

Parsha Ponders

Va'eira | January 4, 2019 | 27 Teves 5779

*The vicious cycle of anger*¹

ויט אהרן את-ידו על מימי מצרים ותעל הצפרדע ותכס את-ארץ מצרים

Aharon held out his arm over the water of Egypt, and the frog came up and covered the land of Egypt²

The second of the ten plagues was the plague of frogs. The frogs were everywhere. They were in the Egyptians' households, including their kitchens and bedrooms³. Miraculously, they even entered the Egyptians; bodies and croaked in their digestive tracks⁴. The verse that introduces the plague has a grammatical oddity. It says that *the frog* came up and covered the land of Egypt. Why is this word in the singular? The simple explanation⁵ is that sometimes things that are great in number are described in the singular. This is because when they are on-mass, they appear to be one giant force to be reckoned with. This is what happened in Egypt.

However, the *Midrash* gives⁶ a different explanation. The verse is being literal; there was one giant frog that began the plague. The Egyptians were bothered by this nuisance, and wacked it with their sticks. Each time they wacked it, the frog replicated. As this occurred, they continued to whack the frogs, resulting in an exponential multiplication of the plague. Egypt became covered, completely overwhelmed by the frogs. Why was the plague engineered in this way? Why wasn't there multiple frogs to begin with? What can we learn from this episode in the Exodus?

When the Egyptians saw that the frogs multiplied when they were hit, wouldn't it have been logical for them to stop? Why did they continue in futility to hit the frogs? The reason is that anger tells a person to act differently than logic would dictate. Anger says the exact opposite: since they are continuing to multiply, for sure they deserve to be hit more. They must be punished as much as possible. As the hits continue, the multiplying does as well, creating a vicious cycle. Their fury ignites, and they are overrun by frogs.

The Torah is teaching us that this is the attribute of anger. In any situation where someone could get angry, for example they are insulted by another, if they were to remain quiet, the matter would eventually pass. However, if the insulted party were to retort an insult back, the original insulter will respond in kind. The insults will escalate back and forth, creating a vicious cycle of anger. Logic would then dictate that it would be best to avoid such people, not engaging in a war of words with them. The original anger would then be able to dissipate. The person's anger will try to stop them from bearing these insults. If they listen, they'll end up becoming overwhelmed, just like the Egyptians were by the frogs.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Birkas Peretz to *parshas Va'eira*

² Exodus 8:2

³ Ibid 7:28, 29

⁴ Exodus Rabbah 10:3, brought by Rashi *ad. loc.*

⁵ Rashi to ibid 8:2

⁶ Sanhedrin 67b, Exodus Rabbah 10:4, Midrash Tanchuma Va'eira § 14, brought by Rashi *loc. cit.*