

פרשת וארא

(The letter below was recently discovered in a royal burial tomb near Cairo. It was translated and prepared for publication by experts in ancient Egyptian.)

Month 5/Day 22/2447¹

To His Royal and Holy Majesty:

- god of Egypt
- deity of all
- almighty one
- Our master and ruler
- Benevolent and Compassionate

Par'o Akhenaten, King of Egypt

Dear Honored and Revered Par'o,

I take the liberty of writing to your holiness because I am your loyal and dedicated servant who follows all of your great deeds with awe, trepidation and love.

As your loyal and dedicated servant, I admire all that you do and know that all that you do is correct, just and wise.

And it is with that approach that I wish to acquire the wisdom that your holiness possesses and about which I am utterly ignorant.

¹This should be the approximate date of the conclusion of *Makkas Tzefardim*, the plague of the frogs. B'nei Yisroel left on the morrow of *Makkas B'choros*, the 15th of Nissan.

Each of the Makkos came during the first week of the four-week cycle of plague and warnings. (See Rashi to our Parsha, Perek 7/Posuk 25.)

Since we left Egypt on the 15th of Nissan, I am assuming that each plague was on the 15th of the month. If we count backwards from Nissan to the beginning of the first plague, *Makkas Dam*, we arrive at the first month of the plagues - the fourth month [Tammuz].

If this is accurate, the second plague, that of the frogs, began on the 15th day of the fifth month and concluded on Day 22 of that month, when the seven days of the plague of frogs was completed.

For the second time in these past five weeks our homeland has suffered because of the magical powers of the Hebrews and their reprehensible leaders: Moshe and Aharon.

First, for a week's time, it was impossible to have water to drink unless we would retrieve it directly from around our holy Nile River that you have created.² The Hebrews made such a terrible desecration!

Then, just this past week, we were stricken again by their sorcery as reptilian frogs invaded our homes and our bodies³.

Now we all know that these plagues were acts of sorcery because Your Majesty and Holiness brought forward our nation's wise and worthy sorcerers and magicians and they performed the very same acts.

So, now with Your Majesty's permission, I will humbly raise my question and I hope and pray before you that it will indeed find favor in your eyes.

My question is:

Why, Your Majesty, when you brought our wonderful sorcerers to show those upstart and brazen Hebrews that they were foolish to try and attack our country with their sorcery, why, instead of replicating their acts of

² We read in Sefer Yechezkel (Perek 29/Posuk 3):

דַּבֵּר וְאָמַרְתָּ כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי... ה' הִנְנִי עֲלֶיךָ פֶּרְעָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם הַתַּנִּים הַגְּדוֹל הַרְבֵּץ בְּתוֹךְ יַאֲרֵיו
אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לִי יַאֲרֵי וְאֲנִי עָשִׂיתִנִּי:

Speak and you shall say, 'Thus said my Lord Hashem, 'Behold I am against you, King of Egypt, the great serpent who crouches amidst his seas; he said to Me 'The river is mine and I made me.'

Radak writes:

ואני עשיתיני - אני עשיתי ותקנתי לי היאור להשקות את ארצי או פירוש עשיתיני עשיתי ותקנתי
אותי בחכמתי ובתבונתי עד שנעשיתי מלך גדול:

I made me – I made and I renovated the river for me to water my land.

Or the explanation is: that the word עשיתיני means I made and renovated myself with my wisdom and with my understanding until I became a great king.

³ We read (Perek 7/Posuk 29):

וּבָכָה וּבָעָמָךְ וּבְכָל עַבְדֶּיךָ יַעֲלוּ הַצְּפַרְדִּיעִים:

In you and in your people and in all of your servants the frogs will enter.

sorcery, did Your Majesty not order them to use their sorcery to void and nullify the sorcery of the Hebrews?

In my humble ignorance, I would have thought that Your Majesty could have truly mocked those Hebrews by turning the blood back into water and to ridding those terrible reptiles from us.

However, Your Majesty in your unlimited wisdom, directed your Egyptian sorcerers to replicate the plague, making more blood from our already limited water supply and adding terrible discomfort with the introduction of more and more frogs to our already inundated homeland.

