

THE WHITE TEETH OF A DEAD DOG

by Rabbi Dovid Green

The last plague given to the Egyptians was the slaying of the first born. Moshe warns Pharoah that this plague will occur at "about" midnight (Exodus 11:4). It's unusual that Moshe spoke in such terms. This is especially true considering that G-d told Moshe the plague would occur "at midnight". Why did Moshe alter what G-d told him? The Talmud says that if Moshe had said exactly midnight, and the plague had occurred at a time that the advisors of Pharoah thought was slightly before or after midnight, they would claim Moshe was a liar.

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin in his work "Growth Through Torah" comments that this is a function of the power of finding fault. After nine severe plagues they still wouldn't consider the possibility that maybe they calculated the time incorrectly? Were they blind? However, since they were looking to find fault, even a minor discrepancy would cause them to claim Moshe was a liar.

Finding fault is always at someone's expense. It can be very hurtful, and it usually accomplishes little. People rarely respond positively to vindictive criticism. Finding the positive traits in a person or a situation goes a much longer way.

In "Duties of the Heart" by Rabbi Bachya Ibn Pekudah, a story is told to emphasize this point. A rabbi was walking through the street with several of his students. They came upon the carcass of a dead dog. "What a vile sight," they remarked. "Look how white its teeth are," responded the rabbi. With those words the rabbi taught his students that even when there is much more which is negative, there is still something positive to look for and find. It is a trait which carries us through life. It effects our relationships with our spouses, children, fellow workers, and employees to name just a few.

In this world no one and nothing is perfect. There is always fault to find. However, the Torah teaches us the negative repercussions of being a fault finder. We should always concentrate on seeing and emphasizing the good in everything. In the merit of our seeking the good in others, may G-d only seek the good in us.

Good Shabbos!

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