ה'.

אמנם ההתראה על מכת הארבה לא פעלה על פרעה שישׁוב לגמרי בתשובה וישחרר את כל עם ישראל ממצרים, אך היא פעלה עליו תשובה למחצה - הוא הסכים שלפחות הגברים ילכו, דבר שלא הסכים עליו עד עתה.

ועל דרך זה, כל מכה ומכה פעלה פעולה מיוחדת, בנוסף על מה שנפעל עד עתה.

Learning takes time

Student's This provides us with a simple explanation
pg. 12 for why the plagues needed to come separately, with a pause in between each one. Stretching them out allowed the Egyptians time to consider the effect of the plague and draw conclusions from it. Had each plague occurred quickly, and without a pause between the plagues, the Egyptians wouldn't have had enough time to contemplate the meaning of the plagues, and thus the plagues wouldn't have had their desired effect.

ועל פי זה מובן בפשטות שהיה צריך להיות מכות נפרדות, ומשך זמן בין מכה למכה - כדי שיוכלו המצרים להתבונן בפעולתה של המכה, ולהסיק מסקנות כו'. (אם כל מכה הייתה נמשכת זמן קצר ללא הפסק זמן בין מכה למכה, לא היה להם מספיק זמן להתבונן במשמעות המכות, והמכות לא היו פועלות את השפעתן).

C. The Winning Effect of Time

>> The Rebbe

Every plague had an effect

Student's There is a lesson we can derive from here regarding our Divine service.
pg. 13

When we are working to spread Judaism and further the teachings of Chassidut we can sometimes feel that our attempts to influence a fellow Jew were unsuccessful.

We all try sometimes to influence people in a positive way. A father tries to convince his son to attend synagogue, a mother tries to convince her daughter in college to participate in Jewish activities, a wife tries to influence her husband to be more present during the family dinner instead of being glued to his phone, and so on. We often feel like we're talking to the wall and having no effect.

Our analysis of the schedule of the plagues and their impact on Pharaoh teaches us a lesson in this regard.

Pharaoh was stricken with a series of plagues, and they seemingly had no effect on him, because he didn't fulfill G-d's command to release the Jewish people. Moreover, he continued claiming "My river is my own, and I made myself." Nevertheless, the truth is that each plague had a certain effect on him, as discussed.

בענין זה יש הוראה ולימוד בעבודת ה':

כאשר עוסקים בהפצת התורה והיהדות והפצת המעיינות חוצה - קורה לפעמים שמרגישים שלמרות שדיברו עם יהודי פלוני וניסו להשפיע עליו כו', לא הצליחו לפעול ולא כלום!

על כך באה ההוראה מהאמור לעיל בפשוטו של מקרא - שגדולה מזו מצינו אפילו בנוגע לפרעה מלך מצרים :

הן אמת שגם לאחרי שפרעה קיבל כמה וכמה מכות - לא ראו אצלו הזזה כלשהי, שהרי בנוגע לפועל לא קיים פרעה את ציווי הקב"ה "שלח את עמי ויעבדוני"⁷ (והמשיך לטעון "לי יאורי ואני עשיתני"⁸ כבתחילה), אבל אף על פי כן, על ידי כל מכה ומכה נפעלה אצלו פעולה מסוימת (כנזכר לעיל).

While the series of plagues didn't achieve freedom for the Jews, each of them still had a certain effect.

Every Positive Action Has An Effect

Student's This is true even about a person like
pg. 13 Pharaoh, and even in the pre-Sinai era when there was a Divine decree that the physical and spiritual cannot mix. It is thus all the more true regarding Jews in the post-Sinai era, that every single action to advance Torah and mitzvot has some practical effect.

Simply put: When we speak in a friendly and sincere manner to a fellow Jew about matters of Torah, mitzvot, ethics, and fear of Heaven, it is impossible that these words should have no effect. These aren't our personal words, they are words of Torah. Even if we don't see the effect immediately, we shouldn't be fooled by appearances. We should know that it is certain that there was some effect, but it just sometimes requires time for contemplation etc. until it is expressed in a revealed manner.

