



# LT TORAH TO GO

Volume 14 - Issue 19

Edited by Rabbi Mara Nathan on behalf of generations of Torah Learners at Larchmont Temple.

EXPERIENCE TORAH THIS WEEK: January 17-23rd  
EREV SHABBAT 8:00PM  
SHABBAT AM SERVICE SATURDAY 10:30AM

SHABBAT BO 5770

EXODUS 10:1-13:16

pp. 448-471 in Torah, a Modern Commentary

## PSHAT...*The plain/simple story*

In *Parashat Bo* Moses and Aaron continue to plead with Pharaoh to let the Israelites go free. Because he refuses, the Egyptians are punished with plagues of locusts, darkness, and finally, the death of their first born. Pharaoh tells Moses, "Be gone from me!" God then tells Moses that, after the last plague, Pharaoh will let the Israelites leave. That mid-night Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt and proclaims that each year on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month a festival lasting seven days will be celebrated in order to recall their liberation from Egypt. *Matzah*, or "unleavened bread" shall be eaten during the 7 days, and on the first night of the festival the children will be told how God freed their people from the house of bondage.

## REMEZ...*Looking for clues*

*Then the Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm toward the sky that there may be darkness upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be touched. [Exodus 10:21]*

**J.P.S...**the blotting out of the light of the sun for three days would have carried a powerful symbolic message for the Egyptians, for the sun was their supreme god, and its worship was pervasive in the official palace ritual....The impotence of the Egyptians' supreme God is exposed, thus foreboding imminent doom.

**RAMBAN...**the darkness was not merely an absence of light, but an opaque, fog-like condition that extinguished all flames, so that the Egyptians could not even use lamps.

**IBN EZRA...** it was so dark that the Egyptians could not even keep track of the days.

**RASHI...**The darkness during the day was darker than that of a normal night, and at night it became even more intense. After the first three days of the plague, the darkness entered a new stage; it was so thick that the Egyptians could not even move. The seventh day of darkness was reserved for the Splitting of the Sea, when darkness enveloped Pharaoh's army so that they could not attack the Jews.

## DRASH...*Discovering Meaning...*

**ZORNBERG...**there is something about the plague of darkness about the way it reduces the human being to a blind and paralyzed vulnerability, that defies rational or moral explanation....In this kind of darkness, one might say, repentance- *teshuvah*- becomes impossible. There is no possible response to the terror of such a condition.

**TORAH TEMIMAH...**God coated the Egyptians eyes with a thick covering that caused them to experience extreme darkness- a darkness they had always lived with but never known until now. The Egyptians had not suddenly become cruel to the Israelites prior to the plague of darkness. They had been this way for more than 200 years. This "inhumane darkness" that so consumed their lives was manifested in their inability to see the Israelites as people, but instead as an ominous threat to their way of life. Thus the plague of darkness was particularly fitting- paradoxically, God "opened the eyes" of the Egyptians, and by doing so, plunged them into the darkness that they had created for themselves.

*Yashar Koach* to this week's B'nei Mitzvah:  
**JULIA NORMAN & MAX SCHECHTER**

*Come hear them teach Torah this Saturday at 10:30AM*

**SOD...Finding Ourselves**

....Not only are the last plagues of locust, darkness and slaying of the first born cruel and harsh, but they also have a deeper, more complex meaning. .... I found the plague of darkness the most intriguing. While some people may look at it as darkness over the land, I saw it as something different.

In the Torah it states, "*Moses lifted his hand toward the sky, and a thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days. People could not see one another, and no one rose from his place for three days. The Children of Israel, however enjoyed light in all the places they dwelt.*" I looked at this passage and saw that it reflects how the Egyptians treated each other. They were not the nicest group of people ever known for they kept slaves to do all their work and would not help their brothers in their time of need like when they were starving or even dying. Therefore, they lost the privilege of seeing their brothers.

The Kotzer Rabbe says, "*No one could see past his own 'self,' thus no one among the Egyptians could rise from 'his own place.'* The darkness was the only plague self-imposed." I agree with the Kotzer rebbe....The Children of Israel would not only help each other but talk to each other, play with each other and most importantly be nice to each other; they got light in their dwellings because God didn't want to punish them for no reason. They were noble and they created the light themselves while the Egyptians turned each other down creating darkness....

This plague not only has a deeper meaning but it also has a life lesson we all should and can listen to. We all rush on with our busy lives not always taking the time to look around, slow down and help the ones around us. We are creating darkness every time we notice someone sick or needy and think to ourselves, "at least that isn't me" and do nothing. Yet we can make light not only for ourselves but for others as well. Just by talking to someone sad or donating to a charity we are creating light. Even us kids can help, whether its help someone when their books fall or help a stressed out friend study, we too can create light in their day and in ours.....

**JULIA NORMAN**

....In preparation for the tenth plague, God told Moses to have the Jews slaughter a sacrificial lamb, and paint the blood of the slaughtered Passover lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. What is the reason for painting the doorposts and lintel with blood? According to the parasha (Exodus 12:23) the reason is that "*God, when going through to smite the Egyptians, will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the Eternal will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home*". This raises a koshi – why does God need the blood to distinguish the Jewish homes from the Egyptian homes—can't He keep track of which homes are which?

....According to Shmot Rabbah, the lintel and doorposts represent Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So the blood is an outward sign of Jewish identity. Only those Jews who were proud of their Jewish identity had the potential to leave Egypt and be redeemed....I think there's a better explanation though. Shmot Rabbah says, "*when the children of Israel were roasting their lambs, the Holy One slew the first-born of Egypt, when they sprinkled the blood on their doors, God's great Name stood there as a protector. When they were making the Pesach offering and singing praises, God divided between the firstborn of Israel and the firstborn of Egypt, so that the blood of the unclean could atone for the blood of the clean.*" The explanation that makes the most sense to me is: The shape of the blood on the door lintel and posts makes the Hebrew letter ה which stands for הוה G-d's name. So as G-d was passing over the houses that night the houses that had G-d with them, both symbolically, and literally, G-d knew that they were Jewish.

This also relates to modern times. The physical direct connection to this is a mezuzah. A mezuzah on a door tells G-d and others that we're Jewish and that we're proud of it. Another way that this koshi applies to the world today is represented by praying or even something as simple as wearing a kippah. G-d knows that we're Jewish, yet still, we pray, and in Reform Judaism both men and women can wear kippot. We wear kippot on our heads as a symbol that we respect G-d.....

**MAX SCHECHTER**

**MITZVAH of the WEEK...**

**JULIA** is working with Habitat for Humanity. "*My family will work either to help build a home for someone who may not have the privilege of having one or to repair wrecked and ruined houses. We will give homeless people a place to live with warmth and comfort and even donating C.F.L light bulbs to put in their homes. Not only are these light bulbs safe and good for the environment but, I can actually, physically put a light in the life like some of the ones I have in mine.*"

**MAX** is going to be visiting a senior in a nursing home. "*From my past experiences of doing so, I know that it's a win-win situation. When I visit them I brighten their day, and from our discussions I benefit because I learn a lot about various topics.*"