



**Partners In Torah**  
**San Diego Study Guide**

***Parshat Vaera***  
***תשפג***

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***Partners Detroit***

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## **Partners In Torah San Diego**

### **Mission Statement:**

**Partners In Torah San Diego is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

**Partners in Torah San Diego has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.**

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming.**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.**

When Hashem appeared to Moshe at the burning bush, and Moshe responded that the people would not believe that Hashem had really appeared to him, Hashem gave Moshe three miracles to perform to convince the people.

The first was for Moshe to throw his staff to the ground where it miraculously turned into a snake. When Moshe grabbed its tail, it turned back into an inanimate walking stick. This along with the two other miracles that Moshe performed for the Jewish people convinced them that, indeed, Hashem had spoken to Moshe and had sent him to redeem them.

Hashem then instructed Moshe to perform the same miracle for Pharaoh  
(Exodus 7:9):

(ט) כִּי יִדְבַר אֲלֵכֶם פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר תִּנְנוּ לָכֶם מוֹפֵת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל אֶהְרֹן קַח אֶת מִטְּךָ וְהִשְׁלַךְ לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה יְהִי לְתַנְיִן :

9. *"When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Provide a wonder for yourselves,' say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh -- it will become a snake!' "*

The Talmud reports that when Moshe performed this miracle before Pharaoh, Pharaoh said to him, "Moshe, you are bringing your magic to Egypt? No one needs your magic here! Don't you know that Egypt is the magic capital of the world?" Moshe responded, "Of course I know, but when a merchant has wares to sell, he takes them to the marketplace. Even though the market is full of vendors with wares like his, if his are superior, he will sell them!"

Pharaoh burst out laughing when he saw the snake, and made fun of Moshe and Aharon saying, "This is all you have to show as the sign of your G-d?" Let me show *you* something. Pharaoh called his magicians and wise men, who all brought their sticks and turned them into snakes. It seems that in Egypt of old this was a standard trick because even children and women were able to do it. After a little while, when all the snakes,

including Aharon's, turned back to sticks, Aharon's *stick* swallowed up all the Egyptian sticks, yet you could not tell the difference in the thickness of the staff.

Not only did this miracle not impress Pharaoh, it convinced him even more that Moshe was just a better magician than his were, and that the whole thing was a hoax to get the Jewish people out of Egypt.

This story repeated itself two more times with the first two plagues, blood and frogs, that Hashem brought on Egypt, which the magicians were able to imitate. As you can imagine, after Pharaoh's prestidigitators imitated the plagues, he became even more sure that Moshe and Aharon were just better magicians.

The third plague, however, lice, the magicians could not duplicate. The Sages explain that magic has no power over something so small. The magicians explained as much to Pharaoh, insisting to him that this couldn't be magic. Pharaoh probably figured they were just offering an excuse to cover their incompetence without having to admit that Moshe was a better magician than they.

This presents us with a daunting question: How did Hashem expect to prove anything through miracles that the magicians could copy? Why, right from the start, didn't Hashem choose miracles beyond the magicians' ken, or suspend their magical powers, so they could not undermine Moshe and Aharon?

The answer is that the purpose of the human being on this planet is to make the correct choices in life and receive reward for those choices. Hashem does not paint us into a corner and force us to believe in Him. He always leaves us with a choice.

Magic lacks the ability to create something from nothing; only Hashem can do that. What magic *can* do is create an apparition, making one thing look like something else. It can make a stick look like a snake; it

can make water look like blood, and it could make something look like a frog. But these were not real, and a little investigation would reveal that they were only imitations of something real. They had none of the qualities of the real living thing. The snake could not move or hiss, the frogs could not croak or jump, and a fish would have lived fine in the red water. On the other hand, Aharon's snake was a real hissing, moving snake. The water in the plague of blood actually became blood that the Red Cross could use for transfusions, hence, all the fish died. Similarly, the frogs were real live frogs that croaked and jumped. To an impartial observer wishing to ascertain what is real or is not, it would have been a no-brainer and the differences would have been clear to see.

But when one wishes *not* to see the truth, *he will not see the truth!* He will explain away the differences by saying, "It's all magic, Moshe is just a better magician than the others and he knows how to make his magic more lifelike and real looking."