In fact, Your Majesty – I wondered the same thing about the report that the audacious Hebrews turned sticks into snakes and so did, of course, our wonderful sorcerers. What I heard was that the staff of the Hebrews resumed its original form and then swallowed all of the other staffs.

In my ignorance I wondered, why Your Majesty did not order our wonderful sorcerers to use their unmatched powers and prowess and undo that which the Hebrews did?

Signed with reverence and awe, I am Your Majesty's humble and unworthy servant,

Attila of Ra'amses

Of course, we do know the answers to those questions and maybe this Atilla of thirty-three hundred years ago knew the answers as well.

The Egyptians were practicing sorcery. Moshe and Aharon were accessing the Hand of G-d that He Yisborach made available to them. The Hand of G-d has no difficulty in defeating sorcery.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky ZT"l wrote an essay on this week's Parshas Vo'eiro and questions why we are no longer able to see the profound effect of sorcery and magic today as it existed in yesteryear – as told in our Parsha and in many other sources in Tanach, Midrash and *Shas*.

His answer is predicated on a principle that is learned from Sefer Koheles (Perek 7/Posuk 14) which reads:

בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הִיָּה בְּטוֹב וּבְיוֹם רָעָה רְאֵה גַם אֶת זֶה לְעֵמֶת זֶה עֲשֵׂה הָאֵל...לְקִים עַל דְּבַרְתְּ שְׁלֵא יִמָּצָא הָאָדָם אַחֲרָיו מְאוּמָה:

On a day of good, be good; on a day of bad, see that it is 'this opposite that' that Hashem has made on that which was spoken that man will find after himself – absolutely nothing.

Rashi writes in explanation of this cryptic verse:

בְּיוֹם טוֹבָה הִיָּה בְּטוֹב - בְּיוֹם שִׁישׁ בִּידֶךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת טוֹבָה הִיָּה בַעֲוֹשֵׁי הַטּוֹבָה:

On a day of good – On a day when you can do something good, be among those who do good.

וּבְיוֹם רָעָה רֵאָה - כִּשְׁתַּבּוֹא הַרְעָה עַל הַרְשָׁעִים אַתָּה תִּהְיֶה מִן הַרוֹאִים שְׁנֹאמֵר (ישעיהו 10/כד⁴) וַיֵּצְאוּ וַיִּרְאוּ בַּפְּגָרֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים וְגו' וְלֹא תִהְיֶה מִן הַנִּרְאִים וְהָיוּ דְרָאוֹן לְכָל בָּשָׂר:

On a day of bad, see – When evil befalls the wicked, you should be among those who view it [and not one who receives the punishment] as it says, 'They will go out and see among the corpses of the men' – do not be among those who will be seen – they will be despised by all flesh.

גַּם אֶת זֶה לְעֵמֶת זֶה - הַטּוֹבָה וְשִׂכָר פְּעוּלָתָהּ לְעֵמֶת הַרְעָה וְשִׂכָר פְּעוּלָתָהּ:

Also this opposite that – The good and the reward for its action opposite the evil and the recompense for its action.

⁴ The entire verse reads:

וַיֵּצְאוּ וַיִּרְאוּ בַּפְּגָרֵי הָאֲנָשִׁים הַפֹּשְׁעִים בִּי כִּי תוֹלְעֵתָם לֹא תָמוּת וְאֲשָׁם לֹא תִכָּבֵה וְהָיוּ דְרָאוֹן לְכָל בָּשָׂר:
They will go and see the corpses of the sinning people because their worms will not die and their fire will not be extinguished and they will be despised by all flesh.

Rashi explains:

תוֹלְעֵתָם - רֵמָה הַאוֹכֵלֶת אֶת בָּשָׂרָם:

Their worms – the worms that devour their flesh.

וְאֲשָׁם - בְּגִיהֵנָם:

Their fire – in Hell.

דְרָאוֹן - לְשׁוֹן בְּזִיווֹן...

Dei'ro'on – an expression of disgrace

אשר לא ימצא האדם אחריו מאומה - להרהר אחריו של הקדוש ברוך הוא:

Man will not find anything after it – Man cannot question G-d's actions.

What is the meaning of:

גַּם אֶת זֶה לְעֹמֵת זֶה עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים...לִיקִים

Also 'this opposite that' that Hashem has made.

