

Parsha Ponders

Va'eira | Jan 23, 2025 | 23 Teves 5785

Waning warning wellness¹

ויאמר יקוק אל-משה אמר אל-אהרן נטה את-מטך והך את-עפר הארץ והיה לנכם בכל ארץ-מצרים
Hashem said to Moshe: "Tell Aharon to stretch out your staff and hit the earth, and it will become lice throughout all of Egypt"²

This week's *parsha* introduces us to the concept of the Ten Plagues. Seven appear in this week's *parsha* and the final three in the next. A careful examination will show that the first nine follow a pattern where there are two plagues preceded with a warning to Pharaoh to let the Jews go, and then the third plague comes without warning. This means that the plagues of lice, boils, and darkness all came without warning. Why is this? What's the reason?

Our Sages teach us³ an interesting lesson in human psychology. The first two times a person transgresses a prohibition, there's still some guilt and resistance to the sin. However, after the second time, the same prohibited act will appear to be permitted in their eyes. They will therefore continue the act without restraint.

We can apply the same concept to the Ten Plagues. After refusing to let the Jews go after the first and second plague, there was no need to warn Pharaoh again. Any fleeting thoughts of guilt were no longer possible for him. Therefore, the plague of lice came without warning.

Yet, after the plague of lice, the necromancers of Pharaoh told him that this plague was the finger of Gd⁴. This realization should have shaken Pharaoh to his core, and he was expected to take it to heart. As a result, he was warned before the fourth and fifth plagues. After refusing to let the Jews go another two times, he was again beyond warning. It was once more considered permitted in his eyes, so the plague of boils came without warning.

Although, we can that at that point Pharaoh really regretted his actions. Instead, after the sixth plague, it was Hashem who hardened Pharaoh's heart. As a result, Pharaoh needed to be warned yet again. Unsurprisingly, he was stubborn after the seventh and eighth plagues. This meant that for the ninth plague of darkness, no warning would have helped^{5,6}.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on [Panim Yafos](#) to [Exodus](#) 8:12

² [Exodus](#) *loc. cit.*

³ [Kiddushin](#) 20a. See also [Ba'al HaTurim](#) to [Exodus](#) 9:4 who makes a somewhat similar connection

⁴ [Ibid](#) 8:15

⁵ [Rashi](#) to [Ibid](#) 4:23 tells us that the tenth plague was already forewarned at the beginning of the whole story

⁶ See the rest of the [Panim Yafos](#), who brings another approach differentiating between plagues which affected the Egyptian's bodies (lice, boils, darkness) and the other plagues which were more of a monetary punishment