



January 17, 2026

Vaera — Shabbat M'vorchim

28 Tevet, 5786

What Was the Point of the Plagues?

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?!



Art by Sefira Lightstone

Answer:

It just doesn't sound menacing

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.

Our children are not trophies

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.

(by Aron Moss from www.chabad.org)

