

THERE'S ONE IN EVERY GENERATION

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

While reading the Haggadah, we learn from Rabbi Yossi HaGalili (of Galilee) that if the Egyptians faced 10 Plagues in Egypt, then they were struck with 50 at the Reed Sea. Rabbi Eliezer says, furthermore, that in reality the Egyptians were not struck with merely 10 Plagues. Each one consisted of four plagues, and therefore there were 40 Plagues in Egypt, and 200 at the Sea. Rabbi Akiva disagrees, saying that there were 50 in Egypt, and 250 at the Sea.

Perhaps one opinion is right, perhaps the other -- perhaps, just as they count the words differently, these great Rabbis might have counted the various sub-elements of each plague differently, and they are both right. But why do we need to know this in the Haggadah? What great impact does this have, such that the Rabbis later decided to include this discussion within the Haggadah itself?

Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, spiritual guide of the Mir Yeshiva in Poland before the War, and then in Ponevitzch in Israel, points to the line which follows this discussion: "how many great things did the Holy One bestow upon us." The Haggadah specifies that each favor G-d showed us at that time was wonderful unto itself. Taking us out of Egypt was enough by itself. Judging the Egyptians for years of tremendous cruelty was enough by itself. All the more so, when these favors are all added together, do we recognize HaShem's kindness. And therefore, he says, even though all of the various "plagues within plagues" are not explained separately, we must recognize that each one was a separate act, a separate benefit for us, and even a benefit for the Egyptians themselves -- teaching them their mistake, and that He is King, before they died.