Thus, there is always a choice. When one wishes to see the truth, it is clear and obvious. And when one chooses not to see it, Hashem provides him with an escape hatch through which he can exit.

Even the ten plagues were insufficient to convince all the Jewish people that Hashem had indeed come to redeem them. Many were unprepared to leave Egypt, died during the plague of darkness, and were buried in Egypt. Maybe they also thought that Moshe was a magician, or that perhaps there was a natural explanation for the progression of unfolding calamities.

Only those who were impartial and open to the idea that Hashem was behind all the miracles would see the obvious differences and recognize the truth. They are the ones who ultimately became the Bnai Yisroel, the great Jewish Nation which we are part of today.

In this week's parsha, Hashem brought the first seven of the ten plagues upon Pharaoh and his people. Another important question that must be asked is why did the great and mighty Hashem need 10 plagues to get Pharaoh to free the Jewish people? Why not just deliver to Pharaoh one knockout punch and get it over with?

The answer is, that, of course Hashem could have done that. But the ten plagues were not only to punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians for their oppression of the Jewish people; they were also to educate the Jewish people about Hashem and His powers.

Nachmanides explains that the plagues proved three of the most important tenets of Judaism: 1) Hashem created the world; 2) He knows everyone in it and is involved in their lives; and 3) that Hashem speaks to man via prophesy.

In the beginning of our Parshah, Hashem told Moshe: (Exodus 6:3)

(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֶל יִצְחָק וְאֶל יַעֲקֹב בְּ(א)קל שֶׁק(ד)י וְשָׁמִי יְדָד לֹא נִוְדַעְתִּי  
לָהֶם :

*3. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as K'El Shak(dd)ai, but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them:*

(Because, except in a prayer, or in the context of a complete verse from scripture, we are not permitted to say any of G-d's real names, we substitute the "k" for one of the letters, hence, Kel Shakkai. Since everybody realizes that this substitution has been made, they understand which name of Hashem is being referred to.)

To properly understand this verse, we need some background. The Torah contains ten different holy names for G-d. When a scribe writing a sefer Torah comes to write one of these holy names, before doing so he must say out loud, "I am writing this name as the holy name of Hashem." If a scribe would forget even once to sanctify even one of Hashem's names, the entire sefer Torah would be פסול - unfit for use.

The idea behind G-d's different names is that each indicates a specific mode that Hashem is in. For example, the name אֱלֹהִים (Elokim) indicates that Hashem is in strict judgment mode. This week's parshah begins with, "And Elokim spoke to Moshe," reflecting Hashem being upset with Moshe for having questioned His sending him to Pharaoh since Moshe's visit only served to increase the workload on the Jewish people.

The name שׁוֹמֵר (Shomer) indicates Hashem adjusting "nature" to bring about His desired outcome. For example, the forefathers' wealth came about without miracles; rather, Hashem made the land fertile, brought the rain at the right times, and brought forth many large and fruitful crops. They had very healthy and fertile cattle, and thus they had large herds of cattle and sheep. Hashem accomplished His goals within the rules of nature.

The name יְהוָה (YHWH) is the name that Hashem used in Creation. This is Hashem's special name from which all the other names emanate. This name also indicates Hashem's supreme kindness, since creating the world was *the* supreme act of kindness.

When Hashem told Moshe that "*I appeared to the forefathers in the name 'Kel Shakkai'.*" He was saying that He dealt with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov via controlling nature, not through open miracles. But now, Hashem would reveal the name that He used when He was in Creation mode, and with that name He would change nature - recreating it in a way - and the world would now witness miracles the likes of which were never before seen. Since Hashem initially created nature, He is its master and can change it as He pleases.

In the plague of blood, for example, all water in Egypt turned to blood, including the Nile River, all other rivers and brooks, the water in cisterns, and even the water stored in vessels. Yet all the blood of the Egyptians was water for the Jews, who were not affected by any of the

plagues. Indeed, if a Jew and an Egyptian were drinking water from the same glass with straws, the Jew would draw water up his straw, while the Egyptian would draw blood up his. How can that be? It's no problem for the Creator of the water and the blood. Only if an Egyptian *bought* the water from a Jew would it not turn to blood.