Chazal explain in Masseches Chagiga (15 a):

גם את זה לעומת זה עשה האל"קים, רבי מאיר אומר, כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא ברא כנגדו, ברא הרים ברא גבעות, ברא ימים ברא נהרות, ורבי עקיבא אומר, ברא צדיקים ברא רשעים, ברא גן עדן ברא גיהנם, כל אחד ואחד יש לו שני חלקים, אחד בגן עדן ואחד בגיהנם, זכה צדיק נוטל חלקו וחלק חבירו בגן עדן נתחייב רשע נוטל חלקו וחלק חבירו בגיהנם

Also this opposite that, G-d made – Rabi Meir says, 'All that G-d created, He created something as its opposite. He created mountains and He created hills. He created seas and He created rivers.'

Rabi Akiva says, 'He created the righteous and He created the wicked; He created *Gan Eden* and he created *Gehinom*. Every person has two parts, one in *Gan Eden* and one in *Gehinom*. If the *Tzaddik* is meritorious, he takes his part and the part of the other [who does not deserve it] in *Gan Eden*. The wicked one is judged – he takes his part and the part of another person [who does not deserve it] in *Gehinom*.

The difference between Rabi Meir and Rabi Akiva is clear. According to Rabi Meir, the 'opposite' is something different, but similar. There are two types of mountains and two types of waterways.

Rabi Akiva's view is in keeping with our translation of לעומת as being truly 'opposite'. There is 'good' and there is 'bad' – there are truly opposites that Hashem has created.

The reason for this creation of opposites, at least according to Rabi Akiva, is explained in the Midrash Koheles Rabba on this verse.

We read:

גם את זה לעומת זה, זה גיהנום וגן עדן, וכמה ביניהם - טפח, ר' יוחנן אמר כותל, ורבנן אמרי שתיהן שוות כדי שיהיו מציצות זה מזה:

Also this opposite that – this [verse] refers to Gan Eden and Gehinom. What is the distance between them – a handbreadth. Rabi Yochanan said, ‘a wall is between them’. Rabbanan say, ‘Both Gan Eden and Gehinom are equivalent so that the inhabitants of each can see what is happening to their counterparts⁵.’

Although, each of these opinions deserve their own investigation and analysis, they all have a certain common denominator. It is possible for each of the opposites, this one and that one, to view the other side. The first opinion says that they are relatively easy to have a mutual viewing because they are hardly separated, only by a *tefach*.

The second opinion, that of Rabi Yochanan, says that it is much harder to gain the view of the opposite side. An effort has to be made to climb the wall and see over it. That is, there is a significant amount of inertia that keeps a person in the path that they have placed themselves. It is hard to get to the other side because there is a ‘wall’ separating them.

⁵ This Midrash seems most compatible with the *sugya* in the last Perek of Massechet Sukkah that discusses the power of the Yetzer Ha’ra’. We learn there (52 a):

דרש רבי יהודה: לעתיד לבא מביאו הקדוש ברוך הוא ליצר הרע ושוחטו בפני הצדיקים ובפני הרשעים. צדיקים נדמה להם כהר גבוה, ורשעים נדמה להם כחוט השערה. הללו בוכין, והללו בוכין. צדיקים בוכין ואומרים: היאך יכולנו לכבוש הר גבוה כזה! ורשעים בוכין ואומרים: היאך לא יכולנו לכבוש את חוט השערה הזה!

Rabi Yehuda interpreted: In the future Hashem will bring the Yetzer Ha’ra’ and slaughter it in the presence of the righteous and of the wicked. For the righteous, the *Yetzer Ha’ra’* will appear to be a high mountain and for the wicked it will appear to be the size of a strand of hair.

These cry and those cry. The righteous cry and say, ‘How were we able to conquer this high mountain?’ The wicked cry and say, ‘How were we unable to conquer this hair strand?’

Seemingly, this Gemara would imply that each group was able to see what the other group was facing and thus their responses are easily understood.

On the one hand, such an opinion limits the wicked one from doing *teshuva* and changing his way. At the same time, it helps the righteous to preserve their standing and removes temptations, challenges and threats to their righteousness.

