

How Do You Know When You're in the Middle of an Emergency and What Do You Do If You Are?

Posted July 12, 2012 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Copyright ©2012 Judith Z. Abrams

BH

The summer season seems to be a time of plagues, whether we are in the U.S. or in Israel. Here in the U.S., record-breaking heat waves have hit the Midwest (105 degrees in Bloomington, Indiana!?) and an unexpected storm toppled trees in the mid-Atlantic, leaving them without power for days. Now Israel is being besieged by jellyfish - yes, you read that correctly - jellyfish. See this link, for example:

<http://worldblog.nbcnews.com/news/2011/07/06/7028229-jellyfish-scourge-threatens-israeli-swimmers-and-electricity?lite>

It will come as no surprise that our sages have already anticipated such situations and prescribe the following course of action:

On account of the appearance of the following do they sound the shofar in every locale: blasting or mildew, locust or caterpillar (Kings 8:37)², ³wild beasts and the sword (Leviticus 26:6)². Everywhere do they sound the shofar on their account, because it is an affliction which spreads. (M. Taanit 3:6)

In other words, the first thing you do is quit denying there's a problem! This is a common theme in Judaism when dealing with unpleasant realities, whether it's jellyfish or the death of a loved one. We make you look the unpleasantness in the eye. Without that, you can't make any headway. With that in mind, I'm interested to hear your answers to these discussion questions:

Discussion Questions:

1. The weather seems to be more and more out of whack. Are we facing an emergency? If so, what is it? And if it is, how can we sound the alarm?
2. Why do you think Israel's is being overwhelmed with jellyfish? Is it a symptom of something larger being wrong? Has the ecological balance somehow been upset? How can the balance be restored?
3. The name for the jellyfish in Hebrew is Meduza, from the legendary Medusa whose hair was made of snakes. Just looking at her would turn a person to stone. In talking with about this with my son, he said, why are we citing a Greek legend in Judaism? Are you surprised by this etymology? Can you think of other Greek/Roman symbols that have made their way into Judaism?

As always, looking forward to your insights!