

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וַאֲרָא

1. Originally, HaShem had sent Mosheh to Par'o, the king of Egypt, with a simple message. He was to tell Par'o that HaShem commands that His People, the Children of Israel, are to be allowed by Par' leave Egypt for a three-day celebration in the service of HaShem. If Par'o would have complied straightaway with this command out of obedience to HaShem, the People would have returned after the three days. Some time after this, HaShem would have commanded Par'o to release the Hebrew People again, only this time it would be to release them permanently and unconditionally. Had Par'o obeyed this command, too, the lesson would have been clear to the whole of Mankind: the mightiest monarch of the most advanced and wealthiest nation of the world of that time had obeyed the command of HaShem, not once (which could have been a fluke) but twice. Despite his country's wealth being based on a slave economy and dependent upon the Hebrew slaves, the king of Egypt had freed the Hebrews at exceedingly great cost. All would have understood from this that HaShem, the G-d of the Hebrews, is the Sovereign and Master of all Mankind, the Supreme King of kings, Whose command must be obeyed. Par'o and the Egyptian people would have earned a place in the annals of the history of the world. They would be the people who had been instrumental in bringing everybody to the realization of HaShem as the Father and King of all the world and that the Hebrew People is His Nation, to the benefit of all.

2. But Par'o did not react as he should have. Together with his advisers and courtiers, he chose to make a stand against the command of HaShem and to rebel against the Divine Authority. So now Par'o and his people will be used to teach the same lessons, but in a different way. Instead of being the example of obedience to the Authority of HaShem, from which example all others would have learned and benefited, they will become the tool and instrument of HaShem to teach what happens if the command of HaShem is treated with disdain. They became the object-lesson to mankind, even being made to suffer ruin and destruction in the teaching of that lesson, if need be. As for the rebelliousness of Par'o and his retort, "Who is HaShem, that I should listen to Him? And neither will I release the Hebrew People!" — HaShem will demonstrate to Par'o, and to the world, for all time, that He is Master of all and everything and that He controls and governs all. And the way He will demonstrate this is through the Ten Plagues that He will bring upon Egypt and by redeeming His People from Egypt with miracles and wonders.

3. When Mosheh told Par'o that HaShem commands him to free the Hebrew People from their slavery, the immediate result had been that Par'o had ordered their slavery to be intensified. Mosheh was greatly dismayed for the Hebrew People at what he perceived as his failure to achieve their freedom. He complained to HaShem for having chosen him for this mission for it brought only further affliction to the Hebrew People. This week's Sidra begins with HaShem's rebuke to Mosheh for questioning His orders, and He reiterates His promise to redeem the Children of Israel from their bondage and to bring them to the land of Kenaan, as He has sworn to their forefathers, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov.

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4. When Mosheh repeats HaShem's message of redemption to the Hebrew People, they cannot listen to him. They cannot be comforted with these promises because of the oppression they are suffering. Mosheh asks HaShem how much less then will Par'o listen to him when he is told again that he must release the Children of Israel from their slavery. But HaShem tells Mosheh and Aharon to go again to Par'o. They are not to be disappointed if Par'o does not obey the command of HaShem. For HaShem knows that Par'o will exercise an unnatural stubbornness.
5. HaShem tells Mosheh that when Par'o asks for a sign of the power of HaShem that he can appreciate, Mosheh shall tell Aharon to throw down his staff and it shall turn into a serpent. When they did this, Par'o, not to be outdone, ordered his magicians to do the same with their staffs. But then Aharon's staff swallowed their staffs. Although he was shaken by what he saw as their more powerful magic, Par'o did not let them see that he was at all impressed.
6. HaShem then tells Mosheh to appear before Par'o, this time not in his palace, but at the river bank, when he is "in communion with his god", and he is to repeat the command of HaShem. In addition, he is to warn him that if he should ignore the command of HaShem, then all the water in Egypt shall turn to Blood. The waters of the River Nile, which the Egyptians worshipped as a god, would be afflicted, too. This, the First Plague, shall demonstrate HaShem's power over the lower regions of the world, for water flows to the lowest level. Mosheh and Aharon carry out the command of HaShem, and all the rivers and lakes and pools of water change to blood, and all the fish in the Nile die. The only way that any Egyptian can obtain water is by buying it from an Israelite. (From this moment, our slavery in Egypt effectively came to an end. From then on, no Egyptian dared any more to treat us as slaves to be ordered around. All we were waiting for now was the agreement of Par'o and his courtiers that we may leave.)
7. After seven days, the Plague is removed by HaShem, and Mosheh begins to warn Par'o about the Second Plague: Frogs, demonstrating HaShem's mastery over the wet-dry regions. When it comes up from the river, Par'o, in an attempt to show that he is not impressed, commands his magicians to do the same as, in fact, he had done with the Plague of Blood. So the Egyptian magicians bring up more frogs from the River. But then, as the constant noise wears down their nerves and life becomes unbearable, Par'o promises to let the people go and he begs Mosheh to remove this Plague. Mosheh tells Par'o to stipulate a time for the Plague to be stopped. This way, Par'o can pretend to his people that he is the one who removed the Plague and he can save his face. "So that you shall know," says Mosheh, "that there is no-one like HaShem" Who gives a chance for sinners to repent. But then, when he sees that there is a respite, Par'o changes his mind and does not allow the Hebrew People to leave.
8. HaShem then commands Mosheh to tell Aharon to bring the Third Plague. To show HaShem's mastery over the lowest regions on dry land, the dust of the earth of Egypt shall be turned into swarming Lice. The magicians try to duplicate this Plague, too, but they are unable to do so, and they admit for the first time that this is no magic but the Finger of HaShem. But Par'o remains stubborn.
9. HaShem tells Mosheh to warn Par'o of the coming Fourth Plague. If Par'o will not allow the Hebrew People to go, HaShem will bring droves of Wild Animals into the very houses