On the other hand, the more that this wall is sturdy and the stronger that it is, it may lessen the punishment for the wicked – because they have less of a chance to repent because they cannot see the beauty of ‘the other side’ and may also lessen the reward for the righteous – they have less of a temptation to change their way.

The opinion of the *Rabbanan* seems to hold that there is not even a *tefach*, a handbreadth that divides these two opposites – they are facing one another – in clear view of each other.

This opinion holds that each side can easily view the other side. Nothing is hidden; they are literally facing each other without any external divide.

This opinion, of course, then holds the wicked responsible for remaining steadfast in their sinful behavior. They saw the opposite side, they were exposed to its goodness and beauty and still they did not change.

At the same time, the reward for the righteous is expanded because they faced all of the temptations to which the wicked succumbed, but they, the *Tzaddikim* withstood it all.

It seems to me that this Midrash Rabba is more closely aligned with the opinion of Rabi Akiva than it is with the opinion of Rabi Meir. The לעומת – opposite of Rabi Akiva deals with stark contrasts and thus the separation between those contrasts is significant when we are discussing the diametrically opposed Gan Eden and Gehinom and their respective inhabitants.

And it is within that purview that Rav Kaminetzky makes his remarks.

In order to provide the opportunity for *Bechira Chofshis* – Free Will - in this world, there must be free-choice. Alternatives must be present. Perhaps, the availability and accessibility of those alternatives is part of the dispute about which we just learned. But, no matter what, there must be choices and a person must have the opportunity to choose.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuva (Perek 5/Halachos 1-2):

רשות לכל אדם נתונה אם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך טובה ולהיות צדיק הרשות בידו, ואם רצה להטות עצמו לדרך רעה ולהיות רשע הרשות בידו...מין זה של אדם...יחיד בעולם ואין מין שני דומה לו בזה הענין שיהא הוא מעצמו בדעתו ובמחשבתו יודע הטוב והרע ועושה כל מה שהוא חפץ ואין מי שיעכב בידו מלעשות הטוב או הרע... אל יעבור במחשבתך...שהקדוש ברוך הוא גוזר על האדם מתחלת ברייתו להיות צדיק או רשע, אין הדבר כן אלא כל אדם ראוי לו להיות צדיק כמשה רבינו או רשע כירבעם...

Permission is granted to every person – if he wishes to turn himself to a good path and be righteous – he has the ability. If he wishes to turn himself to a bad path and be wicked – he has the ability.

This species of mankind is unique; no other species is like mankind in this regard – that man, on his own, consciously, knows that which is good and that which is bad and he does that which he wishes to do and no one will stop him from doing good or bad.

You should not think that Hashem decrees regarding a person from the time of his creation that he will be righteous or wicked. That is not so. Rather, every person has the potential to righteous like Moshe Rabbenu or wicked like *Yerov'om*.

Of course, if that potential is there, the choices have to be available and visible.

At the time of Mattan Torah and through the period of Bayis Rishon, there was Divine prophecy that was extant and well-known. Great miracles occurred at that time. The Presence of the Shechina was palpable.

With such a forceful appearance, wasn't the side of righteousness so clearly visible that it lessened the opportunity to choose evil?

It is that very point, Rav Kaminetzky said, that required that there would be a most powerful oppositional force that would have the possibility of counteracting the goodness that was so easily felt.

That oppositional force was the formidable sorceries that the Torah forbids and that were operational in the Tanach epoch⁶. Their potency was so significant that

⁶ Whether or not sorcery and the like have a real power or are merely illusions seems to be a *machlokes*.

Rambam writes (Hilchos Avoda Zara Perek 11 /Halachos 15-16):

המכשף חייב סקילה והוא שעשה מעשה כשפים....
ודברים האלו כולן דברי שקר וכזב הן והם שהטעו בהן עובדי כוכבים הקדמונים לגויי הארצות כדי שינהגו אחריהן, ואין ראוי לישראל שהם חכמים מחוכמים להמשך בהבלים אלו ולא להעלות על לב שיש תועלת בהן...בעלי החכמה ותמימי הדעת ידעו בראיות ברורות שכל אלו הדברים שאסרה תורה אינם דברי חכמה אלא תהו והבל שנמשכו בהן חסרי הדעת ונטשו כל דרכי האמת בגללן, ומפני זה אמרה תורה כשהזירה על כל אלו ההבלים (דברים יח/ג) תמים תהיה עם ה' א...ל'קך.

