

## Rabbi's Column

One of the sources for this year's educational component of the Seder is Seder Talk: The Conversational Haggada by Dr. Erica Brown. A tiny bit that is included in the book (but will not really be part of the Seder event) is how, without even striving too hard or tormenting the text, one could show that there were really 12 plagues that Pharaoh and his people suffered. While 10 is a nice round number and stands for some very important things, 12 is also an important number for the Jewish people.

So what are these other two plagues?

One we kind of gloss over quickly, as it was the final stage of our freedom. When the waters came back together, a number of Egyptians were killed. That seems worse than the majority of the afflictions categorized as plagues.

The other one requires a bit of understanding about how the Egyptian afterlife works. Supposedly one's heart is taken and weighed opposite a feather. If the scales balance, then the owner of the heart receives a good afterlife. If the heart outweighs the feather, it gets eaten and the person's afterlife experience is not pleasant. In the give and take with Moses, Pharaoh hardened his heart to start with, and it got gradually heavier and heavier. In the end, Pharaoh loses everything, including the chance of a good afterlife, for he acted as if he was God.

As Passover approaches and we continue to prepare for it, a question we might ask ourselves is whether there are interactions we have in which we have unjustly hardened our own hearts. It is not our afterlives which are at stake here, but the quality of the lives we are living, now that we have been freed from Pharaoh.