

Number Patterns

וְלֹא יָמוּת מִכָּל לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל דָּבָר

"None will die from amongst all that is to the Bnei Yisroel." (9:4)

This Possuk is part of the warning that Moshe transmitted to Pharaoh prior to the plague of Dever (pestilence). Harav Sholom Schwadron notes, that this warning is the only one from amongst all those that Moshe relayed that explicitly stated the exemption of Klal Yisroel from the plague. With regard to all the other plagues, the Torah informs us post facto that the plague had not affected the Jews, for example with the plague of darkness the Torah says that whilst the Egyptians were in darkness, the Jews had light. Yet here, Moshe included this fact as part of his pre-emptive warning. Furthermore, asks Reb Sholom, when the Torah recounts the outcome of the plague, the Torah tells us that, "Not even one" of the Jew's animals died, however, why was it not sufficient to merely say that 'None' of the animals died? What was added by telling us, "Not even one," which stresses the one?

In answer, Reb Sholom writes that the plague of Dever was different in nature from all the other plagues. The other plagues, he explains, were each a new creation; something that had not happened before and were therefore apparent to all as a miracle. However, the death of animals would not be obvious as a miracle, because it is an everyday occurrence. There would need to be an aspect of the deaths that would reveal that the sudden death of all the animals in Egypt was actually part of Hashem's master plan to take the Jews out of Egypt. This aspect was the death of all the animals in Egypt both simultaneously and instantaneously. The complete annihilation of all the animals at once would be so different to the normal way of things, even in times of normal pestilence, that Hashem's power would be revealed as the cause. However, it would be necessary for all the animals belonging to the Jews to escape unscathed, to illustrate the ability of Hashem to differentiate between the two flocks. It would be this distinction; the death of all the Egyptian animals at once, and the survival of every Jewish owned animal, that would provide the clear proof that the pestilence was a heavenly curse.

As such, it was necessary for Pharaoh to be aware of this in advance. Pharaoh had to understand the nature of the plague, so that it would have the full impact it was designed to have. It was also necessary for the Torah to point out that, "Not even one," of the Jew's animals died, to stress the nature of the plague. Had even a single Jewish owned animal died, the Egyptians would have been able to point to it as proof that this was just a particularly bad case of pestilence. They would have been able to argue, at least to some extent, that although there was something strange about all their animals dying at once, this was no different than the Jews who also had animals die that night; it was just coincidence that their animals had died in larger numbers!

Reb Sholom concludes with an insight into the approach of Pharaoh to the plagues. The Possuk informs us that Pharaoh sent messengers to check whether Jewish owned animals had died. For this to be effective, it is apparent that he must have first sent messengers to count them before the plague struck, yet had he not done so, he could have pretended that Jewish animals had indeed died. Therefore, Pharaoh's own arrogance was his downfall, as in looking for a way to prove the plague to be chance; he provided the empirical evidence that it was indeed Hashem who had caused it.

Presdigitation...

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּלִטְיָהֶם

"The Egyptians magicians did likewise with their sticks." (7:22)

This Possuk relates how the Egyptian magicians imitated the ability of Ahron to turn water into blood. However, the question arises as to where they found water when Ahron had already turned all the water in Egypt into blood? Rabbeinu Bachya offers several answers to this question. He first suggests that the Egyptians dug deep wells and brought up water from them. He argues that the decree of Moshe was only on pools of revealed water, which would have excluded water found underground.

A second suggestion is that the magicians actually used optical illusions. When they heard the warning of Moshe regarding the water turning to blood, they hurried to a spot it had not yet reached, and just as the blood approached, they put out their sticks and pretended that it was them causing the blood to appear. This explains, adds Rabbeinu Bachya, why the Possuk does not say that the magicians acted, "Before the eyes of Pharaoh and his servants," as it does for Ahron, since they were actually tricking them.

Jewish Hearts...

בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְאִיךָ... פְּרָעָה

"Bnei Yisroel did not listen to me; how will... Pharaoh?" (6:12)

The Sfas Emes asks why Moshe presumed that since Bnei Yisroel were unwilling to listen him, all the more so Pharaoh would be. Klal Yisroel did not listen to Moshe, he stresses, due to their tremendous work burden, but why should this relate to Pharaoh? He answers that Moshe understood that a Jew is always open to doing Teshuvoh; his heart always ready to hear the word of Hashem no matter what the circumstance. As such, even though the Jews were suffering, Moshe had expected a positive response. When this was not forthcoming Moshe believed that Pharaoh, who did not even have the pure heart of a Jew, was a truly hopeless case.