A witch is stoned when he does an act of witchcraft.

These things are all false and deceit and they are the means by which the early idolaters tricked the nations of the world that they should follow them. It is not proper for the Jewish nation who are sophisticated and wise to be drawn to these empty behaviors or to entertain a thought that these practices have some value.

Those who are wise and have unsullied minds know through clear proofs that all of these types of sorceries that the Torah forbids have no wisdom in them. They are empty and foolishness. It is those who don't think who are drawn after them – they have abandoned all the paths of truth because of their belief in the sorcery. That is why the Torah said and warned against all of these meaningless beliefs, 'You shall be pure with Hashem your G-d.'

However, see Ramban to this verse that Rambam brings. Ramban writes there:

וטעם תמים תהיה עם ה' אל'קך - שנייחד לבבנו אליו לבדו, ונאמין שהוא לבדו עושה כל והוא היודע אמתת כל עתיד, וממנו לבדו נדרוש העתידות, מנביאיו או מאנשי חסידיו רצוני לומר אורים ותומים. ולא נדרוש מהוברי שמים ולא מזולתם, ולא נבטח שיבואו דבריהם על כל פנים, אבל אם נשמע דבר מהם נאמר הכל בידי שמים...

The meaning of 'be pure with Hashem your G-d' is that we should direct our hearts to G-d alone and believe that only He does everything and only He knows the truth of the entire future. Only from Him do we seek to know the future, from His prophets, His pious ones, that is from the *Urim v'Tumim*.

We are not allowed to seek the opinions of the astrologers and not from anyone similar to them. We should not believe that what they prophesize will occur. If we do hear a prophecy from them we should say, 'it is all in the hand of heaven'.

Ramban does not say that the predictions of the sorcerers are automatically false. He seems to hold that there can be a modicum of truth in their sayings. But, even if there is such a modicum of truth, that truth is not absolute. It is subjugated to the Ribbono Shel Olom because He and only He is totally in charge of the world.

The contemporary sefer *Tomim Ti'h'yeh* discusses these issues and analyzes them well and comprehensively.

they had multitudes of followers and thus presented an opposition to good and righteousness and allowed *Bechira Chofshis*, Free Will, to be a reality.⁷

That is, Rav Kaminetzky says, the greater the forces of sanctity and holiness that are found in the world, *זה לעומת זה* there must be a greater force of evil and impurity so that Free Will is not hampered.

That, explains Rav Kaminetzky, is the reason that as generations passed and the presence of sanctity and holiness lessened, so did the appearance of the powers of these various types of sorcery lessen.

When the forces of good were not as powerful, then the oppositional forces, by definition, became less powerful as well because those latter forces only existed to counterbalance the forces of good.

Rav Kaminetzky concludes by noting that it is possible that where, in specific instances, a unique and exceptionally force of sanctity and holiness is found, there could also be a surge of impurity.

Let us go now towards the end of our Parshas Voeira and learn about *Makkas She'chin*, the plague of boils.

We read (Sh'mos Perek 9/P'sukim 8-12):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן קַחוּ לָכֶם מִלֵּא חֲפָנֵיכֶם פִּיחַ כֹּבֵשֶׁן וַיִּזְרְקוּ מֹשֶׁה הַשָּׁמַיְמָה לְעֵינֵי פְרַעֲוֹה: וְהָיָה לְאַבְקָה עַל כָּל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהָיָה עַל הָאָדָם וְעַל הַבְּהֵמָה לְשַׁחֵן פֶּרַח אֲבַעֲבֵעַת בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת פִּיחַ הַכֹּבֵשֶׁן וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ לִפְנֵי פְרַעֲוֹה וַיִּזְרַק אֹתוֹ מֹשֶׁה הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וְהָיָה שַׁחֵן אֲבַעֲבֵעַת פֶּרַח בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: וְלֹא יָכֹלוּ הַחֲרָטְמִים לַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי הַשַּׁחֵן כִּי הָיָה הַשַּׁחֵן בְּחֲרָטְמָם וּבְכָל מִצְרַיִם: וַיַּחֲזֵק ה' אֶת יָב פְּרַעֲוֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה:

Hashem said to Moshe and Aharon, 'Take for yourselves a full double-handful of soot from the furnace and Moshe should throw it towards the heavens before Par'o. It shall become dust over all of the Land of Egypt and it shall be upon man and animal as a flowering boil, bubbling up in all of the Land of Egypt.' They took the soot of the furnace and they stood before

⁷ In *Aley Shur* II, Rav Shlomo Wolbe ZT"L says that Hashem empowered the Yetzer Ha'ra to be the offset and equalizer that would counterbalance all the goodness in the world.