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of the Egyptians. They shall wreak havoc and destruction amongst them, in stark contrast with the Hebrew People who will be completely at peace. This way, Par'o and his servants are to see how HaShem is the Supreme Controller of everything and Master over the animals, which are on the ground, Who protects His People. When the Plague comes, Par'o calls for Mosheh and Aharon and, in an attempt to bargain with them, he says the Hebrews should celebrate to their G-d in the land of Egypt. But Mosheh tells him that the command of HaShem is that we are to leave Egypt. Par'o relents and says he will let us go ("but please don't go too far into the wilderness — and pray for me, too!"). But then, when again the Plague is removed, Par'o again retracts and does not let us leave.

10. Mosheh is told to warn Par'o of the Fifth Plague, which is to demonstrate HaShem's mastery over animal life and death, the Plague of Murrain. All the cattle and much of the livestock of Egypt dies, whilst of the Hebrews none is stricken — but Par'o remains obstinate and does not release the People.
11. The Sixth Plague, which is to demonstrate HaShem's mastery over man as well as beast, is the Plague of Boils. The boils affect all the non-Hebrew people and animals throughout the land of Egypt and this Plague continues the lessons of the other Plagues, which started from the lowest regions and progressed upwards. But now HaShem strengthens the heart of Par'o so that the lessons of the Plagues should be completed, and Par'o does not give heed to Mosheh and Aharon.
12. HaShem tells Mosheh to go and warn Par'o of the Seventh Plague, which is to demonstrate how HaShem is Master over the weather and all the seemingly immutable laws of nature, as represented by the constant warm climate of Egypt, and that HaShem controls all of Creation. They warn him to gather indoors all their outdoor workers, together with their remaining livestock, for there is coming a seven-day storm of Fiery Hail the like of which has never been seen in Egypt before. Each hailstone was of huge dimensions and, containing within it fire, was in itself a miracle within a miracle, demonstrating that even fire and water will join together to do the bidding of their Creator. When the hailstones landed, they crashed onto buildings and trees and the fire within burst out and set their surroundings on flame. The Plague causes terrible destruction throughout the land of Egypt. All the agricultural produce which was ready for harvesting was destroyed in the field. Only the region of Goshen, where the Hebrew People lived, was spared and enjoyed peace and tranquillity. Par'o calls for Mosheh and Aharon and admits for the first time that HaShem is righteous and that he and his people are wicked to remain stubborn in their refusal to obey His command. Once again, he begs Mosheh and Aharon to pray to HaShem to remove this Plague.
13. Mosheh prays to HaShem and the Plague ceases immediately — even the hailstones that are already on their way down do not fall to the ground but evaporate into the air. But when Par'o sees that the hail has stopped, he again hardens his heart and he again refuses to let the Hebrew People leave — just as HaShem had spoken to Mosheh.

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra סדרה please go to HAFTORAHS.