Regarding the argument that we don't see the effect, the answer is that we are looking with physical eyes. If we raise ourselves up a little we will see the inner dimension of our fellow Jew and observe that it really had an effect, and the effect will continue to grow until it will be apparent to all.

משיחת ש"פ וארא, ר"ח שבט, ה'תשמ"ו,
הנחה בלתי מוגה
תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ז חלק ב' עמודים 391, 398-401

ואם הדברים אמורים בנוגע לפרעה מלך מצרים, ולפני מתן תורה, כאשר הייתה הגזירה עליונים לא ירדו למטה ותחתונים לא יעלו למעלה - הרי בנוגע ליהודי, ובפרט לאחרי מתן תורה (לאחרי ביטול הגזירה), בוודאי ובוודאי שכל פעולה ופעולה בקשר לעניני תורה ויהדות אינה חוזרת ריקם חס ושלום, אלא פועלת פעולתה בנוגע לפועל מממש.⁹

ובפשטות: כאשר מדברים עם יהודי - בדברים היוצאים מן הלב¹⁰ - אודות עניני יהדות, תורה ומצוותיה, עניני מוסר ויראת-שמים - בדרכי נועם ודרכי שלום, כמו בן - לא יתכן שדברים אלו (שאינם דברי עצמו, כי אם דברי התורה) לא יפעלו את פעולתם; ובמילא, גם אם אינו רואה את הפעולה תיכף ומיד - אומרים לו: "אל תבט אל מראהו"¹¹, שכן, בוודאי ובוודאי נפעלה אצלו איזו פעולה, אלא שבזה עצמו ישנם כמה אופנים, כולל - שלפעמים יש צורך בשהות זמן להתבוננות כו', עד שהדבר יבוא לידי פועל בגילוי מממש.

ומה שטוען שאינו רואה את הפעולה - אומרים לו: הסיבה לכך שאינך רואה היא - מכיון שמסתכל אתה בעיני בשר... תתעלה קמעא, ואז תראה את פנימיותו של היהודי, ותיווכח שנפעלה אצלו פעולה, ותוסיף לפעול יותר ויותר! עד שסוף כל סוף רואים את הפעולה באופן גלוי.

(9) ראה "היום יום" - כ"ז אדר א. י"ב תשרי.
(10) ראה ספר הישר לר"ת שי"ג. הובא בשל"ה סט, א.
(11) ל' הכתוב - ש"א טו, ז.

Story Even a 'No' is a success

Garreth told the following story: I have a store on Lincoln Rd, Miami Beach, Florida. Twelve years ago, as I was walking down Lincoln Road, Rabbi Zev Katz of the “Chabad House on Wheels” stopped me, asking if I was Jewish. I answered in the affirmative.

He asked me if I had put on tefillin that day. “Thanks,” I replied, “I’ve already put on,” and I continued on my way.

I grew up as a religious Jew and studied at Yeshivah University. Somehow, after I graduated, I stopped putting on tefillin. When I told the rabbi I had put on tefillin, the truth was I hadn’t done so in many years. I wasn’t proud of it, but that was the truth.

As I walked away, I asked myself, “What have you done? Not only didn’t you put on tefillin, here you had an opportunity to do it and you passed it up.” On the spot I decided to start putting on tefillin again, and from that day on I put on every day.

Several years later, I met Rabbi Katz again as he walked into my store. “Rabbi,” I told him, “I must tell you a story. You stand outside in the heat and ask passersby to put on tefillin. I’m sure it’s not fun. People laugh at you, it’s hot, and you’re sweating. When you come home, you probably measure your success by how many people put on tefillin. I want to tell you that when I said no, that changed my life. From that day on, I’ve been putting on tefillin every day. You are doing good work. Don’t focus only on the “yeses,” even a “no” can have a big impact.