Par'o and Moshe threw it up towards the heavens and it became bubbling up, flowering boils upon man and animal. The wizards of Par'o could not stand before Moshe because of the boils - because the boils were upon the wizards and in all of Egypt. Hashem hardened the heart of Par'o and he did not listen to Moshe and Aharon, as Hashem spoke to Moshe.

When reading these verses and learning of the intense pain that these boils caused the Egyptians we must wonder why there is special mention of the חרטומים – wizards here. Why would I have thought that they would not be stricken with the painful boils? Why are they highlighted here, noted twice in the same verse?

In fact, if we pay close attention to what the Torah teaches us we will note that in the previous two plagues, the wizards were not mentioned. Neither in the plague of *Arov*, the wild animals that attacked the Egyptians or in the plague of *Dever*-pestilence do we hear from the wizards. Seemingly, they are nowhere to be seen.

To what would I have attributed their absence from those above plagues? The answers lies in *Makkas Kinim*, the Plague of Lice that occurred immediately prior to *Makkas Arov*.

We read regarding the lice (Sh'mos Perek 8/P'sukim 12-15):

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל אַהֲרֹן נִטֵּה אֶת מִטְּךָ וְהָיָה אֶת עֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ וְהָיָה לְכַנָּם בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן וַיִּט אַהֲרֹן אֶת יָדוֹ בְּמִטְּהוֹ וַיַּךְ אֶת עֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ וַתְּהִי הַכִּנָּם בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה כָּל עֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ הָיָה כְּנִים בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן הַחֲרָטְמִים בְּלִטְיָהֶם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת הַכִּנָּים וְלֹא יָכְלוּ וַתְּהִי הַכִּנָּם בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֲרָטְמִים אֶל פְּרָעָה אֲצַבֵּעַ אֲלֵינוּ...לִיקִים הוּא וַיַּחֲזֵק לֵב פְּרָעָה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה':

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Say to Aharon, "Extend your staff and smite the dust of the land and it shall become lice in all of the Land of Egypt." They did so and Aharon extended his hand with his staff and he smote the dust of the land and it became lice upon man and upon animal; all of the dust of the land became lice in all of the Land of Egypt. The wizards did so with their incantations to bring out lice and they were unable; the lice was upon man and upon animal. The wizards said to Par'o, 'It is the finger of G-d'; Par'o's heart hardened and he did not listen to them, as G-d spoke.

Rashi writes:

אֲצַבֵּעַ אֲלֵינוּ...לִיקִים הוּא - מכה זו אינה על ידי כשפים, מאת המקום היא:

It is the finger of G-d – The sorcerers said, ‘this plague is not performed by sorcery; it is from G-d.’

Let us ask – why did the wizards call this plague that they were unable to replicate ‘the *finger* of G-d’. Why did they not say the ‘*hand* of G-d’?

In fact, Ramban and others do not distinguish between the two terms, finger and hand, in this context.

However, it is also possible to say that by referring to this plague that proved their impotence as being merely a ‘finger’ of G-d, the wizards were attempting to minimize the damage done to their reputations as well as wishing to minimize the power of the Ribbono Shel Olom to finally bring Egypt down to their knees.

And this provides us with an insight into the appearance of the wizards by the plague of boils.

At the plague of lice, the wizards were side-lined. They were no longer able to perform their sorcery and witchcraft.⁸ However, Par’o did not dismiss them from his presence and distance them from his palace because it was in his interest to accept their definition of the plagues as being G-d’s finger, i.e. not a demonstration of overwhelming power that could not be confronted.