In the seventh plague hail, the Torah tells us: (Exodus 9:24)

(כד) וַיְהִי בָרָד וְאֵשׁ מִתְּלַקְחַת בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּרָד

#### *24. There was hail, and fire flaming amid the hail*

Once again, this seems to be impossible! How could fire exist inside a hailstone which is made out of ice? And how could a hail stone remain a hailstone if there is fire inside of it? Only the creator, who gave fire and water their properties to begin with, can alter those properties to allow these two opposing forces to co-exist within the hailstone.

The ninth plague, darkness, is a real mind bender. The plague lasted six days, and there were two stages to its intensity. From the onset, it was darker than night, and during the first three days, no one could see anyone else. In the world today, which has many forms of artificial light, we have little experience with absolute darkness. There is a place in Israel called "Dialogue in the Dark" which gives people who are gifted with sight an idea of what it is like to live without any light at all, as blind people do. They have created an environment in which there is absolutely no light, period. Experiencing it is like no other darkness you were ever in. The darkness is so complete, you literally feel like you have no eyes to see.

During the next three days, the darkness was so thick, they could not even move. If they were seated, that is how they remained for three days.

However, for the Jews, throughout the six days of darkness, there was light! In the very homes of the Egyptians where they were plunged into a darkness so thick you could feel it, the Jews saw with light as if



nothing unusual was going on! How could two people standing in the very same room experience a completely opposite reality? This is clearly something only the Creator could accomplish.

These are a few examples of how the plagues revealed Hashem as the Creator of the world. Since the plagues affected only the Egyptians and not the Jews, this proved the second tenet, that Hashem knows who each person is, and that He is involved in their lives, since He tailored the plagues to each person.

Imagine how it was in the plague of wild animals, for example. A Jewish mother would tell her child to go next door to the neighbor to borrow a cup of sugar. He says to his mother. "Ma, there are ferocious lions and tigers out there! I just saw an Egyptian man attacked and eaten by a lion!" His mother responds, "Sweetie, you are Jewish. You don't have to worry. The lions and tigers will not attack you." "Really? Are you sure?" "Yes, I am. Try it!" Sure enough, when he went outside, the ferocious animals didn't bother him at all. This was true with all the plagues.

Before most of the plagues, Moshe warned Pharaoh, telling him what the plague would be and exactly when it would begin. Moshe also told Pharaoh when many of the plagues would end. This proved the third tenet that Hashem communicates His will to man through prophesy.

There is a very interesting story about the plague of frogs. Pharaoh was so oppressed by the frogs, that he could not stand it any longer. He called Moshe and Aharon to his palace, and asked them to beseech Hashem to remove the frogs, and then, he would send the Jewish people free.

(Exodus 8:5)

*5. Moses said to Pharaoh, "Glorify yourself over me--for when should I entreat for you, for your servants, and for your people, to excise the frogs from you and from your houses? Only in the River shall they remain. "*

6. *And he (Pharaoh) said, "For tomorrow. "*

How bizarre! Pharaoh was suffering so much from the frogs, that he swallowed his pride, and called Moshe and Aharon to remove them. Then, when they offer to do so, instead of saying, "Right this minute!" Pharaoh says, "Tomorrow." What was he thinking? He would have to suffer another day with the cursed frogs!

The commentaries explain, that Pharaoh who assumed that Moshe brought the frogs with magic, thought that Moshe knew that his magic spell was expiring, and that the frogs were about to disappear. Moshe would expect Pharaoh to say "NOW!" knowing that he was suffering, so this would make Moshe look like he was in control. Therefore, Pharaoh wanted to call his bluff, by saying, "tomorrow" thinking the plague was going to stop any minute anyway. He found out the hard way that Moshe was no magician.

Rabbi Yitzchak Abrabanel (1437-1508) of blessed memory explains how the ten plagues were designed to punish the Egyptians measure for measure, for what they did to the Jews.

1. Blood – Since they killed the babies of the Jews by throwing them into the Nile River, the river is now blood to remind them of their atrocities.
2. Frogs – They did not listen to the cries of the fathers and mothers when they took their children away, they will now have to listen to the constant croaking of the frogs.
3. Lice – They made the Jewish people toil in the sand making them miserable, the sand that turned into lice making them miserable.
4. Wild animals – The Egyptians entered the homes of the Jewish people to take away their children, now the wild animals will enter their homes and kill their children.

