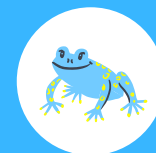


Can you find all 10 frogs hidden on the page?



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Created by Adele Nemirov

VAERA - ואֵרָא

WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA?

Parshas Vaera starts with **Hashem** reminding Moshe of His unique relationship with the Jewish people and His promise to free them from Egypt. Moshe tells the Jews this message, but they are unable to listen because of their suffering. Hashem sends **Moshe** and **Aharon** to **Pharoah** to ask him to let the Jews go free. The Torah then lists the heads of the tribes of **Reuven, Shimon, and Levi**, and the leading families in Levi. Moshe and Aharon go to Pharoah, and Aharon acts as Moshe's spokesperson because of Moshe's **speech impediment**. Hashem warns Moshe that Pharoah's heart will be **hardened**, and he will only let the Jews go after Hashem displays His Power in Egypt. First, Moshe shows Pharoah a sign from Hashem by turning his **staff** into a **snake**, but Pharoah's **magicians** recreate this sign. Pharoah refuses, so Aharon turns the Nile River into **blood**. The magicians recreate this sign as well, and Pharoah refuses. 7 days later, Aharon holds his staff over the waters of Egypt and fills the country with **frogs**. The magicians do the same thing, but this time, Pharoah asks Moshe to request from Hashem that the frogs be removed. When the frogs die, Pharoah refuses to let the Jews leave. Then, Aharon brings the plague of **lice** from the Nile, and the magicians tell Pharoah that it is from Hashem, but he still refuses. Moshe then brings the plagues of **wild animals, pestilence**, which kills all of the Egyptian livestock and spares the Jewish livestock, and **boils**. After each plague, Pharoah still refuses to let the Jews leave. Finally, Moshe brings a plague of **hail** by reaching out his hand towards the sky, which destroys the Egyptian crops and avoids the area of **Goshen** where the Jews lived. Pharoah again asks Moshe to stop the plague, but when it ends, he again refuses.

DID YOU NOTICE?

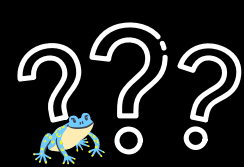
The first three plagues come from the **Nile River**, and they are initiated by **Aharon** rather than **Moshe**! **Rashi** (1040-1105, France) explains that this was because the Nile saved Moshe when he was a baby, and he hid the Egyptian taskmaster's body in the sand of the Nile. Thus, it would be a lack of gratitude for Moshe to cause these plagues. **What can we learn from this?**



PATTERNS AND PLAGUES

Have you ever thought about the patterns of the plagues? Hashem tells Moshe that the purpose of the plagues is to show the Egyptians that Hashem is in charge of the world, and for the Jews to teach their children about the events in Egypt. Many commentators suggest meanings to the order and choice of these 10 plagues.

In the **Haggadah**, we read that **Rabbi Yehuda** divided the plagues as **דצ"ך אד"ש באח"ב** - **three groups**! The **Abarbanel** (1437-1508, Portugal & Italy) explains that each group delivered a different **theological** message to the Egyptians. The **first message** was that Hashem exists, and created the world and all of existence. The **second message** was that Hashem is directly involved in every event, also known as **Divine Providence**, or השגחה פרטית. The **third message** was that Hashem has complete and total control over nature.



This is only one idea about the meaning of the patterns of the plagues. What do you think of it? Can you suggest other possible meanings of the patterns of the plagues?



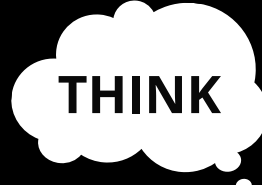
Blood	דָּם
Frogs	צְפַרְדֵּי
Lice	כְּנִים
Wild Animals	עָרוֹב
Pestilence	דָּבָר
Boils	שָׁחִין
Hail	בָּרָד
Darkness	אֲרָפֶה
Death of the Firstborn	חֲשֵׁךְ מִפְּתֵי בְּכוֹרוֹת

HARD HEARTS AND FREE WILL

וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת אֹתוֹתַי וְאֶת מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: (שמות ז:ג)

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt.

Rambam (1138-1204, Spain) explains that Pharoah initially sinned by decreeing to kill the Jewish baby boys, and thus his ability to **repent** was taken away to ensure that he would be **punished**, as Hashem sometimes does with very evil people. However, **Ramban** (1194-1270, Spain) explains that **hardening** Pharoah's heart meant that Hashem removed any **outside influences** to Pharoah's decision, and helped him stick to his resolve. Hashem **preserved** and **strengthened** Pharoah's free will by causing him to **only** make the decision because of his **desire**, not from the pressure of the plagues.



What do you think of these ideas? Can you suggest any other answers?



Do you think that free will is important? Why or why not?

