

# ALSHICH

## INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות

פרשת וארא

SERIES 1: ISSUE 14

## WHY ARE THE 10 PLAGUES DIVIDED INTO 3 GROUPS?

In the Pesach Haggadah, R' Yehudah divided the ten plagues into three groups:

### Group A: דצ"ך

- (1) Blood (דָּם)
- (2) Frogs (צְפַרְדֵּי)
- (3) Lice (בְּנִים)

### Group B: עד"ש

- (4) Wild animals (עָרוֹב)
- (5) Sickness of the livestock (דָּבָר)
- (6) Boils (שָׁחִין)

### Group C: באח"ב

- (7) Hail (בָּרָד)
- (8) Locusts (אֲרֵבָה)
- (9) Darkness (חֹשֶׁךְ)
- (10) Slaying of the firstborn (בְּכוֹרוֹת)

### Consider the following questions:

1. Why did God tell Moshe to give prior warning to Pharaoh before all the *makkos* except for lice, boils, and darkness – the third plague in each of the דצ"ך באח"ב groups?
2. Before the first plague in each of the עד"ש באח"ב groups, God included in His warning to Pharaoh what he would learn as a result: (a) Before the plague of blood (דָּם), He said, "With this you shall know that I am Hashem" (7:17). (b) Before the plague of wild animals (עָרוֹב), He said, "In order that you shall know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land" (8:18). (c) Before the plague of hail (בָּרָד), He said, "so that you will know that there is none like Me in all the world" (9:14). Why did God say different things in each warning?
3. Why did God not state what Pharaoh would learn before the second plague in each group (namely: דָּבָר, צְפַרְדֵּי, and אֲרֵבָה – frogs, sickness of the livestock, and locusts), sufficing with just a general warning?

There are three fundamental principles that Hashem wanted to convey to Pharaoh: (a) God's existence; (b) that He is the God of the Jewish people; and (c) even though He is uniquely the God of the Jewish people, He rules over all of Creation with absolute dominion. Therefore Pharaoh must subjugate himself to Him.

As listed above, R' Yehudah in the Pesach Haggadah divides the ten plagues into three groups, דצ"ך, עד"ש, and באח"ב, using the first letter of each plague to form an acronym. Each of these three groups corresponds to one of the principles that God wanted Pharaoh and the Egyptians to recognize.

The first group of three *makkos* – blood, frogs, and lice (דצ"ך) – came to prove the first fundamental principle to Pharaoh, namely God's existence. Therefore, before the first plague of this group (blood), God stated explicitly, "You will know that **I am Hashem**" (7:17) – i.e., when He will strike the Nile River that is the god of Egypt. [[This answers Question 2a.](#)] In the second and third plagues of this group (frogs and lice),

God did not repeat the lesson that Pharaoh would come to know through them, because He had already made it clear before the first plague. The same is true for the second and third plagues of other two groups of *makkos* as well, באה"ב and עד"ש. **[This answers Question 3.]**

The second group of three plagues – wild animals, sickness of the livestock, and boils (עד"ש) – came to prove the second fundamental principle, that Hashem is specifically the God of the Jewish people. Therefore, before the first plague of this group (wild animals) God told Moshe to tell Pharaoh, "You shall know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land" (8:18). The words "in the midst of the land" come to emphasize that God's manifestation on earth is shown through his special relationship with the Jewish people. It would be "in the midst of the land" of Egypt that God would differentiate between the Jewish nation who were "His people" and the Egyptians who were not (and thereby show that He was specifically the God of the Jews). **[This answers Question 2b.]**

The final series of plagues – hail, locusts, darkness and slaying of the firstborn (באה"ב) – were brought to prove the third fundamental principle, that Hashem rules over all of Creation, and therefore by definition Pharaoh must submit to His will. God thus prefaced the plague of hail by telling Pharaoh, "You shall know that there is none like Me in all the world" (9:14), meaning: "I am not like the guardian angels of the other nations, who have no power over any other nation but their own. There is none like Me Who rules over everything and over all nations, even though I am specifically called the God of Yisrael." **[This answers Question 2c.]** God then continued, "You have already been taught the first two fundamental principles, that I exist and that I am the God of the Jewish people, but you are still trampling My people (9:17) by refusing to obey My command to let them leave Egypt. I am the God of the whole world, including Egypt, so you must obey My command." After the plague was over, when Pharaoh still refused to learn his lesson, God alluded again to the third principle when He said to him before the next plague (locusts), "How long will you refuse to be subjugated before Me?" (10:3).

Regarding the absence of a warning before the third plague in each group (lice, boils and darkness), God did not issue any warning to Pharaoh at all because he had already been warned before the first two plagues in each group and this was considered sufficient. **[This answers Question 1.]**

### THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title "HaKadosh" (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

These sheets, distributed in memory of Yental bas Yitzchok, have been drawn from either the Alshich on Avos or Alshich on the Torah, published by Feldheim. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.