igniting your shabbat services

Va'eira

ארא"א
**Hello and welcome to Spark!**

Spark is a new idea from Tribe, aimed at facilitating the smooth running of Toddlers’ Services, Children’s Services and Youth Services across United Synagogue communities.

Firstly, thank you for offering to run a Children’s Service in your local shul. The US is very proud of the numerous Children’s services that are run every week across the UK, and we would not be able to do this without you!

Spark has been designed in order to help you run your Children’s Services. Obviously, every Children’s Service is different, in terms of how many children there are; what their age range is; how long it is for; and how knowledgeable the children are likely to be of this week’s parasha.

Ideally, where possible, a Children’s Service should consist of some time used to discuss the weekly parasha, and some time devoted to davening. Spark is aimed at the parasha part of the service. It gives you an overview of what happens in the weekly parasha, and then a song, activity, discussion or Dvar Torah to run with the children – depending on their ages.

After the parasha summary on the next page, Spark has been split into 5 sections. Larger communities may have 5 different Children’s / Youth Services running concurrently. Each of these will be able to use one section for their relevant age group. If your shul does not have as many groups, then you should use the section that best suits the age range of your participants.

It has been created in a way to be flexible, so that it can be run in 10 minutes, if you have a short service, or longer if you have the time. If you also look at sections for other age groups, you may even find that you would like to use the ideas and information from more than one of the sections.

It is important to note that Spark should help you to run Children’s Services, but it does not completely run it for you. It is not designed to give to one of the children to read out to the group for them to run themselves. You are running the Children’s Service, and Spark is here to help you do it.

Largely, no props will be needed, but ideally you should read Spark before you start the Children’s Service, so that you can think of further ideas to complement it.

We hope that you and the children in the Children’s Service will benefit from Spark, we thank and congratulate you for doing it; and as always we welcome your feedback.

Shabbat shalom,

The Tribe Education Team
- God reassures Moshe that He is aware of the hardships that the Children of Israel are going through, whilst in slavery.
- God tells Moshe and Aharon that they will speak to Pharaoh, and lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt.
- Moshe questions how he will be able to do this.
- Pharaoh refuses to listen, and the first of the 10 plagues occurs; blood.
- This is followed by another 6 plagues; frogs, lice, wild animals, the cattle epidemic, boils, hail.
- (The remaining last three of the 10 plagues will be in next week’s parasha.)
In this week’s parasha we see that God sends seven of the ten plagues to Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

Activity:

Ask the children to imagine how they would respond to each of these plagues. E.g. they could pretend to spit out their drinks if you say ‘blood.’ Or jump up and down to try and get rid of ‘frogs.’

- Blood
- Frogs
- Lice
- Wild animals
- Epidemic
- Boils
- Hail

Bring along some images or toy models of these plagues for the children to experience them.
In this week’s parasha we see that God sends seven plagues to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Each plague is uncomfortable for the Egyptians, but does not affect the Jews.

Activity:

- Split the children into groups and ask the groups each to act out one of the plagues.
- They can e.g. be frogs jumping, and Egyptians having frogs jump all over them, and Jewish people being unaffected by the frogs.
- Try to make sure to incorporate the concept that the plague was terrible for the Egyptians, but did not affect the Jewish people.
- The other children should guess what plague they are acting.
In this week’s parasha we see that Moshe shows gratitude to things that have helped him in his earlier life. When God says that a plague should come from the river, Aharon strikes the river rather than Moshe. This is to show gratitude, as when Moshe was a baby and his life was in danger, he was placed in the river.

When a plague comes from the ground, Aharon begins this one too. This is due to when Moshe killed an Egyptian, and buried him in the sand. Moshe did not want to harm the two things which had saved him. We see from this how much more grateful we should be to people who have helped us!

Activity:

- Play 20 questions.
- One child should think of a person that they feel grateful towards, and the other children have to try and guess who this is.
- They do this by asking questions that have a yes or no answer.
- E.g. is it a man? Are they alive?
- They have to try and guess it within 20 questions, and for a bonus, guess why they are grateful to that person.

