

NATURE UNLEASHED

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

In this week's Parsha, the last three plagues are detailed. Locust, Darkness, and the Death of the First Born are the culminating display of Hashem's (G-d's) mastery over nature and humankind. As explained in last week's issue, the final plague, the Death of the First Born, stands apart from all the other plagues. However, it makes sense that Hashem's displays of mastery and power would be greater with each and every plague. In what manner are Locust and Darkness a greater display of G-d's power than all the preceding plagues?

The first 7 plagues appeared like changes in the natural order of nature. Rivers shouldn't flow with blood. Frogs shouldn't leave the marshes and invade homes. Lice are a nuisance, but they shouldn't cover the land. Wild beasts should stay away from villages and cities. Animal diseases exist but should be contained. Boils and lesions shouldn't affect everyone at the same time, and hail should be non-existent in the desert. Yet, these events occurred at Moshe's warning and command and were magnificent displays of Hashem's mastery over water, land, animals, humans, and the atmosphere.

The plague of locust was different. Locust are a fact of life in the Middle East, and are a documented and predictable occurrence. In our daily davening we thank Hashem for "His wonders and miracles that are with us daily". Nature is the greatest miracle possible, and the greatest display of Hashem's mastery. However, the constancy of nature disguises the magnificence of its miracle. Occasionally, natural disasters occur which remind us of the awesomeness of Hashem's power, and his control. We take for granted that rain will fall and be absorbed into the ground, drain into the ocean, or evaporate into the atmosphere. Yet, when the rain continues to come down and the ground is fully saturated; and the drains are on overload, and the sun isn't shining; and bridges and streets are washed away by the sheer volume and power of nature's fury; it reminds us that we take for granted G-d's control over nature.

The locust that descended upon Egypt are referred to as the "great army of Hashem". Locust are a natural and predictable event. However, when Hashem unleashed the sheer volume of his "army", the world stood in awe of G-d's mastery and control. It became self evident that it was the G-d of the Jews who was responsible for the continued welfare and existence of the universe. As it says in Yirmiyah 5:22, "That I have put the sands as a boundary to the seas". We take for granted that the tides will flow in and out, and that the moon will stay in its orbit around the earth. If one day the moon should move a drop closer in its orbit the tides would swamp the entire earth and drown all

life. It is the command of Hashem that keeps the seas contained within the boundaries of the sandy shores. The plagues were intended to teach Jew and Egyptian that there is a Creator who maintains the universe by setting limits to the power of nature. The swarm of locust that swallowed Mitzrayim showed nature's power unleashed without the usual and expected controls. Whereas the other plagues were changes in the natural and expected order, the locust were natural, expected, but uncontrolled. The locust forced Jew and Egyptian to acknowledge the miracle of the natural, the miracle of the expected.

The plague of Darkness was unique in its own right. The very first thing G-d created was the separation between light and darkness. Central to the human psyche is the difference between day and night. Our fears and our sense of security are closely linked to light and darkness. For three days the darkness was so extreme that it became tangible. The darkness was so oppressive that individuals were rooted to their spot and could not move for the entire time. Imagine the living hell of being paralyzed in complete darkness with the inevitable indignity that comes without proper hygiene. Try to picture the growing hunger and thirst and the helplessness of not being able to respond to the cries of children and their calls for help. Try to imagine the all encompassing and terrifying thought that life had ended and eternity was everything Dante had imagined it to be.

When Hashem suspended the normal workings of nature, the Egyptian realized how vulnerable and fragile he was, and how dependent he was on the Creator's benevolent control. Locust and darkness were Hashem's final lessons before His ultimate display of power over life and death.

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