In fact, although Ramban and others equate the expression of אֲצַבֵּעַ אֶל־לְקִיָּם with His hand, we may look at the two expressions of ‘finger’ and ‘hand’ as being representative of two very two ways of looking at the world.

The wizards said אֲצַבֵּעַ אֶל־לְקִיָּם, referring to G-d by the generic name that includes Hashem as well as the false deities.

When B’nei Yisroel saw G-d’s salvation at the Red Sea, we read (Sh’mos Perek 14/Posuk 31):

⁸ Ramban writes there that the wizards were not heard from anymore following *Makkas Kinnim*.

Obviously Ramban knew that the wizards were mentioned regarding *Makkas She’chin*, but since they are not speaking, they, in fact, are ‘not heard from’.

What we will continue to write does not seem to be in consonance with the Ramban.

וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה' בְּמִצְרַיִם וַיִּירָאוּ הָעָם אֶת ה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּה' וּבַמֶּלֶךְ עַבְדּוֹ:

Israel saw the great hand that Hashem did against Egypt and the people feared Hashem and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.

Israel saw more than a finger. In fact, Israel saw more than a hand – they saw the *יד הגדולה*, 'the Great Hand' of Hashem.

Furthermore, Israel did not attribute their salvation to *א...ל'קים*, a term that could be used for false gods. Rather they said, 'Hashem' – by His Name', not a name that is shared with others.

It is with this contrast that we understand that the wizards remained in the palace of Par'o even following the events of *Makkas Kinnim*.

The wizards were in the background because they were no longer able to copy the activities of Moshe and Aharon. But, since they attributed the plagues as being *אצבע*, they diminished the impact of the plagues and raised the expectations that they would soon return to their powers which, according to their view, were diminished only temporarily.

Thus, we come to *Makkas She'chin* and we find the wizards still part of the royal entourage, still attending to *Par'o Melech Mitzraim*.

And, thus, the Torah presents us with the power of the *אחרא*, the 'other side', the opposition to the Shechina. Even when vanquished, this *yetzer ha'ra* does not admit defeat. Even though they were clearly routed, the wizards, and Par'o, maintained their beliefs in the power of that 'other side', the strength of their magic and sorcery.

It certainly may seem depressing to read that the 'other side' does not give up, does not relinquish its battle against holiness and sanctity.

However, the obstinate stance of these idolaters also presents us with a reason to be hopeful and optimistic.

Since, as Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky taught, the presence of these forces of impurity exist only to provide an opposition to the forces of sanctity and holiness, if the idolaters don't let go of their empty beliefs no matter what, that implies that deep

within the Jew, no matter how much he may seem distant from Hashem, the *pintele Yid*, the *neshamah* remains alive. And thus, the 'other side' is invigorated to fight the *neshamah* of the Jew.

The existence of a powerful *Saton* indicates that there is a powerful *Kedusha* as well. Within the Jew, the soul has not relinquished its battle to arise from the depths of its person and draw him closer to Hashem, to see His Hand and to know that it is the greatest of powers.

By viewing the pervasive beliefs of the idolaters, we can reverse the *זה לעומת זה* and arrive at the awareness that the belief of G-d embedded within the Jew is no less pervasive and that it is awaiting for the opportunity to be freed from its constraints, to erupt and to become a driving force for sanctity and purity.

Thus, we become aware that when the darkness seems to overtake the light, that the darkness only has its power because the light has not been extinguished. The darkness only has its power because the light is only blocked; it has not been extinguished.

Perhaps that is the meaning of the verse in Koheles (Perek 2/Posuk 13):

וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי שֵׁשׁ יִתְרוֹן לְחָכְמָה מִן הַסְּכָלוּת כִּי־תָרוֹן הָאוֹר מִן הַחֹשֶׁךְ:

I myself have seen the advantage of wisdom over foolishness, just like the advantage of light from the darkness.

I can learn that light is so powerful that it cannot be extinguished, because otherwise the darkness would not possess the power that it has.

From the darkness, our awareness of the supremacy of the light of Torah, the light of Hashem, is ever-increased. As long as we seek the supremacy of wisdom over ignorance, we will recognize the eternity of that light.

Shabbat Shalom

Chodesh Tov

Rabbi Pollock