Discussion Points:

Should we be grateful to the following famous Jews, and why?

- Albert Einstein
- Robert Winston
- David Ben Gurion
- David Hamelech
- Bob Dylan
- Steven Spielberg

You can add to or alter this list as you see fit for your group.
Some interesting points about the plagues;
The procedure of each plague lasted approximately a month. Pharaoh would be warned of a plague’s imminent arrival for approximately 3 weeks, and then each plague lasted a week. (Unless Pharaoh asked Moshe to pray for it to end early.)

Blood;
Pharaoh was warned before this plague.
- The River Nile was where Moshe had been put as a baby when his life was in danger. Therefore, it would have been wrong for him to inflict a plague upon it, so Aharon did so, on his behalf.
- Some say that Pharaoh’s sorcerers were able to turn small bottles of water into blood – but nothing on this scale.

Frogs;
Pharaoh was warned before this plague.
- This also came from the water, so Aharon did it too.

Lice;
- Pharaoh was not warned before this plague.
- This came from the dust of the ground. Aharon did this one too, as Moshe wanted to show appreciation to the ground that concealed the Egyptian that he killed and buried many years ago.
- This was the first plague that Pharaoh’s sorcerers conceded that they could do nothing like it with magic, and it must be from God.

Wild animals;
- Pharaoh was warned before this plague.
- The wild animals did not enter Goshen, (where the Jews lived,) nor did they harm Jews anywhere, even if they were in the land of Egypt.
- During this plague, Pharaoh offered for the Children of Israel to bring offerings to their God, but only if they did not leave Egypt.
- At the end of the plague of frogs, the frogs remained in Egypt and died, so that there was a foul stench as a constant reminder. At the end of the plague of wild animals though, the animals all left Egypt, so that Pharaoh should not be able to benefit from their meat or hides.

Epidemic;
Pharaoh was warned before this plague.
- The Jewish people’s livestock were not harmed, even when in the same location as the Egyptians.

Boils;
Pharaoh was not warned before this plague.
- God ‘hardened [Pharaoh’s] heart.’

Hail;
Pharaoh was warned before this plague.
- The Torah implies that this was the severest of all the plagues up to this point and the Midrash tells us that the hails was made of ice, containing fire within it.

Discussion Points:
- Which plague would they find the most unbearable?
- Which the most miraculous?
- Did Moshe and Aharon act in a good way in bringing these plagues upon Egypt?
- Why did God harden Pharaoh’s heart?
Dvar Torah

One of the most intriguing elements of the Exodus story is the relationship between God and Pharaoh. Though they never actually speak directly, it is clear that they are the major players in the story. Moses for his part finds himself running back and forth between God and Pharaoh, relaying messages and prophecies.

Of course, God has the upper hand, for not only can God turn Pharaoh's beloved Nile into blood, but He can play havoc with all of nature and the rules thereof. Pharaoh never stood a chance.

The ultimate manipulation is where God controls Pharaoh's heart. This makes us realise how futile a battle with God really is. But, how can God punish Pharaoh, if he was not even acting on his own free will? According to Rambam/Maimonides, if man were simply programmed to perform various actions, he would have no responsibility for those actions.

The Midrash tells us that ... when God warns a man once, twice, and even a third time, and he still does not repent, only then does God close his heart against repentance, so that He should exact vengeance from him for his sins. Thus it was with the wicked Pharaoh. Pharaoh took no notice of the first five plagues, and it was only then that we are told that God hardened his heart. This in itself was his punishment. Just as Pharaoh had closed his heart and ignored God, now Pharaoh was punished by losing the sensitivity of his heart, which he had hardened himself. The punishments he receives are for his earlier deeds, not for the later rebellion.
We hope you find our guide to this week’s Parasha useful.

Be sure to look out for exciting Tribe programmes in your shul.

Shabbat Shalom!

The Tribe Education Team

t: 020 8343 5656
e: info@tribeuk.com
www.tribeuk.com