5. Pestilence – They stole the cattle of the Jewish people, now they would have no cattle.
6. Boils – They rejected the Jews as if they were disgusting, now they were disgusting.
7. Hail – They threw stones at the Jews and hit them with their fists, now they would be pelted with hail stones.
8. Locusts – They stole the grain from the fields of the Jews, now their grain and produce would be eaten by the locusts.
9. Darkness – They darkened the eyes of the Jews with their decrees, now they would have their eyes darkened.
10. Killing of the first born – They enslaved Hashem’s first born, they will suffer the loss of their first born.

Harav Yisroel Yaakov Kanievsky (1899-1985) of blessed memory explains how the ten plagues showed that Hashem is the master of the entire world and has control over everything in it.

1. Blood – Hashem has control over the bodies of water in the world. The seas and oceans of the world.
2. Frogs – Hashem has control over all the creatures in the water.
3. Lice – Hashem has control over land.
4. Wild animals – Hashem has control over all the animals upon the surface of the earth.
5. Pestilence – Hashem has control over life and death of the animals.
6. Boils – Hashem controls a person’s health and sickness.
7. Hail – Hashem controls the weather – rain, snow, and hail.
8. Locusts – Hashem controls all flying creatures.
9. Darkness – Hashem controls the sun and the moon and all the celestial beings.
10. Killing of the first born – Hashem controls life and death of people as well as knows the inner most secrets of who fathered which baby and which one is a first born.

Included is a timeline of the ten plagues with interesting information, produced by Rabbi Hillel Haber, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Shaare Torah in Brooklyn, NY.

## מכות 9 Months (לפי רבנו בחיי)

ניסן		אדר		שבט		טבת		כסליו		חשוון		תשרי		אלול		אב		MONTH		
מכת בכורות		חשך		ארבה		ברד		שחין		דבר		ערוב		כנים		צפרדע		דם		
One Week of Makkah		There was a Warning!		Six Days of Makkah		No Warning!		One Week of Makkah		Three Weeks of Warning!		One Week of Makkah		Three Weeks of Warning!		One Week of Makkah		Three Weeks of Warning!		LENGTH OF MAKKAH
Makkah was brought by ה		Makkah was brought by משה		Makkah was brought by משה		Makkah was brought by משה		Makkah was brought by ה, משה and אהרן		Makkah was brought by ה		Makkah was brought by ה		Makkah was brought by אהרן		Makkah was brought by אהרן		Makkah was brought by אהרן		WHO BROUGHT THE MAKKAH?
																				חֲרוּמוֹת
Cherutim did not copy it		Cherutim did not copy it		Cherutim did not copy it		Cherutim did not copy it		Cherutim did not copy it		Cherutim did not copy it		Cherutim did not copy it		Cherutim give up		Cherutim copied it		Cherutim copied it		
Makkah sends out בני ישראל		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		STOP		STOP		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		STOP		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		STOP		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		מַרְעֵה
Makkah sends out בני ישראל		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		Makkah asks משה to stop the מכה		Makkah asks משה to stop the מכה		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		Makkah asks משה to stop the מכה		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		Makkah asks משה to stop the מכה		Makkah does not ask משה to stop the מכה		מַרְעֵה COMPLAINS

1. This chart reflects the עשר מכות according to the times mentioned by רבנו בחיי but the רמב"ן has slight differences.
2. מדרש י"א mentions that most of the מכות had a 3-week warning period and one week of מכה. The מדרש mentions another opinion which says that the warning was one week and the מכה was 3 weeks.
3. There were several מכות which the חרומים felt they could duplicate (although it was not identical), but the others were not even tried by them.
4. Some מכות were triggered by משה, some by אהרן and some by the עולם.
5. There were some מכות that מרעה felt distressed and called for help from משה, and others he didn't feel that desperate.
6. This length of מכת חשך was 6 days, but מדרש considers it 7 days by adding the day of חשך by the יום.
7. מכת בכורות had a warning but the length of the warning is unspecified.
8. Every third מכה had no warning. דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב.

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 Racheil Bat Shulamit  
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